

# **Washington Technology Magnet School**

## **Safe Routes to School Plan**

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**Saint Paul, Minnesota**

Report Prepared by:

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## **Washington Technology Magnet Safe Routes to School**

### **Planning Team**

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## **Chapter 1: Background**

### **Project Background**

Bikram Phuyel was 11-years old and a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Washington Technology Magnet School when on October 27, 2014 at 7AM he was hit by a car and critically injured on his way to school. He was crossing Rice Street, a busy, four-lane arterial road running north/south through the North End neighborhood in Saint Paul. It was still dark outside and Bikram was waiting to cross Rice Street at Hoyt. One car stopped for him to cross the street. Another car did not stop. After suffering a traumatic brain injury and a lot of rehabilitation, Bikram is back at school and doing well, however, he will suffer lingering effects of the crash throughout his life. Bikram's cousin, who witnessed the crash, is a member of the Safe Routes to School Planning Committee that created this report.

After Bikram's crash, the community demanded improvements to the pedestrian environment on Rice Street and enforcement of speed and traffic laws. Indeed, the Saint Paul Police targeted enforcement in the area following the crash and continue to monitor speeds and failure to yield to pedestrians in the neighborhood. The City of Saint Paul passed a resolution requesting the speed limit on this section of Rice Street (which is a Ramsey County road) be reduced from 35MPH to 30MPH. Unfortunately, MnDOT conducted a speed study and determined that the limit is set appropriately for 35MPH, to the disappointment of the neighborhood. The community also requested Ramsey County consider a different treatment of Rice Street at Hoyt, where four lanes merge to three, however, the county engineers determined this was the appropriate location for the lane reduction and made no changes.

Finally, City Councilmember Amy Brendmoen and Washington Technology Magnet School Principal Mike McCollor decided to conduct a community driven process to create a Safe Routes to School plan for improvements for students walking and biking to school. In September 2016, the school and city convened SRTS Planning Committee to engage the local community, students, parents and teachers in the process to set a vision for a more walkable, bike-able and safer community around Washington Tech.

### **Washington Technology Magnet School**

Washington Technology Magnet School is a 6-12 middle and high school that is the largest school in either Minneapolis or Saint Paul. The attendance area (Area C) is entirely East of Rice Street, though the school itself is West of Rice. So, many students enrolled at Washington do need to cross Rice Street to get to school. Others who live nearby and open enroll may need to cross another busy road, Arlington Ave., to get to school. The school serves 2,106 students of which nearly half qualify for free lunch services. According to data collected the vast majority of students are bused to school. The school has several large parking lots, most of which are empty as the majority of the student body does not have personal vehicles. The drop-off area of the school is very busy every morning with parents or caregivers choosing to drop off students. This adds to traffic and congestion at the school entrance and nearby streets.



Map of area around Washington Technology Magnet School, 1495 Rice Street, St. Paul, MN 55117

## **Safe Routes to School Activities**

In October of 2015, Washington Tech hosted the Safe Routes to School National Course Summit, bringing the local community, planners, administrators and others together to learn about Safe Routes to School and opportunities for funding to encourage and improve the ability for students to walk or bike to school each day. The benefits to walking or biking to school are numerous including physical and mental benefits to students and environmental benefits to the community. Following the summit, some opportunities for improvement of the pedestrian environment around the school were identified, though no formal report, plan or community engagement process was established.

In preparation of an application for Safe Routes to School funding, Saint Paul Public Works and Washington Tech teamed up for a student and parent survey, which was completed in December 2015. The survey confirmed that bussing was the primary mode of transit for students. Factors outside of the engineered environment were determined to be strong factors in why parents did not allow their children to walk to school. Factors identified included crime/personal safety and the weather, for example. In addition, dangerous crossings, speed and volume of traffic, and lack of sidewalks were identified as barriers in the surveys. The application for SRTS funding submitted to MnDOT in January of 2016 was not selected for funding.

In Summer of 2016, Saint Paul Public Works submitted a new application for SRTS funding for the area this time including sidewalk gap infill to the Metropolitan Council Regional Solicitation which was selected for funding. The grant includes \$860,000 with expected contribution from the city capital improvement budget of another \$240,000. The funding comes available in 2020-2021. The grant request included crosswalk improvements, sidewalk infill, signage, and shortening crossings along Rice Street and Arlington Ave with bump outs.

Additionally, in early 2017, Ramsey County commenced a study of Rice Street, with intent to reconstruct the street all the way from University Avenue through Larpenteur Avenue in Saint Paul starting in 2019.

Pedestrian crashes continue to abound in the area surrounding Washington Tech. A key school crossing on Arlington Avenue was the site of a fatal pedestrian crash in November of 2016. The victim, an elderly man who lived across the street, was walking in the marked crosswalk when he was hit by a vehicle that did not see him. Several police reports show pedestrian crashes at marked crossings at the intersections of Rice and Arlington and Rice and Nebraska.

The Safe Routes to School Planning Committee has created a plan to address safety through Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering and Evaluation (The 5 E's). This plan should be implemented as resources become available with short-term, mid-term and long-term improvements and programming.

<b>Safe Routes to School Planning: The 5 E's</b>
<b>Education</b> —Teaching children to bike and walk safely.
<b>Encouragement</b> —Developing programs to highlight walking and biking to school as fun, healthy and safe.
<b>Enforcement</b> —Having law enforcement participation such as speed zone enforcement, pedestrian yielding education and enforcement and increased patrols.
<b>Engineering</b> —Identifying and eliminating infrastructure barriers to walking or biking to school safely. Addressing sidewalk and bike lane gaps, unsafe intersections and road design.
<b>Evaluation</b> —Measuring the impact of investments.

## SRTS Washington Tech Timeline

- **September 19, 2016**—Kick-Off Meeting
- **October 4, 2016**—Washington Wake-Up (Meeting with Parents)
- **October 17, 2016**—Mapping area to identify key barriers
- **November 21, 2016**—Discussion of Education and Encouragement
- **December 19, 2016**—Walk the area and Discussion of Enforcement
- **January 16, 2017**—Discussion of Engineering
- **February 1, 2017**—Winter Walk to School Day; Ramsey County Public Meeting on Rice Street/Student Presentation
- **March 20, 2017**—Review Draft Report and findings from Parent and Student surveys
- **May 10, 2017**—Report Released. National Bike/Walk to School Day observed



Ramsey County Public Meeting on Rice Street Study



Rice and Arlington on Project Teams Area Walk



JROTC Students and Principal McCollor at Winter Walk to School Dday



Hoyt Ave on Project Team's Area Walk

## **Chapter 2: Recommendations (The 5 E's)**

### **Education**

Because Washington Tech is a Middle and High School, the education curriculum must meet older students where they are at. The Safe Routes to School Planning Committee recommends robust education around awareness education and teaching the students how and where to safely cross the street. The committee recommends the following strategies to improve education:

- Washington Tech will **create and publish preferred walking and biking route maps** on the school website, as well as have printed versions available for students and parents at the front desk. We will consider asking Washington Students to assist in developing an app showing safe routes to school.
- Washington Tech will include pedestrian and bicycle safety education annually during **Bike and Walk to School Week**. Messaging will include the dangers of distracted walking and promote crossing at signalized intersections whenever possible.
- Washington Tech will **promote the health and wellness benefits** of walking and biking to school to students.
- Washington Teach will **provide personal safety education** to students including environmental awareness (avoiding distractions) and calling for students to report to parents when they have arrived safely to school.
- Driver education is also important for the community. Saint Paul Police will help **educate drivers to stop for a pedestrian in the crosswalk** (at every street corner) by continued promotion and the *Stop for Me* campaign and events.

### **Encouragement**

To get students excited about walking and biking to school, and to support students who do walk and bike, the SRTS Planning Committee recommends:

- **Bike/Walk to School Day** and **Winter Walk Day** will be observed annually with a large school event that include walking and biking giveaways/swag (donated from partners such as Health Partners, St Paul Police Department, and Department of Education). Walk to School Day involves bussed kids through a “remote drop-off” event where busses will drop students off  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away from school and walk as a group.

- Additional **bike racks** be added at school entrances.
- Instating a volunteer program for **crossing guards or supervisors at major crossings**. This will encourage students to walk (and parents to feel safe allowing children to walk) by having responsible, adults supervising the route to and from school.
- Offer an opportunity for students and parents to “sign up” and connect for others who live in their neighborhood for **group walks (i.e. Walking Bus)** during Open House events.

## **Enforcement**

The Saint Paul Police Department has been very supportive of Safe Routes to School planning at Washington Tech and others. The Police conducted an enhanced enforcement program in December and January. Police stopped and cited 21 violators for various moving violations, to include speeding, failure to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk, seat belt violations, distracted driving (texting) and failure to obey traffic control signals. In addition, the SPPD has agreed to:

- **Conduct more frequent patrols** in the area around the school around school start and end times.
- Continue the ***Stop for Me*** campaign to enforce the law that vehicles are to yield to pedestrians at every intersection. Conduct a *Stop for Me* event at Rice and Hoyt during school start and/or end times.
- Rice Street will be a focus corridor for the 2017 *Stop for Me* campaign, meaning frequent pedestrian safety events in the area throughout the year.
- Support SRTS efforts by providing police presence and resources to assist in Winter Walk Day and Bike/Walk to School Day.
- Build strong relationships with students and parents in the area and recognize perspectives of people who will be concerned to see police vehicles parked at the school for events.
- **Place dynamic speed display signs** on Rice Street between Arlington and Larpenteur to help reduce speed.

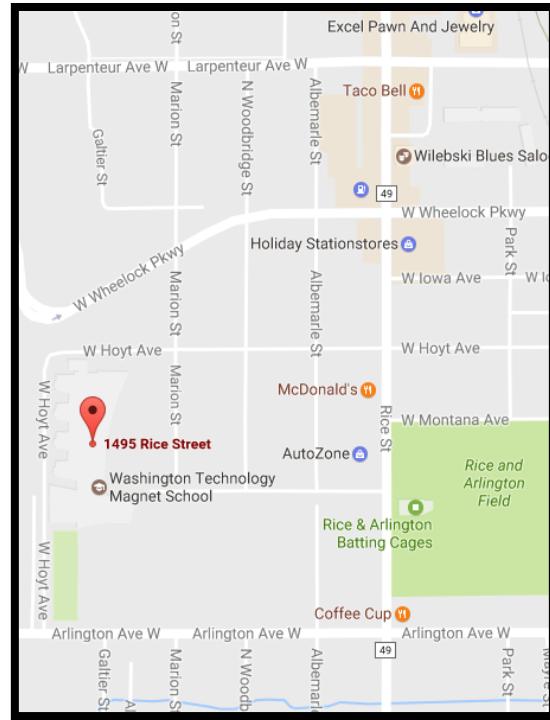
## **Engineering**

The Planning Committee recommends a number of changes to the physical environment in the neighborhood around Washington Technology Magnet to promote safety when walking and biking to school.

## Rice Street Re-Design

Ramsey County is in the process of studying Rice Street and plans to rebuild the street within the next several years. This is an opportunity to change the character of the street from one that prioritizes vehicles over pedestrians to a “complete street” that serves people whether on foot, bike, car, bus or wheelchair. The Planning Committee recommends the following improvements to Rice Street:

- **Reduce speed limit on Rice Street to 30MPH.** Further, implement a School Zone on Rice Street with a limit of 20MPH during school start and end times. Use dynamic display signs to post the correct speed limit for the time of day and week so motorists do not have to guess what the limit is.
- **Convert Rice Street from 4 lanes to 2 or 3 lanes** (at least in the segment North of Maryland Ave.). The center lanes should be for turning left with one lane of traffic in either direction. This will eliminate the “double threat” to pedestrians of a car speeding around another that is yielding. Ensure adequate notification of drivers that the lane shift is coming to avoid points of conflict.
- **Add pedestrian refuge islands** at key intersections to reduce the length of safe crossing of Rice Street. Where possible, plant trees or grass in the medians to improve the aesthetic and health of the corridor.
- **Add “human scale” and “above average” lighting to Rice Street** (lantern-style) rather than tall “bent straw” lights common to highways. This will increase lighting on the street, calm traffic and change the aesthetic.
- **Eliminate parking on Nebraska** leading up to the school. Reduce width of street by extending boulevards and/or using paint to stripe a refuge area between curb and driving lane.
- **Add a high visibility crosswalk for a safe pedestrian crossing at Rice and Hoyt** (such as a HAWK (High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk) or RRFB (Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon)). These are lighted pedestrian crossing signs that are activated by a pedestrian and instructs vehicles to stop while the pedestrian crosses safely.
- Discuss placement of Metro Transit Bus Stops for maximum rider and pedestrian safety. Encourage **upgraded bus shelters** (add shelters where none exist) with real-time bus schedules,



benches, and increased waiting refuge areas. (Metro Transit is planning several shelter upgrades in the area in Summer 2017.)

### **Intersection Improvements**

- **Add bump-outs at the intersection of Rice and Nebraska and Rice and Arlington** that would shorten the crossing area. If there is no room for bump-outs on Rice, the bump outs could only be added to the side streets (Nebraska and Arlington). Bump outs will also create more space for pedestrians to wait safely for walk signals.
- **Add bump-outs at the intersection of Arlington and Matilda.** In the short-term, use bollards to shorten the crossing at this intersection before permanent bump-outs are constructed.
- **Paint high visibility pedestrian crosswalks at the intersections of Rice and Nebraska and Rice and Arlington.** These include (but not limited to block-style painted stripes).
- **Improve traffic signals at the intersections of Rice and Nebraska and Rice and Arlington.** Consider a left-turn arrow to reduce congestion for drivers turning into the school.
- **Install Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI)** timing on traffic signals at Arlington and Nebraska on Rice (completed, March 2017). Consider expansion of LPI to other signaled intersections in the Washington Tech School walk area.

### **Bicycle Infrastructure**

- **Stripe the bike lane on Arlington Ave.** Use green paint to clearly identify the bike route and extend through intersection with Rice.
- **Complete the portion of the Grand Round on Wheelock Parkway from Rice Street west to Dale Street.** This will add sidewalk and bike lane and connect the area to the rest of the Grand Round. Ensure bike connection is extended with safe passage through the Rice Street intersection. The Grand Round will provide an excellent bike and walk route to Washington Tech students.
- **Add a connection from the Grand Round directly to the school's north side entrance off Hoyt.**
- **Add bike racks** to school property at three entrances (Arlington, Nebraska, Hoyt).
- **Add a bike fix-up station** for students and staff to encourage biking to school.

### **Sidewalk Infill**

The area around Washington Technology Magnet School is not well-served by sidewalks, despite being a densely populated area near a commercial corridor and school. For safe walking to school sidewalk infill must be prioritized. Below is a list of gaps in the system in the immediate area.

- **Rice Street** on the west side from Larpenteur to Wheelock (pictured below).

- **Hoyt Avenue** on both sides from Rice Street all the way to the school.
- **Nebraska** on the north side of the street (sidewalks go to the school on the south side already).
- Pave foot path diagonal on grassy area at entrance to school from Rice on Nebraska.
- Side streets leading up to Nebraska Ave including: **Marion, Woodbridge and Albermarle.**
- **Wheelock Parkway** west of Rice Street on north and south sides (will be added when Grand Round is completed).
- **Larpenteur Avenue** gaps on north and south sides between Dale and Interstate 35E.
- **Arlington Avenue** east of Rice Street on south side.



### School Property

The school was built with a large capacity for parking cars and on most days, many the parking lots sit unfilled. Students are not driving to school in the numbers that they used to and many staff also chose alternative modes of getting to school.

It is the recommendation of the SRTS team that the Saint Paul Public Schools **reduce the size of the parking lot and increase green space** (and pedestrian and bicycle connections) through school property.



Two large parking lots east of the school, especially the southern lot are underutilized most of the day.

## Chapter 3: Conclusion

The students and staff at Washington Technology Magnet School have every reason to be hopeful for improvements in the months and years to come to the experience and ability to walk or bike to school. The benefits of walking or biking are enumerable to the individual and to the community. With a planning process now underway to reengineer Rice Street by Ramsey County Public (construction estimated to begin in 2019), this plan is well-timed to assure meaningful improvements to that main barrier.

Additionally, our success in securing federal Safe Routes to School funding (available in 2019-2020) will mean that many of the engineering recommendations are funded and will become a part of the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County's public works implementation plans. In addition, a renewed focus on Safe Routes to School by both the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Schools will mean robust programming and support by school administration and local government departments.

This report should become an addendum to the Ramsey County Rice Street Safety Study, the District 6 Small Area Plan (and Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan), the Revitalize Rice & Larpenteur multijurisdictional planning initiative, the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan and the Saint Paul Safe Routes to School plan library. It will be up to the members of the planning committee and the broader public to continue to reference the Washington Tech SRTS plan and encourage investment and adherence to recommendations as an ongoing practice.



Images from Walk/Bike to School Day. May 10, 2017