

Meeting Minutes

Subject	Regional School Coordination Task Force	Date	Tuesday – October 25, 2016
Facilitator	NCTCOG	Time	2:30 pm – 4:00 pm
Location	NCTCOG – Regional Forum Room	Recorded by	Kathryn Rush
Attendees	Brandy O'Quinn (Blue Zones Project), Brian Jahn (Fort Worth), Joel Fitts (Frisco), Brian Moen (Frisco), Okoth Seferinus (Dallas), Caryl DeVries (Grand Prairie), Robyn Root (McKinney), Sachiko Huang (Plano), Jessica Shutt (Richardson), William Wiegand (Haltom City), Susan Au (Tarrant County), Sam Adamie (Tarrant County Public Health), Yvette Wingate (Tarrant County Public Health), Karla Weaver (NCTCOG), Kathryn Rush (NCTCOG), Trey Ingram (NCTCOG), Daniel Snyder (NCTCOG).		

Meeting Purpose	The purpose of the Regional School Coordination Task Force is to provide a venue for improved interagency coordination, and discussion of NCTCOG school-related initiatives. This meeting highlighted two examples of city-ISD coordination: for school facility planning in Frisco, and for safe routes to school (SRTS) in Fort Worth. NCTCOG staff also provided a brief overview of an upcoming regional call for projects for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, including SRTS projects.
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Discussion Items	
Welcome and introductions by NCTCOG staff and all participants.	
<p>1. Guest Presentation: City-ISD Coordination in Frisco - Joel Fitts, City of Frisco</p> <p>Frisco ISD is the fastest-growing school district in the country, having constructed two to four new schools every year since 1993. To keep up with this growth and maintain a high quality of life, the City of Frisco and Frisco ISD have developed a streamlined process for coordinating and sharing data.</p> <p>City staff have two monthly meetings with Frisco ISD staff. The first meeting covers site selection and infrastructure needs—including roads, utilities, and sidewalks—for future schools. It is attended by city traffic engineers and the school district's Deputy Superintendent for Business Services. The second monthly meeting covers school traffic operations, and includes discussions of school traffic complaints, crossing guard requests, road construction impacts on walking and busing routes, effects of attendance boundary rezoning on transportation to schools, circulation plans for new schools, and on-campus training for new schools. These meetings are attended by city traffic engineers, police department Deputy Chief and Senior Resource Officers (SROs), Crossing Guard Supervisor; and the school district's Deputy Superintendent for Support Services, Director and Assistant Director of Transportation, Bus Routing Supervisor, and Director of Security.</p> <p>A few months before a new school opens, the members of this second meeting will take a school bus and do a run-thru of the school's traffic circulation plan with the school's Principal and Vice-Principal, discuss any concerns they might have, and identify any adjustments that need to be made to the circulation plan. Then for the first few days that a new school is open, the city and school district will have several people located on different parts of the campus, teaching parents the traffic circulation pattern. Because there is now a standard traffic circulation pattern at all new elementary and middle schools, the city and school district created a video for principals,</p>	

teachers, and parents explaining how traffic operations and flow should work (available here: http://viewpure.com/A3ylwE0_HUg).

In addition to these two monthly meetings, there are pre-submittal school design meetings as needed with the school district's architect and engineer to exchange school design drafts before the official submittal to the city.

One of the ways the City of Frisco promotes SRTS is through the Annual Sidewalk Program. The city sets aside money in its annual budget to fill in gaps in the sidewalk network, in places where a developer has not yet come in to develop a site and build sidewalks (which are required under city ordinances). When a developer does come in to build on that site, they are required to reimburse the city for the costs of installing the sidewalks.

Keys to Frisco's successful city-ISD coordination include starting from the top, down (political leadership that decides the coordination process and what staff resources should be dedicated to it); building it into your regular processes; including all the players; and avoiding the blame game.

Questions following the presentation included whether the city counts how many kids walk or bike to school, what the involvement of the planning department is in these monthly meetings, whether the school district is involved in the development of the comprehensive plan, what the coordination process is likely to look like once growth has stabilized in Frisco, and who is responsible for maintaining sidewalks and other public infrastructure once a site is turned over by a developer.

2. Guest Presentation: Safe Routes to School in Fort Worth - A Partnership of the Blue Zones Project, the City of Fort Worth, and Fort Worth ISD - Brandy O'Quinn, Blue Zones Project; Brian Jahn, City of Fort Worth

Brandy O'Quinn highlighted the challenges faced by a large, urban city in planning for SRTS. Namely, there are 16 school districts that serve the City of Fort Worth (though only 14 of them actually have schools in Fort Worth), in the past the City of Fort Worth did not require sidewalks as part of new developments, and over 60 percent of Fort Worth ISD schools were built before 1960 and were not designed or have space to accommodate the greater traffic demands that exist today. By state law, Fort Worth ISD does not bus students living less than two miles from school unless a significant safety hazard exists. Because of its more urban environment, there are many schools in which all students live less than two miles away. Therefore, all students arriving at those schools are either walking, biking, or arriving in a private vehicle.

Ms. O'Quinn then gave an overview of the Blue Zones Project and its interest in promoting SRTS. Over half of children in Fort Worth ISD are considered overweight or obese; and today, only 13 percent of kids in the U.S. walk or bike to school, down from a national average of 50 percent in 1969. As a result of unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity, it is predicted that kids today will have a shorter life span than their parents. In addition, communities are economically viable based on the health of its people; and there are proven economic benefits of promoting walkable communities and safe routes to schools. One of the ways Blue Zones hopes to tackle these challenges is by promoting a Complete Streets approach: designing streets for their target speeds, and building a well-connected street system to reduce travel distances.

Blue Zones convened a SRTS Workgroup consisting of staff from the City of Fort Worth, Fort Worth ISD, Bike Friendly Fort Worth, Tarrant County Public Health, the Texas Department of Transportation, and NCTCOG. The Workgroup was tasked with identifying pilot schools at which to conduct walk audits and prepare SRTS plans. An initial 31 schools were identified by City, ISD, and Blue Zones staff. To prioritize these schools, NCTCOG staff gathered data on bicycle and pedestrian crashes, the density of school-age children, and the ratio of missing

sidewalks within one-half mile of the schools. The Workgroup then analyzed this data in conjunction with other factors, including the presence of bus service, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, whether there was support from the school principal, and the number of students that currently walk or bicycle to the schools based on counts conducted by school crossing guards. Four pilot elementary schools at which to engage the school community and conduct walking audits were selected.

To encourage students to walk and bicycle to school, Blue Zones has started Walking School Buses at C.C. Moss Elementary and other elementary schools in Fort Worth. A video about the Walking School Buses was played for attendees, and can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Su2acInk2I>

Political support was identified as being essential to getting SRTS in Fort Worth off the ground. Fort Worth ISD passed a resolution in May 2015 supporting the SRTS initiative and resolving to identify an employee to focus on SRTS, conduct walking audits for all elementary schools by 2018, work with the city and other partners to apply for funding, and participate in Walk to School Day. Subsequently, the City of Fort Worth passed a resolution in June 2015 affirming support for pedestrian safety programs in all 16 school districts, and resolving to assign high priority to school pedestrian routes in the allocation of 2014 bond funds for sidewalks and school safety zones, and support Fort Worth ISD in efforts to prepare SRTS plans and secure grant funds to implement them. City staff had been advocating to allocate funds for SRTS as part of the city's annual budget for several years, but it was not until Fort Worth ISD passed a resolution committing to SRTS that city leadership agreed to set aside \$250,000 to hire consultants and conduct walking and biking assessments around 20-30 schools. A consultant has been selected, and they will conduct SRTS assessments at all types of schools—elementary, middle, and high—in all types of locations—urban and suburban, in all city council districts. The sidewalk needs that are identified will be connected to the sidewalk bond funding to prioritize needs around schools.

Other lessons learned were that school principals tend to have autonomy, so it is up to them how involved the school will be with Blue Zones and SRTS activities. Furthermore, it is crucial to have traffic engineers involved, and there needs to be more communication and future planning between the city and school districts.

A question posed by NCTCOG staff was how they got the top-level, political support that was identified as crucial to making this happen. Brandy O'Quinn responded that it is important to find champions, and in Fort Worth's case it was the mayor. Timing is key to making sure those champions are there at the right time.

3. Upcoming Funding Opportunity for Safe Routes to School

NCTCOG staff gave an overview of an upcoming call for projects for the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Program, which provides funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects, including SRTS projects. Examples of SRTS infrastructure projects were shown, and ways that communities can get started now with preparing their SRTS projects was discussed. Brian Jahn with the City of Fort Worth recommended that funds be sub-allocated specifically for SRTS projects, to make sure they are not pushed aside in favor of larger, more expensive trail projects identified in NCTCOG's long-range plan, Mobility 2040. NCTCOG staff responded that this will be one of the topics of discussion at the November 16th meeting of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC). Yvette Wingate with Tarrant County Public Health recommended that applications that have health department involvement should receive bonus points. Staff responded that SRTS applications will receive points for the extent of community support and stakeholder involvement they demonstrate, including involvement from county health departments.

Attendees requested that the presentations be sent out or posted online. NCTCOG staff responded that the presentations and meeting minutes would be posted online (www.nctcog.org/schools), and the links to the meeting materials would be emailed out to attendees.

Action Item(s)			
	Item	Responsibility	Target Completion Date
1	NCTCOG to post meeting materials on website	NCTCOG	November
2	NCTCOG to send the links to the meeting materials to attendees	NCTCOG	November

Next Meeting

Date: TBD

Time: TBD

Location: NCTCOG