

Date: 2/19/23
To: House Committee on Education
From: Julie Van Horn, Medford School District's Safe Routes to School Coordinator
RE: Support for Flexible School Transportation Funding, HB 3014

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Zach Hudson and Boomer Wright, and members of the committee:

My name is Julie Van Horn, and I reside in Medford, Oregon. I am the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Coordinator for the Medford School District. The MSD SRTS program efforts aim to increase walking and biking to and from school, decrease traffic congestion, and improve safety.

The Medford School District strongly supports HB 3014. Having the flexibility to use transportation funds to help implement alternative programs, such as Walking School Buses (WSB), Bike Trains (BT) or *Crossing Guards (CG) (*if permitted) would be extremely beneficial. This would allow us to utilize and maximize our funds that are still available due to our current bus staffing shortage. We are operating at 70% bus staffing, which means we have fewer bus stops and buses stay on primary roads resulting in longer walks to the bus stop and longer transit times. Some parents are opting to drive rather than have their student ride the bus. This has only added to the already excessive amount of traffic congestion near schools at drop-off and pick-up times.

Alternative transportation solutions would also be useful to our more rural schools due to sporadic walking infrastructure and parent concerns about safety. It would be more appealing to families to let their children walk if we had paid adults to help guide them safely through the neighborhood and across the busy road. One of our schools has a family that implemented a Bike Train for a one-day walk/bike to school event and it had a great turnout. This was a volunteer based parent organized Bike Train that gave us a glimpse of what is possible if families are provided options or opportunities.

These programs would offer assistance to those in the bus zone and help students from the walking zones along the way. A school I am working closely with has a maxed capacity bus with a stop on the edge of the one-mile zone. That one stop has 20+ students! A bus max capacity of 3 to a seat with students ranging from small Kindergartners to large 6th graders is crowded and can be problematic. Alleviating buses of loads like this would have a positive impact.

Many schools have reached out to me seeking assistance with families experiencing complications getting their students to and from school that live *JUST barely* within the one mile walk zones. Some barriers include working parents, parents with mobility limitations, young children without an older sibling escort, locations of residence, or the route of travel not being suitable for unaccompanied children to walk alone. So far, my efforts or possible solutions have been limited to being volunteer based and or connected to a one day event, such as our Walk + Roll to School Days. This is not a sustainable solution to these families.

Allowing the use of transportation funds towards WSB, BT, CG's would be a WIN-WIN. We could maximize funding usage, target bus stops in the 1-1.5 mile mark, and provide paid, **DEPENDABLE** escorts to school that can also help walk zone families along the way. This would decrease traffic near our schools while providing students with a healthy dose of exercise, more time to connect with their peers, opportunity to get to know their neighbors and neighborhood, hands-on experience and education on how to be a safe and responsible pedestrian or bike rider.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Julie Van Horn – Safe Routes to School Coordinator for Medford School District.