

## **Transportation Department 2023–24 Annual Department Report**

Our students are always our highest priority and to this point in the 2023–24 school year, we have been even more focused on student welfare. Aligning bell schedules to better meet rest and learning patterns, developing plans to serve dual-language students at all grade levels, and improving air quality and the transportation experience for all our students has taken much of the department's time this year.

### **Bell Schedule Change**

Scientific data overwhelmingly shows high school–age students learn better starting later in the morning and elementary students are more active and ready to learn at earlier times in the morning. Staff worked tirelessly over 10 months in 2022–23 to develop a workable transportation plan which would achieve these two primary requirements while expanding services for option schools, special education, career technical education, SUMMA, Rachel Carson, pre-kindergarten, after-school programs, and nearly 4,000 field trips each year. Staff used other large districts to form a basis of what was possible and enlisted the help of a respected consulting firm for its perspective and advice. The result is a schedule which will not only allow students to learn at times best suited for them but will expand access to several programs, enabling ride times to be reduced and ensuring arrival times to access breakfast service in cafeterias.

### **EPA Clean School Bus Grant**

BSD was awarded the largest grant of any school district in the Pacific Northwest, nearly \$20 million, to replace 50 diesel buses with electric school buses. Staff spent several months during mid-2023 developing the data and application which resulted in the \$19,750,000 award. The grant will not only fund replacement of 50 buses but will also fund the purchase of a 2-megawatt storage battery, giving the district a hedge against power outages. A photovoltaic (PV) system will also be installed which will supply power directly to buses. Using the PV system in conjunction with stored battery energy during the day at peak pricing time will reduce operational costs significantly. Additionally, the battery will supply power to the grid when not in use by BSD, further reducing operational costs. BSD will be the first school district west of the Rocky Mountains to implement such a microgrid in its bus charging infrastructure.

### **Grants & Partnerships**

Department staff have been very successful in researching and winning grants related to diesel bus replacement and electric bus implementation.

- BSD was awarded \$272,000 from PGE to purchase an electric bus, the fourth time the district has received this award. Staff has applied for a fifth PGE grant to replace three additional diesel buses.
- The department received a \$500,000 rebate from Oregon DEQ for the replacement of 10 diesel buses with electric buses.
- Staff is submitting documentation to receive \$880,000 in rebates from the IRS for the purchase of 22 electric school buses.
- BSD received an award from Oregon DEQ for over \$169,000 towards the purchase of 23 chargers for the microgrid program.

**Belong. Believe. Achieve.**

- The department completed its first Fleet Partner Agreement with PGE with the installation of 23 electric chargers at the Transportation Support Center (TSC) at no cost. This agreement was valued at over \$474,000 and BSD incurred no costs. Staff are in the process of finalizing a second partnership with PGE to install 32 additional charging stations at TSC along with the storage battery and PV system.
- Staff negotiated with PGE to perform a pilot project in the second agreement whereby PGE will assume the role of general contractor and design and manage the implementation of the microgrid. This marks the first time PGE has taken on this type of role and could lead to a new revenue stream for the utility in future projects.
- Staff applied to the Clean School Bus Rebate Program offered by the EPA to replace 25 diesel buses valued at over \$8.5 million. Award announcements are expected in early April 2024.

### **Electrification Expansion**

Electrification of vehicles has not been limited only to school buses.

- The department installed six automobile electric chargers at TSC along with a large mobile charger located in the TSC repair shop. Electricity used in these chargers will generate credits with the Oregon Clean Fuels Program which will be sold to offset charging costs.
- Staff have replaced two model year 2000 district vehicle autos with two 2023 Subaru Solterra electric SUVs. These purchases qualify for a rebate of \$20,000 each from SB 1142 funds from the state.
- Replacement of four additional district vehicles is scheduled to take place over the next two fiscal years.

### **Staffing**

The 24% wage increase for bus drivers implemented in the 2022 OSEA bargaining agreement has allowed the department to achieve record staffing levels. The 2022–23 year saw the department add a record 70 new bus drivers. The trend has continued this year with 28 drivers added through February 2. Three years ago, the department began the year with over 20 bus routes unfilled. This year began with 8 unfilled routes and all routes have been fully staffed since November. The additional drivers have enabled the spare driver positions to finally fill to a level which allows sufficient coverage for normal absences (e.g. illness, personal leave, etc.) without having to deploy personnel from non-driving positions for coverage. This has allowed the department to dive deep and streamline daily routing and dispatching operations, ensure complete safety personnel coverage, and expand the training team enabling them to perform regular coaching and instruction to current drivers, in addition to trainees. Most importantly, the staffing levels have allowed our routers to run several scenarios of the upcoming bell change which has allowed staff to prepare a well-developed plan to supply services to schools and programs for the 2024–25 year.

### **Looking Forward**

The remainder of the year will be spent finalizing the EPA agreement and placing orders for new electric school buses, continuing to hire drivers in preparation for the 2024–25 bell schedule implementation, continuing to seek funding opportunities for electrification of vehicles of all types, and begin planning and design of a new repair facility at the Allen Blvd. complex with the goal of unifying both 5th Street locations into one facility located at Allen Blvd.