

Fond du Lac Safe Routes to School Plan Update

SRTS Team Meeting #2

January 29, 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: Jamie Adams (FDL Planning), Alexandra Houchin (FDL Planning), KaRee Liimatainen (FDL Human Services), Samantha Martin (FDL SHIP Coordinator), Jennifer Murray (Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, Superintendent), JinYeene Neumann (Carlton County Highway Department, Engineer), Valerie Tanner (Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, Principal), Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning)

Process Overview to Date

Habermann shared that the group first met in October 2020. Since then, ARDC Planning has developed a draft vision statement, coordinated with the school to complete MnDOT's School Environment and Policy Assessment, and helped facilitate a walk audit. Valerie Tanner, Principal at Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, shared that they will be sending out surveys within the coming week.

Habermann said that the main goal of the second meeting is to brainstorm goals for the Safe Routes to School plan. After this meeting, ARDC Planning will use the input to develop draft goals that will be reviewed at a March meeting. After a draft plan document goes out for public review after the March meeting, the SRTS Team will meet one last time near the end of the school year. This may be done in conjunction with school observation activities and student travel tallies, which need to be done when students are attending school in-person.

Existing Conditions Memo Review

Habermann shared that the data collected so far (findings from MnDOT's School Environment and Policy Assessment and findings from a walk audit) have been compiled into the Existing Conditions Memo. He shared basic findings from the School Environment and Policy Assessment and then asked those SRTS Team members who attended the walk audit to share their thoughts. Those thoughts, along with resulting conversation, included the following:

- Crossing Bike Lake Road is terrifying no matter where you cross.
- The Big Lake Road trail is a great asset.
- Having defined crossing routes would be helpful.
- By the Clinic, cars stop closer to the intersection because they can't see.
- There's a big question about where people should cross Big Lake Road, especially when trying to get to the new Cultural Center; it doesn't make sense to cross at the intersection if

going from the Tribal Center to the new Cultural Center. But the County won't do mid-block (non-intersections) crossings.

- There's an issue of people driving not knowing how to interact with people on bikes or walking. There was a suggestion to do education about interacting with other road users.

The group also briefly spoke about the Big Lake Road demonstration project from October 2020, the ongoing Safe Routes to School engineering study, and the FY2023 sidewalk project that will add sidewalks and crossings around the Head Start building.

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

- Lessons and student practice during gym class (Note: John has funding to acquire bike fleet)
- Ask community centers how they can participate
- Virtual education (Safe Kids Northeast Minnesota); school and FDL Human Services doing a lot of good things already
- People learn best through doing – group rides? 20-minute one-on-one self-agency lessons – stop, look, listen
- Reach out to kids with videos on Snapchat and TikTok, showing them how to look cool and smart while riding
- Develop graphics, quick tips for walking and biking
- Distance is a big barrier – people would be biking to school, so maybe that's where the focus should be for to-/from-school trips; but we can focus on walking as a during-school activity
- Developing things like flashing lights and bike lanes
- Educating about safe biking and wearing helmets
- Question: how many kids are in vicinity to walk/bike?

Encouragement

- Incentives/graduated incentives like shoes, bike, etc. (working toward earning something)
- Field trips to Duluth or the Munger Trail (need to meet certain criteria to take part)
- To encourage them to bike not only to school, but outside of school (i.e. log miles to go “from Sawyer to Brookston”)
- Infrastructure that makes people feel safe is good encouragement
- Signage that shares cultural lessons along certain trails
- Safe places for students to store bikes
- Older students, how to engage 12-17 year-olds – collaboration between FDL and Cloquet?
- Bike racks on bus? (Note: Alexander is working, Samantha can provide funding)
- Get staff and adults interested – could make them better advocates, encouraging kids to walk/bike

- Experiential learning through gym class – reflecting on doing (i.e. “That hill was big, so I got off my bike and walked it up.”)
- Lessons about how a bike is not a toy
- Walking in all seasons – Walk to School Days

Enforcement

- Design or provide guidance on best route to get to school
- Engage with students about how they get to school and why – students choose to walk and ride on Airport Road instead of the Big Lake Road trail
- Laminated route maps for bike handlebars
- Grace period for students walking/biking during short-light months
- Explore walk/bike zone – if you’re in a certain distance of the school, you have to walk/bike
- Crossing Big Lake Road to the Cultural Center – SRO could be utilized
- Ongoing conversations about policy (i.e. food, breastfeeding) could be part of conversation about policies needed for walking and biking; a policy group could be created
- Providing bikes to kids that need it – ride to school four times a month to earn a bike
- Getting good equipment is important

Engagement

- Signs and lights – which routes are kids taking?
- Education on the parents’ side of things, know what safety programs are being done
- Youth council/representative to speak to decision-making groups
- How do kids safely walk from school to government center – teach adults to slow down in that area
- Demonstration project – drivers need more education to understand why certain infrastructure strategies are being used
- Educate students so they can educate adults
- Having own driver’s education teacher would be helpful – to include biking/walking lessons to new drivers
- Difficulty with drivers adhering to laws

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 8 minutes to look at Google Maps and answer the question. When the group reconvened, they shared the following ideas:

- Build sidewalks/marked walkways to connect buildings (Underground tunnels?)
- Connect Big Lake Road to school (Note: Will be done with FY23 sidewalk project)
- Stop light at Big Lake Road/Brevator Road (very busy in mornings and evenings)
- Connection north to Language House and Orchard
- Trail around airport and connect to Gas Station
- Make Big Lake Road more of a “downtown” feel with sidewalks/trails on both sides and roadside trees (i.e. Tower Avenue in Superior, but more rural)
- Connect Cultural Center to Language House through the woods
- Standards for trail development make projects nearly impossible to fund (Note: Federal and state funding requires those standards in road rights-of-way)

- Volunteer trail building
- Roundabouts – they seem less safe for people walking/biking, but statistically they’re proven to be safer than some other intersection designs; for a program like Safe Routes to School, the question remains whether they discourage people from walking/biking because of intimidation factors. To better understand, do ped/bike counting before and after the Washington Avenue/14th Street roundabout is constructed in Cloquet in 2022

Vision Statement Review

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

The Fond du Lac Safe Routes to School Team envisions a community where more kids choose to walk and bike to school. It envisions a community where roads, trails, and sidewalks give kids a safe and attractive place to walk and bike. It envisions a community where programs and adult role models inspire young people to learn about and live alongside the environment around them. It envisions a community that knows about Safe Routes to School and uses this plan as a guide to bring about this vision.

The SRTS Team shared that it seems too long (would be nice to limit it to two sentences), that “kids” should be changed to “children and young adults”, and that “envision” is used too often. ARDC Planning will revise the vision statement using this feedback, and the group will review it again with the draft action plan at the next meeting.

Next Steps

- ARDC Planning will develop a meeting summary and distribute it to the SRTS Team.
- ARDC Planning will develop a draft action plan using ideas shared at the meeting.
- ARDC Planning will reach out to the SRTS Team about setting a third meeting date, tentatively for March.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.