

Arlington Public Schools
Multimodal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee
Report to School Board
June 2013

Committee Background and Purpose

The Arlington Public Schools (APS) School Board established the Multi-Modal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee (Committee) in November 2012. Committee members were appointed in December 2012 and the Committee began meeting biweekly in January 2013. This is the Committee's first report to the School Board.

The Committee's charge is to provide advice to the School Board regarding the safe transport of students to and from schools by all modes of transportation. Its overarching goal is to: "ensure student health and safety for all forms of transportation, including but not limited to walking, bus transportation, bicycling, and driving." The School Board laid out additional goals in the Committee's charge, including: "to maximize efficient use of APS transportation resources; to provide for on-time bus service, to ensure a reasonable walk distance to schools; to support effective traffic management at school sites; to make informed decisions that reflect the APS dedication to environmental stewardship; and to consider and report budget implications for any Committee recommendations."

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank Assistant Superintendent John Chadwick and Transportation Director Bob Laws for working with us throughout our first six months, and to Lionel White, Facilities Director, for lending his GIS expertise to the multimodal planning map development process. We would also like to thank Sally Baird for serving as our liaison to the School Board. We extend much appreciation to Dennis Leach, Arlington County (County) Director of Transportation, who has served as a consistent and helpful liaison from our Committee to Arlington County departments, staff and other resources.

MMTSSSC Goals and Work to Date

In our first meetings, the Committee worked to refine our goals and priorities as background for the development of a transportation philosophy for APS. The Committee also developed an outreach plan, gathered expert information, and drafted the components of an APS Transportation philosophy. We then developed recommendations for School Board consideration.

Outreach Plan: To engage schools and to ensure continuous input from schools and the community, the committee provided a public comment period before each meeting, identified Committee liaisons to each APS school and their PTAs; established a general email address, and began planning additional outreach efforts, such forums and meeting at individual schools next year.

Information Gathering: APS Transportation staff and County Transportation staff provided background on school and County transportation plans, programs and operations; a National Safe

Routes to School (SRTS) Partnership representative discussed the SRTS program and provided information about grant funding opportunities for program implementation; representatives from the Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) provided information to the Committee on a number of topics related to school safety education, the crossing guard program and traffic enforcement; APS Transportation staff and the Budget Advisory Council Chair briefed the Committee on the budget process and transportation-specific budget items; APS Facilities staff briefed the Committee on the boundary change process and recommendations, with an emphasis on transportation implications; and APS parents spoke to the Committee during public comment period regarding problems they encountered with the changes in school bus service.

Transportation Philosophy Development: The Committee began the process of compiling the components of an APS Transportation philosophy. Using knowledge gained from the briefings this year and feedback from this interim report, the Committee will propose a philosophy in its final report next year.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends that APS review and update its policies related to transportation, aligning them with Arlington County transportation policy. Current policies related to specific topics such as busing and parking exist, but, do not provide a comprehensive multimodal transportation policy and set of procedures for students, parents, staff and visitors.

Specifically, based on our review of current policies and procedures as well as input from county and school system staff and transportation experts, the Committee provides the following six broad recommendation areas with detailed supporting points.

1. Utilize a ‘Safety First’ approach to all APS Transportation policies and practices.

The safety of our children underpins all recommendations in this report. No effort should be undertaken without a ‘safety first’ approach.

A. Standard criteria for determining the hazards along a walk route to a school must be established. These should be based on clear, specific, age-delimited criteria. The Committee recommends that these criteria be established through a national standards program or external party with national expertise in the area of student safety, used to further refine the multimodal planning maps developed by APS to show bus eligibility zones and help families plan routes to school, and published for all to see.

B. The Committee further recommends that a system-wide hazard evaluation be conducted within all school walk zones to determine where hazards exist.

C. The Committee recommends that staff develop a formal process for identifying, mitigating, and gaining acceptance of route-specific walking hazards as part of the bus eligibility process.

D. APS should work with the County to develop a plan to mitigate as many hazards as possible. This effort is particularly critical as some bus eligibility is determined using the safety criteria. To this end, we are very pleased to learn that APS will hire a Safe Routes to School Coordinator next year.

2. Develop a Robust Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program.

The Committee is extremely gratified to see that APS is about to begin a system-wide TDM study, and is looking forward to participating fully in the progress of this study. We want to be actively involved to ensure that the study captures a baseline assessment for each school, including: transportation mode share by distance, family rationale for mode choice, traffic conditions and identification of safety impediments to biking and walking. This data will be critical to understanding how to encourage non-single-family vehicle travel by giving APS a way to design TDM strategies that fit each school, as a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work. Furthermore, family transportation is complex, especially for families with working parents. There also must be a specialized focus to this work, one that speaks to the child traveler as opposed to the adult commuter since children have unique travel needs that an adult does not.

A. The Committee recommends that once this data is collected, each school begin to develop a TDM action plan designed to encourage non-single family vehicle trips, and develop realistic goals for walk and bike mode shares based on this data.

B. The Committee recommends School Board Policy/PIP 50.1-1 be reviewed and revised. We have learned from County staff that schools are the single greatest traffic generator in their neighborhoods, as they are often the only significant activity zone in the area. At the beginning and end of each school day, schools generate a mini-rush hour, congesting the area around the schools, generating air pollution, and creating safety hazards. APS already has policies in place that seek to reduce traffic to schools and encourage other modes of travel. The Committee recommends that APS explore incentive programs that encourage parents, students, staff and visitors to use alternatives to single family or single occupant vehicle transportation.

C. The Committee recommends that the School Board update its policies related to school construction to ensure that the site selection for any new school include criteria that take into account the availability of transportation choices for students, staff, parents, and visitors.

D. The Committee recommends that the School Board direct staff to design new school infrastructure to encourage safe travel by school bus, walking, biking and transit, and to minimize space dedicated to private vehicles, consistent with County policy. The loss of open space and playground area should be minimized by accommodating private vehicle drop-off

and pick-up through existing infrastructure, including curb-side drop off, to the greatest extent possible.¹

3. Promote the Use of School Buses.

A. The Committee recommends that the School Board recognize the important role of school bus transportation in a robust TDM strategy, and acknowledge the safety benefits of the school bus. In addition to playing a significant role in reducing single-family vehicle trips, school buses are nationally recognized as 8-49 times safer than the auto in transporting children (depending upon whether the driver is an adult or a teenager).² At this time, school buses transport approximately 1/3 of all APS students. Some early data findings from the TDM studies conducted for the Ashlawn addition and the new elementary school on the Williamsburg campus, show that at the ½ -1 mile walk distance, auto trips increase noticeably; once past the one-mile threshold – where bus services are offered, family vehicle trips decline.

B. The Committee recommends that school bus routes be optimized to reduce bus travel time as much as possible, and that stops be located in safe locations that are convenient to families eligible for bus services. In order for school buses to be a successful element of a TDM program, using them must be an attractive option for families. Criteria for stop selection, with input from families, should be made available to families, shared with Arlington County transportation staff and made public.

C. The Committee recommends APS clarify and communicate the Courtesy Busing Policy. APS must provide greater clarity on bus eligibility criteria, the decision making process it employs, and the process to resolve any issues parents may have. These processes should be formalized and made public. Further, as the TDM data becomes available, staff should use that data to better understand if the current policy walk zones make sense from a practical standpoint (e.g., by considering route safety, age, distance, time, and carrying loads as key factors in whether families living in the walk zone actually choose to walk), and whether or not offering bus services to families in the ½-1 mile walk zone will effectively reduce single-family vehicle trips to schools. The Committee plans further recommendations regarding bus and walk zones when data from the system-wide TDM study becomes available.

D. The Committee does recommend that APS assess current walk zone guidelines and study the impact of making them age specific (e.g., if an 8-year old cannot be left unsupervised per Child Protective Services, should he/she be expected to walk/bike to/from school?) Further to that

¹ Four Committee members dissented from the last sentence of this paragraph because they felt that that they needed more information on this topic and suggested that the Committee should discuss this topic more over the next year.

² See, “Report to Congress: School Bus Safety: Crashworthiness Research”, Research and Development, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, April 2002, found at <http://www.nhtsa.gov/DOT/NHTSA/NRD/Multimedia/PDFs/Crashworthiness/SchoolBus/SBReportFINAL.pdf>.

end, the Committee recommends that the School Board acknowledge that children in elementary school generally should be supervised, including in their trips to and from school.

E. The Committee recommends APS develop a fleet plan that encourages capacity planning in the same way that classroom and personnel decisions take this into account. With a 5-10 year fleet plan based on growth projections and valid usage factors, APS can be ready with an annual budget proposal for bus resources in the years the need is projected.

F. The Committee recommends that APS ensure that the Transportation department have the staffing it requires to successfully deploy the technology it has implemented to ensure the safe and efficient transportation of students by school bus.

The Committee believes that the APS Transportation department has been moving in the right direction. Staff has been willing to work with the Committee on major efforts like the multimodal planning maps. APS is to be commended for beginning to build a transportation department for the 21st century and for implementing technologies that will help to optimize and better manage the bus system as well as provide for student accountability on buses.

As this Committee's charge was to consider the County's Master Transportation Plan in our deliberations, we believe it is incumbent upon us to note that school bus transportation is in effect public transportation for students. Arlington County puts a great deal of resources into its transit program in an effort to reduce traffic and congestion on County streets and in communities, to improve air and water quality, and to offer a safer alternative to driving. APS is part of this County and has a responsibility like any other major activity generator to develop policies that complement these County-wide goals.

4. Support and Promote Active Transportation to the Maximum Extent Possible.

A. APS should work with the County to improve infrastructure and implement a sustained education and outreach effort to encourage and increase active transportation mode shares for commutes to school. Active Transportation refers to any form of human powered transportation, such as biking and walking. The Committee is extremely pleased to learn that APS has been awarded a grant to fund a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Coordinator for one year, and we look forward to working closely with this person. However, one year passes quickly and the Committee recommends that APS begin to develop a plan to ensure long-term funding for this position.

A growing body of research links physical activity to the physical and mental health and development of children. In particular, exercise before school has shown to improve students' ability

to focus and perform better academically.³ APS should provide information to students and families about the health benefits related to active transportation to and from school. Schools should consider sharing their efforts to increase active transportation and APS should highlight those efforts system-wide.

B. APS should develop, with the County, ‘school travel plans’ that can be used to secure SRTS infrastructure and non-infrastructure (programs or activities) grant funding; applications for the latter are due in December 2013. School travel plans, as defined by National Center for Safe Routes to School, provide a road map for schools to build successful walking and biking programs. These plans include observations and ideas for addressing the five ‘E’s of SRTS—Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Engineering. As a policy matter, the Committee recommends that the School Board institutionalize the ‘5 Es’ of SRTS as its transportation policies are updated.

The Committee learned from the National SRTS Partnership speaker that it can take up to three years for real change in travel behavior to take hold, so APS must be ready to take the necessary steps to make these modes attractive options for families through a multi-year communications effort. While the transportation network external to APS is under County control, the two entities should be working hand in hand to identify infrastructure improvements that will enable more families to choose active transportation and prioritize improvements. Again, the TDM study and SRTS school travel plans can serve as a baseline to develop those plans.

C. The Committee recommends that APS assess current biking and walking policies and infrastructure to determine if they support current policy and goals of APS and the County (e.g. prioritization of traffic modes for morning arrival/afternoon dismissal, adequate bicycle/scooter parking facilities at each school).

D. The Committee offers several recommendations related to outreach:

1. Work with school staff, the PTAs and Student Advisory Board, and with County DOT staff to develop a ‘toolkit’ of materials for schools to use to promote transportation alternatives (including carpools), as well as an outreach, training and education program/campaign for families and staff;
2. Identify in-school leaders to organize and encourage active transportation;
3. Assess existing and further develop additional age-appropriate curriculum to educate students about safely traveling in their communities on foot, by bike and on transit;
4. Conduct travel training for students and families;

³ See, e.g., Goodyear, Sarah, “The Link Between Kids Who Walk or Bike to School and Concentration,” *Atlantic Cities*, February 5, 2013, found at <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2013/02/kids-who-walk-or-bike-school-concentrate-better-study-shows/4585/>.

5. Use the fall and spring National Bike and Walk to School Days as opportunities to promote walking and biking and encourage students to make active transportation a regular mode of travel to school;
6. Explore methods of more consistent encouragement for walking and biking to school; and,
7. Explore opportunities to incentivize use of alternatives to single-family vehicle modes of transportation.

E. The Committee recommends that the School Board direct APS staff to seek technical assistance in the implementation of walking school buses and bicycle trains, where they are appropriate, and as part of the implementation, APS staff should study best practices for walking school buses, and bike trains to ensure that safety, liability, and other factors are appropriately managed.

5. Design and Implement a Plan to Improve Communications & Transparency.

A. The Committee recommends that APS create and implement a comprehensive Transportation communications strategy to support its policies and specific practices and initiatives. This strategy includes communications between the central office, Transportation Department, and individual schools with families, students, PTAs, and the broader community. A consistent, open, and regular mechanism for communications related to Transportation is just now developing, based on evolving policy and procedures. The role of Transportation staff, central office staff, and school based staff is still being defined.

The Committee would like APS to view this body as a resource of balanced perspectives to assist with the planning and implementation of successful improvements to APS transportation. In working with transportation letters to families this spring, consultation with the Committee was fruitful in producing effective letters to families. Similarly, in undertaking improvements to the Transportation program, including the Transportation Demand Management Study and the new Safe Routes to School effort, the Committee expects to be consulted routinely. Regular communication and collaboration with the Committee and the County is essential to building a strong APS transportation program.

Given the extensive work that has gone into creating the multimodal planning maps, the Committee recommends that the School Board instruct staff to define a process by which these maps will be updated in the future, taking into account comments from the County, APS staff, parents and the public and future changes in infrastructure. APS should encourage feedback on these maps at the localized level. This should be part of the overall Transportation communications strategy.

Regarding bus eligibility, the guidelines should be clearly delineated and communicated to all APS families. Call center staff should have enough information to address concerns in a timely fashion. APS should also communicate proactively with all families, ensuring they are aware of

policies and procedures relating to transportation and mechanisms to address concerns they may have. The burden should not fall on families to seek out information about their child's bus eligibility; rather, APS should actively communicate and make readily available its information regarding transportation.

B. The Committee believes APS must be much more transparent on issues relating to school transportation. This includes information on mode (walk or bus) determination criteria, the decision making process it employs and the process for the resolution of any issues, and the criteria for determining safe bus stop locations. To get to this point the Committee recommends the following to the School Board:

1. Adopt an explicit policy of transparency and encourage staff to collaborate openly with the Committee, including by providing relevant draft documents in electronic form;
2. Encourage staff to gather input from the community before policies, procedures and documents are final or near final; and
3. Develop a communication strategy by which changes to longstanding practice are highlighted and clearly communicated to APS families and the community at large.
4. Open communication channels will be particularly important as new student ID technology will be rolled-out and parents may have concerns about how collected data will be used. APS should conduct vigorous public outreach on the planned global positioning system (GPS) tracking of buses and radio-frequency identification (RFID) tracking of bus riders. A data security plan as well as a privacy policy should be in place and communicated prior to implementation, with consideration regarding an opt-out policy.

6. Collaborate with the County to the Maximum Extent Possible.

Most importantly, the Committee recommends that the School Board:

1. Ensure that APS staff have adequate resources and expertise to successfully collaborate with the County in the ways described below; and
2. Align APS and County capital improvement plans (CIPs) as appropriate.

Given that the County controls most of the transportation infrastructure around schools, and County police enforce traffic laws and provide crossing guards for schools, APS should actively collaborate with the County to make improvements in these areas to maximize the use of all available APS and County resources. Moreover, Arlington County is recognized nationally as a leader in TDM and its staff has expertise in transportation that could greatly benefit APS.

While this Committee is not charged with making recommendations to the County, we have a number of recommendations related to APS' relationship with the County in several key transportation areas. We believe the School Board should facilitate consideration of these recommendations by developing an explicit policy of collaboration with the County in the area of transportation, directing staff to

collaborate openly with the County, and gathering input from County staff during the development of relevant policies, procedures and documents. The County and APS need dedicated channels and protocols through which APS can recommend infrastructure improvements that would improve routes to school. The School Board could ask that an APS staff liaison be included in County Board and County Transportation Commission meetings.

A. Regarding public transit, the Committee recommends that APS work with County staff to:

1. Determine if students could be better served by public transit, including possible routing and scheduling changes. The Committee agrees that use of both ART and Metro services by older students is desirable. The APS Student Advisory Board (SAB) president has indicated that students are interested in learning about transit options and practices. At present, some schools are served by ART and Metro; however, a more concerted effort to connect all schools, but particularly high schools, by transit should be undertaken in addition to the traditional home-to-school bus service currently offered. Improved transit connectivity to schools also would provide staff with an additional travel option, and parents an opportunity to use transit to combine a school drop-off trip with a commute trip.
2. Explore fare reductions for students. The County has instituted a student fare program on ART called iRide. It is subsidized, with fares at ½ of the regular ART fare, but it is not free. Some school systems offer ‘students ride free’ programs – for example, in Montgomery County, MD, students 18 and under may ride free from 2-7p on weekdays. The Committee recommends that the School Board request that the County consider whether a ‘students ride free’ or expanded reduced-fare program could be established for both ART and Metro services and determine the budget implications.

B. Regarding County infrastructure, the Committee recommends that APS:

1. Work with the County staff and citizen advisors to prioritize projects that complete the walkway network near schools and designated bus stops in accordance with the Pedestrian Elements Policy section of the 2009 Arlington Master Transportation Plan;
2. Work with County staff and citizen advisors to identify bike boulevards (greenways) to all schools and prioritize projects that complete the greenway network serving schools; and
3. Encourage the County to study the impact of changing school zone speed limits to 15MPH and/or expanding the school zones at schools where speed is a top concern and where a reduction in the speed limit is likely to increase safety.

C. Regarding Staff level coordination, the Committee recommends that APS ensure or request that:

1. County staff (Planning and Transportation, Parks, Police) and APS Facilities and Transportation staff hold regular work sessions;
2. APS staff collaborate with BikeArlington and WalkArlington to encourage and enable active transportation for students, parents, staff and visitors;

3. The County provide liaisons from other areas of its staff, including GIS, Parks, ACPD, Transportation Engineering & Operations (TE&O), and Planning, to MMTSSSC, and these liaisons should attend relevant meetings;
4. APS staff meet regularly with County GIS staff, including the head of the County's mapping center, to develop a plan to review and update the multimodal planning maps and to be sure APS is considering all of the available data;
5. Procedures are developed that utilize available County staff and resources to achieve goals (e.g. jointly collaborate on development of school multimodal planning maps, conduct regular joint meetings related to the identification and management of safety improvement projects.);
6. County staff collaborate with APS staff to deploy Arlington County TDM strategies to reduce trips to schools in private vehicles; and
7. Recommend County seek funding for SRTS coordinator as counterpart to APS STRS position.

D. Regarding the Arlington County Police, the Committee recommends that APS seek to have:

1. ACPD clarify its policy on enforcement of speed limits to explicitly state that tolerating speeding in school zones is not consistent with ACPD policy;
2. ACPD work with APS to target enforcement on a priority basis, and should employ a renewed focus of its enforcement efforts relating to pedestrian safety, especially the enforcement of crosswalks;
3. ACPD and APS should examine whether the current School Resource Officer (SRO) staffing model (with no SROs assigned to individual elementary schools) is sufficient;
4. ACPD and County work with APS on management of student drop off and pick up to maximize safety for students and the community at large; and
5. APS staff regularly meet with ACPD to identify and prioritize streets and intersections where traffic enforcement can be improved in order to increase student safety.

Next Steps

The Committee looks forward to continuing our work over the next year, and welcomes continuing public input. In the next year, the Committee intends to:

1. Further refine a definition for an APS transportation philosophy and review existing and possible new policies and procedures;
2. Advise APS staff on the TDM study and in developing strategies that can lead to a successful TDM program for APS;
3. Consider the distance criteria in the APS definition of walk zone;
4. Advise staff from both APS and the County as they develop a plan to conduct a transportation hazard assessment around all schools and a mitigation plan for identified hazards and create processes to identify walk route hazards, hazard mitigation, and acceptance of hazards, to whatever extent they have been mitigated, before a walk route is left with such a hazard;
5. Consider the utility, roles, and responsibilities of an organizationally-independent Safety Officer reporting to the School Board directly;

6. Implement the Committee's outreach plan and develop a partnership with schools and PTAs. Some areas of likely outreach will include: RFID and GPS roll-out; continued outreach on bus eligibility issues, multimodal planning map development, review of walk zones, safety hazard identification, transportation demand management, and the promotion of active transportation modes;
7. Advise staff on the creation of a comprehensive Transportation communications strategy;
8. Request additional County staff presentations from ART/Transit and Arlington County Commuter Services/Bike Arlington/WalkArlington;
9. Consider mechanisms to institutionalize transportation planning at the school site level, perhaps including goals in site-based management plans for each school;
10. Consider APS parking policies;
11. Discuss and recommend toolkit and curriculum ideas;
12. Discuss opportunities to incorporate safe active transportation into the school day and into all ways to get to and from school;
13. Help develop site specific TDM goals;
14. Keep abreast of the hiring and integration of the Safe Routes to School coordinator;
15. Look at other areas of school siting, boundaries, and assignment policies that affect transportation;
16. Examine the siting of choice programs, admissions policies to neighborhood and choice schools, and siting of APS expansion and the expansion process itself;
17. Continue to explore transportation-related budget issues; and
18. Continue to address transportation issues that arise during the year.

Multimodal Transportation & Student Safety Special Committee

APS Parent, Student and Community Members (voting)

Kristin Haldeman, Chair

Gillian Burgess, Vice Chair

Penny Everline

Eric Goodman

Lauren Hassel

Jane S. Kim

Erik Maskelony

Jack Owens, Student (Yorktown)

Tim Rosato

Eli Spiliotopolous, Student (H.B. Woodlawn)

Nancy VanDoren

Ronna Weber

Jana Lynott, Arlington County Transportation Commission representative

APS Staff Members (Non-voting)

John Chadwick, Assistant Superintendent of Facilities & Operations

Cintia Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services

Linda Erdos, Assistant Superintendent School & Community Relations

Bob Laws, Director of Transportation

Robert Hindman, Principal, Taylor Elementary

Ellen Y. Smith, Assistant Principal, Thomas Jefferson Middle School

Arlington County Staff Liaison

Dennis Leach, Director of Transportation