

Testimony of Thomas Van Wazer

FY 2012 Advertised Budget Public Hearing  
January 24, 2011

(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

Good Evening. My name is Thomas Van Wazer and I am the Father of a junior at McLean High School. As before, I am here to support later start times for high school students. To me, the evidence is clear that our teenagers are sleep-deprived and that sleep deprivation is a significant contributor to a number of serious problems, including obesity and depression,

First, I want to thank you for following-up on my testimony from last year. In that testimony, I described information that SLEEP had provided to the FCPS Transportation Department staff demonstrating significant additional transportation cost savings could be realized if the start times of five high schools were changed by 30 minutes. I also expressed my disappointment that this information had apparently been ignored by the staff despite the severe budget reductions the Board was ultimately required to make.

Presumably with the encouragement of Dr. Dale and/or the Board, the Transportation Department staff ultimately reviewed the information SLEEP provided. Along with several other representatives of SLEEP, I attended a meeting last fall with Dean Tisdadt and his staff to discuss their review of the information SLEEP provided. While there was an unfortunate misunderstanding about how SLEEP's transportation model worked, we learned at that meeting about the Department's plan to hire a transportation consultant to evaluate the system.

The remainder of my testimony relates to the transportation consultant's work. Before elaborating, it is important to point out that although I am a member of SLEEP, this testimony is mine and does not necessarily reflect the views of SLEEP or any of its members. The actions proposed below reflect a compromise given the stark budgetary situation faced by the Board. Were the budget situation better, the spending priorities accepted here could well be different.

If the plan to hire a transportation consultant moves forward, the Board should to instruct the Transportation Department to evaluate whether changing the start time of any high school within a 30 minute time block produces additional cost savings. This analysis should ideally be done using an optimization tool that allows different factors (variables) to be changed and then studied. As noted above, SLEEP submitted information last year demonstrating that changing the start time of five high schools produced significant cost savings.

To implement this instruction, the consultant should run at least one iteration that allows the start times of high schools to change by up to 30 minutes as the model develops an optimized transportation schedule. When running this iteration, the Board should instruct the consultant to give later high school start times a priority once other conditions have been met. What this means: if the model is evaluating two possible bus runs that both produce cost savings and satisfy other variables (e.g., minimizing dead head time, minimum amount of time between runs), the model should select the bus run that includes a later high school start time.

We all know that there are 100s of different ways to arrange bus schedules. Given the near-continuous stream of new evidence confirming the pernicious effects of sleep deprivation on teenagers, I urge the Board ensure that the transportation consultant identifies a bus schedule that lowers cost AND helps as many high school students as possible by providing more reasonable high school start times.

The 30 minute window proposed above was selected because the Board used a 30 minute window two years ago when it optimized the start times of elementary and middle schools. With the 30 minute limit, the Board apparently concluded that there was no need to conduct a survey or undertake any special, time-consuming community outreach regarding the changes. The same analysis should apply here if the start time of any high school changes.

One last thing about the consultant's work -- I strongly urge the Board and the Transportation Department to ensure the transparency of the transportation consultant's work. For example, the consultant's model should be available for review by the public. All iterations run by the consultant should be publicly available. Finally, all the factors given priorities and/or weightings in a particular run (iteration) should be disclosed when the results of the run are disclosed.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.