

Montpelier Schools
School Travel Plan
August 2007

1. Identification of individuals and organizations involved in the local SR2S Team

The Safe Routes to School Steering Committee for the Montpelier Schools oversees both the programs at Union Elementary and Main Street Middle School. Bill Merrylees with Community Connections, an after-school enrichment program which focuses on increasing healthy behaviors, is the local liaison for the schools. Members of the steering committee meet once a month during the school year to discuss issues and plan activities. Members include the following:

Montpelier SR2S Team

Sue Boyer	Principal, Union Elementary
Pam Arnold	Principal, Main Street Middle School
Jim Thompson	Assistant Principal, Union, Building Contact
Cindy Murphy	Nurse, Main St., Building Contact
Steve Metcalf	Superintendent of Schools
Mary Hooper	Montpelier Mayor
Steve Gladczuk	Central VT Regional Planning Commission (RPC)
Karen Akins	RPC's Regional Safe Routes Coordinator
Sue Sinclair	CVRPC Director
Drew McNaughton	Community Connections Site Coordinator, Union & Main St.
Ginny Burley	Community Connection Director
Mark Moody	Montpelier Police Department
Bill Merrylees.	Community Connections PEP Coordinator
Tom McArdle	Montpelier Assistant Director of Public Works
Suzanne Hechmer	Montpelier Downtown Community Association
Carrie Baker Stahler	Onion River Sports
Eric Scharnberg	Cross VT Trail Association
Vivian Ladd Tomasi	UES Parents Group
Tom Sabo	Montpelier High School Earth Group
Warren Ostler	PE Teacher
Brooke Pearson	Montpelier HS (service org)

2. An assessment of the current levels of walking and biking

Even though Montpelier is a fairly compact community which is fairly well served by a network of sidewalks, the primary travel mode to school at both elementary and middle schools is the family vehicle. A high percentage of kids do walk to school, and biking is popular at the middle school.

**Travel Modes To and From School
(Reported by Students)**

	Union Elem.	Main St. M.S.
Walk	28.70%	38.63%
Bike	2.18%	6.01%
School Bus	25.57%	5.20%
Family Vehicle	38.63%	43.99%
Carpool	2.24%	4.28%
Transit	0.03%	0.30%
Other	2.65%	1.59%

Main Street Middle School:

**Travel Modes To and From School
(Reported by Parents)**

	To School	From School
Walk	17.78%	21.64%
Bike	2.51%	2.73%
School Bus	32.43%	39.08%
Family Vehicle	43.10%	34.03%
Carpool	3.97%	2.31%
Transit	0.00%	0.00%
Other	0.21%	0.21%

According to a survey of middle school parents administered in 2006, there are higher levels of walking and bus riding after school, presumably because parents drop kids off in the morning because of the time pressure then allow them to get home on their own after school, when time is not such an issue.

3. An identification of the physical and cultural barriers students face

Both Union Elementary and main Street Middle School are located less than _ mile from each other in the downtown residential area. Many of the routes to school are the same for both schools. Physical barriers to the schools by neighborhood are summarized below:

Neighborhood	Major road crossings or busy area	Comments
Downtown, VT College	None, all residential	Very accessible
Town Hill extension	County road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some missing sidewalks, • big hill could be barrier • Many one sided walks with mid-block

		crossings.
Barre Street	Center of town	Large low-income housing development nearing completion.
Northfield St./Berlin St., National Life	State Route 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some sections of cross VT trail could be used • Hills a barrier Some walking to bus stop currently
"Toytown", Rt. 2 West from city	Travel on Rt. 2	No sidewalks
Terrace St./ Clarendon St. / Hubbard Park Drive	Travel on State Street	Hubbard Park staff report a number of middle schoolers walk through the park to school daily
The Meadows: Summer St., Winter St.	Cross State Rt. 12 at traffic circle on N. Main	No bus service Crossing Guard at Spring & Elm
Elm Street extension	Travel on RT. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most distant area served by school • Flat terrain • Good sidewalk from rec fields to town
Cummings Street	Travel on RT. 12	Largest low-income housing complex in city, many students

In addition to physical barriers, there are a number of varied factors affecting family travel decisions in Montpelier. Like many Vermont communities, distance was the major factor reported to affect travel behavior, according to parents. Traffic speeds/volumes and intersection safety are also major factors families consider.

Issue	Issue affects travel decision		Change might affect travel decision	
	number	percent	number	percent
Distance	260	54.17%	84	17.50%
Driving Convenience	27	5.63%	14	2.92%
Time	120	25.00%	46	9.58%
Extracurricular Activities	59	12.29%	31	6.46%
Traffic Speed	251	52.29%	108	22.50%
Traffic Volume	215	44.79%	98	20.42%
Adults to Walk With	69	14.38%	58	12.08%
Sidewalks & Pathways	179	37.29%	109	22.71%

Intersection Safety	188	39.17%	93	19.38%
Crossing Guards	89	18.54%	59	12.29%
Violence or Crime	195	40.63%	85	17.71%
Weather or Climate	191	39.79%	69	14.38%

Distance

It is surprising that distance is such an important factor in Montpelier, where most students live within reasonable walking and biking distance from school. Mapping by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission indicates that 62.6% and 68.6% of residential units are located within 1 mile of Main Street Middle School and Union Elementary School, respectively. The parent survey indicated lower percentages among those parents participating in the survey. It showed 46% of Main Street Middle School students lived within a reasonable walking distance (1 mile), while 63% lived within a reasonable biking distance (2 miles).

Distance from Home to School

Less than 1/4 mile	81	17%
1/4 mile up to 1/2 mile	71	15%
1/2 mile up to 1 mile	66	14%
1 mile up to 2 miles	82	17%
More than 2 miles	167	35%
Don't know	4	1%

Changing Student Travel Behavior

Of the factors that could be changed, traffic speeds, sidewalks and pathways, and intersection safety ranked high in priorities.

Traffic Speeds

Traffic speeds in front of Main Street Middle School are not appropriate for heavy pedestrian activity and car loading/unloading. The posted speed limit in front of Main Street Middle School is 25 mph. Speed studies conducted by the CVRPC confirm concern among parents about traffic speeds on local roadways.

<u>Street /Direction of Travel</u>	<u>85th percentile speed</u>	<u>95th percentile speed</u>
Main Street -South bound	37 mph	40 mph
Main Street-North bound	37 mph	40 mph

Sidewalks and Pathways

Because of the hilly topography in Montpelier, it is often difficult to construct sidewalks where they are needed. This has resulted in a sidewalk system that is often not continuous, leaving children to walk in the street with traffic for a portion of their commute to school. 37% of parents indicate that the lack of sidewalks

and pathways are affecting their decision on whether to let their child walk to school.

Intersection Safety

Parents have expressed a concern with a number of dangerous intersections along their child's route to school. Intersections specifically mentioned by parents include the crosswalk at Hubbard, Main Street & College, Route 2 & Northfield. Another parent suggested a traffic signal at the Matt's Mini Mart (Elm and School Street) .

The Montpelier School district stations crossing guards at the following intersections:

Spring & Elm Streets
Park & Loomis Streets
East State & Hubbard Streets
Main & School Streets
Main & Franklin/Liberty Streets

A crossing guard position with recently cut due to budget constraints, leaving the intersection of Berlin Street and River Street without an adult crossing guard. This intersection does have a traffic signal with a push-button walk signal, but several parents of elementary students believe this is an unsafe intersection for their children to cross independently.

School Pick-up/Drop off Zones

Traffic safety issues are a concern in the pick up/drop off zone at both of Montpelier's Schools. The drop off area for Main Street is a through street, so problems there are primarily getting drivers to recognize the importance of driving safely through the immediate school area where there is heavy pedestrian traffic. The problems at Union are primarily related to conflicting movements of cars and pedestrians in front of the school at lower speeds. On May 22, 2007, Jon Kaplan and Nancy Avery from the Vermont Agency of Transportation visited both school sites and discuss some of the issues and potential solutions at each one. The current situation and possible solutions are contained in a memorandum dated May 30, 2007, which is attached.

Problems at Union Elementary are longstanding and in a current stalemate with the administration, teachers, parents, residents, and city staff. The town's traffic committee has been involved since 2004. A description of the existing issues is contained in a memo from Tom McArdle, Assistant Director of Public Works, dated October 14, 2004.

Parental Attitudes

Even though parents are generally supportive of walking and biking to school, traffic safety concerns and fear of crime stop many from allowing their children to walk to school. 46% of middle school parents surveyed said that they would never allow their child to walk to school alone.

Other Parent Comments

- While it would be healthy for my children to walk or bike, I don't think it would be safe due to the hills and main roads they would be on. Also I don't think it is the best use of their time.
- I will only drive my son to school if he has a big project to carry. Walking biking has become his routine and he takes it for granted.
- If school started at 8am it would give more children the ability to walk.
- My biggest concern is the safety of crossing Main St at the top of College St. The crosswalk can be very dangerous. Cars go extremely fast around the bend above the crosswalk.
- I pick my 6th grader up from school because I am already picking up her sisters. I would be okay with her walking home too (with other kids we know).
- The intersection of Rt. 2 & Northfield St. Main is dangerous to pedestrians of any age. Car routinely ignore the "no turn on red" crossing signal, especially in the morning. Perhaps an extended police presence to ticket violators would be helpful before reinstating a crossing guard.
- My older children love walking to school-after school not as much. They are tired and have to walk uphill. My younger ones love to walk with me, but it is always a matter of time and weather. They arrive in such a better mood if they walk.
- I would let my children walk if they wanted to. They don't want to because of the hill on Berlin Street
- Concern for her safety is the #1 reason I don't allow her to walk to school. Time is also a big reason that is in our control. The safety requires community action.
- Physical activity is part of long term health. Colin has asthma & needs an hour of fresh air every day-his time outside being physically active is very important.
- #11- (weather and climate) a lot of those items weren't problems so how would you change/improve them? How does one change or improve the climate?
- I don't think children should be on the street all alone. We live up off the road about 1/4 mile from my daughter's friends. We have compromised by driving her to a friend's house and letting her walk from there. Sometimes we walk her there but have 2 other children at home who need to get to 2 other schools. I have been concerned to see little children walking to school alone or with a friend. I think some educational information should go out to parents setting an age limit on children walking without an adult. I think all children under 10 should be accompanied by an adult.
- sidewalks needed up further on Towne Hill Rd. Incentive programs work. Important for kids who may not be involved in sports to get exercise. The fresh air at beginning of day and exercise will help with students alertness at school.
- I don't know if this is being given a UES or not. But the crosswalk on Hubbard is dangerous. Its crazy that's not a 3 way stop. Also- the Montpelier police(over whom you have no jurisdiction, I realize) should be patrolling before and after school- since so many kids walk.
- My daughter had to walk to school in the beginning of the year due to necessity. I feel that with the school taxes paid in Montpelier, busing should be provided for our children. For single parents who have to be to work earlier than school starts walking is sometimes th only way for children to get to school. When I lived on the Berlin line of

Berlin St, the idea of a 6th grader walking to school was ridiculous. Even on the end of Barre St. it is insane to expect children to walk. What has to happen to our children for busing to be extended to the middle school. Who decided that 6th graders were old enough to walk such a distance. Not all parents are able to transport their children.

- Busy roads, poor sight lines, narrow sidewalks, lack of driver awareness of pedestrians discourage us from allowing our child to walk our particular route to school.
- Why isn't there a light at Matt's Mini Mart for kids crossing after school.
- I would feel safer if I knew my child fully understood safety rules and how dangerous the potential is. I can tell him endlessly, I am not always. Sure he listens/believes me.
- My children get a ton of exercise and also walk downtown 1 mile from our house all the time on weekends, etc. walking to middle school 1 1/2 miles away is fun sometimes but usually inconvenient for the kids. Many middle schoolers don't go home right after school. Mine often want to go down town to dance lessons or to the library are some other activity. Then I pick them up later. We are very concerned about the huge backpack weight. We see our children walking in an abnormal bent over position when they are wearing those awful backpacks and we can't stand it and drive them to school. Of course we want them to walk- it is so good for them. But the weight is so bad.
- We often drive the kids halfway to school and pick them up halfway home. There is a bad intersection near our home that we prefer they avoid.

4. An outline of what steps will be taken to overcome these barriers

Engineering

The Safe Routes to School team has determined that a few key infrastructure changes could start to improve the environment for walking and biking for students in Montpelier. There are four separate elements that are needed to begin changing the local environment:

1. Town Hill Sidewalk extension

As part of the upper Main Street / Towne Hill Road corridor study previously mentioned, the provision for sidewalks to serve the Towne Hill Road neighborhood was also recommended. Towne Hill Road is a class two street serving as a minor arterial connecting a portion of East Montpelier and other communities located to the east with Montpelier and carrying well over 3,500 vehicles per day. The narrow shoulder of the road was felt to be no longer suitable for safe pedestrian and bike travel. In 1999, the City of Montpelier constructed approximately 1,900 LF of sidewalk to link the western portion of this medium density population area comprising roughly 100 single-family homes to the Main Street sidewalk and the Montpelier sidewalk network. This project was considered Phase one of the two-phase road improvement initiative.

The Safe Routes to School application infrastructure request for construction funding will be used to extend the sidewalk another 1,000 feet (Grandview Terrace – Woodcrest Drive) that we intend to build consecutively with road rehabilitation work similar to Phase 1. A preliminary design of this five foot wide bituminous concrete walk & curb has already been prepared by the City engineering staff and it's consultant employed to develop this project. The connection will link the Greenock, Woodcrest, Westwood Avenues & Dyer Street

neighborhoods containing nearly 50 additional homes to the Montpelier sidewalk network and allow a safe route to the Main Street Middle School for area students. These neighborhoods are located within 1.5 miles from the MSMS & Union Elementary Schools. Some children are currently allowed to walk or skate board along this narrow road shoulder. Consequently, the City has received numerous requests from area residents to complete this extension so that more children can walk or ride to school and other destinations. The walk will be constructed within the existing road right-of-way limits and enjoys wide support from area residents, some of whom participated in the 1998-2000 corridor study.

2. Curb Extensions on Main Street in school zone

Speeding is currently a problem on Main Street, which has a posted speed of 25 mph, consistent with speeds appropriate for areas of high pedestrian activity. Speed studies performed by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission in the fall of 2006 indicate that the 85th percentile speed along this stretch of Main Street is 37 mph. In order to physically narrow the roadway and encourage lower speeds, the Safe Routes to School Team has identified the installation of curb extensions, or bulb outs, at the intersections on either side of the school as the number one priority for improving the walking and biking conditions at Main Street Middle School.

The bulb outs would be located at two key intersections -- the intersections of Main Street with both Liberty/Franklin and Jay/North. This treatment is consistent with recommendations made by a consultant hired by the city as part of a comprehensive study of the area. The upper Main Street-Towne Hill Road Transportation Corridor Study, undertaken in 1998-2000, (final report dated January, 2000) identified a number of measures to improve the safety and aesthetics of the area's roadways. Some of the recommended improvements have been implemented over the years within the corridor and none in the vicinity of the school. Recommendations for the middle school area included curb extensions, bike lanes and crosswalks to calm the traffic. We are proposing that only two of the three proposed curb extensions be constructed, eliminating the mid-block crosswalk proposed directly in front of the school.

As noted in the consultant's report, the proposed bulb outs would have several beneficial effects. They would restrict parking near the intersection corners to achieve the required crosswalk setback from parking thereby eliminating vehicle encroachment. They would shorten the distance required for pedestrians to cross Main Street, improve visibility for both pedestrians and motorists, and decrease driver reaction time because of the increased recognition of the school zone and pedestrians intending to cross the street.

3. Improved Signage and Markings at Both Schools

New school signage, including advanced warning beacons, and markings are

being proposed to remind drivers about the presence of school aged children at the Main Street Middle School (MSMS). A standard school signage package for Union Elementary School is also proposed, along with 10 in-street pedestrian crossing signs for each of the major crosswalks along designated school routes. Currently, signage at the schools is not in compliance with the new MUTCD standards. Additional funds for improved signage and markings to control the pick-up/drop-off process at Union Elementary are included to help resolve some of the longstanding problems at this location such as imposing a positive safety impacting on driver behavior in a school zone

4. Feasibility Study-Future Improvements

We are requesting funding to conduct a comprehensive study of the Main Street Middle School and Union School areas including school routes to identify and provide recommendations and preliminary design of additional school route safety improvements for future consideration.

A partial list of likely candidates for improvements to be considered:

- Moving Park Avenue Crosswalks
- Altering on-street parking & drop –off areas to improve the pedestrian environment and safety.
- Improvement of Crosswalks at Barre Street
- Main/Northfield intersection Improvements
- Main Street/College Crosswalk Improvements

Enforcement

We will continue to work with Mark Moody with the Montpelier Police Force on speeding and poor driver behavior. Realistically, much of the driver behavior must be addressed through driver education rather than enforcement. A new commitment to educating parents about safety in the pick up/drop off zone at Union will take place in year 2 of the Safe Routes to School program.

Education

Bike/Ped Safety Education (in classroom) Community Connections will take the lead in offering bike and pedestrian safety education to Montpelier students. Bill Merrylees plans to attend the September 11th training being offered to potential bike/ped safety educators in Randolph. He is also attempting to recruit PE teachers at the schools for this training.

Bike Safety (On Bike) The Montpelier Recreation Department will continue to offer an annual bicycle safety fair in May. Community Connections will

help promote participation by students in this event, in addition to offering bike safety checks and minor repairs on site at the middle school in May.

Driver Education

The Safe Routes to School team will devise a public education campaign aimed at driver behavior in school zones.

Encouragement

Special Events- Community Connections will continue to help organize special events which promote walking and biking to school among students and their families. These events will include:

Intl. Walk to School Day/Week/Month (October)
Way to Go Week (May)
Governor's Fitness Challenge (Spring/Fall)

Walking School Buses-The Safe Routes to School team will continue to encourage and support the establishment of walking school buses for Union Elementary students. A bigger push with parent groups will include holding neighborhood coffees with interested groups of parents to help organize additional walking school buses.

Walking Wednesdays/Wheeling Wednesdays- The Safe Routes to School team will work with school administrators and staff to promote a one day a week promotion to encourage walking and/or biking.

After School Bike Club- Community Connections will be establishing after-school bike clubs for students at Main Street Middle School in the fall and spring.

5. A timeline for implementation and identification of who will take the lead for each step

A timeline of what actions will be taken during year two of the Safe Routes to School program, and by whom, is attached.

Required Signatures:


Sue Boyer, Principal
Union Elementary School


Pam Arnold, Principal
Main Street Middle School