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City Manager's Office



ELK ISLAND
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
Seeing Christ in Everyone

March 2, 2015

City of Fort Saskatchewan
Kelly Kloss, City Manager
10005 – 102 Street
Fort Saskatchewan, AB
T8L 2C5

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Re: School Bus Flashing Lights

Mr. Kloss,

In a recent decision to amend Bylaw C4-09-School Bus Flashing Lights, prohibiting alternating flashing red lights and stop arms on school buses within the City of Fort Saskatchewan, we have been asked to provide our perspective on the possible effects of this change in procedures.

The practice of school buses stopping traffic with flashing red lights was originally intended for use on rural roads only. Rural roads are typically operated at a higher speed limit with no curbs and gutters, stop signs, signals, crosswalks or other traffic control devices to safely assist pedestrians to cross the road.

Elk Island Catholic Schools' Administration is of the opinion that implementing the use of school bus lights will seriously impede traffic flow and will also jeopardize student safety.

From a traffic flow and financial perspective, please consider the following points:

- EICS provides service at approximately 175 stop locations within Fort Saskatchewan, with 10 buses averaging 30 stops per bus at an estimated 100 seconds per stop. The use of the light system will have a negative impact on traffic flow holding up vehicles and increasing driver frustration.
- The School Bus Driver Improvement Program (S-Endorsement) instructs drivers to load and unload students mid-block when buses activate the flashing red lights and stop arm, causing traffic stoppage, mid-block, in both directions.
- School zone loading and unloading is estimated to take between 5 and 15 minutes, again having a negative impact on motorists and backlog.
- Windrows will require clearing in order to provide safe loading and unloading for students having a financial impact on the City, as this is not current practice.
- Authorities report multiple traffic violations on a daily basis, which are difficult to manage and enforce. We foresee an increase with this new practice, resulting in more calls to the authorities and potential court appearances.
- Public messaging and training: 70% of motorists do not have children in school.
- Loss of commonality within municipalities resulting in confusion for commuters.

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As listed, there are several financial and traffic flow concerns but they are only secondary to the main concern of student safety. Although we have no direct information from within our own practices, we rely on third-party studies, anecdotal comments, and statistics that have been provided by other school divisions, ASTAC (Alberta Student Transportation Advisory Council), STAA (Student Transportation Association of Alberta) and the NAPT (National Association for Pupil Transportation) that have revealed that the implementation of School Bus flashing lights and stop arms in the urban areas will have zero to a negative effect on student safety.

Drivers who are not aware of the law or choose to pass in an attempt to avoid the lights can cause even greater risks in terms of student safety. Students walking in front of a bus to cross are now exposed to a possible collision from drivers who may not see them due to the blind spot created by the bus remaining on the road as students cross. Additionally students can develop a false sense of security from the lights and run in front of busses.

The current practice of students exiting the bus and waiting for the bus to leave before crossing at appropriate cross walks ensures that safety is the responsibility of both drivers on the road and the students. The ability for everyone to be able to see clearly vehicle traffic and students is an advantage.

What is proposed by the change in practice will only be as effective and as safe as those drivers choosing to follow the rules. It is also an impediment for us to stop, look, and proceed safely as neither drivers behind buses or students moving forward can really see what may be coming.

We are providing this information for your discernment as we are aware that there has been a request that City Council consider repealing the decision to amend the Bylaw which is to take effect in August of 2015.

Sincerely,

Michael Hauptman
Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Gale Katchur, Mayor, City of Fort Saskatchewan
Tony Sykora, Board Chair, Elk Island Catholic Schools
Josie Krokis, Director of Protective Services, City of Fort Saskatchewan
Lynne Lambert, Director of Transportation Services, EICS
Mark Liguori, Superintendent of Schools, EIPS