

Fixing the School Bus Driver Shortage with Digital Routing Solutions



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Twenty-five million kids in the US use school buses to get to class every year, with the country's nearly 14,000 school districts spending a collective \$228 billion annually on transportation costs.

Sadly, the wheels on the bus aren't going round and round as much as they used to. Why? Because districts nationwide have a driver shortage that's worsening with each new school year. In response, local and state-level authorities have taken matters into their own hands:

- The Chicago Public School District provides students free public transportation cards for the Chicago Transit Authority system.
- Wisconsin law now allows school board members with valid driver's licenses to volunteer as drivers.
- Some Kentucky schools shut down following a disastrous first day that saw students waiting an hour or more for their buses to arrive.

- A Massachusetts district warned parents they would likely need to make alternative transportation plans for their children, as it was 20 drivers short.
- In 2021, some Pennsylvania districts began paying families \$300 monthly to voluntarily opt out of bus pickups.

The list of stories is long, and though the circumstances differ, they all share a common theme: the need for more bus drivers.

In this whitepaper, we explore how school districts can overcome the bus driver shortage with [digital routing solutions](#) and improved recruitment efforts. We also look at school bus driving from the perspective of current and potential drivers to get a better understanding of why so few are willing to take on the job. And we discuss how advanced technologies can significantly improve the bus driver experience and potentially bring more people into the job sector.



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Navigating Through Crisis: Why is There a School Bus Driver Shortage?

Why is the bus driver shortage so severe? The top reasons repeatedly mentioned in multiple studies include:

- Problems with recruitment efforts.
- Drivers retiring.
- Driver salaries.
- Drivers moving to the private sector.
- The pandemic's lasting effects.

To overcome the problem, districts are rethinking how they manage and sustain their fleets, investing in innovative solutions that help address the issue's root causes. By doing so, they also hope to stop the dilemma's ripple effect throughout their communities, such as parent uncertainty, class disruption, and increased tardiness and absences that impact educational outcomes.

Current drivers and potential recruits say a core reason for leaving the job or not taking it on is the compensation package districts typically offer. They say the pay and benefits don't recognize or match the job's responsibilities and duties, including early hours, split shifts, and keeping large numbers of children safe.

Additionally, a bus driver's work environment is far from tranquil. Navigating traffic, ensuring on-board discipline, and adhering to a schedule with little to no leeway built-in can be stressful. If drivers feel underappreciated for the work they do, the stress magnifies, job satisfaction dwindles, and drivers become harder to retain or recruit.

Understanding all the challenges involved is critical to resolving the problem. Bus routing software that [integrates with other school-related technologies](#) can spur improvement of the bus driver shortage by:

- Streamlining operations.
- Elevating the driver's role.
- Offer a path to greater job satisfaction and retention.

Technology's potential to reshape the school transportation narrative is immense, promising a more stable and efficient service for all.



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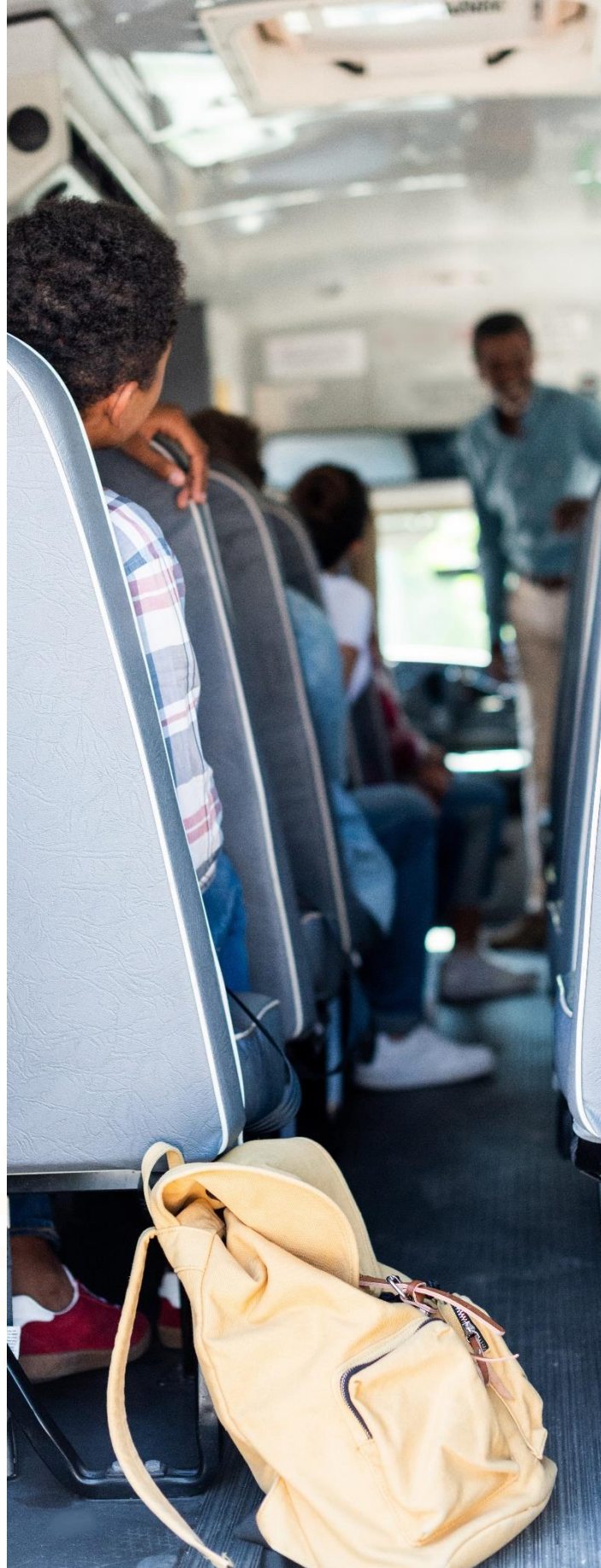
How Traditional Routing Systems Impact Bus Drivers

Traditional bus routing systems have not kept pace with driver and school district evolving needs. Today, these legacy systems put considerable strain on human, financial, and environmental resources, with hidden costs that go beyond a district's bottom line.

- Inefficient routes mean drivers often find themselves navigating circuitous paths that use more time and fuel and lead to greater wear and tear on vehicles. Along with wasting minutes and miles, this inefficient process means drivers don't have time for well-deserved rest or professional development.
- From an operational standpoint, inefficiencies like these can result in higher costs due to higher fuel use and extra driving hours.
- Inefficient routing can also accelerate vehicle depreciation and inflate maintenance budgets.
- Environmental and safety concerns are also at play, with excess emissions contributing to a larger carbon footprint and increased [driver fatigue](#) that can compromise driver and student well-being.

These factors and more directly impact driver satisfaction and retention. Drivers forced to use inefficient routes deal with schedule-related stress, increased scrutiny, and frustration because their time isn't being used optimally. The result is a higher turnover rate and an inability to attract new drivers.

By recognizing the reality of these challenges, school districts can make better choices in overcoming them, including adopting advanced routing software that supports one of their most critical assets—their bus drivers.



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Taking On the Bus Driver Shortage

To meet the bus driver shortage head-on, districts must prioritize:

- Paying drivers adequate compensation.
- Building a positive work environment.
- Implementing supportive driver programs, including tech solutions.
- Developing more effective recruitment programs.

While there's no one perfect answer to solve all these issues at one time, a willingness to try new solutions and explore various creative outlets for attracting and retaining drivers is vital to recruiting new candidates.

Whether you outsource school bus routing or keep it in-house, here are some good starting points.

1. Prioritize Adequate Compensation

There's no better way to acknowledge a bus driver's invaluable contribution than paying them what they're worth. Competitive pay attracts top talent and incentivizes job longevity, as does offering options like equalized 12-month pay schedules like teachers receive. Equally important is cultivating a positive work environment where drivers feel respected and valued.

2. Emphasize Driver Safety and Skill

Creating a workspace that emphasizes [driver comfort and safety](#) can be an essential step in the right direction for addressing the bus driver labor shortage. Ongoing training, including defensive driving and crisis management, ensures drivers are prepared for their roles and supported while performing them.



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3. Rewards and Recognition

Even the simplest rewards like branded shirts and hats or the occasional free pizza can boost drive morale. Other ideas are driver referral bonuses, rewards for safety records, and recognition on the district's website or in its newsletter.

4. Up Your Recruitment Game

Online ads, job fairs, radio and billboard ads, and social media are common ways districts advertise for bus drivers. Many also use state and local industry groups like the [National Association of Pupil Transportation](#) and the [Association of School Business Officials](#) for information and support. No matter which forms you choose, go beyond highlighting the job's essentials and promote the unique benefits and opportunities it offers. For instance, you could emphasize flexible hours, summers off, and the stability of working with the education system. Consider showcasing driving roles as rewarding career opportunities, emphasizing the impact bus drivers have on their community and student achievement. You can also offer coaching opportunities and paid training.

5. Provide Modern Technologies

Bus routing and other student-related software solutions reduce stress and [streamline tasks](#), making the job more efficient and appealing.

Above all else, be sure to listen to your drivers. No one knows the job or understands the challenges better than they do. Their suggestions and ideas for making the job more satisfying should be given the priority they deserve.



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Problems Faced By School Districts Without Route Optimization

Overworked and unhappy drivers, unpredictable costs, and [safety and compliance risks](#) are just a few ways students, families, and staff are impacted by legacy routing solutions. Districts that put off route automation face problems that keep them stuck in neutral:

- Creating or revising maps can take months when done by hand.
- Routing changes due to enrollment modifications are typically on an ad hoc or makeshift basis.
- New student transfers may be delayed in taking the bus if the approval process is done manually.
- “Lost” students can get left on the bus or get off at the wrong stop.
- New roads that could be faster routes can be overlooked entirely.

Unfortunately, bus drivers often bear the brunt of these issues, resulting in them feeling overworked and unhappy. Instead of benefiting from advanced routing technology, they’re tasked with using outdated and inefficient systems that add hours on the road, [sudden route changes](#), and the stress that comes with managing last-minute adjustments. It’s a sure recipe for job dissatisfaction.



Without route optimization, safety and compliance risks can escalate, as manual route planning makes it challenging to ensure all safety protocols are followed. The impact on everyone involved is palpable, with students arriving late at school and parents missing time from work. Staff is left to manage the fallout from all sides, fielding calls from concerned parents and guardians and addressing preventable transportation issues instead of focusing on education.

The right routing technology ensures safety protocol compliance and improves overall driver, student, and family satisfaction, a shift that’s necessary for the modern school district.



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Tech Solutions: How Modern Routing Systems Enhance Driver Experience

Advanced bus routing systems like BusBoss are revolutionizing the school transportation sector. These dynamic solutions are efficient and user-friendly, allowing school districts to optimize bus routes, enhance safety protocols, and improve the driver experience.

- [GPS](#) and real-time re-routing allow drivers to navigate the most efficient paths and adjust based on traffic, weather conditions, road closures, and more.
- Electronic logging devices (ELDs) ensure adherence to hours of service regulations and help drivers maintain legal driving limits, reduce fatigue, and practice safer driving habits.

- Data-driven decision-making helps districts provide drivers with the extra support they need, proactively managing schedules, maintaining vehicles, and balancing workloads, all of which contribute to a more positive driver experience.

Automated routing systems are transforming student transportation, empowering drivers with the tools they need for a safer, more efficient, and satisfying workday. By [integrating these technologies](#) to improve working conditions and professional development, school districts can create an environment where driver retention is enhanced and full bus staffing is truly obtainable!

We hope this whitepaper has given you valuable insight into how optimized routing solutions from BusBoss can play a crucial role in the future of your district's student transportation program.

A leader in easy and affordable bus routing and tracking software, BusBoss solutions are designed to solve all your student transportation needs and state reporting requirements. As a certified member of the Schools Interoperability Framework Association (SIFA), our software enables diverse applications to interact and share data seamlessly.



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