

SEATTLE SCHOOL TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is the School Traffic Safety Committee?.....	2
Celebrations for 2023.....	3
Top needs for 2023.....	4
City of Seattle.....	5
Seattle Public Schools.....	9
WA State Legislators and King County Metro.....	13

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

- WA OSPI – Washington State’s Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State department that oversees all schools in Washington.
- SDCI – Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Seattle’s department that reviews land use and building code permits all property other than City right-of-way
- SDOT – Seattle Department of Transportation
- SIP – Street Improvement Permit, SDOT’s process for requiring and permitting improvements in City owned right-of-way for construction projects
- SPD – Seattle Police Department
- SPS – Seattle Public Schools
- SRTS – Safe Routes to School
- STSC – School Traffic Safety Committee, a City of Seattle commission



WHAT IS THE SCHOOL TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE?

The City of Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee was created in 1975 by Ordinance 104344 and codified in SMC 3.80. It brings together Seattle Public Schools (a State agency), The City of Seattle, King County, and school communities to improve safe routes to school. This mixed volunteer and staff board of 11 members has representatives from Seattle Public Schools (SPS), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), and King County Metro as well as five volunteer members including pedestrian advocates, bicycle advocates, parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

All meetings are open to the public. [Please come and join us!](#)

WHEN DOES IT MEET?

Meetings are open to the public and are generally held 8:30 - 10:30 AM the third Friday of every month. The link to join online and the physical location are at:

<https://www.seattle.gov/school-traffic-safety-committee/meetings>

WHAT DOES THE COMMITTEE DO?

Many details add up to make safe routes to school. The Committee was created to promote effective multi-agency coordination between the different organizations that have a piece of the puzzle.



The Committee:

- *Provides a forum for any community member to raise school traffic safety issues.*
- *Helps connect community members with staff at SDOT, SPS, Metro, and SPD in order to holistically respond to specific school traffic safety concerns.*
- *Uses SDOT data to review and update elementary school walk boundary maps.*
- *Recommends new school crosswalk and crossing guard locations based on consistently applied standards.*
- *Reviews 30% site circulation plans for new and renovated school buildings to ensure that problem safety conditions aren't repeated at new schools.*
- *Works to improve crossing guard recruitment.*
- *Connects SDOT, SPD, King County Metro, and SPS to improve collaboration on traffic safety issues.*

CELEBRATIONS FOR 2023!



CITY OF SEATTLE

1. City Council and the Mayor's office are supporting SDCI staff revising City code for school construction to match student needs and our urban sites. *(page 5)*
2. *The City-funded Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Coordinator did great things! (page 6)*
3. SDOT and SPS have identified concrete steps each will take to improve the SIP process for future public school construction projects. *(page 8)*

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1. New and renovated schools all have substantial bike parking thanks to the implementation of a recent City code change & School Board policy. *(pages 9-10)*
2. All SPS elementary schools and some middle schools have a fantastic bike education module in PE. *(pages 9-10)*
3. In 22-23, all school bus routes consistently ran with reliable service that families can trust. *(page 11)*

WA STATE LEGISLATORS & KING COUNTY METRO

1. Public transportation is free for all students since September 2022! *(page 15)*



TOP NEEDS FOR 2023

CITY OF SEATTLE

1. Continue support for updating City of Seattle code related to school construction. *(page 5)*
2. Provide consistent funding for SRTS projects; decouple funding from tickets. *(page 6)*
3. Finalize agreements to re-start bus stop-paddle ticket support. *(page 6)*
4. Ensure consistency and efficiency in SDOT's Street Improvement Permit (SIP) process by creating an internal accountability & tracking system. *(page 8)*

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1. Reduce crossing guard vacancy rate from 40% → ZERO. *(page 9)*
2. Create a clear path for existing schools to add bike parking. *(pages 9-10)*
3. Comprehensively update SPS Transportation Service Standards to include all students and all transportation modes. *(pages 11-12)*

WA STATE LEGISLATORS & KING COUNTY METRO

1. Fund school crossing guards as required by current state law. *(page 13)*
2. Fund McKinney-Vento costs for transporting students without secure housing to school. *(page 14)*
3. Expand who can review school zone and bus paddle tickets to increase staffing reliability. *(page 15)*
4. Optimize bus routes to serve students. *(page 15)*



City of Seattle

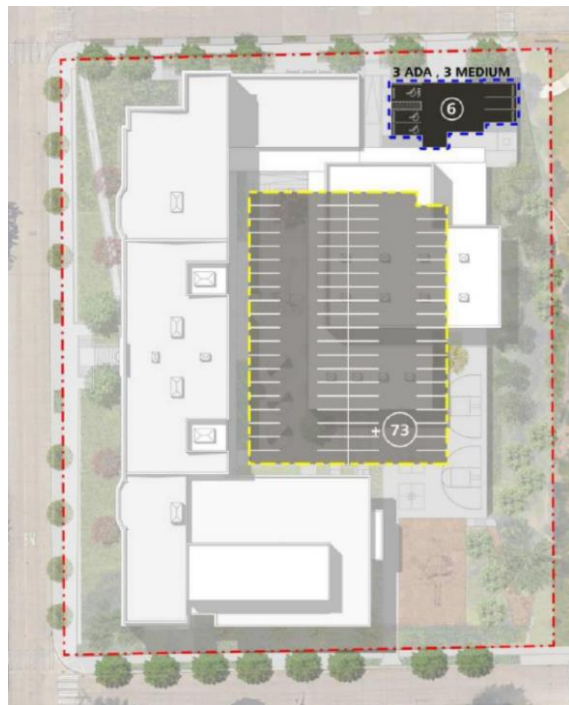
SEATTLE CITY LAND USE CODE FOR SCHOOLS IS OUT OF DATE, BUT SDCI IS ON THE CASE!

THE ISSUE: City of Seattle code sections 23.51(b).002 and 23.54 are dinosaurs of mid-century car-centric planning. Code requires schools to pave playgrounds for parking lots, pushes for inefficient off-street bus loading, and prohibits installing modern HVAC equipment on existing school roofs due to building height limits.

SPS can get around anachronistic code requirements by seeking departures via an extended public process, and they do on nearly every project. But departures cost time and money. Worse, they are habitually hijacked and challenged in court by neighbors whose goal is to delay school construction. For too long this red tape has slowed school projects and impacted school construction budgets as the allocated money evaporates due to inflation.

Seattle Public Schools estimates that **fixing this problem will save \$2.5 million in school construction budgets each year** and let SPS put that money to much better use, like building fantastic schools and fun playgrounds.

A BIG WIN: Thanks to support from City Council and the Mayor's office, SDCI staff are initiating the process to revise City code for school construction. Public outreach is starting in summer of 2023 as the first step. The estimated timeline to complete the code change is 1.5 - 2 years.



Magnolia Elementary departure report graphic showing the required parking lot overlaid on school buildings and play space.

THE ASK: STSC asks for continued support from the Mayor and City Council so we can use taxpayer money to build better schools with less wasteful delay.

Council will need to weigh in on this issue again in winter of 2024 to keep this effort on track. Please support more efficient school construction process!

City of Seattle

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL COORDINATOR

A BIG WIN: STSC is grateful to the Council for funding this position at the School District to support the majority of students, who do not qualify for bus service. After a successful first year for the role, SDOT lured away the coordinator the District had for the 2022-2023 school year. The speed with which SPS has recruited a replacement shows that the value of this work is being recognized.

In just one year on the job SPS's Safe Routes to School Coordinator:

- Worked intensively with 3 top tier equity schools to develop programs including Walking Wednesdays at Wing Luke Elementary, Bike to Books art design at Dunlap Elementary and South Shore PK-8, and a Bike Bus and Walk Group to school at Dunlap Elementary and South Shore PK-8.
- Developed a model building curriculum program that brings City staff into classrooms to listen to students' input on street design.
- Procured a \$.5 M grant that will bring balance bike fleets to all Kindergarten P.E. classes in the district.
- Developed templates with language translation for events including Love Your Route, Earth Day, Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, Walk and Roll to School day, and Bike to School Month.
- Led walking and biking events including a Walk & Roll to School Day with the Mayor and the district's first Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day.

STSC looks forward to working with the new SRTS coordinator as they build on this success!



TICKET REVENUES LEAVE SCHOOL SAFETY PROJECTS HANGING

THE ISSUE: A temporary staffing snafu at SPD has created a \$6.5 million deficit for SDOT's pedestrian safety and Safe Routes to School projects over the next 2 years, a quarter of the anticipated budget. This was caused by a staffing shuffle when some officers who verify and issue automated tickets retired. Going forward, SPD has corrected the problem by assigning officers on light duty, (such as when recovering from



City of Seattle

an injury), to review tickets. They are optimistic that this will prevent a recurrence.

However, this is the second 'short term' loss of revenue in just the last three years. Remote school and changing commute patterns also dropped ticket revenues to zero during the pandemic. Even without sudden shocks, automated tickets change driver behavior causing revenues to decrease over time. This is exactly as it should be! Automated cameras generate large numbers of tickets soon after installation, and when they are working tickets and ticket revenue shrink over time.

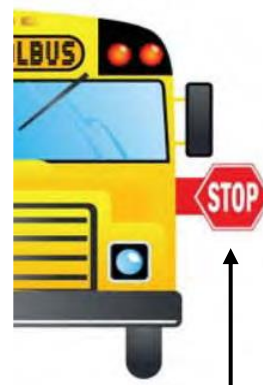
Success in this aspect of traffic safety should not doom efforts to improve pedestrian safety. Safe Routes to School projects are critical safety projects that make a tangible difference in the lives of kids and families throughout the City. They need a stable funding source.

THE ASK: STSC asks City Council to move away from using ticket revenue as a primary funding source for Safe Routes to School projects, and instead robustly fund these critical safety projects from the general fund.

KING COUNTY STOPPED REVIEWING BUS STOP PADDLE TICKETS

THE ISSUE: We are dismayed that King County dropped support for bus stop-paddle automated tickets without having an alternative set up and ready to take over. It's been more than a year since school bus stop paddle tickets have been reviewed by sworn officers and issued. This has eliminated enforcement for very dangerous driver behavior, and left SPS, along with all school districts in King County, once again without a funding stream to pay crossing guard salaries, as the state continues to ignore its statutory requirement to pay for them.

SPS is currently negotiating with the City of Seattle for SPD and the City Attorney's office to take over reviewing stop paddle tickets. The costs associated with this work are paid out of ticket revenues.



Stop Paddle

The Ask: STSC asks City of Seattle to prioritize completing agreements for SPD and the City Attorney's office to support bus stop paddle tickets.

City of Seattle

STREET IMPROVEMENT PERMITS: SLOW TIMELINES, INCONSISTENT GUIDANCE

THE ISSUE: Public school construction projects have Street Improvement Permit (SIP) timelines that are far longer than SDOT's targets. SDOT's SIP process has often taken more than two years to complete for schools. Worse, on multiple projects SDOT's guidance has not matched its ultimate requirements, leading to changes very late in the process, after bidding is complete, and resulting in change orders that are calamitously expensive. This is not a good use of our public school construction money.

Representatives of SPS capital projects, the School Traffic Safety Committee, and SDOT street use met in December of 2022 to discuss issues that SPS has faced during SDOT's required Street Improvement Permit process, communication issues that exacerbated the issues, and ways to prevent these problems from continuing to delay school projects and waste public school construction money.

SPS and SDOT both agree that the goal is to use public school construction funding effectively by ensuring that the street improvement permit process is completed in a timely manner with consistent, appropriate requirement on SDOT's part.

A BIG WIN: Staff at both SDOT and SPS have identified concrete steps each will take to improve the SIP process for future public school projects. Additional meetings during 2023 are planned to continue coordination and monitor improvement.

THE ASK: STSC asks the Mayor's office to direct SDOT to create an internal accountability mechanism related to street use permits in order to ensure that efficiency is prioritized and that public school construction is not derailed by excessive timelines.



Seattle Public Schools

CROSSING GUARDS: THE NEED CONTINUES

THE ISSUE: As of June 2023, 46 out of 114 crossing guard positions (40%) were vacant. SPS has long struggled to fill crossing guard positions. It's a tough job with short, non-consecutive hours, a low hourly rate, cold and rainy environment, and frequently dangerous traffic conditions.



Prior to the pandemic SPS made real strides in filling crossing guard roles through more active advertisement, particularly to hourly staff in food service and playground monitor roles who can add-on crossing guard duties before and after school. In winter of 2020 the vacancy rate had dropped to 30% and was continuing to fall. However many crossing guards were lost during the year-long pandemic hiatus, and since in-person school resumed the crossing guard vacancy rate has reverted to pre-pandemic levels.

Placing recruitment signs at the specific intersections that need guards has proven successful, but this, like the other aspects of the crossing guard program, requires coverage across the City. The crossing guard program is overseen by one staff member at SPS who has little time to travel to each school posting crossing guard advertisements at vacant intersections. The crossing guard program needs to be better linked into SPS networks for additional support.

THE ASK: STSC asks SPS to increase support for crossing guard recruitment by better communicating with schools so that they know they should post ads and spread the word to fill crossing guard positions.

CREATE A CLEAR PATH FOR EXISTING SCHOOLS TO ADD BIKE PARKING

A BIG WIN: New and renovated schools all have substantial bike parking thanks to increased requirements in City code and SPS's policy. Even better, all SPS elementary schools and some middle schools have a fantastic bike education module in PE. Together these make a great environment for kids biking to schools that are newly renovated/rebuilt!

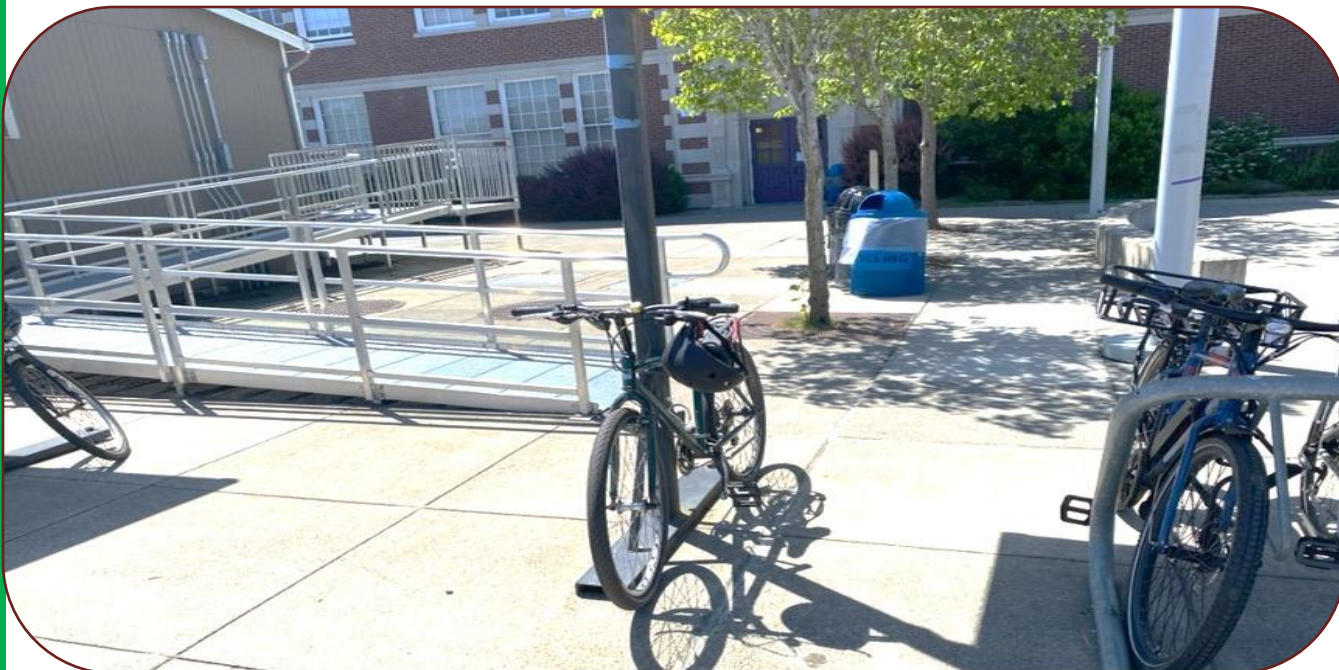
THE ISSUE: Many existing schools have extremely insufficient bike parking. Students who would like to use their newly learned biking skills to ride to school are disappointed

Seattle Public Schools

when a lack of bike parking spaces makes that impractical. Installing bike parking at every school is a logical next step to build on SPS's outstanding bike education program.

SDOT funds mini-grants that can help pay the costs of installing bike parking. The application is quick and easy. However, SPS's internal process to approve and install bike parking is too dependent on overburdened school admin staff and tends not to make it to the top of the to do list.

THE ASK: STSC asks SPS to implement a clear, consistent, and straightforward path that anyone in a school community can spearhead (with school admin agreement) to install bike parking at schools. STSC also asks that SPS proactively reach out to schools to help them get started.



Seattle Public Schools

SPS BUS SERVICE IS DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED



A BIG WIN: Contracting with two transportation providers has allowed SPS to run all school bus routes during 22-23 with reliable service that families can trust!

SPS is following this win by improving efficiency. Reliable service has allowed SPS to make targeted changes to improve efficiency with 2 tiers. For example, data analysis indicated that changing tiers for 12 schools will save \$4.5 million.

Going further, next year Special Education students will be included on general ed buses when possible, allowing them to be transported with their peers while saving money, a long-awaited-for win-win.

STSC applauds SPS for these dramatic student-centered improvements!



SPS TRANSPORTATION SERVICE STANDARDS FOR 2024

THE ISSUE: The SPS Transportation Service Standards haven't been meaningfully updated in many years. A comprehensive update would allow SPS to continue expanding on their recent transportation successes. Key opportunities include:

- *Addressing all Modes* - Every student in SPS participates in transportation, but the service standards are currently focused on busing to the exclusion of other modes.

Seattle Public Schools

Formal inclusion of other modes will build on the success of the Safe Routes to School Coordinator, better wrapping students who walk, bike, and carpool into available supports.

- *Busing as a Learning Support* - In rare instances, SPS provides busing to kids who live inside the walk zone. Revising the service standards to set parameters for this type of busing would allow SPS to make these decisions in a way that is equitable and consistently applied. It would also make it possible to be reimbursed by the state for these costs.
- *Using best practices in place in peer districts* - including a check box in the enrollment forms for families to indicate whether their student(s) will be using the bus will make route planning easier and more effective. This would be paired with easily locatable ways to opt back in when circumstances change.

The Ask: STSC asks SPS to prioritize a comprehensive update to the transportation service standards that is in line with SPS's equity framework and student-centered vision.



WA State Legislators & King County Metro

FOLLOW THE LAW AND FUND CROSSING GUARDS

THE ISSUE: In defiance of the plain language in state law, WA state and OSPI continue not to fund crossing guard salaries. Schools across the state scramble to find money for this key safety position, which is even harder when other costs, like special education, are not fully funded and school are already facing cuts.

RCW 28A.160.150 states that transportation services funding shall be provided for students living within the walk area. RCW 28A.160.160(4) states:

*“Transportation services” for students living within the walk area includes the coordination of walk-to-school programs, **the funding of crossing guards**, and matching funds for local and state transportation projects intended to mitigate hazardous walking conditions.*

If these laws mean that crossing guards should be funded, then legislators should make the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction fulfill that mandate. If STSC is reading the RCW incorrectly, then the RCW should be revised to make crossing guards fully reimbursable.



THE ASK: STSC asks legislators to allocate funding for crossing guards in compliance with existing state law, and to direct the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to revise reimbursement formulas to include crossing guard costs.

FUND TRANSPORT FOR STUDENTS WITHOUT SECURE HOUSING

THE ISSUE: SPS provides students experiencing housing insecurity with consistency in their education by transporting them to the same school throughout the year no matter how far afield they may move. Schools are required to provide this critical service by the federal McKinney-Vento law, but the Washington state legislature has chosen not to fund it. Because the vast majority of SPS’s budget goes directly to teacher and staff salaries, the state’s choice to ignore McKinney-Vento costs directly translates to higher class sizes.

WA State Legislators & King County Metro

With rising homelessness, McKinney-Vento costs are SPS's biggest transportation deficit. At present, 581 SPS students have unstable housing and qualify for transportation under the McKinney-Vento Act. That's more than 1% of the students enrolled in Seattle Public Schools, and greater than the entire enrollment at Genesee Hill, SPS's largest elementary school. The district tries to get them on yellow buses, both to mainstream the kids and for transportation efficiency, but often it is not possible given the frequency of moves and distances involved.

On average it costs \$14,000 per student each year to comply with this important but completely unfunded mandate, which means pulling **\$8.1 million** out of the already insufficient general education budget.

The number of housing related bills passed in the State Legislature this year reflects that the housing shortage is a statewide problem. Seattle may have the largest population of students with unstable housing who qualify for transportation under the McKinney-Vento Act, but Seattle Public Schools is not alone in feeling this funding gap.

THE ASK: STSC asks our state legislators to pass transportation funding reform that corrects the state's long and shameful history of shrugging off the needs of students experiencing homelessness.



WA State Legislators & King County Metro

REVISE TRAFFIC TICKET LAW TO EXPAND POOL OF ELIGIBLE OFFICERS

THE ISSUE: Law Enforcement Agencies across the state are short staffed and struggling to fill positions. When officers aren't available to review school speed zone tickets we lose a valuable tool in the enforcement toolbox, along with funding for badly needed safety projects. In 2023 both Seattle Department of Transportation and SPS experienced interruptions in their automated ticket programs due to staffing shortages.

THE ASK: STSC asks state legislators to pass a law allowing review of automated traffic enforcement citations by any trained and capable individual, including local transportation department staff.

ALL PUBLIC TRANSIT IS FREE FOR KIDS BUT BUS SERVICE TO SCHOOLS NEEDS WORK

A BIG WIN: Washington State made all public transit free for 18 & under in fall of 2022. STSC applauds this fantastic step that is increasing transit use for students! Metro is building on this by actively working to ensure that routes serving schools have enough capacity for students, another big win.

THE ISSUE: Much of the existing bus service is not optimized for students and many students still report that the bus is not a feasible option for getting to school because of a lack of service to the school, service near their house, or route schedules that won't get them to school on time. Although King County Metro has begun actively coordinating with SPS to improve bus service for students, there is still a lot of work to do.



THE ASK: STSC asks King County Metro to prioritize bus service around schools, especially middle & high schools, and to build on its success with Free Youth Fare by actively working with Seattle Public Schools to ensure that every school community is well served.

School Traffic Safety Committee

We appreciate the opportunity to serve on this committee.

In 2023-2024 we look forward to continuing collaboration to help students get safely to school!

