

# Grand Rapids/Cohasset Safe Routes to School Plan Update

SRTS Team Meeting #2  
January 26, 2021, 10:00 a.m.  
Zoom Video/Audio Conference

## SUMMARY

### Introductions

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planning, welcomed everyone and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

*Attendees:* Karen Blair (City of Cohasset), Melanie DeBay (ISD 318 Community Ed. Director), Ryan DeBay (East Rapids Elementary School Principal), Anna Johnson (Get Fit Itasca), Sean Martinson (West Rapids Elementary School Principal), Megan Severson (ISD 318 SRTS Coordinator), Jayme Smith (Itasca County SHIP), Eric Trast (City of Grand Rapids), Maren Webb (MnDOT District 1), Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning), Justin Otsea (ARDC Planning)

### Process Overview to Date

Habermann shared that the SRTS Team met for the first time in November. Since then, ARDC Planning has worked with different Team members to complete MnDOT's School Environment and Policy Assessment and to administer the parent walking and biking survey, which is still open and collecting responses. He shared that the goal of today's meeting is to brainstorm potential goals for the plan using the data collected to date. After the meeting, ARDC Planning will start developing a draft action plan, which will be reviewed at the Team's third meeting in March. The SRTS Team will also be conducting on-site observations and student travel tallies this spring, possibly in May.

### Existing Conditions Memo Review

Habermann distributed an Existing Conditions Memo, which included information drawn from data collection to date, with the meeting agenda. In review of this data, Habermann first asked participants who took a walk around each school property for the walk audit "homework" to share things they learned. Their input is outlined below:

- Drivers not yielding to pedestrians crossing the street has been an issue at West Rapids Elementary.
- Golf Course Road by West Rapids Elementary can feel like trying to cross a racetrack. When police patrol is there, the traffic is good; otherwise, traffic consistently feels like it is going 10 to 15 mph over the speed limit.
- For East Rapids Elementary, there is some conflict with bus traffic in the afternoons. Also, additional features (i.e. signage) could help those trying to cross NE 11th Avenue from East Rapids Elementary to Elkington Middle School, especially as the bottleneck on this road creates car backups. But the area has good sidewalks and is well-lit.
- At Cohasset Elementary, there doesn't seem to be an issue; the police department and the school work to address issues as they present themselves.
- Observations indicate that drop-off/pick-up traffic has been going smoothly at the schools.

Next, Habermann shared preliminary results from the parent survey and the student density maps. The SRTS Team asked for sample sizes to be included in final copies of the survey reports and also noted how the maps demonstrated the overlap of enrollment in the Grand Rapids elementary school maps.

Finally, Habermann shared results from MnDOT's School Environment and Policy Assessment, which was completed by administration at Cohasset Elementary, East Rapids Elementary, and West Rapids Elementary. In response to the results, SRTS Team members shared that the parent drop-off at the new elementary schools has become more efficient since the schools' openings this school year (West Rapids had a large back-up of cars initially), that East Rapids Elementary has an opportunity with students living close to the school and with a potential remote drop-off location at the old Murphy Elementary building, and that a sidewalk on the north side of Golf Course road leading to West Rapids Elementary might be an opportunity to explore.

### **Goal Identification**

Habermann then introduced an exercise to brainstorm goals for the plan.

For the first part of the exercise, Habermann sent the SRTS Team an online form that asked four questions about desired Safe Routes to School programs. He gave the members 10 minutes to go through and answer the questions. When the group reconvened, they shared the following ideas:

#### Education

- Implementation of Walk! Bike! Fun!
- Use of the bike fleet
- Guest speakers about walking/biking
- Peach Jar – flyers about different topics
- Pair lessons about walking/biking with fall bus education
- Interest in walking/biking needs to start with kids (but parents also need to encourage)
- Routes/map for each school showing community after-school destinations; share with families at beginning of school year
- After-school biking classes – currently use trail system, could expand to routes to school
- Bike rodeos
- Incorporate walking/biking into driver's education classes – create a video?

#### Encouragement

- Prizes/incentives (i.e. bike locks) until walking and biking is normalized; perhaps award incentives based on number of times they walk to school, with a bike-related prize at the end of the year (i.e. new bike, t-shirt)
- Making walking and biking a fun thing, not a chore
- Post cards going home to families about routes
- Pictures of full bike racks or students walking on school social media pages
- Walking/biking part of track and field day?
- Walk/Bike to School Days (include remote drop-off for those who live far away)
- Get groups of friends to do it together

## Enforcement

- There are new stop signs at some intersections; maybe draw more attention/enforce here
- Place crossing guards/safety patrol at specific intersections
- Increase enforcement near school sites (high school and middle school both have full-time liaison officers)
- Speed feedback signs (City of Grand Rapids and City of Cohasset have them)

## Engagement

- Grand Rapids city council has been supportive of walking and biking
- Maybe engaging with youth members of the community (at Boys and Girls Club?) would help with our Safe Routes to School efforts
- Maybe offering a public opportunity to give input (outside the parent survey) could help

For the second part of the exercise, Habermann sent the SRTS Team an online form that asked one question about physical changes (to school campuses or roadways) they want to pursue. He gave the members 10 minutes to look at Google Maps and answer the question. When the group reconvened, they shared the following ideas:

- Construct sidewalk on the north side of Golf Course Road
- Refresh faded crosswalks in Cohasset
- Highway 2 corridor connecting Cohasset and Grand Rapids
- Plowing trail behind hospital (leading to West Rapids Elementary) instead of grooming it for skiing
- Tree trimming at intersections near East Rapids Elementary to enhance sightlines
- Little road space resulting in conflict between vehicles and walkers/bikers in front of Cohasset Elementary
- Eliminate parent drop-off within three blocks of school sites for one year

## Vision Statement Review

Habermann introduced the draft vision statement, which was created using input at the Team's November meeting:

The Grand Rapids/Cohasset Safe Routes to School Team envisions a school community where:

- students and their caregivers choose to walk and bike to school;
- students and their caregivers know the location of sidewalks, trails, road crossings, and bike lanes and know how to safely use each type of infrastructure;
- roadway professionals know where students face barriers to walking and biking to school and have a plan to address those barriers when given the opportunity;
- events and programs encourage students to walk and bike; and
- 90% of the school community knows about the Safe Routes to School program.

The SRTS Team added that it might be good to add phrasing about the community generally practicing safety (i.e. attentive driving) in the school zones.

## **Next Steps**

- ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and distribute them to the SRTS Team.
- ARDC Planning will draft an action plan using goals brainstormed at this meeting.
- ARDC Planning will connect with Megan Severson about additional engagement opportunities with the community about the Safe Routes to School plan.
- ARDC Planning will communicate with the SRTS Team about the third Team meeting, expected for March.

**The meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.**