

Interruption of School Bus Services

May 8, 2008

Late on Tuesday, May 6, 2008 it was brought to the attention of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that an inspection of Prince Edward Island school buses showed structural deficiencies in some older buses.

All 320 PEI school buses are inspected regularly every six months by the Department of Transportation and Public Works to ensure that they are in good mechanical condition.

This was a different type of inspection. The purpose was to determine the strength of the bus by taking an in-depth look at the structure of the bus. The inspection requires major work such as removing all the exterior panels, taking the wheel wells apart, and removing the seats and floors of the bus.

Of the 20 buses that were inspected, 16 had structural problems that warranted taking these buses out of service. These deficiencies could not have been picked up through any mechanical inspection or routine inspection of the bus body and frame.

In response, a meeting was held at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 7th to discuss the situation. In attendance were government officials, school board superintendents and senior school board transportation staff.

It was recommended by Transportation and Public Works that buses of 1994 vintage or older be taken out of service until they could all be inspected. This advice was accepted by Education and Early Childhood Development and the school boards.

A news conference was held Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. to advise the public of the issue and to inform parents that there would be no school bus service on Thursday May 8th and Friday May 9th, although schools would remain open.

Arrangements were made to take students home from school on Wednesday using the remaining buses.

Over the next few days, the remaining 84 older buses will be inspected and a decision will be made to pass them, repair them, or take them out of service. An inspection safety expert from New Brunswick has been engaged to assist with this process.

Department and school board officials expect that regular school bus service will resume Monday, May 12th. Most of the 24 new school buses ordered earlier this year were delivered this week. They will be inspected and put into service immediately. Staff will work overtime to step up the inspection of the other buses. If required, other arrangements will be put in place to ensure that all children get to school safely.

Following this process, Transportation and Public Works will be recommending an appropriate inspection and preventative maintenance program to ensure improved school bus safety in Prince Edward Island.