

AD REVENUE MAY FUEL MISSOURI SCHOOL BUSES – OPINIONS DIVIDED



Cash-strapped schools in Missouri's school districts are awaiting a government nod that will allow them to advertise on the exterior and interior of the school buses. The legislation to advertise on school buses was passed, but only just, by the Missouri House this month and will now be considered by the Missouri Senate. There is less funding from the state and allowing advertising space on schools buses could give them a financial boost and create a new avenue for generating revenue. Representative Mike Kelley, R-Lamar, said that this was not a new concept and that advertising already existed around Missouri's schools. Moreover, money was tight since many years and the extra money would be a very welcome assistance. "Have you been to a football stadium, a basketball court or a baseball field for any of our local sport groups? If you have, you will notice advertising because, unfortunately, funding is not there, and that's why advertising has helped pay for sports programs in schools all across the state," he said. Steve Chodes, the chief financial officer for the Springfield School District, was supportive of the proposal. He said that the transportation assistance his district received this year was \$1.6 million. In academic year 2008-2009 it had received \$2.4 million. "School districts are leaving no stone unturned to come up with additional sources of revenue," he said. Advertising on outer side of the bus would be restricted to the passenger side of the bus, targeting pedestrians and ensuring that they do not distract motorists. Moreover, advertising within the interiors of the bus would relate only to health and safety messages. The size of the ads would be specified and the state Board of Education would regulate ad content and ensure that they did not contain "sexual material, gambling, tobacco products, alcohol and political campaigns or causes." Half of the revenue thus generated would be used towards fuel and student transportation costs. The remaining fifty percent was to be used according to the discretion of the local officials. However, there are people who have reservations about the proposal and have expressed unease over safety and over-targeting of children. The Missouri School Boards' Association said that it was a cause for worry and had the potential of causing controversy. Brent Ghan, a spokesman for the Missouri School Boards' Association said, "The intention is good in that it's an attempt to help us deal with the underfunding of school transportation. We think that it's unlikely that it would really have a significant impact on that, and we just wonder if this is really an appropriate way to fund our school transportation system." The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, a strong opponent of the proposal, said that the school buses yellow color, a standard since 1939, was to distinguish it from other vehicles, sending an immediate message to other motorists, that children were traveling inside it. Advertisements could distract attention and prove to be a safety hazard for the children. Bob Riley, the group's executive director said, "The purpose of advertising is to get people's attention, and so, by design, it's getting people's attention to the advertising rather than the bus." Colorado, New Jersey, Tennessee and Texas are among the few states that allow advertising, subject to conditions, on their school buses.