

Back-to-School Readiness

A Planning Guide for Fall Transportation

The first day of school is one of the most visible days of the year for a transportation department. Routes that looked solid in June often need changes by August once new enrollment, revised boundaries, updated bell times, driver roster changes, and fleet updates are factored in. The areas below tend to drive most of the back-to-school planning work.

Lock bell times and boundaries early

Bell times and attendance boundaries drive most routing decisions. When either is still in motion, route work often gets redone. Written confirmation from the superintendent's office, with dates for any planned changes, reduces rework once the planning window opens.

- Any bell time changes from last year
- Attendance boundary shifts
- Schools opening, closing, or changing grade configurations
- New programs or specialized schools that affect routing

Clean student data before drawing routes

Addresses change, students move schools, grade levels advance, and transportation eligibility flags go stale over the summer. A data cleanup pass at the start of the planning window, ideally with a direct Student Information System (SIS) sync, feeds every downstream step from boundary checks to stop placement.

- Addresses and apartment or unit numbers
- Grade levels for rising students
- School of enrollment
- Transportation eligibility flags

Prepare specialized transportation ahead of day one

Students with Individualized Education Program's (IEPs), McKinney-Vento status, foster care placements, and medical accommodations need the most careful planning. Building these routes first, with the current IEP transportation page synced into routing, tends to produce better accommodations than fitting them in at the end of the cycle.



Finalize fleet and asset readiness

New buses come online, older buses get retired or reassigned, and camera, GPS, and scanner hardware needs to be installed and confirmed. Pairing the fleet plan with the route plan confirms that every published route has a bus that is in service on day one.

- New bus delivery and pre-service inspection dates
- Camera, GPS, and student scanner installation and testing
- Retired bus reassignment or surplus process
- Spare ratio by depot and by route type

Plan for the driver roster you have this fall

Retirements, new hires, bid outcomes, and commercial drivers license (CDL) renewals often reshape the driver lineup between June and August. Route assignments built from a confirmed roster, with qualifications and bid results factored in, hold up better than those based on last year's structure.

- Retirements and resignations since June
- New hire training completion dates
- CDL and endorsement renewals
- Route bid results and effective dates

Use a sandbox for scenario planning

Fall planning usually includes scenarios: what if the middle school bell time moves 15 minutes later, what if a new elementary school opens, what if a bus is pulled for maintenance? A sandbox where those scenarios run against real data, without touching live routes, saves rework when final decisions land.

Schedule a driver dry run

A pre-school-year walkthrough gives drivers a chance to check stop placement, turn radius, timing, and site access. Scheduling it at least a week before day one leaves time to resolve whatever comes up.

Get rider information to families early

Families want to know stop, time, and bus before the first week. Rider information sent two to three weeks ahead, with reminders the week of school, reduces first-day calls. Parent app activation, stop lookups, and bus tracking give families a self-serve option that takes pressure off the transportation office in the first days.

Prepare first-week ridership and reporting data

Day-one and week-one ridership numbers are often requested by cabinet and the board: how many riders, which routes are over or under capacity, and on-time performance. Confirming the capture and reporting paths before day one (scanner rollout, on-time thresholds, report owners) prepares the team to answer those questions quickly.

Plan first-week support coverage

First-week adjustments are common. Stops get missed, students show up at the wrong bus, and addresses turn out to be wrong. A support plan for the first week, including phone coverage, ride-along assignments, and clear authority to adjust routes, makes the inevitable corrections faster.

See How EZRouting Supports Fall Planning

EZRouting is a routing platform built for district transportation teams. The planning areas above all run in a single system: scenario testing and auto-generated routes, SIS and special education data sync, driver assignment, fleet readiness, GPS and bus tracking, rider and family communication, ridership tracking, and reporting.

Click the link or go to pathwise12.info/bts-guide to request a demonstration and pricing of EZRouting.