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The MPO Wants to Know: Back to School

In an effort to better understand public views, the MPO has launched a series of online surveys about various transportation-related topics. The survey results will help the MPO develop plans and projects for the future. The responses also will be shared with appropriate roundtables and policymakers. For a list of available surveys, please visit the MPO website at <http://www.dmampo.org/user/survey.html>. Below are the results of the back to school survey, which was distributed to coincide with students' return to school.

Question 1. When you were a child, what mode did you generally utilize to travel to and from school?

Automobile	3.7%
Bicycle	3.7%
Bus	59.3%
Walk	33.3%

Question 2. Of the children that you know, what is the most prevalent mode of transportation used to travel to and from school today?

Automobile	59.3%
Bicycle	0.0%
Bus	37.0%
Walk	3.7%

Question 3. What do you see as impediments to children walking or biking to school?

Respondents see safety as the biggest impediment to children walking or biking to school. Safety concerns relate to busy intersections and roadways as well as to societal concerns, such as abduction.

Other respondents feel that the distance of schools from residential areas is a major impediment. Schools are located along arterial roadways instead of the middle of neighborhoods. Others are constructed in remote areas where development is expected to occur, not where it presently is located.

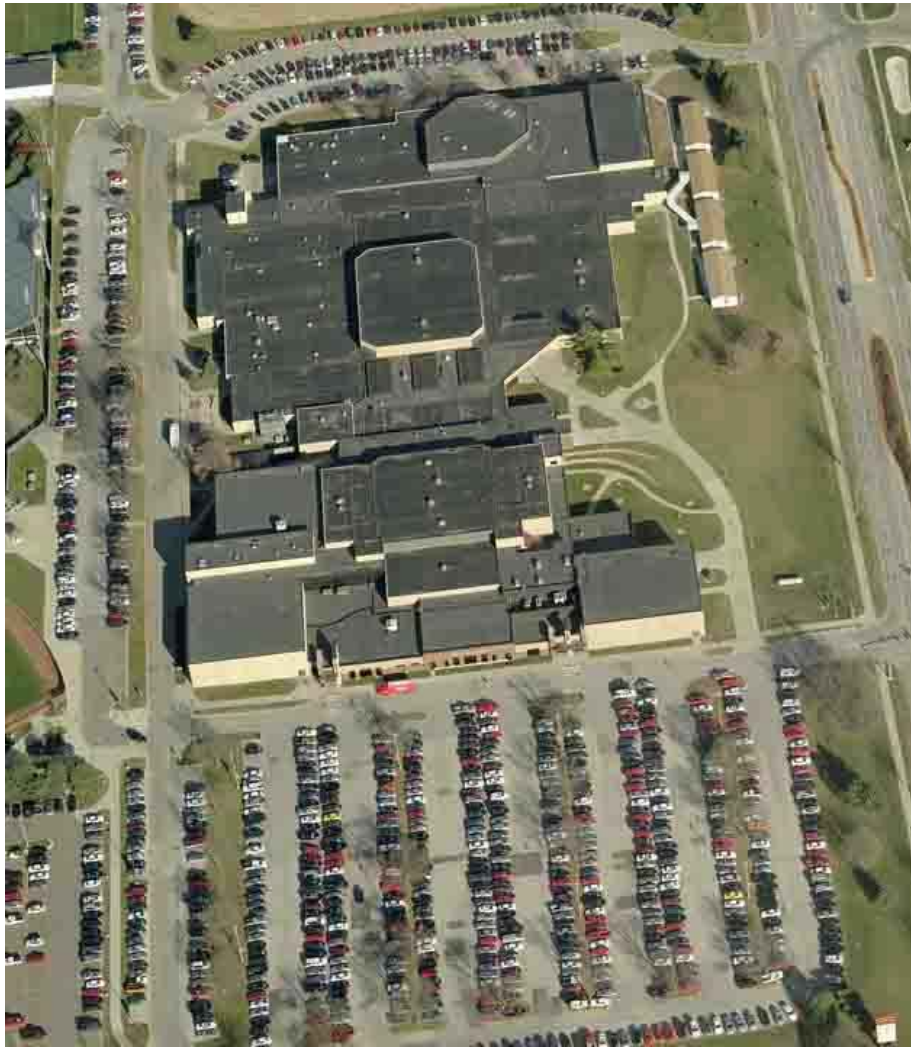
Still more respondents suggest that the lack of trails and sidewalk connectivity impede children in walking or biking to school. Respondents feel more bike parking and wider trails could help. However, respondents

note that some children are “out of shape, lazy, and do not want to put forth the effort” and that parents drive their children to school as habit. This, however, contributes to more traffic on the roadways, which some identify as an impediment to children walking or biking to school. Finally, a few respondents feel that weather “can hinder the number of days of walking or biking.”

Question 4. Are you familiar with the concept of the walking school bus?

Yes33.3%
No.....66.7%

The image below depicts the typical mode of transportation for many high school students: Personal automobiles.



Question 5. What transportation-related thoughts does the image above evoke?

The image above evoked a variety of responses. Some respondents think there are accidents waiting to happen in this image, while one simply stated, “Waste!” One respondent stated that it “looks like a shopping center... No matter where someone parks, they have to cross a fairly significant thoroughfare to get to the actual building...”

The presented image represents individualism and the freedoms that teenagers experience. However, the image makes some respondents desire to encourage carpooling, walking, and riding the bus. “Traffic jams,” “delay,” “congestion,” “frustration,” and “expense” were all used to describe this image. Others would like more green space and feel this image will result in air pollution. Society is auto-dependent, and this image reflects that dependency. One respondent asks, “Why do the students need to drive to school? Is it because they work after school or are in activities that are after school?”

Question 6. How would you like to see the image above transformed (e.g., more bicycle parking, fewer parking stalls, vanpools, etc.)?

Respondents generally would like to see fewer parking stalls. However, one respondent notes that this would “just lead to more congestion. We, as a society, need to change our habits. If there are fewer stalls, there better be an alternative plan that is convenient.”

Continuing with this thought, another respondent states that “the image change that is needed is *inside* the school and the education of the students. If parking is eliminated, students will park in the neighborhoods. The vehicle use is not from necessity for transportation but the necessity for teenage freedoms.”

Others suggest more bicycle parking and multipurpose trails; limitations on who can park (i.e., upper classes); more green space; implementation of parking passes; the addition of bioswales for runoff and large trees for shade; the incorporation of crossing or speed reduction devices; and, programming for uses outside of school hours.

Question 7. The Iowa Department of Transportation lists a variety of no- or low-cost Safe Routes to School projects. Please select those projects you believe would be most beneficial for your community.

Hold a Safe Routes to School workshop.....	61.5%
Conduct a walkability and/or bikeability assessment	65.4%
Conduct a survey/needs assessment about walking to school	53.8%

Run a Keep Kids Alive Drive 25 campaign.....	19.2%
Create frequent walker cards or frequent rider miles.....	15.4%
Give rewards to students who always wear a bicycle helmet.....	15.4%
Hold a bicycle rodeo	19.2%
Hold a walk-a-thon to raise money and awareness.....	11.5%
Present a Golden Sneaker Award to the class that walks the most....	26.9%
Create no idling zones around the school	19.2%
Designate a location for park and walk to school	15.4%
Paint high-visibility crosswalks and in-roadway bicycle markings...	38.5%
Conduct a class walking field trip.....	11.5%
Hold a Crossing Guard Appreciation Day	19.2%
Review sidewalk, building, and property maintenance laws.....	46.2%
Create a walking school bus	26.9%
Have students keep walking journals.....	0.00%
Hold a walk to school scavenger hunt	15.4%

Question 8. What suggestions do you have for improving metro area transportation to and from school?

While some respondents do not see transportation to and from school as a “major problem,” others feel that parents can play a large role in improving these trips. Parents should set an example for their children by using other modes of transportation. Parents, they assert, also should be educated in order to overcome their safety perceptions that cause them to drive their children to school rather than letting them walk or bike to school.

Not only should parents be educated, public service announcements and the general promotion of walking, bicycling, and bus riding are important. This promotion will allow for the use of “existing public transportation as much as possible.”

Other suggestions include having school board members park a mile from school and trying to arrive safely so that they may understand the obstacles children face; implementing and connecting better sidewalks and trails; finding ways to discourage students from driving; coordinating police patrols to reassure parents of their children’s safety; only issuing permits to students that carpool; adjusting school start and end times so as to avoid peak business commute times; and, charging for parking spaces.