

2026 TRANSPORTATION UPDATES – GETTING READY FOR SEPTEMBER

Q&A/FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

STUDENT SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION

1. When will parents and families know if they will be impacted by the transportation service changes?

- Impacted families will receive more information detailing their specific circumstances, resources and supports leading up to the start of the 2026 school year.
- We expect news will be shared later this May/early June, prior to the end of the 2025-2026 school year.

2. What steps is STEO taking to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students who now must walk to school or walk a longer distance to their bus stop?

- STEO recognizes these changes may be an adjustment for families and students, and you may have concerns regarding children's safety. The safety of students is at the core of our operations and STEO, along with support from our community partners, are committed to providing safe, reliable and responsive transportation to as many students as possible under these changes.
- To help prepare students for the upcoming year, STEO is collaborating with several of our community partners to offer support and safety programs over the summer and into the new school year.
- These programs will focus on student safety, active travel readiness, and community awareness. More information about programs will be available soon.
- To further our commitment to providing safe, reliable and accessible transportation and resources to students and families, STEO is enhancing a formal Hazard Assessment Tool that will establish a consistent methodology for evaluating student walking routes. This tool aligns with Ministry of Education reference standards, industry best practices, and local research, including the North Grenville Active Travel Study. We anticipate releasing this assessment tool before the 2026-2027 school year.
- STEO will also have numerous resources available for parents and students on our new centralized online support hub on our website. This central hub will provide families with a single access point for medical transportation and exceptional circumstances requests, hazard and safety concerns, as well as clear guidance on transportation eligibility, application processes, and more.

3. Why are these transportation service changes happening?

- The Ministry of Education introduced standardized transportation criteria across Ontario, along with a new student transportation funding formula. These changes affect eligibility and service, such as ride times and walk-to-stop distances, across the province, including Eastern Ontario.

- STEO is implementing these changes to align with the provincial standard of service and operate sustainability within the new funding model.
- These changes also feed into our 2025-2028 strategic plan priorities, which prioritizes fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability.

4. Will STEO be able to provide my family/child with accommodations or alternative arrangements?

- Requests for transportation based on medical needs or exceptional circumstances will continue to be supported through a centralized Customer Relationship Management (CRM) intake process available on the STEO website, providing families with a clear, accessible, and consistent application pathway for temporary, case-by-case consideration.

5. If there is inclement weather and it is not safe for my child to walk or bike to school, will there be an alternative transportation option available for them?

- STEO recommends referring to our [Cold Weather Information page](#) on our website, which provides guidance on how to prepare for potentially bad weather conditions.

6. My child is now required to walk to school. If buses are cancelled, will they be required to go to school?

- If buses are cancelled, schools within the Upper Canada District School Board and Catholic District School Board often remain open unless otherwise communicated.
- As our cold weather guidelines state, parents/guardians always make the final decision as to whether it is safe to send their child to school. If parents decide to send their child to school when the weather is severe, the school will be open to receive them (unless otherwise communicated). No student will ever be reprimanded for missing school in bad weather.

7. September 2026 is the first time my child will be taking the bus. Are there any resources available for them?

- The [STEO website](#) has a variety of resources for students and families, as well as a [First Time Rider](#) section with safety rules and behaviour expectation videos that will help prepare you and your child for their first day on the bus.
- The [Purple Band Program](#) is also available for Junior and Senior Kindergarten students, which tells bus drivers that your child requires special attention and adult/guardian supervision at their drop-off point.

8. If my child lost their bus access under these service changes, can they catch another bus at a different stop?

- No. Students must abide by our transportation eligibility policies. They must be registered at their respective school before transportation can be provided.

- If your child requires transportation accommodation due to an extenuating circumstance, requests for transportation based on medical needs or exceptional circumstances will continue to be supported through a centralized intake process on the STEO website.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

9. Will any bus drivers lose their job due to the service changes?

- No. We do not anticipate any of our dedicated bus drivers will lose their jobs due to these service changes.
- As outlined in our 2025-2028 strategic plan, these service changes are expected to support service continuity and efficiency, as well as reflect the changing needs of the communities we serve in Eastern Ontario.

10. Will any efficiencies be gained through these service changes?

- Yes. STEO has undertaken a comprehensive review of its transportation system to ensure that services are delivered as efficiently as possible and in alignment with the funding model to the extent possible.
- This includes optimizing bus routes, aligning eligibility with provincial guidelines, reviewing walk distances, and making better use of available seating on buses.
- These changes are part of a broader effort to reduce inefficiencies and focus transportation resources on students who meet eligibility criteria.

11. Are these service changes part of STEO's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan?

- Yes. As outlined in our 2025-2028 [strategic plan](#), our response to the Ministry's transportation funding formula and our evolving operational landscape requires a strategic, fiscally responsible, and sustainable approach.
- This strategic approach must also reflect the changing needs of families, students, partners and communities across Eastern Ontario, as well as support long-term sustainability.

12. What other cost containment initiatives is STEO implementing to ensure they are financially responsible and sustainable long-term?

- The Ministry of Education has introduced a new funding formula for transportation which will see a forecasted \$11.9M shortfall in 2027-28. This funding formula is based largely on an intention to have more uniform service levels across the province, which are in most cases more stringent than STEO's current service levels to students.
- STEO is working on a plan to close this gap between anticipated funding and expense levels, which involves:
 - Aligning STEO service levels with Ministry of Education standards, such as the service changes we are currently implementing. This includes longer distances to

bus stops, longer ride times, and the expectation that more students of all ages walk to school.

- Competitive procurement to better align with the formula and to determine if current and/or new bus companies can provide service at better rates.
- Aligning operations with Ministry funding models.
- That said, STEO has taken many steps over the years to reduce costs and protect student transportation service levels before considering broader changes. These efforts have included improving bus routes, reducing unnecessary travel time and mileage, making the best use of available buses and drivers, managing administrative costs, and working closely with school boards and operators to find efficiencies.
- STEO has also reviewed existing practices to ensure available funding is focused on eligible student transportation needs first. These actions reflect a careful and responsible effort to close the funding gap while maintaining safe and reliable service for as many students as possible.