

Advisory Committee on Transportation Choices (ACTC)

September 22, 2020
Approved minutes

In Attendance: Nancy Van Doren, School Board liaison

APS Appointees

Josh Folb- Sp.Ed. Parent,
Chair
Elizabeth Kiker, ES parent,
Vice Chair
Catherine Frum, Teacher
John Mickevics, APS Staff
Janeth Valenzuela, Parent

County Appointees

Gillian Burgess (BAC)
Eric Goodman (PAC)

Staff

John Chadwick, APS F&O
Kristin Haldeman, APS-MMTP
Lauren Hassel, APS-SRTS
Kim Wilks, APS-Transportation Svcs
Dennis Leach, DOT, Dir.
Christine Baker, DOT-TE&O
Lynn Rivers – DOT-Transit
Hui Wang, DOT-TE&O

Other attendees: Melissa McMahon, Arlington County Commuter Services; Jeff Chambers, APS Design & Construction; Juan Gordon, APS BAC Liaison; Adam Rasmussen, APS FAC Liaison

The September 2020 ACTC meeting was held via MS Teams due to the COVID-19 emergency. The meeting was recorded.

Chair Folb opened the meeting with some housekeeping items related to meeting virtually and called roll to facilitate introductions.

The ACTC approved minutes from the June 2020 meeting.

1. Updates

Kristin Haldeman provided a brief update on the schedule for the Fall boundary process to address the new elementary school at Reed coming on-line in Fall 2021.

She then described a project Elizabeth Denton had sent our way. The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT), for which Elizabeth now works, leadership program will conduct a project to help APS staff with their return to school commutes in light of COVID-related changes.

Christine Baker updated the ACTC on Vision Zero progress. Target date for adoption has been pushed back to Spring 2021 due to pandemic delays. Next round of public engagement is underway. Asking for ACTC assistance in getting the word out and sharing into communities. There are two upcoming on-line public meetings: one in English and one in Spanish.

2. Revisions to TDM Use Permit Conditions

Ms. Haldeman, joined by Melissa McMahon from County Commuter Services and Jeff Chambers, Dir., APS Design & Construction, presented work she and the County have been doing to update the TDM section in the County's Use Permit conditions.

Arlington County zoning requirements include a tool called a Use Permit (from the website): "The Zoning Ordinance distinguishes between uses permitted "by-right" and uses allowed by "special exception," with a use permit being a form of special exception. Use permits are required for land

and building uses outside the rights of the ordinance in certain zoning districts (separate from Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) use permits). Use permits provide a process for considering and approving such uses, subject to special conditions particular to the character of the use.”

Schools are subject to Use Permits, and when APS constructs at a school site, we go through this process whether we are building a new school or adding on. To obtain a Use Permit, the developer (APS) agrees to a set of generally standard conditions ranging from the extent of land disturbance, to tree protection, to stormwater management to transportation and TDM. Commercial and residential development go through this process as well and have had TDM condition sets that reflect their uses. County staff monitor compliance with the TDM conditions annually through site visits and interviews.

In addition, more recently, when we add portable classrooms to a site, we also have had to obtain a Use Permit.

Initial TDM conditions followed those used for commercial or residential development projects, so some of TDM conditions were less appropriate for the school context and varied widely in their content. For the most part, this tended to be the result of an evolution in the TDM condition set over time. Further, for the sites where we are making a simpler change, like adding the portable classrooms, the TDM conditions for a new site were not all applicable to an existing site. To address these issues, last year, APS began working with County staff to revise the conditions for schools to make them fully appropriate to the school context and standardize them so they will be applied consistently to all APS projects. The team developed a short condition set for operating schools with minor changes and a longer set for schools undergoing new construction. Other areas of change include:

- Streamlining role of Site Transportation Coordinator (typically a school administrator with additional responsibilities)
- Including Bike Parking management role in Transportation Management Plan (TMP)
- Standardizing benefit availability across modes
- Tying the benefit budget to School Board approved budget
- Streamlining Performance monitoring – using data we collect already rather than hiring consultants to collect traffic data that does not tell us much about how the school operates.

Staff will present to the Transportation Commission on Oct.1, then file an application for an omnibus revision to all school TDM conditions on Oct. 5, aiming for a County Board approval in December.

ACTC members asked questions about use of bike lockers, space for cargo bikes – especially at elementary schools, where parents may be bringing their students and coming by more frequently. Mr. Chambers noted that lockers at The Heights are not yet utilized, but staff is hoping that providing bike lockers at a site in more convenient locations will engender more use. County staff noted it would look to see space for different bike types and improved bike parking amenities in the design process for new construction. Ms. Burgess added that she would like to see APS consider bike drop-off as an arrival mode as it plans for drop off design.

3. Return to School Transportation Planning

Ms. Haldeman next presented an update to the Committee on work occurring around transportation planning for return to school. Mr. Folb noted that there are things we can learn as a result of this pandemic and come out better on the other side.

First, Ms. Haldeman thanked County staff from DOT, ACCS, Water Sewer Streets (WSS) , DPR and ACPD who have supported this effort since summer for all the work they have done for APS to date and continue to provide through this return process. APS could not do this work without them.

Two groups have been working in parallel on walk & bike to school tasks and park & walk tasks. Walk & bike tasks have focused on the expanded walk zone areas primarily. Work group members walked and 'audited' each zone, reporting back on safety issues to put into a priority action queue, and using their experience to help develop navigation maps for the zones to help families make their way to safe crossings. The group also focused on addressing the challenging crossings that families will need to cross from some of these expanded areas. ACPD has been heavily involved in identifying crossing support for these intersections. Lastly, group has been developing walking school bus and bike train resources to help families who would like to form groups (or 'ped pods' as some other places are calling them). Henry Dunbar also inventoried all bike racks at schools and uploaded them into Rackspotter.com, and the County bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee members are also stepping up to help where they can.

ACTC Comments/Questions on Walk & Bike Access

- Add bike pick up and drop off areas at schools
- Crossing guards should be prioritized as they are more economical than bus service
- How much lead time will there be between announcing a return date and the date itself, to give families ample time to plan. Mr. Chadwick noted that there must be, as there are many pieces that have to be put in place first. Dr. Duran will update on dates at the next School Board meeting.
- Carlin Springs continues to be a difficult road for students. What are we doing to help? Some students used to take the ART75 to school, but with capacity constraints on ART, very few students will be able to take the bus. Plan to improve access through the park and communicate to the nearby community that students will be there. Ms. Valenzuela would like to see a more focused effort to improve the roads in this area.

The second work group is focusing on addressing students who typically arrive by car. Because students will be screened at school, parents/guardians that typically just dropped off their student and left will now need to stay to ensure their students pass the screen and can enter the building. We are working with County staff to identify areas near schools where parents can park and walk their students in – or wait nearby to receive word from their student that they are in. Residential Parking Permit (RPP) enforcement near schools will be relaxed during drop off and pick up to facilitate. Students arriving on foot or bike without a parent, would have to return home if they do not pass the health screening as they cannot enter the building. Communications with families about these practices will be critical. APS will need parents as partners in all of this.

Ms. Haldeman has started to meet with school staff to identify which doors students will use based on their arrival mode and based on that how the transportation around the site will be managed. Bus students will be screened at the bus stop so will have a separate entrance. Staff off-site parking needs are also being taken into consideration in the site management plans. She showed the Committee a sample site map and described how it will be used.

Lastly, Ms. Haldeman discussed planning around bus routing. Chair Folb noted that he had tried the three transit options – ART, Metrobus and Metrorail – to familiarize himself with the current conditions. He noted that he felt safest on ART buses, though recognized that part of the safe environment was a severely reduced capacity. To begin Ms. Haldeman noted that some APS buses are on the road assisting with food service delivery – new since the summer – at 10 non-school sites. We are getting a lot of participation at the new sites. In the previous week, APS

served more than 5,000 meals – vs. the summer where we were serving about 2200/week. At least through December, meals are free for anyone between the ages of 2 and 18. APS buses are also serving out of county special education programs. Drivers who are not assigned a route yet have been re-assigned to help in other areas, so we can keep them active.

Early in the summer, APS contracted with the Consulting firm, Dynamic Ideas, to run scenarios to understand how (or if) we can transport all eligible students who plan to return to school for the hybrid model. Ms. Haldeman described the various parameters used in the scenario planning – with pick-up time, arrival time, travel time being the three elements that could change the outcomes. The biggest constraint we have is only being to transport 11 students per bus. Results from the two scenarios run to date showed that we would need anywhere from 60-100 more buses in the fleet than we currently have. And, while distressing – it did start to show us that there are some policy decisions we could make that could help make this work. For example, could we change bell times or could we drop students off at school very early.

Questions from the Committee:

- Would it help if screening time per student was lower? Perhaps marginally, but not to the degree we'd need it.
- Could we change middle and high school start times? Potentially middle; high school students are constrained by sports schedules.
- Could you screen before the bus stops? The screener is on the bus. Logistically makes sense to deliver the screener to the stop. Could you run a scenario to look at what happens if we eliminate dwell time related to screening at the stop – find
- Is there a hard max to the start time of the scenarios? I.e. how much could you change the school day. We did not use that in these scenarios. Teacher contracts could factor into that. Josh – as long as its 7.5 hours – could pursue. It's an ELT question.

Special education routes were not included in these scenarios as they are more customized, based on student needs. The first group of students who could return will be special education students who need assistance accessing their virtual learning. When we get to the next group of students who return, we may need to re-route all Level 1 students depending on where students live and the school they will attend.

More comments:

- Using Long Branch as an example, could put staff parking on street as it is long term, and screen students on site. Also, could then use open parking lot as outdoor space for lunch or PE or other outdoor activities.
- Do the park & walk teams include school staff or people from the surrounding area? Ms. Haldeman meeting with school staff to understand typical site management. Encourage school staff to review with families.

Other:

- Note meeting dates for SY20-21
- Need to get a student rep for our Committee. Ms. Haldeman will circle back with Cintia Johnson.