

Bus Driver Shortage Real-Life Example: Farmington Municipal Schools

Q&A with Billy Huish, Director of Transportation at Farmington Municipal Schools, and Franc Kacaj, Account Representative at TransACT Communications



Billy Huish

Director of Transportation
at Farmington



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Why Farmington Decided to Implement a New Software System

Farmington Municipal Schools is a public school district in Farmington, New Mexico. It is the 7th largest school district in the state, has 68 bus routes, and covers over 880 square miles in a large rural area. Farmington buses average 6,000 miles per day and over 1M miles annually.

With so many buses and miles to cover, Farmington had to sit back and ask themselves: "are we really supplying or providing the best possible routes and stops?" According to Huish, Farmington was not supplying the proper service to its students. So, they decided to make a change: implementing the TravelTracker – Routing (TT-R) Software into their transportation department.

Huish explains that Farmington ran the buses "the same way, same order, same everything," but once they were able to access the TT-R dashboard, they could instantly see essential insights, such as:

- Bus overlaps
- More efficient stops
- Miles they could save

This was manageable through the TT-R consolidation feature, which allowed Farmington to reduce its fuel usage by making its routes more efficient.

"When you travel over a million miles within a school year, every little bit you can save or cut off is a big impact in your budget."

Consolidating Bus Routes to Keep Drivers Moving and Save on Fuel

Route consolidation is useful in the long- and short-term. While Transportation Directors can preplan consolidated routes at the beginning of the school year, staff can also use TT-R to quickly accommodate last-minute driver changes.

"A lot of the districts we talk to are severely short on drivers," Kacaj explains. "They're running into scenarios where almost every morning they'll get a phone call from a driver or set of drivers saying that they are out."

This causes the districts to scramble to make up for the routes that now don't have a driver. Sometimes districts are fortunate enough to have a substitute driver. Other times, transportation directors must hop on a bus and drive or consolidate the routes missing a bus driver at the last minute.

“Route consolidation is hugely important and it’s only getting even more pivotal as fuel prices keep going up.”

To get to the bottom of the issue, Kacaj asks Huish how Farmington uses the TT-R route consolidation feature for bus driver shortages.

“Say you have a driver call in,” Huish begins, “we can look at—say bus 53—that has called out for the day, and bus 53 serves our westside up on Harper Hill. We can look at that and say, this bus stop has X number of kids on at four or five stops, and we’re able to look at the other buses in the area to consolidate different bus stops or buses.”

So, how long does it take someone to use Travel Tracker – Routing to consolidate routes and provide updated driver materials amid a driver shortage?

According to Huish, *“it takes very little time at all. By the time we have a driver in here, or if it’s one of the regular drivers that we’re consolidating, our routing coordinator has a map printed, route sheet description, student names; whatever is needed is done before the driver leaves.”*

The TT-R consolidation feature will also automatically reroute buses, provide details for student count, and relay route duration to school staff if there is a sudden delay in getting students to school on time.

Using Technology to Incentivize and Retain School Bus Drivers

There are various ways to combat bus driver shortages and incentivize drivers to improve retention. During the Q&A, Kacaj asks Huish, “how do you respond to last-minute bus driver shortages or incentivize drivers and keep them on your staff?”

“Prior to a routing program, bus drivers had to hand draw on a map, their route descriptions, and student rosters,” Huish explains. “With the TT-R program, we’re able to take that workload off our drivers. We print out their route and attendance sheets, then consolidate them into a book form that’s kept in their buses.”

“If there’s an overnight change, we build the new route sheet right away.”

TravelTracker – Routing has made it easy for the drivers by eliminating the need for manual processes. Farmington provides its school bus drivers with all the materials needed, including:

- Route and stop times
- Rosters listed by bus stops
- Student attendance sheet

Educational agencies can improve school bus driver retention by eliminating manual paperwork, supplying all the necessary materials, and offering incentive pay.

“We do retain most of our drivers. The word gets around what we do for our drivers and how we treat them. We’ve got enough drivers in training to cover our retirements.”

To learn more about TravelTracker, go to www.app-garden.com/routing