

Greene Elementary School Walk Assessment Fall River, MA

May 10, 2017

*Sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety
and Awareness Program*

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

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Walk Assessment Overview

On May 10, 2017, WalkBoston conducted a walk assessment in the vicinity of the William S. Greene Elementary School in Fall River, in partnership with the Fall River Mass in Motion program and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. The goals of the walk assessment were to examine pedestrian safety issues that may preclude children from walking to the Greene School and to recommend improvements to the local built environment that enable safer walking. Support for the walk assessment was provided by MassDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Enforcement and Awareness Program. Participants included the following stakeholders:

- Chris Gibson, Fall River Police Department
- Lourdes Santiago, Fall River Public Schools/Greene School
- Robin Thorpe, Fall River Public Schools/Greene School
- Marcia Picard, Greater Fall River Partners for a Healthier Community
- David Weed, Greater Fall River Partners for a Healthier Community
- Laura Ferreira, Fall River Traffic and Parking
- Eric Andrade, Mass in Motion Fall River
- Erin Reed, MassDOT/Safe Routes to School
- Lisa Estrela-Pedro, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District
- Rev. Susan Lee, St. Luke's Episcopal Church
- Dorothea Hass, WalkBoston
- Adi Nochur, WalkBoston

In the weeks preceding the walk assessment, MassDOT's SRTS program conducted a survey of Greene School parents to determine where students live and how they get to and from school. The full SRTS Greene School survey report is included in Appendix A to this report. Based upon the survey results, SRTS estimated that 53 percent of Greene School students live within a half-mile "walkshed" of the school and that another 22 percent live within a one-mile walkshed (between half a mile and a mile from the school).

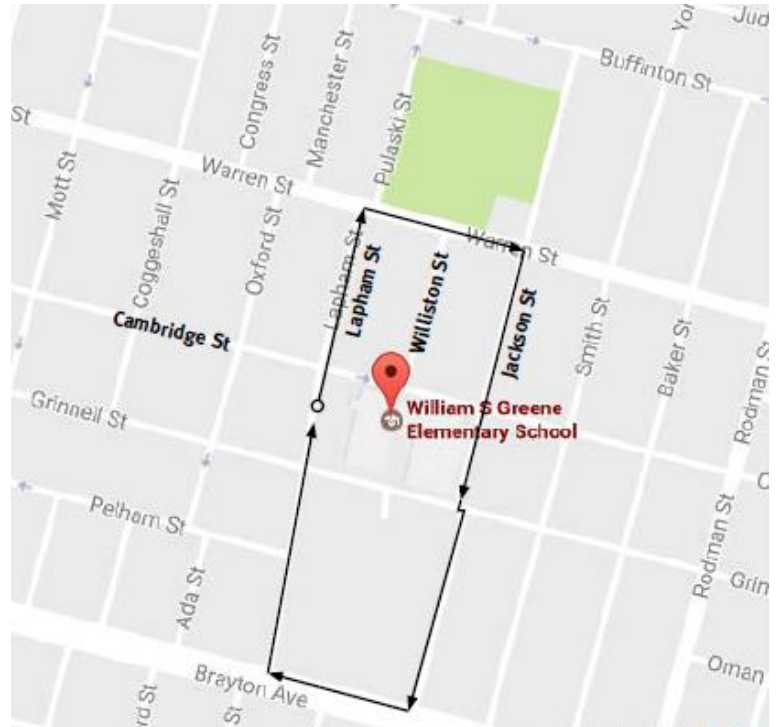
Despite the high proportion of students living in close proximity to the school, the survey found that only 19.1 percent of students walk to school in the morning, and that 23.5 percent walk home in the afternoon. SRTS also found that the walk/bike shares for Greene School students within the half-mile and one-mile walksheds were 31 percent and 18 percent, respectively. These values fall far below SRTS's expected walk/bike shares of 60 percent for a half-mile walkshed and 29 percent for a one-mile walkshed, which are based upon more than 6,000 surveys they have collected statewide since 2011.

These data suggest that the number of students walking to the Greene School can be substantially increased. Creating safer conditions for more students to walk to the Greene School will reduce the number of car trips to and from the school and their associated greenhouse gas emissions, while also increasing physical activity for students. The report sections that follow describe recommendations for pedestrian safety improvements that emerged from the walk assessment.

Greene School Context

Over 730 students from kindergarten through fifth grade attend the Greene School, which is located in the heart of Fall River's Niagara neighborhood and is bordered by Cambridge, Jackson, Grinnell and Lapham Streets. These streets are narrow and residential in nature and as such traffic speeds and volumes on them are generally low. The exception is during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times at the school, when the high proportion of parents driving their children results in severe traffic congestion. Getting more students to walk to school will help alleviate this issue.

Crossing guards are stationed at all four street corners outside the school during arrival and dismissal times to direct traffic and to help children and parents safely cross the street. Just a couple blocks north and south of the school, Warren Street and Brayton Avenue serve as east-west arterial streets with higher traffic volumes and speeds. Many of the students who currently walk to school have to cross these streets without the assistance of a crossing guard and the same would hold true for many potential walkers as well. Warren Street is also the location of Pulaski Park, a large City park that is widely used by children in the surrounding community. Given these conditions, the walk assessment recommendations (detailed in the report sections that follow) focus on creating safer crossings and reducing traffic speeds along Warren Street and Brayton Avenue.



The walking route for the May 10 Greene Elementary School walk assessment, which focused on pedestrian safety issues on nearby Warren Street and Brayton Avenue.

Key Recommendations

- Upgrade crosswalks and install traffic calming measures along Warren Street
- Extend School Zone and lower the speed limit on Warren Street to 20 miles per hour
- Study options for a safe pedestrian crossing across Brayton Avenue

Upgrade crosswalks and install traffic calming measures along Warren Street

The crosswalks immediately adjacent to the Greene School are well-marked with a highly visible ladder design. Just one short block north on Warren Street, however, the crosswalks are almost completely faded, creating an unsafe situation for children who need to cross the street. Walk audit participants agreed that the crosswalks at the corners of Warren/Lapham/Pulaski Streets and Warren/Jackson Streets (the southern corners of Pulaski Park) should be restriped in the near term and also upgraded to ladder design to further enhance their visibility. Curb extensions/bumpouts should also be created with paint and flex posts at the northern edges of these crosswalks to create clear sight lines for pedestrians around parked vehicles.

In addition, in-street pedestrian crossing signs should be installed at the crosswalks across Warren Street at the aforementioned locations, and a double-yellow line should be painted down the center of Warren Street to clearly delineate the travel lanes in each direction. Both these measures will help calm traffic and create more predictable vehicle movements along Warren Street. In the longer term, pedestrian ramps should be added at the northern edge of the intersection of Warren Street and Jackson Street to make that crossing fully accessible.

Extend School Zone and lower the speed limit on Warren Street to 20 miles per hour

The current posted speed limit on Warren Street is 30 miles per hour, which is too high for a street in a thickly settled residential area that includes a school and a park. There is currently some signage on Lapham Street designating a School Zone with a 20 miles per hour speed limit, but that signage also states that the School Zone ends before Warren Street. WalkBoston recommends updating the signage to extend the School Zone to include the segment of Warren Street that abuts Pulaski Park (between Lapham Street and Jackson Street), as well as posting new 20 miles per hour speed limit signs on Warren Street. The new speed limit signs should indicate the presence of the School Safety Zone, and they can also incorporate flashing yellow lights that can be activated during arrival and dismissal times to further enhance their visibility and calm traffic. “SLOW” and “SCHOOL ZONE” should also be painted on Warren Street, in conjunction with the other paint upgrades there (see previous section).



Crosswalks next to the Greene School (top) are well-marked with a highly visible ladder design. Just one block north on Warren Street at Lapham/Pulaski Streets (middle) and Jackson Street (bottom), the crosswalks are almost completely faded and need to be restriped and upgraded to the ladder design.

More broadly, WalkBoston recommends that the City of Fall River work with MassDOT to institute lower speed limits citywide. Recently passed state legislation now allows cities and towns in Massachusetts to reduce the default speed limit on thickly settled city streets to 25 miles per hour, and to designate Safety Zones with a speed limit of 20 miles per hour in areas where vulnerable road users are likely to be present. Given the high number of vulnerable children attending the Greene School and using Pulaski Park, the need for a Safety Zone in this area is clear. Extending the current Greene School Zone to Warren Street is the best way to achieve this objective in the near term.

Study options for a safe pedestrian crossing across Brayton Avenue

Two blocks south of the Greene School, Brayton Avenue presents a formidable barrier to safe walking. With four travel lanes (two in each direction) separated by a median, plus parking on both sides of the street, Brayton Avenue is very wide to cross, especially for children. In addition traffic moves at high speeds on this street, which has no safe crossings between Rodman Street and Stafford Road – a distance of nearly half a mile. Despite these unsafe conditions, Greene School students and parents cross Brayton Avenue without any crosswalk protections because there is no other way for them to walk to and from the school.

The presence of the median creates complications with respect to siting a fully accessible crosswalk across Brayton Avenue. There is a break in the median at Lapham Street, which could be a good location for a crosswalk given its alignment with the existing Greene School Zone. However, the long crossing distances and high traffic speeds along Brayton Avenue still pose challenges to safe walking. Any potential crosswalk across Brayton Avenue should incorporate a highly visible ladder design and be considered in conjunction with additional safety measures, which may include the following:



Long crossing distances and high traffic speeds present significant obstacles to safely crossing Brayton Avenue.

- Painted fog lines at the edge of the parking lanes to narrow travel lanes and calm traffic
- Curb extensions/bumpouts to reduce the crossing distance and calm traffic
- A clearly marked pedestrian refuge island to create a safe waiting area in the middle of the street
- High-visibility signage (potentially including in-street pedestrian crossing signs) to draw drivers' attention to the crosswalk
- Installation of a traffic light with WALK signals, or a pedestrian-activated HAWK (High-Intensity Activated crossWalk) beacon, to stop traffic at the crosswalk
- Reducing the posted speed limit on Brayton Avenue from 30 miles per hour to 25 miles per hour, in conjunction with a broader citywide approach to lowering speed limits (see previous section)

Appendix A: Greene School Safe Routes to School Report