



Left photo credit Margaret McCauley, Right SDOT

2022 Annual Report

Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee

Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee

Email: stsc@seattle.gov

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What is the School Traffic Safety Committee?

The City of Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee was created by Ordinance 104344 in 1975 and codified in SMC 3.80. It brings together Seattle Public Schools (a State agency), The City of Seattle, King County, and school communities to improve safe routes to school. This mixed volunteer and staff board of 11 members has representatives from Seattle Public Schools (SPS), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), and King County Metro. There are 5 volunteer positions. Volunteer members include pedestrian advocates, bicycle advocates, parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

All meetings are open to the public. Please come and join us!

What does the Committee do?

There is a complex array of details that add up to ensuring our children and neighbors have safe routes to school. The Committee was created to ensure that there are working relationships between the different organizations that each have a piece of the puzzle, and that there is a mechanism for any community member to raise school traffic safety issues and get a response informed by that multi-agency coordination.

The committee

- ▶ Mechanism for any community member to raise school traffic safety issues,
- ▶ Uses SDOT data to recommend new school crosswalk locations and crossing guard assignments,
- ▶ Reviews traffic circulation plans for new and renovated school buildings,
- ▶ Updates elementary school walk boundary maps
- ▶ Works to improve crossing guard recruitment,
- ▶ Connects SDOT, SPD, King County Metro, and SPS to improve collaboration on traffic safety issues,
- ▶ Addresses other school traffic safety issues as they arise.

When does it meet?

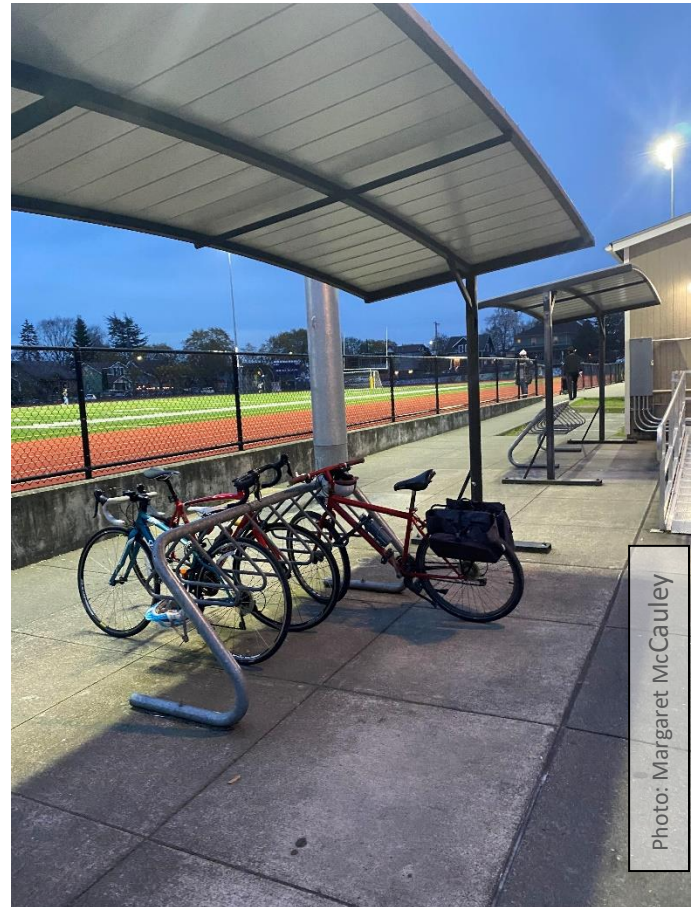
Meetings are open to the public and are generally held 8:30 - 10:30 AM the third Friday of every month.

The STSC is currently holding hybrid meetings, with participation options through the City's video meeting service and in person. The link to join online and the physical location are at:

<https://www.seattle.gov/school-traffic-safety-committee/meetings>

Meetings are often held at the school district administrative building, John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence (2445 3rd Ave S) and less often at Seattle City Hall, Room 370, 600 4th Ave, Seattle, WA 98104

The Committee has historically had one meeting a year on site at a school that is about to be or is being renovated. This is expected to resume in 2023 after a 3 year hiatus.



Garfield High School bike parking in use in the evening



Site visit to 16th Av S / Mercer Middle School

Top Needs for School Traffic Safety in 2022

Seattle Public Schools

- Reduce crossing guard vacancy rate from 39% → ZERO
- Comprehensively revise SPS Transportation Service Standards to include all students and all modes and to use current technology to improve planning and service

City of Seattle

- Revise City code to reflect education as the priority for school property
- Standardize SDOT street improvement requirements for school projects to focus on student safety
- Funding for SDOT sidewalk improvements to fill in gaps in Safe Routes to School

A Big Win: Crosswalk + Stop Sign Policy for School Zones

Most of Seattle's schools are on streets classified as 'residential'. In the past SDOT's policies did not respond to the traffic conditions around schools, treating all residential streets the same even though schools experience high traffic volumes around drop-off and pick-up times that are generally not seen on other residential streets. As a result SDOT's policies have restricted installing crosswalks and 4-way stop signs at corners near schools.



In 2022, SDOT changed requirements for both 4-way stop signs and crosswalks, making them much easier to install around schools.

With these changes Seattle Public Schools will be allowed to build crosswalks when schools are built, rather than having to wait years after construction and line up budget separately. Additionally, SDOT will now consider corners around schools on residential streets to be potential locations for 4-way stops signs. These changes to SDOT policies expand the traffic safety tool-kit on streets classified as residential and make it much easier to install basic pedestrian safety & traffic calming features around schools. Thank you SDOT!



Loyal Heights Elementary School families using a new crosswalk across 32nd Ave NW. Photo courtesy of Benjamin Meyer.

Another Big Win: School Streets program made permanent!

School Streets are SDOT's innovative program to create safe, low stress walking, rolling, waiting, and mingling areas adjacent to schools at arrival and departure times. The SDOT School Streets program offers schools an opt-in option to close a non-arterial block adjacent to the school to pass through traffic and open the block up to people walking, rolling, and biking. Started in the spring of 2021 as a pandemic response, this program continues as a permanent option for schools to expand the community space around their buildings at drop-off and pick-up times. This option is a big boost to building school communities, giving school communities the space to get to know each other through regular interactions.

Seeing these benefits in other school districts in North America and at Geneesee Hill Elementary School in West Seattle, the STSC had been advocating for school streets to be an easy to arrange option for other schools in the City. SDOT created a pilot program in 2021 and in 2022 it became permanent. Currently 14 blocks at 11 schools participate. STSC and SDOT expect more schools will opt-in as the program becomes familiar.

STSC encourages SDOT to build on its success by thinking creatively about street signage and/or other improvements that would communicate the nature of school streets more clearly than the moveable sandwich boards that are currently used. Permanent treatments could include chicanes, decorative pavement, colorful paint, planters, and more!



Whittier Elementary School Street after departure time. Photo: Margaret McCauley

Yet Another Big Win: SPS Safe Routes to School Coordinator Sara Colling started in April

Thank you to the City for paying for this important position.

Thank you SPS for getting Sara on board.

Her work revolves around 3 key goals:

1. Ignite a culture around active transportation that encourages physical activity, reduces congestion and risk around schools, strengthens school communities, and improves truancy. The SRTS Program Manager will provide consistent, central support in removing barriers to, and encouraging, walking, and biking to school.
2. Provide leadership and guidance to schools and their communities as they develop, test, and implement plans, building on successful models in Seattle and beyond.
3. Identify initiatives and programs that have been successfully developed and deployed at other school districts. This includes but is not limited to school pools, safe routes to schools, walking school buses, and other walk and ride share programs.

For starters she has created a new SPS webpage with resources specific to walking, biking, and rolling to school: <https://www.seattleschools.org/walk-bike-and-roll-to-school/>. She staffed 7 “Bike to School Day” events and worked with SPS and SDOT to broadcast bike to school stories. She submitted a WSDOT grant to expand the “All Kids Bike” program. She’s working with SDOT to bring City staff into

classrooms to collect input on the Seattle Transportation Plan. She also started work to bring King County Metro's RidshareOnline School Pool software to Seattle Public Schools. We look forward to supporting Sara as she focuses attention on 3 priority schools in the 2022-23 school year!

And an Exciting Development: Free Youth Transit Passes!

Thanks to recently allocated funding from the state, all transit will be free for youth 18 and under starting on September 1st! STSC applauds the state's commitment to serving the youth of our state and to expanding transit ridership. SPS and Metro are in dialogue about how to get free ORCA passes to all students.

Now Some Challenges...

Crossing Guards Needed

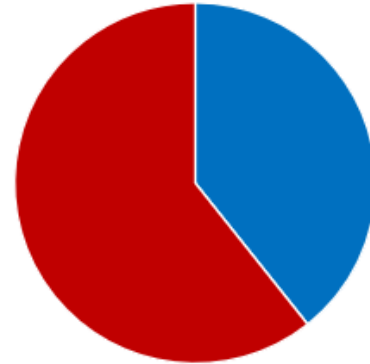
Prior to the pandemic a focus on raising the awareness that many paid crossing guard positions were vacant had led to more crossing guard applications and positions filled. However due to the long furlough during the pandemic the crossing guard vacancy rate shot back up at the start of the 2021-2022 school year. Previous success hiring crossing guards shows that these vacancies can be filled. SPS can help by removing an unnecessary hurdle:

SPS requires applicants to pay a \$55 background check fee upfront during the application process. This is a significant cost to folks who will be making \$34 per day as crossing guards. For retired applicants on fixed incomes this fee often results in significant delays bringing them on board, as they need to wait for their next month's social security check to be able to pay it. During that delay they are prevented from serving their communities and may look elsewhere for part time jobs. More importantly, kids are left crossing on their own at unsafe intersections even though a potential new hire is available.

SPS already recognizes that background check fees are a disproportionate burden for hourly applicants, and already waives them for most hourly staff, but not for crossing guards. By fixing this oversight SPS can speed crossing guard hiring for the cost of a few hundred dollars a year.

Crossing guard costs are paid with revenues from bus stop-paddle tickets, not out of the general fund. Eliminating the background check fee and hiring guards to fill every open position would be a clear win for SPS, students, and the school community.

Crossing Guards as of June 2022 **update**



■ 46 locations need guards

■ 71 filled

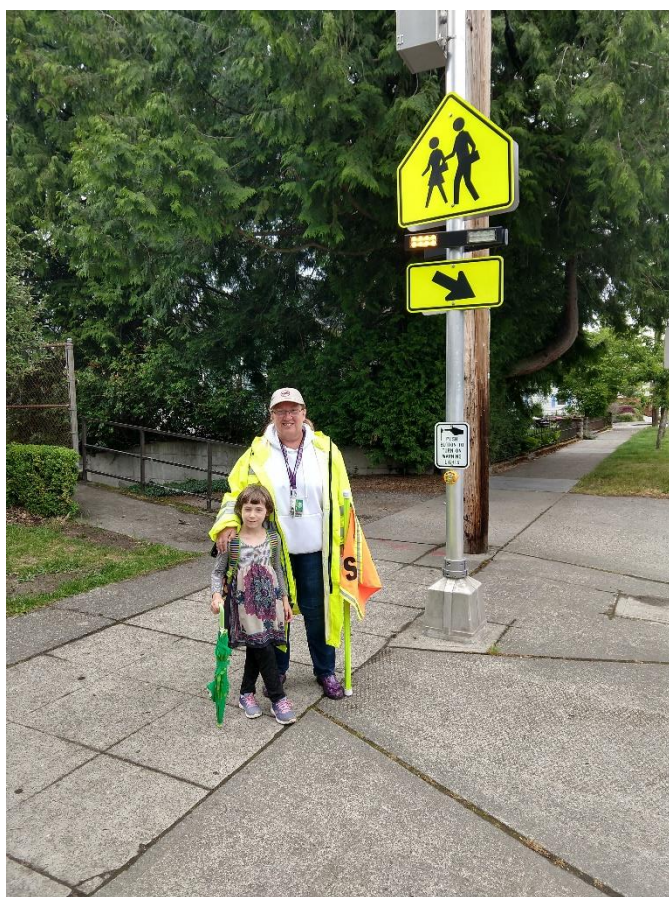
It's time to Update SPS Transportation Service Standards

The SPS Transportation Service Standards are ready for an update. Key opportunities include:

Inclusionary Transportation: Many special education students could be transported on general ed buses, allowing them to be mainstreamed with their peers and saving SPS substantial transportation costs. Families of special education students are eager to talk about how this could happen.

Addressing all Modes: Every student in SPS participates in transportation, but the service standards are currently focused on busing to the exclusion of other modes.

Busing as a Learning Support: In some instances, SPS would like to provide busing to kids who live in the walk zone in order to reduce truancy and habitual tardiness and help ensure students have an opportunity to get to school on time. Revising the service standards to set parameters for this type of busing would make it possible to be reimbursed by the state for these costs. A small number of bus routes already run for these reasons - currently SPS is not reimbursed for these transportation costs.



Using best practices in place in peer districts: Having a clear, easy way for families to indicate whether their student(s) will be using the bus will make route planning easier and more effective. Requiring GPS trackers on the (non-family) vehicles that transport students that communicate with mobile telephone apps to allow families to see where their students are will boost confidence and reduce the number of families who drive when bus arrivals are unknown and unreliable.

A Comprehensive Look at Bell Times: Updating the Transportation Service Standards is an opportunity to have an interactive discussion about bell times that weighs pros and cons for families and schools along with operational and budget needs at SPS.

Green Lake Elementary's long serving crossing guard, Miss Shirley, is a favorite with kids.

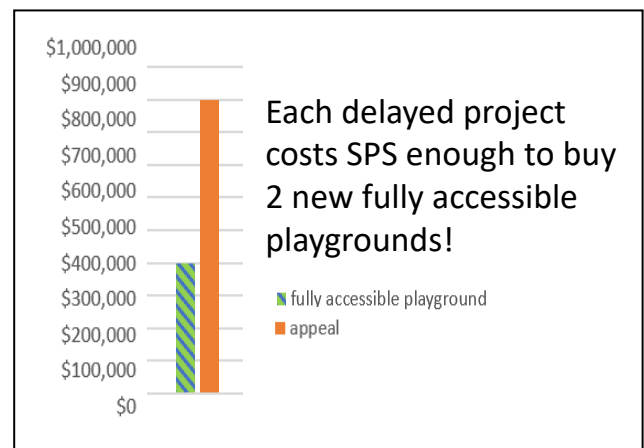
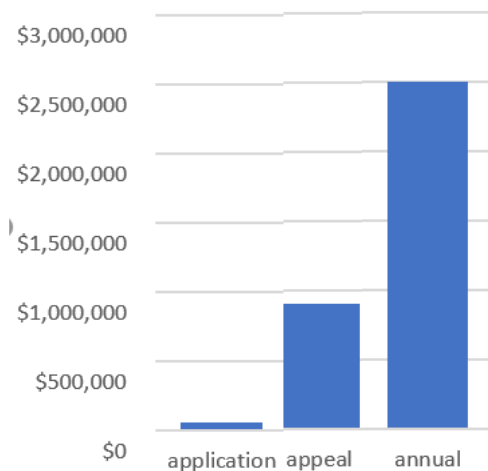
Photo: Mary Ellen Russell

Seattle City Land Use Code for Schools Is Out of Date

City of Seattle code sections 23.51(b).002 and 23.54 are badly out of date, with multiple requirements that do not reflect the reality of school sites in Seattle or the City's goals to reduce car trips and support multi-modal transportation. Current code requires SPS to keep HVAC equipment below the height cutoff for single family houses, to move existing on-street bus loading zones onto school sites, and to develop parking lots for more than 100 cars at each elementary school. **These code requirements are not realistic, and often could not be met even if the entire playground was paved over as a parking lot.** As a result SPS must seek departures on nearly every capital project. These departures come with significant costs and substantial delays.

- Each departure process = \$50,000 in consultant fees + additional \$ for City staff time (paid directly by Seattle Public Schools)
- Departures get appealed - Average appeal delay costs 1% of the project. 1% of Northgate Elementary replacement = \$900,000
- **Current code wastes ~\$2.5 million of taxpayer money each year**

These departures could be justified if they resulted in better school designs, but the reality is that the process has become so habitual that each departure decision uses the same boilerplate language. The City could save \$2.5 million of taxpayer money each year and speed up the delivery of classroom space by simply making that boilerplate departure language the code requirements.



Hope! CMs Pedersen & Strauss have started discussing code change with the mayor's office. With continued attention we can push this effort forward!

SDOT Can Be a Better Partner When New Schools Are Built

SDOT Should Make a 'No Surprises' Commitment to SPS

SPS construction and renovation staff have experienced multiple instances where staff turnover inside SDOT results in increased street improvement requirements very late in the process, when construction is underway. This inconstancy leads to un-needed change orders, delays delivering projects, and cost over-runs. These unnecessary delays and cost over-runs are borne directly by the public. **SPS would like a no-surprises commitment from SDOT, guaranteeing that new SDOT staff will abide by the written commitments made by previous staff working on projects**, so that SPS can have clarity about what street improvements will and will not be required before construction begins. Public schools are a public good. As a public agency SDOT should be mindful that their stewardship of public resources should include avoiding unnecessary delays and cost over-runs during public school construction.

Recent conversations with SDOT show that they are aware of this issue and working to correct it. STSC is hopeful that this issue will be resolved this year.

Focus SDOT SIP Requirements on School Traffic Needs

STSC has observed numerous instances where SDOT requires SPS to build street improvements that are not geared toward meeting the needs of the school community. STSC urges SDOT to develop a policy of treating SPS as a partner agency by focusing required street improvements on the needs of the school community, rather than requiring SPS to build expensive improvements to promote private car capacity.

As two public agencies charged with stewarding public resources, SDOT and SPS should work as partners to maximize the public benefit of each school project. Certainly SPS can and should continue to develop street improvements as part of its capital projects. **SDOT should develop a formal policy directing SIP reviewers to weigh educational goals and support of the school community as part of their review process**, and to refrain from requiring improvements that do not prioritize the traffic safety of the school community.

SDOT's Pedestrian Programs Need More Funding

Each year SDOT installs improvements that make it safer to walk to school, but many gaps remain

24% of Seattle's streets are missing sidewalks, including more than 2,400 blocks within ¼ mile of schools in the city. At its current rate SDOT builds about 25 blocks of sidewalks each year, enough to have sidewalks throughout the city in 100 years. City Council has the power to speed up sidewalk construction, and **a choice to prioritize sidewalk funding is also a choice to prioritize student safety.**

About half of the students in Seattle Public Schools are not eligible for busing. These students are expected to get themselves to school each day, walking or biking to school during rush in the dark. Their families frequently express concern that our streets just are not safe enough for kids to navigate on their own. With pedestrian deaths rising in our city now is the perfect time to demonstrate Seattle's commitment to Vision Zero and to student safety by increasing funding for sidewalk construction.



Working together to make Washington Middle departure time safe. Photo: Margaret McCauley

Summary: What can the School Board do to help?

1. Initiate a Comprehensive Revision to the Transportation Service Standards.
2. Let the City hear from you about revising code to reflect how schools are already built and about filling in gaps in walking infrastructure around schools.
3. Provide additional support to recruit, train, and manage crossing guards – waiving background check fees would be a good start!

Summary: What can the City Council do to help?

1. Update City Code to eliminate habitual departures for SPS projects and eliminate wasteful red tape.
2. Update SDOT policy to treat SPS as a partner and focus requirements on the transportation needs of school communities.
3. Increase the budget to fill in gaps in walking routes to schools.
4. Direct SDOT to develop effective physical markers for school streets.

We appreciate your help!

We appreciate the opportunity to serve on this committee.

In 2022-2023 We look forward to continuing collaboration with Seattle Public Schools and the City of Seattle to help students get safely to school!