

PARSIPPANY-TROY HILLS BOARD OF EDUCATION



TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

**BOARD APPROVED:
FEBRUARY 5, 2007**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The Board of Education appreciates the gracious support of the Traffic Safety Committee by Mayor Michael Luther, Township Council President Rosemarie Agostini and the President of the Joint Council of PTAs, Jennifer McVea.

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“To be only for yourself is to be almost nothing.”

B.F. Skinner

BACKGROUND

The commitment of the Board of Education (BOE) to the health and safety of each of our students has been a priority since the school district was organized in 1928. As a large township, with many students living considerable distances from the schools, transportation of students was a major concern of the BOE from the very beginning. Over the years, the Board established scores of bus routes which reflected the Board’s policy on transportation. In addition, based upon perceived needs the Board also established bus routes for students who did not reside at remote distances as described in the policy on transportation.

Throughout the years, regardless of the number of routes and the cost, the transportation of students has been an oft-discussed topic at numerous meetings. Although discussions have been extensive regarding the need for additional routes because of safety issues, the definition of a key term, “hazardous” and what constitutes a hazardous route have remained elusive. The seeds for the formulation of a diverse committee to examine what constitutes a “hazardous” route to and from school have been germinating for many years.

In the spring of 2006 when the Board of Education eliminated certain non-mandated routes as a result of the need to reduce its 2006-07 school budget, parents of students who were no longer being bused to school voiced their concerns at board meetings. Most of the dialogue focused on the walking routes to school being “hazardous” rather than on the distance the students had to walk. Rather than simply deflect public commentary, it was clear that there was a need to define terms and broaden the base for the discussion.

There are specific state laws (NJSA 18A:39 and NJAC 6A:27) regulating the busing of students who are considered to live “remote” from the school they attend. Over the years the Board of Education has maintained a policy reflecting the laws. In fact, the Board guidelines for busing are less stringent than what is mandated by the state:

The Board shall provide for the transportation of pupils residing remote from their schoolhouse and shall make rules governing such transportation.

For the purposes of this policy, the term “remote from their schoolhouse” shall be given the following meanings for each of the following classifications of pupils:

Elementary	Pupil shall be deemed to reside remote from the schoolhouse if the walking distance from home to school is greater than 1.25* miles.
Middle School	Pupil shall be deemed to reside remote from the schoolhouse if the walking distance from home to school is greater than 2.0 miles.
Senior High School	Pupil shall be deemed to reside remote from the schoolhouse if the walking distance from home to school is greater than 2.5 miles.

*In the event of a fiscal emergency the Board reserves the right to revert to the mileage definitions in N.J.S.A. 18 A:39-1.

The Board has also provided busing for students who do not fall within the distance guidelines. These routes were approved by the Board, based upon recommendations by the superintendent who was district administrative officer at the time the routes were approved. It may be assumed they were established because of “hazardous” conditions. However, although specific guidelines for the establishment of what became know as “Courtesy Busing” may have been part of the discussions at the time, a written criteria resulting from former Board action is not extant.

The Time is Ripe for a Collaborative Panel to Define Terms

The Board of Education honors state regulations, but it is also sensitive to the needs of the public. Therefore, although the Board could not restore the eliminated “Courtesy Routes,” rather than ignoring the outcry from certain sections of the community, the Board created an ad hoc Traffic Safety Committee (TSC). A resolution, approved at a regular meeting of the BOE, September 21, 2006, called for a diverse committee consisting of Board members and representatives appointed by the Mayor, Town Council President and the President of the Joint Council of PTAs. The TSC was charged with

addressing the subject of traffic safety as applied to students and to agree to a common definition of a “hazardous route.” Its mission was clearly focused:

- 1) to examine the traffic patterns in Parsippany-Troy Hills
- 2) to define the term “Hazardous Route,” based upon the application of the criteria suggested by 18A: 39-1.5 to specific streets and roads in the township and
- 3) to determine if there are particular streets and roads that are “hazardous” according to the definition of the term as agreed to by the members of the committee, and
- 4) to report to the Board of Education, the Mayor, and the Town Council the findings of the committee.

Promoting the spirit of collaboration while demonstrating a commitment to the mission, the committee met periodically from October 2006 through January 2007. The following is a listing of the committee’s membership. Robert Crawford served as chairman and recorder.

Membership

Board of Education:	Bob Crawford (Committee Chair) Debbie Orme
Liaison:	John Montefusco, Jr., Board Transportation Committee Chair
Superintendent:	Lee Seitz
Business Administrator:	Marlene Wendolowski
Town Council:	Jimmy Vigilante
Parents:	Fran Orthwein Terri Marxen
Traffic Engineer Consultant to Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills:	Gordon Meth
Ex officio:	Robert Perlett

*“To achieve you need thought....You need
to know what you are doing.”*

Ayn Rand

COMMITTEE PROCESS, A SUMMARY OF THE WORK

The committee held its first meeting on October 30, 2006 at the Board of Education Office with all ten members in attendance. The initial segment of the meeting was spent discussing and agreeing to nine operating principles which defined the rules by which the committee agreed to operate. Those operating principles agreed to were as follows: 1. A majority vote would be the process by which committee decisions would be reached; 2. All ten members of the committee would have voting privileges; 3. A committee member had to be present at the meeting to vote; 4. A quorum of six members needed to be present for a vote/decision to be taken; 5. The public would be invited to attend meetings but would not be permitted to participate; 6. E-mail would be used as a communication vehicle but email communications about committee work would be limited to committee members; 7. Meetings would last 90 minutes and would be held at a frequency determined by the committee members; 8. Meeting minutes would be distributed within 48 hours of the meeting and a meeting agenda would be distributed 48 hours prior to a meeting; and 9. a “parking lot (listing of topics appropriate for other committees)” would be utilized to record ideas and issues that came up during a meeting that were not germane to the committee’s mandate.

The latter part of the first committee meeting was spent reviewing conditions that might be included in the definition of the term “hazardous” and it was agreed that the definition of “hazardous” would be defined as it relates to pedestrians only. The committee used the 10 hazardous criteria listed by 18A:39-1.5 as the basis for its discussion and agreed to include the following elements when judging whether a street or road is hazardous:

1. traffic volume
2. vehicle velocity
3. the presence or lack of walkways
4. limited sight distances
5. drop offs
6. bridges or overpasses
7. train tracks or trestles
8. highway or arterial road crossings
9. quality of street lighting
10. width of the street

Weather conditions were precluded from being a “hazardous” condition and the issue of unlit/concealed walkways/pathways was referred to the Building and Grounds Committee for their consideration.

The committee’s second meeting was held on November 14, 2006 and time was spent clarifying and confirming the committee’s mandate. After reviewing a map of the Township detailing all of the town’s many streets and roads, it became clear that the committee’s efforts would, indeed, need to be focused on developing a tool that could subsequently be used by the Administration to determine which streets and roads were “hazardous.” With input from Gordon Meth who is the Traffic Engineer and Consultant to the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills, and using the Circulation Element of the Master Plan developed by Keller & Kirkpatrick in association with Burgis Associates, Inc., the committee developed a Hazardous Roads/Streets Grid (HRSG) which listed the hazardous conditions agreed to at its first meeting.

Additionally, the committee availed itself of the opportunity to review relevant transportation policies from a number of neighboring districts including: Hanover Park Regional School District, Clinton, Bloomingdale, Clifton and Butler which provided valuable insights into how those districts had handled the issue of hazardous streets and roads.

After considerable discussion the initial Hazardous Roads/Streets Grid (HRSG) design decisions reached by the committee included the following: Not to assign scores to individual conditions nor determine what total score might constitute a “hazardous” rating until the grid had been road tested by the committee, to accept a daily traffic volume average rather than attempt to ascertain traffic volumes at specific times during the day; and to accept posted speed limits with the understanding that those speed limits were often exceeded by up to 10 miles per hour. It was also agreed that the relevance/impact of the age (and grade attended) of a walker would be considered once the grid had been road tested. In order to validate the concept of using the HRSG, committee members decided to determine the applicability of the HRSG themselves by “road testing” it on selected streets and roads.

On the afternoon of November 20, nine members divided into two teams and each team was assigned to test the HRSG on five streets. The streets and roads reviewed included: Mazdabrook Blvd., Lake Shore Drive (Lake Hiawatha), Reynolds Avenue, Troy Road, Beachwood Road, Intervale Road, Littleton Road and Lake Shore Drive (Lake Parsippany). Committee members walked each street and road and the existent hazardous conditions were captured on the HRSG.

The committee's third meeting was held on November 27th to discuss and evaluate the learnings from the prior week's field trip in an effort to determine if the HRSG could serve as a viable assessment tool. Considerable discussion ensued about a number of topics including the impact of parked cars, road width, sidewalks, traffic velocity, and traffic volume.

Based on that discussion, an agreement was reached that the varied conditions on many of the roads suggested that the HRSG should include the option to add descriptive annotation which would be used to capture a street or road's unique and potentially hazardous characteristics and/or any already existent features mitigating risk. (i.e. crossing guards, traffic lights, speed humps, etc.)

The committee also developed and tested scoring models to capture that appropriate risk quotients that existed when certain hazardous conditions existed either alone or in combination and established a threshold total which would designate a road or street as being hazardous. Given the positive impact that the presence of a walkway has on the overall safety of a street or road, the committee decided to develop two versions of the HRSG with one applied to streets and roads with walkways and the other applied to streets and roads without walkways.

Recognizing that morning traffic volume was a major concern, the committee decided it wanted to compare the volume projections provided by the Township in order to confirm that the numbers reflected traffic patterns between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Consequently, each member agreed to take one or two roads and conduct a volume count between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Those counts would then be provided to Gordon Meth to compare with the average daily traffic volume data to determine if the counts were aligned.

On January 9th the committee met for its fourth meeting to review the HRSG and to decide if the committee was prepared to recommend to the Board of Education that the HRSG be used as the methodology to determine if a road or street is “hazardous.” Recommendations to fine-tune the HRSG were made and the average daily traffic count was determined to be a viable measure to use to measure traffic volume during between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Committee members from the Administration provided their insights about how they would use the HRSG and the appeal process that would be implemented should questions or challenges arise.

The nine committee members who were present voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Education that the HRSG be used as the methodology to determine if or not a road or street is hazardous. The committee also agreed to prepare and deliver a report summarizing their work and their recommendations to a joint session of the Board of Education, the Town Council and the Mayor’s Office.

“How can I tell what I think till I see what I say.”

E. M. Forster

THE GRID

At the heart of this report is the “Hazardous Street and Road Grid (HSRG),” a highly functional device that can be used to foster a common understanding of safety conditions on our roads and to determine whether or not a roadway is hazardous. It is truly the result of collective minds working together in mutual respect. Debbie Orme assumed the responsibility to synthesize discussions resulting in a tool that transforms a series of terms into a hands-on experience. The Grid provides specific guidelines to be employed by all groups concerned with safety conditions on roadways traversed by student going to and from school. Key terms are defined in the Glossary.

Grid to determine hazardous roadways

Grid to apply to roads without walkways only

Grid B

See Chart	See Chart	Add 40	Add 35	Add 30	Add 15	Add 15	A total of 40 plus is hazardous
Road or road section description	Speed	Volume	*Specific	W/LSD	Drop off	W/O ASL	Total
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00
							0.00

Summary explanations should be included.

AM peak Hr. volume
 0 to 60 = 0
 61 to 90 = 1
 91 to 120 = 3
 121 to 135 = 7
 136 to 150 = 11
 151 to 165 = 15
 166 to 180 = 20
 181 to 195 = 25
 196 to 210 = 30
 211 to 225 = 35
 226 to 240 = 40
 241 & up = 45

Speed Limit
 25 mph = 0
 30 mph = 30
 35 mph = 40
 40mph+ = 45

*** Specific :** Any item such as an unguarded dangerous crossing, highway crossing etc.

W/LSD - with limited sight distance
W/O ASL - without adequate street lighting

Please consult the glossary for definition of terms

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRIDS TO DETERMINE HAZARDOUS ROUTES

The first step in the process to establish the employment of the grids to determine hazardous routes is for the Board of Education to accept and approve the grids for implementation within the district. When approved, the Policy Committee of the Board will be commissioned to embody the grids as the criteria used in determining hazardous streets within the district in the transportation policy. The policy will be presented to the Board in accordance with statute to be approved by same.

Upon approval, the Administration will be directed to enforce the policy and use the approved grids in the determination of hazardous streets or sections of streets.

- A. All routes that were labeled as hazardous resulting in “Courtesy Busing” during the 2006-2007 school year will be reassessed using the appropriate HRSG.

- B. Specific roadways that were brought to the attention of the Board and administration during the spring of 2006 to December 2006 will also be assessed using the grids.

FUTURE DISTRICT APPLICATION OF THE HAZARDOUS STREET GRIDS

Once the Board has approved the establishment of hazardous routes based upon the employment of the appropriate grid by the administration, the following procedure will be followed in response to a specific parent/guardian concern:

1. When the Transportation Department receives a parental/guardian concern regarding a street or portion of a street with regard to its being hazardous, the Coordinator of Transportation will visit the location and utilize the appropriate grid. Grid A for streets with walkways and Grid B for streets without walkways.
2. After the Grid is applied to the location a determination will be made by the Coordinator of Transportation. The parent/guardian will be apprised of the result of the assessment.
3. If the parent or guardian is not satisfied with that determination the Business Administrator will review the situation and make a recommendation to the Superintendent for his consideration.
4. In the immediate future, the Board of Education will create an appeal process to be used in the event of continued parental/guardian dissatisfaction with the determination by the Superintendent.

“The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter-- it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

Mark Twain

GLOSSARY

So that discussions can be conducted effectively, many of the words and terms used on the HRSG need to be defined in the context of traffic safety. It can be difficult, if not impossible to truly communicate if there aren't common definitions that are understood by everyone. Some of the words and phrases included in the glossary have specific meaning to professionals in the field. There are, however, common words that are used in specific ways. The definitions given are based upon usage by officials of the State of New Jersey as they were explained and/or applied by committee members during the course of its work. In addition, there are entries that reflect language used in BOE policies and printed material on the subject of transportation distributed by the central office.

Adequate Street Lighting – Adequate street lighting shall refer to whether or not the street lighting on a street provides sufficient visibility for motorists to see a pedestrian walking in the early (before sunrise) morning. The Illuminating Engineers Society publication Roadway Lighting shall prevail when quantifying standards.

AM Peak Hour Volume – The AM peak hour volume shall be defined as the sum total vehicles during the highest four consecutive 15-minute intervals between 7-9 a.m. on a typical weekday morning when school is in session. Traffic counts either have to be conducted directly or obtained from a traffic study conducted for other purposes. All data that is less than 3 years old shall be deemed to be acceptable. For older data, judgment shall be used when deciding whether it is still applicable. In the case of doubt, a new traffic count shall be conducted. The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) publication Pedestrian Compatible Planning and Design Guidelines (April 1996) states “Lightly traveled rural roadways and suburban streets having an Average Annual Daily Traffic less than 1,200 seldom require a sidewalk or shoulder to accommodate pedestrians”. Based on typical relationships of peak hour volume to daily volume, 1,200 vehicles per day translates into a traffic volume of 96-144 vehicles per hour. This was used as the basis for determining hazard classification for roadways without walkways.

Busy Road Crossings – A busy road crossing shall consist of the need to cross any state, county, or municipal arterial road (as defined within the Circulation Element of the Parsippany-Troy Hills Master Plan) without the protection of a traffic signal or crossing guard.

Competitive Bids 18A:18A-4(a)

Every contract for the provision or performance of any goods and services, the cost of which in the aggregate exceeds the bid threshold, shall be awarded only by advertising for bids, and bidding therefore, except as is provided otherwise in this chapter or specifically by any other law. Said bid is to be awarded to the lowest responsible bidder.

Courtesy Busing: 6A:27-1.3

(a) District boards of education may provide for transportation of students who reside less than remote from their school of attendance with their local policies and at their own expense.

Drop offs – A drop off shall be defined as any unprotected downgrade having a slope greater than 1 foot vertical for every 3 feet horizontal located within 5 feet of a walkway or roadway if no walkway is present.

Grid A – Grid A is a scoring chart that is used to determine hazard level for roads with walkways, as earlier defined.

Grid B – Grid B is a scoring chart that is used to determine hazard level for roads without walkways, as earlier defined.

Hazardous Route – A hazardous route, as defined by N.J.A.C. 18A:39-1.5 shall be any roadway where a combination of factors determine that it is not an appropriate route for school children to walk to school on. Within the purview of the Parsippany-Troy Hills Board of Education, a hazardous route has been defined as any road section having a score of 40 or more under the criteria defined herein.

Highway – A highway shall refer to any roadway under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and having a classification of Arterial roadway or Freeway.

Late Bus – Bus Service provided to Middle School and High School students by the Parsippany-Troy Hills School District after the normal school day (4:00 and 5:30)

Limited Sight Distance – Limited site distance refers to locations where a vehicle does not have adequate stopping sight distance to see a potential pedestrian walking in the roadway, due to vertical or horizontal geometry of the roadway, or specific sight distance obstructions. For these purposes, stopping sight distance shall be based on stopping sight distance contained in the latest version of the American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) publication A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets. The following table consists of required sight distances based on the 2004 edition of said publication. Limited sight distance would refer to any location that does not provide at least this sight distance.

Speed (mph)	Required Sight Distance (feet)
25	155
30	200
35	250
40	305
45	360

Speed in this table refers to design speed. It is presumed to be posted speed plus 5 mph.

For locations with steep downgrades, add an additional 1 foot per mile per hour.

Source: A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, 2004 Edition by American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials Exhibit 3-1.

Method of Measuring Distance from School (Portal to Portal) – 6A:27 1.2

For the purpose of determining eligibility for student transportation, measurement shall be made by the shortest route along public roadways or public walkways between the entrance of the student’s residence nearest such public roadway or public walkway and the nearest public entrance of the school which the student attends.

Other Specific Hazard – Other specific hazards refers to any particular situation that either the Parsippany-Troy Hills Board of Education or the Parsippany-Troy Hills Police Department feels is hazardous to pedestrians (e.g. rail crossing, a busy commercial driveway, etc.).

Remote Distance – 6A:27-1.2

The words “remote from the school of attendance” shall mean beyond two and one-half miles for high school students (grade nine through twelve) and beyond two miles for elementary*(see Page 2) school students (grades preschool through eight).

Road or Road Section – The hazardous definition shall apply to a Road or Road Section. Where no road section is given, the entire length of the street shall be used. Road Section shall refer to a specific street between two identifiable landmarks or cross streets. Road sections will be applied where some condition relating to hazardous streets (e.g. walkway presence, speed, volume) is different from adjacent sections.

Road Width – Road width shall be defined as the full pavement width of a road, measured perpendicular to the direction of traffic. It is recognized that a width of 18-20 feet is required to accommodate two-way vehicular traffic. For this reason, any roadway having a width of less than 24 feet was deemed to be too narrow to adequately accommodate pedestrians and vehicles at the same time, forcing traffic to yield to pedestrians.

Roads with Walkways – Roads with walkways shall be defined as any road section that has a continuous walkway on it. In order to determine hazardous route scoring, Grid A shall be used for these road sections.

Roads without Walkways – Roads without walkways shall be defined as any road section that does not have a continuous walkway on it. In order to determine hazardous route scoring, Grid B shall be used for these road sections.

Speed – The speed of a roadway shall be based on the posted speed limit. If no speed limit is posted, it shall be deemed to be the greater of 25 miles per hour or the speed limit contained within the ordinances for the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills. Based on the research documents *Killing Speed and Saving Lives*, by the UK Department of Transportation and *Vehicle Speeds and the Incidence of Fatal Pedestrian Collisions*, by the Australian Federal Office of Road Safety, the probability of a pedestrian fatality increases linearly by 3.5% per mile per hour (mph) of the vehicle between 20 mph and 40 mph. This relationship was used as the basis for the points assigned to speed.

State Thresholds for Spending – For nonpublic students: \$826 per student.

Tiered Bus Runs – 6A:27-2.1 iii. Tiered route shall mean the utilization of a single vehicle to service more than one route.

Traffic Volume - Traffic volume refers to the number of vehicles crossing a specific location in both directions of travel.

Transportation or Aid In Lieu Transportation for Students Attending Nonpublic Schools – 6A:27-2.1

- (a) Transportation or aid in lieu of transportation shall be provided in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18:39
- (b) District boards of education shall advertise and receive bids for non-public transportation before a determination is made to provide transportation or aid in lieu of transportation.
- (d) The residents' district board of education shall not expend more than the maximum per student expenditure for nonpublic school transportation in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:39-1. (\$826 for the 2006-2007 school year)

Vehicle Velocity – See speed.

Walkway – A walkway shall refer to a concrete or asphalt sidewalk of 3 feet or greater in width that is separate and distinct from the roadway, and allows pedestrians to not have to travel in the roadway. The roadway shall refer to the area traversed by automobiles. Walkways are one of the most critical factors when determining routes to be hazardous to walking to school. The Institute of Transportation Engineer's (ITE) publication Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities notes that a recent study found that streets without sidewalks had 2.6 times more pedestrian collisions than expected, while streets with sidewalks on only one side has 1.2 times more pedestrian collisions than expected. For this reason, separate criteria were established for defining hazardous routes based on the presence or absence of walkways.

CONCLUSION

The committee is aware of the need to revisit the subject of traffic safety and the busing of students on a regular basis. The process presented, however, the result of the committee's work can be applied by various groups in the township to all our roadways, now and in the future.

Of great significance is the demonstration of collaboration among the participants on the committee. P.B. Fahy, correspondent for Parsippany Life, was the committee's Boswell as he chronicled extensively its activities. In his article on January 17, 2007, he wrote the following:

Over the past two months...the committee has taken a political hot potato and through hard work and cooperation between all the groups involved, it has come up with not only a sound solution, but a model for the small "d" democratic process. They have toiled both in meetings and out on the townships roads and byways to develop a tool that can be used to insure that road hazards can be measured accurately and with consistency.

Indeed, not only was common ground established among the diverse members on the committee but there is a product resulting from its work that is concrete, practical and effective. Diversity and the committee system works.