

SCHOOL BUS FLASHING LIGHTS/STOP ARM

Fact Sheet | November 18, 2013

Background

In 1987, the City of St. Albert prohibited the use of school bus flashing lights and stop arms under the Traffic Bylaw: “While operating a School Bus on a Roadway, no Person shall activate any flashing stop light or mechanical stop arm with which the School Bus may be equipped.”

This section of the bylaw was enacted after the Provincial Government revised the Highway Traffic Act to allow municipalities to regulate the use of school bus flashing lights within their jurisdictions, encouraging municipalities to consider prohibiting its use on most urban roads. Prior to that, school buses were prohibited through Provincial legislation from using flashing lights or stop arms in municipalities on roads that were 50 km/hour or less.

The use of flashing lights and stop arms was intended for rural roads only, as they typically have a higher speed limit, with no curbs, stop signs, signals, crosswalks or other traffic control devices to properly assist pedestrians to cross the road.

Use of Flashing Lights and Stop Arm

According to a letter from the Minister of Transportation at the time the Highway Traffic Act was revised:

- “In some low speed urban situations, it is better to require students on school buses to use existing traffic controls such as stop signs or signals and crosswalks than to depend on school bus warning lights for protection.”
- “Where well marked intersections and roadways are present, it is actually safer to use those markings and devices than to use flashing school bus lights.”

Children are educated to cross streets only at intersections, and to signal their intention to cross the street in accordance with the Alberta Traffic Safety Act (point, pause, proceed). Allowing buses to stop randomly mid-block and have children cross the street in front of school buses contradicts this education and can increase the pedestrian accident risk in an urban area.

Although the alternative crossing location may not be the most direct route, it is considered to be the safest route.

Other Alberta municipalities that specifically prohibit the use of school bus flashing lights and stop arms include:

- Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Spruce Grove, Strathcona County (urban district area only Sherwood Park), Fort Saskatchewan (roads with posted speed limit of 50 km/h or less), and Grande Prairie (roads with speeds of 79 km/h and less).

Bus Safety in St. Albert

- Traffic safety is a priority for the City of St. Albert and the RCMP.
- The City continues to work with the RCMP, the school boards and with St. Albert residents to monitor the effectiveness of traffic safety rules, and when necessary, recommends changes to the traffic bylaws to ensure safety of all road users.
- While there are no current plans to recommend changes to this section of the Traffic Bylaw, the City will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Bylaw as new residential developments occur, especially in rural areas in St. Albert.

Who to contact

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