



This is  
**one camera**  
you won't be  
**smiling for**

With some 30,000 students travelling to school in Waterloo Region every day, safety is always on the mind of Benoit Bourgault, the General Manager of Student Transportation Services (STS) for the region.

Bourgault finds it disconcerting the serious injuries in this area of transportation are a result of children being hit by drivers who don't stop for the red flashing lights of a school bus. It's a practice that Bourgault hopes to put an end to.

"The thing that keeps me up at night is the number-one complaint I get from bus drivers in the area—the fear that somebody will fail to stop for them while a child is crossing the road."



Bourgault said on average there are about 500 to 700 violations a week by drivers in the region who don't stop for school buses. So on receiving support from the Waterloo Region Police Service, his department mounted cameras on the stop arms of six of their buses as a pilot program. (Stop arms are stop signs on school buses that swing out when the bus opens its doors.)

"For a number of years I've been aware that stop-arm cameras have been in use in other jurisdictions in Canada (Alberta) and in the U.S. And we constantly get inquiries from parents asking us why we don't have them here, so we started looking into it," said Bourgault.

The STS found a company that would mount the cameras, monitor the footage, and report the results directly to the police. And the results that came from the pilot program revealed a frequency of almost one violation per bus per day.

With those results in hand, Bourgault was able to persuade both school boards in the region to move forward with installing the cameras on their buses.

Fitting the buses could cost \$16,000 per bus, which was more than the school boards could afford, but the Waterloo Region offered to cover the cost. With violations costing drivers between \$400 and \$2,000 for a first offence, and between \$1,000 and \$4,000 for subsequent offences, the cost of the cameras is expected to be recouped in fines.

Since distracted driving is on the rise, Bourgault sees an ever greater need for the stop-arm cameras.

**"It drives me crazy to think that people would be on their phones while going through the red light of a school bus stop arm, but we already have too many cases where distracted driving is suspected."**

The camera itself has seven heads mounted on the side of the bus to view every lane, and it captures video imagery of the 10 seconds before and after the stop arm of a bus is fully extended.

Bourgault acknowledges that these cameras are only one part of the solution, but he believes they are a step toward improving the safety of the students who use the buses. The important thing that is still needed is public awareness of the cameras, and that will come from the violators, who will be up in arms at the fines they'll have to pay.

"There's a very important safety rule already in existence—don't run a red light. So for the people who will be getting upset about something like this, you need to understand that it doesn't take much for a seven-year-old to get distracted and run across the street. It doesn't take much for a teenager to text on their phone and not pay attention to their surroundings. This technology will improve the safety of those children."

## The Highway Traffic Act



The *Highway Traffic Act* of Ontario says that when a school bus is stopped on the road with its upper red lights flashing and the "Stop" sign deployed, drivers must come to a complete stop in both directions. The owner of a vehicle can also be charged if their vehicle does not stop for a school bus, even if they were not driving it at the time. Passing a stopped school bus can have severe consequences.

A driver or car owner can be **fined between \$400 and \$2,000 for a first offence, and between \$1,000 and \$4,000 for subsequent offences**. A person also runs the risk of being given six demerit points on their driver's licence.

