

**APS Multi-Modal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee  
Minutes  
April 11, 2013**

**Transportation Committee Attendees:**

Kristin Haldeman	Ronna Weber
Nancy Van Dorn	Erik Maskelony
Lauren Hassel	Bob Laws – APS Transportation Dir.
Jack Owens	Cintia Johnson – APS
Eli Spiliotopolous	Robert Hindman
Eric Goodman	Gillian Burgess
Ellen Smith	Tim Rosato
Jane Kim	<i>Speakers:</i>
Tom Bruccoleri (for Dennis Leach)	Donna Owens, Public Comment
Penny Everline	Dan Dixon, APS BAC.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm; this evening’s agenda and meeting minutes from the last two meetings were approved.

**Public Comment: Donna Owens**

Ms. Owens’s comments focused on the history behind the Committee’s formation, namely the APS Fall 2013 decision to strictly enforce the policy walk zone, thereby eliminating bus service for a number of students who had previously been able to ride the bus. In doing so, APS was expecting children to walk where there had been no focus on the safety of those paths. It was only through the elimination of bus service that a focus on alternative modes has started to be discussed. In her opinion, the Committee has not yet addressed this busing issue. Ms. Owens detailed the timeline of the APS Transportation dept.’s progress with regard to addressing concerns related to busing. She noted that she was particularly struck by the fact that the mid-August presentation to the School Board about the bus plans was only 20 minutes long and did not include any discussion about how students were designated as eligible or ineligible for bus service, nor were there any instructions for those now expected to walk. Maps had been removed from the APS website.

Any Committee recommendations about walk zones should ensure that whatever the distance, the path must be safe. Further, there must be an understanding that many walking/biking students will need an escort to school – which some working parents are not able to do. She asked the Committee to keep in mind that one mode of commuting will not work for everyone and we need to recognize that busing is a big part of the transportation plan and we should invest in it in the same way the County invests in public transportation for its residents. This issue needs to be addressed for those families that don’t have cars but have children that are now being restricted from the school bus and have to walk.

Jack Owens, student MMTSSC rep., noted that he has a friend who used to be able to ride the bus, whose parents leave at 4AM for work. She has no option now but to walk to school because her stop was eliminated. Committee members commented that we also should look at stop eliminations as part of our review.

**APS-Transportation Update  
*Communications Working Group Meeting Report Out***

The group provided feedback on the draft letter to be sent on April 15 as well as the bus transportation communications plan timeline. Committee members in attendance were gratified to see that courtesy bus service would continue through next year, so that every student who has bus service this year will continue to have it next year.

Communications timeline is as follows:

- 4/15 – Send general letter detailing the bus eligibility and communications timeline; Letter states that students riding under ‘courtesy’ program will be able to ride next year.
- 5/15 – Send bus eligibility (courtesy and regular) letter to **already enrolled** families – excepting rising 6<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> graders. In August, families eligible for bus service will receive information on specific bus stops and times. New students will receive all their information by 8/1.
- Walk maps will be online by 5/31
- 6/8 – Send summer school bus and summer school transportation information.

\*Parents with special needs children or requiring childcare transportation for summer school should contact the school now.

- 6/25 – Send information about summer school bus transportation routes and stops.
- 8/1- Post information online; a call center number also will be provided should parents need more information or have questions.

Parents can use the Parent Portal to view their child’s bus information: bus number; stop location and pick-up time. (Only shows bus number, not the actual route.)

Re: the Call Center and process – Instead of an ‘appeal process’ as last year, all calls will come to the call center. When any call comes in, it will be logged into the system and the caller will receive an email confirmation of the call and the issue, with a tracking number. Last year, if someone called, call center staff could only take a message, now they actually are able to look up the information right away, e.g. for questions like “where is my child’s bus stop.” For those without email access, they will receive the tracking number during their first call. Call center also includes four bi-lingual staff to handle calls from non-English speakers.

Requests to add a child to a bus, or other questions call center staff cannot answer, will be escalated to higher level APS Transportation staff who can address them one on one. However, callers will still receive electronic confirmation of the phone call and issue, and will receive a call-back from someone who can address the question.

### ***GPS Pilot: Abingdon, McKinley, Williamsburg and Washington-Lee***

APS is testing GPS on one bus servicing each of the four pilot schools to see how well it works. Those schools will receive a letter with details of the pilot. Committee members in the working group offered suggestions on the letter, specifically to address concerns parents might have regarding data security. Bob Laws said he will bring one of the buses to a meeting to give the Committee a first-hand look at the actual GPS and its capabilities. Students will be given a card with RFID (not a proprietary system) that the GPS reads, thereby providing transportation staff with the ability to locate the child in an emergency. Middle School students and High School students will actively swipe their card when they enter/exit the

bus, while Elementary School students will be 'passively' logged as they enter – with their RFID chip being read automatically as they enter and exit. APS' goal is to have one card with the student ID that can serve multiple purposes: lunch card, school entry, bus and anything else the student might need their ID for.

This first letter will be very basic, just a general overview of it with no specific information about what data will be collected. Committee members asked if APS is making any preparations to address any parent fears of this coming across as a "big brother issue." Mr. Laws replied that right now APS is just addressing the positive aspect of the GPS capabilities. For example, we had a couple of students that were missing when they were supposed to be getting off the bus. With these GPS cards we would be able to tell exactly when they got off the bus and where they got off, and that would have been helpful information at the time. This GPS system can also monitor driver behavior (stops, speed, deceleration).

### ***2014 Transportation Budget Breakdown (Bob Laws)***

APS has ordered 10 new buses that are already in this year's approved budget - 7 large buses and 3 small ones for special needs transportation – that will be in service for the next school year. Some of these will replace high mileage buses (those w/ 120k miles or older than 12 years). The 3 smaller buses will come with AC (\$7000/bus), but APS-T is planning to approve it for the larger buses. All buses will have cameras. Special needs buses also have larger doors, a special lift and will have the car seats or air rides, so the bus is a little bit more comfortable and versatile to address different needs. Mr. Laws added that he does not want to have more than 2 wheelchairs on a bus at a time, although right now we have two buses carrying 3. He'd like to have the fleet to be able to change that.

Ideally, he would like to retire ten buses but will not do so until after the school year begins to ensure APS has enough bus capacity to meet the demand. He does not want to put the older buses into service right away, as he'd rather not have them on the road more than necessary. If put into service, it would likely be for HS short trips. Further, he'd rather wait to add new drivers (and the cost) until necessary.

The proposed budget includes 6 more buses, along with 6 drivers and 4 attendants. Basic bus cost=\$98,000. Special needs bus cost=\$102,000. If approved, these would be ordered mid-year. Due to their specialized equipment, special needs buses cannot be used as a regular bus. If more special needs children enroll, then APS will have to find a way to add additional buses to accommodate those needs.

The maximum amount of students he prefers for a standard bus is 45-51, but the buses can seat more than this amount, at least at the elementary level (up to 77 at three to a seat). At the high school level, buses are always overcrowded at the beginning of the school year then become less crowded after a couple of weeks. APS is trying to change that. One member commented that this may be a reason why students stop using the bus, despite being eligible. One of the student committee reps., confirmed that this does happen. Mr. Laws replied that with the new system, APS will now know who is actually using the bus, and be able to use that to balance capacity needs. Often, what they find with high-schoolers is that once they learn to drive they no longer use the bus, or they might use it sporadically when the weather is poor. APS will now be able to track that level of data.

Committee members asked if APS has looked into using smaller buses for choice schools, as often those runs carry fewer children. Mr. Laws said this would be difficult as the larger buses make several runs a day between schools and they need the versatility of the larger bus.

Staff had previously stated that on time performance was 98% but staff is requesting additional in the budget to “increase on time performance.” Staff was unable to explain reason for this budget request. Re: parking, APS is looking at parking systemwide, and the costs associated with it, but right now it is not something they are focusing on. Each school is also different in how they delegate parking lot privileges to students and staff depending on the amount of space that they have available.

The last FY14 budget item Mr. Laws noted was re: the GPS system (\$148,000). In answer to some questions about the system he noted the following: the system can report how often the bus stops, how long they wait at stops, and how fast they are driving. The wireless system polls the bus’ data every 30 seconds and sends it to a separate server. After the pilot, APS hopes to install the system on all buses.

### ***Revised Draft Maps: Ashlawn & Long Branch Elementary Schools***

Sidewalk details have been added to the maps. However, the maps will need to ground-truthed to be sure that the layers are accurate. (Fairfax Dr. on the Ashlawn map, for example, was not showing correct sidewalk detail.) Staff has not looked at crowd-sourcing (posting maps on-line and allowing people to validate the maps, and upload information and pictures). For now, after Committee review, it will be a walk and paper exercise, with groups providing feedback at the school level. APS is hoping to send out these maps to everyone and have multiple inputs on them so that they are accurate and true about walk zones and sidewalks.

Committee members asked about the policies behind determining walk hazards/impediments, specifically referencing the park near Ashlawn, which is not in the walk zone. Mr. Laws replied that potential crime areas are considered hazards, and considered a priority safety concern when evaluating school walk paths. Parks can be unsafe in the dark, and elementary school children especially should not be expected to walk through a park at night or without proper lighting or chaperoning.

It was noted that the resulting walk zones in the Ashlawn and Long Branch areas are now well within the 1 mile policy walk zone. A question was raised as to whether the communications letters would address this fact, as some currently ineligible riders using courtesy busing, will now be eligible for ‘regular’ rider status due to the hazard identification. A recommendation was made that staff catalogue the hazards/impediments they have identified should parents ask.

With regard to the scope of the TDM studies, Committee members wanted to know if they would look into hazard mitigation to encourage more students to walk and bike to school (e.g. look at things like park lighting or other safety improvements that could turn one questionable walk path into a safe one and over time lead to a need for fewer buses). Mr. Laws said he believes that this type of ‘needs analysis’ will be done, and underscores the importance of working with the County – esp. Parks staff, as these improvements could be funded through that dept. However, the current scope for the contractor (Toole Design Co.) is only to look at the schools with new construction. One member pointed out that in the RFP, there is a Task that seems to include all schools.

APS would like to bring all the maps back to the Committee for final review before they are posted. These maps are deigned to be a tool for parents to use as they develop their route to school. APS would also like to discuss the TDM studies with the Committee. There were a couple more comments on map details. Additional comments should be sent to Mr. Laws.

## **Strategic Framework**

The Committee discussed the concept of mode shift – creating policies that increase non personal vehicle transport mode shares – as a way to organize our thinking, and potentially using targets to help measure progress toward goals. Conceptually, this fits in with the guiding principles the Committee has discussed, namely aligning with County transportation goals, ensuring safe transportation to schools by all modes, and increasing use of active transportation.

Systemwide, we know we have about 33% of our students riding the bus; we don't really know what the shares are for the other modes. In looking at data for the 5 schools involved in the new elementary school planning, the following are averages for other modes:

- about 18% walk; which may be higher systemwide (perhaps 22%), as these 5 schools are in areas that are less walkable;
- 3% bike;
- 3% carpool;
- <1% use transit (not surprising as these are elementary schools)
- 37% drove alone (this may be closer to 40%) systemwide
- Bus use for these schools was higher than the system average, at 39%.

If APS had policies and programs to encourage all non-single-driver auto modes and increase those mode shares, there could be a decrease in auto trips, resulting in less congestion and traffic around schools, with accompanying improvements in safety. This also could have County-wide impacts.

### **Committee Comments:**

- Main goal must be safety;
- Promote other modes, rather than seek to reduce one;
- Recognize that eliminating bus service resulted in increased vehicular trips;
- Should think about how to do this with staff travel too (leading by example; though with 4800 staff and 22000 students, the focus should be on the students);
- Ensure we are offering choices, and encouraging alternative modes when feasible;
- Importance of offering choices that are: safe, reliable, convenient;
- We need more data on which modes students actually use to get to school;
- Parents want safe and efficient transportation;
- 80% of the staff lives outside of the County, many have no other transportation alternatives;
- Our main concern is with the safety of the children;
- Overseas, use of public transportation is very high because it was free for kids; we should recommend that the County make public transportation free to students as well.
- Free transit for kids would have to be subsidized by the County;
- Every school bus takes 26 cars off the road, on average, which contributes to a safer walking environment.

The Committee wrapped up the topic with a proposal that we begin to work in small groups to allow for work to be done in parallel, taking one large topic per meeting, and using small groups to discuss issues within that topic area.

## **Budget Advisory Council (BAC) Presentation (Dan Dixon, BAC Chair)**

The BAC's charge is to advise the School Board on the operating and capital budgets. Its membership includes Arlington citizens with children in APS and those without. It is not full time. There is a small staff in the central office working on budget issues full time. Mr. Dixon noted the following about the APS budget process.

- The budget session begins publicly in February with the release of the Superintendent's budget.
- Opportunities for comment and feedback occur in March and April; however, if there are items that this Committee would like to see in the next budget, the discussions for the next budget begin in Sept.
- The County used to have a significant surplus, so the challenge was 'how do we spend it?' That is no longer the case.
- Expectations about class size is a huge driver of budget decisions. The cost to maintain current class sizes is about \$30M/year.
- 80% of the APS budget is for salaries and benefits.
- 'Relocatables' (trailers) are more expensive because they can only be one story.
- APS is planning for an additional 1,200 students next year.
- 80% of APS revenue comes from the County; and 46% of the County budget goes to APS.
- Formulas, called planning factors, have been developed to determine staffing (e.g., X number of custodians/sq foot; or Y number of teachers per student). \*\*There are no 'planning factors' used for developing transportation needs.
- APS has requested a ½ cent tax increase for additional school funding in this year's budget.
- Years ago, there used to be a formula to determine how much went to schools. That is no longer.
- On April 20<sup>th</sup>, the County Board will vote on its budget and determine how much will go to APS.
- On May 2nd, the School Board will vote to approve its budget.
- Sequestration should not affect the County; about 80% of funding comes from real estate taxes.
- The County also has always supported school bonds.

Mr. Dixon noted that growth is a big concern. More than 20 schools use relocatables to house student classrooms. Many parents do not believe we should have trailers as teaching areas. Some have said they do not mind them if they are installed properly. He also contrasted the budgeting for the Central office vs. that of the schools – Central office salary structure, for example, based on step increases vs. schools which is more zero-based budgeting (if you increase on area, must take from another).

He counseled the Committee that there will always be trade-offs, and some may not see transportation safety as their main priority – instead, class size or achievement gap. The Committee, however, should not dwell on trade-offs, but should recommend what it believes is right. Ideally, you get your concerns to staff early in the process and educate them. Then, in the fall when the superintendent is pulling together his recommendations, you would have educated senior staff.

In response to a question, Mr. Dixon said there may be comparative data from the Washington Boards of Education guide, but he did not know if that included comparative data on transportation.

Meeting adjourned at 9:23pm.

**Next meeting: April 25**