

MEMORANDUM

To:	APS School Board Members
From:	Multimodal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee
Cc:	Patrick Murphy, Superintendent; John Chadwick, Asst. Superintendent – Facilities
Date:	February 27, 2014
Re:	Transportation Philosophy and Bus Service Recommendations

The School Board has asked the Multimodal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee (“Committee”) to provide recommendations on (1) an APS philosophy for transportation services; and (2) the reasonable distance from school to begin bus services.

APS philosophy for transportation services

The Committee recommends that the School Board adopt the following statement as the philosophy for APS transportation services:

APS will provide safe, efficient, and convenient transportation choices, which recognize the diverse needs of families and staff, strive to reduce traffic congestion and emissions around schools and their neighborhoods, and promote healthy living.

The Committee has built consensus around the following principles: safety; choice (in mode selection); efficiency; equity; promoting health; and reducing traffic congestion, and believes that these principles must be embodied in an APS transportation philosophy statement. The philosophy statement above has been designed to address each of these principles.

Provision of Bus Services

For the 2014-2015 school year, the Committee recommends the following five actions:

1. The School Board amend Policy 50-5 to provide bus service beginning at the following distances from the school:
 - Elementary Schools: ½ mile
 - Middle Schools: ¾ mile
 - High Schools: 1 mile
2. APS place bus stops at locations that meet APS bus stop safety criteria along school bus routes developed through the APS school bus route planning process.
3. APS continue to measure the “walk zone distances [...] along the shortest safe walk path” as specified in Policy Implementation Procedure 50-5.1 Pupil Transportation and provide bus service as needed per this assessment.

4. Contingent upon adoption of the Committee's first recommendation above, APS eliminate courtesy busing. APS staff should remain responsive to parents who request bus service for their students for safety or other reasons.

5. APS prioritize implementing the radio-frequency identification (RFID)/GPS system to track APS students riding school buses as soon as possible as it is key to student safety and bus system management.

Rationale

These recommendations are consistent with the transportation philosophy the Committee has proposed above, as well as the safety assessments completed by APS to date. A review of staff-supplied data (Attachment A) on the current number of students eligible for *regular* (i.e. non-courtesy) bus service shows that once safety is taken into account, many children within the current "policy walk zones" in Policy 50-5 have bus service. At this time, the bus eligibility distances are effectively close to the distances the Committee is recommending, because safety concerns have reduced the current "policy walk zones" to these distances for elementary schools and high schools.¹ In other words, APS is already operating close to these levels of service for those schools.

For middle schools, the Committee was particularly aware of the fact that safety assessments have not been completed. Complete safety assessments will certainly deem more students eligible for bus service under the current policy: after a recent safety assessment, more than 200 children were deemed eligible for regular bus service to Jefferson Middle School.² Moreover, considering the age of middle school students, the early start time for middle schools and anecdotal experiences with those students, the Committee thought that starting bus eligibility at $\frac{3}{4}$ mile was reasonable. Based on the APS GO! Survey data (Attachment B), the Committee believed this change in policy would significantly reduce traffic from family vehicles at middle schools, making these neighborhoods safer for everyone. The Committee notes that the "effective 'walk' distance" shown in Attachment A for Middle Schools, based on October 2013 data, is already one mile. If the recommendation above is not adopted, the Committee strongly recommends that APS provide bus service to all middle school students more than one mile from school.

Additional data from the APS GO! survey supports the Committee's recommendation, as the data show that walking to school begins to decline at about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. Use of bus begins an upsurge at this point as well, indicating that many families are, in fact, being provided bus service starting at $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. It is reasonable to surmise that if bus service were not offered at that distance, use of single-family vehicles would increase.

The Committee has developed a consensus that minimizing the use of single-family vehicles decreases traffic congestion at the schools, makes all routes to schools safer, and aligns with County smart growth policies. The Committee believes that the bus service recommendation

¹ Importantly, the Committee understands that the safety assessments have not been completed for all middle and high schools.

² These students are not reflected as "eligible for busing" in Attachment A, which is based on October 2013 data.

specified above supports the ability of families to choose the best transportation mode for their circumstances, while minimizing the use of single-family vehicles. Committee members have met with many of the PTA groups at individual schools, a number of whom have reported that traffic from family vehicles during student drop-off and pick-up times has caused safety issues at and around the school.

The Committee has observed that an inordinate amount of APS resources are currently dedicated to determining whether students are eligible for school bus service – regular and courtesy – and managing the system. At the same time, the Committee has observed that students who have asked for and been denied courtesy bus service may be in unsafe situations, such as crossing busy roads without adult supervision, or may instead be getting to and from school in single-family vehicles.

Through public comment and correspondence received since its inception, the Committee has observed that courtesy busing has been a particular source of stress for APS families and APS transportation staff. Families of APS students whose bus transportation has been classified as “courtesy” are in limbo, worried that their families’ schedules will be thrown into chaos if their children are not provided bus service in the future. Further, the Committee has a variety of concerns about the equity of the current courtesy busing system, including its first-come-first-served allocation process.

Ultimately, the recommendations made herein are largely consistent with APS current practice and the effective ‘walk’ zones that have been established. The data shown in Attachment A, “Bus Eligibility,” strongly suggests that any increase in capacity that APS will need to provide to implement these recommendations is marginal.

Need for Information on Bus Ridership

The Committee recommends that APS prioritize the implementation of the RFID/GPS program as a means of simultaneously and consistently identifying/accounting for students on buses and providing a data source to be used in bus route planning and management. APS staff and the community have identified a number of concerns regarding the ability to tell which students are in fact riding which school bus and when. Bus ridership information is important to student safety, parent peace of mind, and effective transportation planning, as data enables APS to use school buses more efficiently. This data will allow APS to better plan and optimize routes and to ascertain when and where ‘back-up’ or ‘overflow’ buses might be needed, for example when loads may increase due to the weather.

The Committee will continue to develop its final recommendations to the School Board, aimed at fulfilling the philosophy described above. Importantly, the Committee sees many opportunities to increase the percentage of students biking, walking, taking transit and riding buses to school and looks forward to presenting these as part of our final recommendations in June.

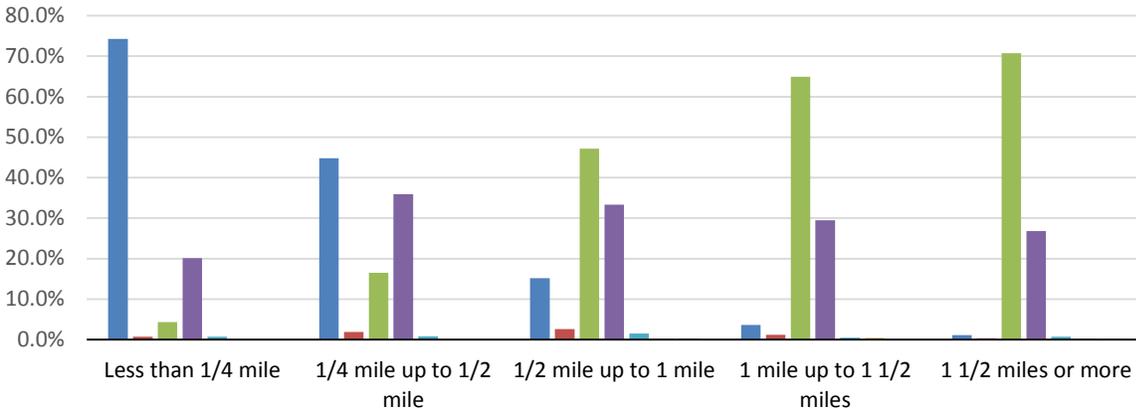
Attachment A: Bus Eligibility

		Elementary School	Middle School	High School
1	Eligible for busing	7,992	2,420	3,418
2	Total Enrollment	12,780	4,421	5,742
3	% Eligible of Total	62.54%	54.74%	59.53%
	Distance from School:	<i>Percentage of families, self-reported</i>		
4	At least 1/2 mile	56.0%	86.0%	91.5%
5	At least 1 mile	25.0%	54.0%	67.5%
6	At least 1.5 miles		31.0%	41.5%
7	Effective "walk" distance	<1/2 mile	1 mile	1-1.5 miles
8	Courtesy bussed	177	29	114
9	Safety assessment completed	Most	Some	Little

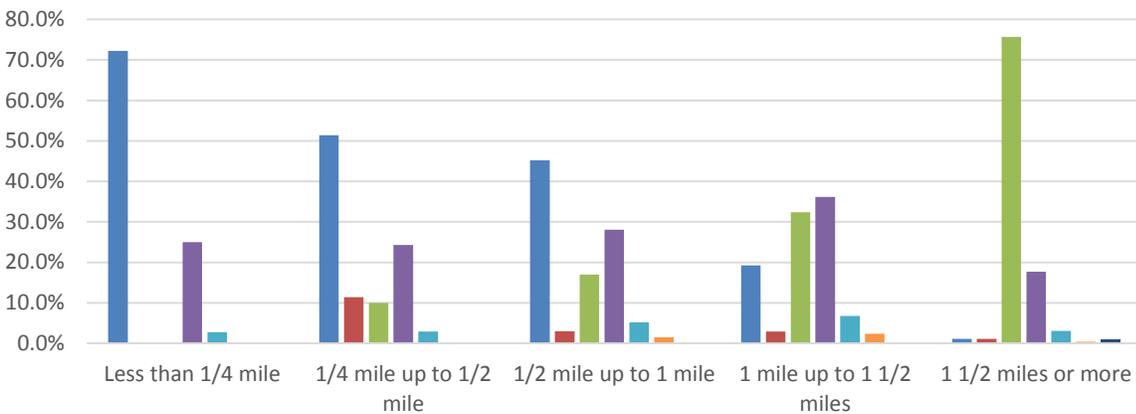
Sources: APS staff data – Sept. 2013 (lines 1, 8)
 APS website – Oct. 2013 (line 2)
 APS Go! Survey (lines 4-6)

Attachment B: APS Go! Student Travel Parent Survey

Parent Reported Mode by Distance - Elementary School



Parent Reported Mode by Distance - Middle School



Parent Reported Mode by Distance - High School

