

New York School Districts Install GPS Tracking Systems in Buses

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Cutting-edge technology is making it easier for transportation directors to keep track of some school buses in New York. With the help of a global-positioning satellite (GPS) system installed in each of the school buses for a pilot testing program, school officials can locate exactly where their buses are at all times.

IC Corporation introduced the pilot program with 10 New York school districts to integrate a GPS - or telematics solution - into their buses. International Truck and Engine, IC Corporation's parent company, developed the telematics solution - known as AWARE Vehicle Intelligence - to help improve overall school transportation operations through better maintenance efficiencies and immediate knowledge of each vehicle's location.

The new system can keep track of the location of each school bus at all times and monitors the various systems on the bus, such as checking how often its flashing red stop lights are activated. This provides a real-time record of school bus stops, which is important to school officials when it comes to knowing the exact times when school buses are making stops. Access through a password-protected Web site gives school officials secure access of the location and performance of their school bus fleet.

In the New York pilot program, supervisors managing the district transportation operations are pleased with the new innovation and are discovering a number of potential uses and advantages for AWARE in school buses.

"Security is its greatest benefit," said Chuck Tanzer, fleet manager for the Saratoga Springs City School District. "By knowing where the bus is, if there is any kind of incident, I know where it is and can better determine how best to support the situation. You know immediately if there has been an accident or hijacking so that help can be dispatched that much quicker. That's even more important since 9/11."

In addition to tracking a bus's real-time location, AWARE also helps manage such operating costs as fuel costs. AWARE combines remote vehicle performance monitoring, diagnostics, service and vehicle positioning into a single Web-based tool, allowing school administrators access to the most updated information on their bus fleet. It provides maintenance professionals with an easier way to diagnose any issues with a bus, and it provides parents and school officials with peace-of-mind knowing that the buses are being monitored continually.

"Tracking fuel efficiency was accurate and easy, and today that is one of my biggest issues since my budget won't change because the prices do," said Robert Zeller, transportation supervisor at Warwick Valley Central School District.

One example from the pilot program provides a vivid illustration of how AWARE can make a difference. A New York school transportation director one day checked via computer on the location of one of his school buses outfitted with AWARE and discovered the bus was 45 miles away in a different city.

Unaware the bus had an assignment that day, he called the dispatcher who claimed the vehicle was in the bus parking lot. As it turns out, a substitute driver mistakenly had taken the wrong bus on a field trip and AWARE was able to pinpoint its exact location.

AWARE also features a "geofence" capability that allows school

officials to designate a virtual boundary for school buses. If a bus leaves that boundary, an immediate alert can be sent to transportation officials via e-mail, cell phone text message or pager to let them know that a bus has left its operating area.

"School officials need to know where their school buses are at all times," said Dan Lindberg, vice president and general manager of AWARE Vehicle Intelligence at International. "When those school buses leave the lot each day with AWARE, school officials are able to track their location. AWARE also monitors performance and diagnoses maintenance issues remotely. This helps deliver greater driver, passenger and bus safety.

"School administrators also will detect an impact on the bottom line because the system helps reduce fuel and maintenance costs. Over the long run, AWARE can help pay for itself with the financial return on investment and overall peace-of-mind."

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