

Safe Routes to School Networking Call: Arrival and Dismissal Wednesday, August 25, 2021, 12:30 p.m.

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program Networking call covered all things arrival and dismissal. We separated into three breakout rooms—suburban, rural, and urban for a guided discussion. Below you will find a summary of each discussion along with helpful resources related to arrival and dismissal.¹

Urban Breakout Room (participants from Arlington, Boston, Chelsea, and Worcester)

- There seems to be a lot of obstacles when it comes to students biking to school such as a bus company in Boston discouraging biking, concerns in Chelsea regarding people stealing bikes, and more families driving due to safety concerns.
- Although most schools tend to be neighborhood schools, traffic is a big concern on both ends. More walkers leaving and crossing the street means longer wait times for cars but there is also a convenience factor to overcome when it comes to choosing cars over walking.
- Some solutions that urban municipalities such as Worcester have adopted are staggered dismissal systems where students who take the bus are dismissed first. In addition to the school bus, many students also use public city buses such as the MBTA or WRTA. Other communities like Arlington are looking to make a street one-way based on arrival/dismissal reports from SRTS.
- There is frustration associated with new infrastructure because it can be confusing to students and adults if they haven't seen it before. It might be used improperly or not at all even though it was put in place to improve safety and walkability. There is also frustration surrounding new school builds because the people in the room have conflicting priorities.

Rural Breakout Room (participants from Sturbridge and Townsend)

- One of the challenges facing dismissal involves the sheer volume of cars traveling to rural sites. When it comes to managing over 900 students, dismissal is a challenge.
- The impact of COVID and an unwillingness for families to take the bus contributed to increased traffic at school sites. Some feel that traffic might decrease in the coming year, but communities may elect to only promote bussing even when walking and biking are options.
- In terms of improving safety, sometimes it isn't a big overhaul. Rather, there are small tweaks that can have a dramatic difference on arrival and dismissal.
- In rural areas, the lack of sidewalks can be a barrier though there could be solutions such as Park, Walk, and Roll locations.
 - Similarly, rural school leaders believe there can be an opportunity to use park and walks by identifying neighborhoods with low vehicle counts, such as communities which typically serve vacationers. These are idle for portions of the school year.
 - Park, Walk, and Roll locations don't have to be school-wide either, there can be specific grades such as 5 or 6 that can participate.

¹ The views, opinions, and statements presented in this summary document were made independently by the attendees of this networking call. They may not necessarily represent the opinions or guidance of the Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Program, its agents, or employees.

- Engaging the community early and throughout the year leads to more effective solutions. This also helps SRTS achieve a sustainable position within a community. Task forces can make a big difference.

Suburban Breakout Room (participants from Cape Ann, Concord, Falmouth, Hudson, Lexington, North Adams, Southborough, Wakefield, and Weymouth)

- There was definitely agreement about the need for improving the school's built environment due to the increase in student population.
 - There is not enough room on school property for buses and family vehicles. The result is excessive queueing and idling.
 - Parent congestion has been more of an issue due to COVID and it will continue this year due to the lack of cohorts and limited guidelines/contact tracing on buses. The result is more families driving.
- There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to communities. Some towns have a "split personality" where one section has more of a suburban feel and another part of town is completely rural.
- There was interest expressed regarding the opportunity for schools and municipal departments to be able to talk to peers in neighboring communities. Adding more people on this call from different communities would help diversify the group.
- One point of frustration was a lack of consistent arrival/dismissal language across a district. Policy can help codify these procedures. Education is also key, especially across a district in order to make it equitable. Safe Routes has PE curriculum and bike safety sessions available and can also hold "train the trainer" sessions during professional development.

Helpful Links:

- [Student Safety During Arrival and Dismissal Backpack Flyer](#)
- [Mass General Laws](#)
- [Model Policy Language](#)
- [Crossing Guard Training](#)
- [Pop-up Projects for Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Park, Walk, & Roll Tip Sheet](#)
- [Why Walk, Bike, & Roll? Tip Sheet](#)
- [Travel Survey Info](#)
- [Walking School Bus and Bike Train Guide](#)
- [Driver Education Resources](#)
- [MassDEP Green Team](#)