

Dakota County
Safe Routes to School

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Safe Routes to School Comprehensive Plan

Southview Elementary School

**City of Apple Valley
Dakota County, MN**

May 2010

Prepared by:



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and Associates, Inc.



SHIP

Statewide Health Improvement Program

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Project Background

The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) aims to help Minnesotans live longer, healthier lives by reducing the burden of chronic disease. The Dakota County Public Health Department received SHIP funding to work with community partners to develop and implement programs to improve nutrition, increase physical activity, and reduce tobacco use in schools, workplaces, community settings, and healthcare sites. As part of this effort, comprehensive Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plans have been developed for 10 schools in Dakota County that seek to increase walking and biking to school through the following means:

- **Education** – Teaching children to walk and bike safely.
- **Encouragement** – Developing programs that get children excited about walking or biking to school, such as walk/bike incentive programs or Walk to School Day. May also include methods that help parents and guardians feel comfortable letting their child walk or bike, such as walking school buses or adult crossing guards.
- **Enforcement** – Having law enforcement support, such as speed zone enforcement or increased patrols, along the designated routes to school.
- **Engineering** – Identifying infrastructure barriers to walking and biking, such as sidewalk/trail gaps, hazardous crossings, or the need for secure bicycle parking.
- **Evaluation** – Measuring the effectiveness of the various components of the SRTS project.

The following sections describe the development of a Safe Routes to School Plan for Southview Elementary in the City of Apple Valley, Dakota County, Minnesota.

Existing Conditions

Southview Elementary School is part of Independent School District 196 serving the Rosemount, Apple Valley, and Eagan communities in the Twin Cities suburbs. Southview is located on Garden View Drive between County Road 42 (150th Street) and County Road 46 (160th Street) in the City of Apple Valley. The school was built in 1967, was expanded in 2007, and is located adjacent to Valley Middle School. The area surrounding the school is primarily residential.

Student Data

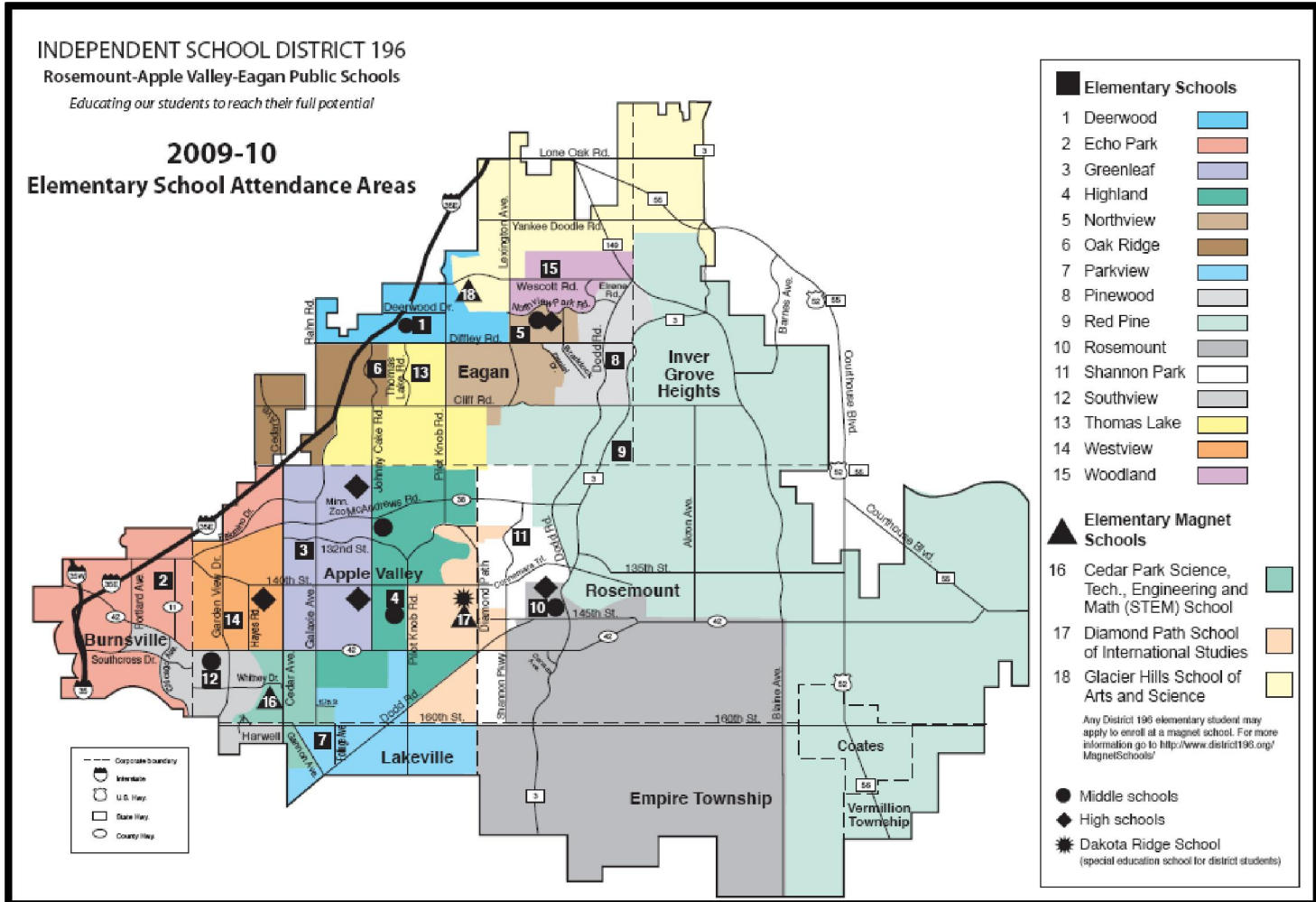
Currently, there are approximately 706 students in kindergarten through 5th grade at Southview Elementary School (2009-2010 school year) and the school day is from 8:30 am to 2:50 pm. The

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elementary school boundary map for District 196 shows that the attendance area for Southview Elementary is concentrated to the neighborhoods near the school between County Road 42 and County Road 46.



Source: www.district196.org

The attendance and ½-mile walk areas very closely coincide on the northern (County Road 42) and eastern (Harmony Way) boundaries. As a result, there are not any roadways within the walk area that are designated as hazardous crossings, making Southview a very walkable and bikeable school. The walk area for Southview Elementary is shown on the map on page 14.

Students at Southview are not allowed to bike to school until 2nd grade, unless accompanied by a parent, and are required to walk their bikes on the school grounds.

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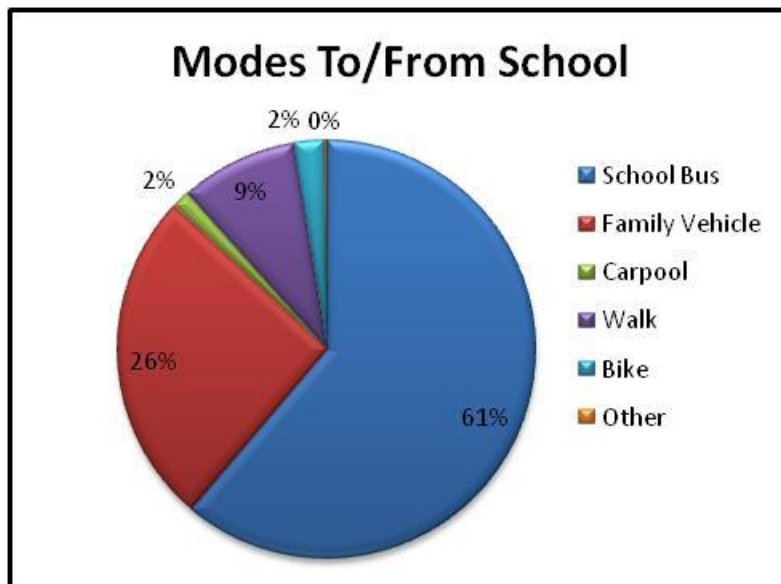
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Safe Routes to School Activities

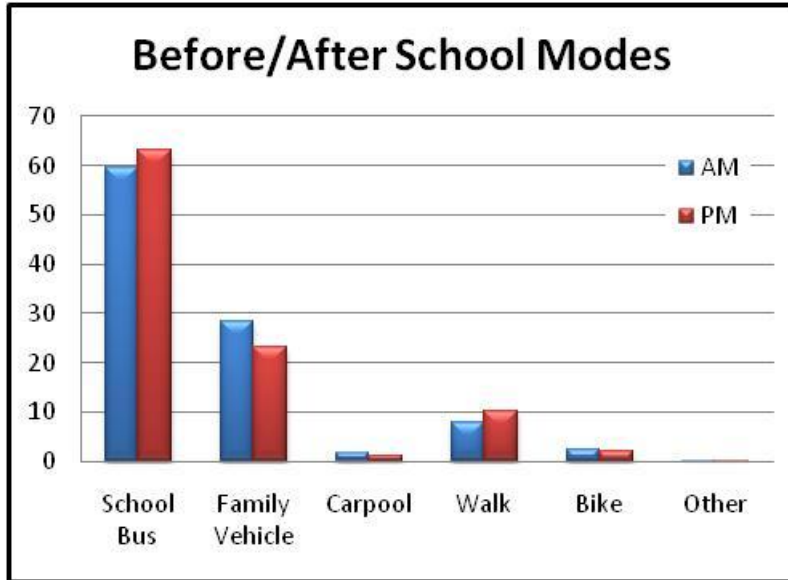
Southview Elementary has three student crossing guards and one adult (parent) crossing guard for the Whitney Drive/Garden View Drive intersection. The adult crossing guard is paid by the Southview Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Currently, there isn't a targeted Safe Routes to School program at the school, but the school did receive a grant to start a walk/job club for 3rd through 5th grade students to log their laps, with rewards for various levels of laps completed.

An estimated 100 students live within the walk area and are not provided bus transportation, however only about 40 percent of students in the walk area regularly walk or bike to and from school. These students would be the targeted audience to regularly walk or bike to school, as well as students that live outside the walk area but area to the south and west of the school (east of Lac Lavon Drive and north of County Road 46). In-classroom tallies of students' arrival and departure modes were conducted at Southview Elementary during April 2010. As shown in the chart below, an average of 9 percent of students currently walk to school and an average of 2 percent of students currently bike to school. The most predominant mode is school bus, but 26 percent of students are driven to school by a parent, resulting in large numbers of parent vehicles during pick-up and drop-off. The tallies also showed that more students walked and rode the bus home from school in the afternoon.



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Well-used bike rack at the front of Southview Elementary.

A parent survey of concerns and attitudes related to walking and biking was also conducted in April 2010, with 82 responses. Distance, traffic volumes, and intersection safety were the most common reasons given for not walking or biking; however, intersection safety and violence/crime were the improvements that would be most likely to influence parents to starting letting their students walk or bike. Past incidents of vehicles approaching students walking home from Southview and other schools in

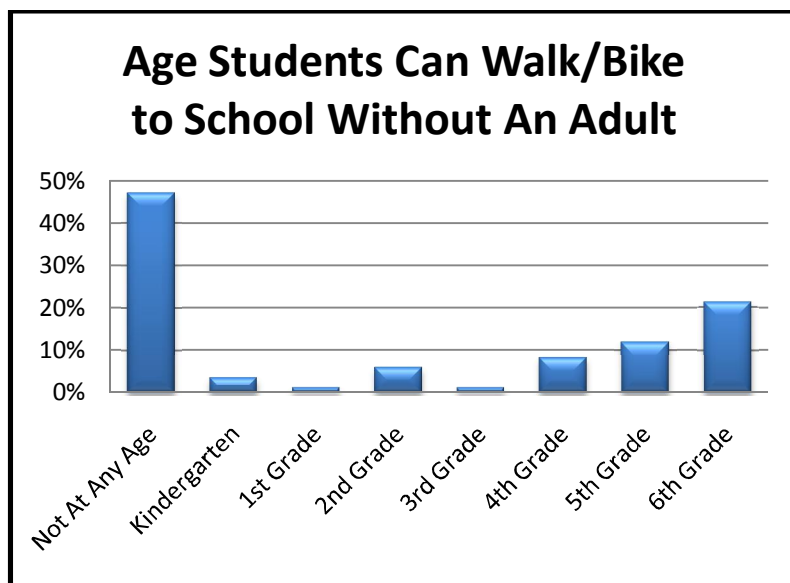
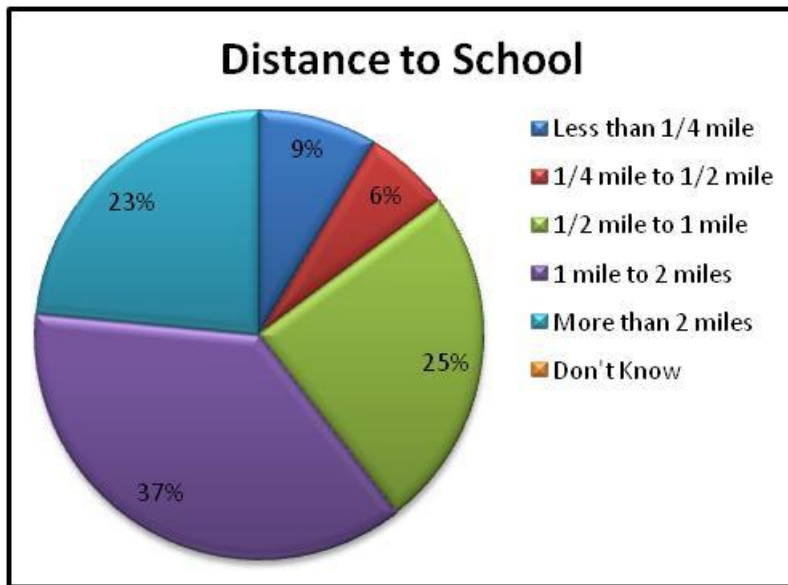
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nearby communities have resulted in parent concerns about “stranger danger” when students are walking or biking to school.

The charts on the following pages show some of the other key results from the survey.

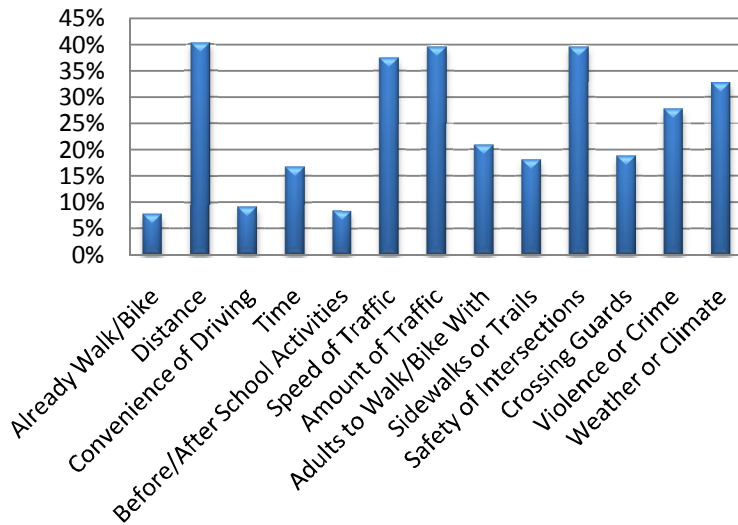


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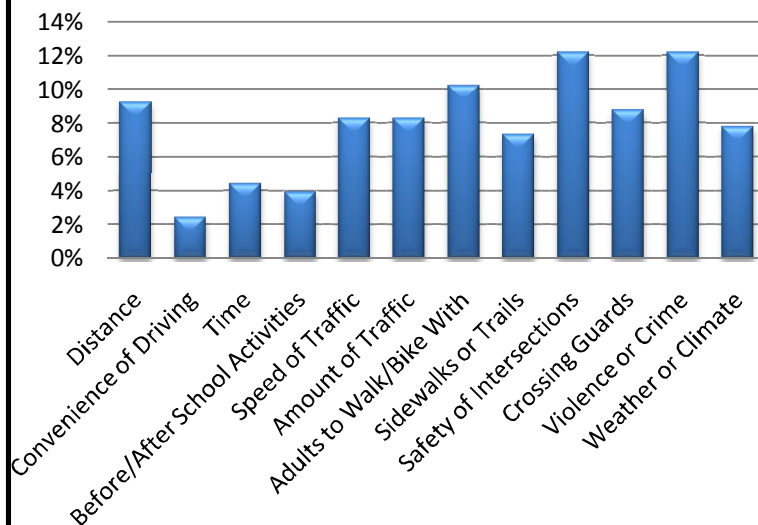
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Factors Affecting Decision to Walk/Bike



Improvements That Would Increase Walking/Biking



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Infrastructure

The roadways surrounding the school generally have a well-connected system of sidewalks on both sides of the collector roadways, including Garden View Drive, Whitney Drive, and 157th Street. Most of the local residential streets do not have sidewalks on either side of the street. There are currently three designated school crossings on the roadways surrounding the school:

- Garden View Drive/Baldwin Drive
- Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive (patrolled)
- Whitney Drive/Hopewell Lane

A review of the crash history for the past five years (2004-2008) showed there have been no pedestrian or bicycle crashes at any of the designated school crossing intersections at Southview. There have been 7 crashes at the Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive intersection, but 4 occurred on a weekend or during the summer and only 1 crash that occurred at 8:12 am on a weekday may have been related to school arrival. There have also been 2 crashes at the Garden View Drive/Baldwin Drive intersection, one of which was a left-turn crash that occurred at 3:05 pm and may have been related to school dismissal. The crash rates for these intersections are about average for similar intersections in the Twin Cities metro area. Overall, the area around Southview should be considered safe for walking and biking from a traffic safety perspective.



Existing school crossings at the Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive intersection.

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Existing driver feedback sign on southbound Garden View Drive, just north of Valley Middle School and Southview Elementary School.

Traffic speed and volume studies conducted on Garden View Drive by the City of Apple Valley in 2007 in showed that there are about 5,900 vehicles per day on Garden View Drive south of County Road 42 (150th Street). The average speed in this segment was calculated to be 28.9 miles per hour (mph), which is slightly under the posted speed limit of 30 mph. The data was collected in the summer, when school was not in session, so no data was collected regarding the average speeds during school arrival and dismissal, when the school speed zone is in effect. Both Garden View Drive and Whitney Drive have posted school speed zones of 20 mph.

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*School speed zone on Garden View Drive in front of Southview Elementary and Valley Middle Schools.
Frequent speed enforcement is done on Garden View Drive by the Apple Valley Police Department.*

In addition to the off-site pedestrian and bike facilities, Southview Elementary has an on-site crosswalk from the building to the sidewalk leading to Garden View Drive, which crosses the parking lot entrance. The school also has one bike rack at the southeast corner of the school, but there are also racks located at the front of Valley Middle School. A total of 19 bikes were counted in the front bike rack before school in May 2010.

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Marked crosswalk on the Southview Elementary site.

Site Evaluation

A site evaluation was completed at Southview Elementary on March 29, 2010 that included walking around the site and observing the dismissal process on a typical day. All parent vehicles enter and exit the one-way parking lot that accesses Garden View Drive and all buses use the one-way parking lot that accesses Whitney Drive.



Students waiting to be picked up. Vehicles wait in the queue and only pick up students when they reach this loading area, which is supervised by school staff.

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Queue of parent vehicles in the east parking lot prior to school dismissal.

The queue of parent vehicles stretches through the east parking lot next to Southview and into the adjacent, connected parking lot at Valley Middle School. The buses also use all the available curb space in the south parking lot. Due to the volume of traffic entering and exiting the site during school arrival and dismissal, the school has signed the driveway onto Garden View Drive to prohibit left-turn movements during these times. Despite the volume of bus and vehicle traffic during the peak periods of school activity, the congestion cleared out rather quickly and the all-way stop control at the Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive intersection is appropriate to handle the volumes of traffic.

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Signed left-turn restriction at the Southview driveway onto Garden View Drive.

The school crossing at Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive is currently patrolled by a combination of 3 students and a paid adult crossing guard was heavily used. The crossing at Whitney Drive/Hopewell Lane also used to be patrolled, but few students crossed there so the patrol was discontinued.



School patrol crossing students as a group at Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive.

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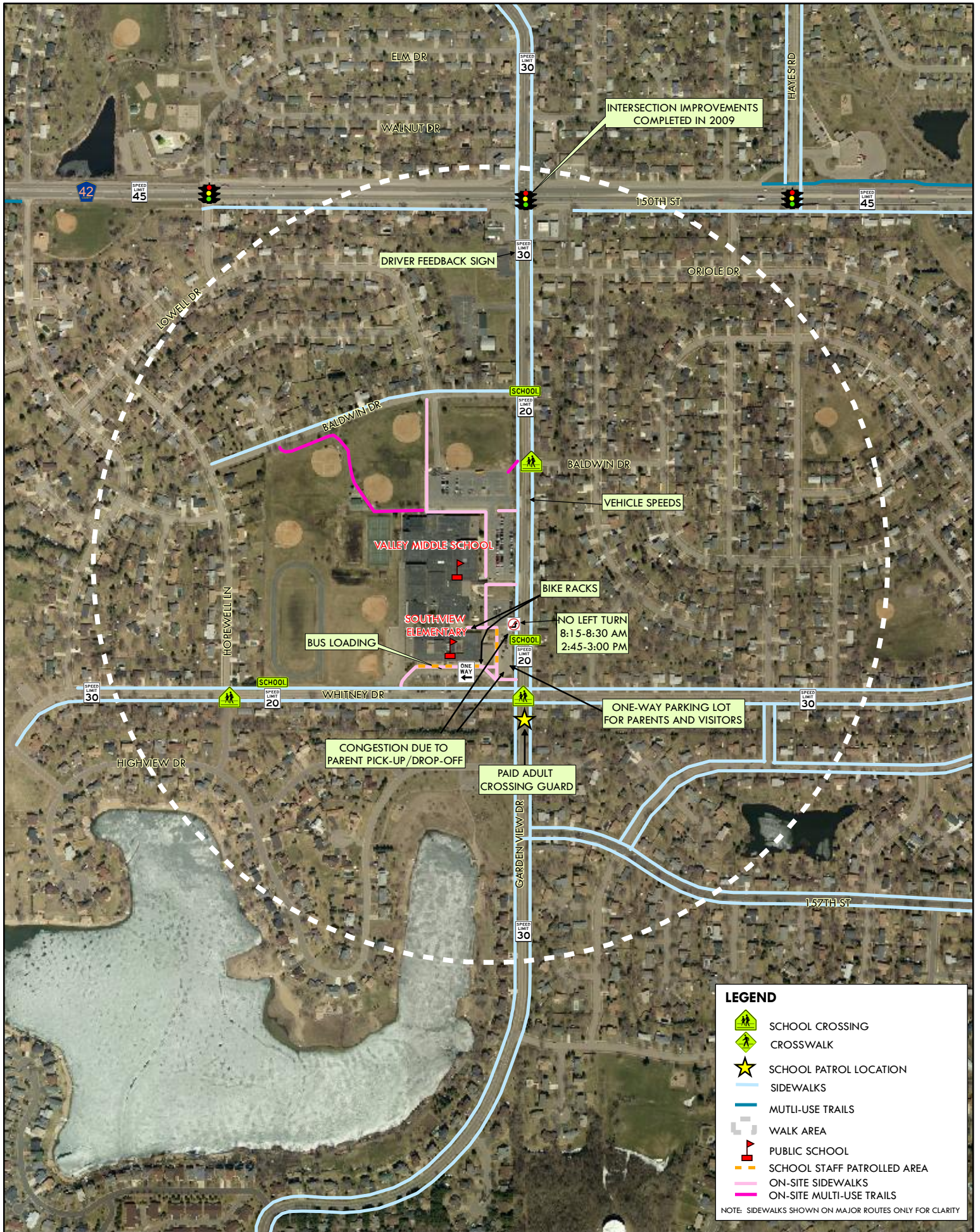


Existing Issues and Challenges

In addition to the data collection and site evaluation completed as part of this project, a Safe Routes Working Group was established for Southview Elementary that included the school principal, teachers, the City of Apple Valley, and parent representatives. The role of this group was to identify and discuss barriers to walking and biking to school as well as potential ways to overcome the barriers.

The existing challenges to walking and biking to Southview Elementary are summarized in the following bullets, as well as the map on the following page:

- Parking lot congestion due to parent pick-up and drop-off.
- Traffic on Garden View Drive and Whitney Drive due to parent pick-up and drop-off.
- The volume of traffic on the school site and the resulting congestion contributes to the perception that it is not safe to walk or bike.
- Vehicle speeds on Garden View Drive are a concern.
- Recent incidents have generated “stranger danger” concerns.
- Parents would be more willing to let students walk or bike if they knew they would be supervised.
- District budgets may increase walk radius in the future – opportunity for more walking and biking, but could also mean even more parents driving.



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Recommendations

Despite some of the current challenges to walking and biking to Southview Elementary, the school's location adjacent to the neighborhoods it draws students from, the relatively small attendance area, and the existing sidewalk infrastructure provide tremendous opportunities to significantly increase the numbers of students regularly walking and biking to school. The following recommendations have been developed specifically for Southview Elementary to address the identified challenges to walking and biking. The short-term recommendations are actions that could be implemented prior to or during the 2010-2011 school year, while the long-term recommendations may require policy changes, additional discussion and coordination, or significant funding sources. In addition to the recommendations, the group that should take the lead in implementing the recommendation has also been identified.

Short-Term Recommendations

The short-term recommendations included in this section primarily consist of low-cost improvements that can be implemented in the six months, although some are dependent on funding availability. The recommendations are generally prioritized in terms of actions that are easiest or most necessary to complete first. The infrastructure recommendations are also summarized on the map included at the end of this report.

1. Expand the existing Walk/Jog club where students track their mileage to include walking and biking to/from school. The "Golden Sneaker Trophy" and "Trek Across America" should also be continued as on-going encouragement and incentive activities. Southview has already started to implement this recommendation using a Safe Routes to School mini-grant for spring 2010 from Dakota County.

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Trek Across America map outside the school office, where students track their total mileage.

2. Southview is doing an excellent job with the existing school patrol at the Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive intersection. The adult crossing guard position should be continued. Implementation lead – Southview.
3. Start a weekly or monthly “Walking Wednesday” (or whatever day the school chooses) with staff or parent volunteers as the crossing guards for all the marked crossings on Whitney Drive and Garden View Drive where students cross. Southview is planning Walk to School event in spring 2010 using a Safe Routes to School mini-grant from Dakota County. Implementation lead – Southview.
4. Provide periodic targeted enforcement of the school speed zone on Garden View Drive. Implementation lead – City of Apple Valley.
5. Add AHEAD plaques to the advance school crossing signs on Garden View Drive and Whitney Drive to make the locations of the school crossings clear to drivers. Implementation lead – City of Apple Valley.

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Example of advance school crossing sign with AHEAD plaque.

6. Install additional bike racks at the front of Southview to provide more bike parking. Implementation lead – Southview.
7. Establish a permanent Safe Routes committee at Southview Elementary to provide on-going support and organization for Safe Routes activities, including regular Walk to School days, adult walk/bike volunteers, and special events. Implementation lead – Southview.
8. Investigate the feasibility of remote pick-up/drop-off sites on Garden View Drive, south of Whitney Drive, and on Baldwin Drive, north of Valley Middle School. The remote sites could be used for school bus and parent pick-up/drop-off on the Walk to School days, to provide opportunities for physical activity even for students that live too far away to walk or bike to school. This would require increased adult supervision between the remote sites and the school site. Implementation lead - Southview.
9. Improve the visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists on the school site by installing fluorescent yellow-green crossing signs and repainting the crosswalks in the school parking lot – Southview/District 196.

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Crosswalks on the Southview site may be upgraded to match the crossings on the adjacent city streets. This will make the crossings more visible and recognizable to drivers.

10. Organize a walking school bus¹ or bike train for student to walk and bike together as a group to and from school. The best potential for this would be for students that live east or southeast of the school that currently have an informal bus/train at dismissal because they are escorted as a group across the Garden View Drive/Whitney Drive intersection. Implementation lead – Southview.

11. Work with neighborhood associations, senior citizen groups, or others to designate ‘safety houses’ on the school routes and solicit volunteers to supervise students walking from the remote drop-off sites to the school building. Implementation lead – Southview, with assistance from City of Apple Valley and Dakota County Public Health.

Long-Term Recommendations

The long-term recommendations included in this section primarily consist of higher cost improvements or actions that would require a significant policy change, either of which would be expected to take longer than six months to occur. These recommendations are generally prioritized in order of importance, however funding availability may mean that the highest priority recommendations are not

¹ A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school to as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers.

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the first to be implemented. The infrastructure recommendations are also summarized on the map included at the end of this report.

1. Designate a Safe Routes coordinator at the district level and each of the individual elementary and middle schools in the district, similar to the way bus transportation is currently coordinated. The district-level coordinator would share information and coordinate Safe Routes activities and best practices among all the District 196 schools. The school SRTS coordinator would be responsible for scheduling meetings of the SRTS committee, training adult volunteers, and working with parents and students to address issues or concerns related to walking and biking. Implementation lead – District 196.
2. Eliminate the bussing of students that live just outside the walk area on the northeast and southeast edges of the attendance area and reallocate the funding to the existing paid adult crossing guard or to add a second adult crossing guard, if necessary. There is already a large group of students walking and biking to these areas and there are a number of homes that are in a narrow area just outside the walk area, but the students could easily walk or bike to school. Implementation lead – District 196 Transportation.
3. Develop a Safe Routes website for Southview Elementary that provides walking/biking route information as well as other information, such as the volunteer schedule for adult crossing guards. Implementation lead – Southview.

- 1 - MAINTAIN ADULT CROSSING GUARD
- 2 - PROVIDE PERIODIC ENFORCEMENT
- 3 - UPGRADE ON-SITE CROSSWALK
- 4 - ADD AHEAD PLAQUES TO ADVANCE WARNING SCHOOL CROSSING SIGNS
- 5 - INSTALL ADDITIONAL BIKE RACKS
- 6 - POTENTIAL REMOTE PICK-UP/DROP-OFF LOCATION
- 7 - TARGET AREA FOR WALKING SCHOOL BUS



LEGEND

- SCHOOL CROSSING
- CROSSWALK
- SCHOOL PATROL LOCATION
- SIDEWALKS
- MULTI-USE TRAILS
- WALK AREA
- PUBLIC SCHOOL
- SCHOOL STAFF PATROLLED AREA
- ON-SITE SIDEWALKS
- ON-SITE MULTI-USE TRAILS

NOTE: SIDEWALKS SHOWN ON MAJOR ROUTES ONLY FOR CLARITY

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Funding and Implementation

Funding for the various recommended projects may come from a variety of sources depending on the type of project and who is implementing it. Some potential funding opportunities that currently exist and may be used to fund these recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- Statewide Health Improvement Program funds, which are available through several programs administered by Dakota County Public Health:
 - Safe Routes to School mini-grants
 - Active Living grants, which are available to cities in Dakota County, but may be used to fund improvements on school sites
 - Assistance with preparation of infrastructure grant applications. Cities in Dakota County can submit infrastructure projects and the County's consultant will assist in identifying potential funding sources and preparing applications.
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota
- Federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds through the Metropolitan Council
- Federal Safe Routes to School funds through the Minnesota Department of Transportation²

No one of the E's of Safe Routes to School will by itself increase walking and biking, which emphasizes the need for cooperation among school, city, county and other agencies to implement change.

² The federal Safe Routes to School program was funded through fiscal year 2009. Future funding will be dependent on passage of the Federal Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill, which is currently being discussed in the United States Congress.