

Ellis School Walk Audit Report

Walkabout: September 14, 2017

Address: 302 Walnut Street, Roxbury 02119

The Ellis School is concerned about the safety of children walking to school. Students at the Ellis are encouraged to walk to school through Walking School Buses and events such as Walk-to-School Day. However, WalkBoston observed that crossing the streets, especially Walnut Avenue, where drivers regularly go 35 mph and over, is unsafe for children. This Walk Audit recommends street changes to slow traffic.

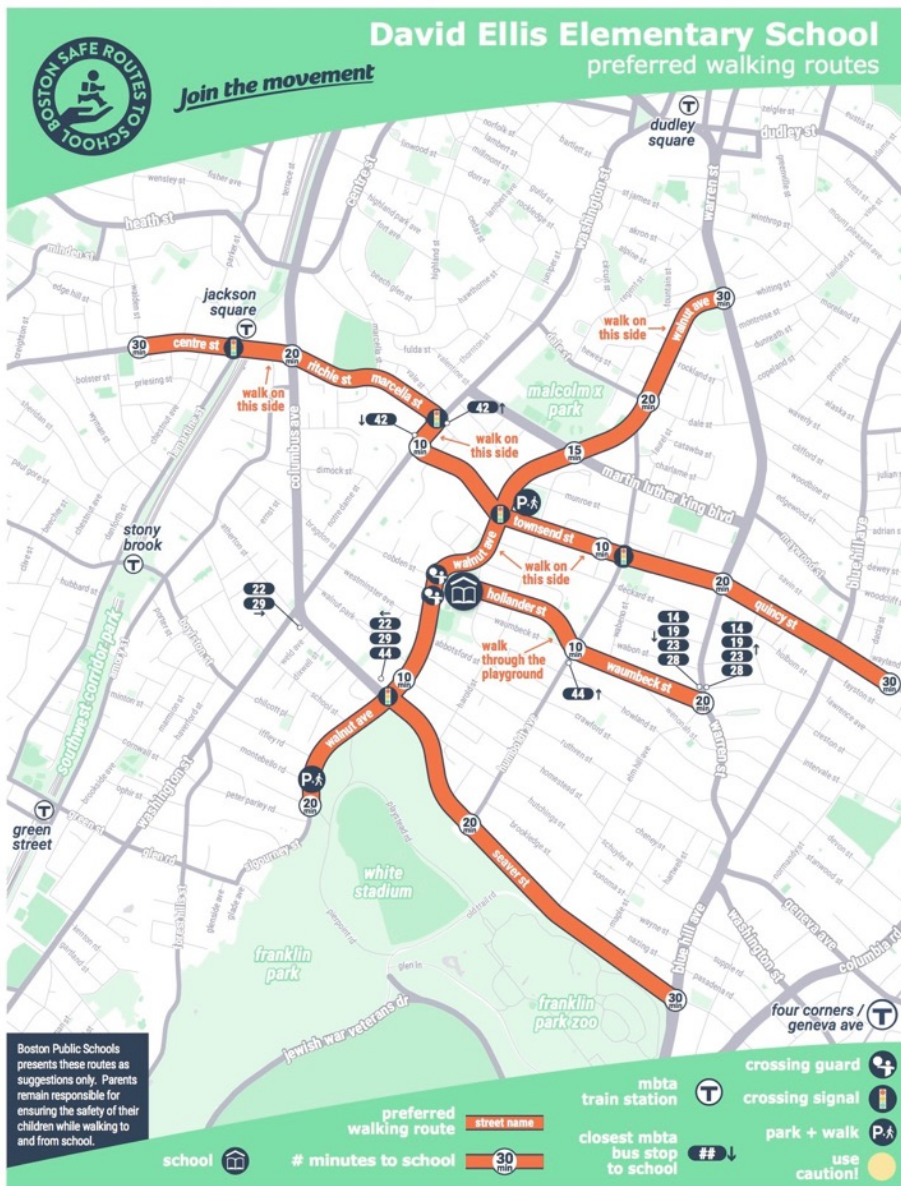
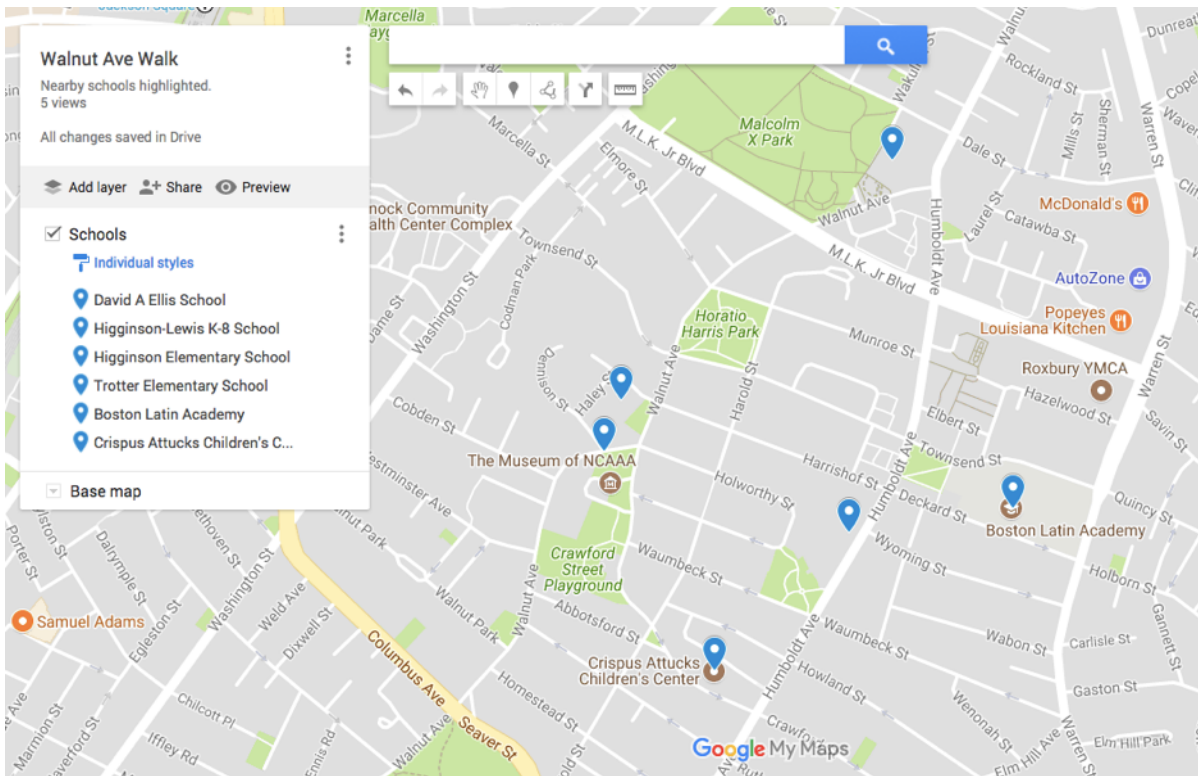
The Ellis School has had a robust student walking program. Mr. Sam Balto, the physical education teacher and safety coach, has championed the School's Walk to School program. As shown below students and parents participated in a workshop to identify safety features by temporarily setting up colorful cones. This workshop, led by Mark Fenton an expert on school walking routes, was held on May 26, 2017. Subsequently, WalkBoston staff met with Mr. Balto and a parent volunteer to review safety conditions around the School on September 14, 2017.



Ellis School Profile and Neighborhood

- Ⓜ Attending the school are 430 students in grades K-5. The majority of students are Hispanic and 99% are minority. Students arrive at school between 9:00-9:40am. The School's start time is 9:30am. Dismissal is 4:10pm.

The following page contains two maps: the first highlights nearby schools, while the other was created by the Safe Routes to School program for the Ellis School. Ellis is set within a residential neighborhood. Creating safe walking conditions is especially important because there are several schools nearby. The Higginson Elementary School (K-2) is two short blocks from the Ellis on Harrishof St. and the Trotter School is located on Humboldt is three blocks away. Two to three other other schools are within a third to half a mile away. Students walk to the school from many of the surrounding neighborhoods, with Walnut Avenue highlighted as an important spine of preferred walking routes to the Ellis.



Recommendations

1. Reduce Vehicle Speeds, Especially on Walnut Street.
 - a. This can most effectively be done through speed tables on Walnut Ave.
 - b. Add school zone signs to Westminster near Walnut.
 - c. Paint the word SCHOOL on the pavement near the school to better indicate to drivers they are entering the school zone.
 - d. install a speed feedback board along Walnut Street.

2. Make Street Crossings Safer for Walkers
 - a. Daylight street corners and mid-block crossings so drivers have a clear view of pedestrians. This is especially important at some intersections because Walnut Street has many curves.
 - b. Use V types of crossing as shown below at Ruthven/Walnut to make a larger crosswalk area. A similar V crossing has been installed at Longwood/Riverway in the Longwood Medical District.

3. Eliminate parking near crosswalks, e.g. Ruthven/Walnut.

High Vehicle Speeds Create Dangerous Conditions for Walking Students

Although the streets around the Ellis School are not particularly wide, the WalkBoston staff was surprised to find that many cars were going 35 and above, way over the City's 25 mph speed limit. In mid-October, Mr. Balto, working with others at the school including students measured speeds around the school using a hand held speed detector. As shown in the following photos, many cars traveled at speeds of 35, 45 and even 50+ mph. (Mr. Balto can provide many additional examples upon request).



These speeds are much too high for an area that has children walking to schools, playgrounds and friends' homes. Since the David Ellis School is located on Walnut Street, it must be crossed by the majority of walking students.

The high speeds are partially the result of the roadway geometry. Walnut Street has few intersecting streets, thereby allowing vehicles to gather speed as they move

along the roadway. The minor intersecting streets along Walnut are primarily T intersections. Moreover, there are very poor sight lines for crosswalks because of roadway curves and cars that are parked very close to crosswalks. Since children are shorter than adults, they are more often blocked by vehicles parked near crosswalks.

WalkBoston staff were also surprised to see so many drivers texting/looking at phones. There was far more distracted driving than we had anticipated. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) believes that distracted driving is a major factor in the increase in vehicle-vehicle and vehicle-pedestrian crashes and fatalities in the past few years.

School Walking Activities

There are two Walking School Buses to the school, and both utilize Walnut Ave. Every day this year there are a group of students who do before school care at the Higginson Lewis and walk south down Walnut Ave in a walking school bus. There is also a parent led walking school bus that meets at Walnut Park Play area on Fridays and walks north on Walnut. On Walk to School Day events that occur two or three times a year, two school staff lead walking school buses.

Walk to School Day events average over 150 students walking to school at the Ellis School. Each walking school bus route gets between 20-40 students. Typical travel patterns of the students when there are no “walking events” are 200 students on buses, 100 cars and 100 walkers.

Observations & Specific Issues to Address

Ruthven/Walnut:

There is a crossing to Walden Park Play Area, but drivers have poor sight lines with cars accelerating as they approach the Park.

Walnut slopes down from Seaver. Also, as shown in the photo cars park right next to crosswalk despite the many empty parking spaces on the street.

Recommendations: In short term, remove a parking space on each side to daylight this crosswalk. In longer term, creating curb extensions and/or speed table on Walnut to slow vehicles and make people waiting to cross more visible to people driving.



Curb ramps already exist at both corners on Ruthven on Walnut, paint the crosswalk from the park to the other corner of Ruthven across Walnut to make a larger V crosswalk area, similar to example photo at right.



Cobden/Walnut:

Cars from north come around a bend and people driving have very poor sight lines to the crosswalk. There is a crossing guard at this location at arrival and dismissal times, but it still feels unsafe. Consider a bump out to improve visibility.

Westminster/Walnut:

Westminster carries a fair amount of local traffic as cars head into the residential streets from Washington. However, as drivers approach Walnut Street there is no indication that a school is sited nearby. Adding school zone signs and perhaps the word “SCHOOL” painted on the pavement would alert drivers to the presence of walking students. Also, the installation of a median island would control cars making short lefts & require them to go around it; drivers often cut the angle in order to try and beat oncoming vehicle traffic, putting them in conflict with people in the crosswalk.

Walnut Ave/Holworthy/Crawford:



This is a very awkward and large intersection; there are STOP signs but most drivers don't stop; a few came to rolling stop while turning right onto Walnut in the direction of the Ellis School. Most cars roll through the STOP sign and start to make their way towards Cobden Street, gaining speed.

Change the angle of the school zone sign to make it clear the school zone is down Walnut Ave. The intersection might benefit from a mini-traffic circle. An alternative would be to bump out the northwest corner to make the turn more of a right angle and remove parking near crosswalk to make stop sign and people waiting to cross more visible to people driving.

Summary

The greatest problems for student safety in this area are excessive vehicle speed and poor sight lines at crossings. People regularly drive over the citywide speed limit of 25 mph (and school zone limit of 20mph) on Walnut Avenue. In the short term, area would benefit from a speed feedback board, more paint such as SCHOOL painted on pavement near school, etc. There is also a need to daylight the crossings by removing parking at either side of the street for many crosswalks. Longer term traffic calming efforts such as speed tables on Walnut Street should be added when any street, sidewalk or development projects are considered in the vicinity.

Walk Audit Participants

Sam Balto, Ellis Gym Teacher; Yvonne Ramirez, Active Parent & Walking School Bus Volunteer; Dorothea Hass, WalkBoston; Brendan Kearney, WalkBoston

Report prepared by: Dorothea Hass and Brendan Kearney, WalkBoston - November 3, 2017