

A Brief History of Adult School Crossing Guards in Madison

Based on Traffic Engineering records.

Compiled by Arthur Ross, Pedestrian-Bicycle Coordinator, January 21, 2015

We have records in the office of Adult School Crossing Guards (ASCG) dating back to 1956. We do not have records for every year 1956 to the present, but for most of these years. A newspaper article from 1960 indicated that was the 10th year of the program.

The first indication I could find of criteria for determining ASCG assignment locations dates to 1961 when the Police Traffic Captain asked the Traffic Engineer if there were standards for determining the need of a School Guard position. The Police Captain at that time stated "I firmly believe that the survey function of determining whether an intersection should or should not be a school crossing belongs to the Traffic Engineering Department and I suggest that in the future such resolution be directed to you. If, upon your recommendations, it is passed by the Council it should be referred to the Police Department for hiring of the Guard."

In July of 1962 a resolution was introduced to the Common Council "Providing for the necessity of crossing guards and necessary protections at crossing locations." This resolution adopted the method for determining the level of protection required at school crossing locations. It does not appear, however, that this was adopted by the Council at that time. The resolution indicates that it was placed on file in November 1962.

In 1970 there was request from the Board of Education that crossing guards be placed under the control of the Board of Education and the Police Department. A resolution to transfer control of the location of school crossing guards to the Board of Education was adopted by the Common Council on May 14, 1970.

This resolution amended MGO 5.01(4) to read

Crossing guards and school crossing guards, the location of which shall be determined by the Board of Education, after study and recommendation of the Department of Transportation and Police Department, shall be appointed by the Chief of Police . . .

By "control" the Board of Estimates appeared to only have taken on the final approval process from the Common Council. Transportation was still doing the studies and Police was still hiring and supervising the crossing guards.

The Madison Schools reorganized its grade level structure in the fall of 1972

	From	To
Elementary	K – 6	K – 5
Middle	7 – 9	6 – 8
High	10 – 12	9 – 12

In a letter from the Madison Public Schools to the City Traffic Department, the Schools indicated that "Since the K-5 structure is considered to be the elementary program, crossing guards will be assigned to traffic hazard areas for the protection of children in these grades. Children of the 6 – 8 middle school will not be considered in this count."

The criteria for evaluating school crossing guard locations was amended in 1972 to reflect this change.

In fall of 1975 a resolution was adopted requesting a restudy of the criteria for determining the necessity for crossing guards which was done originally in 1962.

“It is particularly important that the criteria be properly validated as to their real ability to predict safety conditions at a crossing.”

Revised criteria were adopted by the Common Council on 8/31/1976 with a couple of proposed amendments still pending.

One of these amendments was adopted by the Council on 9/14/1976.

A clarification of an existing part of the criteria was adopted by the Council on 9/28/1976

February 1977 control of school crossing guards was transferred from the Board of Education back to the City. It was at this time that the Transportation Commission was given the responsibility for making the determinations after study and recommendation from the Traffic Engineer. The Transportation Commission was also given the responsibility to adopt guidelines to be used in determining the need for crossing guards.

At this time there was also a transfer of budget responsibility. Apparently the School District had been paying at least part of the cost of the crossing guards. In a letter from the school Superintendent to a Police Lieutenant, the Superintendent says “as of January 1, 1977, the yearly budget for adult crossing guards will be handled entirely by the City; therefore, contractual arrangements with the Madison Metropolitan School District have been cancelled. It will be your responsibility to budget for the adult crossing guard program from this point on.”

In February 1980 an Alder introduced further amendments to the ASCG criteria, stating in the preamble

The city's school crossing protection criteria were adopted as policy on August 31, 1976, . . . , and later amended . . . September 14, 1976, and . . . September 28, 1976.

Three and a half years later it is apparent that they need amending again in several respects. Common practice in that time has been for the Transportation Commission, strictly observing the criteria, to adopt each spring a list of changes in school crossings, subtracting several and adding a few; but when the recommended changes come before the Council, they are drastically amended. This happens, in the opinion of the sponsors, because the criteria do not reflect the reality of the situation. Time after time, neighborhood groups and alderpersons identify factors that ought to weigh in the decision whether or not to provide school crossing protection but that are not identified in the criteria. This resolution seeks to remedy the deficiency and to create a more workable set of protection criteria.

Amended criteria were adopted by the Council June 30, 1981.

The current version was the next iteration, adopted by the Common Council in 1990.