

Inclement Weather Operations

Procedure 219

Revised: 10/15/2024

Statement

Inclement weather, such as snow, fog, freezing rain, flooding, hurricanes, and tornados, may interfere with the safe transportation of students throughout the school year. It is a consensus that Tri-Board, along with its contracted bus companies, are in the best position to assess the risk of inclement weather may have on home-to-school transportation. Weather and its impact on road conditions must be considered for the safety of the 30,000 transported students on school buses that behave very differently than the average family vehicle. Tri-Board regularly monitors [Environment Canada](#) for weather alerts impacting our service area.

Procedure

Tri-Board will not plan for an early dismissal due to weather and will therefore do its best to cancel services in the morning for the entire day when inclement weather is predicted in the afternoon. Bus status alerts are issued for all service cancellations and delays of 15+ minutes through BusPlanner Web. Families relying on transportation services are responsible for signing up to receive these alerts via email or the BusPlanner app. Tri-Board endeavors to post major events on our social media channels.

Buses may be canceled in the morning due to legacy road conditions, current or forecasted weather expected to commence during peak afternoon ride times. Buses that are canceled due to weather in the morning may run in the afternoon if weather improves by noon and is expected to stay consistent.

When Environment Canada issues alerts for hazardous or extreme weather such as tornadoes, Tri-Board supervisors monitor radar, news reports, and weather forecasts continuously for the duration of the alert to determine possible service impacts. Tri-Board communicates with local bus companies and schools, so they are prepared for possible changes to operations.

Winter Weather Considerations:

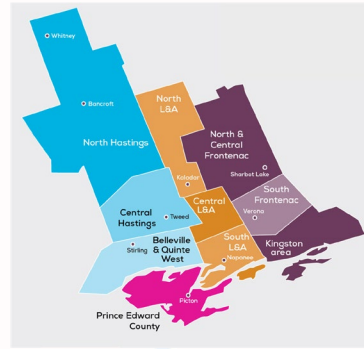
Due to their structure, school buses behave uniquely in winter weather compared to other vehicles and require special consideration. Tri-Board relies on a team of professionals to make decisions on service operations throughout the winter season. This team is divided into weather zones based on the unique weather patterns we have historically found within our service area.

Weather Zones

Winter Weather behaves differently throughout Tri-Board's service area. Each weather zone has its own inclement weather monitoring team of local bus company staff.

- North Hastings
- Centre Hastings

- Belleville & Quinte West
- Prince Edward County
- North Lennox & Addington
- Central Lennox & Addington
- South Lennox & Addington
- North & Central Frontenac
- South Frontenac
- Kingston Area and Frontenac Islands



Each weather zone has a “Weather Captain” who gathers pertinent information very early in the morning from local bus operators, drivers, and road crews regarding driving conditions. The information collected by Weather Captains is provided to Tri-Board Supervisors who review this data along with Environment Canada safety guidelines, radar, and weather forecasts (morning and afternoon) to provide an overview for each zone to Tri-Board’s Chief Executive Officer by 5:30AM. The decision to cancel all transportation is made and shared by 6:00AM.

Snow and Freezing Rain/ Flash Freeze

Both snow and freezing rain have an impact on road conditions and visibility. Salt/sand is ineffective at melting ice in certain conditions. Municipalities in Tri-Board’s service area manage snow clearing differently depending on current and expected ice/snow fall.

Extreme Cold

Environment Canada issues [Extreme Cold Warnings](#) at varying temperatures throughout Tri-Board’s service area. Temperatures of -35°C and lower increase the risk of getting frostbite within minutes. Buses often run into mechanical issues such as breakdowns in extreme cold, which can increase the time students are outside waiting.

Other Inclement Weather Considerations

Flooding

Operators must be aware of flood prone areas on their route and have a planned alternate route for these areas. Buses should not attempt to drive through standing water because the road below could be damaged. Students should not be dropped off at flooded bus stops. Risks to students include contaminated water, swift currents, wildlife, or downed power lines resulting in electrocution. If the driver becomes aware of a flood mid run, they must follow the process identified in the Partial Route Cancellations Due to Weather within this procedure.

Heavy Fog

Heavy fog can severely reduce visibility. Typically, heavy fog is problematic for bus drivers during winter morning run times and then dissipates. However, if the fog does not clear by noon, the afternoon run will also be canceled. Schools will be notified by Bus Operators and will be responsible for communicating with families.

Tornado

A school bus is not considered adequate shelter from a tornado and cannot safely operate on the road. Bus Drivers will not attempt to drive through, around, or away from a tornado.

Tornado Watch

Environment Canada issues a “[Tornado Watch](#)” when conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms with one or more tornadoes. When Environment Canada issues a Tornado Watch, transportation will continue, and drivers will remain vigilant to changing conditions and have a plan to reach shelter should the conditions deteriorate, or a tornado warning be issued. If weather deteriorates quickly upon departing from school, the driver should return to the school as their first option.

Tornado Warning

Environment Canada issues a “[Tornado Warning](#)” when a tornado has been reported or when there is reliable evidence that a tornado is imminent. When a tornado warning has been issued, no bus runs will be initiated in the affected area and will be delayed until the Warning has ended. If the Warning is announced at or near the dismissal of the school day, students are to remain in the building in a designated safe area. Drivers who are parked at the school should seek shelter within the school as well.

Runs already in progress will be evacuated to the nearest safe shelter/ public building. Once inside, students and the driver are to remain together, away from doors and windows.

If caught in the direct path of a tornado or one is sighted nearby, and shelter is not accessible, the Driver will:

1. Report their route number, location, and the presence of the tornado to their Dispatcher
2. Evacuate all passengers and seek safety that is:
 - a. Below ground level, such as in a ditch, ravine, or natural depression. Above-ground sites such as overpasses and bridges are not safe shelters
 - b. Away from the school bus
 - c. On the opposite side of the road of any power lines, utility poles, trees, etc., if possible
3. Instruct passengers to lie flat on the ground face-first while protecting their head using a jacket, other clothing, or their hands and arms, and to not look at the tornado.

Once the tornado has passed, the Driver will:

4. Account for all passengers, check for injuries, and provide first aid if needed. Obtain medical attention if needed.
5. Before leaving a shelter or the immediate area if out in the open, the bus driver should monitor the local sky for a few minutes in the direction the tornado came from to ensure a second tornado does not follow a similar path.
6. Be alert for continued storm activity, downed power lines, ruptured gas lines, or structural damage to trees, buildings, roads and bridges.
7. Establish communication with the Operator (bus company), Tri-Board and School to determine the next steps.

Partial Route Cancellations Due to Weather

If a driver feels a portion of a route cannot be safely driven due to unsafe road conditions brought on by weather such as flooding, ice, or snow, this will be posted as “Contact Bus Company – some roads not travelable.”

When a driver is aware of an issue in advance of picking up students at the school in the afternoon:

1. The driver will inform the bus operator of the issue and impacted students (or portion of route) as soon as possible
2. The bus operator will call the school and provide a list of student names with associated bus routes
3. If the bus operator cannot contact school in a timely manner, the bus operator will contact Tri-Board who will contact the school principal and/or superintendent.
4. The school will call the parents of the named students to arrange for the parents to pick-up students at the school

When a driver is aware of an issue while transporting students in the afternoon (after school pick-up):

1. The driver will inform the bus operator of the issue and the impacted students (or portion or route)
2. For students who will return to school, bus operator will call the school and provide a list of student names with associated bus routes and timing of return
3. If bus operator cannot contact school in timely manner, bus operator will contact Tri-Board who will contact school superintendent
4. The school will arrange for staff to supervise students being returned to school
5. The school will call the parents of the named students to arrange for the parents to pick-up students at the school

Early Dismissals / Delayed Departures Due to Weather

Tri-Board endeavors to cancel buses in the morning when inclement weather is expected to impact afternoon transportation, due to the increased safety risks and complexities of reorganizing bus routes shared by three school board districts and operated by multiple bus companies. However, schools may require an early dismissal or delayed departure due to quickly deteriorating weather conditions or unforeseen natural disasters. The School Principal/ School Board Superintendent(s) must contact Tri-Board as soon as possible and Tri-Board will provide instruction to all bus companies operating routes for the applicable school and contact any other school(s) and school board(s) sharing these routes, if applicable. It is the responsibility of the applicable school and/or school board to communicate with parents.