

## DPS, Cut your Bus Stops

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When my kids started school in 2007, I became concerned with minimizing school bus commutes and carpool lines. The first year, I was surprised at the number of elementary school bus stops in a single neighborhood, sometimes separated by only a few closely-spaced houses. It became apparent that a parent merely had to ask for a stop in front of their home for it to be arranged. What happened to neighborhood bus stops like I had when I was in public school? When did having the bus stop immediately in front of one's house become an entitlement?

I was even more surprised with the long, traffic-blocking line of cars with single occupants who sat, engines running, for 20-30 minutes, twice-a-day, so that their kids wouldn't have to ride the bus. Later, I was surprised that Durham was able to spare a policeman (sometimes two) to direct carpool traffic every day (for many months); and then I was surprised when the school entrance was rebuilt to incorporate a >0.1 mile driveway (and this is just to get to the school parking-lot) in order to accommodate carpool lines without blocking traffic. Some days they still block traffic for a spell.

Most people have told me that they drive their kids to school because of the long bus commutes (> 40 minutes for 8 miles, both ways, in the case of my neighborhood). But when I asked people to commit to a single neighborhood bus stop in order to substantially shorten the commute, all but a handful refused to do so. The kids in my neighborhood alone could fill a bus, reducing the route to 1 stop and shortening the commute to 20 minutes. What's more, like many south Durham developments, we have an ideal neighborhood bus stop – a clubhouse with more than ample parking (should participants live at the fringes of the neighborhood and need to drive).

The state board of education now requires a 0.2-mile minimum distance between bus stops, and DPS is apparently conforming. As a result, parents have bombarded DPS transportation services with complaints. In fact, state law requires only that the bus stop within one mile of a student's residence.

Why, then, do DPS bus routes have so many stops? In those neighborhoods that have them, the bus should not stop anywhere but the clubhouse, playground, or other such common area. In addition to shortening bus trips, this would help DPS kids (and their parents) get more exercise via walking, during which they will likely have valuable interactions with their neighborhood peers.

Admittedly areas in the city center may certainly need closer bus stops, because two city street corners 50 feet away from each other can be miles apart in terms of traffic, crime, and general safety. One size never fits all. (I wish our bureaucrats would realize this.)

In the long term, however, if there is any concern for safety at a communal bus stop that is otherwise ideally situated, DPS should not simply schedule an additional or alternative bus stop of the parents' choosing. DPS should call the Department of Transportation about getting speed bumps installed or the Sheriff's Office and Durham County government about getting a deputy patrol (for 20 minutes either side of each scheduled bus stop) or, better yet, to make public-safety at all school bus stops a top priority. How is DPS supposed to arrange efficient school transportation, as required by the state, if the State Department of Transportation doesn't ensure that we have safe and proximal common areas large enough to accommodate a group bus-stop or if the County doesn't ensure that these bus stops are free of criminal activity?

In the meantime, I'm extending my request for participants for a communal South Durham , Creekside Elementary bus stop..If you are interested in driving your kids to a nearby South Durham location (Southpoint Mall or the Renaissance Center comes to mind), thereby avoiding having to drive all the way to Creekside Elementary to wait in a carpool line twice per day (and saving several hundred dollars in gas/year as a result), please drop me an email ([mmr121570@yahoo.com](mailto:mmr121570@yahoo.com)). If I can get enough students to fill a bus, I'll take it up with DPS transportation services.