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Apportioned Tags – What School Bus Contractors Need to Know

On January 1, 2016, new requirements will take affect regarding the use of apportioned plates for interstate travel. This change came about when the International Registration Plan (IRP) removed the charter bus exemption from the definition of an apportionable vehicle. As a result, in the change to this definition, all buses meeting the definition of an apportionable vehicle will be required to obtain an apportioned registration when carrying on business outside of Pennsylvania.

Many school bus contractors handle charter trips in addition to the school-related transportation they provide. PSBA has developed an FAQ which we hope will answer many of the questions contractors may have related to this issue. The forms mentioned in this article (MV-41, MV-550, MV-551, and the New Apportioned Account Checklist can be found on the Useful Links section located at the bottom of the PSBA home page (www.paschoolbus.org).

We are certain that additional questions will arise as the new requirements are implemented. If you have a specific question not covered in this article, please contact PSBA Executive Director Mike Berk at (717) 975-1951, x.500 or mberk@paschoolbus.org.

Questions on the New Apportioned Tags Requirements

Q1: When does a school bus contractor need apportioned plates or to obtain a trip permit?

A1: When a school bus is being used for profit (for-hire) in interstate charter trips, you can use a BA tag and obtain the proper trip permits or it must be registered with an apportioned plate. If you strictly use your school buses for school-related activities (home-to-school, school-to-home, field trips, transportation of sports teams, etc.), for both interstate and intrastate trips then you do not need to have apportioned plates.

Q2: Are apportioned plates needed for intra-state trips (within Pennsylvania)?

A2: No, apportioned plates are only needed for interstate trips.

Q3: Can I use a school bus with apportioned plates to transport children for school related activities (as noted in Q1)?

A3: Yes, you can use school bus with apportioned plates to transport students for school related activities.

Q4: Do all the buses in my fleet have to be apportioned tags or can I have a mix of apportioned tags and other school bus tags?

A4: You can have buses with different registration tags in your fleet. Just be sure that when you are running a charter trip, you are using a bus with the appropriate tag.

Q5: Are apportioned tags needed if a day camp in Pennsylvania takes a field trip over the border into another state? How about if the day camp is located in New York but the bus company is transporting students from Pennsylvania into New York?

A5: Both scenarios refer to day camps which appear to reference the transportation of children across jurisdictional borders. Even though these scenarios are presumed to be for summer day camps, PennDOT considers these as school related activities. Barring any special jurisdictional requirement, i.e. District of Columbia permits, we do not foresee these types of movements requiring trip permits or apportioned registration. It is recommended to check with the jurisdiction where travel is intended to ensure your travel meets enforcement and jurisdictional registration requirements. If you have questions regarding laws or regulations from another jurisdiction it is recommended to contact that jurisdiction for clarification.

Q6: How do I obtain an apportioned plate?

A6: You will need to establish an apportioned account using the PennDOT forms MV-551 and MV-550. There is a checklist which has been created to help you through the process. You can register by coming to PennDOT headquarters in Harrisburg or at a local tag & title company that handles this transaction.

Special Note: If a bus is titled as a “school bus” and you want to put an apportioned plate on that vehicle, you must first complete an MV-41 (Application for Correction of Vehicle Record or Verification of VIN) to retitle the vehicle from a “school bus” to a “bus”. There will be a fee associated with this form.



Q7: How do I pay for my apportioned registration?

A7: PennDOT requires guaranteed funds when collecting registration fees for apportioned vehicles. Apportioned fees are paid monthly to 58 U.S. and Canadian jurisdictions therefore acceptable methods of payments are Certified checks, Money Orders or Cash for in-person counter transactions. PennDOT will credit any unused months remaining on the non-apportioned “BA” plate. Any payment made in excess of the actual registration fees will be held on the account escrow for future use or you may submit Form MV-700, Application for Refund of Motor Vehicle Products. It is important to bring in your “BA” plates to receive credit for the unused months remaining. In return you will receive the apportioned “BN” license plate.

(Note: Your apportioned registration will only be good until May 30, 2016. At that point, you will be asked to renew for a full year.)

If you go to PennDOT without your BA plate, you will submit your paperwork and PennDOT will then invoice you for your apportioned registration. When you pay that invoice, which can be done by check, PennDOT will then send you the apportioned plate.

If you are using a local tag/title company, payment may be made to the tag agency, they in turn will submit their payment to PennDOT unless otherwise directed. Payments directed to PennDOT by the tag agency must be certified payment. Personal or business checks are not accepted for apportioned registration payment.