

# OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

## School District of Philadelphia

### Investigative Report Synopsis

---

#### Introduction

The OIG investigation substantiated that an executive-level employee used a Transportation pool vehicle for personal purposes on numerous occasions to include trips taken during the pandemic when schools were operating in a virtual environment. The employee used the vehicle during weekends, holidays, after regular work hours, while on vacation and sick leave, and, as a resident of New Jersey, very often on days when they never came to Philadelphia at all for work. The OIG further substantiated that Transportation failed to maintain adequate records to identify that the employee was the driver of the vehicle in order to timely assess the employee's responsibility to pay Tolls by Mail and a red-light violation received while operating the vehicle. The employee's personal use of the vehicle violates the District's vehicle usage policy and procedures as well as Transportation's pool vehicle policies and procedures.

#### Applicable Policy

##### *Vehicle Usage*

School Board Policy 711 addresses "Use of School District Vehicles." That policy and its Attachment, "Non-Bus Vehicle Usage Policies and Procedures," describes the goal of the policy, in part, as "enhance[ing] accountability for vehicle usage" to "promote the uniform, efficient, safe and ethical use of the District's fleet." Transportation, under supervision from the Chief Operating Officer, is responsible for "enforc[ing] adherence to fleet operational procedures[.]" According to the policy, employees who are "found to have violated the policies set forth in this Directive may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination."

Policy 711 requires that District vehicles "are to be used only for the performance of job-related duties and responsibilities and for no other reason except for commuting to employment site." Section 3.4 of the Attachment states that "[d]epartments are responsible for take home vehicle assignments subject to the approval of both the department head and the General Manager of Transportation Services." The policy is clear that take home vehicle privileges can be used only between the employee's permanent primary residence and work location.

Section 6.1 of the Attachment reiterates that "District vehicles [are] for official use only. District employees are directed to avoid any vehicle use that might result in or create the appearance of impropriety with regard to public perception concerning the misuse of District vehicles. Employees may not use District vehicles while off duty except for work-related activities designated by their department head."

#### **REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE**

PHONE: 215-400-4030      EMAIL: [INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG](mailto:INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG)      WEBSITE: [philasd.org/inspectorgeneral](http://philasd.org/inspectorgeneral)  
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

## ***Pool Vehicles***

Transportation's usage procedures for pool vehicles states that "pool cars are to be used by authorized personnel conducting official SDP business only. Personal use is not allowed. Pool cars must only be driven by staff that have completed a Pool Car Authorization (PCA) Form[,]” which has been approved by Transportation. Additionally, the procedures state that "pool cars are available for reservation between 6:30 am – 6:00 pm. Vehicles must not be taken home.” If an employee wants an "extended reservation,” such requests must be approved by the employee's "Chief and the Fleet Services Manager.”

In order to reserve a pool car, the "Pool Car Vehicle Authorization Form' must be fully completed with the [employee's] Department Head's signature and submitted to [Transportation] Dispatchers at least 24 hours in advance.” This form delineates specific reservation details as well as employee acknowledgements that the pool car will only be used as stated and in accordance with [District] policies, that the employee's license is current, valid and subject to periodic license checks, and that GPS Tracking Devices are installed in District vehicles and that the District has the right to monitor activity. The form also states that any violations, tolls, tickets, or towing fees are the responsibility of the driver.

## **OIG Investigation**

### ***Investigation substantiated that the employee used a District vehicle for personal purposes.***

The OIG received information alleging that an employee abused a District pool vehicle by using it for personal purposes during non-business hours. The pool vehicle, which contained clear District markings, was seen at mall parking lots and other non-District locations in New Jersey. OIG investigators reviewed GPS data for the vehicle and found that the vehicle was undoubtedly being used during non-business hours, including weekends.

District vehicle records were not complete and could not be used to determine who was misusing the vehicle. The Transportation Department was able to identify the employee as the driver of the pool vehicle and indicated that the employee received the car in late 2019. GPS records showed the car was misused from December 27, 2019, to November 24, 2020. In total, the employee drove the vehicle on 64 Saturdays and Sundays for various non-District excursions as well as using the vehicle on holidays such as New Year's Day 2020, July 4<sup>th</sup> 2020, and on at least two sick days and two vacation days when the employee was conducting no District business. The employee also used the vehicle on 94 days for non-business trips during the work week throughout 2020.

## **REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE**

PHONE: 215-400-4030      EMAIL: [INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG](mailto:INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG)      WEBSITE: [philasd.org/inspectorgeneral](http://philasd.org/inspectorgeneral)  
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITTED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

In terms of usage, the employee drove the District vehicle continuously for the greater part of 2020, putting at least 6,000 miles on the car, despite working remotely for the vast majority of the time due to the pandemic shutdown of school buildings. The employee also used city fuel stations to pump 241 gallons of gas that the District paid for while work was virtual. OIG investigators calculated fuel consumption from only April 2020 through November 2020 when the District was operating virtually.

The employee was interviewed and admitted to the misuse of the vehicle, including using the vehicle on the weekends for personal errands, to visit family and friends, and to travel to places such as a winery, Top Golf, and Chickie & Pete's. The employee also admitted they drove the pool vehicle on weekdays for non-business purposes during and after regular work hours. The employee denied knowledge that such vehicle use was prohibited and stated they had never been given the vehicle policy, never signed a vehicle use authorization form, nor were they aware that the vehicle was equipped with GPS tracking. Despite the employee telling investigators they never signed a vehicle authorization form, investigators received a signed copy of the employee's Pool Car Use Authorization Form from October 2019.

Of greatest concern, the Pool Form indicated that the employee was requesting the vehicle from November 4, 2019, to December 20, 2019. However, the employee drove the vehicle for over a year, and no one from Transportation attempted to have the vehicle returned on December 20, 2019.

***Investigation substantiated that Transportation failed to maintain adequate records for department pool vehicles.***

Parking, automatic red-light, and toll violations are processed using the vehicle license tag, and violations involving District vehicles are mailed to the District for payment. Especially during the pandemic when there were no toll takers, authorities established Toll by Mail or Toll by Plate, a license plate tolling system, whereby an invoice was mailed to the owner of the vehicle. Transportation employees are responsible for receiving these invoices or violations and recording them in a spreadsheet to cross reference with driver information maintained by Transportation with the help of departmental Fleet Liaisons. The tolls or violations are then forwarded to the responsible employee for appropriate payment. Each department's Fleet Liaison is responsible for properly maintaining records of use and custody for the department's pool vehicles.

**REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE**

PHONE: 215-400-4030      EMAIL: [INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG](mailto:INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG)      WEBSITE: [philasd.org/inspectorgeneral](http://philasd.org/inspectorgeneral)  
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

In May 2020, while the employee was misusing the pool vehicle unbeknownst to everyone, Transportation received a Toll by Mail from the Delaware River Port Authority for the car. Transportation could not determine the driver of the pool vehicle and were unable to determine who was responsible for the toll. Several months later and still not having resolved the pool vehicle's Toll by Mail, on August 11, 2020, a red-light violation was issued for the pool vehicle. Again, Transportation could not determine who the driver was and the toll went unpaid. In September, five months after the toll was issued, a Transportation employee was able to track the vehicle through GPS to 440 N. Broad Street where a note was left on the car windshield requesting that the driver reach out to Transportation regarding the toll and red-light violation. The employee call Transportation the next day.

Despite the fact that a Pool Car Use Authorization Form had been completed on the car, it took months for the District to determine the driver responsible for the tolls and violation. To make matters worse, in the intervening months before the employee ultimately returned the car, the District received complaints from other employees about seeing the pool vehicle at multiple locations in New Jersey and driving in southern New Jersey during non-work hours. In early November 2020, an anonymous citizen called the District to report seeing the pool vehicle traveling in New Jersey at night. Because the District was unable to determine who was driving the vehicle, members of Transportation became concerned that the vehicle may have been stolen by a non-District employee. Based on the possibility of the car being stolen, the fuel ring was turned off on November 23, 2020. The next day, the employee returned the pool vehicle to the District.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The OIG recommends discipline consistent with Pennsylvania law and District policy for the employee's continued misuse of a District vehicle. Additionally, the District should seek reimbursement for the employee's fuel consumption during the pandemic when the District was operating virtually, but the employee continued to use the vehicle for personal travel and pump free gas at the City's fueling stations.

The District must strengthen compliance with the non-bus vehicle policies and procedures. District employees must be made explicitly aware of the usage limitations for their assigned District vehicle and for any pool vehicle they may request. Such limitations should emphatically include that District vehicles cannot be used for personal travel. Transportation should conduct mandatory trainings for District employees on vehicle usage policies and their explicit prohibitions. Additionally, the current disciplinary provisions outlined in Policy 711 state that "[e]mployees who are found to have violated the policies set forth in this Directive may be

#### **REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE**

PHONE: 215-400-4030      EMAIL: [INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG](mailto:INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG)      WEBSITE: [philasd.org/inspectorgeneral](http://philasd.org/inspectorgeneral)  
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITTED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.” (Emphasis added). This language should be updated and replaced with definitive language that an employee who violates the District’s vehicle policy “shall be subject” to progressive disciplinary action. While this employee’s vehicle misuse did not result in any accidents or injuries, Transportation’s compliance with the policies and procedures governing vehicle assignment must be improved in order to enhance accountability for vehicle usage and to promote uniform, efficient, safe, and ethical use of the District’s fleet.

**REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE**

PHONE: 215-400-4030      EMAIL: [INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG](mailto:INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG)      WEBSITE: [philasd.org/inspectorgeneral](http://philasd.org/inspectorgeneral)  
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITTED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.