

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

Published by Order of the Legislature

Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Energy

DATE OF HEARING: 4 OCTOBER 2018

MEETING STATUS: PUBLIC

LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: BRIEFING RELATING TO BILL NO. 101, AN ACT TO AMEND THE HIGHWAY TRAFFIC ACT

COMMITTEE:

Allen Roach, MLA Montague-Kilmuir [Chair]
Hannah Bell, MLA Charlottetown-Parkdale
Kathleen Casey MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point (replaces Alan McIsaac, MLA Vernon River-Stratford)
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Mermaid (replaces Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque)
Hon. Tina Mundy, Minister of Family and Human Services
Hon. Pat Murphy, Minister of Regional and Rural Development
Hal Perry, MLA Tignish-Palmer Road
Bradley Trivers, MLA Rustico (replaces Jamie Fox, MLA Borden-Kinkora)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jamie Fox MLA Borden-Kinkora
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque
Alan McIsaac, MLA Vernon River-Stratford

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

Jason MacKinnon; RCMP L Division (Supt. Mac Richards, Criminal Operations Officer)

STAFF:

Emily Doiron, Clerk Assistant (Journals, Committees, and House Operations)

The Committee met at 1:30 p.m.

Chair (Roach): Good afternoon everyone. We'll bring this meeting to order.

I want to first of all welcome everyone here today. It's great to see everyone. I'd also like to welcome Superintendent Mac Richards, the Criminal Operations Officer from the RCMP L Division here in the province and Jason MacKinnon, one of our bus drivers. I'd like to welcome you both here today.

Just before we get started just a couple of little things. I would ask that anybody who has cell phones ensure that they're shut off or on vibrate or on silent; we'd appreciate that. As the session begins, when you're going to speak at least the very first time, identify who you are before you speak; that way it helps the staff ensure that they accurately are able to capture those that are speaking. They really appreciate that when you do that.

We have a couple of substitutions here today; thank you those that are coming in to substitute, we appreciate that.

I think we'll look to adopt the agenda.

Ms. Casey: So moved.

Chair: Kathleen.

The reason why we're here today is to continue on with the conversation around school bus safety; safety of the kids on the road and how we can best increase that safety and make it a better environment for our children that are on the buses across the Island.

I believe Superintendent Mac Richards is going to give us a short presentation from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I'd invite the superintendent to get ready to do that. Before you start, just give your name so we can –

Supt. Mac Richards: Superintendent Mac Richards, RCMP L Division, Criminal Operations Officer.

Good afternoon. It's my pleasure to be here before you today to speak on traffic matters

and more specifically, the passing of school buses. My understanding was at this time to speak about the possibility or the idea of raising the fine for passing the school buses. That was my initial invite. If that's not correct, please bear with me.

Really I'd like to start today with what I believe we all have the shared premise, is that collectively, our goal is road safety and that our highways are safe for everyone.

The specific issue of passing school buses and school bus safety is something that I believe as a society we've been trying to address for far too long. Unfortunately, I do not believe we've achieved our goals in this regard or in road safety generally.

The reasons why we haven't been successful have never been truly identified. The one thing that is known is that driving behaviours need to change. This is truly the only way to increase safety on our roadways.

As a police officer, I've always touted that education is the first option. If behaviours and attitudes can change, then we'll have achieved our goal. The main benefit in changing behaviours is that these are long-term and not transient in nature. It's an engrained behavior versus a forced compliance. This is also the most cost-effective means to achieve our goal.

However, I'm also a realist and recognize that for some, individual education is not enough and enforcement will be required.

The illegality of passing school buses while stopped – much like impaired driving – is not a new law and it's known by everyone who drives. Education on both of these topics has been taking place for decades, yet the problem still exists. It would appear that education enforcement have not achieved our goals. These two activities are both preventable and rely 100% on those who are operating motor vehicles.

For the period of September 27th to March 2018 – and I just use those times that was the original meeting date – I reviewed the calls to the RCMP for passing school buses and during that period there were 30. Of these, we laid charges in four incidents and for 14, no license plate was obtained.

I then looked into the files for the period of April 2018 until last week and during this period there were 17 complaints, three of which resulted in charges, three warnings, three where there was some miscommunication or misunderstanding what the law was. Finally, eight where the license plate was either not obtained or was not correct.

Today I've been asked if increased fines will essentially solve this problem. No one knows this answer; it may have some impact. But I do not believe it will achieve the desired results. Only a change in attitudes will.

The Province of Prince Edward Island already has one of the highest fines, almost double the majority of the provinces in Canada. Yet, this problem still persists. The same can be said for use of electronic devices. The penalties are some of the highest, yet the use remains.

I conducted an unofficial poll in which I asked a number of people what they felt the fine for passing a school bus was. No one knew. I don't believe that people are passing school buses because the fine is what it is, and that an increase in fine will correlate directly to a decrease in the activity. I'm not convinced that drivers are actually taking this into consideration into how they drive.

I open this conversation with my opinion being that the driving behaviours need to change. I've been in the Province of Prince Edward Island for over two years now and can attest to the lack of compliance with – and I'll go out on a limb and say – respect for traffic laws. I do, however, know that motorists fully know what the traffic laws are as driving behavior improves dramatically when a marked police car is behind them. Unfortunately, often when there is not a visible sign of law enforcement, driving behaviours change.

Having said all that, I do believe that we can change driving behavior generally, and more specifically, as they relate to school buses through a number of means.

As I said, first and foremost is education. I guess we can start with the bus drivers in training and compliance with what the rules of the road are; messaging to the motoring

public. Obviously there are multiple different platforms that we can use to get that message out. I guess finally again, perhaps re-evaluating how we are conducting pickups and drop-offs. For the safety of the children we must look at the known risks and make adjustments if possible.

Enforcement: looking at active versus reactive patrols in the laying of charges. Could we consider mandatory court or mandatory training?

Equipment: use on cameras on buses in other areas has provided ability to better prosecute offenders. As I've noted earlier, in many instances, license plates were either not obtained, or obtained with incorrect numbers. Can't really expect a bus driver to drive the bus, look after the children and obtain a license plate all at the same time.

Some of the files I reviewed it was fairly clear that it was just a single digit that was reported incorrectly by the bus driver. However, this minor error in itself precludes us from laying a charge against the registered owner.

Strobe lights on buses, these are being used in different jurisdictions and with personal experience they do highlight the school buses and make them more visible to the motoring public.

Greater use of side and rear reflective tape: again to better illuminate the school buses. The use of red lights on the side of the buses and not just on the front and rear and at the stop arm.

Truly, if any actions we take improve the safety of the children, reduce the number of school buses being passed, then I think we've met our goal.

That's all I had from the formal side, so I'll open it up if there's any questions.

Chair: Hal Perry.

Mr. Perry: Thank you very much and thanks for the presentation.

You mentioned in it that from April 17th of this year until now, the present time, there were 17 complaints? Is that correct?

Supt. Mac Richards: I'll just go back to my numbers to make sure I have them right. Yes.

Mr. Perry: So that's in April, so really school was out for July and August. It's only about three months.

Supt. Mac Richards: April, May, June (Indistinct) September.

Mr. Perry: I consider that a lot. I consider one a lot, to be quite honest. When you said some of them were given warnings, what was the reason they were given a warning?

Supt. Mac Richards: Well some depend on the circumstances. I can't say for all, but the warning is obviously one of the avenues we have, it depends on the circumstances. Discretion is always one of the ones available to us. I can't speak to them specifically and dive that deep into and recall all the files.

Mr. Perry: I guess what I'm asking is you mentioned earlier about education and we've been educating people for two decades and it didn't seem to change a lot. You talked about forced compliance, that hasn't really seemed to work either. I just want to know what the reason is why people choose to pass a school bus with the lights flashing.

Supt. Mac Richards: Often it wasn't that we found in even some of them, it wasn't a – almost a conscious choice, it was more about not paying attention; passing half of the school bus before realizing that the red lights were flashing. I can't speak to what someone is thinking when they do it, but for some, definitely it was inattention and not paying attention. Or, not understanding that if you're coming the opposite way and someone is exiting the school bus that you, too, have to stop.

It's education but I can't disagree; enforcement does play a part of it.

Mr. Perry: Just from your own personal, again, perspective what would you like to see change?

Supt. Mac Richards: It's not just me, it's a common comment that I hear from different people is driving behaviours and whether

it's stop signs, red lights. I sit at my office on University Avenue at the intersection there, every day people accelerate through yet, yellow and red lights constantly. It's not just that intersection.

I'll use a very, I guess, example that I can say first-hand, I live out here in the Stratford area by the Sobeys, so existing off that there is a stop sign. Nobody stops. In fact, if you stop, the first worry you have is the guy behind me going to stop. Yet I was coming home one day and I noticed every car is stopping. Then I noticed there was a police car trying to make a left hand turn. So all of a sudden because of the visible sign of that police car everybody now complies with the law. That's the issue we have to change is, people understand what the rules are, they're just choosing not to follow the rules.

In this instance, we were talking safety of children for the most part. It has to be a change in driving behavior and it's not just in one area, it's from tip-to-tip.

A friend of mine from Alberta came this summer, they have a cottage here. It's the first thing he said to me is the driving. It's constant. That's something we have to change, it's not just me or people that I know. You read the editorials in the paper, on the news, there's a common theme here about driving and not stopping at lights. And/or following what, I would say, a pretty well known or common driving and that's really what we have to change. As I said, if we can change the driving behaviours, we wouldn't really be having this conversation. If we can change it for the long-term, then that's far better than if they see a police car then they drive correctly. That's not what we really want. We want them to drive correctly all the time.

Mr. Perry: I just have a couple of more questions, Chair, if you don't mind.

You mentioned tip-to-tip, so I'm assuming you're talking right across Canada.

Supt. Mac Richards: No, sorry, tip-to-tip on the Island.

Mr. Perry: Okay, so, on the Island. When you were saying about Alberta, I was wondering. Yeah, okay, so, on the Island, that was one of my questions. So it is right

across the Island, it's not in one particular area, one particular section of road.

The other one I have is – so we do have the highest fines in Canada at the present time, right?

Supt. Mac Richards: Yes.

Mr. Perry: Do you think that increasing those fines again or more is going to alleviate some of this problem?

Supt. Mac Richards: My personal opinion is, I don't think it will. I mean as I said, we already have of the – I think it's the second highest in Canada which is over \$1,000 for a base fine. Yet if you look at what the average income for the Island is if we follow, that's a huge number for sort of – but yet it continues. I don't think people are thinking about it that if it was more than \$1,000 I won't do it, or if it's because it's \$1,000 I'm going to risk it. For some it may. We don't know what's going through people's minds, but I don't think that alone will solve the issue.

Mr. Perry: But it's \$1,000 maximum, right?

Supt. Mac Richards: Minimum.

Mr. Perry: Minimum, sorry. How would I say it: Are police officers comfortable with charging the maximum and how often do they do that?

Supt. Mac Richards: That's not very common that we'd lay that maximum fine, that's more through the courts. To me, we're not really concerned about the fines, it's about the event. I'm still not sure if that will change the behaviour. I think we still, as I said, it's the driving behaviour that we need to look at.

You compare it to other provinces, they still have the same issues, yet the fines are much lower, or they have more compliance in comparison, the ones that I could do.

Mr. Perry: Great, thank you.

Chair: MLA Perry, thank you for those questions.

MLA Bradley Trivers.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

With your permission – it is Brad Trivers, MLA for District 18 Rustico-Emerald – I'd like to recognize someone in the gallery today.

Chair: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Bob Shand is here in the gallery and thank you for your presentation, Supt. Richards. Bob is one of my constituents who have consistently raised this issue and he lives on Route 2 where he used to load his son on the bus and it was in a dip between two hills and there were multiple lanes and it was at the end of a passing lane, and all these things that could possibly contribute. But in speaking with him and hearing your presentation today, really, it comes down to people just simply not paying attention and not obeying the rules. That seems to be the general consensus.

In fact, traffic safety across my district, I would say, it's easily the number one concern, especially – I mean, there are some particular intersections that are bad like at Hunter River where it goes Route 2 and Route 13, and there are obviously infrastructure issues there as well.

If people did follow the rules then we would have that. I should mention, as well – and thank you, Chair. I know this is a little lengthy, but there was an RCMP car today when I came into town and they're something I rarely see in the district except when Cavendish Beach Music Festival is on. It's like you say, when the car is there people do obey the rules.

I know when I drive through Borden-Carleton, there's a pizza place there and they have a car that's parked out at the end of the road and it looks like it's a law enforcement vehicle, and I swear every time I drive through I think, I'm like: Oh, I have to check my speed and check everything. It makes a huge difference.

My first question to you is given that we seem to all agree, the people I talked to and you in your presentation, that it's police presence that's the important thing. Do you think that we need to have the RCMP traffic

– what was it called? The traffic services division that used to exist. It was eliminated in 2013. My understanding is this division, I think there were five or six in the division, they would move around the Island almost randomly so people didn't know where they were going to show up.

Do you think we need to bring that back?

Supt. Mac Richards: I guess before, you perhaps misquoted me slightly.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Supt. Mac Richards: I didn't say that police presence was the main issue. I said driving behaviour was the main issue.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Supt. Mac Richards: No matter if it's a traffic section or just the general patrol, we will never be able to be on as many roads as school buses are at any time of the day.

So whether it's a dedicated traffic unit or whether it's just the patrol, that'll only cover a small segment of the highways. That may solve that issue, but I'm more concerned then about, if it's only enforcement that's causing the issue, or the solution, what about all the 99% of the other highways where the school buses are? That's my real concern is, those ones where law enforcement isn't at.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for clarifying that. It really is driver behaviour that's the issue, but you did say that when there is a police presence then people do follow the laws of the road. They know what they are and they change their behaviour.

Even though it won't cover the whole Island all of the time, it seems to me if there was a traffic services division then people – you don't know where they're going to show up. People might change their behaviour thinking: Oh, well that traffic service division is out there, I don't know when it's coming to my area of the Island. Of course, they will be present in more places than they are today.

I'll ask that again: Do you think that bringing back the traffic services division

would help, not just with school buses and people stopping for school buses, but with traffic safety in general? You mentioned red lights and running stop signs and speeding, and all the rest of it.

Supt. Mac Richards: As I said, there's no doubt that traffic enforcement plays a role in changing some behaviours. However, voluntary compliance is the key. Those are the long-term changes that abiding by the rules, whether the police are there or not, that's where we have to get to.

The thought that you may get a ticket, we need to – as I said, changing driving behaviours because that will be long-term. That will increase the road safety and that's where our goal is, is road safety, not enforcement.

Chair: Brad.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, so it's already been brought up as well by Mr. Perry that in fact, this is something we've been trying to do for years and years is change people's behaviour and we're having not great success, which is why I personally think having more RCMP presence would be good maybe through this traffic services division.

Another idea that's been brought to me by actually quite a few constituents is this idea of photo radar. So there are people, for example, in Hunter River. They have a house that's up and they can see – it's a hill that comes down into Hunter River and they can see – they have a speed radar sign that shows the speed of the vehicles coming down the hill, and it's coming into a 50-kilometre an hour zone and time after time again, it's not just 60 or 70, it's 100 kilometres an hour, people coming down. They said: Why don't you look at photo radar?

Even if people know where the photo radar is, it's that police presence again, right? They know that it's there. They're going to obey the laws even if it's just in that area. And if you move it around, then they don't know. I wanted to get your opinions on that.

Supt. Mac Richards: Well, having worked in provinces that have photo radar, it still

doesn't meet what you want. Still getting speeders double the speed limit, and the one sort of downside with photo radar is – I guess there's a couple – one is, much like the bus drivers, you have to literally get the license plate. So if the license plate is obscured in any way, you're not able to lay a ticket.

The other second part of that is, is these tickets only go to the registered owner. If you pay your fine, there is no implication on the driver and his driving abstract. It still remains clear. It's the registered owner who's getting the ticket which has no impact on the ability for them to have a drivers' license or accumulate points, so to speak.

There are some pros and cons to it, there is no doubt. But having worked in a town that had photo radar, it didn't stop speeding. Still, speeding was there. It didn't resolve all of the issues.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

In my understanding going back to this traffic services division was that the additional cost was actually almost paid for by the additional tickets that they wrote. So it wasn't necessarily a cost issue. I don't know if that's entirely true. I would like your opinion on that, but I wanted to know if you're actively lobbying for additional funding so you can put more RCMP officers on our roads to help make them safer.

Supt. Mac Richards: We're almost reviewing the way we're doing our operations and traffic is one. It's a common complaint or issue that's raised across the province, is traffic and road safety. It's one we continue to look at.

As far as actively lobbying, there have been no proposals made to date.

Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to MLA Kathleen Casey.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Kathleen Casey from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Supt. Richards, well first of all welcome to the Island.

Supt. Mac Richards: Thanks very much.

Ms. Casey: Only two years, hopefully you stay for a very long time.

I'm curious to know if the number of people that you've identified who've been caught passing school buses with the lights on; do you know if there's a certain demographic? Is it young people? Is it seniors? Can you identify a certain demographic of who is actually passing school buses?

Supt. Mac Richards: Well, whether it was the ones that we've been able to identify or based on descriptions from bus drivers, I would say it runs the gamut.

Ms. Casey: Okay, Mr. Chair, I just have a few questions.

You talked in your presentation, Supt., about only change in attitudes will eliminate this infraction of passing buses while the school lights are on. Seatbelts were a major shift in attitude here on Prince Edward Island and I may be naïve, but I think for the most part when people get in their car now they put their seatbelts on, so it's possible that we can change attitudes.

I did note in your presentation, education was the strongest element for this change in attitude, and I'm wondering if this committee, at the end when they're making recommendations to the Legislature, if maybe we could make a recommendation that when there's a renewal of a license that there's a handout given to the person on school bus safety and what the fines are and – just so everybody, every time you renew your license, that happens.

Also for new licensees, when they're 16, if they could be given the same handout, and maybe we up our education, our promotional materials, and our education, so maybe that could be a recommendation from this committee to actually, to do that.

I would also wonder if this committee could seek from the minister how many school buses have cameras on them. From the presentation we know that cameras on buses help us identify those who are making the infraction, so maybe we could recommend that more cameras be installed on school

buses, and we may very well be doing that now.

I do know that over the years since I've been here, we've replaced our whole fleet of school buses over the years, so just wondering if that could also be a recommendation, and thank you for your presentation.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to MLA Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

Hannah Bell, MLA for Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Certainly your presentation makes it clear that this is a complex issue, and changing behaviours is challenging. I'd certainly echo my colleague's comments that I had also thought about, the impact we've had over here is – sorry, my voice is still iffy – on the seat belts, DUI, and even needing to be licensed and have registration and insurance. We know those are still – there's not complete compliance, but we've seen that shift in sort of behaviour.

Some of that has been with things like legislation and fines and so on, but also by making them a priority in terms of what is acceptable behaviour socially. So social pressure is one of the ways that we can affect – particularly, for instance, in thinking around DUI, like drinking under the influence has been one of the best examples of that, where the combination of all those factors along with that social pressure of how this is absolutely unacceptable behaviour because of the risk and the impact it has on others.

I would like to see the committee making recommendations based on your clear statements about some of the things that we should be doing, particularly around making this a priority of not just education, but a priority in terms of how unacceptable it is that we put our children in this level of risk, because we don't want to be waiting for the day when we say: we told you so.

That's sort of the story that I can get from this, is we often – we see huge change come because there has been a terrible tragedy, and we are in – really just waiting for something like that to happen to be in a told-you-so space.

A lot of the things that you've talked about do have costs to them, but we also have to look at our costs – are they investments to mitigate risk? So things like cameras on buses and the additional visibility pieces are part of something which should really be an acceptable investment to make if we think that this is really as critical and important as it is, but I would really echo the need to aggressively educate. Not only in terms of it being something that – we shouldn't just be reminding people – we should be making this a priority from an education perspective in the same way that way we have with seat belts, and the same way that we have around DUI.

One of the last things we seen with that is where, when we back off on any of those campaigns because we think we've done it, we see the stats begin to slip. We've seen that recently where there is an increase in young people who are being charged and suffering the consequences of driving under the influence because we've backed off from that campaign.

So we can't afford to sort of take this off the priority space, and I would really like to see the committee making a recommendation for a very aggressive campaign in that same kind of space, making it clear that this is our priority.

Thank you very much for the clarity of your presentation.

Supt. Mac Richards: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you, Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: I'll now move to Minister Murphy.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Chair.

Let me start by apologizing for my tardiness, for being late –

Supt. Mac Richards: No, it's okay.

Mr. Murphy: – for the first part of your –

Supt. Mac Richards: Won't hold it against you.

Mr. Murphy: – presentation.

As you indicated, inattention is a big part of the problem. I know it's not just when it comes to school buses, but I find it alarming when I see how many people are texting. They're stopped at a light and their head is down or you're waiting behind somebody and the light turns green and you're still waiting for them to move. I don't know how we deal with that, maybe bigger fines, but it's a big part of the overall inattention problem.

I know you've indicated that increasing the fine, in your opinion, wouldn't help; and I agree that it wouldn't help, but somebody's not going to think: Well, gee, I'll just do this, I'll pay the fine if I get caught. But I can guarantee you probably if they do get fined once, they're not going to do it the second time if it's a \$2,000 fine. So it might be a deterrent in that sense.

I've often wondered – I've seen on the media, I guess mostly social media, where some of the school bus drivers, they'll cross the whole road, they'll angle on the roadway so that physically a vehicle can't get past them. I'm wondering is that something that can be legally done in the province. It mightn't work on multi-lane roads, but most of our roadways are just two-way traffic.

And wondering about – I like the idea of making the buses more visible. That's certainly an easy one, or you would think that would be an easy fix to put some strobe lights on all our buses as a minimal cost. But another one I thought might be more of a physical barrier to the people passing the buses is if we have an extension – I know how you have an extension so that the bus driver can see the children in front of the bus. I'm wondering if they had something like that on the left-hand side of the bus that would extend over into the other lane with flashing lights on it or something, so that if somebody does pass the bus that they're physically going to hit this barrier, then you'd think that they would feel obligated to stop.

Supt. Mac Richards: Much like you, I don't have the answer if that would be effective; but as I said sort of in my conclusion report of that was, I think we need to look at how we're doing things; and just because that's the way we've done it or, but not putting maybe into context of today's society or roadways or whatever that is, but I think any idea is worthy of exploring and maybe trying out to see if it does have an effect.

I, too, was of similar thought, of yes, if we extended that stop arm out, would that be more visible? I think it's a legitimate question, and maybe one that should be explored.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

MLA Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for your presentation,
Superintendent Richards.

I get increasing the fine, it's a monetary thing, you don't think of it in the moment; and I don't know what Jason's going to say later, but I'm sure he's going to be much more calm than the bus drivers that are coming to me all the time.

I understand your situation. I understand that, but these people are ticked off. They're sick and tired of this: Oh, we got to tell them more about it. If people on PEI don't realize you're not supposed to pass a great big yellow bus, we don't need more flashing lights, we don't need more education. They're taught this. I've asked drivers' instructors. They're taught this.

So I'm not saying the fines are the way to go, but the school boards are doing a good job. What they're trying to do is work with families and parents to try and find alternative stops for those kids. I know out in our area they're trying to get people off Route 2, because it doesn't happen on the side roads. It's happening on the major roads.

I don't know if, like – a guy told me at the Co-op the other day why don't we put a big

picture of them up there and say what was your rush when we find them? When people get caught for drinking and driving they're more scared of their name being in the paper than going to jail for the weekend. That's the truth. That's what people tell me.

I get there's kind of – I don't mean to make light of the situation, but I think Hannah, you said it, somebody's going to get killed one of these days. I know it's three times or 17 complaints, but it's just going to take that one.

I don't know if we need to take a – you know, the RCMP does some great things online with comical approaches and things, but one person with a picture there saying: What was your rush? Because they were fined \$2,000, I don't know. But I guess what I'm trying to say is if I went back to the bus drivers that spoke to me and said: This is what we did at our standing committee. And I'm only a fill-in here, but they would be like: Are you kidding me, Sidney? That's all we're, you know, and I know – do you understand what I mean? I know your hands are tied with a number of things, but I'm sure you guys hear that frustration, too.

Supt. Mac Richards: Oh, (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: And I don't want to have to go back to someone and say: Well, we're going to teach them more. Because in the heat of the moment when you're late for work and you're racing, that's what's going on. They don't care about a fine or if there's lights or not. Everybody on PEI knows you can't pass a bus with the lights on. It's just the first thing you think of when you see it.

Supt. Mac Richards: I don't disagree that for some, education won't be effective. I said that off the top, that for some, it will be enforcement; but I guess if we look at the very narrow scope that I looked at, in that sort of six-month period, roughly 50% of the vehicles that passed the school bus, wouldn't matter what the fine is because we can't charge them because we can't get a license plate. So, it still comes down to the safety for me.

If we can get the license plate through whatever means that is, then we can lay the charges. But if we can't get license plates or stop the drivers, we still have the issue. To

me that's, I think, why we're here is about the issue of how we stop people from doing it in the first place. One hundred per cent agreed, for some, education, we try it. It's very, sorry, it's the most sort of what do you want to use – cost-effective means. It's by far the cheapest way to get your point across is through education.

Yes you're right, there are some that won't take that opportunity and enforcement is a legitimate portion of that. I kind of use that hand-in-hand; education first, enforcement second. And you're right; everyone knows the rules of the road.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

I noticed last winter when this – don't know if it was last winter or not – when this became a bit of a more vocal issue in the media and online – we seen some people taking pictures or videos of their kids being stopped, or at the school bus. There was one very close to my own road and people whizzing by.

Is there any talk of the RCMP doing something like that? Like letting it be known when we have traffic stops during our long weekends and it's not like we're trying to surprise people with these stop checks. We want people to know, we want to advertise that we have a police presence this weekend as a deterrent so people won't drink and drive. Is there anything like that to say: Guess what, on Route 2 out in Morell today, or Route 2 out near Hunter River, we're going to be there and we're going to be videotaping that day. Outside the box thinking I guess because the education is not working, the fines aren't working. Is there something outside the box where we can – I know it's ridiculous to suggest publicly shaming but that seems to be the only thing that's going to work and might help to prevent a tragic (Indistinct)

Supt. Mac Richards: As I stated earlier was, the enforcement has to be two-fold. One is the reactive side which is sort of responding to the calls. The second side for us is being more proactive, that's the social media side, whether it's riding on the school bus, whatever that is, there's other means for us. We play a part obviously in the enforcement, that's our role. So yes, there

are obviously more things that we can do and should be doing.

Mr. MacEwen: I would encourage outside the box to do something that gets notoriety; that gets people talking about it. Gee that's an interesting way to do it, we better - because the same old thing is not working.

But thank you, appreciate it.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: MLA Bradley Trivers.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks again for coming in here to do this. This is a really hot topic in the district and it's something people are passionate about and they see a problem. It's not just with passing school buses, but it's with traffic safety in general.

You mentioned in your presentation when there's a police presence of some sort people are stopping at the stop sign, when the police presence isn't there they're going through the stop sign that you just mentioned in Stratford. To me, you're not laying any charges. That is almost a proactive thing to do. You put in the police presence and then people obey the law.

What people are telling me – and I think I agree with them – is if we have more police presence more people will obey the law and then we'll have less chance of really, fatal accidents happening or fender benders or any accidents at all.

I just wanted to be just very clear on this point. Do you think we need more police presence here on Prince Edward Island?

Supt. Mac Richards: It's a tough one to really answer with any – it certainly depends on what you're looking for. As I said, to me it wouldn't meet my goal in road safety if people are only following the rules because they see the police car. If that's what it takes we can still look at deploying our resources how we have them, but we will never be able to have enough policemen on enough highways to stop that tragedy from happening until we change the behaviours on how people drive.

Chair: Thank you.

MLA Kathleen Casey.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm a fan of the RCMP PEI traffic Twitter page, or Twitter feed. Do you know that there are 14.3 thousand followers for that account? So it might be a way of tweeting out about what the fines are about passing a school bus and that might be something. But I enjoy following their Twitter feed. So caps off to whoever is doing the RCMP PEI traffic feed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair: Allen Roach, MLA Montague-Kilmuir; just a couple of questions.

I would agree when you talk about behaviours and I think that that's been something that's been ongoing for a long time. It took forever; it seems, to get people to put their seat belts on. Someone mentioned that it's finally kicking in and people are wearing their seat belts.

When it comes to bus drivers, I think bus drivers are pretty busy. They have the handle, they got to open the door, they got to watch the children either getting off or getting on and they're checking the mirrors, they're watching for traffic. I think it's almost too much to expect that the bus driver is going to be the best evidence or the only evidence that you're going to have. Would you agree with that?

Supt. Mac Richards: 100%.

Chair: Thank you.

One of the things that I know – it's taking place now – is that there are cameras that are being tested in Prince Edward Island and that they're worth about \$45,000 a piece. They're hooked up directly to motor vehicles registration and that it has a camera that can capture the plates as they see them and provide that information to the police officer. I know that's being tested.

It seems to me that technology today – and I think this would be a two-fold question – I really do believe we need cameras on school buses. But having worked in a province

where there is a license plate required both on the rear of the vehicle and on the front of the vehicle, it's much easier to capture that plate that's on the front of the vehicle in a lot of these instances.

Would you agree that that is something that would assist, whether it was the camera, whether it was the bus driver, whether it was a police officer, whether it's a parrot who is standing on the side of the road that sees this, would you agree that that's something that we, as a committee here, should consider making as a recommendation going forward out of here?

Supt. Mac Richards: I guess that final decision would be up to the committee as to whether you're proposing two license plates on a vehicle, it's ultimately yours. I mean there's more chance to see a plate, obviously the better chance you have of reading that. I do know from some of the technology with the cameras it's almost a 360, or a 180 degree pan that would follow a vehicle from, sort of to the back of the bus, to the front of the bus, so that you have the whole sort of action of that vehicle passing the school bus, not just a static picture.

As I said, having worked in provinces with polar radar, people find very ingenious ways to get around the license plate issue; because without a license plate you can't lay a charge; whether that's manipulated license plates obscuring the license plate. It's not sort of the silver lining that will solve all of the ones, but those ones, I guess, it shows really where they're coming from if they're taking that extent to block their license plate knowing that there's a chance it could be photographed.

Anything that would identify vehicles more would assist us. As you said, I believe I'd mentioned in my presentation, that's a lot to ask for a bus driver. Because I think any bus driver or any parent would tell you, they're more concerned about the child than anything else happening around them. To be looking out both sides of the windows and trying to get all that down, that's a pretty tough ask. I don't know if I could multi-task that much.

Chair: Thank you.

When it comes to evidence to bring someone to court, I think that that's the – and I agree as somebody said – if you bring somebody to court maybe it's a good opportunity for the media to take that opportunity to say: so and so was charged for passing the bus, as they do a lot with impaired driving.

I do believe that when you gave us your list, if I could say that, at the beginning about your concerns, I think you've pretty much touched on each point that this committee would probably agree with that that would all help.

I understand that the PEI Association of Chiefs of Police and each police department are taking this very seriously and that they have been working towards trying to come up with a plan or an idea to try and reduce the amount of people that are passing school buses.

I certainly thank Lewie Sutherland, I think, who at one point was the chair of that group. I'm not sure who the chair is now but I'd like to thank them for the work that they're doing. I understand that they're actually going to have some sort of a symposium or a meeting coming up sometime in the next three to four weeks. I'll be looking forward to hearing what comes out of there.

The use of cameras front and back; and I don't think that there's any one thing that you listed that's a silver bullet. But I think a lot of them in combination, particularly when it becomes to behaviours – would it be fair to say that in the mornings the majority of people that pass school buses are just rushing to get to work?

Supt. Mac Richards: As I said, I can't really speak to what was in their mindset of to why. Whether it's rushing to get to work or thinking about work while they're driving and really not paying attention, I really can't say.

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Any further questions?

Superintendent, I want to, on behalf of each of us here, thank you for taking the time out of your schedule. I have an idea of how busy

your schedule is. Again, thank you for coming and giving us that presentation.

I understand we're going to now speak with a bus driver. But if at all possible superintendent, if you could just stay with us for a little bit in case there's some questions that came up that either one of you might be able to respond to, I'd appreciate it if you could stay with us for them.

Supt. Mac Richards: It'd be my pleasure to.

Thanks very much.

Chair: Thank you.

I would now ask Jason MacKinnon please come forward and join us.

Superintendent, if you want to stay right there.

Supt. Mac Richards: I'll give them some space.

Chair: All right, thank you again.

Jason MacKinnon: Good afternoon, my name is Jason MacKinnon; I'm a school bus driver for Charlottetown-Stratford and I'm also the chair of the health and safety committee for all the school bus drivers across Prince Edward Island.

Chair: Thank you, Jason.

Would you like to kind of address the committee first just with a few remarks?

Jason MacKinnon: I have no statements or anything like that. I was just asked by my supervisor to come in and talk. Being the chair of the health and safety committee, we spearheaded about a year and a half ago a campaign that we were putting across about the red light issue. I can answer, actually, a lot of the questions that were brought forward to this committee.

The campaign that we brought forward – because I'll give you a little instance – I started driving eight years ago, driving on the Mason Road in Stratford dropping off a little girl 4-years-old, she crossed in front of the bus. Mostly every day she crosses she bolts across. It doesn't matter what you tell

them they'll do it. The mother was standing on the other side. I had a vehicle come from behind me and by the time he reached the stop sign he would have to been going at least 45-50 kilometres an hour. I laid on the horn, yelled to the girls name, she actually stopped and the vehicle flew by.

Now to reiterate some of the comments that were made; as the school bus driver, I got the license plate, make of the vehicle, description of the driver, description of the passenger, all to put in our report to the school board. The school board passes on to the different police forces across Prince Edward Island and the driver just got a warning. It was in the paper. All that kind of information was put in. That kind of made me to the point of this is something that I'm going to take to heart after (Indistinct) incident. This is something I see every day.

We spearheaded this campaign like I said a year and a half ago. We did a survey to the drivers. We got back about, I would say, probably 63, 64% of the drivers got back with the statistics. One of the biggest numbers that we received – was actually one of the smallest numbers but it's still the biggest number – is 3% of drivers are seeing this daily. Is it a geographical area? Yes it is. The drivers out in the urban areas are not seeing it as much in the country roads and stuff like that because they're not as heavily trafficked as they are within the rural areas.

In this case he asked the question about cameras on the buses. From my understanding there are about 20 buses on Prince Edward Island that do have cameras. I do believe the company that the government got them from might have been from BC Gateway and I don't think any of them are working.

I know for instance, my bus was the first bus, bus 46, whenever I had bus 46, was the first bus to have cameras and it never worked from day one. They had to bring the company in to put new motherboards in, new camera systems, because the cameras, when they took them out, fell apart in their hands because of our environment. So they weren't – they were good six months to nine months outdated before the province even bought them. I'm not sure the price tag of them but pretty sure they're fairly expensive.

School bus drivers, like I said, we carry the most precious cargo on Prince Edward Island. School buses carry 70 passengers plus one, the driver. So you can imagine having 70 kids on your bus looking back. We have seven mirrors that we watch literally every second along with the main window. When we pull up to a stop we activate our amber lights. Of course you know, the amber lights are to tell the traffic that there's a stop up ahead, be prepared to stop. When we get to that stop we activate our red lights. We don't have the arm thing anymore; it's all done in switches. But whenever we activate our door switch it activates our red lights.

We are taught and we go through training and stuff like that usually every year. We have professional development days on the actions and stuff how the school buses work. We do our pre trips and stuff every morning, post-trips in the afternoon whenever we get off our buses. The mechanical side of the buses, it all depends on something happens during our drive. But the light issues, drivers are well educated on. Of course, you're going to have some drivers that you know – you always have your kind of one pre centers or whatever. But the fact of the inattention of the motorists out there is definitely one of the biggest factors.

Raising fines across Prince Edward Island; an opinion, like I say I'm part of our union. I said I'm the chair of the health and safety, I'm a bus driver. Raising the fines are not going to do a thing. It's the enforcement of the fines. So if somebody goes through my red lights, we get a license plate, we put our paper work in and we – I say we get a follow up from the police departments but we don't. But if that does happen and they're willing to charge the driver, then in our opinion – and this is one of the things that we did bring up within our campaign – is the enforcement of that fine. I'll give you a for instance.

Last year on the Bunbury Road I was dropping off a student with his mother, as they were crossing the road a car went right through them and literally was inches from hitting them. Gave all the information to the RCMP; the RCMP gave the driver a warning. In my opinion that really upset me because the fact is she almost took these two people out and just to get a warning –

warnings are not hitting home. Our campaign is a hit-home campaign. The last slide you see on our campaign is actually half of a school bus and half of an ambulance. It says: Do you want these red lights turning in to (Indistinct) lights. That's the basic gist that we're trying to get.

We want this educational piece to hit home and hit home to the fact that these people realize that these are their kids or their nieces or nephews or grandkids and things like that across the Island.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Any questions?

MLA Hal Perry.

Mr. Perry: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for your presentation. It's nice for bringing that perspective of being out there as a bus driver and seeing this every day.

I'm going to ask the same question that I asked to the previous presenter. What do you think can be done to make change for the better?

Jason MacKinnon: Definitely I would see – I understand where Mr. MacEwen is talking from there, where we educate, we educate and it's still not hitting home. But like more public awareness.

When fines are laid and fines are convicted more, I would say, media coverage on that, so that people are saying or realizing that: Okay, this is happening, this is the consequence they received and it's actually being done. I'd like to see more cooperation with the drivers and the police forces across Prince Edward Island, being that – if I put my paperwork in for a conviction and I'm not hearing any information about that conviction and what's going on with it and I'm second guessing.

The statistics that the last presenter had are statistics of drivers that put their information in, but there are so many frustrated drivers out there seeing that nothing is happening. They're not seeing nothing in the media or anything about what's going on, so they're not bothering filling out their paperwork. As

a health and safety chair, when I talk to these drivers at our professional development days and say: You have to fill out your paperwork – but it's just the frustration of them saying: Well, we fill out our paperwork and we had the license plate and it comes back and everything was good but nothing gets done.

The statistics are fine with the ones that are putting their paperwork in, but it's the ones that are getting frustrated and it's across the Island.

Mr. Perry: Right, and one more thing; being on the bus, is there anything that you would recommend equipment-wise that might be beneficial?

Jason MacKinnon: Equipment-wise, yes definitely.

At this committee it was one of the things that was asked of me to bring up was the cameras, to put in camera systems that are reliable, high definition, things that are going to work weather-related too, as well, to basically fortify that conviction. Because it's section 202 under the *Highway Traffic Act* is what we charge under, but you guys are probably all well aware of when in 2008 that the *Highway Traffic Act* was revised to bring in section 241, where it's the registered owner of the vehicle that gets charged. If the registered owner doesn't comply, well then there's a subsection four where they can also be charged another \$1,000 for failure to comply.

Yes, it's up to the registered owner if they want to give up the person who was driving, but then – but yeah, equipment-wise, yes. I would like to see, personally and I speak probably for a lot for drivers as well, is a reliable camera system on the buses and also the reintegration of front license plates.

Mr. Perry: Okay.

Do you think a rear prevention bar would be an asset?

Jason MacKinnon: I did some research. There's an extended arm that comes out on the school bus. It comes out about six-and-a-half feet. It does cross into the other lane so I guess logistically and legally, I'm not sure where the province can sit with that.

I have talked to a couple of companies in the United States that piloted the system. The first system wasn't great because it connects to the stop sign mechanism which is run by an airbag, and it was steel. So whenever they would come out, after so many times it would break because it was too heavy.

Then they came out with an aluminum shaft-style, that when it came out and the vehicle hit it, it would break away but it would also come back out. Then, of course, when the bus was parked beside the car for court purposes it was hard for the driver to explain why that mark was on their vehicle at the same. Conviction rate, they had 100% conviction rate and I do believe this was in Tennessee and there was another – it might have been New Jersey, but I'm not – but yes, there are different avenues.

One of the ones we did recommend, I believe it was a year-and-a-half ago, was the double stop signs on school buses and the LED lights. Now, the LED lights definitely catch your eye and the double stop signs worked great for – because I drive bus 43, which is one of the newer ones, and it has a double stop sign. It worked great for the first couple of months last year, but then the drivers kind of get back into their mundane routine of distracted driving, and we see a lot of the texting and driving and the distracted driving from our vantage point.

Mr. Perry: To just add to that, Chair, if I may?

That bar, or the arm, would it be better to have one on the front and also one on the back? Are most of the vehicles that pass a school bus, are they coming from the front or are they coming around from the rear end?

Jason MacKinnon: I would say, and I can't really be a statistical person on that, but what I have seen personally, and I see it a lot, is definitely coming from the front.

Mr. Perry: Front?

Jason MacKinnon: (Indistinct) vehicles from the front, yeah.

Like the last presenter said, and Mr. Roach was saying too, as a school bus driver we're watching seven mirrors. We've got 70

passengers, 50-70 passengers. We're watching all of the traffic. We're watching everything within our realm to try to open the window, get your head out the window to try to get a license plate because when you look in the mirror it is reverse and you don't think of that when you're doing your paperwork.

It's near impossible, but any of the ones that we do get in there, in our aspect, we just like to see the cooperation, the follow-ups, the conversations or anything like that with all the police forces across PEL.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Jason.

Jason MacKinnon: No problem.

Chair: We'll now go to MLA Brad Trivers.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

Thank you for your presentation.

Jason MacKinnon: Oh, no problem. It was kind of ad-libbed.

Mr. Trivers: It's great to get a driver perspective on things, of course.

I wanted to follow up on your issue with the camera. It was one camera that was on your bus, first of all? I just wanted to –

Jason MacKinnon: There was actually three. There was one camera to catch the vehicle coming through, another camera to catch the vehicle from the back, hopefully the license plate, and we had a third camera that aimed up towards the stop sign so that the people who were being convicted couldn't use the fact of: Oh, we didn't see the stop sign because it was actually being caught on camera being used.

Mr. Trivers: That clarifies that.

When you reported that into maintenance that they weren't working, you said they weren't working right from day one as far as you could tell.

Jason MacKinnon: As far as I could tell, yeah.

Mr. Trivers: What did they do? Are they replaced now or are they on order?

Jason MacKinnon: From my understanding, and it's one thing that really ticks me off, if you want to use a word, is: It's a cost measure. The cameras have not been working properly since day one, and we even did bus switches here and there to try to see if – the quality of the pictures were very poor. The quality of the video was poor. Even the one that was on my bus was at 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon. It looked like it was 10:00 p.m. at night kind of idea. That was the quality we were getting. So to get that aspect of the license plate or the vehicle or the description of the driver, you couldn't do it.

Mr. Trivers: Chair, I was wondering if maybe the committee could consider putting a request into the department for the number of buses that have cameras, the number of cameras, the number that are operable, and maybe some information about the cost of the cameras and whether there are plans to buy more or fix them, these sorts of things.

I just want to throw it out there. I know I'm subbing in on this committee, but I wanted to – because I think that would be very useful information for us to know and I think for bus drivers to know and everybody involved, really; parents.

Chair, I do have another question.

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: This is another issue that was brought to me about school bus safety just very recently. I understand that – and feel free if this is outside of the scope of what you want to talk about – but there's like a base one radio channel and there's a base two radio channel, the way I understand it it's told to me.

Jason MacKinnon: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: And it used to be that you could sort of talk to the schools or talk to maintenance sort of on the same channel. But now they switched it so you have to switch channels?

Jason MacKinnon: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: I had one driver report to me that they thought that was unsafe because if they had an issue, they didn't want to take

the time to switch channels and they felt that in many cases they would actually have to pull over to the side of the highway and they told me that the RCMP doesn't like it when they do that because it confuses drivers.

Again, if you would like just to give your take on whether you think this change contributes to buses being unsafe or not or if it's not a big deal.

Jason MacKinnon: When I first heard the idea I didn't like it just due to the fact of like – yes, we were able to get a hold of our maintenance depot and whether it was the school board, whether it was the schools all on the same channel, for us to – and then a lot of radio systems we changed over to Bell Aliant radio stations now.

It's the placement on the bus. There was no actual bracket set up for school buses so they had to be remanufactured. On certain buses, your radio could be in different areas so they're not ideal. Placement of the radio handle is ideal, but to get up – if mine – I have to get up and look and switch, so yes you have to pull over to do that safely.

Personally I don't like the switch and a lot of drivers have the same feeling because it makes it an unsafe atmosphere, especially for the children on the back too, whenever you're pulling over and they're wondering why and if they're getting up out of their seats and you're trying to calm them down if you have a problem with the bus or if you have a situation and you have to switch to an actual separate channel so that you're in contact with base one only and there's no other radio chatter within.

There are three different switches and of course, if you're on a field trip, for instance, and you have to get a hold of the western end, then that of course, that's another channel switch and things like that. The reason behind the channel switch, from what we were told, is that it's just so much radio chatter for the schools with base one and base two, that it was just due to a lot of communication loss and especially when you had a child that might have been on the wrong bus or missed or something like that. They were trying to just alleviate some of that radio pressure off the system.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Minister Murphy.

Mr. Murphy: Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, Jason.

I guess I don't have any problem with the cameras, but I just think that the camera thing is after the fact and I think we should be more focused on preventing something from happening. The cameras are fine, but the incident already happened when the cameras are involved, right?

Mr. Murphy: That's why I like the idea of some sort of barrier that actually physically stops the traffic, that the traffic – if you're going to go through the lights, you're going to run into something.

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah.

Mr. Murphy: I think it'd be more effective. But what I'm hearing from you, too, is that you would like us, this committee, to make a recommendation that we, that there's no forgiveness, that there's no warnings, that if you go through the lights of a school bus, you're getting a fine.

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah, and I'm just reiterating what I'm hearing from drivers from all across PEI, is when the incident happens and we do our due diligence of our paperwork and stuff like that, we're of the expectation that something is going to happen.

I've had incidences from Charlottetown city police, from the RCMP, where a warning was given in an incident where after I was talking to the RCMP officer, explaining to him what happened, I sat down and had a conversation with these guys and they're like: In hindsight, after talking with you, I wish I would have fined that person.

Because it's – you know, like I had one instance where the RCMP went to the door and he's like: Well, I heard two children in the background and it was a single mother. I said: Okay. He said: So I just gave them a warning. I said: Okay, well, she blatantly went through my lights, near hit a kid that was running across the road because she has no idea where the children are coming from, only to go home to get something and then go back, and this was a teacher.

So these are instances, and this is not the first instance of that happening, right? He said: Well, I just took it that, you know, a single mother, and for her to pay a hefty fine. I said: I understand that, but if she paid that fine once, would she do it again? So he's like: Well, in hindsight, I wish I would have charged her.

Yes, laying a charge, getting a conviction, getting it publicized is one way of public awareness; and then of course, something like the campaign that we've done, the red light issue campaign. What I see on Facebook and things like that is, for instance, Orange County Sheriff's Department every year do a Facebook message thing. They get together, the bus drivers and the police department get together, do a thing, a little promotional thing for the – and it's not just a matter of the first of the year or the end of the year kind of idea, buses are on the road ten months of the year.

So it's not a: Let's do a little campaign in September and we'll forget about it until June. It's – although I don't expect it to happen every month, but if you do a sporadic campaign, and what I mentioned there a little earlier, what ticks me off and a lot of other drivers is the fact is, when you start putting cost over the life of a child, then we've got some serious problems.

Mr. Murphy: Just back to Sidney's talking about thinking out of the box here, it got me thinking out of the box a little bit. I wonder, like, instead of a fine, if you could, part of the penalty for doing that would be a fine, plus you have to spend a day on a school bus or you have to physically be a crossing guard for a school bus for a day.

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah, there's some measures like that. You can have some community service on that end.

Mr. Murphy: I think it would certainly

Jason MacKinnon: Putting somebody –

Mr. Murphy: – raise some awareness around the whole thing.

Jason MacKinnon: Putting somebody on a school bus is definitely a safety and security

issues, but that's something you'd have to contact the school board on and –

Mr. Murphy: Have Mr. Richards sit beside them.

Jason MacKinnon: Sure, any day.

Chair: Minister Mundy.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you.

I want to apologize to my colleagues in the Legislature and the superintendent for my tardiness as well. I was late running from another meeting, but I'm glad to be here because I feel this is something very important.

I don't know if you all know or not, but in my past life I used to be a school bus driver myself –

Jason MacKinnon: Oh, there you go.

Ms. Mundy: – so I have some intimate knowledge of some very near-misses myself. I know that you do have to have many days, or every day, eyes in the back of your heads and in the side of your heads as well. There's a lot going on. You're multi-tasking. So to be able to – and many times, you prevent the accident from happening because you are looking around at everything that's going around and you can see sometimes when a car is coming and you lay on the horn and it catches the driver's attention.

In saying that, that you're catching their attention, as MLA MacEwen said, a big yellow bus sitting there with red lights flashing, that should catch their attention as well, but for some reason it's not. I'd have to agree with the superintendent that many times I think it is driver behaviour. It is just people are too preoccupied with whatever they've got going on in their day.

Good example of that this year was my daughter was rear-ended when she was stopped for a school bus. So not only did the driver that hit her not see her, but he didn't see the big school bus either. I can only imagine if he hadn't hit her, because there were kids walking across the road, he would have plowed right into them.

I guess when I think about that, beeping the horn sometimes catches their attention, or something else catches their attention. The big school bus isn't. It kind of reminds me of a book that was written by a gentleman by the name of Seth Godin. It was called the purple cow theory. It's a good book, isn't it? What he talks about is sometimes we become so used to seeing things that we don't see them anymore.

A good example he gives is we were driving back and forth to work each and every day and we pass farms and we see all these cows in the fields, but eventually we don't see them anymore; but if you dropped a purple cow in the field, you'd see it. You'd stop. You'd probably pull the car over and say: Oh my goodness, there's a purple cow in the field.

It goes for – you know, for country kids, they don't see the cows anymore; but if you take a city kid and you drive them through the country, they're going to see the cows in the field because it's something that they're not used to seeing.

It kind of goes to the point, I guess, what Mr. MacEwen was saying, is that maybe we need to start thinking outside the box. Maybe it's not increased fines, because right now Prince Edward Island has – we have the highest fines in Canada. Education, we're almost educated to death. We keep putting the education out there, but it's still not solving the problem.

I guess the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result, so maybe we need to think about: is the yellow school bus the symbol? Maybe it needs to be changed or maybe it needs to be a modification to the bus. Maybe it doesn't need to be flashing strobe lights. I don't know, but I think all we've been talking about here today is the same thing we've been doing, and I think we need to get a little bit more aggressive.

Maybe we need to do a jurisdictional scan. I don't know if the clerk's office can do some kind of a scan and come back with some statistics. Is there anybody out there that's got it right? Is there any other country or any other jurisdiction that getting children to school by whatever means is working and they don't have fatalities and they don't

have cars passing school buses and they don't have children dying and they don't have bus drivers stressed out.

I think I'd like to think maybe more outside the box. I think we can keep doing what we're doing in the meantime, and any improvements, small improvements we can do, but I think if we're going to get serious about this we've got to be thinking about a purple cow.

That's just my comments.

Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

MLA Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

It's just to follow-on from the minister's comments there in terms of sort of in other jurisdictions. There aren't as many other countries in the world that use the school bus system that's necessarily owned and operated by the education department. In other countries, for instance where I grew up, you use the public transit system. One of the pieces that makes that work for kids going to school is because there are designated, marked school bus stops or bus stops.

It's about looking at how public transit works for safety, so that in terms of providing infrastructure beyond the bus and public transit functions in terms of you've got kids traveling with adults, but also because the buses themselves are following regular routes, often they have designated lanes for transit for example, but it's the fixed, marked stops that make a difference.

It is substantially different from how we currently do school transit now, but that is actually the experience of a lot of kids in other countries in terms of how do they get to school. If they're not walking or cycling, then they're doing something like that.

That may be one of the things that we could also begin to think about on a broader system is designated spaces and stops. Is it safer for children to get together and walk and get on the bus in one designated space, and that the drivers know where that space is

because it is marked as such as a formal bus stop, for example. There's definitely some really other interesting things we could think about on the longer term that are a bit more creative in terms of how do we move kids around or people around safely and what are they doing in other areas.

Jason MacKinnon: Just to speak a little bit on that, I know from the school board perspective, of course we get our lists and our stuff so that every year our designated stops and stuff like that are based on trying to get as many accumulated in a geographical area as possible. Of course, that doesn't always happen because you get the phone calls from the parents: Why does my kid got to talk 10 minutes or whatever? So that's where a lot of leeway is happening.

But to come back to it, yeah, Prince Edward Island actually does have the largest fines in North America. So it's – to go back to the fact of do we want to increase those fines anymore or do we want to use the fines that we have now and push that fine and get a little bit more public awareness on that?

But yes, I understand. I get what you're coming from, make something – and there is different things. Like we've talked to some drivers and say: Well, when we're driving, we're looking here, we're not looking up. So there's a wag system something that can be developed for school buses that are used for emergency vehicles and stuff where the lighting system is actually right in front of you and it's the LED systems and stuff like that.

Then of course, it goes back to people who have medical issues and stuff like that, you've got to go around that barrier, but would that alleviate some of the problem? Personally, I would say yes; but the integration, like you say, after the fact of trying to get that conviction, reintegrating the front license plate where it's easier for us to catch the license plate and we don't necessarily have to get the whole identification of the driver because it goes back to the vehicle's registration and then it's on the elements of the vehicle's – of course, if we can, we try to give as much information as possible. But when kids are getting off the bus, you're making sure you got, okay, is there six, and then six are going

to here, two are going there, two are crossing.

The school board does its very best to make all the stops safe, as much on the door side as possible. Does it always happen? No, because of there's a way geographically is that we – the route of the bus. I think from my understanding when talking with Graham Miner that the school bus system is more of a North American phenomenon, as opposed to Europe and other places like that.

Chair: Thank you.

Just a couple of points: You had mentioned that you had done a follow-up through your department with respect to the radios, and you got a response on that. Did they change the radios completely? Do they work now?

Jason MacKinnon: Oh, yeah. The radio system, yeah, they just – we used to have an Island company that had our radio systems before and then they just basically upgraded to the Bell Aliant radio systems that they use or Bell, I guess; but yeah, they're great.

What happens is when we press the mic it goes from the mic to Halifax, Halifax to wherever the point of return is; but they do work great. They're a good radio system.

Chair: Now, you did the same thing with the cameras, the cameras that kind of fell apart or weren't correct for this environment. You did that follow-up through your department. Were all of those cameras replaced and are they working today?

Jason MacKinnon: I can't answer that question because that's –

Chair: Okay.

Jason MacKinnon: – beyond my –

Chair: All right. Well that's –

Jason MacKinnon: – beyond my –

Chair: – something we might –

Jason MacKinnon: I just know –

Chair: Yeah.

Jason MacKinnon: – from my aspect of the bus that I had the camera system on, it's the one that they use in the commercials, it's the one that they have a pamphlet on at the Access PEI, that pretty much from day one, and I witnessed the video – the first couple of instances that I have where they wanted to use the camera system, they couldn't figure out the legality of who could pull the camera system or the chip out of the motherboard to view it. There was a logistical issue of, was it going to be the school board, was it going to be the RCMP, was it going to be the government garage, they had no idea who could do that.

Once they got past that and then they seen the quality of the video, then it was basically just put it back in there and we'll just hope for the best kind of idea in the next situation. The camera system was more of a deterrent, possibly. It still basically fell on us as a driver to try get as much information as we could on that, on a situation.

Chair: Thank you.

I always thought if you had a button that you could push that would blast out paint that covered the side of the car as it went by –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Jason MacKinnon: Are you recommending that?

Chair: – and then we'd all see it when it came down the road. Anyway, that's just –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: I have had the opportunity, of course, in my past, and I did attend an accident where a student was struck. She was 14 years old. I was less than 30 seconds away when the accident happened, and there was no deterrent there.

That was a long time ago, and it's almost sad to see that we're still where we are, and so I appreciate MLA MacEwen's comment about starting to think about things differently and do things in a different way. Maybe the paint blasting out of the side of the bus and into the car is a bit too much, but it makes you wonder what we've got to do to get their attention, certainly behaviour as well.

I was kind of a little bit disheartened to hear that some of the school bus drivers – and I understand why they feel that way – that they've become disheartened.

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah.

Chair: I think that we need to find a way to encourage them, on a more positive participation level. So maybe if we could somehow ensure that whenever a bus driver reports an incident, that the bus driver is pretty much guaranteed that they will get a response as to what took place and what happened – the follow-up, as you call it.

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah, and I think that would be a key thing to get more drivers proactive in putting their paperwork in and things like that. Being the fact that – well, like personally, three years ago I had an incident on Browns Lane and there was two students that near got hit by a car that was coming through, and he seen the bus, he seen the lights, but he just kept proceeding to come through.

I put my paperwork in, had everything down to basically it was a pen sitting on the side I had that all down there – that happened three and a half years ago, and I still haven't received any information on what happened.

It's that follow-up. It's that care for the officer to say: Okay, this is what's happening; let's get your story on it. And then to follow up afterwards as to whether you're going to court, it's where the incident is basically, what's going on with it.

I think that would be a huge asset in order to have them drivers say: Okay, at least I know once I put my paperwork in, I'm getting a feedback on what's going on.

Chair: Sure, okay.

Well, Jason, I certainly want to thank you for taking the time to come in and see us –

Jason MacKinnon: No problem.

Chair: – and have some conversation with us.

I think there's a lot that both presenters have given us today, food for thought, and I think

it's really going to be extremely helpful in us making our recommendations that we will put forward to the Legislature.

Jason MacKinnon: Okay.

Chair: As Minister Mundy stated, Prince Edward Island does in fact have the highest fines in the country, and that doesn't seem to have deterred –

Jason MacKinnon: Yeah.

Chair: – anyone. We're not only just high; we're high by huge numbers. We're four times and five times higher than some provinces, and even greater than that. The fine structure doesn't seem to be the deterrent that we'd hoped in previous occasions where we've driven those fines up considerably.

I'd like to take the opportunity on behalf of the committee to thank both of you for coming in today. I'd like to thank the committee for some really, really good questions and food for thought here today.

Thank you both very, very much.

Jason MacKinnon: Thank you.

Chair: We're going to take a quick recess for five minutes and then we'll come back. We have some other new business that we're going to have to work out, so we just want to take five minutes with the clerk.

Mr. MacEwen: Let's keep 'er going.

An Hon. Member: Let's, yeah, (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Do I just keep on going then?

Ms. Mundy: I have another meeting (Indistinct)

Chair: All right, okay, we'll do that.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, I'd appreciate it.

Chair: Don't want anybody (Indistinct)

Is it the will of the committee that you would like to continue now with Bill 101 that's on our work plan, to get this one

finished before – as soon as we can?
Everyone good with that?

Clerk Assistant (E. Doiron): On the document I just handed out, there was talk at the last meeting about having information from the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and there were a couple of items that were mentioned today that the committee might be interested in receiving so I'm not sure if the committee wants the department in or just to send a letter requesting information.

How would the committee like to proceed on that point there?

Ms. Bell: Chair?

Chair: Hannah.

Ms. Bell: I had heard in the discussion that we wanted to get some information about the cost of the – the state of the cameras, the cost of the cameras and what the next steps are for that, whether that's going to be addressed, because I think that was a bit of a concern; that cameras were identified as a potential opportunity but the ones we have may not be working.

Perhaps that could be submitted in writing rather than asking somebody to come in to talk about it. That would be more effective.

Chair: Also, I think that with reference to the license plates, we could perhaps do the same thing. Forward a letter just asking the cost of having two plates as opposed to the one and where that cost would (Indistinct) – They do it in other provinces. There are companies out there that obviously make two plates that are identical, and of course the plates would stay with the vehicle and the owner – or stay with the owner so that if you sold the car, the plates come off that car and went on your new vehicle.

I think we should be able to get that in writing. However, I think maybe in order for us to – once we get the information, I think we may have to go back to the Legislature to have the legislation changed to reflect that. I'm not sure if that would be – or if they could just do it under the regulations. Perhaps we could find that out through a letter.

Minister Mundy?

Ms. Mundy: Just referring to the fines, there was a little bit of concern with the bus driver that was present that the enforcement isn't being kept up, that they're reporting and people are being charged, but they're just getting off with warnings.

I'm wondering if there would be any information we'd be able to gather as to how many reports we have annually and actually how many charges and fines to see if there is a big discrepancy between that? Because if enforcement is indeed an issue, then maybe that's something we need to be beefing up as well. Do you think that's information we'd be able to get?

Chair: I think, certainly, it is. But, we'd have to get it from all of the police departments.

Ms. Mundy: From where?

Chair: All police departments.

Ms. Mundy: Yeah.

Chair: Because they have issues, as he just noted there; Browns Lane in Charlottetown, so.

Minister Murphy.

Mr. Murphy: Just to follow up on what Tina is saying there, I think we'd have to look at maybe taking that discretion away from the police officers if they're letting their personal emotions or whatever be involved in whether somebody gets a ticket or not.

Chair: Thank you.

I think it was certainly heard –

Mr. Murphy: I think it was one of the incidences where the –

Chair: It was certainly heard by the superintendant because I saw him taking notes about that at that time.

The other thing, and I'd like to confirm, but I'm of the understanding that if a person is convicted of passing a school bus, that their vehicle insurance is either doubled or tripled

for the following five years. That's pretty significant in terms of a fine that goes beyond the fine and I don't know if that's correct, but I suppose we could send that to Graham Miner's shop and ask if that's in fact just a letter and we'd have that brought back here.

Mr. Perry: Chair?

Chair: MLA Perry.

Mr. Perry: If I may, in addition to that, too, I have a little bit of a concern over who the car is registered to because it may not be the driver that day. It could be somebody they lend the car to. It could be a business that one of the employees is driving, and I would like to know how we could get it back to that driver so that maybe, like you said, if that is the case that insurance of that vehicle is two-to-three times higher for the next five years and that person that owns the car didn't have any – other than the responsibility, of course, of lending the car or letting someone else use the car at that time. Just explore how we could put it more on the driver of the vehicle at that specific time.

Another thing I wanted to add, and I'm not sure if it goes right here or not, but it was to maybe have someone else come in and present or send in information. Perhaps it could even be a pilot project on what we had talked about today about that prevention bar at the rear of a bus, because there is a company on the Island now that has developed a rear prevention bar that extends out. It has stop lights on it. It has stop signs on it, and it has a camera on it.

The company is actually based up west – not the company, but the – I guess –

Mr. Murphy: Inventor.

Mr. Perry: – the inventor and the investors, and they're looking at using a company right now that's actually in the east and they'd like to promote this because they do believe, and I do believe, too, and it has been said here today: Prevention and safety, we have to be proactive, thinking outside of the box. What we've been doing over the years hasn't been working, so let's try something new.

This is something that I would like to propose, is that we have them come in and do a presentation on their product.

Chair: Okay.

Is this something the committee would be interested in seeing? Have a look at it?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: Thank you.

Do you want the information now, clerk?

Clerk Assistant: I can send you an email.

Mr. Perry: Okay, excellent.

Thank you.

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Do you want to see that in here versus asking the department of transportation to set up a time and let them pitch it to them, cut out the middle man?

Mr. Perry: Yeah, I'd like to see it (Indistinct). I would like to see it presented and actually see it implemented as fast as possible.

Mr. MacEwen: I just thought if they went straight to the department, would that be quicker?

Mr. Perry: I would like to see it as a recommendation from this committee.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Chair: Just – sorry – but just on the point, if we could arrange it it might be a good opportunity for the committee just to spend the time when the presentation is being made with the department of transportation if the committee is really interested in seeing that. Or, even if they came, I suppose, and provided a presentation that showed it, but it would be nice to see it.

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Chair: MLA MacEwen, sorry I interrupted you.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

No, I just wanted to point out that information about the cameras on the buses. That stuff was tabled in the spring during our budget estimates, so the numbers of cameras and the costs and all that, so it might save your search if you look there.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Chair: MLA Brad Trivers.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

The other thing – the way I understand it, it's the Public Schools Branch that's actually responsible, as it says in the notes, for transportation in the school system. So we have a bus driver here, but someone from the Public Schools Branch – I think they're probably the ones who are responsible for maintaining the buses, if I don't misunderstand.

It might be useful adding someone from there to come in and talk about the changes that might be recommended or that they would like to see on school buses themselves.

Chair: Is the committee all right with that?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Clerk Assistant: Just to confirm what has been discussed here at the committee; I think it's been agreed to send a letter to the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy on inquiring about the license plates and kind of the possibility of having the front and rear-facing license plates, and also inquiring about car insurance and if that's affected by the fines that are associated with passing school buses.

We also talked about the cost of cameras and the state of them and all that, but if that information is available in the documents that were tabled this spring then I can just re-forward that onto the committee so you have it kind of at your fingertips.

Then there was also discussion about inviting in someone from the Public Schools Branch to talk about the maintenance of school buses and what they would like to see

on buses, and then also to have the group that has been developing the rear prevention bar for the back of school buses to see if they are interested to come into present to the committee.

So there's two groups to send invitations to, from my understanding, but I would seek any clarification if there's any on those items.

Mr. Trivers: You said the Public Schools Branch?

Clerk Assistant: Yeah, so the Public Schools Branch regarding the maintenance and then this group that has –

Mr. Murphy: (Indistinct) transportation too or (Indistinct) –

Clerk Assistant: Would the committee like to send a letter to the department or would you like to have them also invited in to be with the committee in person?

Mr. Trivers: I think if we do invite the department of transportation in, based on what the superintendent was saying – I mean, he really branched out into traffic safety in general, I mean, he was talking about stopping at stop signs and red lights. I think since they'll be here anyhow, maybe talk about safety when it comes to school buses but traffic safety in general and different things that can be done. I would suggest let them know ahead of time, and maybe just increase that scope a little bit, throw that out there for the committee to consider.

Also, Chair: in terms of the cameras, I can't remember what was tabled, but really it's the number of cameras, the cost of cameras, are there plans to buy more, do they switch buses or are they permanently mounted to buses, and those are the sort of questions that –

Ms. Bell: And addressing the quality issues – sorry, and addressing the quality issues.

Chair: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Right, right. So as long as that's been tabled, then we have it, but some of those might not be (Indistinct)

Clerk Assistant: Okay, perfect.

Chair: New business?

Ms. Bell: Chair?

Chair: MLA Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

We're seeking an update from TIE specifically on the EV-charging infrastructure. It was meant to be applied for this year, the federal fund application. We'd like to know was that application done, the status of that, and what that could look like for that infrastructure.

Clerk Assistant: Sorry, EV funding?

Ms. Bell: Electric vehicle.

Clerk Assistant: Okay.

Ms. Bell: Electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Chair: Okay.

Clerk Assistant: So does the committee want to add that to their –

Chair: Can we add that to one of our existing topics?

Ms. Bell: Yeah.

Chair: Or do you want to make that a separate topic?

Ms. Bell: No, we could add it to an existing one. It would probably fit under the section regarding to the discussion on infrastructure plans, I think, which is priority number five?

Chair: Yes.

Ms. Bell: I think that's probably the better fit.

Chair: Okay.

MLA Trivers.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to be clear if traffic safety needs to be a separate topic, or if it's just

going to expand the scope when we bring in the department of transportation; and maybe it does need to be a separate topic – it's a huge, huge issue in my district.

Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: I hear about it all the time. It's number one for sure.

Chair: When they're coming in to talk about the bus safety, we'll perhaps add it then for them to bring some discussion and presentation to us on that.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, great.

Thank you.

Chair: Any other new business?

Ms. Casey: Motion to adjourn?

Chair: All right, thank you all very much for taking the time to come in this afternoon. I think it was a very good meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

The Committee adjourned