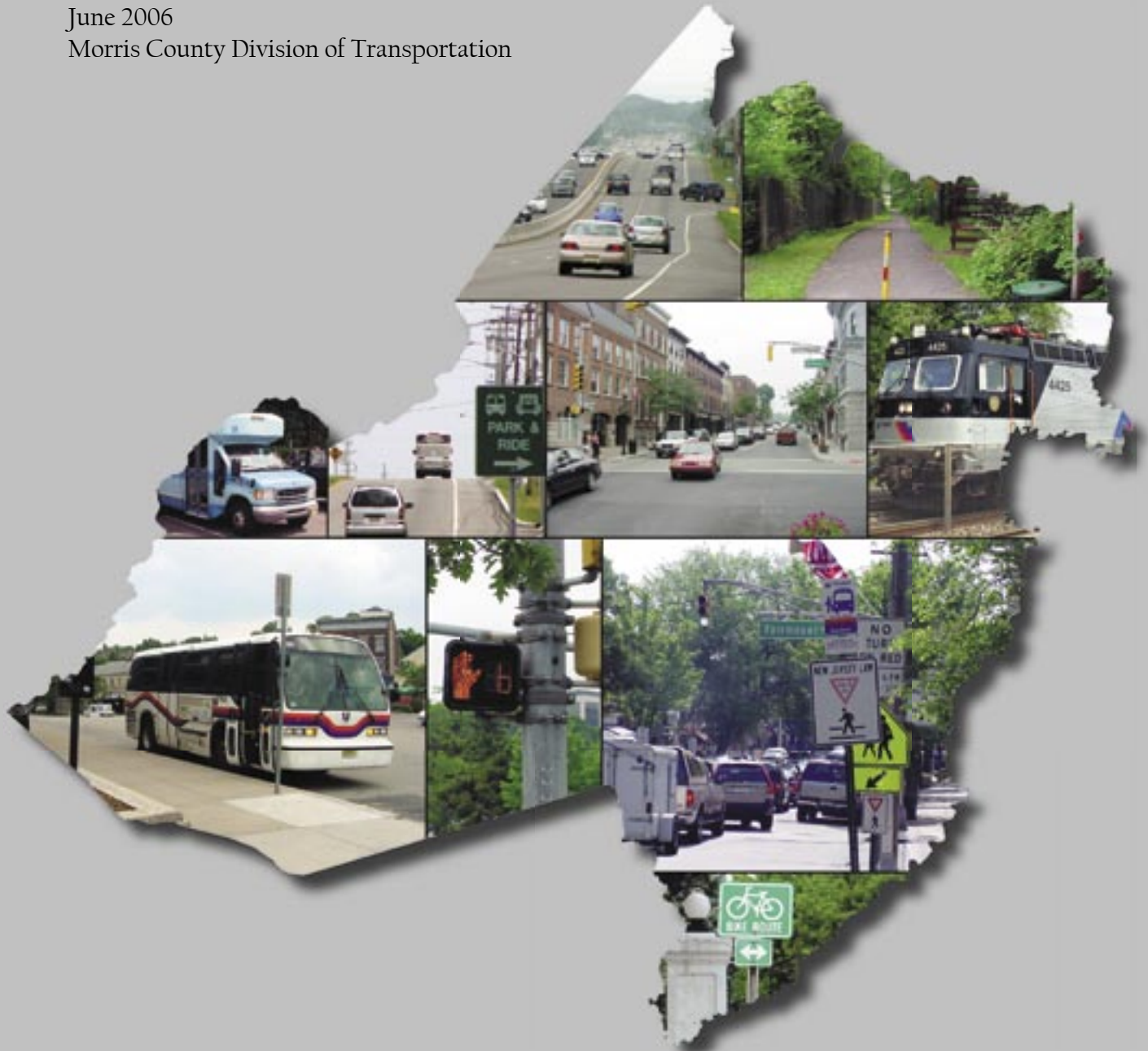


Bulletin #1

“It’s Not Cool to Drive to School”
An Examination of School Related Congestion

June 2006
Morris County Division of Transportation



The Morris County Division of Transportation, in coordination with the Morris County Planning Board, is developing the Circulation Element of the Morris County Master Plan. A series of ten transportation bulletins, which will be released individually, are being developed to reflect major countywide and regional transportation issues that affect our daily lives. In addition to the bulletins a technical document is being developed. This document will reflect detailed county projects, demographics, issues, and projections. It is anticipated that these broad based bulletins, which will have a large distribution, will create an exchange of ideas; therefore, becoming an important part of the plan's development.

Bulletin #1 addresses the issue of school traffic. During municipal outreach to elected officials, staff, and residents, the concern of the traffic caused by parents driving their children to school surfaced again and again. The discussion in Bulletin #1 addresses this issue and many others related to school transportation.

This bulletin can also be found on the Morris County Division of Transportation's (MCDOT) website at www.mcdot.org. Questions may be directed to Deena Cybulski of the MCDOT at mcdot@co.morris.nj.us or by using the contact information provided below.

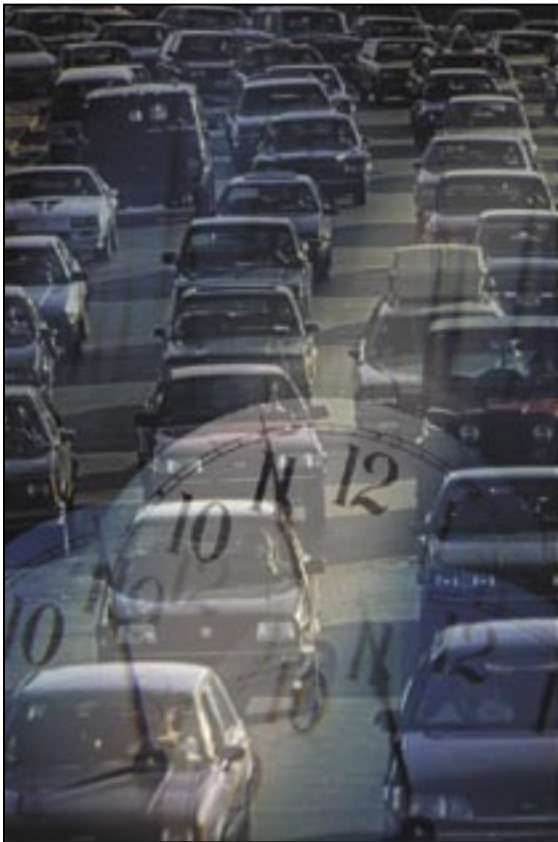
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IT'S NOT COOL TO DRIVE TO SCHOOL!



Our kids need to get to school, but do we all have to drive them?

When school is out for summer vacation, motorists generally see a significant decline in traffic congestion during the morning commute. According to the New Jersey Department of Transportation (2005), between 20 and 30 percent of all morning traffic can be attributed to parents driving their children to school. If more children ride the bus to school,



there will be less congestion. However, buses can also add to traffic problems and pollution. Walking or biking to school can be an alternative to buses and cars. This will help reduce traffic and pollution, while providing children with some exercise.

The Center for Disease Control (1999) reports that 30 years ago, as many as 70 percent of school age children walked or bicycled to school; today that number is roughly 10 to 15 percent. In a survey conducted by Health Styles (1999), the reasons most cited for this dramatic decline (from highest to lowest) include distance to the school, traffic around school, poor infrastructure (lack of sidewalks or crosswalks), weather, crime, and school policy. These conditions are a result of land use and transportation decisions made over the last 40 years.

Prior to World War II most communities were compact and centered around civic buildings, which typically included local schools.

The post-war dispersal of land uses and the building of highways have contributed to a new phenomenon



called "school sprawl." School sprawl results when schools are located on the fringes of communities, accessible only by automobile or bus due to distance from residential areas and lack of basic bicycle and pedestrian amenities. School sprawl contributes significantly to traffic congestion and air pollution.

Even when students live in proximity to their schools, the tendency has been for them to be driven by car or bus. According to the Federal Highway Administration (2000), as many as 90 percent of children living less than two miles from school are driven or bused. School districts are not required to provide busing to children living within two miles of school, yet often do provide "courtesy" busing because conditions are deemed too dangerous to permit children to walk or bike.

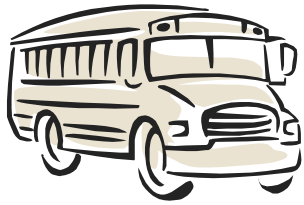
There were 79,275 children enrolled in public schools in Morris County for the 2004-2005 school year. (NJ Department of Education).

School buses account for 75 percent of diesel engines on local roads. (Center for Disease Control Survey, 1999).

School sprawl contributes to less exercise because of reduced opportunities to walk or bike.

Safe Routes to School Programs must recognize the varying schedules of students affected by pre- and post-school activities.

The practice of courtesy busing has, however, become a contentious issue because of its hefty price tag. In 2006, Parsippany and Long Hill decided to end courtesy busing and many other school districts are considering the same action to minimize costs. In Parsippany, the school board was able to



trim \$125,000 off the school budget this year by eliminating courtesy busing for the 750 students living

within 2 miles of the school. If parents believe that conditions are not convenient or safe for their children to walk or ride bicycles, they will drive their children to school, increasing congestion on roads to the schools. Where the elimination of courtesy busing is not desired or



feasible, some school districts are considering subscription busing, which requires parents to pay for busing.

In recognition of these issues, the Morris County Division of Transportation embarked upon a **Safe Routes to School Pilot Program** in the Wharton Borough School District in September 2005. The program's goal is to build a physical environment and encourage a social climate that supports children's ability to walk, bicycle, carpool, or take transit safely to



school. The official kick-off began on October 5, 2005 (International Walk to School Day). Walking and bicycling to school increased from 20 percent to almost 70 percent on that day and it is the ongoing goal of this program to sustain this level of walking and bicycling. Although it is too early in the program to determine the level of participation of walking and bicycling these activities are being observed. In order to monitor the level of walking and bicycling, formal surveys will be conducted twice during the project, once during the beginning of the plan development phase and again near the end of the implementation phase. In addition, during the same two periods, counts will be conducted of the number of vehicles dropping off students and the number of students in each vehicle and the number of bicycles in the bicycle rack. A comparison of the survey data and count data, and statistics compiled from participation in Safe Routes to School events will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Morris County will continue to support this program and pursue other opportunities to reduce congestion by school-related traffic. The results, successes, and challenges from the Wharton experience will be documented in a "How-To Guide" to serve as a tool for other municipalities, advocates, planners, engineers, and educators.





Proposals



1 ♦ Reduce the number of children transported by automobile.

Taking the bus, walking, bicycling, and carpooling will alleviate traffic congestion around schools, create safer, calmer streets and neighborhoods, improve air quality and provide a cleaner environment, while increasing physical activity for children.

COUNTY ACTIONS

- ▶ *The Morris County Division of Transportation, TransOptions, and the County Superintendent of Schools should work together to explore carpooling options, opportunities, and incentives for parents in order to reduce the number of individual trips.*
- ▶ *The Morris County Division of Transportation should continue to develop more **Safe Routes to School** programs throughout the County through education, enforcement, encouragement, and engineering. Developing a working partnership with the County Superintendent of Schools is vital to disseminate information about the new statewide funding source and the How-To Guide developed through the Wharton pilot program.*
- ▶ *The Morris County Division of Transportation should organize a **School Transportation Summit**, inviting representatives from all Boards of Education, superintendents and principals in the county to identify common transportation problems and explore potential solutions.*



GENERAL ACTIONS

- ▶ *Create a program to systematically monitor student travel behavior to determine when and how students are traveling to and from school. Monitoring would address overall student travel patterns, times of travel, methods of travel and other factors that may be used to develop transportation alternatives and improvements.*
- ▶ *Encourage Boards of Education to provide incentives to students who walk, bicycle or ride the bus to school.*
- ▶ *Encourage Boards of Education to consider limiting the number of parking permits or charging students for parking spots, particularly when parking at the school is limited.*
- ▶ *Increase school bus ridership by ensuring parents of bus safety through driver education, GPS technology, bus monitoring, and random bus inspections.*

2 ♦ Increase bicycle and pedestrian accessibility to schools.

Walking and bicycling to school will reduce the need for busing and help to reduce traffic congestion.

COUNTY ACTIONS

- ▶ *Require transportation infrastructure that supports walking and bicycling as part of any new development or redevelopment proposal and encourage maintenance of existing infrastructure systems.*

GENERAL ACTIONS

- ▶ *Require transportation infrastructure that supports walking and bicycling as part of any new development or redevelopment proposal.*



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