

Regular Meeting #3

Maine Transportation Safety Commission Meeting

March 19, 2026; 8:30am-11:30am

45 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME; and virtual

Chairs: Megan Welter, DOE; Bruce Scott, DPS

Participants: Megan Welter, Bruce Scott, Rob Susi, Christopher Ireland, Robert Skehan, Stephen Marquis, Wayne LaPierre, Mitzii Smith, Chris Pasciuto

Staff Support: Deb MacMaster, Jason King, Jennifer Belanger

Agenda

Call to Order

Approval of Minutes: **Motion: Brackett; Second: St. Pierre; Vote: Unanimous**

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees: N/A

New Business:

- Update on LD 2159: *An Act to Require School Buses to be Equipped with and to Use School Bus Crossing Arms*: Amendment discussion
 - Review of language update – revised amendment to the amendment
 - Sought new language in subsection §2306-A to clarify when the crossing arm needed to be activated
 - Language also added to the section re: the proposed Commission, adding some flexibility of the Commission and duties. Also added language related to the report back to the Transportation Committee
 - Effective date
 - Discussion about whether language should be included re: the “bus may not be in motion at any time while the door is open” and whether it should have some language added related to while passengers are on board
 - **Motion to approve changes: St. Pierre, second: Pasciuto – Vote: Unanimous**

Unfinished Business – Bus Specifications:

- Update on LD 2159: *An Act to Require School Buses to be Equipped with and to Use School Bus Crossing Arms*
- Review of and recommendations to Title 29-A, Ch. 19, subchapter 4: School buses
 - Add language to describe testing procedures for antipinch
 - §2304(2) Clarify that doors need to open after the door closes on a body part
 - Add language related to antipinch sensor alarms; concern is that it is difficult to test/measure the level for inspection
 - For future discussions, consider:
 - Look at §2308 to add more info about stopping distances
 - Look at passenger vans and the requirements that they follow the same requirements
 - This would need more discussions, as there could be safety issues as other cars may not be expecting the
 - Possible reorganization of 29-A into a section about School Buses to incorporate all of the related statutes
 - Not necessarily related to statutory changes; sharing info about near miss videos and other safety-related situations to identify
- Review of and recommendations for Ch. 86, “Maine Uniform School Bus Specifications”
 - Update the “National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures 2025 as enacted by the 17th Congress”
 - Clarify language in 29-A: statute takes precedence over rule
 - Door section §2304; clarify that §2304, buses should have an alarm, specify that doors are prevented from closing on a limb
 - Alarm: concern that sound is too low for many drivers, need alert that is non-visual, given all of the visual inputs drivers must process in the course of their work
 - Some bus models have stronger alerts than others
 - Caution: if goal is for retrofit for doors on older buses, if we create a standard higher than what is possible with retrofitting, that’s problematic
 - Manual doors exist on many Maine buses – how would we account for this?
 - Rule Ch 86 should also be amended to ensure that the rule is reflective of what is updated into statute
 - DPS rules regarding bus inspection should also be updated
- Review of school bus retrofitting and anti-pinch sensor technology: Clifford Chase

- Bluebird Bus dealer; sent letter to the Commission
- Anti-pinch sensors: has not performed retrofitting of anti-pinch sensor doors to date: no manufacturer-approved guidance. This technology isn't a simple "add-on".
 - Concerns: who will certify these systems, who will install them, who will have liability for these systems, what would the warranty be?
 - "I don't think it will work. It worries me, it scares me. With older buses, I just don't feel comfortable."
- Crossing arms can be retrofitted to older buses, regardless of year of bus manufacture.
 - Dealer technicians can install
 - Can take 6-8 hours for proper installation, depending on the bus
 - Warranty is 1 year
- Industry can support crossing arm implementation, but not all at once. The timeline in LD 2159 is too short. The work can be done, but more time will be needed. Considerations: dealer technician availability, training for district mechanics if going that route.
 - 18-36 months is most realistic for crossing arm retrofitting
- Other Tech Options:
 - Brake interlocking system: can be applied to all fuel-type school buses. If door is open, it does not allow the bus to move beyond "skipping," or "dragging the bus".
 - Uncertain if it can be equipped on electric bus; will report back
 - Works with hydraulic brakes and air brakes
 - Cannot do after-market work on brakes, so not an option for retrofitting
 - Warranty: 4 years / 50k miles
 - Cost: moving forward, Maine schools can opt for this at no additional cost on their new buses
 - 360-degree Camera System: still under development, still needs federal approval: anticipated in October 2026.
 - Enhanced danger zone lights: option currently available
 - Front camera that is activated when door opens, shows front view from the grill, wide angle of entire front of the bus, visible to driver on internal bus console, stays active until bus hits 7 MPH. Automatically equipped with Bluebird.

- Mobileye: passive collision avoidance system: collision warning, lane departure assist, etc. Alerts driver.
 - Cost: \$1,700 per bus
 - Request to Commission: verbage clear on model year vs calendar year. Currently delivering “2027 models” right now, so make sure that it’s clear which standard we are using. Provides clarity.
- Synthesis of Current Thoughts on Recommendations: School Bus Specifications
 - 29-A: more specificity to doors, alert system, exception regarding manual doors
 - Rule Ch. 86: limited; update referencing language from 2015 to 2025; buses need to meet Maine State Inspection (allows for changes in the manual to be automatically included in the rule)
 - LD 2159: ensure the Transportation Committee includes exemption for manual doors
 - **Vote: unanimous**

New Business – Driver Training

- Review of Ch. 81, “School Transportation Safety” and bus driver training: considerations on (1) training; (2) requirements for districts to report to the DOE; (3) oversight authority to ensure the training is provided
 - Bus Drivers:
 - Current landscape: 16 hours of driver training, report to the state via NEO system. District training, regional training, state-wide training in July. All trainings through MAPT is optional.
 - Barriers to participation include cost, distance, lodging/meals, district needs regarding drivers, providing overtime for non full-time employees
 - Volunteer training providers through MAPT
 - Training topics and structure is not specified
 - Discussion regarding changes:
 - Number of hours: 24-32 hour minimum?
 - Content of training: can be hard to find, can be expensive
 - Online / asynchronous: has been attempted in some locations; not particularly successful
 - Uneven resources across the state for absorbing additional training requirements. Divergence in funding, supports, across

the state. Would need funding considered with any increase in training.

- Important to outline and standardize the training framework for all drivers across the state. This is for Transportation Directors as well. MAPT has provided this, but it should be formalized.
 - Consider: state to take on driver training as part of the DOE operations. Standardize. Bus Inspections run that way through Jason's team at DPS, could it also work that way for driver training?
 - Team includes 8 inspectors in the state; usually in teams of 2. Bus inspections are approximately 50% of the team's work.
 - Model of the DOE's "distinguished educator" program. Could we have a similar program for drivers? Provides leadership, training, standardization.
- Other state models for standardization?
 - Mitzi to reach out to regional cohort of the national association.
- Framework for curriculum:
 - Convene Transportation Directors to discuss what curriculum items are needed.
 - Drivers want support, are scared. Directors are engaged, want to be able to provide more for drivers. There will be robust engagement in this discussion.
 - If there is a set curriculum, training could be arranged through MAPT regional / state training cycles.
 - However, MAPT is a volunteer org. May not be appropriate. An entity like the State would have ultimate responsibility.
- Driver training and standardization is paramount.
 - Should the commission create the standard, training program / curriculum, review it each year?
 - Should the commission request funding for training, hiring to implement, etc?

- Provides an opportunity: when DPS Bus Inspections occur, could also do compliance check with training
- Consideration: Federal Training Requirements – it is not required to have standardized training, no curriculum mandated. Is Maine going to have more strict regulations?
- Compliance and standardization in training: needs to be a function of the state; shouldn't be up to local control.
 - Opportunity to address the foundational issues. We should be “thinking big.”
 - Maine Constitution is very clear that education is determined locally. Local control is a foundational aspect of education in Maine. To go against this tradition will have headwinds.
 - Report should discuss the context of structural ways that we got to this current situation. Understanding of symptoms vs. root causes.
 - Caution: fixes will cost money, and there are inequities in our school funding system; want to ensure that the fixes we propose will not be borne by local taxpayers. Need to remove barriers, not create new financial asks into already-strapped districts.
 - Caution: need to focus on “both-and” regarding training and bus specifications.
 - The cost of new buses are \$150,000 (they were around \$85,000 just prior to Covid); if districts don't have the funds to purchase new buses with all of the newly required elements, districts may hold onto less-safe buses b/c the cost of a new bus is prohibitively expensive.
 - Needs to be ongoing funding to support training and bus specification needs
- Transportation Directors
 - Some districts don't have a dedicated Transportation Director, so need to consider how to include those districts. Often also Facilities Director, often don't have support admin staff, etc.
 - Should we consider requiring a dedicated Transportation Director for SAUs?

- Allow for a regional model for some of these small districts?
 - Mandate that Transportation Directors cannot also be drivers?
 - Other state models for standardization? Should consider other state models for Transportation Directors as well.
- Students
- Synthesis: How to move forward
 - Training and curriculum framework – drivers, directors, and students
 - Initial training vs ongoing
 - How to fund various aspects of recommendations
 - State-specific considerations: rurality, geography, and local control considerations
- Next steps and agenda setting
 - Focus of next meeting:
 - Determining best practices
 - Identify training, how it will be disseminated
 - Communication, how to communicate to districts, students, families

Adjournment: **Motion: Brackett; Second: Scott; Vote: unanimous**