

North Mitchell County Elementary School

Safety-Focused

Safe Routes to School Report

April 2015

15815 GA-93

Baconton, Georgia



Georgia

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

*Prepared with assistance from the Georgia SRTS
Resource Center*

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North Mitchell County Elementary School

Safety-focused Safe Routes to School Report



Introduction

On March 11, 2015, stakeholders at North Mitchell County Elementary School (NMCES) in Baconton, Georgia met to examine the walking and bicycling network around the school and identify potential engineering improvements and education strategies to address safety needs. Their participation in a Georgia Safe Routes to School (SRTS) walk audit shows support for improving the walking and bicycling environment while increasing the number of students safely walking or bicycling to school, as well as within the City of Baconton. The stakeholders participating in the walk audit included members of the school administration and staff, the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission and Georgia SRTS Resource Center.

Safe Routes to School Team

Name	Organization
Jacquelyn White	Principal, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Shanicie Williams	Health Teacher, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Kisne Jackson	Bookkeeper, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Katrina Thomas	Registrar, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Barbara Reddick	Senior Planner, Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
Zack Dallas	P.E. Teacher, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Kedrah Knowlin	P.E.C. Teacher, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Patrick White	Head Custodian, North Mitchell County Elementary School
Chelsea Carter	School Outreach Coordinator, Georgia Safe Routes to School Resource Center
Wendy Phelps	Toole Design Group
John Dempsey	Toole Design Group

During the two hour meeting, the team discussed how students currently travel to and from school and their concerns related to walking and biking to school; the group also assessed common walking routes near the school through a facilitated walk audit. The walk audit also included a 'Pop-Up' improvement demonstration for the team to experience in the field. The temporary improvement installation simulated a shared use path, enhanced crosswalk pavement markings and educational wayfinding signage as methods for increasing the safety of walking or biking to NMCES.

Existing conditions

School location and student proximity

North Mitchell Elementary School (NMES) is located at 15815 GA-93, Baconton, Georgia, in the southwest region of the state. Baconton is a small city at the crossroads of US Route-19 and GA-93; about midway between the City of Albany, 17 miles to the north, and the City of Camilla, approximately 15 miles to the south. The highest density neighborhood in the City of Baconton is located west of the intersection with US Route-19 and GA-93. The neighborhood is primarily single family-detached homes. The NMCES campus is approximately one mile east of the intersection of US Route-19 and GA-93 as seen in Figure 1 on Page 5 of this report. There are no residential neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the school campus.

State route GA-93 provides east-west travel in this portion of Mitchell County. Because the school is located on GA-93, it is the primary connection between Baconton and the school, although the road narrows and is called Lester Road west of US Route-19. GA-93 is classified as a major collector with an approximate 410 annual average daily traffic volume¹. The typical roadway cross section is approximately 24 feet wide with two 11 foot travel lanes and 1 foot shoulders. The roadway has a posted school zone of 45 MPH and lacks sidewalk infrastructure. Lester Road NE is classified as a major collector with an approximate 1,590 annual average daily traffic volume². The typical roadway cross section is approximately 20 feet with two 10 foot travel lanes. The roadway lacks sidewalk infrastructure.

US Route-19 is located on the eastern edge of Baconton and provides north-south travel. It is classified as a principal arterial with an approximate 9,610 annual average daily traffic volume³. The typical roadway cross section is a four lane divided highway, approximately 30 feet wide on each side of the grass median with two 12 foot travel lanes and shoulders varying in width from 2 feet to 4 feet. The intersection of US Route-19 and GA-93 is signal controlled with pedestrian countdowns, has high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings crossing all four road segments, however lacks sidewalk infrastructure (Photo 4 and 5).

The City of Baconton and the neighborhood residential area west of US Route-19 have disconnected sidewalk segments with several traffic calming techniques implemented throughout the neighborhood. Also located west of US Route-19 are popular destinations used by the school community, which include: Baconton Community Charter School, Baconton athletic field complex, and City Hall. Future destinations within the community will likely include the Baconton Community Center and Library.

NMCES on-campus circulation is provided by a separate bus driveway and personal vehicle driveway loop. Access from GA-93 to both driveway loops is supplied by right and left turn lanes. Approximately one half mile from the intersection of US Route-19 and GA-93, the bus driveway provides circulation to the rear of the school building. The bus driveway also supplies access for school deliveries and maintenance vehicles. Approximately 900 feet to the east of the bus driveway, a personal vehicle driveway loop provides access from GA-93. This access driveway offers circulation for personal vehicle pick up/drop off procedures, as well as access for staff and visitor parking.

¹ Georgia Department of Transportation, 2013 <http://trafficserver.transmetric.com/gdot-prod/tcdb.jsp?siteid=2050183>

² Georgia Department of Transportation, 2013 <http://trafficserver.transmetric.com/gdot-prod/tcdb.jsp?siteid=2050187>

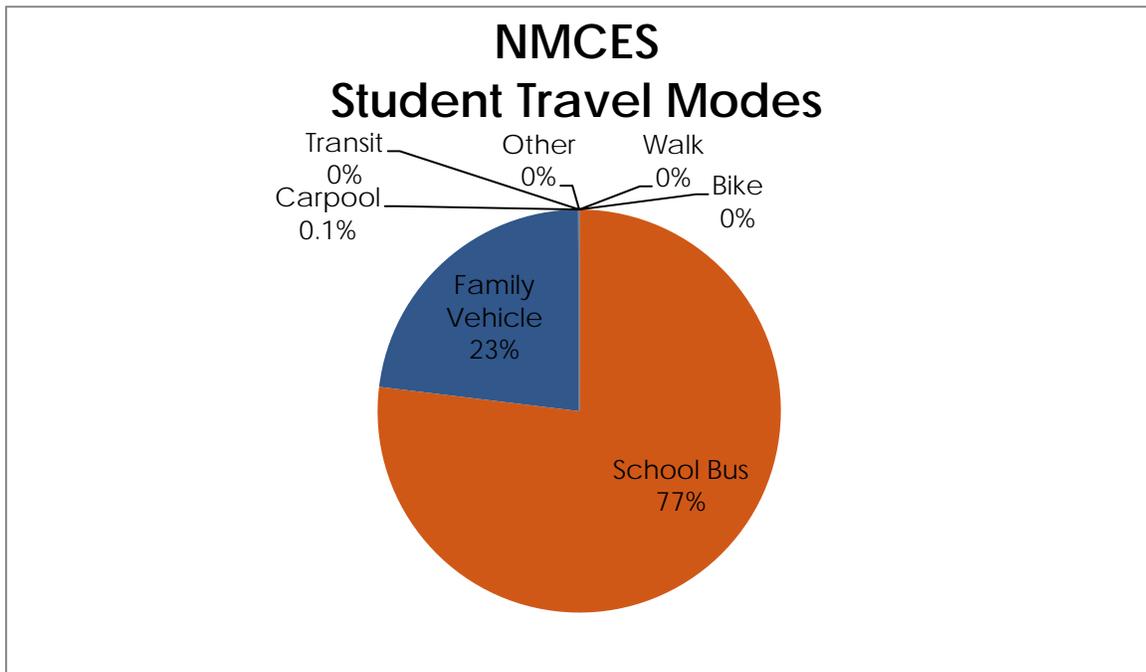
³ Georgia Department of Transportation, 2013 <http://trafficserver.transmetric.com/gdot-prod/tcdb.jsp?siteid=2050267>

Student Travel Patterns

Bus service is provided for all students attending NMCES. Since NMCES is part of the North Mitchell County school system, many students live in Camilla and are not located within the 2 mile walking or bicycling distance to the school campus. Approximately 100 of the NMCES students enrolled as of December 2014 live within the city limits of Baconton.⁴

- 2.0% (3 students) live within 0.25 miles of the school
- 2.0% (3 students) live within 0.5 miles of the school
- 7.0% (10 students) live within 1 mile of the school
- 13% (18 students) live within 2 miles of the school
- 75% (102 students) live more than 2 miles from school⁵

There are no students currently walking or bicycling to school. NMCES actively promotes both walking and bicycling having recently participated in Georgia Walk to School Day (spring 2015) and conducted a bicycle giveaway, raffling away 12 bicycles within the community. NMCES also has a contemporary exercise facility on the school campus which receives routine use from the students and community.



Arrival

School starts at 7:45 AM, with students arriving by the first of six buses around 7:00 AM; the last bus arrives around 7:40 AM. Buses use the separated bus driveway loop. The remaining students arrive intermittently by personal vehicle using the separated drop-off driveway loop.

Dismissal

Students are dismissed at 2:45 PM. Students are released by grade starting with the youngest students being released before the older students. Personal vehicles are loaded via the separated driveway loop

⁴ Student enrollment total from Student Travel Tallies, December 2014.

⁵ Estimate of distance from student's home to school, Parent Survey, January 2015.

⁶ Student travel modes from Student Travel Tallies, December 2014.

and depart the school campus prior to the first buses leaving the school campus. School staff assists and coordinates both personal vehicle and bus dismissal procedures.

Walk Audit Summary

The SRTS Team met at NMCES to discuss possible walking and bicycling infrastructure improvements for the community. The team focused their efforts on access to and travel on the campus. The group first surveyed the elementary school’s internal parking lot and sidewalk infrastructure (Photo 1). For the most part, the parking facilities have curb separated sidewalks, but very few ADA-compliant curb ramps or high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings.

After assessing the internal sidewalk infrastructure, the team walked to the intersection of GA-93 and the bus driveway loop. This intersection was the location for the ‘Pop-Up’ installation improvement shown in Figure 2. The temporary ‘Pop-Up’ installation components included a shared use path, high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings, wayfinding and educational signage (Photos 6, 7 and 8). The shared use path components demonstrated to the team the effectiveness of basic changes that can increase safety while promoting walking and bicycling to school.



Figure 2. The pop-up location demonstrated how a shared use path would benefit walkers and bicyclists.

The installation and proposed trail support and are consistent with the long-term vision to connect the City of Baconton to the school complex. The anticipated walking routes are included in the table below.

Anticipated Walking Routes

Street	Speed limit	Road Width	No. lanes each direction	Sidewalk and shoulder width, if present ⁷
GA-93	55 MPH (45 MPH School Zone)	24'	1	N/A
Lester Road NE	25 MPH	20'	1	N/A
US Route-19	55-65 MPH	30' (36' separated median)	2	2'-4' shoulders

⁷ Street and sidewalk widths are approximate.

Key Barriers and Safety Issues

The lack of students and families walking or bicycling to school is in part due to the relative isolation of the school to nearby residential neighborhoods. Another contributing factor may be a built environment that lacks sidewalks or separated paths to support walking and bicycling. According to Parent Surveys collected in January 2015, the top five issues affecting parental decisions to allow their child to walk or bicycle to school are:

- Distance
- Speed of traffic along route
- Amount of traffic along route
- Weather or climate
- Safety of intersections and crossings

These issues were identified during the team meeting and from parents who currently drive their children to school.

GA-93

- **Sidewalks.** The NMCES team noted the school evacuation location is Baconton City Hall which is located west of US Route-19. There are no sidewalks present on GA-93 to access NMCES or to access the school evacuation site by walking or bicycling.
- **Perceived Traffic Speed.** The posted speed limit on GA-93 is 55 MPH. During arrival and dismissal procedures, the posted school zone speed limit is 45 MPH (Photo 2 and 3). Vehicles were observed traveling at a relatively high rate of speeds at all times of the day.
- **Lighting.** There is limited roadway lighting and no pedestrian scale lighting along GA-93.

Lester Road NE

- **Sidewalks.** No sidewalks are present on Lester Road NE to access NMCES by walking or bicycling. Lester Road NE borders the Baconton community to the north and should provide good pedestrian connections to existing sidewalk segments throughout the neighborhood.
- **Lighting.** There is limited roadway lighting and no pedestrian scale lighting along Lester Road NE.

US Route-19

- **Sidewalks.** No sidewalks are present on US Route-19 to access NMCES by walking or bicycling.
- **Perceived vehicle speeds.** The posted speed limit on US Route-19 is 65 MPH and 55 MPH. Vehicles were observed traveling at a relatively high rate of speed at all times of the day.
- **Traffic Volume.** US Route-19 has an approximate 9,610 annual average daily traffic. Many of the vehicles observed were industrial grade heavy trucks which is not uncommon to this segment of roadway.
- **Lighting.** There is limited roadway lighting and no pedestrian scale lighting along US Route-19.

Intersection of US Route-19/GA-93/Lester Road NE

- **Crossings.** Approximately five years ago, this intersection was upgraded from stop controlled on GA-93 to a signalized crossing. The signalized intersection upgrade also included high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings and pedestrian countdown signals at all four crossing locations. Since vehicle speeds are relatively high, users noted that crossing safety was a concern within the community, in

spite of the pedestrian signal.

- **Sidewalks.** While high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings exist at all four crossing locations, no sidewalks are present to access the intersection.
- **Intersection Design.** The current US Route-19 lane configuration consists of two through travel lanes, left turn and right turn lanes in both directions of the separated roadway. The current GA-93 lane configuration consists of one travel lane and left turn lanes in both directions. During observations and based on documented average daily vehicular traffic volumes suggested that this lane configuration should be evaluated to determine the feasibility of reducing the number of designated travel lanes.

Opportunities for Improvement

In spite of observed relatively low motor vehicle traffic volumes, there are no pedestrian and bicycle facilities to access the school campus. Roadways lacking separate pathways, wide shoulders or crosswalks signal to drivers, potential pedestrians and bicyclists that streets are for motor vehicle use only. Additionally, the school's relative isolation from the Baconton neighborhood contributes to the low occurrence of students walking and bicycling. Alternatively, the lack of existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities present opportunities to enhance network connections from the City of Baconton to the school campus. The following sections include recommendations to improve the physical and cultural environments surrounding NMCES to enhance walking and bicycling conditions.

Engineering Recommendations

To assist in addressing barriers and safety concerns identified by the NMCES team and community, site specific infrastructure changes are recommended around the school and in the surrounding community. The following highlights the basic concept of each infrastructure recommendation which provides a more detailed description of the intended improvement. The site specific locations include:

- A. NMCES Campus
- B. GA-93
- C. US Route-19
- D. Lester Road NE
- E. Intersection of GA-93 and US Route-19

The final section of this report includes a map summarizing the existing conditions and recommendations.

NMCES Campus

- **Crosswalk markings and ramps.** Retrofit all ends of existing crosswalks to be ADA-compliant and restripe all existing crosswalks with high-visibility white crosswalk pavement markings. Crosswalks and ADA-compliant ramps are an important component of creating a connected pedestrian network. Existing crosswalk markings in the internal parking lot at NMCES are not high-visibility white pavement markings and many connections to the crosswalks are not ADA-compliant.
- **Pedestrian scale lighting.** Current campus lighting provides general lighting for the personal vehicle driveway loop, bus driveway loop and parking lot areas. The NMCES campus currently lacks pedestrian scale lighting and should be considered at intersections or corridors that may be perceived as a barrier for safe walking and bicycling to the school campus.

GA-93

- **Shared Use Path.** Construct a shared use path on the south side of GA-93 from at least the intersection of US Route-19/GA-93/Lester Road NE to NMCES campus. The shared use path would include sufficient lighting, high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings and the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) 'Combination Bike and Pedestrian Crossing' (W11-15 with W11-15p) signage at driveway or roadway intersections. Shared use paths are a valuable element of comprehensive pedestrian and bicycling networks. As low-stress facilities, these pathways offer a preferred alternative on which pedestrians and bicyclists do not have to compete for space with motor vehicles. The paths and trails should also include adequate lighting for year-round use.
- **Signage and Wayfinding.** Team up with students, faculty and community members to install wayfinding markings and signage for the entire length of the proposed shared use path. The signage and wayfinding components will help increase awareness and establish branding within the community to harness support building momentum for future use.
- **Shared Use Path Features.** Long term use of the shared use path facility should anticipate an increasing demand of varying users. As the growth increases, the community should look to expand shared use path connections and wayside features that may include; bicycle parking, seating, shade structures, water fountains and or landscape enhancements.



Figure 3: Proposed shared use path infrastructure recommendation on the south side of GA-93.

US Route-19

- **Sidewalks.** Based on the NMCES student locator map (Figure 1), a significant group of students reside in a residential community off of US Route-19 between Bradley Lane and Pearl Lane. This location is approximately 1.5 to 2 miles walking or bicycling distance to the school campus. Consider adding a sidewalk segment on the east side of US Route-19 from Bradley Lane to GA-93.

Lester Road NE

- **Sidewalks.** Construct a sidewalk on the south side from at least Jackson Street NE to US Route-19.
- **Traffic Calming.** Consider implementing additional traffic calming measures such as speed humps and warning signage. This would be similar to other treatments on City of Baconton's neighborhood streets.

Intersection of US Route-19 and GA-93

- **Sidewalks.** Construct sidewalk segments and ADA-compliant ramps to all four intersection crossings. Sidewalks along GA-93 should connect to the shared use path.
- **Traffic Study.** Conduct a traffic study to evaluate and determine the appropriate traffic lane configuration. The study should assess the current traffic lane configuration on US Route-19 and the opportunity to perform a road diet by removing the right turn only lanes. The removal of the right turn lanes would decrease the overall pedestrian crossing distance and reduce potential conflicts between turning vehicles and crossing pedestrians.
- **Signage.** Consider installing 'Turning Vehicles Yield to Peds' (R10-15) signage at all four road intersection crossings, or prohibit right turn on red.
- **Gateways and Transitions.** Suggest implementing gateway or transition treatments at this intersection. The gateway treatments could provide visual cues at roadway transitions to help alert users of a change in the roadway environment and could act as a traffic calming device. The gateway treatments could also highlight the City of Baconton to contribute to the overall sense of place within the community.

Education Recommendations

The education recommendations are designed to work in conjunction with the engineering recommendations to improve the safety and comfort level for all road users near NMCES.

Student safety education

Through accepting the technical assistance for the Safety-focused SRTS Report, North Mitchell County Elementary School agreed to provide pedestrian safety education for students. The Child Pedestrian Safety Curriculum produced by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is recommended for this instruction. Integrating pedestrian (and bicycling) safety education into the school curriculum will benefit all students. Pedestrian and bicycle safety education should occur in advance of

major walk or bike to school events, so that children are adequately prepared and have an opportunity to practice the skills they have learned.

Other educational opportunities

- **Parent information.** Incorporate information on walking and bicycling to school in communications with parents. At the beginning of and throughout the school year, provide parents with information to clarify that NMCES Elementary School supports walking and bicycling to school. This communication can also be used to suggest ways that parents can support safe walking and bicycling, and promote the social and health benefits of walking and biking.
- **Driver information.** Provide parents and guardians with safe driving information and materials that stress the importance of driving safely in school zones and being alert for pedestrians and bicyclists during arrival and dismissal. These materials can be provided during back-to-school nights, health and safety fairs, and Safe Routes to School events, among others.
- **Bicycle Rodeo.** Hold a bicycle rodeo. Bicycle rodeos showcase bicycle safety skills instruction, bicycle skills practice, equipment inspections, and helmet fitting.
- **Community Outreach.** Develop and implement a community outreach campaign. It is important for local communities to be made aware of students walking and bicycling in their neighborhoods. A comprehensive outreach campaign that could target neighborhood communities within Baconton, Pelham and Camilla to remind community members to drive the speed limit, watch for children when driving during arrival/dismissal procedures and even how to use push button devices at crosswalk intersections.

Walk Audit Photographs

Walk audit participants took photographs to document the walk audit as well as supplement the walk audit project recommendations. The following photos are from the walk audit. All of the walkabout photographs are available at:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mff58yoir7zvz/AABOZmJ50u09_xa25naOWgHza?dl=0



Photo 1: The only ADA compliant curb ramp in the parent drop-off loop.



Photo 2: School zone and advanced school zone warning signage on GA-93.



Photo 3: GA-93 in front of NMCES looking west towards the intersection of US Route-19 and City of Baconton.



Photo 4: High-visibility crosswalk pavement markings at the intersection of US Route-19 and GA-93.



Photo 5: Typical pedestrian countdown signal at US Route-19 and GA-93 intersection with high-visibility crosswalk pavement markings. The intersection lacks accessible sidewalks to access the push buttons to activate the pedestrian countdown signal.



Photo 6: Temporary 'Pop-up' installation of a high-visibility crosswalk improvement for the shared use path concept (before).



Photo 7: Temporary 'Pop-up' installation of a high-visibility crosswalk improvement for the shared use path concept (after).



Photo 8: Temporary 'Pop-up' installation of wayfinding signage improvement for the shared use path concept (after).

Existing Conditions and Recommendations Map

