

Regular Meeting #5

Maine Transportation Safety Commission Meeting

April 3, 2026; 8:30am-11:30am

45 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME; and virtual

Chairs: Megan Welter, DOE; Bruce Scott, DPS

Participants: Megan Welter, Bruce Scott, Cheryl Brackett, Bob Skehan, Wayne LaPierre, Mitzii Smith, Chris Pasciuto, Chris Ireland, Rob Susi

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:

Review of Draft Report: Guiding Questions:

Based on discussions, review of meeting minutes, and the draft report, what should be included in each of the sections?

What should be included in recommendations in this report?

What should be work directed to the ongoing work of the Commission (presuming the final passage of LD 2159)

Current Statutes and Regulations & Recommended Changes or Improvements

A. Review current statutes and regulations related to safety standards, protocols, and school bus driver training and ensure clear communication of these requirements to all school districts

- Driver Physicals; Chapter 82 (repealed):

- History: repealed b/c rural districts had difficulty accessing physicals, and it was time consuming. Never gave guidance after the old DOT physicals; up to the SAU to determine the scope, frequency of physicals.
 - DOT physicals: standardized for CDL drivers, very high standard, designed for longer-distance drives, may not be necessary for bus drivers. Only registered physicians are able to provide these physicals.
- Need to provide greater clarity statewide. How?
 - What's the standard? What's the reporting requirement? What's the oversight?
 - Can we adopt the DOT standard, but exempt certain items within that physical that are not relevant to bus drivers, or are overly burdensome? For example, allowing any medical provider to conduct the physical, as long as they follow the standard form.
 - Why lower the standards? CDL drivers live in rural areas, and have to meet the DOT physical.
- Retesting after a medical leave. Need protocols / training for Transportation Directors to navigate these situations.
- Consensus:
 - Needs to be a standard established, consistent.
 - Need to invite in experts to help define that standard.
 - Prudent to adopt the DOT standard, while being mindful of barriers.
- Outstanding Questions / Decisions:
 - Licensing matter? (law / statute) Or employment matter? (rule / regulation)
 - If licensing, easier path, but intentional coordination is the challenge.
 - Director Ireland offered to survey states regarding how they handle these circumstances. Could provide info within about a month.
 - Federal Motor Safety Administration, part of US DOT. How many registered physicians are there?
 - SAU funded or state funded?
- Recommendation to Legislature:
 - Create statewide standard for driver physicals. "Repeal the repeal."
 - Adopt clinical standard, continue discussing methodology.

- The Commission will continue working on this item, surveying states and bringing in experts to craft that standards.
- Chapter 29-A:
 - Changes discussed mirror LD 2159 changes.
 - Arms must be retrofitted by Feb. 15, 2027.
 - Changes and funding were voted into the Supplemental Budget (LD 2212).
 - Manual door exemption did not make it into LD 2159. **Recommendation: fix this.**
 - Caveat: we did not examine parts of 29-A that wasn't specifically targeted to school buses. There may be more to explore: **Recommendation: future commission should look at Title 29-A more holistically.**
 - **Recommendation: 2308; bus must be prevented from moving at every stop.**
- Rule Chapter 86
 - Most changes discussed mirror LD 2159.
 - Inspections: does anything need to be added here? How is this program implemented? Are changes needed?
 - **Recommendation: in rewrite of Ch. 86**
 - **Section 3: National Congress 2025**
 - **Section 3, Subpart 2: meet most up-to-date Maine safety inspection standards.**
 - Automatic brake lock if door is ajar (micro-lock).
 - Don't try to retrofit; only for new purchases.
 - Could be discussion for future-commission.
 - Recommendation: Ch. 81 / Title 29-A (copied above)
 - Require: all drivers must use parking brake at every stop. (Ch. 81). Bus prevented from moving at every stop.
 - **Future Commission should consider: all new buses (2029 and future) must be equipped with the microlock or similar technology.**
- Rule Chapter 81: Recommendations
 - **Explicit clarification of pre- and post- trip inspections**
 - **Add a section regarding parent/family communication: inform about student training**
 - **DOE to provide resources for the content to be shared**
 - **DOE to be reviewing and revising training standards regularly, in accordance with the National Congress**

- **Transportation Directors must meet minimum training standards. DOE / Future Commission will work to identify training requirements for Transportation Directors, or supervisors of bus drivers.**
 - Minimum # of training hours
 - New hire has X months to comply

C. Identify changes or improvements needed in school transportation rules to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, staff, and drivers

Bus Specifications

D. Identify school bus safety features that can be installed, upgraded, or replaced, including door anti-pinch sensors and control (crossing) arms

- See above conversation regarding Title 29-A and Chapter 86.

Training

F. Confirm that school districts have a process to complete, on a semi-annual basis, school bus safety training checklists

G. Identify training needs for bus drivers and a mechanism for this training to be provided to all school transportation units

- **Recommendation: DOE shall contract with individuals in organizations with expertise in school bus safety, student transportation, highway safety to create minimum training requirements and minimum training curriculum. That training will be provided in order to meet the entry level requirements as well as ongoing minimum training requirements.**
 - **Module structure**
 - **DOE to also include module for student training that is available to SAUs to meet student training requirements**
 - **Must be funding to ensure that every SAU can meet this requirement**
 - **Hire state employee (DOE?) to focus on driver training and safety, responsibility to coordinate across the state**
 - **Future Commission to continue this work.**
 - **Implementation idea: “Train the trainer” model, regional trainers -> Maine School Safety Center already employs this model with other topics**

- Discussed briefly regarding initial training: driver must meet ITSA standard prior to operating a school bus
 - 40 hours of pre-service training, part of licensing prior to becoming a driver
- Discussion should we include a recommendation that requires drivers to attend regional or statewide training every X years?
 - **Must be funding to ensure districts have the resources for drivers to attend conferences.**
 - **Must be funding for the MAPT conference(s)**
 - No consensus on requiring attendance at conferences, but to instead reduce barriers to attendance at conferences.
 - Implementation question: could we utilize regional service center model? Utilize the infrastructure that already exists?
 - Implementation question: how do we treat drivers like professionals? People are not entering the profession, and the average age of our drivers is older, with greater medical needs, from our drivers.
 - Active marketing for drivers?
- Discussion of a recommendation idea: right now, transportation is part of the EPS model, which is an adequacy model. DOE to examine how transportation is funded, and how drivers are paid throughout the state; set minimum pay? Recruitment and retention study.
- Compliance and Monitoring:
 - **Additional resources needed for expanded compliance. DPS has people willing / able, but not capacity to absorb.**
 - **Ramp-up period: first inspection is educational, consequences not until a second infraction**
 - Student training: what is involved? What content – different needs for K as for HS. How to ensure all students are trained?
 - Students will participate in trainings, 1-2 times per year
 - National Congress recommendation: one time per school semester for all students who take the bus
 - 5-minute refresher prior to a field trip

Updated Best Practices

B. Produce an updated set of best practices for school bus safety and disseminate it to all school districts

- Driver behaviors

- Driver training
- As curriculum is created, this will create updated best practices

Communication with Families and Students

E. Encourage and assist school districts in the effective communication of school bus safety information to students and families

- Update best practices
- See Ch. 81 recommendations

Other Recommendations:

- Focus on the tragedies is obviously important. There are numerous drivers across the state that are taking this to heart, and are absolutely dedicated and fabulous drivers. If there's a way to lift up and celebrate our fantastic drivers.
 - Acknowledgments section
 - Add to Context section
 - Recognize that these are highly transferrable skills, and these drivers could work in multiple other industries. We should be sure to discuss and acknowledge this fact.

Process

- Commission Edits: due Friday 4/10
- Revision Back and Forth: due Friday 4/17

Acknowledgment of the student deaths, hopes that these tragedies initiate positive change for all other student in Maine

11:30 Adjournment: Motion: Marquis; Second: St. Pierre; Vote: unanimous