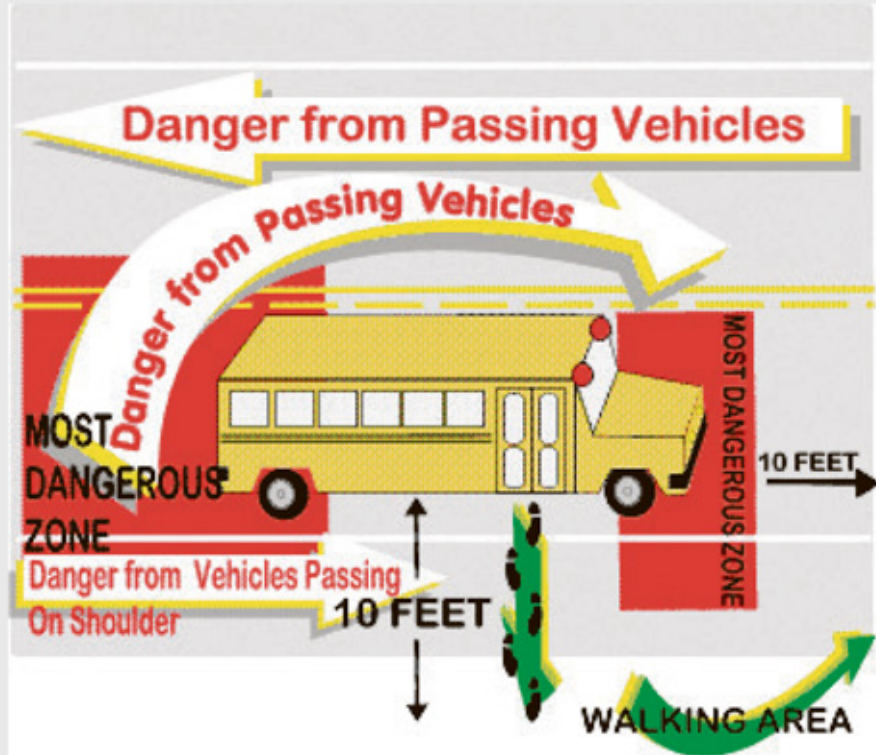


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School Bus Safety - Motorists Must Look Around, Slow Down & Stop

By Jean Follmer



When school starts, the school buses are back on the roads. This often results in a slower commute and the frustrating realization that an earlier departure may be necessary to "beat the bus" in order to arrive at destinations on time. If you do happen to "beat the bus" on weekday mornings, the Lamorinda School Bus Program (LSBP) still urges you to use caution on the roads. "Even when the bus isn't there (at the stop), we have kids along the road waiting for buses and drivers need to be careful. In the morning, kids are crossing the street unassisted, so that's a vulnerable point. We try to encourage the kids to arrive (at the bus stop) 5 minutes early," said LSBP Program Manager Juliet Hansen. However, many kids are running to catch the bus and are crossing streets without looking in the process. In the afternoon, drivers physically get out of their buses to help children cross the street. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, pedestrian accidents account for two-thirds of school bus-related fatalities. If you do get caught behind the bus, it's important to remain calm and accept the fact that your drive will likely take a bit longer. In each Lamorinda community, there have been cases of drivers cutting off buses and passing stopped buses that have their flashing red lights on. Gary Hein, Lead Driver for Durham School Services said the worst red light runner streets are: Lafayette Reliez Valley Road from Grayson to Pleasant Hill and Pleasant Hill Road from Highway 24 to Olympic Boulevard Moraga Moraga Road from Rheem Boulevard to St. Mary's Road and Rheem Boulevard between Moraga Road and Glorietta Boulevard Orinda Anywhere on Miner Road and Anywhere on Overhill Road As a bus prepares to make a stop, its yellow lights will start flashing. When the bus is stopped, its red warning lights will flash and the stop signal arm on the side of the bus will be out. The U.S. Department of Transportation says "Motorists must come to a complete stop a safe distance from the bus and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the arm is retracted, and the bus begins moving before they start driving again." "The law is very clear that all vehicles must stop in both directions when a school bus has its red lights on. The only exception is when there is a physical median or divider separating the opposing traffic," said Hein. Hein said the Lamorinda Police Departments have helped reduce the red light runner problem by following buses and ticketing offenders. Lafayette Police Officer Chilimidos said, "I'm one of the officers that follow the school buses. Most people seem to be compliant, but there are always a few that aren't. I've had to give some citations. If you see a school bus, generally speaking, there

is a police car around." "Every day with our 22 buses, there is somebody who (illegally) passes a bus," said Hansen. She also said there are a few locations, like Reliez Valley Road, where drivers are not only passing stopped buses with flashing red lights, but they are crossing a double yellow line to do it. When a bus is passed illegally, the driver calls the violation in and attempts to get a license plate number, but they're not always able to that since their first responsibility is to the safety of the children on the bus. "Ultimately it's up to all of us that drive our roads to obey the law. These are our children we're putting at risk," said Hein.



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