LEARN Regional Transportation Study

Prepared for the LEARN Board of Directors

LEARN **February 6, 2019 DRAFT**

INTRODUCTION

Finding cost efficiencies and effectiveness is a key dimension of the LEARN mission and vision. The LEARN Board of Directors requested that LEARN administration examine and explore comprehensive student transportation services to our member school districts. The request included consideration of both low-participation to high participation models. The purpose of this report is to examine the feasibility of such a vision of regional transportation for both regular education and special education students in the LEARN region.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Finding cost efficiencies and cost-effective programs and services is a foundational dimension of the LEARN mission and vision. Moreover, regional educational service centers (RESC) were designed and established by Connecticut General Statutes for providing cooperative programs and services. For over 50 years, LEARN has provided cooperative programs and services that are responsive to the needs of its member school districts. As district and school expenses continue to increase and state funding continues to decrease, local boards of education struggle to adopt balanced budgets that meet the needs of their tax paying constituents as well as the programmatic needs of their students. Staff salaries and benefits consume the largest percentage of local budgets. Reductions to these line items are often either impossible, due to bargaining unit contract constraints, or impractical due to significant negative impact on student learning.

LEARN has worked to support regional transportation solutions over time. Specifically, in late 2008, LEARN member districts worked together to explore the potential of regional transportation as a cost saving solution. LEARN published a request for proposal for Regional Student Transportation in January 2009. LEARN received only one bid for a portion regarding specialized transportation. No bids were received for the overall regional transportation request. In fact, transportation companies contacted the Office of Attorney General, suggesting that we were violating certain laws, and attempting to break existing contracts. LEARN did not pursue that opportunity again. (See Attachment A).

In 2011, the RESC Alliance, the six regional educational service centers acting as one, conducted a feasibility study of Regional Transportation and Uniform Regional School Calendars for the Governor's Office. (See Attachment B). This study examined the feasibility and implementation of regional transportation services and uniform school calendar. The study concluded that Connecticut, the "land of steady habits", with a long-standing tradition of and support for local control, proves to be an obstacle to achieving these goals. The study further concludes that alignment of school calendars across regional or statewide is a necessary precursor to the development and success of a regional transportation system. In addition, the report identified the obstacles of contracts, their expiration dates, as well as the array of providers.

Over seven years ago, Superintendents in the Middlesex/Shoreline Superintendents' Association (MSSA) and the Southeastern CT Association of School Administrators (SECASA) began to discuss how regional efficiencies in transportation might help reduce costs. These Superintendents were the first in the state to develop and adopt a *voluntary* regional school

calendar. Scheduling vacation and holiday breaks as a region reduced the number of additional days districts were transporting students to "out of district" schools and programs. The uniform school calendar helped to reduce costs. (For example, one Superintendent estimated a $40,000 savings in his district just from a common calendar). The regional calendar not only supported reduced costs for transportation, but also facilitated common professional development days that allowed for regional professional learning opportunities (See Attachment C). This chart illustrates that all districts have the same December and April vacation breaks, most have the same February break, and a majority begin the school year on the same day.

Following the Feasibility Study, the state legislature established a Task Force for Uniform School Calendars. The recommendations of that Task Force became the foundation for a new law, now identified in Section 322 of PA 13-247, where each regional education service center was expected to develop a uniform regional school calendar to be used by each local or regional board of education in the region, consistent with the guidelines. This made the regional calendar a requirement by law. The guidelines were to include but not be limited to:

- at least 180 days of actual school sessions during each school year,
- a uniform start date,
- uniform days for professional development and in-service training for certified employees, pursuant to sections 10-148a and 10-220a of the general statutes, and
- not more than three uniform school vacation periods during each school year, not more than two of which shall be a one week school vacation period and one of which shall be during the summer.

Subsequently, in this last 2018 legislative session, the legislature modified the law so that the calendar is now required to be developed, but is **not mandatory to be followed**. Consequently, the start date for schools for the 2018 - 2019 school year was not as aligned. Some school districts opened after Labor Day while others opened according to the regionally adopted calendar. Since the LEARN region also includes magnet, charter and technical schools, the variance in the opening day for school created additional costs for school districts who were transporting students to other schools and districts.

In addition, in the 2016-2017 school year, LEARN established a Regional Magnet Advisory Council. The purpose of this Council is to provide regional input and recommendations to guide the work of the LEARN Board of Directors regarding our magnet schools. LEARN is required to have school governance councils, advisory groups for the magnet schools. The CT State Department of Education approved our plan to have one governance council for LEARN magnet schools. While the LEARN Board of Directors is the governing body, this group of educators serves to inform LEARN's recommendations to the Board.

During its series of meetings last year, members were interested in exploring transportation, particularly for special education. LEARN invited Mason Thrall, CREC Director of Operations, to address the committee. (See Attachment D) His presentation revealed the challenges that CREC faces providing this wide scale delivery of children throughout the Hartford region. His presentation identified several critical elements requiring coordination in order to support a regional transportation solution. He specifically pointed to several policies requiring

coordination including school start times, attendance eligibility, and routing limitations/ride times. This input continued to advance the discussion toward the possibility of more shared special education transportation.

Concurrently, LEARN, as a result of superintendent feedback, initiated a Business Manager Roundtable with the charge of examining regional efficiencies in cooperative purchasing and regional transportation. Based largely on the complexities of local transportation contract requirements, including age of the fleet, hub vs. door-to-door pick-up, ride times, etc., the focus on regional transportation options quickly shifted to exploring solutions for out-of-district transportation for special education and magnet school programs. Several recommendations, including creating an RFP for special education out-of-district transportation and the creation of a ride share clearing house, were entertained. Key to all recommendations was the accurate collection of out-of-district special education programs, numbers of students (ages and special requirements), and program start and end times.

A recent Superintendents' Summit: Reimagining Regional Resources, September 2018, continued the dialogue regarding regional efforts that can support not only efficiencies, but achieve regional efforts that support robust programming for students. In the arena of transportation, our local superintendents identified special education costs for transportation as a high cost demand. The discussion also addressed the realities of local communities' expectations for transporting children within their towns. Superintendents concluded that greater efficiencies could be found by determining potential ride sharing for purposes of transporting children to special education out placements. These are situations when a child's IEP determines that the best placement is "out of the school district" and requires transportation to a particular site. Such transportation can have high costs associated with it.

The interest in locating shared transportation solutions has been examined over time. Given both the collective efforts as well as the barriers, this study is structured both to define the current state of school transportation in southeastern Connecticut, as well as to explore areas of success and to make recommendations for how to build on that success.

STUDY DESIGN: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

In an effort both to understand the challenges and complexities of regional transportation and to surface potential solutions, this study was designed to explore:

1) Current transportation requirements for our local school districts;
2) Existing local transportation contracts;
3) Current out-of-district transportation needs: special education
4) Schools of choice transportation

The LEARN region includes twenty-four districts (25 towns) and covers approximately 1200 square miles. There are over 135 schools and programs for approximately 43,647 students.

Transportation Requirements

In 2012 and again in May 2014, the Office of Legislative Research (OLR), the Connecticut General Assembly, issued a Research Report: *Busing Public and Private School Students* (See Attachment E). This report summarizes the requirements for public school districts regarding student transportation. The report specifies the following:

> In general, state law requires each local or regional board of education to provide transportation to school-aged children wherever reasonable and desirable (CGS 10-220(a). It also identifies transportation as a type of "school accommodation" that boards of education must provide so that children aged five to 20 years may attend public school (CGS 10-186).

The report also highlights additional transportation that local and regional boards of education must provide to Technical High Schools, Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers, Charter Schools, Interdistrict Magnet Schools, and Open Choice Schools. Each of these requirements is slightly different as is any reimbursements. For example, districts must transport students under age 21 to their district designated state approved technical high school or agricultural science and technology education centers and are eligible for partial transportation reimbursement; however, magnet and charter school transportation are required only if the school is in the district. Districts may elect to transport to magnet and charter schools and may receive some reimbursement from the state.

For special education students, as summarized in the report, the law requires school districts to provide transportation to and from the curb of the student's house (but not beyond) unless the school district makes another arrangement with the parents (CGS 10-76d (e)). State regulations also require that a students' school district provide transportation needed to implement the student's individualized education program (IEP).

A report completed by the Connecticut School Finance Project, *School Transportation for Connecticut's Students-An examination of Connecticut's student transportation policies and practices and comparison with geographically similar states;* November 2016 (See Attachment F), compares current Connecticut policies and practices with Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania. This report also indicates that the average per-pupil cost for transportation in Connecticut is $885.78, which has increased 42.2% since 2000. The general recommendations suggest that CT consider more regional options, such as our neighboring state of Rhode Island; however, it does not address the variances in existing local contracts and/or how to accommodate such variances. The report also reinforces that state reimbursements for transportation are also contingent upon appropriations.

Local Transportation Contracts

Collecting district bus contracts was a challenge to achieve from the analysis. Ultimately, the requests yielded all of the 21 LEARN member districts as well as one district outside of our region. (See Attachment G). As can be seen in Table 1, six bus companies provide services to the region with only two remaining districts that own their own bus service.

Table 1: Regular Education Bus Companies

First Student	M&J	STA	DATTCO	Durham	Self-Operated	Specialty Transp.
Bozrah	Clinton	Groton	East Haddam	Madison	Montville	Guilford
East Lyme	N. Stonington	Ledyard	East Hampton		Preston	
Norwich	Old Saybrook	New London				
Region 4	Region 18	Region 17				
Stonington	Salem	Waterford				
	Westbrook					

Each of the school districts is in a separate transportation contract with the transportation companies listed above. Each Board of Education creates a bid document and signs a unique contract with its chosen transportation vendor. As a result, there are many variables between and among district contracts that make any direct comparisons fairly complex and at times, not possible. The uniqueness of each contract as well as local decisions by each of the communities create differences between and among each community. For example, East Haddam provides site/offices at no charge to the vendor while New London's contract specifies that the contractor is responsible for lease and maintenance of facilities. In Clinton, the contractor is responsible for developing routes and in Groton, the Board of Education is responsible for developing routes. (See Attachment G: Summary of Transportation Contracts by District).

In the simplest of terms, the expiration dates of the contracts vary. The current contract expiration dates are listed in Table 2 below to illustrate the range. This makes any regional agreements difficult to achieve with contracts on various timetables.

Table 2: Contract Expiration Dates

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Groton	East Lyme	Bozrah	East Haddam	East Hampton	Clinton
N. Stonington	Ledyard	Region #17	Madison	Waterford	Westbrook
Norwich	Old Saybrook	Region #18			Guilford
	Region #4				Stonington
	Salem				
	New London				

Additional variables include a broad array of considerations that impact costs for transportation such as:

- **The housing of buses and other vehicles:** Some contracts require buses to be housed within the school district. Where the vehicles are located impacts costs since the buses and other vehicles are taxed at the town/city tax rate. Tax rates can vary greatly between towns.

- **Requirements regarding the actual vehicles:** Contracts may specifically require both Type I vehicles (71 passenger), Type II vehicles (20 passenger), and Wheelchair vehicles.

There also may be stipulations regarding the age of vehicles (i.e. no older than 5 years) or maximum number of miles on a vehicle.

- **Requirements regarding maintenance and supervisory staff:** Some contracts indicate that maintenance must occur in the district and a specific supervisor/manager be assigned to the district. When staff are required for specific roles such as this, it can effect the costs.

- **Daily rate calculation:** Bid specifications may indicate that the buses be available from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm for any and all in-district transportation. Others may use a shorter period of time for just normal "home to school to home" transportation. "In district" and "out of district" field trips, late buses and even mid-day runs may be at additional cost to the district. School start and end times vary by contract and district.

- **Ride Time Limits:** Whether contractual or driven by local policy, some contracts have ride time limits, or limitations to the amount of time that students are allowed to ride the bus. Time limits can require additional runs or buses to accommodate the student population.

- **Other Variables –** Out of district field trips and transportation to out of district special education placements or particular schools of choice are, in most cases, additional costs. These normally include a minimum charge based either on miles or hourly rates. Special education and schools of choice transportation costs will be discussed in greater detail. There are also additional costs for a transportation aide. Again, a review of contracts shows a wide variation in these costs.

Consequently, direct comparisons between and among contracts are difficult to achieve. Moreover, aligning contracts would be particularly challenging given the broad array of variables and local expectations. However, a key area for review is the management of transportation for special education.

Special Education Transportation

In addition to transportation contract information, districts were asked for data on their special education population including what programs/facilities/schools they were transporting special education students to and how many were going to each location.

Total transportation expenses can range from 3% to 10% of district budgets and special education transportation can represent a significant portion of those costs ranging from 1% to 44%. (See Attachment H). While most contracts include special education transportation in their agreement, six of those have given the selected vendor exclusive rights to transport all district students. At least 13 contracts allow alternative vendors for special education student transportation if necessary. Contrarily, another district contracts for regular education only and the Board determines special education transportation.
Since costs are significant, LEARN recently requested that districts provide data on out of district special education placements and the number of students travelling to each as an

illustrative example. The number of students can change on any given day, so this example is illustrative of **a particular moment in time**. The total number of students represented in this data was 305. Table 3 reflects a summary of the out of district placements by number of students. (See Attachment I).

Table 3: Summary of Out of District Placements by Number of Students

Ten or more students	Five to Nine Students	One to Four Students	No students at this time
ARC New London	American School for the Deaf	ACES- Mill Rd	ACES- Village School
Bradley, Kingston RI	Meliora Academy, Meriden	ARC Norwich	ACES -Whitney Ave. North
Sharp	CREC-Strive	Baron Therapy Services	CW Resources
Adelbrook	LEARN, Salem	Ben Bronz, West Haven	EASTCONN Putnam
Lighthouse, Groton	EASTCONN SRP, Plainfield	Brookside Elementary	Gengras Center
Bradley, Montville	High Road Learning Center/Upper	Brownstone Intermediate	Palmer School, Montville Montville
The Grove School, Madison	LEARN Lillie B Haynes	Cornerstone, Cranston RI	Woodhouse Academy
Waterford Country, Wtfd.	Learning Clinic, Brooklyn	CREC Coltsville	
	The Foundation School, Milford	CREC MPA Soundbridge, New Britain	
	CREC River Street	EASTCONN Killingly	
	EASTCONN (VOC) Columbia	EASTCONN Danielson	
	Mount St. John, Deep River	FVTA, W. Hartford	
	Natchaug-Joshua Ctr Norwich	Griswold Elementary	
		Hopewell Elementary	
		Lyman Memorial	
		Pathways-The Children's Community Programs of CT	
		Project Genesis	
		SAargent, Warwick RI	
		St. Vincent's	
		Stamford Academy	
		STARR, UCONN	
		Woodland	
		ACES- Sails	
		Ben Bronz, West Hartford	
		Charles Hayden Boys and Girls Village	
		CT Center for Child Development	
		High Road Learning Center/Bennie Dover	
		Hope Academy	
		LEARN (BPR) East Lyme	
		LEARN (LBH) East Lyme	

		Natchaug Joshua Ctr Old Saybrook United Cerebral Palsy Bradley, Westerly RI Grace Webb, Hartford Intensive Ed Academy, West Hartford LEARN Riches Ledyard Lighthouse, Niantic Natchaug Joshua Ctr Mansfield ACES- Whitney High Fast Benhaven, Wallingford Giant Steps High Road Learning Center Horizons LEARN (ABA) East Lyme Middlesex Transition Natchaug Danielson	

The data reveals that in many cases, students are riding independently to a particular location. The table also illustrates the broad array of locations to which students are being transported on any given day. Transporting a single student to an out-of-district placement can cost thousands of dollars per year. As an example, the cost to transport a student from Montville to Adelbrook in Manchester is approximately $292.60 per day for an annual cost of $52,668. Special education transportation costs are reimbursable as an allowable special education cost under the special education Excess Cost Grant. All state reimbursement for transportation is based on what the state budget allocates and can change from year to year.

Schools of Choice

There are several schools of choice for students in the LEARN region including Vocational-Agricultural programs, Vocational-Technical High Schools, Magnet Schools and Charter Schools. Table 4 summarizes these options.

Table 4: Southeastern CT Regional Schools of Choice

Magnet Schools	Charter Schools	Vo-Ag Schools	Vo-Tech Schools	Other
The Friendship School Regional Mulitcultural Magnet School	ISAAC Charter School Integrated Day Charter School	Lebanon Vo-Ag Ledyard Vo-Ag	Grasso Tech High School Norwich Tech Vinal Tech	Griswold High School NFA

Dual Language & Arts Middle Magnet School Three Rivers Middle College Magnet School Marine Science Magnet School Science & Tech High School ACT Magnet (EASTCONN) Winthrop Magnet Nathan Hale Charles Barrows Arts Magnet Middle			Agricultural Science & Tech Center	

Districts are required to provide transportation to the magnet and charter schools within their town/city and to their designated Vocational-Agricultural or Vocational-Technical schools. They are not required to provide transportation to schools of choice outside their own district. However, if they choose to transport to a magnet school outside of their town, they are eligible for reimbursement for this transportation. Current magnet transportation rate is $1,300 per year per student in this region. The Hartford region has a higher reimbursement rate. As an example, Table 5 below shows which LEARN member districts provide transportation to LEARN magnets in the region.

Table 5: LEARN Member Districts Providing Transportation

Enrollment LEARN Districts only					
Town	**RMMS**	**TRMC**	**DLAMMS**	**MSMHS**	**TFS**
Clinton				3	
East Haddam	1	1		2	
East Hampton					
East Lyme	12	2		16	41
Groton	85		7	54	48
Guilford				1	
Ledyard	20	7	5	22	11
Madison					
Montville	47	9	10		15
New London	228	13	74	25	249
North Stonington	4			3	
Norwich	66	7	36	11	
Old Saybrook			2		

Preston	2	2			
Region #4				5	
Region #17				4	
Region #18	1				
Salem	5		2	2	4
Stonington	18	4	3	54	10
Waterford	26	3	4	23	83
Westbrook			1	1	

Town Transports or Reimburses

LEARN Responsible for Transportation (or reimburses)

If students did not have local transportation, LEARN created a small "hub system", whereby families can bring their children to the hub and a selected vendor will then transport the child to the magnet school. LEARN is then eligible for the same reimbursement rate as the local towns. The current reimbursement rate for Magnet School transportation is $1,300.00 per child per year and parents who transport can receive $5.00 per day.

POTENTIAL PROMISING PRACTICES

Potential Promising Practices

This report has highlighted the broad array of variances between and among the transportation contracts in the region. The data in the report indicate a wide range of complex issues that would need resolution for even two contiguous districts to provide regular education transportation cooperatively. Major among these issues are different vendors, contract requirements, school start and end times and the expanse of geographic areas. While there still may be opportunities, cooperative agreements would need extensive time to work through these complexities.

At the same time, in order to begin to develop regional solutions to create efficiencies in student transportation, it is worth examining current practices that are demonstrating progress. Three areas are highlighted here as having some level of promise: Special Education Transportation Schools of Choice Transportation and Sub-Regional Transportation.

Special Education Transportation

Specifically, the area of special education, as discussed previously, has some of the highest expenses associated with the services and are currently relatively independently operated. To illustrate what might be possible, what follows is an exploration of shared special education transportation.

To coordinate transportation between and among various sites, with required home pick up for children with special needs, would require a highly coordinated effort. This is further complicated by the changes that can occur for child placement at any time of year.

The earlier discussion of special education suggests that there are opportunities to save dollars by working cooperatively in the area of special education transportation. To illustrate, Table 6 below demonstrates two actual examples of "ride share" agreements between two districts. LEARN's Transportation Department is currently providing these services. Each example shows the potential cost for the student as a solo transport and then the **actual** district cost with the ride share route.

Table 6: Examples of Ride Share Agreements

Example #1	**Transportation to CREC Program in Hartford**	
Solo Run		
Miles (hub to home to school, driver home, same run in the pm	216 miles	
Cost per mile	$2.09	
Total Cost of solo run	$451.44 daily	
Ride Share Run		
Miles shared	Hub to 1st student's home @full cost, then shared between second pick up, school, etc.	
Actual Current Costs	$195.00 daily	
Daily savings	$256.44	
Annual Savings	$46,159.20	Based on 180 days

Example #2	**Transportation to Waterford Country School in Waterford**	
Solo run		
Miles (hub to home, to school, driver return, same for pm run	72	
Cost per mile	$2.09	
Total Cost for solo run	$150.48 daily	
Ride Share		
Miles shared	Hub to 1st student's home @full cost, then shared between second pick up, school, etc.	

Actual Current Cost for ride share	$70.00 per day	
Daily savings for ride share	$80.48	
Annual Savings	$14,486.40	

These ride share examples illustrate how cost savings may be achieved. Ride sharing requires a sharing of current and timely information regarding students and transportation routes. Through our Regional Business Managers roundtable, our business managers have entered some data at times into a database at LEARN. There have also been times when our local area special education directors and business managers have informally reached out to one another and/or to LEARN when faced with a long distance placement. In order to coordinate special education transportation, a more formal system would need to be implemented requiring the sharing of key information. This would require a shared commitment on the part of our member districts, a willingness to allow other school districts to transport local children as well as agreements regarding liability insurance, to name a few. Such formal system would require items such as the following:

- Entering student information from districts into a formal shared data base beginning in August of each school year and as new students are enrolled about student placement, home address and other additional special needs that may affect transportation (i.e. need for wheelchair vehicles, need for an aide on the van, etc.). This would require careful attention by Special Education Directors and/or Business officials

- A regional database would then require a form of regional coordination or a designated individual, as determined by each district, then to identify what ride shares would be most efficient while still keeping student/local needs in mind, examining routes and determining whether shared rides are practicable. Alternatively, members would need to establish a system for determining rides, who will transport and establishing agreements.

- To deliver the shared transportation, it may also require the development of contracts with vendor(s), providing communication with districts, schools/programs, and families to ensure smooth transitions, as well as the understanding that a student may be transported by a bus company from another town other than the hometown.

- The shared system would require some monitoring as needed to evaluate both effectiveness and efficiencies

- The shared system could require changes to local transportation contracts if districts were to choose to participate.

To realize cost savings and efficiencies would require shared commitment between and among our local school districts across a broad array of staff.

It would be helpful if the state legislature incentivized opportunities to pilot more shared transportation and offered incentives to support districts as this type of cooperation requires more

time and effort. Shared transportation for special education continues to hold promise for more efficiencies.

Schools of Choice Transportation

As with special education transportation, there are opportunities for cost savings in the area of schools of choice. At the present time, districts are either choosing to transport to all or just a few designated schools of choice absorbing the transportation costs or electing not to transport to out of district schools due to budgetary constraints.

Working together on regional transportation solutions to schools of choice would potentially reduce mandatory expenses districts pay for transportation to Vocational-Agricultural and Vocational Technical Schools, reduce voluntary transportation expenses to other schools of choice and provide more access to schools of choice for the region's students.

As with special education, a central shared database would need to be developed. This would include:

- Information from districts and include school choice data regarding the number of students, home addresses and schools students are attending. Schools of choice would need to provide such data.

- The development a hub system (with two-district minimum). A hub system is where a vehicle is sent to one location and families are responsible for bringing their children to that designated site in order to be transported to the school of choice. One vehicle may pick up students along the route to the school in an efficient manner. Hubs need to be in safe and easily accessed locations.

- Districts would need to compare the costs of ride share versus the district provided transportation, which may include state reimbursement; districts could then determine whether this was a fiscally better alternative.

Such shared transportation is possible and can achieve cost savings. Specifically, below is an example of LEARN coordinated Magnet School ride sharing from 2017-2018 (Table 7). The magnet schools included Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London, Dual Language & Arts Magnet Middle School in Waterford, Marine Science Magnet High School in Groton and Three Rivers Middle College Magnet School in Norwich. The shared ride service for the schools represents a regional alternative in action.

Table 7: LEARN Coordinated Regional Magnet Transportation

2017-2018				
LEARN Coordinated Magnet Transportation				
Bus #1	$	495.75		
Bus #2	$	454.63		
Bus #3	$	146.24		
Total Daily Costs	**$**	**1,096.62**		
Districts Participating	number of students			
Chester		3	$ 251.11	Used small bus rate and included Essex and Deep River
Clinton		4	$ 259.99	Used small bus rate
Deep River		3	$ -	
East Haddam		2	$ 265.17	No information from district; used average rate
East Lyme		6	$ 266.10	Used smaller bus rate
Essex		3	$ -	
Haddam/Killingworth		9	$ 301.25	Used smaller bus rate
Montville		8	$ 273.00	District run transportation - used an average rate
North Stonington		6	$ 215.56	Used smaller bus rate
Norwich		101	$ 658.86	Used big bus rate and included 2 buses due to number of students
Old Saybrook		16	$ 249.60	Used smaller bus rate
Salem		7	$ 257.50	Used smaller bus rate
Westbrook		2	$ 223.90	Used smaller bus rate
Total		**170**	**$ 3,222.04**	
Daily Cost for ride sharing	$	1,096.62		
Daily Cost for separate transportation	$	3,222.04		
Daily Savings for ride sharing	**$**	**2,125.42**		
Annual savings	**$**	**382,575.60**	180 days	

By working together to identify shared transportation needs across town and district lines, some efficiencies may be possible in our local transportation system. Such solutions would require local school districts to work together to achieve such efficiencies, which requires considerable time, effort, and working across town lines. Both special education and school choice transportation provide the greatest potential for achievable solutions.

Sub-Regional Transportation

Creating regional efficiencies for transporting more than 42,000 students is a daunting task under any circumstances. It is complicated further by the individual and complex nature of twenty-four school districts spread over 1200 square miles, each with their own set of transportations policies and requirements. Statutory requirements for public open choice schools (Technical High Schools, Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers, Magnets and Charters, and Open Choice Schools) and inconsistencies in how transportation costs are supported and reimbursed add additional complexities to developing a regional solution.

Although a satisfactory regional model has yet to be developed in Connecticut, other states have varying levels of cooperative efforts in place. In most cases, these efforts are based on either a countywide structure for educational support services (i.e., New York, New Jersey) or county run schools (i.e., Maryland). In examining examples of the regional solutions in other states, size of the collaborative was striking. For example, in New Jersey, the Sussex County Regional Transportation Cooperative included 146 school districts and transported 10,450 students to over

500 schools. In Maryland, Calvert County Public Schools transports 15,570 students to 24 schools in the county. While both examples illustrate the possibilities, our region serves over 42,000 students in our 24 towns supporting 135 school.

In order to create a viable regional transportation solution there are a number of conditions that would have to be in place. Although current contracts expire at various times over a five-year window (as previously illustrated in Table 2), it would be more critical to establish a uniform transportation contract that all school districts (or at least groups of districts) would accept and abide in order to begin negotiating with the existing transportation companies. There would have to be a level playing field that would ultimately benefit districts and transportation vendors alike.

Here in lies the challenge. Currently, bus transportation contracts vary by town in numerous factors including, vehicle requirements (age, mileage, size, etc.) location of buses, fuel and maintenance, daily rate calculations, extra-curricular costs, surveillance cameras and communication equipment, and ride time limitations. In addition, each district may have embedded board policies that determine distance for walking to a bus stop, door-to door service for portions of the population and even eligibility for transportation that would require alignment in a uniform contract. Uniform contracts by necessity would have to address out of district transportation including special education transportation as well as public open choice options. Along this vein, it would be advantageous to work with local legislators to develop incentives for cooperative transportation initiatives and to create a uniform requirements for transporting students to out-of-district public school programs (Magnets, Charters, and Technical etc.).

While creating a uniform contract or bid specification would be a critical first step to developing a viable regional solution for in-district transportation, the region's size is a factor that needs to be addressed. Breaking the region into sub regions of contiguous school districts could be a leverage point for the transportation companies. Instead of four or five towns spread out over the region, companies might better serve the region and create their own cost efficiencies if the towns were all in one area or better still clustered by borders. For example, two of the current transportation contractors have individual contracts with towns in opposite ends of the region. In one case, Stonington and Region 4, and in another case, Clinton and North Stonington. The LEARN region could easily be divided into four or possibly five sub-regions of school districts that bordered one another. Based on the enrollment in each district, a series of sub-regions could be identified for purposes of contract bidding and negotiation. This would also simplify the RFP process especially during the five year spread on contract expiration dates. Districts in the sub-region would be grandfathered into the regional contract for its duration. Transportation companies would bid on the contract specifications knowing that additional districts would be added during the life of the contract, creating opportunities to gear up their infrastructure as well as create a predicable financial future. Table 8 illustrates one way that the region could logically be subdivided based on proximity and enrollment.

Table 8: Example of Possible Sub Regions for Regional Transportation Contracts

Sub-Region 1		Sub-Region 2		Sub-Region 3		Sub Region 4	
District	Enrollment	District	Enrollment	District	Enrollment	District	Enrollment
Clinton	1787	E. Haddam	1026	Montville	2200	Groton	4429
Guilford	3387	E. Hampton	1868	New London	3506	Ledyard	2365
Madison	2931	E. Lyme	2773	Norwich	3542	North Stonington	730
Region 17	2099	Old Saybrook	1311	Waterford	2511	Preston	425
		Region 4	945			Stonington	2072
		Region 18	1301				
		Salem	402				
		Westbrook	762				
Totals	**10,204**		**10,388**		**11,759**		**10,021**

Creating a structure for sub-regions, regardless of the actual configuration, afford a number of beneficial economies of scale for both the region's school communities and the transportation companies. The sub-regional construct could also solve the obstacle of where to house the buses. Locating a regional hub for mechanical service and parking would be made somewhat less burdensome if a transportation company could centrally locate to their sub-region.

Organizing the region in four clusters as suggested above could also create increased efficiencies for out-of-district transportation for open choice schools and specialized out placement programs. Ideally, the uniform contract would have a provision for out-of-district transportation, like filed trips and extra-curricular transportation. The transportation company serving the sub-region would, by default, be better situated to create ride-sharing opportunities.

Scheduling field-trips, athletic events and even early dismissal and late starts would all be easier to plan for and address for a transportation company with a centralized hub. In addition, the number of sub-drivers could be minimized as a cohort of sub drivers could be used to cover the districts in the hub as opposed to having to have multiple sub drivers when contracts are spread throughout the region.

The transition to a sub-regional organization might prove challenging during the transition as contracts expire. Table 9 provides an illustration of how it might evolve over the initial five-year transition.

Table 9: Contract Expiration by Sub-region

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Region 1		Region 17	Madison		Clinton Guilford
Region 2	East Lyme Region 4 Old Saybrook Salem	Region 18	East Haddam	East Hampton	Westbrook
Region 3	New London			Waterford	
Region 4	Ledyard				Stonington North Stonington

(*In sub-region 3, we currently don't have current contract expiration dates for Montville and Norwich, and in sub-region 4 we don't have expiration dates for Groton, North Stonington, and Preston.) For purposes of a visual representation of contract expirations and sub-region configuration we have provided a color-coded map of the LEARN region (See Attachment J).

SUMMARY

The Superintendents in the LEARN region along with LEARN staff have worked successfully in the past to create opportunities to work together to provide programs and services to students, faculty, and families in a cost-effective manner. This report summarizes the time and effort that has been spent over the past ten years working to create efficiencies in the area of transportation. The data reveal that the challenges to a full-scale transportation system have been impediments to making progress at a large scale. The Study concludes that the most promising practices reside in the areas of regional special education transportation and regional schools of choice, where districts need to cross town lines to provide transportation. In addition, reimagining how regional transportation infrastructure could be designed provides a more manageable and potentially realistic approach to containing cost and creating greater efficiencies.

To date, current systems and ways of approaching regional transportation have not born fruit. The approach in the current study was to identify potential promising practices and to identify what would need to be done to accomplish such audacious concepts. While more work at the state and local levels will be required to advance and support any true regional solutions, the first steps will be to bring decision makers from each town together to tackle the nuts and bolts of creating a common set of expectations and commitments for transportation contracts. It is a challenge that has promise, but will require a concerted effort to overcome existing models of autonomy.