

# 'CAN'T WAIT OUTSIDE THAT LONG'

## HALTON SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE CAUSING DELAYS

REETI ROHILLA  
rrohilla@metroland.com

School bus delays have been an ongoing challenge for numerous families in Halton Hills and across the region since the start of the school year.

A wide-reaching labour shortage has found its way to Halton's school bus services — causing delays on a number of routes — said Halton Student Transportation Services (HSTS) general manager David Colley.

Halton Hills resident Pratik Babaria said working around the delays has now become part of his family's daily routine.

"For over two months, they haven't had enough drivers and the bus keeps getting late by 40 to 45 minutes," said Babaria. "We can't wait outside that long, especially in the cold."

Colley said that while some routes have seen occasional delays of up to 45 minutes, the average wait time has been around 10 minutes.

Servicing nearly 31,000 students per day, HSTS is a non-profit transportation consortium providing busing services to Halton District School Board (HDSB) and Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) students since 2008.

The company contracts a total of 476 bus routes to five companies across the region — ideally requiring 476 permanent drivers, plus 10 per cent substitute drivers for optimal operation.

With a high percentage of school bus drivers over the age of 60 — an age demographic known to be more vulnerable to COVID-19 — companies saw countless absences during the pandemic.

"We currently need more than 30 drivers," said Colley. "Every bus route has a permanent driver and if the driver leaves the industry, the position for that route will be open."

Colley said the organization appoints multiple drivers — often up to three individuals — to cover each open route with minimum delays.

While close to three dozen routes have been affected by the driver shortage, Burlington residents like Amit Kumar said they're fortunate not to have been impacted.

HCDSB chair Marvin Duarte and HDSB chair Margo Shuttleworth said the school boards staff have implemented a number of strategies to recruit and retain drivers. This includes joint news releases, emails to families, school website features and social media campaigns.

"In addition to the challenges we face because of the driver shortage, buses can be late due to a variety of reasons, including traffic, delays at schools, the occasional me-



Reeti M. Rohilla/Metroland

Many students, including Ansh Babaria, have been dealing with ongoing wait times for their school bus.

chanical breakdown and driver absences due to illness, etc.," said Duarte.

In the budgets approved for the 2022-23 school year, the HCDSB set aside approximately \$10.7M and the HDSB spent around \$20.3M for HSTS.

A Halton school bus driver of three years, Maureen Winata is encouraging anyone looking for part-time work to consider becoming a school bus driver.

To work as a school bus driver, an applicant must have a clean driving record and be at least 21 years of age to qualify for a class B licence.

"The school bus is not as scary as it looks — it's about the mindset," said Winata. "I was intimidated by the size of the school bus before. On my first day of training, I was scared that I would get fired ...

**"We remain hopeful that in time the situation will improve."**

- HDSB chair Margo Shuttleworth

but once you get the training, it's not scary at all."

Working four to five hours a day split between mornings and afternoons, Winata appreciates the opportunity to bring her children on the bus instead of leaving them at daycare.

"I have peace of mind knowing that I have my kids with me and it's good to show them what mommy does. I think I set a good example for my kids that you can do things and include your family without

leaving them alone," she said.

As bus companies continue to train and recruit, Colley said they now have more drivers available as compared to the first week of the school year.

"We remain hopeful that in time the situation will improve," said Shuttleworth.

Anyone looking to work as a school bus driver can contact one of the five companies contracted by HSTS, including Attridge Transportation, First Student, Elliott Coach Lines, Switzer-Carty Transportation and Voyago Transportation.

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With Halton seeing an ongoing bus driver shortage, we wanted to explore how this is impacting local families and what's being done to address the issue.*

# Edgewater

SENIOR LIVING

## HOLIDAY BAZAAR

CLOTHING CRAFTS FOOD AND MORE!

**Join us for our Holiday Bazaar!**  
**Thursday December 15th**  
**from 10am - 3pm**  
**Located at: 111 John Street,**  
**Georgetown, ON**