

19 March 2013

Minutes

APS Multi-Modal Transportation & Student Safety Special Committee

Present:

Robert (Bob) Laws – Director of Transportation

Jana Lynott

Penny Everline

Dennis Leach

Cintia Johnson

Eric Goodman

Ronna Weber

Nancy Van Doren

Jane S. Kim-Guthrie

Eli Spiliotopolis

Lauren Hassel

Christine Green (SRTS National Partnership)

Tim Rosato

Gillian Burgess

Ritch Viola – Arlington DOT

Erik Maskelony

Speaker: Kathleen McSweeney, Jefferson PTA President

New member: Eli Spiliotopolous

The meeting was called to order at 7pm.

The agenda was reviewed. No comments were submitted.

There was a move to accept the agenda. The motion was accepted.

The meeting minutes from 3/14 will be accepted at the next meeting, due to the short space of time for the committee to review.

Public Comment Period

The committee welcomed Kathleen McSweeney, Jefferson PTA President.

Kathleen advised the committee that a group of PTA presidents is sending a letter to the School & County Boards addressing several budget issues, including transportation. The letter requests that parents be notified by June of their transportation eligibility and that courtesy bus students receive an extension for the next school year. She noted that there are parents who are making decisions now about where their children will attend school next year, and families need to know their transportation eligibility so they can adjust accordingly. She requested that the Committee endorse the extension of Courtesy Busing for the next school year.

Question: Kathleen, as PTA President, was asked to write a letter to the School Board and County Board. PTA presidents from other schools who have not signed the letter to the School & County Boards are encouraged to do so. **Kathleen will forward a copy of the letter to the Committee.**

Cintia Johnson replied that there is a plan in place to send busing communications to parents for the 2013-14 school year beginning in April. This will be sent to all families affected by the change in the busing schedule.

Christine Green– National Partnership for School Routes to School - Greater Washington Region gave a presentation. She provided handouts on the program and gave a thorough review of the program.

Highlights:

The number of children walking or biking to school has declined over time. There is an increase in obesity in recent years as a result of lack of good exercise. Safety is always the main focus when planning biking/walking routes.

Focus on 5 E's

- Education
- Encouragement (consistent)
- Engineering (infrastructure)
- Enforcement (police)
- Evaluation (impact on health, increased activity).

SRTS programs are often run out of Departments of Transportation, but can be run out of the school system. Parents and principals can have a role in securing mini grants.

She noted that the program was started with federal funding in 2005. In Virginia, the coordinator is Rob Williams in VDOT. The National Center for Safe Routes to Schools is a federally-funded organization that helps jurisdictions collect and analyze data. The National Partnership for SRTS is a separate national advocacy organization that lobbies Congress and promotes SRTS around the country.

The program offers three types of grants, all of which currently don't require any matching:

- infrastructure grants
- non-infrastructure grants
- Quick start mini grants (easier application, no federal reporting)

The MAP-21 transportation bill will change SRTS grants:

- Easier application
- 20% funding match requirement

- Smaller pot
- Competes with other County projects

Applications for non-infrastructure grants under the current funding (no match required) will be due next winter (around December 2013). These require an activities and program plan. Applications under the new funding (requires matching) due 5/15/13.

Successful SRTS programs require someone to focus on SRTS. For example, Alexandria has a contract with Trails for Youth for education. Fairfax County is currently compiling data.

The program is a part of Michelle Obama's Lets Move Program.

The National Center examined the schools that showed an increase in walking and biking over 2 years and saw that successful programs included:

- In school leaders
- Activities that reinforce biking/walking on a regular basis
- Generate parent support
- Policies/Incentives that support walking and biking (let them leave early as an incentive for others to want to walk/bike).

The best performers doubled their walkers and bikers.

There is a need to talk and encourage parents and children to walk and bike to school. There is a need to change an entire culture. This could take 3 years. First year parents are ok with the program, then the second year they are getting excited, then by 3rd years...very excited parents and want to get involved.

Resources:

- WalkArlington
- BikeArlington
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (has a School Pool Tool to coordinate car-, walk- and bike-pools to school)
- Greater Washington Case Studies

www.saferoutesgreaterwashington.wordpress.com

Ritch Viola discussed the Arlington experience with SRTS: 1999-2000 was the County's first Pedestrian plan (Chris Zimmerman on the County Board was concerned with routes to get to school after a major snow storm). A committee from APS transportation and public works and ACPD visited all the schools to look at issues, focusing on safety and enforcement. Some suggestions were easy to implement (traffic routing) and some were harder (traffic calming, building sidewalks). Almost all were built. They focused within 2-3 blocks of the schools. This

effort resulted in National Walk to School Day participation and the development of the first walk maps. Approximately \$2 million was spent on the program and funding ended around 2005.

Since that time, the County has shifted and the initiative has not been active.

Dennis: around 2006-2007, that SRTS effort was winding down, iRide started, allowing students to ride ART buses for a discounted price. It was a joint County Board/School Board effort. Many of the displays are still in schools. Arlington Commuter Services stocks information at the schools.

Question: why doesn't Arlington offer free transit to all residents under 18?

Answer: WMATA provides 80% of all bus trips in Arlington, so the County would need to work with WMATA on funding such a program.

Bus Stop location Criteria:

Bob Laws discussed what he looks for when establishing school bus stops:

- Pick streets with lower traffic volumes and lower speeds
- Minimize or avoid multi-lane roads where pedestrians are most at risk of injury
- Pick streets w/ sidewalks or designated ped paths separate from the roadway and traffic. If these are not available, pick roads with sufficient space to walk along the roadway to reach the stop. Avoid or limit stops that require backing up
- Avoid or limit stops requiring the bus to make a left turn along the route
- Select stops that provide sufficient visibility for pedestrians and drivers
- Choose "door side" stops whenever possible
- Minimize need for students to cross a road to get to the bus stop regardless of the type of roadway.
- Students must not cross multi-lane roads
- Locations should offer adequate lighting
- Locations should have sufficient space and parents to wait at least 10 feet from the roadway
- Corner stops are preferred b/c bus drivers stop at intersections
- Consider number of students that will use the stop - minimize it with the middle school students
- Stops should be located so that students and parents have adequate pathways to walk from home
- Avoid railroad crossings along route (N/A for Arlington)

The Edulog system used to program the bus routing system was discussed. APS started using it 9 months ago.

Bob noted that it is not possible to create new stops for courtesy busing.

With regard to the kindergarten students, it is policy that it is up to the parent to get their child to the bus stop.

Bob noted that he addresses every issue that is given to him at the start of each school year.

Choice Schools – Bob noted that once a choice stop is established, he cannot create additional stops for choice schools.

Bob noted that the bus drivers provide input on the routes. They do a dry run on new routes at the beginning of the school year. Bob noted that he takes this input seriously.

With regard to safety, if a student's walk path to school is considered to be unsafe, then the decision is made to bus those students. There is an issue with the limited number of crossing guards

Comment: the above list should differ based on the age of the child.

Comment: We should look not only on identifying hazards, but on mitigating them.

Question: We are looking for a balance to get both busing and walking to work together to reduce auto trips. Comment about stops – is there going to be an opportunity to review with driver and PTA's the location of stops that will come?

Question: We want to ensure that adequate resources are available and a comprehensive approach is made to ensure everything is in place for safety. There can be support put in place to support walking and biking.

Question: With regard to the bus stop issue, it is noted that some parents depend on the bus system and that they made decisions based upon this service and it has a huge impact on families.

Question: What is safe for a child?

Bob – we work collaboratively and together to come up with safety policies.

Question: Do siblings get to travel with K-students?

Answer: yes

Comment: Buses are the school transportation backbone for families.

Enabling different ways to get to school is fine when it is safe enough. Need to look at all scenarios, identify the hazard and fix them. Need to emphasize the safety part in greater details.

Bob noted that the letter on busing for 2013-2014 would come out in April. Initially it will go to the Superintendent, and then to families.

Question: Can the committee see the letter first?

Discussion on whether this was appropriate.

Recommendation that the committee initially reviews the letter and gives input.

Recommendation this is added to the charge of the committee.

Bob noted the difference between regular and courtesy busing. If a student is in a walk zone, but there is space available on the bus, he can permit "courtesy" busing; however everyone who would use that bus stop also has to receive courtesy busing. So there must be room on the bus for everyone at that stop or in the area of it. Students who received courtesy busing this year, might not be given it in the coming year. There is no guarantee.

If a student/family appeals their bus eligibility status, and bus services are granted then it is considered "regular" busing.

It was noted that the issue on addressing the bus situation last year was not addressed correctly. The timeline is now being written to address the concern with regards to rolling out the transportation plan. Another concern was the form that was used for appeal and courtesy; plans are in place to make appropriate changes.

A brief discussion ensued about the importance of busing in the menu of transportation options available to students and in reducing single-occupant vehicle trips, and how other non-auto modes can contribute to reducing the demand on busing over time, but that busing is seen as the backbone of school transportation. Through infrastructure improvements and encouragement, walking and biking can become viable options for families, but it should be a choice – something for which Arlington is noted. It was noted that a child is 8 times safer in a school bus than in a family car, and 49 times safer in a school bus than with a teen driver.

The next meeting will be April 11th.

Questions are to be gathered for the police. (They need to know the agenda and what is to be covered).

Issues to address in upcoming meetings:

- Courtesy busing
- Charge/going forward/strategic framework
- Budget discussion is important
- Boundary issue/ more seats for more students
- Police will come with a couple weeks lead time.

The meeting ended at 9:00 p.m.