



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

March 5, 2024

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SUBJECT: SCHOOL TRAFFIC CONGESTION ISSUES

This report is being provided in response to Councilmembers’ concerns about traffic congestion caused by schools for student drop off and pick up. Schools, particularly charter schools, without attendance zones and bus service rely heavily on personal vehicles for student transportation, which dramatically increases the number of vehicle trips to and from the schools. This report provides an overview of Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) guidelines and associated Traffic Management Plan (TMP) requirements for schools, details ongoing school traffic congestion concerns that existing guidelines do not sufficiently address, and outlines the City’s efforts to implement interdepartmental process improvements to prevent and mitigate recurring issues.

Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) and Traffic Management Plans (TMP)

All schools (public, charter, private, etc.) requesting permits to develop or redevelop in the City of Fort Worth are required to submit both a TIA and TMP for review and approval by the Development Services Department. A TIA is an engineering study that documents and evaluates existing and future traffic conditions with and without a proposed development and identifies the infrastructure needed to mitigate impacts to roadway operations. A TMP details how the flow of traffic will be managed within a site. Chapter 12 of the Transportation Engineering Manual (TEM) provides guidelines for TIA preparation. In addition to those guidelines, the following items are included in the TIA or TMP:

TIA

- The study must include all site driveways, intersections adjacent to the school, and intersections within one mile per the TEM guidelines. A level of service, queuing, and delay analysis shall be performed at all the intersections for background condition and build out including planned future phases. A follow-up study would be required for any additions to the school, phasing plans, or as required by the TIA.
- The TIA must include an infrastructure improvement plan to address the safety and congestion issues created by new traffic beyond the school site. The TIA must also clearly define what infrastructure is needed
- All infrastructure improvements shall be the responsibility of the school to mitigate their new trips to not cause an unacceptable level of service within their TIA study area. The infrastructure improvements identified would be required to be constructed prior to the certificate of occupancy of the school.

An infrastructure plan to address bicycle and pedestrian safety, such as adding sidewalks, bike lanes, missing sidewalk gaps, curb ramps, crosswalks, signage, school zone flashers, Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons, etc., is also required.

TMP

- A TMP is required for the school site to address queueing issues during drop-off/pick-up hours. The City requires 5 feet per student queue space for charter and private schools with no bus services. For a Traffic Management Plan to be accepted by the City, it must demonstrate that all drop-off and pick-up queueing will be provided within the school site and no queueing will occur on the adjacent roadway.
- Recommended mitigation measures to address queueing issues on the adjacent roadway such as infrastructure improvement, staggered schedules, traffic control by Police Officer, etc. are required to be included in the TMP study. All mitigation measures including Police traffic control are at the expense of the school.



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Beyond TIA and TMP studies, schools are required to accommodate off-street parking for school staff, students, and visitors within their site. Elementary and junior high schools are required to have 2.5 parking spaces per classroom. High schools must include 1 parking space per 2 students expected in attendance and another 1 parking space per 5 stadium seats.

Traffic Congestion Concerns

The City does not have an ordinance to mandate schools' implementation of their traffic management plans. The City also does not have a reliable method to monitor and enforce traffic management plans after schools become operational. Consequently, the City becomes aware of TMP non-compliance through investigations of complaints submitted to the Transportation and Public Works Department. The City then assumes responsibility of mitigating the traffic congestion issues for which the City has limited ability to improve. This often leads to frustration for residents expecting speedy resolution of the traffic congestion issues.

Recurring concerns related to queuing on public streets include the following:

- Gated Access - Many charter and private school properties are gated and restrict times that parents can queue on site. In this situation, the adjacent public street is the only option for queuing.
- Some parents have a desire to drive to school, park, and then walk students to and from the school site during drop-off and pick-up times. This causes added congestion and additional pedestrian/vehicle conflicts around the school site.
- There is a limited street grid to disperse school traffic within new residential developments.
- Many schools serve kindergarten through 12th grades. This poses a challenge when the arrival and dismissal times are not staggered enough to allow traffic to clear before the next group of parents arrives.

Staff-explored Policy Options

Below are two options explored by staff to revise the current requirements for schools without attendance zones and/or non-busing schools.

Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

Staff explored the option of requiring a time-limited Conditional Use Permit (CUP). A CUP would allow for a review of the school facility's TIA/TMP prior to renewing the CUP through the zoning public hearing process and help ensure that a given site still complies with the City's TIA/TMP requirements. If the TIA/TMP review finds the facility is not in compliance with the City's requirements, then appropriate mitigation measures could be required as outlined in the TEM.

The City has limited regulatory authority over schools and must treat all schools, including public, private, and charter schools, similarly. State law limits the City's ability to use its zoning ordinance to prohibit schools from being located at specific locations. Denial of CUP by the City Council could violate this state law. Additionally, denial of a CUP by the City Council could imply the City might initiate lawsuits against schools in an attempt to close schools that fail to comply with an approved traffic management plan. Staff does not recommend requiring a CUP for schools.

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As part of the TIA, staff recommends requiring a TMP queuing analysis based on maximum student enrollment and again when a school exceeds the original maximum student enrollment (e.g. program or building additions) and there is street congestion. In some cases, congestion occurs when new school staff simply don't correctly apply the TMP due to lack of knowledge of the traffic plans prepared by the school's engineer.

Next Steps

Staff will initiate City code amendments to strengthen the TMP requirements for existing and new schools. For school sites where the existing TMP is deemed deficient or the school staff have failed to apply it, staff is working to coordinate with executive-level school officials in an attempt to ensure awareness and to foster collaborative problem-solving to address and/or mitigate the deficiencies.

If you have any questions, please contact Ty Thompson, Development Services Assistant Director, at 817-392-2120 or Martin Phillips, Transportation & Public Works Assistant Director, at (817) 392-7861.

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City Manager**