

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho



Background

The city of Caldwell, Idaho is home to just under 50,000 residents and is currently the 6th most populated city in the state. The city is located on the western side of the Treasure Valley and contains a mixture of agricultural, educational, and professional industries, which continues to attract young families and promote growth. The Caldwell School District consists of eleven schools, including the two project schools, Washington Elementary and Syringa Middle Schools, which share adjacent campuses.

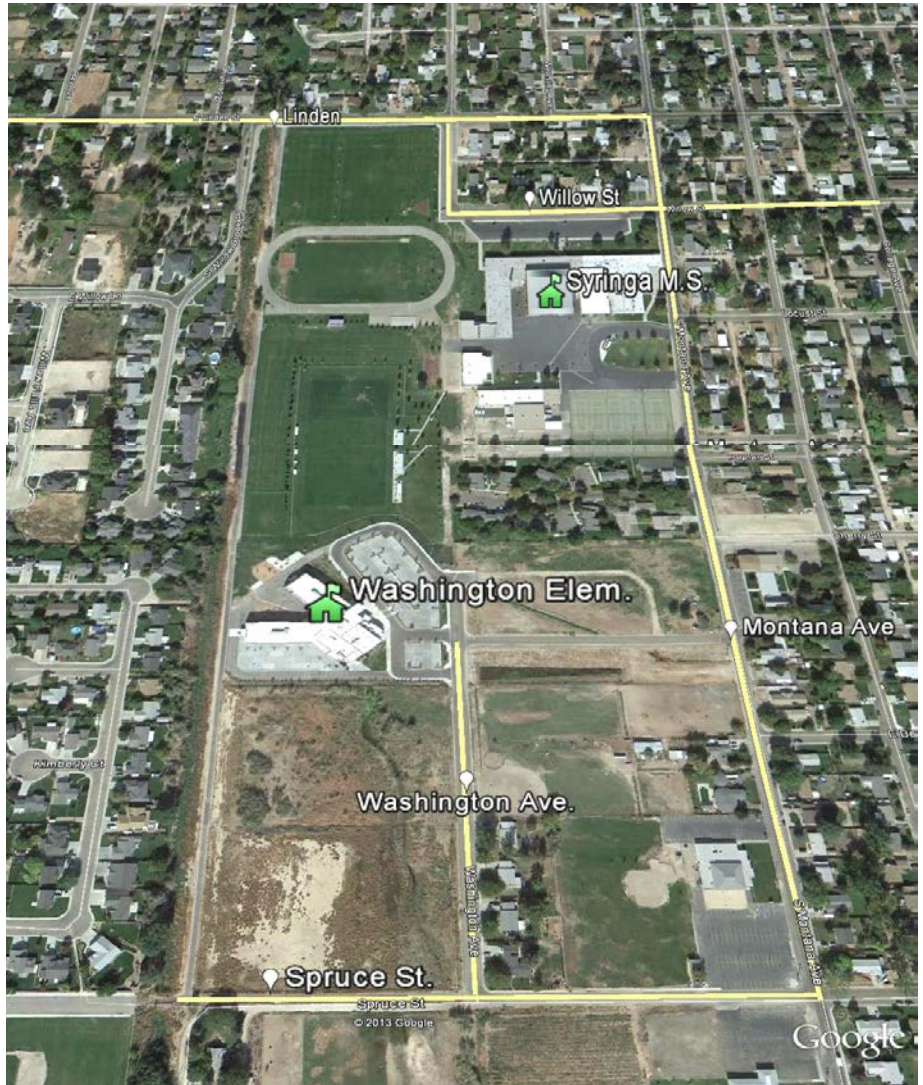
The city has recently invested in a revitalization of downtown and has been working on Safe Routes to School Planning for two years. In addition the Treasure Valley YMCA began working on Safe Routes to School education and encouragement activities in Caldwell over the past year. The city is now looking for more specific plans and activities centered particularly on the two schools.

The schools are located on Montana Avenue, a minor arterial, about ½ mile southwest of the College of Idaho. Part of the Syringa Middle School field abuts a second arterial, Linden, to the north and Willow Street, which runs directly in front of the school. The roadway space of Willow Street is a generous 50' wide and is not currently striped but does include an attached sidewalk along the front of the school property.

Montana Avenue is a two lane road and is approximately 32' wide with a painted center stripe and is striped for on-street parking on both sides. There are intermittent sidewalks between the two schools on the west side with a gap at the tennis courts on the school grounds and another gap at an undeveloped lot east of Washington Elementary. Washington Elementary is set back one block west from Montana Avenue. A pathway has been built from the Washington school grounds to Montana Avenue.

The city has developed a Bicycle Master Plan and has begun implementation of that plan by constructing a pathway system that connects north-south through the heart of the city. A portion of the pathway system runs behind both schools on the west and connects to Linden Street on the north and to Spruce Street and a second middle school, Jefferson, on the south. Currently most of the elementary school

students live to the east of Montana Avenue and must cross what is viewed as a busy and somewhat unsafe street to get to school. As a result, the entire student body is currently eligible to be bused to school on a hazard or safety bus.



Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho

Recommended Infrastructure Improvements

Montana Avenue, from Linden to Spruce – Montana Avenue is the principal route oriented north/south serving both campuses. The east side of the road is predominantly residential, and the road itself spans nearly 4.5 miles in total length. The roadway has both suburban and rural contexts, resulting in a conflict of users including typical residential motorists like commuters or parents, and agricultural trucks or vehicles. As both the area and the roadway evolve into a more urban type, temporary solutions are needed to accommodate walking and bicycling students until a complete street is realized including adequate sidewalk, buffer space and bicycle facilities.

Montana Ave. From Locust to Beech

1. Complete a continuous designated walkway on west side of Montana, from the parking lot at Syringa Middle School Alder Street.

- **Montana Avenue, between Cherry and Beech** – We recommend paving additional shoulder space and adding an extruded curb to provide a safer multi-use space on the west side of Montana Ave. Treatments should include an extruded curb and vertical candles to establish a safe buffer between pedestrians/bicyclists and the travel lane. Costs are significantly lower, drainage is maintained, and a vertical presence is added. Once the property develops, the pathway space can then transition into a full bike lane as the required curb/gutter/ sidewalk is added.

- **Montana Avenue/Poplar Intersection toward Locust** – The sidewalk ends at the asphalt in front of the tennis court. Stripe the area along the curb edge as a walkway for pedestrian use.

A worn piece of loose plywood covers a deep irrigation inlet in front of the tennis courts and presents a significant hazard.



Montana Ave. today with proposed walkway location outlined



Example of similar roadway with extruded curb shoulder walkway



- **Irrigation inlet cover** – There is a large irrigation inlet (a concrete hole) near the convergence of the sidewalk and asphalt in front of the tennis courts. This clear hazard should be covered with a safe and substantial grate to prevent injury.

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho

Montana Avenue/Alder Street Intersection

Perhaps the most critical intersection in the schools' area, the Montana/Alder intersection currently lacks many safety features to promote safe crossing by students, and also to raise awareness to drivers. Several tools should be employed at the Montana/Alder intersection to raise the profile of the crossing and help eliminate the need for safety/hazard bussing. This could potentially save the school district significant funds and promote walking or bicycling.

2. Add further improvements to significantly raise the profile and driver awareness of the crossing.

Several steps can be taken to improve the intersection ranging from relatively low cost to higher and more substantial investments. Initial cost effective steps that can be taken include:

- Install in-pavement markers (in-pavement pedestal signs) within the current crosswalk.
- Add school zone pavement markings in southbound lane.
- Restripe the existing crosswalk with fresh paint.
- Install crosswalks on all four legs of the intersection.

Additional steps that require higher funding levels but have positive and documented impacts include:

- Install curb extensions spanning into Montana Avenue to shorten crossing distance and raise driver awareness.
- Install Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFB), to give motorists additional prompts to stop for crossing pedestrians.



RRFB



Painting Ladder crosswalk



Pedestal sign



Curb extensions



Painting School Marking

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho

Montana Avenue school intersections; Spruce, Alder, Willow, Linden, and Washington/Linden

3. All of the intersections on the alignment of Montana Avenue will need to be improved over time. Improvements should include;
- Add more substantial paint schemes including ladder style crosswalks markings
 - Install in-pavement pedestal signs
 - Improved landings and curb ramps
 - Fill in sidewalk gaps



We recommend the city recognize these as priority pedestrian and bicycle projects focusing on the construction of curb ramps first and completing the sidewalk segments beginning the west side of Montana immediately north of Willow.

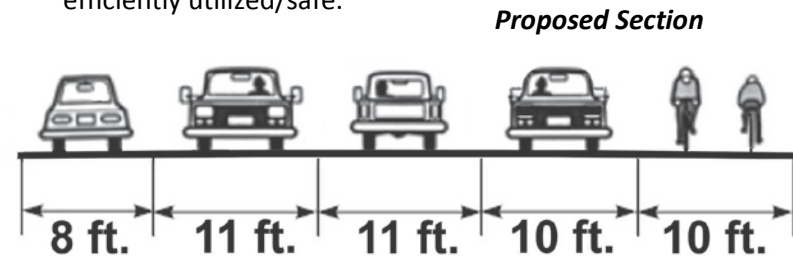
Washington/Willow from Linden to Montana Ave.

4. Calm and redefine space on these two streets. Washington/Willow form an L-shape adjacent to the school field and school building at Syringa Middle School. The roadway is currently 50' of unmarked pavement except for traverse style crosswalk at the corner of the "L" and one "SCHOOL XING" marking. Middle school parents use it for drop-off. The width and lack of markings encourages higher speeds. The space could be redefined to narrow, provide for bikes, clearly mark desired crossings and provide a designated drop-off area. Add these elements starting on the west/south side;

- Add a 10' two-way bike path along sidewalk on west/south.
- Stripe 10' of parent drop-off and pick-up lane to the south and west of the travel lanes, possibly with hatched markings.
- Stripe two 11' travel to narrow perceived width of the road.



- Stripe 8' for on-street parking on the north side of Willow and east side of Washington.
- Stripe the crosswalk with ladder style markings
- Fix the drain at corner of Montana.
- Review drop off procedures, ensure space in front of school is efficiently utilized/safe.



Adding this bike path provides safe ingress/egress to the school, a bike connection to the west from Montana to Linden (requires crossing improvements on Linden at Washington and/or a connection west to the pathway crossing, and buffers sidewalk from pick up/drop off.

Linden, Robert Ave. to Colorado Ave.

5. Review school zone markings/signs/flashers on Linden and upgrade as needed.

Linden is the highest volume road spanning east/west in the school zone area. it has school crossings, school zones and a connection to the pathway west of the school grounds. Traffic could be further slowed and driver awareness raised by:

- Improve school zone warning with flasher system. (can be solar powered and timed)
- Add a ladder style crosswalk marking at pathway with upgraded signage and an in-pavement pedestal.
- Complete the sidewalk on south side of Linden between Washington and Montana.
- Add trees, banners or other vertical elements to edge of school ground to slow traffic near school.
- The city could go further by placing school flashers with active radar detectors unit outfitted with speed indicator signs.

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho

Pathway

6. Improve access to school(s) from pathway. The pathway is a significant investment by city residents in bicycle and pedestrian connectivity. It does not serve the school grounds well with limited gate access points at Washington and a lack of paved landings or connections to school infrastructure at both schools.
 - Relocate gate(s) into school grounds as appropriate.
 - Pave landings from pathway to school grounds.
 - Consider building a bridge to connect neighborhood to the west of the canal to the pathway at Chapparro St.

Washington, Alder to Spruce

7. Improve access to Washington Elementary School and set the pattern for future development with better utilization of this roadway space.
 - Stripe a shoulder walkway on Washington St. south of the elementary school to Spruce on the west (undeveloped) side of the roadway to create safe walking space.
 - Stripe for on-street parking on the east side the street.
 - Add shared lane arrows to set the pattern of a biking connection from the south.

Policy Recommendations

The consultants reviewed planning and policy documents for the city and school district.

City Recommendations

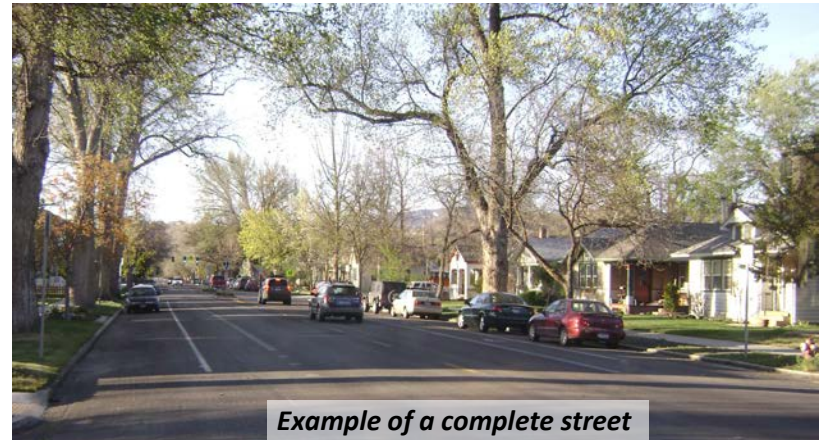
The consultants reviewed existing city policies and practices. The city has taken steps in recent years to amend plans and codes to encourage mixed use compact development. We commend that action and recommend these further steps to strengthen them.

City Code

1. Further refine Mixed Use Zone(s) for neighborhood activity centers using model code language in resources.
2. Add connectivity measurements/requirements to standards and approval processes.

City Street Standards

3. **Develop and implement standard school zone treatments** for the city. The treatments are currently different at different sites that have similar characteristics. The city has been working with the school district to identify the highest priority sites for implementation. Continue that work until all sites are reviewed.
4. **Finish Complete Streets standards.** The city has been reviewing the street standard requirements to add complete street elements. Consider these specific elements:
 - Narrow lane widths (10'-11') on all roadways except principal arterials/commercial service. Consider narrower lane widths on arterials where speeding traffic creates safety concerns.
 - Develop a toolkit of traffic calming measures such as curb extensions, median islands, median refuges, and more to slow speeds where pedestrians and bicyclists are at risk.
 - Develop checklist of pedestrian treatments to consider at crossing improvements.
 - Adopt specific design standards for bicycle facilities, ADA treatments on sidewalks, and school crossings considering context. Require that all schools, activity centers and other key destinations are served with bicycle facilities.
 - Utilize the identified collector system to provide connectivity for all users with bicycle boulevard type treatments.



Example of a complete street

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Caldwell, Idaho

School District Recommendations

The school district can strengthen support for walking and biking as active transportation for students by amending district policy to include references to the benefits and offer support for the activities. Every school that accepts federal funding for school lunches is mandated to have wellness policies that include goals for physical activity. In addition every school district in Idaho is required to have a transportation policy to support busing. These two policy areas provide an opportunity to adopt policies that support walking and biking to school. The resource link has model policy language in each of the following areas.

General Policy

5. Add General policy promoting regular physical activity.

Wellness Policies

6. Recognize benefits of physical activity by:
 - Supporting walking and biking to school
 - Recognizing academic benefits for active students.

Transportation Policies

7. Support active transportation/ Safe Routes to School program.
 - Regularly collect data on walking and biking.
 - Consider fixing hazards instead of busing students to avoid them.
 - Support walking school bus.
 - Support crossing guards when appropriate.

Joint City/School District Recommendations

The city and school district have taken positive steps recently to work more closely on planning for facilities. We encourage a formal collaboration policy to ensure that partnership continues.

8. Develop policy and process to meet regularly, collaborate on facility planning and share facilities as a means to make most efficient use of tax dollars.
9. Review school district and city policies on school site size, location of school, parks, libraries and other public facilities, and criteria for determining sites.

Non-Infrastructure Recommendations

For Capital improvement plans:

1. Continue to conduct pedestrian and bicycle counts. Ask schools for volunteers.
2. Use counts and school survey findings to inform infrastructure improvements.

Washington and Syringa Schools

3. Implement a Walking School Bus after improvements are completed on Montana (for Washington School).
4. Continue to complete travel surveys and in class tallies.
5. Educate parents about driving safely near school (s).

Events:

6. Continue Walk to School, and Bike Rodeo (Washington School).
7. Hold safety assemblies yearly, or add to Health/PE curriculum (Syringa Middle).

Resources: Model and sample policies and other tools are available at:

<http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org/index.php/resources/>

– go to Best Practices

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