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# REPORT

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## **BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

1. Correspondence directed to the Minister of Transportation, from the Chair of the Rainy River District School Board, regarding the condition of two secondary highways within the Rainy River District.



# *Rainy River*

## DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

January 7, 2014

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### DIRECTOR

Heather Campbell

The Honorable, Glen Murray  
Minister of Transportation  
Ferguson Block, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
77 Wellesley Street W.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z8

Dear Minister Murray,

I am writing on behalf of the Rainy River District School Board to express our concern over the condition of two secondary highways within our District, Highway 502 and Highway 622. In addition to providing quality education to our students, the Rainy River District School Board also offers various extra-curricular activities for secondary students, including team sports such as hockey, volleyball, and basketball. Our three high schools' teams compete within the Northwestern Ontario Secondary Schools' Athletic Association league (NorWOSSA), which thus requires teams to travel to compete against other high schools within Northwestern Ontario.

In December 2013, Iron Range Bus Lines discontinued its use of Highway 502, the highway connecting Fort Frances to Dryden, as the company felt that the poor maintenance of the highway resulted in dangerous road conditions. Similarly, Atikokan High School relies on Highway 622 to transport its school teams to compete against secondary schools to the north. Highway 622 is maintained as a Class 4 level highway from the Hydro One Generating Station southerly to Highway 11 and as a Class 5 from the Hydro Generating Station northerly to Highway 17. Due to the inadequate winter maintenance of Highway 622 from the Hydro Generating Station and north, Iron Range Bus Lines has expressed concerns now with Highway 622 and is now evaluating the condition of Highway 622 when deciding if this route is viable per school trip.

We realize that you may not be concerned with decisions by Iron Range Bus Lines, but both these "connector" routes are very significant to those of us who need to get from Highway 11 to Highway 17, as expeditiously as possible. Frances High School teams must now travel to compete in Dryden, Red Lake or Sioux Lookout through a circuitous route, along Highway 71. While the Highway 502 route from Fort Frances to Dryden takes approximately two and a half hours, the alternative route via Highway 71 now is an approximate four hour bus ride.

Similarly, the Atikokan High School teams are now faced with travelling east towards Thunder Bay and then turning north to travel to Ignace, thus doubling the length of the trip from two to four hours.

The rerouting of our school teams means additional costs for the schools and for the students themselves, as the cost of each trip is per kilometer with some trips now requiring the students and their coaches to incur hotel costs as well. Additionally, this rerouting has resulted in many trips, to location such as Sioux Lookout or Red Lake, now being "overnighters," as bus drivers can only work up to 14 hours a day.

As a school board charged with the responsibility for student achievement and well-being, we recognize the importance of student extra-curricular activities and note the benefits for our students in having an increased sense of self-worth and the overall enhanced engagement in school. However, the negative impact of increased travel on their academics is also very concerning, with students now having to leave school earlier in the day to travel to competitions and to spend greater time away from their studies. As a result, we urge you to improve the maintenance of Highways 502 and 622 so as to create safe routes of travel for our students, their parents, our staff, and our volunteers.

Through correspondence with the Manager of Operations in the Northwestern Region, we have learned that there are many concerns being raised by citizens with respect to the deplorable road conditions on Highway 502 and 622 and understand that the Ministry continually audits the performance of contractors, with any failure to meet the requirements resulting in the application of financial consequences. We also request information as to how road maintenance is assessed, by whom, how often, and if penalties have been applied to the contractors assigned to Highway 502 – Transfield - and Highway 622 – IMOS.

On behalf of the Rainy River District School Board, I thank you in advance for your attention to these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Michael Lewis, Chair  
Rainy River District School Board

c. Sarah Campbell, MPP, Kenora-Rainy River  
Bill Mauro, MPP, Thunder Bay-Atikokan