

Advisory Committee on Transportation Choices (ACTC)

November 3, 2021
Minutes

In Attendance:

APS Appointees

Josh Folb- Sp.Ed. Parent,
Chair
Elizabeth Kiker, ES Parent,
Vice Chair
John Armstrong, ES/MS/HS
Parent
John Mickevics, APS Staff
Janeth Valenzuela
Alistair Watson

County Appointees

Gillian Burgess (BAC)
John Carten (TAC)
Chris Slatt (TC)

Staff

Kristin Haldeman, APS-MMTP
Lauren Hassel, APS-SRTS

Dennis Leach, DOT, Dir.
Lynn Rivers, DOT-Transit
Hui Wang, DOT-TE&O
Christine Baker, DOT-TE&O
Eric Balliet, DOT-ACCS
Zara Seastrunk, DOT-ACCS/ATP

Other attendees: Libby Garvey, County Board liaison, Cecilia Ciepiela-Kaelin – FAC liaison, Juan Gordon – BAC liaison

1. Welcome and Administrative Items:

- The November 2021 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, introduced Alistair Watson, new ACTC member and asked Committee members to introduce themselves.
- The Committee approved minutes from the September meeting.
- Ms. Haldeman notified the Committee that Marcus Gregory, most recently Asst. Superintendent for F&O, resigned in mid-October, effective at that time.

2. Transportation Policy & PIP revisions (Kristin Haldeman)

Ms. Haldeman updated the Committee on the past work and background on the Transportation Policy & PIP revisions (see slides). The current policy was last revised in 2005; the PIP on student transportation was last updated in 2014. Because the policy was simply called Transportation – it also included a section on Use of School Board vehicles, including the white fleet, with an associated PIP. The draft revisions are now at a place where they can begin the six month approval process.

Over the course of the work, she convened several work groups that focused on various aspects of APS-provided student transportation. As part of that work, the need for a bell time policy emerged – as APS did not have one, and was developed and adopted in Sept 2020. More on that later. Staff, with APS special education advisory committees also recognized a need for a PIP that described the process for obtaining specialized transportation services for students with disabilities who need a transportation accommodation, and developed that document. Additionally, staff recognized a need for a PIP that specifically focused on transportation to APS-sponsored activities (e.g. athletics, field trips, etc.), and developed that stand-alone document. In sum, the Transportation Policy was renamed as part of the revision process to focus specifically on APS-provided student transportation; the Use of School Board

vehicles section was moved to a separate policy and the PIP moved with it; and three PIPs emerged for the revised student transportation policy.

The policy revisions focus on school bus eligibility, include the centralized stop approach for option schools, and retain the service delivery hierarchy, which places the top priority on getting students to and from school for the regular school day. However, this can and does run afoul of some HS sports transportation needs, so schools have been hiring charters to cover these trips until school buses become available, usually after 4:30pm. This hierarchy then has budget implications.

The current schedule assumes policy adoption in April 2022, with a 30 day period for public comment built in starting after the winter break. ACTC and ASEAC/SEPTA should provide enhanced feedback though, before the public comment period begins. Ms. Haldeman will send drafts of the documents for the Committee to review.

As FYI, the School Board does not adopt PIPs, but likes to see them with the associated policy revisions.

Ms. Burgess: This could be a good venue to discuss hub stops as there are some things that could be improved. Ms. Haldeman noted that there is some opportunity for that. To break it down: policies are the School Board governance and broad (the “what”), while PIPs describe how staff is directed to implement the policy (the “how”), generally. Then there are standard operating procedures describe the “how” of day to day operations.

3. Bell time project (Kristin Haldeman)

Last week, F&O gave a presentation to the School Board about operational efficiencies, which included a discussion of bell time challenges for transportation and a proposal to address the issue. This year with the driver shortages, APS has even fewer drivers available to cover routes – in fact, APS is not covering all routes. The driver shortages do not include daily outages. This has led to doubling up routes and late arrivals. In total, APS has eight different bell times, which is impacting on time performance and our ability to serve HS athletic trips. Bus use is not balanced among the early, middle and late bell tiers. The time available between the two largest groups of buses – MS and HS – is severely constrained. The optimal time between tiers is 50 minutes. New School Board policy on bell times lays out framework for review. Last time of comprehensive review was in late 1990s.

The presentation to School Board laid out a potential timeline should the Board wish to see changes deployed in August 2022. It is a very ambitious timeline and would require a very limited scope. There are many stakeholders involved in a change like this – both internal and external.

Ms. Garvey recollected having to extend the school day by 5 minutes due to excessive snow days when she was on the School Board, and this small change had a big impact on families. It’s important to work this through a good process. Also, really important to incorporate transit into the mix for student transportation. She cautioned that APS should be mindful that there could be push back if this comes across as a change just to make transportation work; must also work for students.

Ms. Burgess noted that more recent research suggests that the youngest students should start first. It’s possible that elementary starting first could be beneficial to families and simplify some things, also positive impact on extended day – may not need AM ext day. Thinks APS should broaden the analysis to look at these possibilities. Could look at MS/HS starts relative to ART schedules as well. Elizabeth Kiker recounted her experience in Seattle when they changed bell times to put ES first. They found it very helpful.

Ms. Slatt used the calendar change to start school before Labor Day experience as a cautionary tale – families had already set summer plans before the change was announced. He noted there are similar issues here, as camps and other after school programs that serve families are setting their schedules at least 6 months before the start of the next school year. This may not be the kind of change that can be decided in January (or later) and implemented in August without throwing a monkey wrench into every after school activity.

4. Free Fare Initiative (Lynn Rivers)

Lynn Rivers, Transit Bureau Chief, updated the Committee on the County's plans for a student fare-less pilot using funds from the American Rescue Plan. Similar conversations are happening around the region and the Country. This pilot will begin with MS/HS students who are using hub stops as well as some Kenmore students who live farther from school but are not bus eligible. It will be larger than the 2019-20 APS pilot. The pilot will seek to understand the impact that a fare-less program would have on current resources and the level of administration required to implement. Plan is to use the iRide card, which is already acknowledged by the fare system and thus will not require any back-end work, with funds loaded by the County. This is the first step in the process as we look at how to roll this out for all students.

Ms. Burgess: Wants to be sure families can easily understand the project. Understands need to study, but wants to know why it can't be so simple that when students tap their iRide card it's just free.

Ms. Rivers: Had to be able to stand this up quickly. To do what you suggest, there'd need to be a good deal of back end work on the fare system programming. There is more to come.

Mr. Leach: The goal is to get this up and running in January for the Winter/Spring semester to last through all of next fiscal year/2022-23 school year. There is sufficient funding right now for about 2400 students to travel to/from school over this timeframe. He noted that the APS fleet has 200 vehicles, while the ART fleet has 78 vehicles. The ART fleet is capped at that number until 2025, including buses in maintenance, so it's important to understand resource impacts first. Staff is excited about the potential for this, and wants to understand implementation parameters.

Mr. Slatt: Echoes Ms. Burgess and wants to be sure it is communicated simply and effectively so pilot becomes a long-term free fare for students program.

Ms. Haldeman: Using APS transit pilot infrastructure – including communications - was a good place to start to get this new pilot up and running quickly.

Chair Folb: ACTC is all in to assist with promotion. We want this to succeed; ideal would be students to ride free on any bus through Arlington with a farebox.

Ms. Burgess: Please seek out Parent input outside of staff. ACTC can help 'translate' pilot info into comms parents can understand.

APS staff will assist with communications to families.

5. Pilot Updates (Hui Wang)

- a. **Lorcom temporary sidewalk** – 600' along Lorcom b/t N Oakland and N Quebec, using on-street parking lane. Online survey responses supported keeping the temp sidewalk in place.

Also counted about 50 pedestrians per day using it, including students. County felt comfortable keeping it as it is buffered by a bike lane. Next will communicate with neighbors.

- b. Nelly Custis & Military Road** – County CIP project at this intersection contemplated two options: signal or round-about. County decided to implement a temporary round-about to test this option. Just deployed last week; Community feedback coming in – though much has been about the aesthetics of the roundabout. Staff agrees it is not ‘pretty,’ but it is offering the desired test environment. A permanent round-about will include more capital work, eg to relocate utility poles. Ms. Wang and Mr. Leach have driven through the installation and observed users. Ms. Wang noted that she did observe cars slowing down as they enter the round-about, achieving the desired result. Also seeing some signs getting hit; staff out replacing.

Ms. Burgess noted in the chat that the asphalt curb cuts are hard to see for cyclists, esp. those riding in the dark and aren’t expecting them– could they be brightened up with paint.

Chair Folb: Thank you TE&O for your engineering creativity.

Program Updates

- c. SRTS (Lauren Hassel)** – Walk/Bike/Roll to School event at Hoffman Boston ES and other locations focusing on safety; while fun, bottom line messaging is that this is not one day it’s every day – let’s do it right and safely. Have received a lot of support from ACPD & Crossing Guards on messaging this as well. Randolph ES focus school celebration – lauding them as the only all walk zone school - encouraging them to do things like ‘Move on Monday; Walk on Weds.; Use Feet on Friday.’ SRTS tallies underway; adding to 8 years of data we can use for more planning. Health & PE bike instruction unit is also back in business. BikeArlington working on some bike train projects. Innovation and Barcroft are target schools. Arlington Commission on Aging/55+ volunteer project: Senior-led Walking School Bus pilot at Oakridge.
- d. Vision Zero (Hui Wang)** – External stakeholder meeting in December. Updating projects on website. Slow Zones – headed to County Board for final adoption in mid-November. Global supply chain disruption is hitting County projects; may need to re-bid some equipment procurements, also may need to delay some project implementation – esp. those with a lot of signage.

Ms. Wang addressed Lee Hwy & Sycamore fatality with the limited information she has available; County staff and ACPD will together review the crash to see if there is something that can be done from the engineering side.

Ms. Burgess asked about County response the two recent student bicycle crashes. Report on one at Harrison suggests vehicle clipped the cyclists. Ms. Burgess noted that the student was hit when the bike lane ended, and both crash locations had been identified in the Bicycle Element for improvement.

Mr. Armstrong requested that school speed zone beacons be turned on for a longer period of time for students/families travelling to school sites before they currently come on.

e. TDM Update (Eric Balliet, Zara Seastrunk)

Ms. Seastrunk working with BikeArlington on communicating CaBi program changes to APS staff. She also noted that DDOT offering free 30-day memberships to all CaBi member jurisdictions to help riders get around in light of Metro vehicle issues. Information available on ATP's website.

6. Improving Major Crossings to Increase Bike/Walk Access to School: 12th St S & S Rolfe St.

Hoffman Boston PTA brought this location to our attention due to safety concerns. Students walking to school using new sidewalk/road through new Trove apartment complex. New crosswalk striped on south side of intersection. Cars parking along west side of intersection obstructing sight lines. A lot of WHS students crossing here to get to their bus stop. Ms. Wang noted that the slow zones for Hoffman Boston has been extended to include this area. Intersection also under review for an all-way stop. Data collection underway now that schools are fully back in session. Ms. Wang believes chances are high, esp. since it is in a school zone.

12th & Scott St. intersection has received some new treatments as well. More will come as part of an NC project.

Mr. Slatt said he's glad to see these improvements; would like to see a method to anticipate needs like this when known development is coming. He also requested the County add some bollards to bump out the corners at 12th & S Rolfe as the way they are currently designed facilitate high speed turns. Ms. Wang said they can look into it, though they typically come with markings and marking season is over for this season. Stop sign could go in right away if warranted.

Ms. Burgess noted that the curb cuts look somewhat new, and was surprised that they were designed facing the intersection as she had heard that the County no longer builds curb cuts like this. They also have poles in the pathway so anyone travelling with wheels on these sidewalks would be forced into the intersection. Mr. Leach said they would check back with water sewer streets as it looks like a concrete maintenance project, where bad concrete was replaced and a curb ramp added. Ms. Burgess suggested there may be process improvement issue here – if design is bad, replace with a good design.

Update on sidewalk survey: WSS – survey is completed; awaiting report and QA/QC on report. Ms. Wang, awaiting as well as it will help their long term program.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 pm

Next meeting: January 5, 2022