

Advisory Committee on Transportation Choices (ACTC)

June 29, 2020
Approved

In Attendance: Nancy Van Doren, School Board liaison; Matt de Ferranti, County Board Liaison

APS Appointees

John Armstrong, Chair
Jeff Elkner, Teacher
Josh Folb- Sp.Ed. Parent
Paine Gronemeyer, Student
Elizabeth Kiker, ES parent
Chenda Lee, ES Parent
John Mickevics, APS Staff
Janeth Valenzuela, Parent

County Appointees

Gillian Burgess (BAC)
John Carten (TAC) *by phone*
Eric Goodman (PAC)

Staff

John Chadwick, APS F&O
Kristin Haldeman, APS-MMTP
Lauren Hassel, APS - SRTS
Kim Wilks, APS-Transportation Svcs
Dennis Leach, DOT, Dir.
Jim Larsen, DOT - ACCS
Lynn Rivers – DOT-Transit
Hui Wang, DOT-TE&O

The June 2020 ACTC meeting was held via MS Teams due to the COVID-19 emergency. The meeting was broadcast with closed captioning on Comcast Xfinity channels 25 and 1085; Verizon FiOS channels 39 and 40. The meeting also could be viewed online with closed captioning at www.arlingtonva.us.

Chair Armstrong opened the meeting with some housekeeping items related to meeting virtually.

The ACTC approved minutes from the March 2020 meeting.

Public comments were directed to the APS Engage portal.

Mr. Armstrong also announced the new Chair and Vice Chair, Josh Folb and Elizabeth Kiker.

1. Update on Return to School Task Force (“Task Force”)

Gillian Burgess, ACTC’s rep to the Task Force, provided a brief overview of the Task Force structure and operation. The Task Force is meeting weekly and had met earlier in the day, when staff presented the proposal for two instructional models: virtual and hybrid. Transportation would be on the agenda in the next few weeks. She said she believes the Task Force has meetings scheduled through August and for the time being is focused on the start of school. The Task Force could be extended into the Fall if its help is needed. Janeth Valenzuela also serves on the Task Force as the representative from the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on Refugees and Immigrants.

2. Back to School Transportation

Kristin Haldeman presented an update to the Committee on transportation issues APS will have to address in the context of COVID guidance/constraints. (See slides.)

One of the most significant issues we will face is that our buses will only be able to carry 12 passengers. Buses will likely need to make several trips back and forth to pick up all students on a typical route. In the context of the hybrid model, where students would be split into two groups, looking at our typical bus ridership (not planned/eligible ridership, but actual ridership), rough calculations show more than 500 trips per AM and PM (for reference, Transportation typically does

a little more than 400 trips per day). Eligible ridership estimates show somewhere between 800 and 900 trips each AM and PM. APS is trying to get a better idea of who will actually ride. The survey that went out the previous week asked if bus riders would continue to use the bus. About 35% said no; and of that about 54%, said they would drive. That means about 2,000 fewer riders per day. And potentially more than 1000 new drivers per day.

Ms. Haldeman then reviewed actions APS can take to help reduce demand on the bus, but also reduce vehicular travel through encouraging more walking and biking. APS will soon send an 'intent to return survey' to families asking them which instructional model they will choose AND whether they will use APS transportation. This should help us gauge the scope of bus ridership. She then reviewed TDM options for staff and how behavior may change due to COVID.

Following is Committee discussion notes:

Will there be early drop-off as before when it was used for play time (Key ES)? This could reduce the congestion of many arriving at once.

There are some practices that would make students safer that can be accelerated: e.g., remote drop-off, makes driving less attractive. Walking school buses and bike trains. PTAs may not have the capacity to lead them, though. BAC/PAC members might like to volunteer. Prioritize students walking/biking and taking bus for early entry to school. Transit – recent evidence showing little transmission on transit.

Cars are also a public health concern. Need to keep that in mind as well.

Jim Larsen (ACCS) reported that the state DPRT is prohibiting promoting carpooling as of today.

May need to come up with a way to keep cyclists apart when parking bikes.

Responding to a question about whether there will be a plexiglass barrier between bus drivers and students, Ms. Wilks noted that APS is not permitted to add the plexiglass shields. Drivers will have face shields.

On area where County assistance with small infrastructure changes to help manage parking around schools or making walking and biking more accessible is on the last block from the Custis Trail to ATS on George Mason, where the route is a bit scary. Could we add a jersey barrier to make that last connection?

Would like to see signage for temporary changes (e.g. parking) be more substantial or barriers more substantial. Temporary can too easily be destroyed/moved.

Remote parking locations should be within a few blocks of school with easy walks to school. Maps will help.

If cars are dispersed, walking and biking will be safer.

Ms. Wang noted that County does want to support safe back to school. DOT is already in conversation with school staff about each of the school sites to see what can be improved. Re: temp signage – initial signage was put up quickly; looking at more substantial signage. Will be a community-wide communication effort.

Is addressing this crisis engendering more creativity? Not only in transportation but on the instructional side as well. On trails for example, still very crowded – worried that we have not been creative about addressing.

County staff noted that the State not as far along as Arlington. They are working on that.

Ms. Van Doren told the group she is appreciative of all the efforts of County and APS staff to address this evolving crisis. She acknowledged Matt de Ferranti, who will be the ACTC's new County Board liaison, and was able to join the call for a little this evening. Thanks to John Armstrong for Chairing for the past two years. It was important to hold this meeting so Board and staff could hear from members.

Mr. Leach added that the County is committed to getting students back to school safely and already has been meeting with APS staff. Update on ART - like school buses, transit buses can only carry about 12 passengers at a time and current service is reduced. Very supportive of remote drop off to reduce congestion around schools and getting more students walking and biking.

Paine Gronemeyer bid farewell to the Committee. This is his last meeting. In the Fall he will attend Cornell University for its Urban and Regional Studies program. Very excited about the program and hopes to come back to Arlington one day.

(Applause for our graduate)

In response to a question about our bus driver availability, Ms. Wilks noted that as of March 1, APS had 171 drivers. Their return status is not yet known. We continue to recruit. We will not see returning drivers until Aug. 24, as there has been no summer school. Driver contracts begin on July 1 with new FY. About 80 will need physicals before they can start back.

Transportation patterns were heavily influenced by extended day. We will need to keep in mind that patterns may change if extended day is not offered.

Update on ART Pilot – with COVID budget adjustments, funding for the pilot was cut for this year. APS will continue to promote the iRide card and hopes to bring the pilot back as soon as funding allows.

Update on ART/Metro operations – no fares being collected at present to keep passengers away from the drivers (boarding from rear door only). Will likely continue through the end of the calendar year. Also, ART has been running a Saturday level of service on only some routes since shut-down. Just instituted all day service that day. By end of summer, hope to have service on all routes, operating all day.

Ms. Burgess noted that she hopes we can take advantage of opportunity to tweak service to better meet school bell times once we return to some sense of normal.

Ms. Van Doren documented the meeting with photo of attendees.