A yellow school bus is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The front of the bus features a large black grille with vertical slats and a central emblem. Above the grille, the words "SCHOOL BUS" are written in white on a black background. The bus has large black tires and a black bumper. On the side of the bus, the words "LEGISLATIVE AUDIT" are written in black. The background is a plain white surface.

# School Transportation Funding and Safety

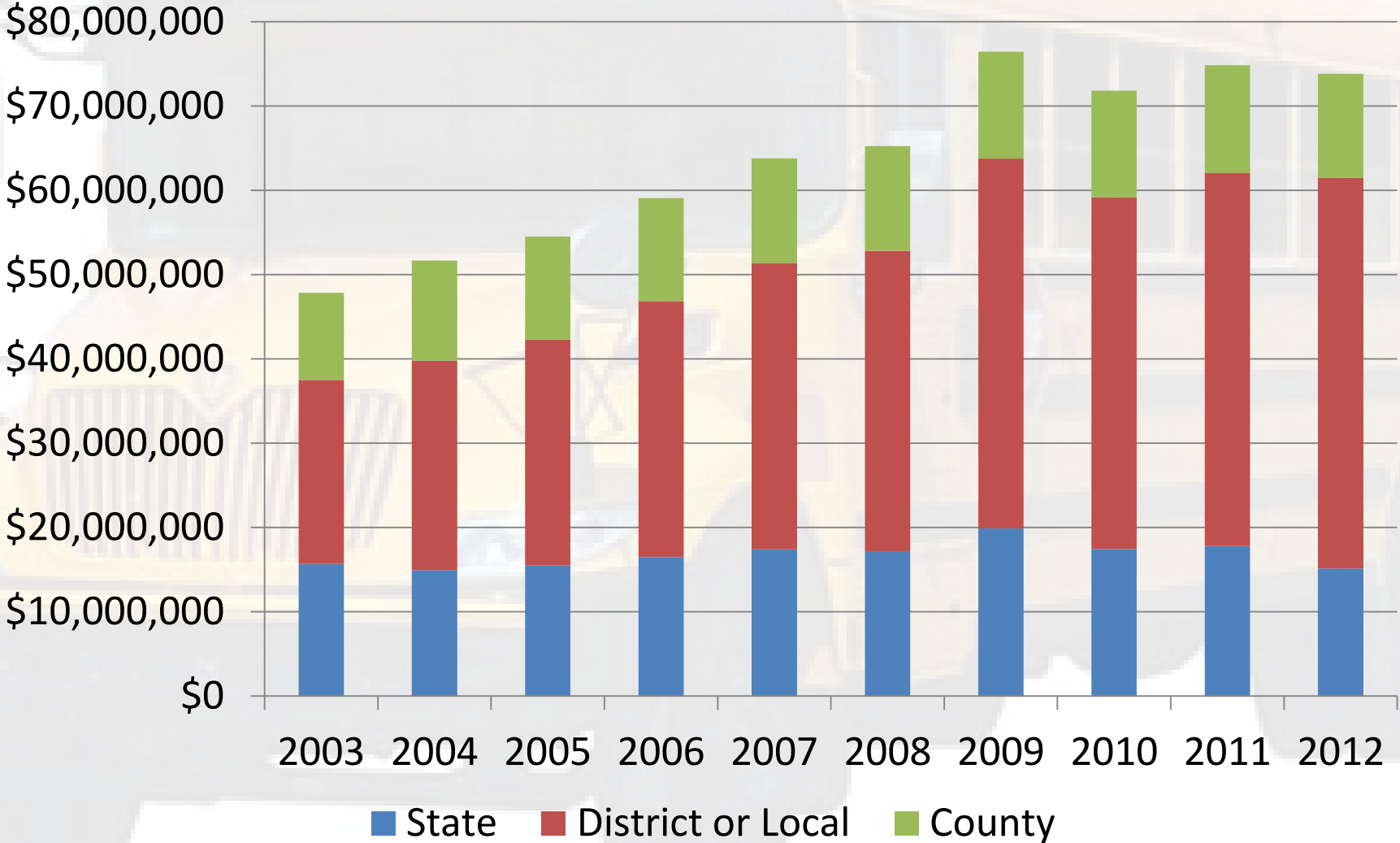
LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Performance Audit (13P-01)  
June 2013

# Introduction

- Eligible for transportation if residing at least three miles from the nearest public school.
- District- or contractor-operated bus routes
- Individual transportation contracts

# Sources of Funding



# Bus Routes

Route established by the local board of trustees



Approved by county transportation committee



Bus on the route inspected and approved by MHP



District or contractor operates route/BPE standards



District files reimbursement claim



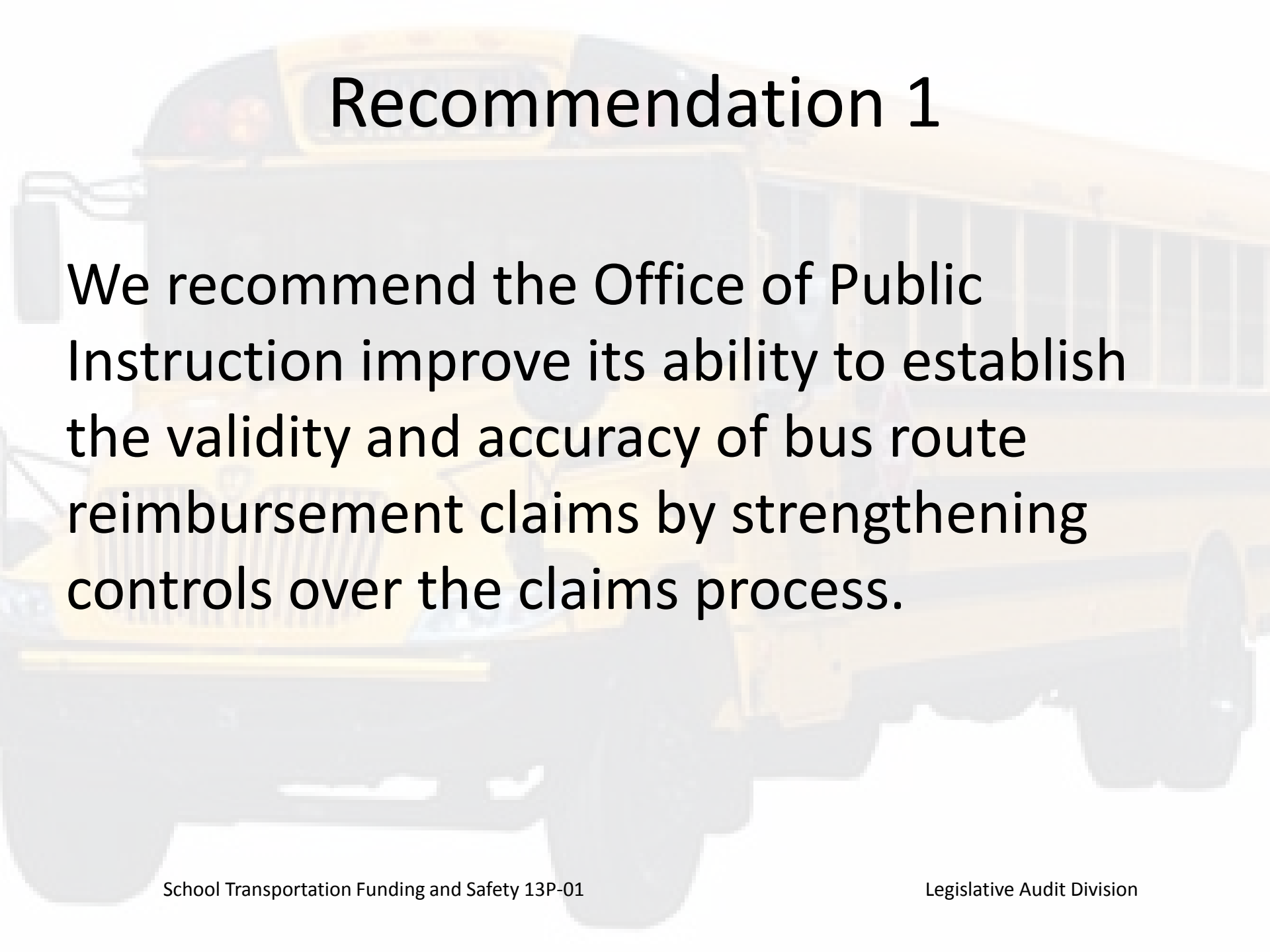
OPI disburses reimbursements to counties

# Effectiveness of Reviews

- State relies on districts and counties to submit accurate information.
- County transportation committees do not regularly scrutinize routes.
- Maps often inadequate for the purposes of determining route mileage.
- Independent audits do not often address transportation.
- Desk audits can only compare mileage as approved by the county transportation committee to the claim amount.

# Reimbursement Inaccuracies

- Nonbus mileage for the cost of getting a driver to a bus parked at a non-school location (\$141,000)
- Only transportation to and from school is eligible for state reimbursement (\$200,000)
- Some districts appear to claim a larger reimbursement than documentation would indicate is justified (\$6,000 for one route in a semester)



# Recommendation 1

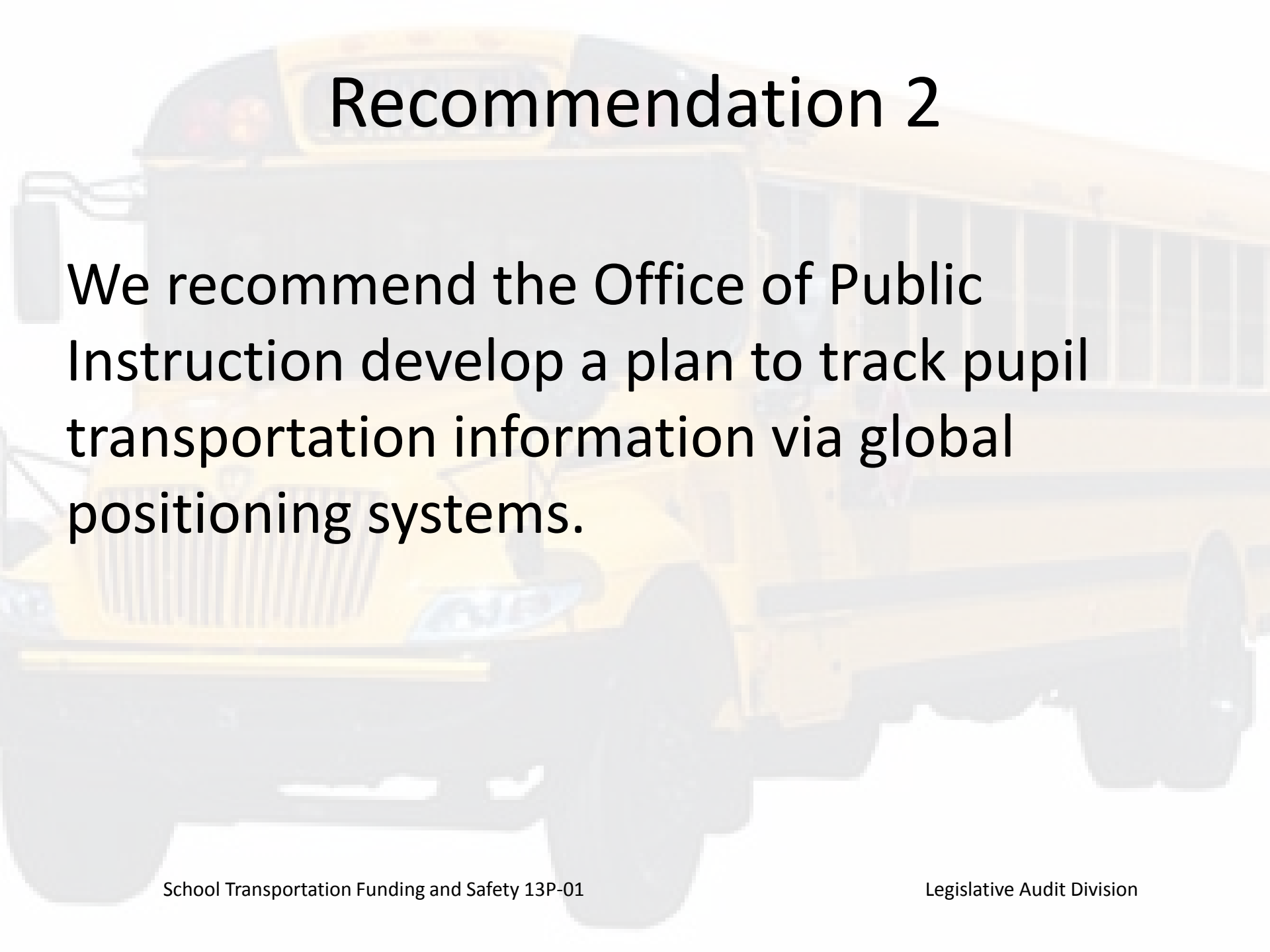
We recommend the Office of Public Instruction improve its ability to establish the validity and accuracy of bus route reimbursement claims by strengthening controls over the claims process.

# Global Positioning Systems

Even if changes discussed previously are made, a technological solution offers additional benefits.

- Districts beginning to use GPS systems
- OPI hasn't planned to integrate
- Could make process more efficient
- Routes may not operate every day or vary in length depending on day





## Recommendation 2

We recommend the Office of Public Instruction develop a plan to track pupil transportation information via global positioning systems.

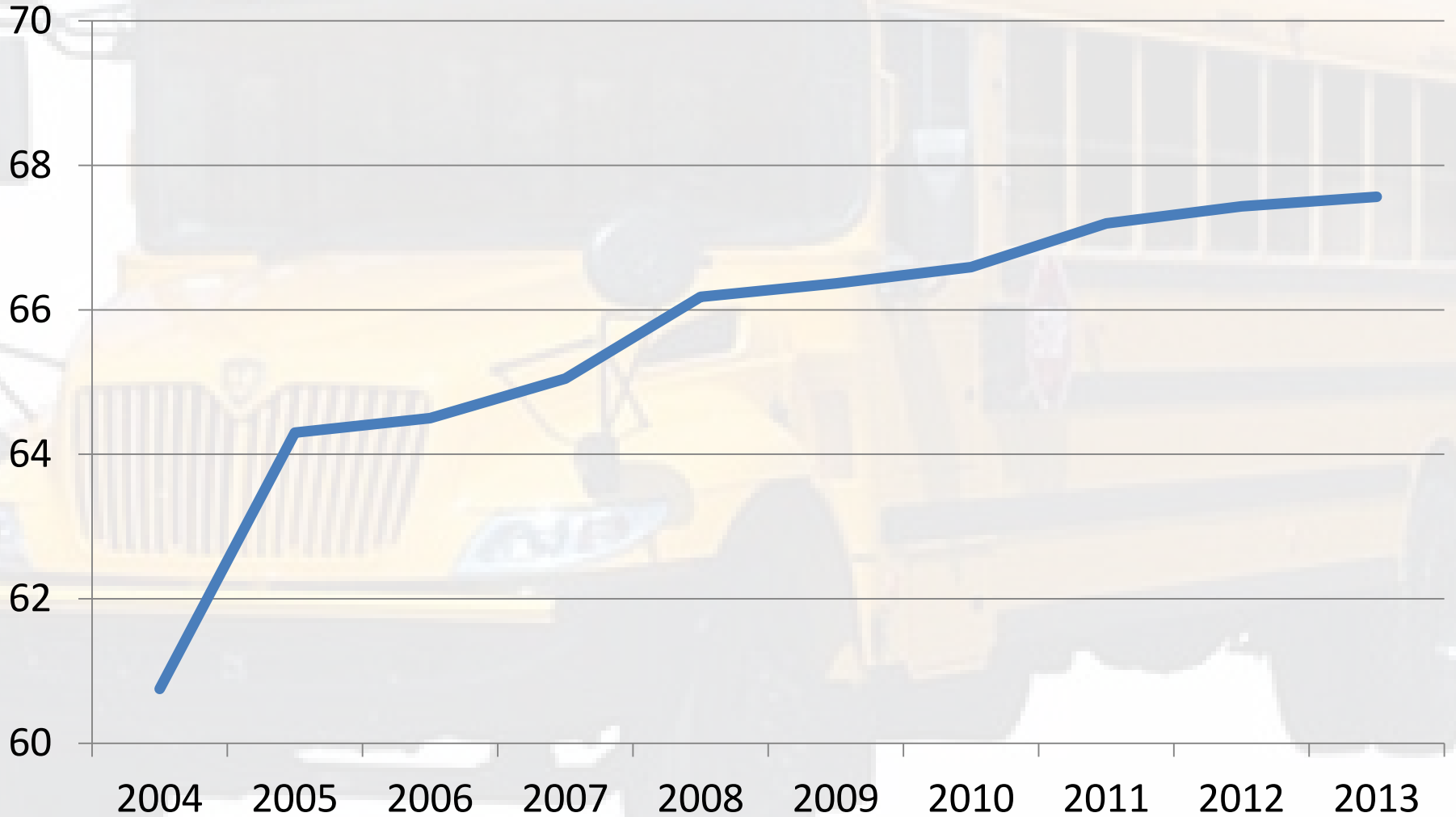
# Reimbursement Rates

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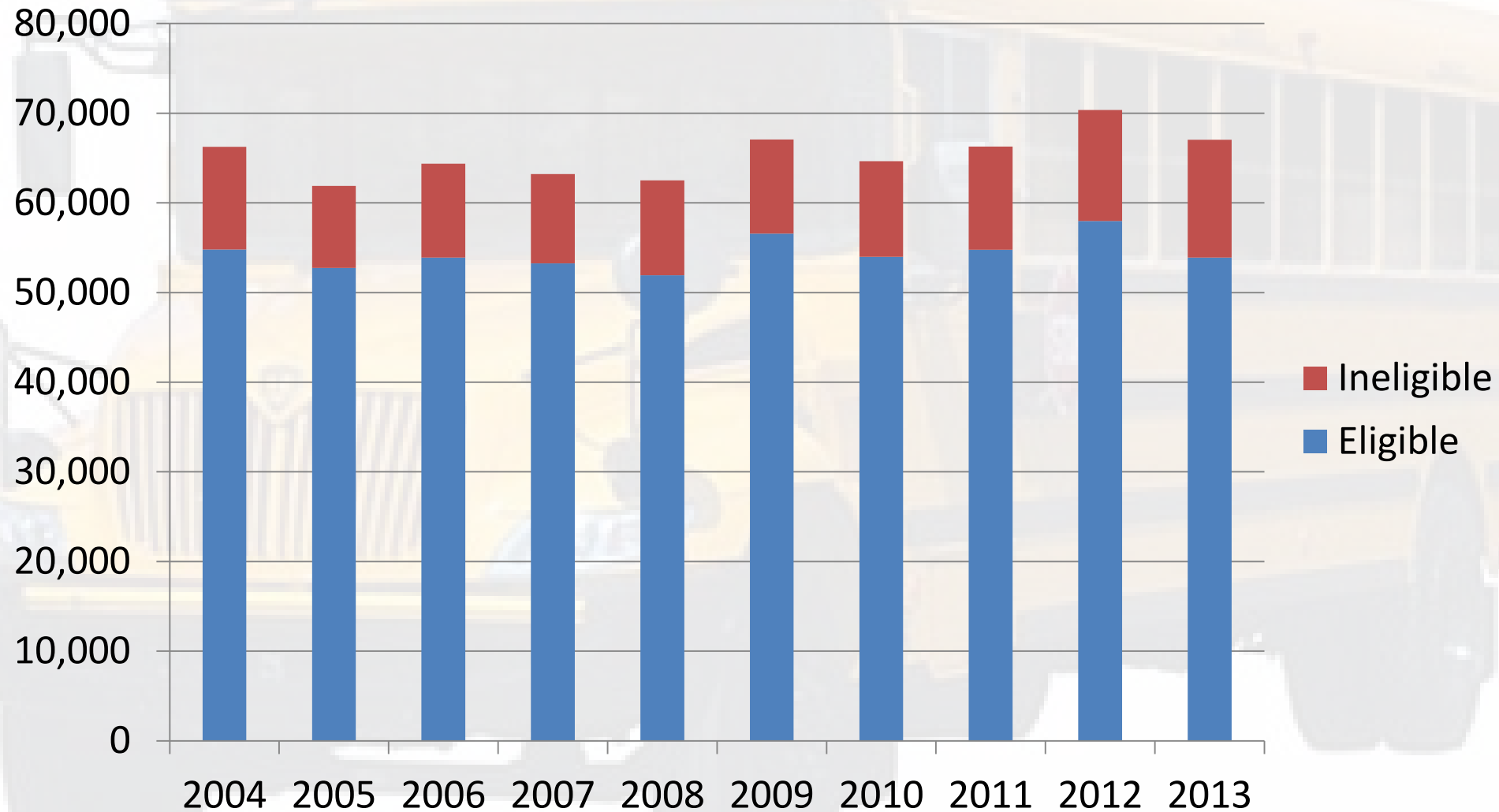
Bus capacity	Rate per mile
49 passengers or less	\$0.95
50-59 passengers	\$1.15
60-69 passengers	\$1.36
70-79 passengers	\$1.57
80 or more	\$1.80
Nonbus rate	\$0.50

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# Average Bus Capacity



# Total Riders



**Average reimbursement increased from \$1.37 to \$1.48 per mile.**

**Reimbursed for 17,514,400 miles during the 2011-12 school year.**

**Higher rate increases reimbursement by over \$1.9 million for that year alone.**

# Recommendation 3

We recommend the Montana Legislature review the effects of the statutory reimbursement schedule to determine if changes are necessary to promote efficiency, simplicity, or equity.

# Safety Issues

We reviewed the Highway Patrol inspection forms for selected buses and boarded 52 buses at selected school districts. The buses themselves appeared to be in good condition and generally received inspections in a timely fashion.

# Driver Standards

Bus drivers are required to hold a specially-endorsed commercial driver's license, are subject to random drug and alcohol testing, and must meet other requirements including that they are of "good moral character."

- Background standards for teachers
- Driving history for traffic education



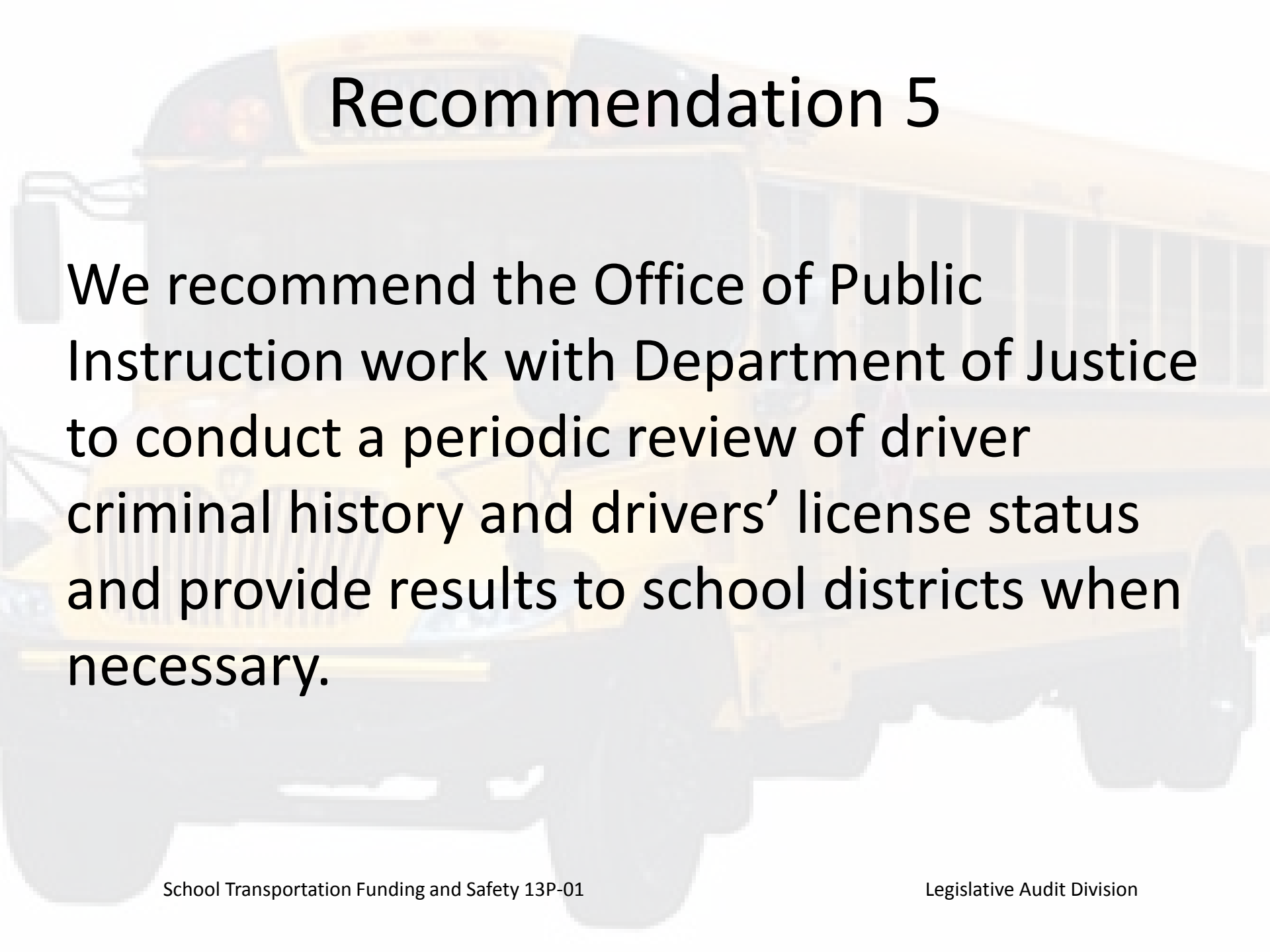
# Criminal and Driving Histories

- 8 individuals who had criminal histories that would appear to violate the moral conduct code in place for teachers
- 1 individual with an active arrest warrant
- 1 on driver list (who may not have been active as a driver) listed on SVOR
- 2 with DUIs within 36 months of driving

# Recommendation 4

We recommend:

- A. The Board of Public Education work with the Office of Public Instruction and other stakeholders to establish criteria defining the good moral character and acceptable driving history for school bus drivers.
- B. The Office of Public Instruction require districts to perform background checks for school bus drivers to ensure drivers meet all criteria for criminal and driving history.



# Recommendation 5

We recommend the Office of Public Instruction work with Department of Justice to conduct a periodic review of driver criminal history and drivers' license status and provide results to school districts when necessary.



Questions?

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Performance Audit (13P-01)  
June 2013