

This year it was brought to the attention of the Board of Directors for Valli Vue Estates that the Anchorage School District would not provide school bus services within the Association. After contacting the appropriate personnel within the district, along with an increase of communication from concerned parents, a drive through was conducted by the ASD to determine whether bus service would be restored to the community. Following the drive through, the Association received an email response from Jim Anderson with the Anchorage School District, and a formal letter from Heather Philip with transportation, both attached.

Jim Anderson of the ASD response on ASD Bussing within Valli Vue:

I apologize for the delay but unfortunately I was unable to get some specification information that I was hoping for. In addition, there were multiple issues I had to focus on during the week. I apologize as I know the HOA leadership was awaiting this email. I did, however, let you know last week that the committee's recommendation, and the District's decision, remained unchanged after the Safe Student Transportation Committee conducted their drive-thru analysis early in November.

On November 2, 2023, the Safe Student Transportation Committee conducted a site visit/tour in Valli Vue. One parent from the community joined the drive thru of the community's roads. The roads on November 2nd had no snow, so it certainly was not representative of the Anchorage Bowl since the middle of that month. The driver of the bus is a forty-year veteran bus driver. During the tour they stopped at multiple locations to discuss tight/blind curves, where accidents had occurred in the year prior to stopping those routes, where buses had slid off the roads, and the angle of roads that were too steep to go down during winter months.

Many of the tight turns were unable to be traversed without crossing into the incoming lane. Two pickup accidents in the year prior to stopping this route occurred when the bus was hit by a truck while going around the tight turns. I'm providing some background information that clarifies our bus transportation issues:

- The average pickup truck weighs close to 6,000 lbs. The average 40' school bus weighs between 35,000 – 45,000 lbs. A bus, even with chains, can't safely drive up or down a steep road with the same confidence as a 4x4 truck.
- The turning radius for a car vs. a truck is far less, which is why you and your neighbors seem to have no issues driving around tight turns without getting accidents in your neighborhood.

ASD is the only government organization in ASD that has loco parentis legal obligations and liability for students, from the time we pick them up until the time they are released each day. The HOA, the Mayor and/or Assembly, and the Governor and/or legislature, do not have this legal responsibility. In fact, no other government agency can relieve ASD of our loco parentis responsibility. For this reason we make many decisions each year in the best interests of maximizing safety for our students while reducing liability in areas of high risk.

The decision at the beginning of this year, to change the bus stops in your area, were not made for convenience, but due to a history of challenges in the recent past. These included:

The decision to remove interior stops within Valli Vue, implemented last winter, was due to multiple factors including the following:

1. Steep grades of roads in the Valli Vue area with deep ditches and no recovery area for a bus that loses traction due to weather conditions. Several busses were pulled out of the trees last winter, prior to changing the bus stops.
2. Narrow roads make it difficult for a bus to travel on, as a bus is wider than most passenger vehicles.
3. Multiple blind curves that cause difficulty to see adequate distance while traveling.
4. Stops located on main roads are less than 1.5 mile from residences. Across the Anchorage Bowl, by state statute, 1.5 miles is the max walking distance unless a major road must be crossed by pedestrians.
5. This area has a history of multiple buses stuck throughout the winter months. These accidents were caused by passenger vehicles hitting our buses, or the bus slid into a fixed object while driving.

If the state figures out how to provide adequate transportation funding, we can certainly look at procuring 20' buses. This would change the levels of risk that we have with 40' buses. We have not had an increase in state transportation funding since the first day of school in August, 2015. We expect a \$5.5 million deficit this year in transportation, and are unable to look at procuring large numbers of 20' buses, plus hiring additional drivers, for the many communities in the Anchorage Bowl in which we are unable to provide transportation services. At this time Reliant has two 20' buses, with one of them fully operational.

At this time we have thoroughly driven the route with experienced transportation personnel, we're unable to mitigate risks, and are unable to change the bus stops. I will very much reconsider these routes if we can find new ways to mitigate these known risks. Parents always have had the ability to drive students to bus stops or schools, if they're concerned about the students walking alone, and I've seen it all over the city for as long as I can remember.



Anchorage School District Transportation Services Anchorage, Alaska

December 14, 2023

On November 2, 2023, the Safe Student Transportation Committee conducted a site visit in Valli Vue at the request of the Valli Vue Community Board to add stops within the neighborhood. At 8:15am the SSTC and invited parent(s) left in a school bus to drive the requested route areas.

The SSTC were able to listen to the parent concerns while experiencing first-hand the safety reasons that transportation listed as why the buses have been pulled from the interior Valli Vue area. The driver of the bus, a forty-year veteran, gave excellent feedback as the person navigating the streets. The streets are very narrow, and the winding nature of the roads make for blind corners which requires the bus to use the oncoming traffic lane when taking these curves. This is a situation that was the cause of a head-on collision on Lone Tree. The grade of the streets is significant and can be difficult for drivers to navigate in the winter months. These steep grades can be dangerous when a bus loses traction as all the weight is in the front pushing the bus forward down the hill.

On November 7, 2023, the SSTC discussed the bus experience, the community concerns, and visual photos provided by a parent from Valli Vue. The final decision from the Safe Student Transportation Committee made on December 14, 2023, would not place bus stop locations within the Valli Vue Community for the safety of the students on the bus and the driver who must navigate the area.

Sincerely,

Heather Philp
Senior Director, Transportation Services

Cc: Jim Anderson