

# Safe Routes to School Plan – Sandpoint, Idaho



## Background

Sandpoint is a town of 7,365 on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille and has continued to evolve from a community steeped in a tradition of logging to one with a strong presence of artisans and craftsmen. The economy of Sandpoint has also evolved and is now represented by those based in tourism, hospitality and services. Lake Pend Oreille School District has five schools in Sandpoint including the Sandpoint Middle School; the focus of the Safe Routes to School project.

The school is located on Division Street, and co-located with Sandpoint High School. Both campuses share one common access point which is very congested and problematic due to bus traffic, morning commute traffic through the corridor, high school drivers and middle school drop-off as well as increased walking and bicycling rates and increased school population. Additionally, neither school has other access points to help alleviate traffic pressures.

Division Street is functionally classified as a collector and has a posted speed limit of 35 mph. There is a marked crosswalk at Michigan Ave., a connecting local road, on both sides of the entrance. Due to the volume, speed and conflicts with drivers turning into the high school, the crossing at Michigan has been viewed as very unsafe.

Division Street intersects with State Highway 2 at a 45-degree angle just south of the high school. There is a pathway along portions of Highway 2, however there is no direct access to the school property from the pathway and students traveling from the east must cross Division Street, either at the intersection with the highway or at Michigan, to access the school.

Students who live west of the school could potentially reach the campus by traveling on local



**Sandpoint Middle School shares one access with Sandpoint High School and has no other outlets. This makes for a busy and challenging environment for all users: buses, motorists, walkers and bicyclists.**

roads and pathways if a connection could be secured and constructed. There is evidence that some students do this today, though the path they use is not formally part of the network. There is a city park north of the schools that shares an access road with the middle school. However the route is discouraged from being used and a gate limits access to students living north of the campus on the north side of Pine Street.

## Early Success

Early in our process the challenging environment at the crossing of Division at Michigan and the school entrances became very apparent. The Safe Routes to School Coordinator had identified a crossing guard as a potential remedy. However the cost and the need to study other alternatives had delayed a decision. Our recommendation was to go forward with the crossing guard now and they did. We saw the guard in action and talked to school officials and city officials who all have deemed it a great success. They also recognize that it functions better than a pedestrian activated or full traffic signal would and support the crossing guard continuing.



# Safe Routes to School Plan – Sandpoint, Idaho

## Infrastructure Recommendations

The key to improving walking and bicycling conditions around the campus of Sandpoint Middle School is to increase the number of access points to shorten distances, disperse congestion, minimize conflict with motorists, and remove some of the unstable conditions currently in existence. To achieve this end there is no one solution but numerous steps small and large. **With the crossing guard in place the next highest priority is creating additional access points to the schools.**

**New Highway 2 Bus Connection** – Buses delivering students utilize the same driveway as all other drivers. The size and speeds of a school bus means the bus drivers need wider gaps in traffic to make left-hand turns; they have been using gaps created by pedestrians crossing (not a safe option) and are now directed by the crossing guard. This still translates into longer queues for all other drivers. To remove busses from the left turn queue and increase overall network efficiency, a new more direct connection for buses only is recommended.

1. **Connect from Highway 2 into high school parking area** for bus access only. To be located logically immediately to the south of the High School parking lot, southwest of Division. This requires permission from ITD. The bus drive would cross the Sandpoint multi-use pathway, requiring appropriate signage and awareness campaigns to prevent any pathway/bus conflicts. The design could potentially also serve direct pathway access to the campus.



Several possible routes exist to connect Hwy 2 with Sandpoint High School and Middle School

2. **New Right-in/Right-out driveway access at south driveway on Division** – as another means of accessing the high school, the district and city would allow right-in/right-out turning movements, especially for high-school drivers at the southern driveway to further defuse the issues with the Division/Michigan intersection. Today the driveway is exit only.

**New Walk/bike connection from the west** – Homes and students west of campus have no official walk/bike route. Such a route would shorten walk/bike distance and remove these students from the chaotic traffic in front of the school. Explore and implement one or both of the following options.



3. **Option #1** – Make a connection off of Lincoln Avenue, spanning the Catholic Church grounds – likely on the north side, then span the property currently owned by the Department of Lands. This could be done with the permission of both property owners. In discussion with stakeholders it was determined that the land owned by the Department of Lands cannot be developed and would make an ideal location for a trail. The church uses the driveway on the north side to move bigger vehicles, which may pose a barrier.
4. **Option #2** – A trail connection from Janelle Way would have direct access to the middle school campus. There is a route through a stormwater wetland easement that links the neighborhood behind the school directly with the backside of the campus near the school track. Crossing the wetland is a barrier that would have to be overcome.

## Safe Routes to School Plan – Sandpoint, Idaho

**Connect from Pine Street** – to the north of campus where there is a mix of housing and two sizable parks. With no direct access to the schools students now travel out of direction to the east. An existing service road could be opened and enhanced to promote walking and bicycling with three steps.

5. **Pine Avenue crossing** – Erect a mid-block crossing system directly across from the school baseball field, linking with the apartment complex to the north. The crossing should be striped, signalized using either an RRFB or HAWK pedestrian activated signal. The crossing is intended to work in concert with improvements and increased access to the service road behind the ball field south of Pine, connecting with the school campus.
6. **Pine Avenue, Service Road** – A service road behind the baseball field fully connects Pine Street with the middle school campus. However the road is unpaved and restricted by the use of a locked gate to prevent vandalism to a storage shed. In concert with a mid-block crossing, paving this access road and promoting its use would promote walking and bicycling for students living north of the campus. Furthermore, heavier use should enhance safety by substantial user presence. This could also be another link to the community pathway system.

- A. **Pine Avenue sidewalk** – Fill the sidewalk gap on the south side of Pine in front of the athletic field as soon as practical.



7. **Move the bicycle parking for students at the high school**- The parking is currently located on a landscape strip across from the high school and at the edge of the high school parking lot. Moving it nearer the school entrance and potentially covering it may encourage cyclists. (School is already pursuing this)
8. **Carpools for high school students** – The high school will institute a carpool program to help reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles accessing the school. This is one more way to help reduce the overall congestion on Division and Michigan that make conditions unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists. (This is ready to go for 2013-14 thanks to the principal and parent support, Done!!)

**Michigan Avenue and Division intersection** – further improvements could enhance pedestrian safety at and near the intersection

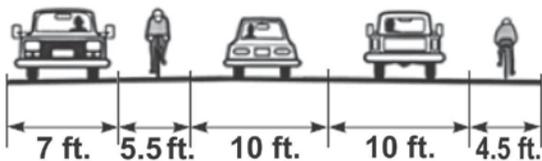
9. **Install an RRFB or HAWK pedestrian activated signal on Division at Michigan** – a signal would work in concert with a crossing guard during school start and release times to prevent constant crossing cycles. During the rest of the day and summer it would provide safe crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists to campus. (Lower priority with crossing guard in place.)



10. **Sidewalks on north side of Michigan Avenue** – Students walking to school via Michigan clearly use the grass on the northeast corner (behind the street trees in front of the church) to access the crossing. Though the rest of the road does not currently have sidewalk and sidewalk on the south side is complete, working to improve the overall condition is important. Having a sidewalk space on the church grounds may require establishing an easement behind the trees to accommodate detached sidewalks and save the trees depending on the right-of-way. We recommend community and church representatives work out an agreement and build a sidewalk segment.

# Safe Routes to School Plan – Sandpoint, Idaho

**11. Michigan Avenue bike lane** – Michigan Ave. between Division and Olive has on-street parking on both sides; parking on the south side of the road is primarily used by students as none of the adjacent properties are residential or front the road. Improve bicycling conditions and reduce parking activities, by removing on-street parking and adopting the following roadway paint scheme: Narrow and stripe parking on north to 7', stripe two 10' travel lanes and include a 4.5' bike lane on the south and 5.5' bike lane on north. The narrower lanes should also slow traffic making the corridor safer for all users – OR – If wider parking or travel lanes are desirable, shared lane arrows could be employed according to AASHTO guidelines rather than bike lane.



**12. Sharrows on Superior Avenue**—Another street providing access to both walkers and bicyclists is Superior Avenue. The road links to Division as well as the community pathway along the west side of Highway 2. To enhance this connection, paint shared lane arrows from Highway 2 to Division Avenue.

## Policy Recommendations

### City

1. Implement Comprehensive Plan goals on mixed use zoning, prioritizing pedestrian access to school and public facility locations, supportive land use patterns, etc.
2. Adopt a mixed use zone and identify priority areas in CA-4 and CA-5 for its use. (See resources.)
3. Review the master network plan for sidewalks and bicycles for connections and ensure that there is convenient access to priority locations and facility connectivity.
4. Adopt design standards for bicycle and school crossings.
5. Develop a connectivity index or measurement tool.

This project was conducted by Idaho Smart Growth and Vitruvian Planning with support from the Idaho Transportation Department.



### School District

The school district already has a head start on most districts in support for walking and biking in the general policies. These could be enhanced further with the following recommendations.

1. Consider adding support for crossing guards to Safe Routes to School policy. The crossing guard is in place, adding policy language will ensure its continuance if it proves successful.
2. Develop goals within transportation policy to promote walking and biking when possible. (See resources.)
3. Add: “support walking school bus and bike trains” as possible implementation tools. (For middle school students these could possibly be self-lead groups of students, or adult corner captains rather than adults leading the groups.)
4. Support safety guidelines and educational programs for walking and biking in transportation plan – taught in health classes.

### Joint City/School District

The school district and city are working well together. You may still consider a joint resolution that memorializes collaboration. If/when Sandpoint grows and new school locations are considered the city and school district may want to develop siting criteria and facility sharing polices.

### Non-Infrastructure Recommendations

1. School – Continue to support encouragement activities appropriate for middle school students.
2. City/School – Utilize new pathway with fun run or other activity to encourage use.
3. School – Conduct regular travel surveys as part of transportation procedures. Utilize data to identify walking and biking routes and walking school bus and bike trains.
4. City – Utilize school travel surveys to inform infrastructure improvements.



**Note:** Model and sample policies and other tools are available at: <http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org/index.php/resources/> – go to Best Practices