

Draft Minutes of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
Subcommittee on Idaho Public Education Transportation

June 19, 1995

Subcommittee TeleConference

Co-chair Representative Bruce Newcomb called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Members on the teleconference were Co-chair Senator Bruce Sweeney, Senators Atwell Parry and Sue Reents. Staff members present were Nancy Van Maren and Margaret Campbell.

Ms. Van Maren reviewed the motions of the last committee meeting regarding the pupil transportation study. JLOC requested OPE determine approximate costs for an evaluation, which could determine how the system could operate more effectively. Last week she mailed the committee materials outlining different options.

Senator Reents asked if any other members of JLOC had responded to the options. Ms. Van Maren said that she had spoken briefly with Representative Gurnsey about the study, but had not received other comments at this point.

Senator Sweeney said he would prefer to have a report issued by the end of December, and suggested considering Option One, Part I. Information from Option One could be used to further develop Option Two if the committee decided to pursue this issue after December. Senator Reents said the cost of the G.I.S. study in Option One, Part II, was expensive for the number of districts it would address. She asked if the benefits would be sufficient on a statewide basis.

Senator Parry said there was a move in the United States to make families more financially responsible for transporting their children to school. For example, families in Orange County, California, must pay the entire cost of transporting their children. This has led several to seek alternate forms of transportation. He said that until the percentage of transportation costs reimbursed was cut back, Idaho would not go very far in reducing transportation costs.

Senator Sweeney agreed with Senator Parry, and said that Legislators needed some kind of a report to reference before the next session started. Senator Parry said that Option Two would take too long and not be useful for next Legislative session.

Co-chair Newcomb said that one of the key issues was standardization of the data statewide and accountability for the funds received. He thought there should be sanctions for non-compliance.

Senator Sweeney asked if surveying Twin Falls county under Option One, Part II, would be sufficiently representative of the state. Ms. Van Maren said that the eight school districts would

be representative. One district did not bus their children, one had software, and Buhl, with the highest costs per mile in the state, contracted with Mayflower. She said she had recently learned that Mayflower had entered into an agreement with a software firm, and would be marketing joint services to school districts across the nation.

Senator Parry asked if OPE could release an interim study in December. Ms. Van Maren said interim studies could go two ways: focus on a series of smaller reports with some portion released in December, or begin a larger comprehensive study and issue preliminary findings in December. She said the latter posed problems, as preliminary findings may change when the evidence is all in. Senator Sweeney asked if a comprehensive report would be necessary for JFAC's use. Senator Parry said that would depend on the information provided.

Senator Reents asked if the data necessary for G.I.S. mapping was in place statewide. Ms. Van Maren said some had been developed, but other areas were weak. Data sets of varying quality could be purchased.

Senator Parry said that it appeared that for \$20,000 information could be obtained on all school districts by December using Option One, Part I. Ms. Van Maren said that an OPE staff member would not be available until September, but some work could start in July if additional staff resources could be brought on.

Senator Reents said the committee could complete the second and third options under Table 1 before deciding to study the issue further. Co-chair Newcomb said he thought OPE should identify actual costs so data could be standardized. He said G.I.S. was not as important as Part I; as long as costs are reimbursable at 85 percent, there was no motive to reduce them. Senator Reents said OPE should focus on the second and third options of Table 1 for a report in December. After those two pieces are together, decisions could be made about further study.

Senator Parry clarified the funds available for this study. Ms. Van Maren said that funds available would be close to \$92,000. Senator Parry said the OPE should get assistance for the study and pursue the second, third, and fifth options on Table 1 with the priority of releasing a report before the start of next session.

Senator Reents asked if it would be helpful to prioritize the three items of study. Senator Parry said he thought the decision should be left up to Ms. Van Maren, with the understanding that she would produce as complete a report as possible by December. He said it would be an opportunity to show Legislators the good work of the OPE.

Co-chair Newcomb agreed with the three selections. He said it was a good direction with opportunity for more studies later.

Senator Reents moved that the subcommittee recommend to the full committee that the OPE proceed with Table 1, options two, three, and five, giving Ms. Van Maren flexibility to decide how to prioritize them according to available resources, with the goal of releasing the report(s) in December. Included in this was an understanding that the committee

would then consider a progress report at a later meeting and determine whether to request further study. Senator Parry seconded the motion.

Co-chair Newcomb clarified that these were only recommendations of the subcommittee to the full committee. Members asked if funds could be encumbered under the subcommittee's recommendations. Ms. Van Maren said this was possible. She said she would send information to the full committee and take a formal vote by mail.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Senator Parry said if these recommendations were not approved by the committee, the encumbered funds could be released by Ms. Van Maren without any problem. Some funds would be returned to the general fund even after encumbering for this report. Ms. Van Maren explained that the funds were available because staff started in September and the office did not begin full evaluations until January.

Senator Parry said JFAC would likely view this return of funds with good reasons favorably.

The teleconference was adjourned at 8:50 a.m.