

'We want kids to be safe': school bus driver on new technology

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Canadian school buses are getting safer. School divisions across the country are adding cameras to the outside of buses, to warn drivers of outside dangers next to their vehicle.

By November 2027, all new school buses will have cameras that monitor movement around them when they are driving at less than 10 km/h. The system will also alert the driver that something is next to them, and they should stop or pay attention.



ALEX LAMBERT THE CARILLON - An SRSD school bus extends its stop sign to halt drivers so it can safely drop children off. Transport Canada is mandating cameras around buses for all new school buses by late 2027.

One bus driver for the Seine River School Division (SRSD), who asked not to be named because she didn't have permission from the division to speak, said the mandate is welcome.

She said when there are hundreds of kids running around, drivers never know when someone or something might be in a blind spot next to their bus.

"When we're loading up at the school, there's always kids playing on the play structure and in the playground area. And soccer balls go between us," she said. "We can't always see little children that are running out between the buses. We need at least six feet ... eight feet of clearance for us to see something."

"(Cameras) immediately in front of our bus would be ideal, because there's been kids that have been hit and killed."

According to one manufacturer for the technology, MJG Technologies in Winnipeg, the new cameras are supposed to see from directly beside the bus, to 50 feet away in all directions. Warnings like beeps will sound next to the driver, where they can then look at a live video feed next to them to see where the movement comes from, and if it's of concern.

President of MJG Technologies Maurice Gregoire said this technology will be a big help for drivers.

"It gives a full view of everything that's happening around the bus," Gregoire said. "It's basically a bird's-eye view, and all around the bus right to the ground."

"If there's any motion around the bus that's not the ground, beep beep beep, and it tells the driver 'this is happening on this side of the bus,'" said Gregoire.

He said his company has had the technology for a long time, it just hasn't been popular.

Gregoire said the four new high-definition cameras on every bus would mean there won't be any blind spots anymore.

He said where the monitors are going to go still has to be figured out with Transport Canada. He added it shouldn't be right in front of drivers, as it could be a distraction. Gregoire also said the live video feed will be able to automatically turn off at a certain speed so drivers can focus on the road.

The SRSD bus driver said the regulations Transport Canada is implementing are a great way to keep her and her students safe.

"We're tuned to listen to the beeps. If our bus is making a strange noise, immediately we need to know what it is," she said. "A beep will alert us, it's got to be loud enough though, as kids are sometimes loud."

She said the monitor might be distracting for her, but said she wants to see it in real life before she has an opinion on it.

The technology will also be clear enough to read license plates of drivers who run through flashing lights and stop signs. Some SRSD buses in the division already have those cameras on their buses, including the driver who approves of the regulations.

She said last year, her cameras caught nearly 70 drivers driving past her while she was dropping children off.

"The camera has saved my bacon, a lot, just in people running my stop sign," she said.

Before those cameras existed, bus drivers would have to memorize license plates, and if violators would contest tickets, judges would often drop the ticket, as it was their word against someone else's. Now with video, almost all charged drivers have to pay their tickets, which can be up to \$674 and demerits, according to the province.

She said her colleagues have seen the same things she has, not just with driving through stop signs, but with kids running around their bus.

"We're not out here just because we want a paycheque, we want kids to be safe."

SRSD Supt. Colin Campbell said he hadn't heard of the new regulations when asked on Monday, and said it sounds like a big budget item the division will have to deal with. He declined to comment further on the topic.

Gregoire also said none of the parts for his company's system come from the United States, so American tariffs wouldn't impact rollout.