



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee

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1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT & WHY DOES THE COMMITTEE EXIST?

The City of Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee was created by Ordinance 104344 in 1975 and codified in SMC 3.80 to bring together Seattle Public Schools, the City, and parents to improve safe routes to school. This board of 11 members includes representatives of Seattle Public Schools (SPS), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), King County Metro, and 5 volunteer positions filled by pedestrian advocates, bicycle advocates, parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

What does the Committee do?

The Committee was created to ensure working relationships between the different organizations that each have a piece of the puzzle, and to provide a mechanism for any community member to raise school traffic safety issues and get a response informed by that multi-agency coordination. The committee recommends new school crosswalk locations, crossing guard assignments, criteria for placement of crossing guards, and traffic circulation plans for new and renovated school buildings. It also reviews and responds to traffic concerns raised by parents and school staff, periodically updates elementary school walk boundary maps, works to improve crossing guard recruitment, and helps distribute information about transportation resources to parents and educators.

When does it meet?

Meetings are open to the public and are generally held 8:30 - 10:30 AM the fourth Friday of every month at the school district administrative building, John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence (2445 3rd Ave S).

This report to City Council is a summary of current status and needs for the different facets of school traffic safety in Seattle.

2. THE DISTRICT NEEDS AN ACTIVE TRANSPORT COORDINATOR

It has become clear to the committee that more support is needed for students and families to walk and bike to school. In the Seattle Public School District, 60% of students are not qualified to receive busing. While SPS has staff who work heroically to ensure that buses arrive on time to transport bused students to school (see section 5 below), the significant majority of students in the walk zone get to school without organizational support.

Many parents and students feel that walking to school is not safe due to traffic, crime, and importantly the lack of other students also walking to school. This places a burden on families to transport their children via car which falls especially hard on low income families. At the same time, studies show that families driving kids to school increases air pollution around schools, adversely affecting the health of all students, and particularly those who suffer from respiratory conditions. Driving kids to school also increases traffic congestion around schools during rush hour, and makes streets less safe for pedestrians, which then increases the pressure to drive children to school, creating a vicious cycle.

By failing to support walking to school, SPS is missing an opportunity to ignite a culture around active transportation that encourages physical activity, reduces congestion and risk around schools, strengthens school communities, and improves truancy.

The Ask: The Committee strongly recommends that the Seattle Public School District hire an Active Transportation Coordinator focused on promoting multi-modal transportation such as walking, biking, and school pooling in a coordinated way throughout the district



Currently some schools with strong PTAs and internal support have been able to promote walking to school, but most schools simply don't have the capacity to elevate the opportunity of active transportation to their students. Even at schools who do have volunteer support to promote walking and biking, that support is often reliant on the planning and organizational skills of specific parents and is prone to falling apart as knowledgeable parents follow their kids to new schools.

An Active Transportation Coordinator at the district level would be a move toward a more equitable and persistent transportation support system that would give every student an opportunity to get to school safely. In a city that is growing as fast as Seattle, it is critical that our understanding of human mobility shifts to prioritize sustainable and safe transportation options. The Seattle Public School District has an opportunity to acknowledge this need and influence the future of transportation in Seattle by hiring an Active Transportation Coordinator.

Increasing active transportation among SPS students would have multiple benefits. **Walking and biking to school have been shown to increase students' ability to focus on school work, and to improve classroom performance.** According to research by Niels Egelund of Aarhus University in Denmark, "As a third-grade pupil, if you exercise and bike to school, your ability to concentrate increases to the equivalent of someone half a year further in their studies."¹

Walking School Bus at Bailey Gatzert Elementary, from http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/



Active Transportation also helps set the foundation for a lifetime of active commuting which has substantial lifetime health benefits including reductions in obesity and heart disease. Promoting active transportation and carpooling also helps reduce congestion around schools, which makes walking and biking safer in a self-reinforcing loop, while reducing pollution and greenhouse gases. And active transportation increases students'

time spent outside, allowing them to make more robust connections to their neighborhoods and gain confidence in their abilities to navigate the world on their own.

One of the best ways to facilitate active transportation is to help parents form walking, biking, and carpooling groups. School privacy laws make collecting and disseminating data such as addresses cumbersome, and while this benefits students by protecting their data, it also means that fellow students attending the same school and living a block or two away from each other often have no idea

¹ Found on 6/7/2018 at <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2013/02/kids-who-walk-or-bike-school-concentrate-better-study-shows/4585/>

that they live so close. King County School Pool is an existing resource available to help parents form walking and carpooling groups. **Redmond, Bellevue, and Kirkland School Districts are using School Pool to help families arrange car pools**, but families at SPS cannot currently take advantage of this resource. To use School Pool, families need minor administrative assistance from the school district which is not currently provided. Providing the support to help parents and students connect with neighbors who attend the same school is a straightforward way to reduce the number of car trips to schools each day while also fostering stronger neighborhood and school communities. An Active Transportation Coordinator who could help families opt in to a school pool network would greatly increase the number of neighbor connections made.



3. WALK BOUNDARIES

The School Traffic Safety Walk Boundary Subcommittee has just completed a two year effort to update the walk boundaries around each elementary school. The walk boundaries had not been updated for several years. A review of the walk boundary maps showed that many maps were out of date and were not accurately reflecting existing conditions on the streets. Maps were also inconsistent, with elementary schoolers expected to cross arterials for one school but receiving busing to an adjacent school because the same arterial was considered too dangerous to cross.

The Walk Boundary Subcommittee reviewed the Walk Boundary Map for each school and checked it for accuracy with regard to crossing guard placement and conditions on the ground. SDOT has a rubric to score the difficulty of crossing intersections. At the Subcommittee's request SDOT evaluated and rated several intersections for each school to ensure that decisions about which streets could be crossed without assistance were consistent throughout the process.

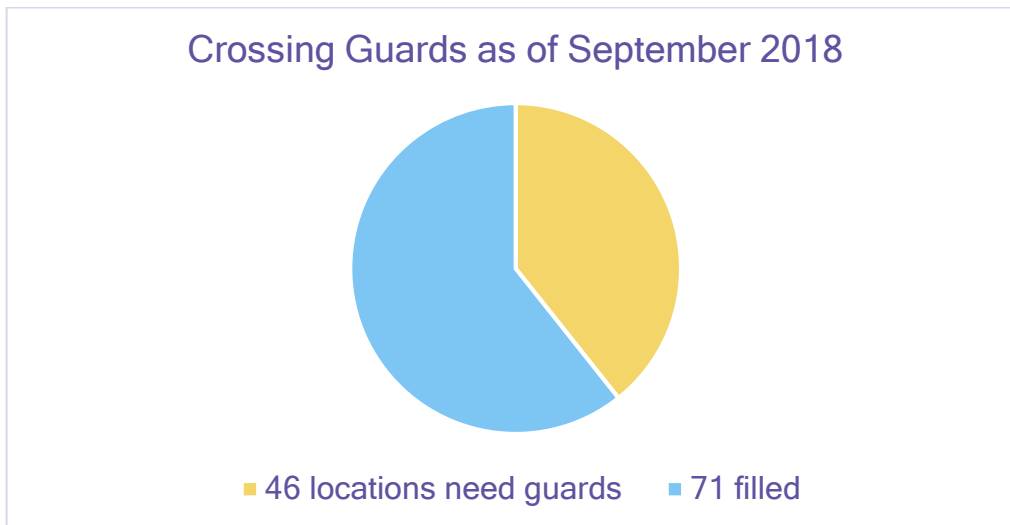
In some instances, the Subcommittee found that the old Walk Boundary Maps inappropriately required children to cross dangerous streets unaided, or to walk farther than one mile to school. In those cases, the committee reduced the walk boundary so that kids can receive busing in future years.

The majority of the changes that the Subcommittee made, however, were to expand the walk boundary. SDOT consistently works to implement safety improvements for pedestrians on arterial streets. There were many instances where SDOT improvements had made streets and intersections safe enough for children to start walking, and the Subcommittee was able to increase the Walk Boundary around a school so fewer kids will receive busing in future years.

The new Walk Boundary Maps will be implemented for the 2019-2020 school year.

4. CROSSING GUARDS

During the process of updating the Walk Boundary Maps it became apparent that Seattle Public Schools has a critical shortage of adult crossing guards. In September 2018 there were 71 crossing guard positions that were filled, and 46 open crossing guard positions. **This is a vacancy rate of 39% in a critical safety position.** Crossing guards are a core part of School Traffic Safety.



SDOT rates intersections for safety to determine guard placement

The Committee receives regular requests for additional guards. To respond to them, the committee relies on SDOT intersection ratings to bring consistency and equity to the process of allocating crossing guard resources.

SDOT scores intersections based on road type, number of lanes, traffic controls, sight distance, speed limit, and pedestrian facilities. SDOT rankings are used to determine whether an intersection is considered safe for kids to cross without an adult crossing guard. In some instances where pedestrian traffic is particularly high, such as immediately in front of a school, guards are also assigned to intersections with lower SDOT ratings based on feedback from parents, school staff, and crossing guards working nearby.

The Ask: The School Traffic Safety Committee has identified several key needs that could improve crossing guard implementation:

The perennial crossing guard shortage means that every school day in Seattle kids are required to cross 46 dangerous intersections without assistance in order to receive their education. Increased crossing guard recruitment and retention is urgently needed to allow kids to get to school safely.

More personnel and support needed

There is currently one SPS employee who manages the crossing guard program including recruitment, training, retention, performance evaluation, equipment distribution, and even substituting for absent guards. Yvonne Carpenter works heroically to make sure that the most dangerous intersections are staffed, but **it is unreasonable to expect one person to serve as manager and backup for so many positions.** When Yvonne was recently absent on medical leave, parents contacted the School Traffic Safety Committee asking why their crossing guard inquiries were going unanswered, and why new guards were not being on-ramped. This critical safety position requires additional staff support to ensure that the crossing guard program continues to function.

In addition to administrative back up, additional people to act as substitute guards are needed. Many crossing guards are elder citizens who experience health issues which require them to miss work. The Committee recommends establishing a pool of “floater” guards to fill in when regular guards are unavailable.

Some schools have had administrative staff such as secretaries train to be crossing guards so that they can act as backup crossing guards when a guard is out sick. Implementing this strategy district wide could be another way to provide crossing guard backup, but means the district would need a way to appropriately charge any overtime this caused. The School Traffic Safety Committee recommends that SPS actively explore all options to provide adequate backup for crossing guards.

Attracting and retaining crossing guards is a challenge. The job involves dangerous work outside in all weather for two non-consecutive hours each day. The pay is minimum wage. Additionally, crossing guards are paid less than bus monitors. In order to increase recruitment and retention the Committee recommends **increasing the hourly rate for crossing guards** to at least match the bus monitor rate and exploring the idea of allowing crossing guards to count commute time one-way, since they are required to commute twice a day in order to perform their jobs.

The School Traffic Safety Committee worked with SDOT, Seattle Police Department, and SPS to develop laminated recruitment fliers and post them at intersections with unfilled crossing guard positions. Since these fliers were posted there has been a dramatic increase in the number of crossing guard applicants.

During the process of updating the Walk Boundary Maps the Subcommittee noted many instances where a Walk Boundary could be increased if an adult guard could be located at a new intersection. These are locations where students living closer than 1-mile from their assigned school are receiving busing because unstaffed intersections with a high SDOT rating are located between them and the school. The Committee recommends that the need for busing could be reduced further if crossing guard recruitment and retention is improved to an adequate standard.

The crossing guard program historically was run by the Seattle Police Department, and certain guards were enthusiastic about that association. The Committee met with the Police in 2018 to discuss the possibility of recruiting guards for unfilled locations from the existing network of Community Police Academy graduates. As a result, the Police Department distributed information about applying to become a crossing guard to this network.



5. SCHOOL BUS WOES

Seattle Public Schools do not employ bus drivers. The work is contracted out. The current high cost of housing within the Seattle metro area limits the pool of people interested in split shift, part time jobs. Experienced drivers have been moving to take full time jobs with benefits at King County Metro and the other regional transit systems, resulting in a constant driver shortage.

Numbers as of November 2018:



54,000 SPS students

22,000 qualify for bus service

363 drivers needed for full staffing

340 drivers currently on staff

20 drivers absent each day

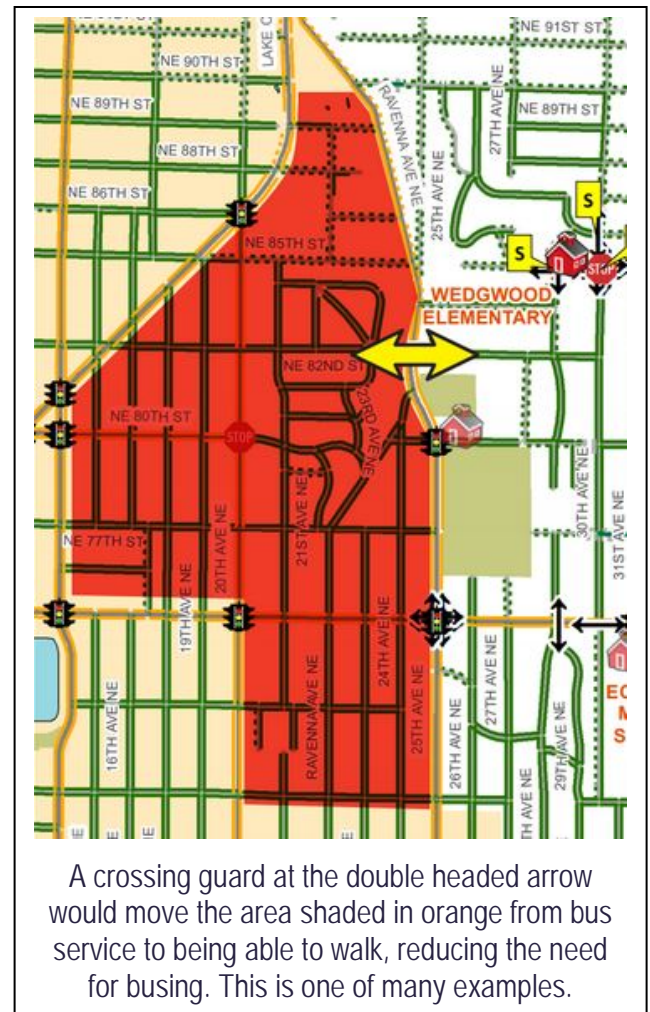
= 43 drivers short each day



Because of the driver shortage, many routes are seeing delays of up to three hours. This is a huge problem for Seattle families and kids. Kids' learning cannot be advanced when they are regularly missing hours of the school day. Much of SPS transportation staff time is taken up with trying to fill this gap and reply to the many angry parents and guardians.

Solving this intractable problem will require hard work that mostly falls outside the mandate of the STSC. However, the Committee suggests that the creation of an Active Transport Coordinator position and

additional staff to support the crossing guard program, as discussed earlier in this report, would contribute to solving the busing crisis. Hiring an Active Transportation Coordinator and additional staff to support the crossing guard program will be a step to reducing the number of children who are being bused. In the current situation increasing the number of available bus drivers is very difficult. On the other hand, reducing the number of kids who are bused due to solvable problems such as missing crossing guards is an achievable goal to address the bus driver shortage.



6. SCHOOL SPEED ZONE CAMERAS

Each month the Seattle Police Department generates a tally of the number of tickets issued by school speed zone cameras. The tally shows the total number of tickets for each school as well as the distribution of tickets between 6-10 miles per hour over the speed limit, 11-15 mph over, 16-20 mph over, and greater than 21 mph over the speed limit.

The Ask: use the data and funds from these cameras to fix the safety problems they reveal

To better understand safety needs at schools with these cameras, in 2017 the School Traffic Safety Committee began developing a spreadsheet to track changes in

the number of tickets at a given location over time. Different months of the school year have different numbers of school days, so comparing the ticket data from one month to the next does not give a meaningful picture of whether speeding at a given location is increasing or decreasing. The Committee’s spreadsheet compares ticket data to the same month in the previous year to get a better picture of changing conditions. It also ranks locations based on their average number of tickets and highlights any locations that show a sharp deviation from their average.

Location	YY	Month	Avg	Change from Avg	2018-19												2017-18			2017-16		
	Change	Rank	Avg		Sept 18	June 18	May 18	April 18	Mar 18	Feb 18	Jan 18	Dec 17	Nov 17	Oct 17	Sep 17	June 17	Feb 17	Feb 16				
Holy Family Elementary School																						
EB SW Roxbury St																						
# Violations	30%	13	19	142.7	27%	181	71	184	168	155	126	154	65	106	161	139	98	148	242			
6-10 over				100.9		129	43	132	117	112	87	107	53	78	113	102	71	106	163			
11-15 over				36.0		45	23	46	46	37	35	36	11	28	39	33	22	37	66			
16-20 over				5.6		7	5	6	4	6	4	11	1	0	8	4	5	5	12			
>21 over				0.2		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1			
WB SW Roxbury St																						
# Violations	-97%	26	13	175.1	-96%	7	90	147	195	252	150	192	62	180	256	261	168	223	269			
6-10 over				124.6		5	65	107	148	175	117	145	46	143	189	172	111	150	171			
11-15 over				41.3		1	24	35	40	66	30	42	16	39	54	74	45	62	50			
16-20 over				6.4		1	1	5	6	11	3	5	0	6	11	12	12	11	5			
>21 over				0.5		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	0			

An excerpt from the School Speed Zone Cameras spreadsheet

The spreadsheet shows that on average the fewest number of tickets are issued on S Orcas St at Dearborn Park Elementary School, 33.1 westbound and 34.5 eastbound, with the majority of these falling in the 6-10 mph over category. On the other end of the spectrum, the greatest number of tickets are issued on southbound 15th Ave S at Mercer Middle School,

with 826.6 average tickets. Southbound 24th Avenue East at Montlake Elementary School is typically the second highest location with an average of 709.1 tickets.

As the spreadsheet data becomes more robust over time the Committee plans to use it to track locations where conditions may be changing, and to identify problem locations that may warrant additional consideration for improvements by SDOT.

School Bus Paddle Fines

In September 2017, a program wherein cameras on some of the school buses serving Seattle children record when drivers fail to obey the law to stop and wait safely for children. The King County Sheriff's staff reviews the images and issues fines where violations are observed. School bus paddle ticket funds are a new source of revenue available to SPS. State law requires that these funds be used for school zone safety improvements.



2017-2018 revenue from the bus paddle fines was used to fund crossing guards. According to state law, crossing guards are a transportation expense which should be reimbursed by OSPI, however the reality is that the current OSPI funding formula emphasizes buses and excludes crossing guards. This leaves the district scrambling to fund this critical safety position.

It is still unclear exactly how much revenue SPS will receive from the stop paddle cameras in the coming years, however it is likely that revenues will be higher now that the program is fully implemented. In light of this new revenue source it seems like the ideal time to consider how the district can support children walking to school with crossing guards and an Active Transportation Coordinator.

The implementation of bus paddle cameras is an opportunity to examine how SPS can support children walking to school.



7. CONSTRUCTION & REHABILITATION REQUIREMENTS

Seattle Public Schools are Constantly Rebuilding

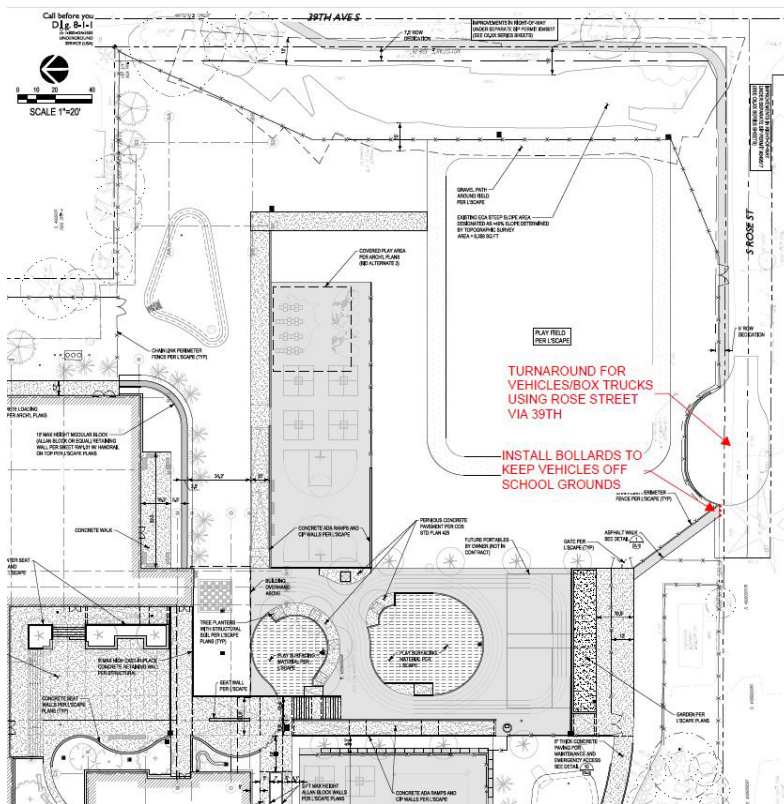
One of the School Traffic Safety Committee's core functions is to review proposed circulation patterns around new and renovated schools and provide input to the design teams and SDOT about potential safety issues before construction begins. In 2017 and 2018 the Committee reviewed plans for Wing Luke Elementary, Roosevelt High School, Lincoln High School, and Broadview Thompson K-8.

The Ask: Revise City of Seattle Code on street improvements around new and renovated schools

During this process the Committee observed SDOT requiring schools to build street improvements that were not aimed at improving traffic safety

for students, with costs that came out of funds designated for much needed school facilities.

One example of this is a box-truck turnaround that SDOT required as part of the improvements for Wing Luke Elementary, which will be used by commercial vehicles making deliveries to nearby residences. The Committee inquired with SDOT Street Use Division to get a better understanding of what requirements exist in the code. The response from SDOT indicated that requirements for schools should be limited to curbs, sidewalks, some curb ramps, street trees, and traffic calming measures such as crosswalks and rapid flashing beacons. This response is in clear conflict with actions we observed from SDOT during the Wing Luke project. *(continued on next page)*



SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
WING LUKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROJECT

Excerpt from a draft plan for Wing Luke Elementary showing SDOT's requested box truck turnaround impinging on the school's playground. After multiple requests by the School Traffic Safety Committee to remove this requirement were refused, SDOT eventually allowed a revised alignment that did not require using playground space, but still hampered the school's ability to optimize its traffic and security measures.

There is a related issue with the way that traffic studies are conducted when schools are being built or renovated. The traffic studies for schools use the same methodology that they would for any commercial development. The result is a plan focused on peak hour commuting capacity rather than the distinct traffic concerns of families and school children.

The School Traffic Safety Committee recommends that required street improvements around new and renovated schools should be focused on student and family safety, not on commercial vehicles, and that school traffic study methodology should focus on the modes of traffic utilized by school children: busing, walking, and biking in addition to car travel. The STSC calls for the City to adjust the DCI requirements to more equitably assess and assist the mobility and safety of all our neighbors, not just those in cars.

The Committee applauds the recent passage of CB 119398, which appears to be aimed at including a greater focus on multi-modal transportation in the City's requirements for traffic studies. However, the Committee would still like to see a specific emphasis on student transportation and peak traffic conditions at schools (which differ from peak times for commuters) incorporated into the upcoming Director's Rule. The Committee plans to follow the progress of drafting the Director's Rule associated with CB 119398, and to give input whenever possible.