

Information and Privacy Commissioner,  
Ontario, Canada



Commissaire à l'information et à la protection de la vie privée,  
Ontario, Canada

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## ORDER MO-3141

Appeal MA13-196

Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

December 30, 2014

**Summary:** The requester sought access to student transportation procurement records of the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board's (the board's) consortium. The board denied access, stating that the consortium is an independent entity and that the consortium, not the board, has custody and control of the responsive records. This order finds that the consortium is part of the board. This order also finds that, if the consortium is not part of the board, then it has control of the consortium's responsive records.

**Statutes Considered:** *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56, as amended, section 4(1); Ontario Regulation 372/91; *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.E-2, section 190.

**Orders and Investigation Reports Considered:** Orders MO-2813, PO-1725, and PO-2775-R.

**Cases Considered:** *City of Toronto Economic Development Corporation v. Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario*, 2008 ONCA 366; *City of Ottawa v. Ontario*, 2010 ONSC 6835; and *Canada (Information Commissioner) v. Canada (Minister of National Defence)*, 2011 SCC 25, [2011] 2 SCR 306.

### OVERVIEW:

[1] The Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board (the board) received a request under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA or

the *Act*) for records related to the procurement of student transportation issued by the board's consortium, Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay (the consortium). The requester specifically sought access to:

1. the name(s) of the successful contractor(s), and all the bidders (respondents to the RFPs [Request for Proposals]),
2. copies of all contracts awarded to successful proponents for the 2011 and 2012 RFPs and any updates to contract terms, especially regarding rates for successive years (years 2-5),
3. date contract(s) awarded,
4. description of the work, including additional pieces of work added to the initial contracts of successful proponents,
5. who was disqualified from those RFPs and the reasons why,
6. what the rankings were via the master matrix used for evaluations, and copies of the master matrix,
7. copies of letters requesting debriefing sessions,
8. dates of the debriefing sessions,
9. questions asked by the proponents at these debriefing sessions,
10. specific feedback provided at these debriefings, either in briefing notes or materials offered (e.g. tables, charts. evaluation sheets), and
11. any other documentation related to these RFPs and the assessment of the bids (from bid closing date) and any 3rd party information used to assess these bids.

for contracts of \$10,000 or more awarded by whatever means and specifically, by directed negotiations (such as sole source), tender, RFS, RFI, RFQ and/or RFP during 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, and covering future years.

[2] The board issued a decision letter to the requester explaining that it does not have custody or control of the requested records. The board further stated that it has been advised by legal counsel that the consortium is not subject to the *Act*.

[3] The requester (now the appellant) appealed the board's decision.

[4] During mediation, the board explained that while there was a Memorandum of Agreement between the board and the consortium, a provision pertaining to record-keeping is not included in the agreement. The board further explained that the consortium operates as a separate business entity in a separate facility. It stated that it was not involved in the tendering process and was never provided with those records and that it does not have access to the responsive records. Further, it stated that the board does not have physical possession of the responsive records and has never had physical possession of the records. The board indicated that it was advised by the consortium of the winning bidders. The board further stated that it did not have control of the records and that it was the consortium who had both custody and control of the responsive records. As a result, it is the board's position that it does not have custody or control of the requested records.

[5] With respect to the board's position that the consortium is not subject to the *Act*, the appellant provided the mediator with a copy of "Financial Reporting for Transportation Consortia" dated September 2009 (the report) issued by the Ministry of Education, which indicates that the board is a full partner in the consortium. It also indicates that the consortium is unincorporated. The appellant indicated his belief that unless the board's consortium was an incorporated entity instead of an unincorporated consortium, the board should be able to produce the records requested.

[6] The appellant subsequently explained to the mediator that he was not satisfied with the board's decision and believed that, even if the board did not have the records in its possession, it should be able to obtain them from the consortium.

[7] The board advised the mediator that it maintains its position and suggested that the appellant obtain the requested records directly from the consortium that has a greater interest in the records.

[8] No further mediation was possible and the file was transferred to the adjudication stage of the appeal process where an adjudicator conducts an inquiry. Representations were exchanged between the parties in accordance with section 7 of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's (the IPC's) *Code of Procedure and Practice Direction 7*.

[9] In this order, I find that the consortium is part of the board. In the alternative, if it is not part of the board, I find that the board has control of the consortium's records. In any event, I order the board to issue a new access decision to the appellant.

## **RECORDS:**

[10] At issue are records related to the procurement of student transportation issued by the board's consortium, as described above.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **Background:**

[11] The *Education Act* (the *EA*) sets out the powers and duties of publicly funded school boards across the province. Chief among the mandatory duties of a school board is the provision of “effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils.”<sup>1</sup> School boards are also given the power to provide transportation to their pupils, including the power to enter into agreements with other entities for the provision of that transportation.<sup>2</sup>

[12] According to the ministry’s website,<sup>3</sup> student transportation affects 40% of the student population in Ontario, with over 800,000 students transported on about 18,000 vehicles daily. In 2013-14, the ministry allocated over 800 million dollars in funding to the province’s school boards to transport students.<sup>4</sup>

[13] In 2006, the ministry introduced reforms designed to “support and strengthen the management capacity of boards” in the area of student transportation. Central to the reforms was the establishment of “transportation consortia”. According to the ministry’s Transportation Consortium Resource Guide (the Guide), the purpose of the establishment of transportation consortia is to streamline and economize the provision of safe and effective school transportation services among coterminous school boards.<sup>5</sup> Transportation consortia are financed by participating school boards from their share of transportation funding from the ministry. According to the ministry, the reforms have resulted in better contract and performance management with increased transparency in the use of public funds.<sup>6</sup>

[14] The Guide describes two business forms of transportation consortia available to school boards. The first is the unincorporated consortium which the ministry describes as an “interim step”. The Guide recommends that school boards move ultimately towards establishing legally separate not-for-profit corporations.<sup>7</sup>

[15] According to the report, there are 72 school boards in Ontario, but the number of school boards participating in transportation consortia is 100 because some school

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<sup>1</sup> Section 169.1(1)(c) of the *EA*.

<sup>2</sup> Section 190 of the *EA*.

<sup>3</sup> <https://sbsb.edu.gov.on.ca/VDIR1/Student%20Transportation/AboutTransportation.aspx?Link=Trans>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://sbsb.edu.gov.on.ca/VDIR1/Student%20Transportation/Funding/Default.aspx?Link=Trans> and [http://faab.edu.gov.on.ca/Memos/SB2011/SB\\_10.pdf](http://faab.edu.gov.on.ca/Memos/SB2011/SB_10.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See Transportation Consortium Resource Guide:

<https://sbsb.edu.gov.on.ca/VDIR1/Resources/AboutTransportation/SLE.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sbsb.edu.gov.on.ca/VDIR1/Student%20Transportation/AboutTransportation.aspx?Link=Trans>

<sup>7</sup> See Guide, above at page 2.

boards are participating in multiple consortia as full partners or purchasers of services. Only one school board in Ontario is not participating in a transportation consortium.<sup>8</sup>

[16] This order concerns a request to the board for records related to the procurement of student transportation by the consortium.

**Is the consortium an institution subject to *MFIPPA*?**

[17] The access provisions of *MFIPPA* apply to all municipal "institutions". An institution is defined in section 2(1) as follows:

(a) a municipality,

(b) a school board, municipal service board, city board, transit commission, public library board, board of health, police services board, conservation authority, district social services administration board, local services board, planning board, local roads board, police village or joint committee of management or joint board of management established under the *Municipal Act, 2001* or the *City of Toronto Act, 2006* or a predecessor of those Acts,

(c) any agency, board, commission, corporation or other body designated as an institution in the regulations; ("institution")

[18] In addition, Ontario Regulation 372/91 reads as follows:

1. (1) The following bodies are designated as institutions:

1. Belmont Improvement Area Board of Management.

2. Each board established for transitional purposes under section 7 of Ontario Regulation 204/03 (Powers of the Minister or a Commission in Implementing a Restructuring Proposal) made under the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

2.1 The Board of Governors of Exhibition Place.

2.2 The Board of Management of the Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts.

3. Centre in the Square Inc.

4. Revoked: O. Reg. 48/12, s. 1 (2).

4.1 Every corporation incorporated under section 142 of the *Electricity Act, 1998*.

4.2 The Downtown Improvement Area Board of Management.

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<sup>8</sup> "Financial Reporting for Transportation Consortia" dated September 2009.

- 4.3 The Hamilton Entertainment and Convention Facilities Inc.
5. Joint committees of management established under the *Community Recreation Centres Act*, all such committees.
6. Kitchener Housing Inc.
  - 6.1 Every local housing corporation incorporated under Part III of the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*.
7. Municipal Property Assessment Corporation.
8. Every source protection authority as defined in subsection 2 (1) of the *Clean Water Act, 2006*.
- 9.-11. Revoked: O. Reg. 343/08, s. 1 (3).
12. Toronto Atmospheric Fund.

[19] The board submits that the consortium is not an institution under *MFIPPA*, but a separately operated independent organization. It states that the consortium was established by agreement as the central administration for student transportation services by three district school boards<sup>9</sup> (collectively the "school boards") in the region of Thunder Bay:

- a. the board,
- b. Lakehead District School Board (LDSB), and
- c. Conseil scolaire de district catholique Aurores boreales (CSDCAB).

[20] The board states that the school boards are equal partners of the consortium for the purposes of providing common transportation services to their respective pupils and students located in the jurisdiction of the consortium. The consortium is administered by a Governance Committee comprised of the following representatives from each of the three school boards:

- the Director of Education or their designate,
- the Senior Business Official, and
- a Trustee.

[21] The board states that section 190 of the *EA* permits a school board to arrange for the transportation of its students, and also permits a school board to enter into agreements with others to arrange for this transportation.

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<sup>9</sup> The board acknowledges that all three school boards are institutions under *MFIPPA* and submits that the consortium is not a "school board".

[22] The board states that the consortium has an Administrative Team, consisting of a Manager of Transportation from each school board or designate and the Consortium Manager.<sup>10</sup> The Administrative Team is responsible for approving the consortium's practices and jointly managing the implementation of all school board transportation policies and procedures and the consortium's practices.

[23] The Manager of Information Technology at the board is responsible for monitoring the board's Transportation Services, which includes:

- acting as the board's representative on the consortium's Administrative Committee;
- acting as a liaison between the consortium and the board in matters pertaining to transportation; and
- reviewing the board's transportation policies and procedures and the student transportation services provided by the consortium, amongst other transportation-related activities.

[24] The board identifies a number of the steps undertaken by the school boards to separate the consortium's operations and records from the school boards, including separate locked office spaces, telephone lines, and a website.

[25] The consortium was represented by the same counsel as the board and provided similar representations to that of the board.

[26] The appellant relies on the terms of the agreement between the school boards that created the consortium. He states that the consortium is the creation of an agreement between school boards. He states that the agreement provides for the school boards to own, insure, fund, staff, and control the consortium.

[27] The appellant points out that the agreement provides that the purpose of the consortium is to act as a "central administration" for student transportation services, and not as a legal entity.

[28] The appellant's claims that because the consortium is an unincorporated entity, it should be considered to be part of a school board. He states that the agreement provides that the consortium is owned, funded, staffed, and controlled by the three school boards.

[29] The appellant relies on section 190(6) of the *EA*, which allows a school board to make an agreement or agreements with a corporation, commission or person for the

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<sup>10</sup> Referred to as the Consortia Officer in the Consortium Agreement.

transportation of students. He states that in the context of the current arrangement, there are two possible interpretations of this section:

1. Only a board can make an agreement or agreements with providers of transportation of pupils (e.g. school bus companies, taxi companies, single bus/taxi operator, etc.); or alternatively,
2. A board may make an agreement or agreements with defined party (ies) for transportation services who in turn contract(s) with providers of transportation of pupils (e.g. school bus companies, taxi companies, single bus/taxi operator, etc.).

[30] The appellant states that regardless of either interpretation, the defined providers/parties are stated in the *EA* as "a corporation, commission or person". He points out that the consortium is none of these and, therefore, as a consortium, it can only enter into transportation agreements because it is an operational arm of the board or boards it supports. He also states that the consortium, by its agreement with the school boards, is staffed by employees of those boards.

[31] The appellant relies on the Guide, which states that an unincorporated consortium does not exist in law as an entity separate from the participating school boards. He also relies on the following definition from the Guide, which provides that:

Unincorporated Consortium - A business structure for the organization and operation of a Transportation Consortium that is created and governed through a Consortium Membership Agreement, in which all participating School Boards are parties. An Unincorporated Consortium is not a separate legal entity from the School Boards themselves, and would only operate separately from an operational standpoint and not from a legal standpoint.

[32] The appellant states that for years, the ministry's procurement data on contract terms and rate results (the subject of this access request) was posted on the ministry's website. With the advent of the new RFP process and the introduction of "consortia", he states that the website has been removed and RFP results have not been made public thus, he states, shielding the use of public money by consortia from public scrutiny.

[33] In reply, the board and the consortium dispute the appellant's claim that the consortium is an operating unit or "arm" of any one school board. They state that if the Legislature intended for municipal privacy legislation to apply to consortia, it could have done so by designating consortia, such as the consortium, as an "institution", pursuant to *MFIPPA* and/or O. Reg. 372/91.



[34] In surreply, the appellant relies on his initial representations where he stated that the *Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, 2010*, (the *BPSAA*) applies to public sector organizations, which include school boards and the consortia organized for purposes of procurement of goods and services to the school boards. He states that the Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive Implementation Guidebook (the Directive) does not list "consortium/a" as one of its categories, but it does identify "school boards" and "corporations". He submits that the Legislature saw no need to expressly identify an additional category of "consortium" as an institution as it recognized consortia as having no legal status, being no more than a buyers group (for business efficacy reasons) on behalf of and as an extension of their "institutions", the school boards.

### ***Analysis/Findings***

[35] Section 4(1) of *MFIPPA* reads, in part:

Every person has a right of access to a record or a part of a record in the custody or under the control of an institution unless . . .

[36] A record will be subject to *MFIPPA* if it is in the custody or under the control of an institution; it need not be both.<sup>11</sup>

[37] A finding that a record is in the custody or under the control of an institution does not necessarily mean that a requester will be provided access to it.<sup>12</sup> Rather it means that the institution must take steps to obtain the record (assuming it does not already have possession of the record) and then, after reviewing the content of the record, issue a decision responding to the access to information request. Access to the record can still be refused if the record is excluded from the application of *MFIPPA* under one of the provisions in section 52, or is subject to a mandatory or discretionary exemption (found at sections 6 through 15 and section 38).

[38] Section 2(1) of the *Act*, set out above, defines institutions under *MFIPPA* to include a school board or any agency, board, commission, corporation or other body designated as an institution in the regulations. A board is defined under the *EA* as a district school board or a school authority. A school authority is defined under the *EA* and includes a board of a district school area.

[39] None of the parties argue that the consortium is a school board in itself under *MFIPPA*. Nor did any of the parties argue that it is an agency, board, commission, corporation or other body designated as an institution in Ontario Regulation 372/91. I also accept that the consortium is not a school board or an institution designated under Ontario Regulation 372/91.

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<sup>11</sup> Order P-239 and *Ministry of the Attorney General v. Information and Privacy Commissioner*, 2011 ONSC 172 (Div. Ct.).

<sup>12</sup> Order PO-2836.

[40] The issue in this appeal is whether the records of the consortium are in the custody or control of the board, either because the consortium is part of the board,<sup>13</sup> or because the board has control of the records of the consortium. I find that the consortium is part of the board. I also find, in any event, that the responsive records of the consortium are in the control of the board.

*The consortium is part of the board*

[41] In support of my finding that the consortium is a part of the board, I note that the Guide defines a “transportation consortium” as “a set of coterminous school boards operating transportation services for their students in conjunction with one another through a business vehicle.”<sup>14</sup> The very definition of a consortium, therefore, is that it is no more and no less than the school boards it serves.

[42] Further, the Guide defines “transportation service provider” as a third-party bussing company that provides bussing and transportation services to a transportation consortium. The Guide makes it clear, therefore, that the consortium is not a transportation service provider.

[43] The consortium<sup>15</sup> was created by the Consortium Agreement (the agreement), and is composed solely of the three school boards that compromise it. These three school boards are:

- the board,<sup>16</sup>
- Lakehead District School Board (LDSB), and
- Conseil scolaire de district catholique Aurores boreales (CSDCAB).

[44] According to the agreement, the purpose of creating the consortium was to allow these three school boards to reduce their transportation costs and eliminate duplication of administration costs in the provision of transportation services to their respective students. The agreement states that:

The Boards hereby contract to enter into an agreement whereby they will collectively provide a common administration for transportation service for students registered within their respective jurisdictions.

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<sup>13</sup> This order only concerns whether the consortium is part of the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board (the board) or whether the board has control of the responsive records. The other two boards are not parties to this appeal, therefore, did not provide representations.

<sup>14</sup> See Guide, above, at page 5.

<sup>15</sup> Also known as, the Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay collective.

<sup>16</sup> The institution in this appeal.

[45] All approved costs and expenses relating to the consortium are financed by the participating school boards and each participating school board is liable for all financial obligations for which the consortium is legally liable.

[46] The agreement provides that the ownership of the consortium shall remain vested with the three school boards, the board, the LDSB and the CSDCAB. It also provides that each school board shall appoint three members to the Governance Committee of the consortium, consisting of a Trustee from each school board, the Director or designate from each school board, and the Senior Business Official from each school board.

[47] The agreement also provides that the Administrative Team will consist of the representatives responsible for transportation matters from each school board and the Consortia Officer. The Manager of Information Technology at the board is the Consortia Officer. The agreement states that the "existing Transportation Staff of each Board shall remain employed by their respective Boards."

[48] The board refers to section 190(1) of the *EA*, which permits the board to "provide for" transportation of students, and section 190(6), which permits it to enter into agreements "for the transportation of students". The agreement is not an agreement entered in to under section 190(6) of the *EA*. The consortium is not a provider of transportation services, but rather the mechanism by which the two school boards have consolidated management and administrative services for the provision of those services. I agree with the appellant that the consortium can only enter into transportation agreements under section 190(6) of the *EA* because it is doing so on behalf of the board.

[49] This would be consistent with page 6 of the Guide, which talks about the two ways in which school boards through unincorporated consortia can enter into contracts with the transportation service providers (the bus companies):

- a common contract covering all the boards, or
- each board signs its own separate contract.

[50] The consortium does not transport students for the school boards. The responsibility for transporting students rests with the bus companies and the responsibility for paying these companies rests with the school boards. The role of the consortium is to provide management and administrative support for the school boards to acquire the transportation services through third party providers.

[51] The consortium manages the provision of transportation on behalf of the school boards; however it is these school boards that have the legal responsibility for the provision of these services.

[52] Based on my review of the agreement, I disagree with the consortium that it is a separate entity because the operational and administrative tasks of the consortium are separate and independent from those of the school boards that comprise the consortium. I find that merely separating offices, providing separate computer access and a website, and delegating some transportation-related operational and administrative tasks, does not render the consortium a separate entity from the board.

[53] The board states that it has undertaken a number of steps to ensure that the records of the consortium are isolated from the board's own records. The consortium's electronic records are stored on the board's computer network, which is accessible only to the consortium staff and the board's Technology Department staff for network administration purposes. Nevertheless, it is common and appropriate for an organization to restrict access to certain records or categories of records to those which need to have access to those records. In Order PO-1725, the requester sought access to information from Cabinet Office's electronic calendar management database. In that order, former Assistant Commissioner Tom Mitchinson stated that:

The capabilities of the database in permitting employees to make entries relating to personal matters, and to place certain restrictions on access to its contents (subject to systems management considerations), are normal features of most electronic calendar management databases and are not inconsistent with the institution's lawful custody of the database and its contents, or with its responsibilities in relation to its records management functions.

[54] The board points to the consortium's website to support its view that the consortium is a separate and distinct entity from the board. I do not agree that this is a significant factor. The consortium's website<sup>17</sup> provides information about a variety of transportation matters for the three school boards, including transportation policies, bus routes, school zones, safety features, and contact information. It makes logistical sense to have one website where third parties can go to access information about the consortium.

[55] By reason of the *EA*, it is part of a school board's education mandate to provide transportation to students. In this appeal, the consortium's sole purpose is to provide administrative services related to the transportation of school boards' students, a function of school boards under the *EA*. It would be a perverse result if the establishment of a consortium to share transportation administrative services, which is entirely controlled and even staffed by school boards, resulted in the removal of records from access under *MFIPPA*.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://ststb.on.ca/home>

[56] In the case of *City of Toronto Economic Development Corporation v. Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario (TEDCO)*,<sup>18</sup> the Ontario Court of Appeal found that the City of Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO) was subject to the provisions of *MFIPPA* because TEDCO was deemed to be part of the City of Toronto. Although that case concerned the interpretation of section 2(3) of *MFIPPA*, the comments of the court are helpful in this appeal. In *TEDCO*, the court stated at paragraph 39 that:

...a formal and technical interpretation of s. 2(3)<sup>19</sup> runs contrary to the purpose of [*MFIPPA*]. We are dealing with a corporation whose sole shareholder is the City of Toronto, whose sole purpose is to advance the economic development of the City, and whose board of directors - at the time of the proceedings before the adjudicator - was populated by persons directly appointed by City Council, including the Mayor of Toronto (or his/her designate), the Chair of the City's Economic Development and Parks Committee, two City Councillors, and the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism (or his/her designate). In light of what La Forest J. observed in the above-cited passage from *Dagg*, it seems to me that TEDCO is just another example of a complex bureaucratic structure of public administration. In my view, it is contrary to the purpose of [*MFIPPA*] and access to information legislation in general to permit the City to evade its statutory duty to provide its residents with access to its information simply by delegating its powers to a board of directors over which it holds ultimate authority. [Emphasis added by me]

[57] I agree with the court in *TEDCO* that it would be contrary to the purpose of *MFIPPA* and access to information legislation in general to permit school boards to evade their statutory duty to provide access to their information simply by delegating their powers to a consortium over which they hold ultimate authority.

[58] I also have considered the findings of Adjudicator Stella Ball in Order MO-2813, where she found that a police association was not subject to *MFIPPA*, as it was not an institution named in *MFIPPA* or Ontario Regulation 372/91, nor was there anything in the material before her that supported the appellant in that appeal's assertion that the association was created by the institution, a police services board. On the contrary, in this appeal, the consortium was created by the board, an institution under *MFIPPA*.

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<sup>18</sup> *City of Toronto Economic Development Corporation v. Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario*, 2008 ONCA 366.

<sup>19</sup> of *MFIPPA*. This section reads:

Every agency, board, commission, corporation or other body not mentioned in clause (b) of the definition of "institution" in subsection (1) or designated under clause (c) of the definition of "institution" in subsection (1) is deemed to be a part of the municipality for the purposes of this Act if all of its members or officers are appointed or chosen by or under the authority of the council of the municipality.

[59] Adjudicator Ball stated in Order MO-2813 that:

While the association may have a collective bargaining relationship with the board, this does not lead to the conclusion that it is a part of the board, co-manages the police service, or is synonymous with the police service. In his representations the appellant refers to the provisions of the *Police Services Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.15. I have reviewed that *Act*, and it is apparent that associations and police boards are distinct entities with different purposes, with the role of associations being the representation of police officers with respect to their working conditions and remuneration. The provisions of that *Act* do not indicate that associations are created by the police boards with which they bargain.

[60] In this appeal, unlike the situation in Order MO-2813, I find that the consortium is part of the board, an institution under *MFIPPA*, and that it is subject to *MFIPPA*. It is not a distinct entity with a different purpose than the board. The consortium was created by the board and its two partner school boards and arranges transportation services for school board students, which is a function of school boards under section 190(1) of the *EA*.

[61] The situation in this appeal is similar to that in Reconsideration Order PO-2775-R, where Adjudicator Donald Hale determined that Victoria University was part of a provincial institution, the University of Toronto, even though Victoria University was not a listed institution in Regulation 460 under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)*.<sup>20</sup> In that order, Adjudicator Hale found that the degree of integration of the financial, academic and administrative operations supports the conclusion that Victoria University is part of the University of Toronto for the purposes of the *FIPPA*. He stated that:

...that the operational and financial affairs of Victoria [University] and the University [of Toronto] are integrated to a very high degree. The University provides funding in the form of a Block Grant and an Instructional Grant to Victoria to enable it to conduct its Arts and Science programs, under the auspices of the University's Faculty of Arts and Science. That funding is derived from several sources, including student tuition and government grants from the Province of Ontario, which are collected and disbursed by the University to the federated universities, including Victoria.

[62] In this appeal, as well, the operational and financial affairs of the consortium are integrated to a high degree with those of the three school boards named above. In sum, I find that a request for records of the consortium may be made to the board as

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<sup>20</sup> The provincial equivalent to Regulation 372/91 of *MFIPPA*.

the consortium is a part of the board. Accordingly, I will order the board, as an institution under *MFIPPA* that has custody and control of the records, to issue a new access decision to the appellant.

*The board has control of the consortium's records*

[63] Even if the consortium is not "part" of the board, I find that the board has control of the responsive records. The records, as outlined in detail above, are RFP-related records concerning the acquisition and provision of student transportation services for students of the board and its partner boards.

[64] In addressing the issue of custody or control, I must have regard to the purposes of *MFIPPA*. In the *City of Ottawa v. Ontario*,<sup>21</sup> the Divisional Court found that in determining whether an institution has custody or control of a record, the analysis requires a purposive interpretation of the statutory language used in *MFIPPA*. The Court described the intent of the legislature in enacting *MFIPPA* as enhancing democratic values by providing its citizens with access to government information.

[65] Student transportation is part of a school board's responsibility under the *EA*. Interpreting the term "custody or control" as including access to records about the procurement of student transportation is consistent with the purpose of *MFIPPA* as set out in section 1(a) by enhancing a citizen's right to fully participate in democracy through access to information about this important government activity.<sup>22</sup>

[66] I also have regard to the two part test applied by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Canada (Information Commissioner) v. Canada (Minister of National Defence)*<sup>23</sup> in determining whether the board has control of records that are arguably not in its physical possession. The test is:

- (1) Do the contents of the document relate to a departmental matter?
- (2) Could the government institution reasonably expect to obtain a copy of the document upon request?

[67] Applying the first part of the test, the contents of the records relate to a function of the board.<sup>24</sup> The school bus is an extension of the classroom. The school principal's authority applies aboard the school bus. The consortium's website states:

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<sup>21</sup> *City of Ottawa v. Ontario*, 2010 ONSC 6835.

<sup>22</sup> *City of Ottawa v. Ontario*, (cited above).

<sup>23</sup> 2011 SCC 25, [2011] 2 SCR 306.

<sup>24</sup> *Ministry of the Attorney General v. Information and Privacy Commissioner*, cited above; *City of Ottawa v. Ontario*, 2010 ONSC 6835 (Div. Ct.), leave to appeal refused (March 30, 2011), Doc. M39605 (C.A.); Orders 120 and P-239.

All transported students are accountable to the school Principal who has the authority to ensure that an appropriate level of conduct and discipline is maintained for all riders while traveling on a school bus that is under contract to the Boards.<sup>25</sup>

[68] The appellant sought access to records related to the procurement of student transportation. Student transportation is a matter that has been deemed to be a part of a school board's mandate by reason of section 190 of the *EA*. The board has the statutory power to provide transportation for its students and the transportation of students is a basic function of the board.<sup>26</sup> I further note that neither the consortium, nor the board, has suggested that the information at issue does not relate to the transportation of school board students. In fact, the consortium states that it:

...acknowledges that the departmental matter at issue [the transportation of students], at least indirectly, relates to a school board matter - the transportation of pupils.

[69] Concerning the second part of the test, I refer to my discussion above on the role and status of the consortium. Based on that and some additional considerations outlined below, and taking into consideration the terms of the agreement, I find that the board should reasonably be expected to obtain a copy of the records upon request:

- The consortium was created as a collective of the three school boards for the purpose of providing common administration of transportation services.
- The board's own employees by the terms of the agreement, participate in the management and operation of the consortium. The consortium's Governance Committee includes a Trustee from the board, the Director or designate from the board, and the Senior Business Official from the board. The consortium's Administrative Team consists of the Manager or designate, responsible for transportation matters from the board and the Consortia Officer. The Administrative Team is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the consortium.
- The consortium is funded by the three school boards through funding the boards receive from the ministry. The board receives over five million dollars a year from the ministry to pay for the transportation of its students.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.ststb.ca/policies\\_procedures/discipline\\_on\\_buses](http://www.ststb.ca/policies_procedures/discipline_on_buses)

<sup>26</sup> Order P-912, upheld in *Ontario (Criminal Code Review Board) v. Ontario (Information and Privacy Commissioner)*, cited above.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://sbsb.edu.gov.on.ca/VDIR1/Student%20Transportation/Funding/Default.aspx?Link=Trans>



- Each school board, by the terms of the agreement, is required to enter into common contracts with the transportation service providers. Each school board, not the consortium, is responsible for obtaining liability insurance. Each school board also pays their share of the administration and operating costs of the consortium.
- The consortium's electronic files are located on the board's computer network. The Manager of Information Technology for the board is the board's representative on the consortium's Administrative Committee. The consortium's staff, which includes board employees, have access to this information. As well, two individuals from the board's Information Technology department have access to the consortium's electronic files for network administration purposes.
- The board's Manager of Information Technology attended procurement team sessions and participated in the review and evaluation of RFP submissions, therefore, he would have had the opportunity to have copies of and to have reviewed the responsive records in this appeal.
- The ministry's "Financial Reporting for Transportation Consortia" dated September 2009 provides that a consortium is required to provide financial information to school boards. It states that:
  - school boards with decision-making power within the consortium are full partners in the consortium;
  - school board auditors may require the consortium to be audited since the board uses the consortium's financial information; and
  - consortiums have to provide school boards with financial information for the province's year-end financial statements.
- An RFP in this appeal for transportations services issued by the consortium provides that *MFIPPA* applies to information provided to

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The document "Student Transportation - Grants for Student Needs, 2013-14" also states that the Lakehead District School Board receives over six million dollars and the Conseil scolaire de district catholique Aurores boreales (CSDCAB) receives over \$700,000 annually from the ministry for student transportation.

the consortium by a qualified provider of transportation services.<sup>28</sup> It reads:

The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.M.36, as amended, applies to information provided to the Consortium by a Qualified Supplier. The confidentiality of information supplied by Qualified Suppliers (including their Submissions) will be maintained by the Consortium, except as otherwise required by law or by order of a court or tribunal... [Emphasis added by me].

[70] To summarize and recapitulate, the following factors support a finding of board control over the records<sup>29</sup>:

- the provisions of the agreement outlined above about the extensive involvement of the board and its partner boards in creating, owning, and operating the consortium;
- the role of the consortium as a provider of administrative services to the board for transportation services, a responsibility of the board under the *EA*;<sup>30</sup>
- the complete funding of the consortium by the board and its partner school boards;
- that there was no understanding or agreement between the board and the consortium or any other party that the records were not to be disclosed to the board;<sup>31</sup>
- the terms of the RFP concerning the application of *MFIPPA* to proponents' information;
- the involvement of board employees in the management and operation of the consortium; and,
- the financial reporting requirements of the consortium to the board.

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<sup>28</sup> The appellant provided a copy of certain pages of an RFP. See page 17 of this RFP entitled: "Student Transportation Services: Request for Services (RFS), Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay, RFS: #RFS/11G-02."

<sup>29</sup> *Greater Vancouver Mental Health Service Society v. British Columbia (Information and Privacy Commissioner)*, [1999] B.C.J. No. 198 (S.C.).

<sup>30</sup> Order PO-2386.

<sup>31</sup> Orders M-165 and MO-2586.

[71] Having regard to the board's ownership and control of the consortium, its management of the consortium through its employees or appointees, and the participation of its employees in the RFP processes at issue, I find that, the board could reasonably be expected to obtain the records on request.

[72] In conclusion, I have found that the consortium is part of the board for the purposes of the *Act*. Even if it is not part of the board, I conclude that the board has control of the consortium's records. I will order the board to issue an access decision to the appellant for the responsive records.

**ORDER:**

I order the board to issue a new access decision to the appellant in accordance with the terms of this order, treating the date of this order as the date of the request.

Original Signed By:  
Diane Smith  
Adjudicator

December 30, 2014