

# CITY OF SEATTLE SCHOOL TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Photo Credit Anna Zivarts

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## Acronyms used in this report

OPCD	Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development
SDCI	Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
SDOT	Seattle Department of Transportation
SPD	Seattle Police Department
SPS	Seattle Public Schools
SRTS	Safe Routes to School
STSC	School Traffic Safety Committee
WSDOT	Washington State Department of Transportation

# 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, the City of Seattle, and community members 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, as well as volunteer members, including pedestrian and bicycle advocates, parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

All meetings are open to the public. [Please come and join us!](#)

## What does the committee do?

A complex array of details add up to ensure our children and neighbors have safe routes to schools. 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:

- provides a forum for community members to raise school traffic safety issues with SDOT, SPS, SPD, and King County Metro;
- helps connect professional staff across city, county, and state agencies to holistically address school traffic safety concerns;
- identifies needed crossing guard assignments using intersection safety data provided by SDOT;
- works to improve crossing guard recruitment;
- uses SDOT and SPS information to update elementary school walk boundary maps;
- reviews and advises on traffic circulation plans for new and/or renovated schools; and
- engages with and responds to emergent school traffic safety issues as they arise.

## Where does the committee meet?

[Meetings](#) are open to the public and are generally held 8:30-10:30 a.m. on the third Friday of every month. Meetings are hybrid and one can attend online through Teams and in-person at Seattle City Hall (Room 370, 600 4th Ave, Seattle, WA 98104).



Photo: Marilyn Firman

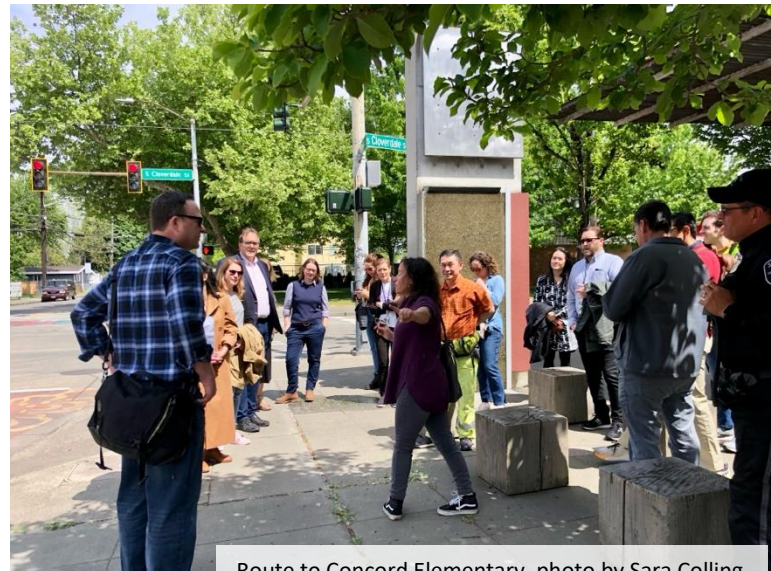


# Highlights of 2023-2024

## Cross-agency collaboration – Many successes!

As an interagency commission, STSC is uniquely positioned to help foster collaborative work and holistic problem-solving across government agencies.

- **School walking tours:** Based on a request made by a community member during one of the committee's meetings, in spring of 2023 STSC hosted a walking tour of **John Stanford Elementary and Concord Elementary**, two schools close to I-5 on/off ramps. The walking tour was attended by representatives from **SDOT, SPS, SPD, OPCD, and WSDOT**. This first-of-its-kind tour highlighted the significant traffic safety concerns and potential solutions for both schools.



Route to Concord Elementary, photo by Sara Colling

- **School walk zones:** Over the past year, STSC has worked with SPS to systematically review school walk zone boundaries for each elementary and K-8 school in the district. Working with SDOT, we've also developed an Intersection Scoring Rubric to identify both 1) potentially risky-to-cross intersections that may need to be excluded from walk boundaries, and 2) intersections where safety improvements have made those intersections more crossable for students on the way to school. The good news is that steady safety work by SDOT and collaborators has allowed for re-scoring and opening routes.
- **STSC, SPS, and SDOT coordination:** After advocacy from the Committee, SDOT funded a Safe Routes to School Program Coordinator position embedded within Seattle Public Schools. The coordinator has been in their role since August 2023 and meets at least weekly with the SDOT Safe Routes to School team to provide wraparound support for families to walk and bike at equity-priority schools. Here are some examples of this collaboration:



- John Muir Elementary and Wing Luke Elementary held their first walk to school punch card encouragement campaign. If students joined the walking school bus a minimum number of times during October's Walk and Roll to School Month, they received a free prize. SDOT provided the materials and prizes and SPS led the coordination and school communications. The school walk leaders reported an increase in participation at both schools with the campaign.
- A staff member at Martin Luther King Jr Elementary reached out to ask for traffic calming outside the school. Based on this input, SDOT is working to install two all-way stops to support the school.
- STSC wrote a letter of support for the Alki site development plan throughout the appeals process. It was helpful for SPS to have the committee's support and acknowledgement of

the traffic safety implications of additional parking as a tradeoff for early learning walking infrastructure.

- The Safe Routes to School coordinator also makes sure that maps of crossing guard vacant/filled positions are up to date and shareable for use in conjunction with the SDOT walk maps, facilitating this routine yet important inter-agency data flow and collaboration.
- **King County Metro and SDOT coordination:** After SDOT staff visited classrooms at Mercer Middle School to collect input through a model building activity (another partnership between SPS and SDOT), they heard from students that they wanted the bus to come more often to their school and to better align timing for when they get out of school. SDOT shared this with the Metro's STSC representative. In response to this request, Metro was able to add two new trips to Route 107 that aligned with the school's bell schedule. Metro also adjusted the Route 36 schedules to ensure trips operating around the bell times were served by larger articulated buses to maximize capacity. These changes also benefited students attending Cleveland High School.
- **SPS and SDOT Coordination:** In previous years, school zone beacons have not operated for summer school sites. In 2024, SPS improved its internal processes to identify summer school host sites earlier in the spring. This gave SDOT the lead time they needed to reprogram school zone flashing beacons to operate for summer school locations.
- **SDOT coordination with private and public schools:** The School Streets program continued to expand as additional private and public schools requested SDOT approval and support for traffic calming measures in their immediate vicinity.



School zone beacon; photo SDOT

## Working with the City to update codes and regulations

STSC works with SPS and SDOT to address site-specific concerns, work that allows SDOT to evaluate current policies and update them as needed.

- **All-way-stops:** This year, based on a request from James Baldwin Elementary for an all-way-stop intersection, SDOT updated its guidelines for such interactions to grant the school a much-needed safety improvement. This built on SDOT's recent work updating its all-way-stop guidelines, as the condition at James Baldwin had not been included in SDOT's previous updates. STSC applauds SDOT for quickly expanding and updating their policy to meet real world conditions!
- **School parking requirements:** Since 2022, STSC and the SPS capital project team have been working with the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) staff to update outdated city codes that cost taxpayers millions of dollars annually. City of Seattle code [Chapter 23.51B](#) (on public schools in residential areas) and [Chapter 23.54](#) (on parking requirements) are outdated remnants that reflect car-centric thinking that is simply not applicable to our urban schools today.



Are we there yet?

- To comply with the code as written, schools will have to pave yards and playgrounds to provide parking and cannot update HVAC systems on school roofs due to height limits, among other limitations.
- This requires SPS to apply for “special departures”, a process that not only adds time and costs to the projects but also allows anyone to further delay the process by paying a small fee to challenge the outcome in court. This challenge system has been abused by a small number of individuals to deliberately delay school construction.
- STSC has been supporting SPS staff in their work with SDCI to draft code revisions that will better reflect the City’s interests, planning best practices, and SPS’s needs. Under the current timeline, SDCI and Department of Neighborhoods expect to submit their recommendations for final legislation to the Mayor in the fall of 2024 or soon thereafter. STSC is looking forward to providing feedback on this important project and supporting these efforts.

## Advocacy efforts

The committee regularly writes letters to advocate for changes that would benefit Seattle schools and the safety of the kids who attend them. Below are some letters that the committee sent during the past year, which can be found on the new [STSC correspondence webpage](#):

1. Support for Alki Elementary parking requirement modification
2. Support for the Seattle Transportation levy package
3. Support for Aurora updates and request for additional at-grade crossings
4. Support for the expanded use of school zone speed cameras
5. Support for SB 5873 providing adequate and predictable student transportation across the state



Photo: Margaret McCauley



## Reducing crossing guard vacancy rates

### Investigating funding issues

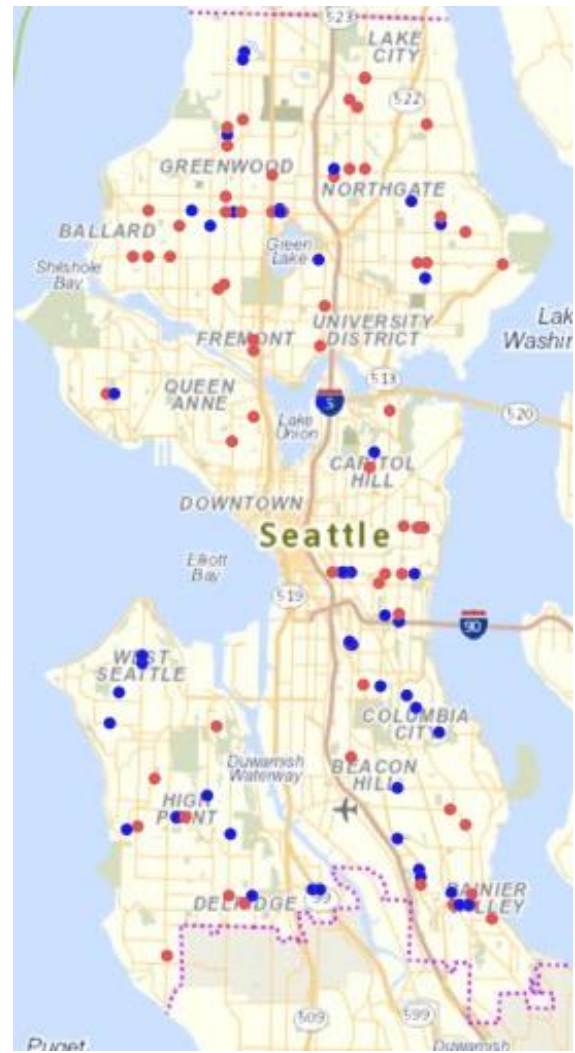
Per [RCW 28A.160.160](#), the state must fund "transportation services" for students living within the walk area or one mile of their school, comprised of:

- the coordination of walk-to-school programs,
- the funding of crossing guards, and
- matching funds for local and state transportation projects intended to mitigate hazardous walking conditions.

Despite this clear language and legislative mandate, state funding has not been provided in recent enacted operating budgets. Seattle Public Schools and other districts throughout the state are thus required to cover crossing guard wages using local revenue, fundraising, and other means; ask community members to volunteer their time as crossing guards; or simply allow positions to remain vacant, thus putting their students in danger.

### Monitoring vacancies

STSC evaluates safety conditions for elementary school walk zones and determines which intersections require crossing guards to allow young students to cross safely. As of July 2024, **almost 55% of all crossing guard posts are vacant**, an increase of 15% from June 2023. This high vacancy rate represents a significant traffic safety issue for Seattle students.



Dots indicate locations where crossing requires an adult guard. Red dots are not currently staffed.



Photo Credit: SDOT

# School Traffic Safety Committee objectives for 2025 and beyond

1. Regularly review and update walk zone boundaries and walk zone maps.
2. Add youth representation to STSC committee meetings, discussions, and work.
3. Continue to integrate with WSDOT to resolve traffic problems that cross City and State authority; establish ongoing WSDOT participation in STSC.
4. Send a formal letter of feedback once draft city code updates and design guidelines are released - make special note of the drawback of current parking requirements and convoluted appeals system.
5. Continue to explore how to make Seattleites aware of STSC as a resource and venue.

## What we need from our partners to be successful

### Seattle Public Schools

1. Reduce crossing guard vacancy rate from 55% to 0%.
2. Initiate a continuous rolling process for walk zone reviews to keep them up to date.
3. Remove barriers so that parents, kids, and other non-staff community members can advocate for bike racks at and near schools - create a clear path for existing schools to add bike parking.
4. Institutionalize Safe Routes to School as a part of School Board Policy 3405 on Student Wellness and encourage schools to adopt Safe Routes to School as a part of their Comprehensive Site Improvement Plans.
5. Continue to build out systems for people to get involved – in traffic safety at their school and in their neighborhood, showcasing volunteer opportunities, support for people who want to create walk and bike groups - and make doing so feel safe and supportive.



Overflowing bike rack at Thurgood Marshall Elementary. Photo: Margaret McCauley

### City of Seattle and Seattle Police Department

1. Operationalize the work to review tickets from stop-paddle cameras on school buses. SPD, City of Seattle, and school district officials must work together to re-start this key safety measure.
2. Get hotspot patrols back in high-risk areas to adjust parent and other driver behavior. Like speed zone tickets, police presence is an effective short-term measure, and STSC will work with SPD and SDOT to figure out physical adjustments for long-term fixes.
3. Support the school construction code change over the finish line! SDCI has been working for more than a year on a code update that will cut unnecessary red tape and streamline school construction permits. Getting this code change finalized will save taxpayers more than \$2.5 million a year in school construction budgets.
4. Focus on joint SDOT/WSDOT responses to unsafe traffic near freeways. In the past, these traffic issues have been dismissed by both SDOT and WSDOT separately. Build on existing collaboration to create comprehensive responses to dangerous traffic near freeway on- and off-ramps.





## WA State Legislature & King County Metro

1. Fund school crossing guards as required by current state law.
2. Prioritize transportation funding for public transit, Safe Routes to Schools, and walking and rolling infrastructure over increasing car infrastructure.
3. Invest in Vision Zero.
4. Focus on joint SDOT/WSDOT responses to unsafe traffic near freeways. In the past these traffic issues have been dismissed by both SDOT and WSDOT separately. Build on existing collaboration to create comprehensive responses to dangerous traffic near freeway on- and off-ramps.
5. Support Metro's ongoing adjustment of routes and stops to accommodate students.

## Public support for systemic change and culture shifts in safety

1. Promote bike buses and other non-car activity in the streets to help change driver behavior and expectations.
2. Emphasize walking, biking, rolling as part of the transportation experience (transportation isn't just cars) and emphasize the joy in those other non-car ways of moving around.
3. Participate in the cultural shift and visibility of these other movement types in addition to helping with engineering, road safety, and other physical aspects of safety.

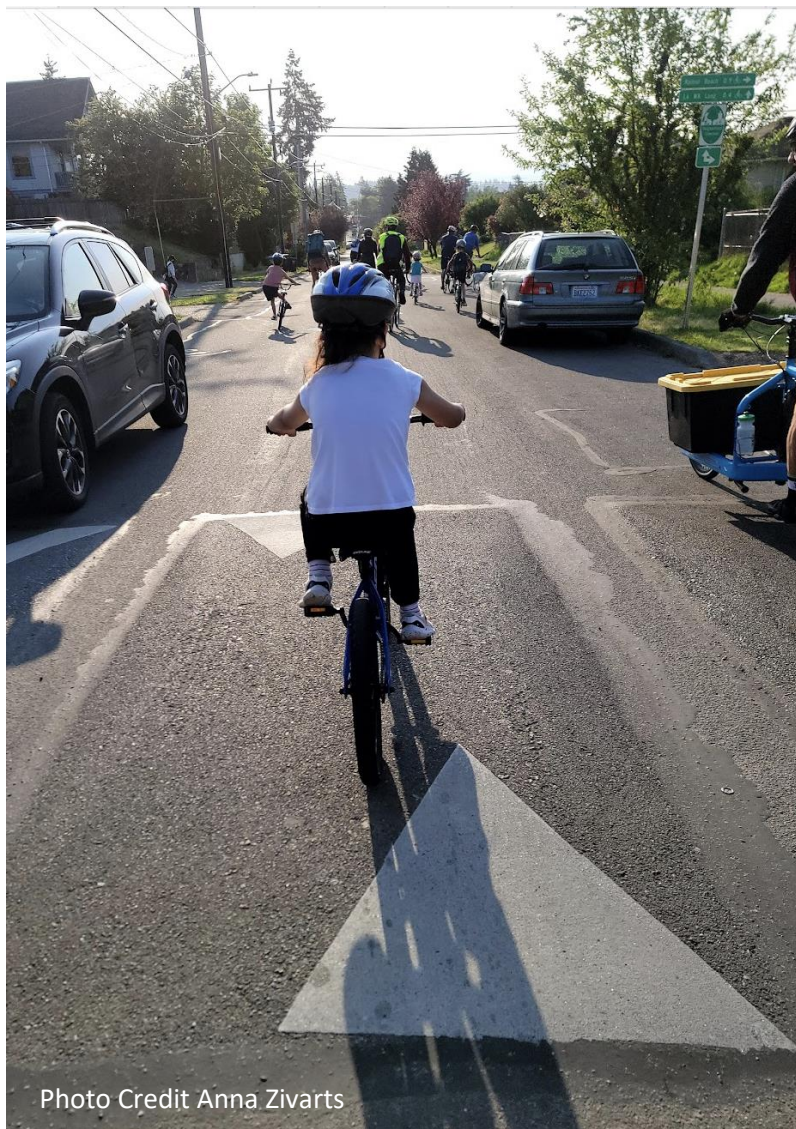


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