

# School Transportation

School Bus Purchase Program

FAQs – Update 06/10/15

## New School Bus Purchase Request (EF-T-17) (A District Submittal)

### When will NEO Transportation be available?

NEO Transportation launched November 1, 2013. Updates and refinements are implemented as needed.

### When is training available?

Classroom training is provided each year at the annual State School Transportation Conference. It typically occurs during the **3rd week in July** at the Sugarloaf Conference Center, Carrabassett Valley, Maine. Watch for an announcement in the Maine DOE News. All school Transportation Directors should attend.

### What is it?

The New School Bus Purchase Request is one of 6 steps (request a bus, receive approval, report the bus purchase, report a bus approval cancellation, submit the safety and training annual data report, and submit the vehicle annual data report) required to participate in the Maine School Bus Purchase Program. The New School Bus Purchase Request is an annual request submitted to the Maine DOE by public school districts and schools that receive state funds. There are two types of bus purchase requests 1) a new bus that replaces an existing school bus and 2) a new bus that is an addition to the existing school bus fleet (without retiring an existing school bus). The school bus purchase program has a 3 year cycle, e.g., a request is placed in FY15, with an approval the bus is then purchased in FY16, and state subsidy begins in FY17 (the year following the purchase). Source: Title 20-A, section 5401.

### When is it due?

Each year the New School Bus Purchase Request opens **November 1** and closes **November 25**. There are no extensions. We strongly recommend that you submit your request during the first week in November. Requests are submitted for buses that will be purchased in the fiscal year (FY) following the FY of the request, e.g., a request is submitted on November 1, 2014 (during FY15) seeking approval to purchase a bus between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016 (FY16).

### Where is the request located?

The request is located in the NEO Transportation system under the **“Vehicle Inventory”** tab. Select **“Vehicle Annual Data.”**

### How is a request completed?

There are 3 options to submit a request for a new school bus:

- Option 1 – Replace an existing bus
- Option 2 – Request an addition to fleet
- Option 3 – Emergency

To be eligible for the School Bus Purchase Program a bus must meet minimum age and mileage requirements (see 05-071 Chapter 81 (pages 4-5)). If your bus does not meet both age and mileage requirements do not submit a request unless you have an emergency request.

Option 1 – Replace an Existing Bus – Open your vehicle inventory. For the bus that you want to replace/retire, click on **“Select Link”** which is in the **“Navigation”** column and choose **“Request**

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**Replacement.** Complete items in the “Request Bus (New)” block. Press the “**Create**” button located in the lower left of the screen.

Option 1 – Note – The NEO system will allow 2 bus requests for 1 bus VIN if the requests are placed during different fiscal years (FYs). For example, the following 2 request can exist in the system at the same time:

- FY15 request to replace VIN 1234
- FY16 request to replace VIN 1234

If the FY15 approval does go through then the FY16 approval will be cancelled automatically. If the FY15 approval does not go through then the request will time out at the end of FY15 and the FY16 approval will remain in the system until approved or until the FY16 cycle closes. The system will allow only 1 approval per replace/retired VIN.

Option 2 – Request Addition to Fleet – Open your vehicle inventory. Click on the “**Request Addition to Fleet**” button. It is the large blue button near the upper left of the screen. To be eligible for addition to fleet the following criteria are considered:

- Buses to accommodate increased enrollment
- Buses to replace contracted services (emergency)
- Buses to replace contracted services (planned)
- Buses for non-critical special purposes (special needs student transport)

Complete items in the “Request Bus (New)” block. Press the “**Create**” button located in the lower left of the screen.

Option 3 – Emergency – Open your vehicle inventory. For the bus that you want to replace/retire, click on “**Select Link**” which is in the “**Navigation**” column and choose “**Emergency Request.**” Complete items in the “Request Bus (New)” block. Press the “**Create**” button located in the lower left of the screen. To be eligible for an emergency request the bus being replaced/retired needs to be damaged beyond economic repair due to one of the following:

- Crash / accident
- Fire
- Structural failure
- Vandalism
- Other loss

Maintenance issues are not a qualification for an emergency request.

### **When are requests approved?**

Each year round one (1) bus purchase request approvals are posted between **December 31** and **January 31**. Round two (2) bus purchase approvals are dependent on approval cancellations. There may or may not be a round two (2) approval. If there is a round two approval it typically occurs between September and November. Any bus that does not make round one (1) approval is automatically considered for round two (2). You do not need to submit anything for your round one (1) requests (EF-T-17) to be considered for round two (2).

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### Where are approvals posted?

Districts can confirm the New School Bus Purchase Approval in NEO Transportation in two locations 1) the district NEO Transportation site and 2) the public NEO Transportation site. On the district NEO Transportation site the approval is found under the “**Bus Purchase**” tab. Select “**Requests Summary.**” Approvals are listed in the “**Request Status**” column. If you see “**Approved**” listed for a request then the purchase is approved. If you see “Applied – Round 1” (or 2) after the date approvals have been posted (typically between December 31 and January 15) then that bus did not make Round 1 and will automatically be considered for Round 2 approvals. On the public NEO Transportation site a list of all approvals are provide. The public NEO Transportation site can be viewed at this link:

<https://neo.maine.gov/DOE/NEO/Dashboard>. Public site approvals are typically posted during late January or February.

### How are approval change requests handled?

Changing the original bus request submittal (EFT-17) may affect your approval.

Option A – Changing the retiring VIN – If a district wants to change the retiring VIN then the district needs to cancel the approval. The original approval will not move forward to the new request. The district can submit a new request (EF-T-17) for a different retiring VIN. The new request will then be considered during the Round 2 approval evaluation.

Option B – Changing the payment term – Increasing the number of payment years - The payment type and payment years shown on your bus approval are what the district requested at the time of application (EF-T-17). Districts may increase the number of payment years, e.g., if a district requested a 3 year term payment the district may change to a 5 year term payment. The business manager will need to record the change when entering the new bus purchase report (EF-T-20) in NEO. Follow the directions above for Stage 1, enter the actual payment years and upload the financial documents that confirm the term payment. School bus purchase report (EFT-20) changes should be recorded in NEO during the week that the district takes possession of the bus.

Option C – Changing the payment term – Decreasing the number of payment years - The payment type and payment years shown on your bus approval are what the district requested at the time of application (EF-T-17). If a district decreases the number of payment years, e.g., if a bus purchase approval was received for 5, 4, 3, or 2 year term payments and a district wants to change the term payment to 1 year or any number of years less than the original approval, then the total district approval amount will be reduced.

Option D – Changing the bus type and capacity – Increasing or decreasing the requested bus type and capacity may affect the maximum bus approval dollars. If the type or capacity is increased the original approval amount will remain the same. If the type or capacity is decreased then the approval amount will be decreased to match the approval for new the type and capacity.

Changes are reported on the School Bus Purchase Report (EF-T-20). To change an original bus request follow instructions on the School Bus Purchase Report (EF-T-20) FAQs.

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### **How long is my approval valid?**

Bus purchase approvals are valid for the fiscal year (FY) of the approval. The district needs to take possession of and make at least one payment during the FY of the approval. Approvals are not transferred from one year to another.

### **Who has access to the request?**

The district superintendent, business manager and transportation director have access to the New School Bus Purchase Request.

### **Where are instructions located?**

Instructions are included in the NEO Transportation detailed “**FAQs**” documents for each report. Once the NEO system edits are completed we will post instructions in the NEO Transportation system.

### **How do I certify my request before it is submitted?**

At this time, no certification is required for this request.

### **How do I confirm that the request was submitted?**

Districts can confirm submittal of their New School Bus Purchase Request by selecting the “**Bus Purchase**” tab, clicking on “**Requests Summary.**” Look at the request fiscal year (FY). If your request is listed on this page then the request was submitted. Please do not call the Department to request verification as you can confirm it yourself.

### **Who do I contact for assistance?**

Contact the MEDMS Helpdesk at [medms.helpdesk@maine.gov](mailto:medms.helpdesk@maine.gov) for your password or technical issues associated with access to NEO Transportation.

Contact Pat Hinckley at [pat.hinckley@maine.gov](mailto:pat.hinckley@maine.gov) for details about the content of the request or program information.

Contact your district IT department and the MEDMS Helpdesk (at [medms.helpdesk@maine.gov](mailto:medms.helpdesk@maine.gov) ) if you have technical difficulty with the NEO system.

### **What Maine statute and rule govern the School Bus Purchase Program?**

The statute is Title 20-A, sections 5401 and 5402. The rule is 05-071 chapter 81. See the Maine DOE School Transportation website: <http://www.maine.gov/doe/transportation/laws/>

**What is the website link to the Maine DOE School Transportation page?** <http://www.maine.gov/doe/transportation/>