

Advisory Committee on Transportation Choices (ACTC)

January 9, 2019
Approved minutes

In Attendance:

Nancy Van Doren, School Board

APS Appointees

John Armstrong, Chair
Janeth Valenzuela, Vice Chair
Rose Breyault, Parent
CC Clark, Parent
Josh Folb- SPED Parent
Catherin Frum, Teacher
Paine Gronemeyer, Student
Erik Healy, AP Career Center
Elizabeth Kiker, ES Parent
David McBride, MS Principal
John Mickevice, APS
Commuter

County Appointees

Gillian Burgess (BAC)

Staff

John Chadwick, APS – F&O
Kristin Haldeman, APS-MMTP
Lauren Hassel, APS - SRTS
Elizabeth Denton, ACCS -ATP
Jim Larsen, ACCS
Lynn Rivers, DOT-Transit Bureau
Christine Sherman, DOT-TE&O
Ritch Viola, DOT-Planning

Public: Rachel Goldstein, Abingdon parent; Maureen McMorrow, Abingdon parent

Chair Armstrong welcomed attendees and attendees introduced themselves.

November minutes were approved.

1. Public Comment:

Ms. McMorrow spoke on behalf of Abingdon parents who live in Fairlington and choose to walk to school although bus service is provided. They and other bus-eligible students live across 395 from Abingdon and cross the bridge over the highway on foot or by bike to get to school. They are also forming walking school buses.

The number of students walking and biking is effectively eliminating the need for 1 of the 2 buses serving the neighborhood. As a result, they are helping APS and Arlington reduce costs, decrease its carbon footprint, and increase walking.

Ms. Clark asked for a definition of walking school buses. Ms. McMorrow explained that walking school buses are in use at several Arlington schools and involve students walking together with one or more adults, picking up students as they go, to reach school in the morning and return home in the afternoon.

There are multiple walking school buses at Abingdon now and families would like to formalize a walking school bus for the route along 34th to Abingdon St. In closing, Ms. McMorrow indicated that Abingdon families are on board with APS transportation priorities and pleased to do their part.

2. Updates:

- a. Carlin Springs improvements** – Christine Sherman (AC-TE&O) provided a progress update on elements of the implementation plan. Several of the short-term recommendations are already completed or are slated to be started in the coming months, including 5th Road curb extensions and widening of the Campbell ES sidewalk (summer). **APS will check to see if Campbell will be used for summer programming.*

In addition, LED lights are coming but will not be a drastic change in “wattage”/brightness. There are several driveway ramps along Carlin Springs Road that are no longer in use. These gaps will be filled in over the summer; all are within existing right of way so no easements are required.

Ms. Sherman mentioned that she and a handful of TE&O staff will attend the Vision Zero session of the NACTO Conference in DC on January 13.

On behalf of families living along Carlin Springs Road, Mr. Armstrong asked how to address overgrowth along sidewalks. Letters were to be sent to homeowners about managing overgrowth but Janeth Valenzuela stated that neighbors did not receive letters.

Gillian Burgess suggested the County's *Report a Problem* tool as one means of requesting action, though Sidewalks are not an option on the tool.

Ms. Sherman requested specific locations of the overgrowth so that she can refer the request to the appropriate department or departments.

- b. TDM** – Elizabeth Denton provided background on Arlington Transportation Partners (ATP), which works with 4700+ APS employees to promote transportation options. She reported that the APS TDM benefit has been reinstated and more than 400 staff have signed up since December 17.

Ms. Denton has been conducting presentations at schools and is planning a Staff Commute Challenge in March. She mentioned an article that appeared in StreetsBlog USA citing Arlington's work with APS staff on TDM, which also was cross-posted in the National Safe Routes to School newsletter.

Ms. Burgess noted that Arlington has been named #17 for bicycling nationwide.

Catherine Frum asked how many staff had signed up for the TDM subsidy before it was suspended. Kristin Haldeman recalled the number was 500-600 staff members. Sixteen percent of current enrollees selected the bicycle subsidy. Ms. Haldeman added that staff at Yorktown High School asked about requesting a Bikeshare station.

- c. MTP Bike Element Update**

Ritch Viola presented on the County's work to update the Bike Element of the Master Transportation Plan and asked the Committee to encourage community members to provide input on the draft. He distributed hand-outs with specifics on workshops on January 14 and 22, a webinar on January 15, and online channels to weigh in. He noted that schools are a big part of the network of bike facilities in the County and stressed the importance of getting input from APS staff and families.

Mr. Armstrong asked if the draft includes anything about bicycle education in schools; Mr. Viola indicated the focus is more on public education. Ms. Burgess reiterated the importance of providing input now because “if it's in the plan, it will get done” and some improvements could even be paid for by developers. Elizabeth Kiker noted that cyclists and non-cyclists should weigh in, whether about what would make them bike more, what they note as a driver or walker, and any other observations.

The County would like to receive comments by January 22. Public hearings for the draft plan will take place in March and April, with Board action slated for June. Overview posted on ACTC website.

d. Elementary School Boundary Process

Ms. Haldeman shared transportation updates on schools affected by the boundary process: Abingdon, Barcroft, Drew, Henry (Fleet), Hoffman-Boston, Long Branch, Oakridge and Randolph. For these schools, rising 5th graders will be grandfathered for 2019-20 – with transportation -- and siblings may join them for that school year only. Transfers could be an option if families want to keep younger siblings enrolled after grandfathering year.

Ms. Haldeman described walking with parents of Henry students who will be moving to Drew to help identify options for continuing to walk to school next year. The intersection of Walter Reed and Glebe Road is particularly challenging, and the County engineer and outreach staff who joined APS staff and parents on the walk are exploring possible improvements. APS also plans to provide recommendations and resources to parents who want to keep walking, such as maps, safety tips and walking school bus guidelines.

Mr. Armstrong asked if the number of walkers has increased or decreased as a result of boundary changes. Ms. Haldeman explained that, while walkability was one of the goals of the boundary process, most of the changes affected outskirts of zones so there are not a lot of new walkers.

Ms. Haldeman also noted that planning unit changes affected some option school “feeder zones,” particularly for Claremont and Key Immersion Schools.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ms. Haldeman announced the resignation of APS Transportation Director Angel Garcia-Ablanque. Kimberly Wilks is serving as Acting Director, and a search is under way for a successor.

3. School Board Work Session

Ms. Haldeman gave an overview of the outline for the upcoming School Board Work Session on Transportation presentation. Last Spring, the School Board adopted the VA School Board Association structure for policies, and as part of the realignment, staff are reviewing all policies and Policy Implementation Procedures (PIPs). Facilities & Operations has been reviewing the current Transportation Policy and its PIP and will discuss some of the areas in need of revision at the work session scheduled for January 22.

School Board member Nancy Van Doren explained the need to look at the current Transportation policy with a goal of maximizing efficiency and that one approach to that end could be a mass transit model with aggregated stops.

Ms. Van Doren also provided some background on past APS experiences with changes to the bus system, emphasizing the importance of conducting outreach to ensure understanding, convey the rationale and provide families with sufficient lead time to absorb changes. She reiterated that APS needs to anticipate adjustments from the perspective of APS families as part of the policy review process, noting that four of the five current School Board members were not serving in 2012, the last time APS initiated a major transportation change.

Ms. Haldeman elaborated on Ms. Van Doren’s remarks with the following analogy: the School Board sets the policy – or the “WHY.” The Superintendent/ staff determine the PIPs – or the “HOW” – in relation to that policy.

The work session agenda will include:

- an overview of the current transportation Policy and PIP;
- quick review of a pre-sent Transportation 101 presentation;

- discussion of operational goals for the bus system and APS' operational priorities to address those goals; and,
- next steps for stakeholder engagement with an eye toward returning to the board in June with policy revisions.

There are some key policy statements that are not in the current policy and there are elements in the policy that are better suited for a PIP. The current PIP is quite long and tries to cover a lot of ground; it should be broken up into separate documents and include alignment with other departments (e.g. Teaching & Learning on field trips).

Ms. Haldeman noted that since many Board members are relatively new and not as familiar with the workings of the bus system, they will be sent a “**Transportation 101**” presentation prior to the work session that includes:

- Bus System Overview
- Ridership Statistics
- Bus Productivity Data (how full are the buses..)
- Ongoing Challenges
 - Sheer number of trips (400+) and stops (~2500)
 - Increasing traffic volumes
 - Bell times too close together
 - Long routes & early pick ups
 - Underutilized buses
 - On time issues
 - Transportation planning for students with special needs
 - Constrained budget limits fleet size
 - Parking for buses

With respect to related actions that impact bus efficiency, Ms. Haldeman indicated that strategic changes to school bell times could make a major impact on efficiency. Currently, there is no policy guiding the development of bell times. Thus, current bell times, which were developed in the early 2000s and are scattered across school levels (elementary, middle and high) and types (option, neighborhood). John Chadwick noted that if changes to bell times are considered as part of this review, they will look at the actual bell times but not the current order.

Ms. Burgess commented that research says middle school students need more sleep and some schools have changed times to reflect that research. Mr. Chadwick offered to send bell time reports from the last time changes were made (2005) to ACTC Chair. For the Work Session, they will indicate that they are looking at bell times and that further research will be part of the plan.

Special Education (SPED) transportation planning also plays a role in bus service efficiency. SPED is the only type of bus transportation that is mandated by law. Bus service for general education students is not mandated by law. (***Note – transportation for homeless students also is legally required.*) However, in working with special education families, it appears there are several areas in need of improvement. She added that she has been working with the SEPTA president to distill information from a Fall work session into an action plan that includes steps to improve the delivery of special education transportation. Of note, is that there is no PIP on SPED transportation to help guide parents through the process. Creating one would help clarify steps and expectations on all sides.

Josh Folb recommended consideration of bus service that includes SPED AND general education students riding together (SPED students riding on non-SPED buses) where possible. Ms. Haldeman noted that reverse inclusion would also be considered (general education students riding on SPED buses)

Operational Goals

Ms. Haldeman then outlined the following Operational Goals for maximizing school bus efficiency.

- Safe bus ride
- Safe stop location (for students and public)
- On-time performance
- Limited ride time
- Efficient use of resources/road system

She noted that one of the trade-offs of meeting these goals could be consolidated school bus stops.

Mr. Folb suggested that APS consider establishing bus stops with signage so they become a fixture. Ms. Haldeman agreed that fixed stops and fixed routes would help with efficiency but members noted that security concerns remain if stop locations are marked/publicized.

Operational Priorities

Ms. Haldeman then outlined the following Operational Priorities to meet the above stated goals:

- Reduce yellow bus travel time
- Increase on-time performance
- Improve bus productivity
- Integrate with transit
- Improve SPED transportation (integration/efficiency)

Mr. Folb motioned to approve these Operational Goals and Priorities, and Ms. Clark seconded. ACTC members voted unanimously to support these goals and priorities.

Ms. Clark noted that availability of transportation can be a deciding factor in family decision-making around APS opportunities (option schools, programs, etc.) If transportation is not available or more limited than what is currently provided, families need to know before they apply to or enroll in an option school or program. Communication about level of service is needed *before* students enroll. She also added that if bus routes and stops are made public, it helps families know what to expect. If routes and stops are fixed, then there is less confusion and less burden on staff from year to year. There is also community benefit in having fewer stops to minimize noise, flashing lights and other disruptions in residential neighborhoods.

Ms. Haldeman noted that Transportation will be working with other APS offices to develop a brief survey of bus-eligible families regarding use of bus transportation to inform evaluation and determination of next steps and conduct stakeholder engagement. Ms. Burgess offered support in promoting survey and encouraging responses.

Ms. Haldeman noted that the School Board Work Session will be online and that ACTC members are welcomed to attend or watch via cable TV.

4. Bus Efficiency

The group discussed what 'efficiency' means in the context of the bus system and how the goals and priorities relate to it.

There are several 'efficiency' projects in the works Ms. Haldeman discussed with the Committee. To use the Drew route configuration as an example, APS will begin to look at student (or housing) density to identify potential locations for consolidated stops. Given the underutilized capacity on many option school routes, it makes sense to collect a number of students in one place and limit the number of stops on a route. This will in turn limit the ride time on the bus and give the driver the time needed to make it to school on time.

As an example, Ms. Haldeman reviewed the pilot APS conducted in the summer of 2018. The pilot consolidated bus stops for middle and high school students for the five weeks of summer school. Families received notice of the pilot in advance. According to students, families and Transportation staff, the system worked well. The buses picked up many students at fewer stops. Ride times were reduced, and staff reported no on-time issues.

In terms of innovations in bus efficiency, Boston Public Schools (BCPS) initiated an RfQ-style *Transportation Challenge* to reduce its \$110M transportation budget. MIT won the challenge and developed an algorithm to optimize stops and then optimize routes from those stops. In the first year, BCPS saved about 8% of its budget. Denver created its *Success Express*, which is a shuttle bus circulating between all schools in a section of the City, to address attendance issues. All grades ride the bus.

Elizabeth Denton asked whether bus transportation could be used by APS employees as well as students. Mr. Chadwick noted that staff would need to arrive before students arrive, but a shuttle could work.

Ms. Haldeman described her work with the special education community on improving SPED transportation service. She is working with the SEPTA president to synthesize the results of an October workshop APS held with SEPTA to create an action plan and timeline to address the coordination between Special Education and Transportation. One recommendation was to make “opting out” of SPED transportation an option that could be re-instated on parent request without re-convening an IEP Committee.

Finally, with respect to integrating with transit, Ms. Haldeman shared information about Portland, ME and Minneapolis, MN – both of which do not use yellow buses for high school transportation, rather provide their students with free transit passes. She also cited Justice High School in Fairfax, which offers free Connector, CUE and some Virginia Metrobus routes to students. She and Lynn Rivers have spoken with the Fairfax planner who worked on the project who reported that anecdotal information suggests student passes are showing a positive effect on drop-out and accident rates. Students are staying in school longer, possibly to keep the pass, and teenage crash rates have gone down, presumably because they are driving less/taking the bus more.

5. ART Bus Pilot

Ms. Haldeman shared plans for an ART Bus pilot to support high school bus routes. She noted that since ART buses alone would not suffice, adding Metrobus would help. Ms. Rivers reported that APS has two times the number of buses as ART so there would still be a need for school buses. She added that Arlington County receives operating assistance from the state for public transportation so the County is obligated to continue to provide *public* transportation, meaning that all school-serving routes also must serve other community members.

The proposed ART bus pilot would involve Career Center students. Next steps include:

- Review ART and bell time schedules for alignment
- Determine implementation parameters
 - o Eligible if in walk zone
 - o Terms of service
- Develop budget
- Conduct outreach
- Set implementation schedule

Mr. Armstrong asked whether they would get rid of yellow bus entirely or gradually “wean” off. Ms. Haldeman indicated the latter, noting that we already have iRide card and existing relationships to build on.

Mr. Folb moved to support further exploration of the idea and process outlined above.
seconded, and the Committee voted unanimously to support the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Next meeting:

March 6, 2019

Syphax 354/356, 7-9 pm