

Response to Questions on the FY 2010 County's Line of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Fall 2008

Request By: Supervisor Bulova

Question: What is the Park Authority's position on students using trails for walking to school? If needed, can trail modifications be made to accommodate students?

Response: All park trails are public trails and can be used by anyone during park hours. The Park Authority welcomes student use or any other non-motorized use of the park trails. The Park Authority designs and builds trails that are accessible to all users where the site conditions allow.

Regulation 7101.5 in the Public Schools Policy Manual deals with Facilities and Transportation Services: School Bus Transportation and Walking Routes. The Park Authority does not specifically build trails to accommodate students walking to school in accordance with this policy. Site conditions, land ownership and park policy sometimes require construction that is not conducive to every day use by school children. For example, the most effective way to provide some stream crossings is the use of a concrete ford/fair-weather crossing which is not favored by some trail users for everyday use. In addition, narrow land areas and sensitive cultural and natural resources can impose topographic and routing challenges which result in trails which do not meet the accessibility guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Parks and their facilities are typically only open during daylight hours unless they are lighted facilities. Therefore, trails with the park system are not open for use during some morning and evening hours when school children might need to use them. Finally, resources for trail maintenance are limited and activities such as snow and ice removal from park trails are not routine. This might create conditions that are not desirable for students walking to school.

To meet requirements for school walking, routes would generally require grading and paving of park trail surfaces, adding pipes and/or bridges to stream and ditch crossings, clearing of undergrowth along the entire corridor, and regular mowing and surface maintenance. Routes would also need adequate signage.

Trail modifications could be made, however, each modification would vary in the amount of work necessary and funding needed. To make modifications, the Park Authority would have to study each trail to assess needed modifications. Like other capital projects, a study would be followed by design work, a look at the feasibility of land ownership versus establishing land barriers, and a review of the final destination and existing route. Funding would also vary greatly ranging from \$10 to \$4,000 per linear foot depending on the specific location of the existing trail facility, the points of destination for the student user and determination of the school officials for what constitutes a safe route for that particular location. Modification proposals would then be included in the process to prioritize projects supported by bond funds.

In addition, modifications in park trail maintenance procedures and associated funding would be required. Maintenance includes, for example, the clearing of brush on the side of the trails and snow and ice removal. Funding for staff and materials would be necessary at the current cost of approximately \$.50 per linear foot of trail.

For an estimate of the potential cost of a trail modification, a possible scenario can be considered. A hypothetical modification could include a route from a residential community to a school over an existing half mile natural surface park trail that includes one 30-foot stream crossing. The estimated total cost of trail modifications would be \$462,400 (\$316,000 to convert the surface to an all weather asphalt surface, \$120,000 to install an all weather pedestrian bridge over the stream, and \$26,400 for brush clearing for visibility, minor maintenance, new signs, etc.). This estimate does not include ongoing maintenance costs.