

### ▶▶ DISTRICT PROFILE



**West Valley School District** is a suburban district located in Spokane Valley east of the city of Spokane, WA. The district consists of one main high school, two alternate high schools, two middle schools, four elementary schools, and one pre-school with a student population of 3,750.

The transportation department serves 1,680 students each day and operates 30-36 buses along 19 routes with an additional three SPED routes.

**Brian Liberg**, Transportation Director, relates how he used the routing software system from Transfinder, Routefinder Pro, to save the district \$70,000 after implementing the solution.

### SITUATION

If two major railroad lines crossed your district, and you had a river, a freeway, and a major North/South arterial running through it, it would have seemed plausible to have your school bus drivers stop at every corner to pick up and drop off students. That was the situation at West Valley School District in the Spokane Valley in the 2006-2007 school year as it had been for at least 15 years.

Until the summer of 2007, the transportation department, which transports about 1,600 of the 3,750 enrolled students, used Microsoft Streets and Trips – a simple vacation planning tool – to manage the routing of its 30-36 buses. Since everyone in the district was content with the district’s transportation system, the department hummed along.

But in 2007 things began to change. The Director of Transportation, who was the only one familiar with the Microsoft tool, left the district, and a new Director was appointed. Diesel fuel costs started to rise precipitously, and no one in the department had a clear idea of which stops had students and which ones did not. Neither did they have a good handle on how many stops each bus made, or where the students lived relative to the stops.

That’s when Brian Liberg, the new Director, started looking into a routing software solution specifically designed for school districts. He had several criteria: ease of use, cost, and service. Showing the Administration why software would make his operation more efficient was his primary goal, but focusing on these other criteria also would help make his case. The time was perfect to make his pitch and he succeeded.

### SOLUTION

The Administration agreed with the selection of the routing software solution from Transfinder, and also approved the purchase of an entire suite of Transfinder solutions.

The decision was based partly on the fact that the district’s Student Information System from Skyward was compatible with Transfinder’s routing system. For example, Skyward has a dedicated Transfinder export routine, which enables student information to be exported to Routefinder Pro.

At the same time, Routefinder Pro can export bus number, route, and stop information for particular students into Skyward.

Brian also had convinced them that once he analyzed and adjusted the district's transportation operation using the software, he expected that there would be a number of changes affecting everyone. Therefore, he would have to build in a method to communicate these changes to district personnel and the community in real time. The Administration agreed and authorized the purchase of an intranet solution for the district, and an Internet service for the public so that Brian could communicate and publicize the changes.



According to Brian, “Changing the way things were done after 15 years was an ambitious undertaking. But I wanted to have everything in place when we launched the new transportation program, and opening the lines of communication through emails and the website would help the community better accept the changes needed to make our operation more efficient.”

He added that while efficiency was the primary driver for purchasing routing software, getting a handle on all the data on students, buses, and miles traveled in order to build in cost savings was certainly a factor and an outcome he expected to track.

## BENEFITS

His expectations were met. In the very first year, Brian gathered data on students, buses, routes, stops, and miles traveled annually. He then made some slight adjustments, and in the very first year, recovered about **\$70,000** in costs.

## Here is how he did it.

The software allowed him to see on the map where students lived and how many lived within a two-to-three block radius of a stop. By slightly expanding the walkout for each stop, he could eliminate quite a number of stops. For example, he saw that one route had 44 stops for an elementary school, which he was able to reduce to 19.

In addition, Brian could clearly see which buses were traveling along an “S” path, that is, traversing two parallel main streets and a secondary street between them. He simply eliminated the middle path, and had students picked up on each of the main streets. He also tightened up layovers between trips. In all, Brian shaved off two routes and reduced driver hours and fuel costs.

This saved the district \$35,000.

Finally, since the state only funds students who live outside a one-mile radius of a school, Brian eliminated stops that were in a reasonable walking distance of schools. With some of the schools, it is now a four-to-five block walk for students, and with others it is a two-to-three block walk.

This change resulted in an increase of \$35,000 in state reimbursement, bringing the ROI in the first year to a total of \$70,000.

Brian continues to look for other ways to gain greater efficiencies, and is confident that he and his staff will use technology to help the district provide safe and convenient transportation services, while containing or reducing costs. He already has looked at his fleet, which is in excellent condition, and is finding ways to extend maintenance tasks, such as oil changes, using Transfinder's fleet maintenance software.

He is currently costing out what his office needs to do to save in the year ahead. Like other states in the nation, Washington is facing a multi-billion dollar shortfall, and Brian intends to do his part to help the district save teaching positions and student programs.