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Group pushes for Central Time Zone

Monday, August 31 2009

By Chris Meyers
Staff writer

A group of Indiana residents who fear being in the Eastern Time Zone causes Hoosier students in public schools to have to wait for their buses in the dark would like to see the state be on Central Time, a move they say would mean less time in the dark for morning bus routes.

"This is definitely a time zone issue, and I would strongly object to ending Daylight Savings Time," Sue Dillon, spokesperson for the Central Time Coalition, said of the group's goal to get the state on Central Time.

To help its cause, the group has gathered statistics from around the state of a dozen robberies, rapes or deaths of K 12 students who were waiting for buses in the dark.

Dillon has seen locally how serious the consequences of students waiting in the dark can be.

"I live in Carmel, and there was a 15-year-old boy who was run over by a school bus in January," she

said.

That event sparked her interest to try to convince Indiana's legislators to switch the state from Eastern to Central Time.

At this point, the group does not have the endorsement of any legislators, but Dillon hopes the grassroots effort can raise enough momentum to eventually take the cause to the statehouse.

According to a press release from the group, the Indiana State School Bus Drivers Association supports the return to Central Time because it would shift an hour of sunlight to the morning rush hour during the fall, winter and spring.

"Safety for children is our primary concern and it is often difficult to see the children along dark streets and

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roads. One more hour of sunlight would greatly improve visibility as well as morning driving conditions for everyone," said Ron Chew, president of ISSBDA.

For Whitley County Consolidated Schools Transportation Director Keith Kohut, he has not heard any specific complaints from drivers about driving in the dark in the morning after the DST changeover, but said daylight driving is always safer than in the dark.

"Most times, they would prefer to drive in the daylight," he said.

Aside from visibility at bus stops, daylight makes it easier for buses to do turnarounds and for drivers to see potholes and other hazards in the road.

Steve Clason, superintendent of Whitko Community Schools, also has not heard any reports from the transportation director or bus drivers about driving routes in the dark, but shares the sentiment of Kohut that daylight driving is always safer.

"Obviously, we are all concerned for the safety of kids when it gets to that point in the winter in the dark," Clason said.

He said most bus routes run from 6:30 to 7:30a.m., a time when the sun has usually not yet risen once the DST changeover occurs. The start time of classes would also occur during a time of more sunlight if the state was in Central Time.

If the state was on Central Time, there would be several days where students would be picked up during times shortly after sunrise.

Dillon said students waiting for buses are not the only ones affected by more darkness in the morning, such as construction workers, farmers and any morning commuter.

"There are more than just school children at risk, but they are the biggest victims," she said.

"It's a dangerous situation," Kohut said.

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