



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 11, 2024

REQUESTER: Katherine Coffin

PRESENTER: David Riesland, Transportation Engineer

ITEM TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF ADOPTION, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF RESOLUTION R-2324-148: A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA ADOPTING A SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL POLICY.

BACKGROUND:

Local governments in Oklahoma have multiple tools for improving the accessibility and safety of routes to and from schools. Diversifying school transportation options gives staff, students, and their families new opportunities to improve their health, safety, and sense of community. Safe routes to school policies change how decisions are made about school and transportation infrastructure, ensuring that people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities have abundant opportunities to access their schools safely and easily by foot, bicycle, and public transit.

DISCUSSION:

Many streets around schools are designed primarily for cars, with few features that support safe travel for people walking and bicycling. This is especially dangerous for people who are more likely to be harmed in pedestrian-vehicle crashes, such as children from low-income households. These children are more likely to be hurt as compared with children from wealthier areas, who tend to be transported to school in cars. Streets that prioritize cars over other modes of transportation near schools are also a missed opportunity: walking or biking to and from school or a bus stop provides daily opportunities for physical activity and engagement with the surrounding community. Safe spaces for physical activity and social engagement are significantly less available in low-income communities and among priority populations. Concerns related to priority populations will vary in different communities, reflecting local demographics and socioeconomic factors, as well as the equity, safety, and health goals expressed in their community assessments. Lack of physical activity among children increases their risks for a range of health problems over the course of their lives: obesity, stress and depression, certain cancers, stroke, asthma, and chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. These harms are also costly for communities. The ways children get to school raise crucial issues about health, safety, and equity in our communities.

Safe routes to school policies change how decisions about school and transportation infrastructure are made by balancing the needs of students traveling to school by car with those traveling by foot, bicycle, and bus (or public transit where available). This ensures that people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities will have abundant opportunities both to access their schools

safely and easily and to add more physical activity into their daily routines. Local governments can use safe routes to school policies to improve the ways that people commute to and from schools by facilitating:

- Healthier commutes (for people and the environment);
- Daily opportunities for physical activity, even in areas with few recreational spaces;
- Safer routes for walking and bicycling;
- More transportation options, many low- or no-cost to users;
- Reduced traffic (and frustration);
- Positive interactions between school users and surrounding neighborhoods

In Oklahoma, local governments (such as cities, towns, and counties) make decisions that affect the locations of schools, the types of transportation available around them, and the safety of surrounding areas. Local governments, in particular, have multiple tools for improving the safety and accessibility of transportation options around schools; policy is one of those tools.

Policies are useful when changes need to apply consistently over time, in order for a community to achieve its goal. Many public health policies, such as building codes and zoning regulations that protect us from unsafe or hazardous environments have made healthier environments the norm. Oklahoma communities can use a safe routes to school policy to create healthier, safer, and more connected communities for some of their most vulnerable populations. Safe routes to school policies can help ensure related projects are incorporated into planning activities and may help secure funding through transportation grants and allocations. Throughout the policy development and implementation phases, community partners can help support outreach efforts, organize coalition meetings, facilitate school walking audits, collect data, and evaluate progress.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of Resolution R-2324-148 to adopt a Safe Routes to School Policy for the City of Norman.