

Prioritizing School Routes in 5A Network

RECOMMENDATION(S):

Recommend that Council receive this report for the Corporate Record and direct Administration to report back to Council through the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure and Planning not later than Q2 2022 with operational and capital funding recommendations for an expanded Active and Safe Routes to School Program.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The City's existing Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRS) program uses a multi-pronged approach that combines engagement, education, and encouragement with engineering improvements and enforcement to support immediate and long-term increases in active school travel. With the Council-approved 'Always Available for All Ages & Abilities' (5A) Network Guiding Principles and Network Map, there is an opportunity to expand the ASRS program to prioritize implementing 5A network improvements adjacent to schools.
- What does this mean to Calgarians? An expanded ASRS Program will help build accessible sidewalks, pathways and bikeways that are well lit and easy to navigate with the objective of increasing comfort and safety for all users around schools.
- Why does this matter?
 - Routes that meet 5A Network principles provide accessible, affordable, year-round options for active school travel.
 - Encouraging families to walk and wheel to school improves physical health, is linked to better school performance and safer school zones with less traffic and better air quality.
- In 2022, Administration will use remaining capital funding in the Active and Safe Routes to School program to accelerate improvements at participating schools and finalize a new prioritization framework to identify operational and capital funding recommendations for the next business cycle.
- Previous Council Direction: Administration was directed to report back to Council in November 2021 during the final year of the 2019-2022 budget cycle and to provide a scoping report and funding recommendations for an expanded Active and Safe Routes to School Program for the 2023-2026 budget cycle.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city that moves

DISCUSSION

Existing Policies & Program

The City of Calgary's Transportation Plan (CTP) outlines seven goals, including safety, universal access, affordability, and environmental sustainability. Calgary's Pedestrian Strategy, 'Step Forward', has a key target of 20% of students walking to school by 2025.

In January 2020, Council approved the 'Always Available for All Ages & Abilities' (5A) Network Guiding Principles to prioritize walking and wheeling infrastructure in Calgary. In February 2021, Council approved amendments to the CTP, including a 5A Network Map with recommended routes. The 5A Network Map and Principles will guide investment of new pathway and bikeways through street reconstruction, redevelopment, and completion of missing sidewalk and pathway

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links. To aid in budget and investment allocation, City Administration is developing a prioritization tool to identify a list of projects where 5A routes should be built based on four main criteria: user demand, route connectivity, safety improvements, and equity/ inclusivity. The time required to complete the 5A Network is dependant on the amount of funding provided for ongoing City lifecycle programs, developer contributions, and available capital funding, as well as operating funding for winter maintenance and lighting. Administration prepared a Council Briefing about 5A Network Funding and Implementation earlier this year (see Attachment 1).

The existing ASRS program is part of the Community Mobility Improvements (CMI) portfolio managed by the Infrastructure Services Department after the Organization Realignment on January 1, 2022. The ASRS program is funded with an annual operating budget of \$75,000 and a capital budget of \$1,500,000 over four years (2019-2022). Additional details about the current program are provided in Attachment 2.

- The current operating budget accommodates partnering with external facilitators to deliver programming at schools. For this budget cycle Administration projected working with 30 schools over four years with capital improvements depending on the context and need of participating schools.
- To balance program resources across all schools, capital investments focus on localized safety improvements such as marked crosswalks, curb extensions (permanent or temporary) and signage changes adjacent to schools.

Administration will use the remaining \$1.3M capital budget in the existing program to invest in short-term capital investments in 2022. This will include temporary and permanent intersection improvements, pilot projects and providing schools end-of-trip facilities like bike racks.

Scope for an expanded Active and Safe Routes to School Program

Building and improving 5A routes near schools will require dedicated funding to support planning, design, construction, and operations.

Improvements would include building missing sidewalks or pathways to connect to existing infrastructure, re-designing the public right-of-way to provide additional space dedicated to walking or wheeling, improving safety at intersection crossings, lighting upgrades, wayfinding, or additional winter maintenance. Additional community engagement will be needed with adjacent community stakeholders as projects extend beyond the school area into the surrounding community.

Administration will create a new framework to prioritize 5A Network improvements adjacent and within walking distance of schools. The framework will review additional factors including:

- *School demographics*: Proportion of students who live within walking/wheeling distance and age of students
- *School clusters*: Locations where there are clusters of multiple schools adjacent to the same 5A upgrade
- *Safety*: Safety review using traffic collision data and perceived safety based on school and community feedback
- *Gap assessment*: identifying barriers at key school access points such as offset gates, closed sidewalks, and the availability of safe crossings across arterial roadways.
- *Equity considerations*: To provide infrastructure for schools that can't participate in the full program because of staffing or parent volunteer constraints

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- *Opportunities on joint use sites:* How to best deliver 5A infrastructure connections to fill gaps and provide shared mobility benefits to multiple destinations

In Q2 of 2022, Administration will report back on additional scoping details and a new framework for a proposed expanded Active and Safe Routes to School Program. The expanded program will select a prioritized number of school sites to improve in the next business cycle (2023- 2026) and include estimated capital and operating costs for these 5A Network improvements.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- Public Engagement was undertaken
- Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- Public/Stakeholders were informed
- Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

The City has a Joint Use and Planning Agreement with the Calgary Board of Education, the Calgary Catholic School District and the Conseil Scolaire FrancoSud. The Agreement provides tools and guidance to achieve complete communities and outlines a coordinated approach to the allocation, use, planning and development, and maintenance of municipal reserve, open space, and school sites to address the evolving needs of Calgarians. The Agreement is currently being updated and staff will engage with the Joint Use Committee as the framework is developed

Since January 2019, Administration has established a relationship with school boards and partners through a 'Safe Student Travel Advisory Group' (SSTAG) and the group meets monthly to discuss school travel issues. SSTAG has representatives from the Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Separate School, Alberta Transportation, Alberta Motor Association who delivers the School Safety Patrol program and bussing companies. As a new framework for prioritizing 5A Network improvements at schools is developed, staff will seek data and feedback from SSTAG members.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

Improving 5A routes near school sites will improve mobility options for people of all ages and abilities, enhancing connectivity, safety, and quality of life for the overall community. Active school travel helps school-aged children participate in physical activity which is linked to improved health and mental well-being and happiness.

Environmental

Increasing active school and community travel supports reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality which align with Calgary's Climate Resilience Strategy.

Economic

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Increased use of active travel facilities helps optimize use of city street assets. Peak demand for driving facilities, as well as the need for enhanced traffic management, is reduced when more students actively travel to school.

Service and Financial Implications

No anticipated financial impact

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The ASRS program has an annual operating budget of \$75,000. We will continue to partner with Ever Active, our external program facilitator to provide school programming. Any additional operating budget adjustments regarding staffing resources for project engagement as well as operations and maintenance of new 5A routes would be brought forward in 2022.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

The Active and Safe Routes to School program has \$1.3M in capital funding remaining to invest in infrastructure upgrades at participating schools in 2022. Administration anticipates preparing a budget request for an expanded Active and Safe Routes to School program which will implement prioritized routes near schools from the 5A Network Map in the next business cycle.

RISK

Building out a complete and connected 5A Network around schools will take time and there may be more interest from schools than there are staff resources. The new framework will help staff prioritize feasible projects and Administration will explore addressing this shortfall through new partnerships and bundling infrastructure upgrades to create efficiencies with project design and implementation.

There are many complex factors beyond providing comfortable and reliable routes, that influence how families choose to travel to/from school including distance from home, work/extra-curricular schedules for both students and parents, and family preferences for schools with specialized programs. Behaviour change takes time and we anticipate that we may only see modest increases in walking and wheeling to schools where a high percentage of students are coming from outside a 2 - 5 km radius.

The Province of Alberta is responsible for the design and construction of new schools in Calgary communities. The City is often asked by community groups to build safety improvements at new schools in new communities. Staff will continue conversations with the Joint Use Coordinating Committee to explore how to efficiently design and build connections and school sites that meet 5A Network guiding principles in new communities.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Transportation Briefing to SPC on Transportation and Transit March 17, 2021: 5A Network Funding and Implementation Update
2. Background on Current Program

Department Circulation

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General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform