

From: Victoria Swayze [<mailto:vikaswayze@gmail.com>]
Sent: Sunday, September 13, 2020 10:42 PM
To: Paul Else <pelse@sd48.bc.ca>; Jack Crompton <jcrompton@whistler.ca>
Cc: rlythe@sd48.bc.ca; Chiggins@sd48.bc.ca; Stuart Bent <sbent@sd48.bc.ca>
Subject: Cheakamus - Spring Creek Bus Decision Appeal

Dear Mr. Else, The Board of Directors of SD 48 and Mr. Crompton,

My name is Victoria Swayze and I am reaching out to you on behalf of the Cheakamus Crossing parents.

First of all, we would like to thank you for the work you have done to help our kids return to school safely. These are challenging times, the situation is constantly evolving, but our kids are happy and enjoying their return to school and it is a huge testament to the work you have done leading up to the first days.

After the very recent announcement on school bus cancellation and after the first two days, the Cheakamus parents are facing a number of challenges and we would like to formally appeal your decision to cancel the school bus. We understand you, Mr. Else, and the Board of Directors had the safety of our children, budget and bus availability in mind when you made this decision, but in the end the decision came down to cancelling only the routes that formally lie within “walking distance” of the school. In the past with this Courtesy Rideship being approved it was never in parents’ minds to review your policy on what is considered to be a “walkable” route. While many of us walked the distance of 2.8km or more to school growing up, there is a big difference in walking through neighbourhoods and walking through a forest in the mountains. With the Cheakamus - Spring Creek walking route, we have the following things to consider:

- unless the kids are expected to walk along Highway 99, the route from Cheakamus to Spring Creek via the Valley Trail is 2.8 km. We barely do not meet the criteria of school bus eligibility and with the following points we do consider ourselves eligible for an exception:

- wildlife (bears and cougars being primary and very real danger)
- often unplowed trail (early in the morning)
- weather conditions
- relying on the trail to be properly lit
- a portion of the trail lies under the power lines with a clear sign that the area is to be avoided during storms. No children’s route should cross under major power lines in a large open area
- most importantly, the fact that the route has no access in case of emergency. If a child gets hurt on the way, there are no houses to knock on the door and ask for help. Their friends would have to run to get help and then we would need to run back and carry the child out. There is no access for a vehicle anywhere on the route.

The distance alone doesn’t determine whether the route is “walkable”, the terrain itself is an important contributor. For all these reasons it is absolutely out of the question that elementary and early middle school kids will be walking alone. For parents to be accompanying them is also unrealistic. It takes about 40 minutes each way in good weather and most parents don’t have 3-4 hours in a day to walk their kids to school and back.

Which brings us to the my next point that almost everyone is driving their kids. At drop off and pick up the parking lot is congested and unsafe. People block traffic, back up, there are kids and parents everywhere. And this is on a sunny +25 day. We add a snowfall and icy roads to this and this becomes more dangerous. The school parking lots are crowded with families, much more than physically spaced school bus stops, jeopardizing our COVID social distancing efforts.

This is where I include Mr. Crompton in this discussion. I understand that SD48 and RMOW are different institutions and potentially don’t work on projects together. This could be a case of looking outside the box, working together and coming up with the solution. Mr. Crompton, please consider the following:

- With Whistler's relentless efforts to reduce local driving, this decision makes very little sense.
- Lack of traffic lights from Spring Creek onto the highway and increased amount of cars will increase probability of accidents
- Cheakamus is a predominantly WHA community with lower income levels. Not everyone has two cars, not everyone has a car at all.
- Most families have 2+ children which, depending on the age, makes it impossible to carpool. If you are a family with 3 kids of any age, carpooling is out of the question.
- Most people don't have the workplace flexibility to be late in the morning and to take a break between 2:00-3:00 to shuttle their child to aftercare.
- Most private aftercares (in the absence of adequate KOTG spots) rely on school bus drop off.
- Lastly, Cheakamus has very limited parking for the amount of units and households. It was designed with the promise of ample public transportation and now you are forcing us all to drive.

We are all living in COVID times where being a parent and having a job is extremely difficult. We are going into winter where our incomes, careers and businesses will suffer due to increased sick days we will have to take to keep everyone safe. Please help Cheakamus parents by removing the extra stress of finding a way to get their child to and from school and the parents will in turn continue to contribute to Whistler's economy to ensure we as a town will survive this pandemic.

In summary, we are kindly asking for the following:

1. We are asking Mr. Else to approve the Courtesy Rideship for another school year which will give us time to review and appeal the fact that our route is considered "walkable"
2. If Mr. Else is unable to provide a bus due to funding, lack of actual busses or anything else that might get in his way, we would like Mr. Crompton to review possible solutions - providing funding or a Whistler Transit bus to cover the route.

We thank you for your time and consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Victoria Swayze on behalf of Cheakamus Crossing parents.
604.698.6743

*In lieu of physical signatures in support of this letter Mr. Else will be receiving individual applications for Courtesy Rideship from affected families.