



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION Charles Barrett School Safety Improvements Alexandria, VA

In response to numerous citizen requests to improve pedestrian safety on Martha Custis Drive and Valley Drive in front of Charles Barrett Elementary School, the City of Alexandria launched a comprehensive Safe Routes to School safety project. After several public meetings with the community, the resulting plan of action included geometric reconfiguration of the intersection in front of the school to shorten crossing distances, adding sidewalks, installing improved signage, installing raised crosswalks and bicycle infrastructure. The project was funded through a federal Safe Routes to school grant.

Background

Prior to 2012 transportation conflicts and crashes occurred in the Charles Barrett Elementary School neighborhood. These crashes and near misses were partly due to the skewed intersections with poor sight distance, long pedestrian crossings and pedestrians crossings at unmarked areas. Additionally, poor intersection design and missing sidewalks added to the conflicts. With over 22 percent of students walking or bicycling to school, and a strong Safe Routes to School program, the community and the City made improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure a priority.

Implementation

Initially, the City of Alexandria organized three community meetings to discuss the problem and ask for input, and then two public hearings before the City's Traffic and Parking Board. The input received revealed that while the community wanted improved bicycle facilities and improved pedestrian infrastructure, the community was also concerned about maintaining two-way traffic movement on Valley Drive and minimizing the impact to parking. After collecting input from the community, the City developed a comprehensive package of solutions which were implemented through the City's Department of Transportation and Environmental Services.

The solutions included:

- Installing crosswalks and raised crosswalks
- Shortening crossings
- Converting a “Y” intersection to a “T” intersection
- Improving sight distance
- Adding sidewalks
- Adding bicycle sharrows
- Reversing one-way movement in school driveway/Kiss-n-Ride
- Separating bus traffic from parent drop-off and pick-up traffic
- Correcting conflicting parking signs
- Moving the local bus stop away from crosswalk at main school entrance
- School implementing a School Safety Education Campaign

The city was able to open up additional parking spaces during the day and through parking restriction changes, the project resulted in a net loss of two parking spaces.

Sustainability

The City of Alexandria took significant steps to make sure that the engineering efforts were understood and utilized to the best extent possible. The City collaborated with the school and community to promote a School Safety Program which involved communicating safe drop-off procedures and parking around the school. The new procedures were sent to all families and reviewed at the first open house and Parent Teacher Administration (PTA) meetings. The City of Alexandria Police Department provided additional enforcement following the implementation of the improvements.

Currently, a group of parents participate in a weekly Walking Wednesday program utilizing a Walking School Bus. Walking School Buses are led by one or more parents who “pick up” neighborhood kids on the way to school, similar to a school bus. The school also provides incentives for students who walk often and host bicycle safety rodeos for 4th and 5th graders.

Contact

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