

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, February 7, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD PROGRAM – EXPOSURE INDEX UPDATE

FROM:

Zoran Postic, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek approval to fully implement and administer the 2020 School Crossing Guard Program Policy and Procedures applying the newly established Exposure Index warrant method.

Report Highlights

- In 2020, the School Crossing Guard Program underwent both a Program and Policy review to inform the 2011 School Crossing Guard Policy.
- At the Council meeting of November 17th, 2020, the School Crossing Guard Program Policy and Procedures were approved on an interim basis for a two-year period, allowing for the development of the Exposure Index to be completed.
- The 2020 School Crossing Guard Program Policy utilizes the 2017 Ontario Traffic Council School Crossing Guard Guide as a framework for the warrant process, reflecting latest industry best practices and relies on evidence-based data to determine School Crossing Guard locations.
- All existing School Crossing Guard locations will remain in place and have been evaluated based on priority ranking and a risk assessment of site conditions.

Recommendations

1. That Council receive the new School Crossing Guard Program Exposure Index developed for the City of Vaughan in support of the School Crossing Guard Program Policy and warrant method as outlined in Attachment 1;
2. That Council approve the 2020 School Crossing Guard Program Policy and Procedures in full as outlined in Attachment 2;
3. That the Deputy City Manager of Public Works be authorized to fully administer and implement the 2020 School Crossing Guard Program Policy and Procedures based on the established Exposure Index warrant method; and
4. That the City Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Region of York, York Regional Police, York Region Public District School Board, York Region Catholic District School Board and York Region Public Health.

Background

The School Crossing Guard Program was established over 30 years ago to promote active and safer travel for school-aged children.

The School Crossing Guard Program (SCGP) was established by the City over thirty (30) years ago to promote active and safer travel for school-aged children to and from school. The Ontario Highway Traffic Act (HTA) assigns responsibility to the municipal government, or any corporation under contract with the municipal government for establishing and maintaining school crossings. As of today, the City has assigned School Crossing Guards (SCGs) to assist pedestrians and children at one hundred and fifteen (115) locations.

The School Crossing Guard Program is based on industry best practices and evidence-based data.

The interim 2020 SCGP Policy and Procedures included recommendations from the 2017 Ontario Traffic Council (OTC) SCG Guide, which serves to create uniformity in the operation of SCGP across the Province.

Aligning the updated SCGP Policy with the OTC SCG Guide provides a clear framework and evidence-based data to assess potential locations and reassess existing locations. A 2020 benchmarking study found that over sixty percent (60%) of all surveyed municipalities were already using warrants based on the new OTC SCG Guide and several others were looking to adopt the same practice. The Exposure Index (EI) quantifies the level of interaction and potential conflict between vehicular and pedestrian movements at a given crossing, reflecting the level of risk exposure.

Some of the more notable changes to the 2020 interim SCGP Policy and Procedures include:

- Utilization of the EI at each traffic control type and location which measures risk to pedestrians based on conflicting vehicle turning movements.
- Thresholds for crossings of forty (40) assisted and unassisted children (i.e. alone or with a parent/guardian).
- Field assessment component and further warrant criteria to be evaluated when considering removal or reallocation of a SCG (i.e. speed limits, inherent sightlines concerns, road design, collision data, etc.).
- Comprehensive communication plan prior to the potential removal or reallocation of a SCG or any major changes to the SCGP affecting the local community.
- Annual traffic studies of approximately twenty-five (25) locations per year.

The School Crossing Guard Program Policy was administered for a two-year period to evaluate locations and assess staffing and financial impacts of the new Exposure Index warrant.

The EI studies were delayed due to the global impact of Covid-19 and the significant disruption of school closures and in-class learning. Regular pedestrian and vehicle patterns were required to return to pre-pandemic norms to ensure accuracy in developing the EI matrix.

True North Safety Consultants (TNS) were retained by the City of Vaughan to develop the EI for SCGP. Two studies analyzing conflicting vehicular turning movements and pedestrian volumes were conducted in the spring and fall of 2022 at each of the one hundred and fifteen (115) SCG locations. The data was utilized to develop an 85th percentile threshold for each crossing facility type. Once the thresholds were established, the EI method was used to evaluate existing and potential SCG locations.

Staff are reporting back on the outcome of the EI that will complete the requirements under the 2020 SCGP Policy and Procedures.

Previous Reports/Authority

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of November 17, 2020; Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report No.53, Item 3:

<https://pub-vaughan.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=53196>

School Crossing Guard Policy CW(WS) November 4, 2020:

<https://pub-vaughan.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=52002>

School Crossing Guard Program Review CW(WS) November 4, 2020:

<https://pub-vaughan.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=53199>

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of June 28, 2011 – Update to School Crossing Guard Policy and Procedures Report 35, Item 4:

https://meetingarchives.vaughan.ca/extracts_2011/pdf/35ws0621ex-11.pdf

Provincial legislation, HTA Section 176 School Crossing Guards:

[Ontario's Highway Traffic Act](#)

2017 OTC School Crossing Guard Guide:

<https://ontario-traffic-council.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2018/07/OTC-School-Crossing-Guard-Guide-2017-Updated-07-18.pdf>

Analysis and Options

The warrant process developed is based on the Ontario Traffic Council School Crossing Guard Program Guide.

The OTC SCG Committee creates standard practices based on industry guidance and applies evidence-based data to promote the warrant application for SCG locations across Ontario. Municipalities use the OTC SCG Guide as a framework, but tailor their policies to ensure local requirements are met.

The EI warrant application requires traffic data collection based on conflicting vehicular turning movement counts and pedestrian volumes. A threshold development of an 85th percentile curve for each type of crossing facility is then used to determine warrant for a SCG. Three categories of locations were studied:

- crossings with an existing SCG;
- approaches of an existing location that does not currently have a designated SCG (meaning the other non-serviced legs); and
- new locations (intersections without a SCG at the request of citizens or school administrations)

The EI thresholds for the City of Vaughan were collected during the spring and fall of 2022. The data was collected by video and counted manually for each SCG location. Site-inspections were also performed for each SCG location during both the spring and fall studies.

The City has developed the Exposure Index warrant with a priority ranking assigned to each location in comparison to the threshold.

Within each priority level, a higher risk level was also given to sites where one of the following criteria was met:

- Posted speed of more than 50 km/h on the subject approach of the intersection.
- 85th percentile speed over the posted speed of the subject intersection.
- Collisions between 2016 and 2021 were recorded at the site.
- Sites with restricted visibility due to obstructions that cannot be addressed with minor upgrades (i.e. trimming of vegetation, installation of signs, etc.).
- Crossing over four lanes of traffic.

The combination of the priority ranking, and risk level provides guidance on the recommended actions for existing sites with School Crossing Guards.

Based on both studies performed in 2022, it is determined that all existing SCGs will remain in place.

- 90% of SCG locations have an EI above the threshold and will remain in place.
- 10% of SCG locations on one or both studies have an EI that is below the threshold, with an identified lower risk level. These locations will be placed on a monitoring plan to reevaluate vehicular and pedestrian travel patterns and volumes in 2023.
- As part of the annual SCG location assessment, locations that continue to remain below the EI threshold with lower risk levels will be identified as potential for removal or reallocation. In the interim, staff will work with identified schools to promote and encourage active and sustainable modes of transportation through programs such as Active School Travel. The aim is to increase sustainable mobility practices at identified locations to meet warrant. Should removal or reallocation of a SCG be considered, a comprehensive communication plan will be developed, and public consultation will take place with the identified community, inclusive of all vested stakeholders.

There have been many benefits realized as a result of the recommendations contained in the 2020 Council approved School Crossing Guard Program Review.

The 2020 SCGP Review included a recommendation for the addition of a SCG Coordinator which has benefited the overall program from both a health and safety and inspection standpoint. There is also greater oversight on recruitment, training, payroll and all administrative processes. For the 2022-23 school year, the SCGP commenced with a less than 2% vacancy rate, and staff engagement scores remain high, with an overall job satisfaction rate of over 90%.

Financial Impact

There is no direct financial impact as a result of this report. The SCGP budget forecasts a growth rate of three new positions annually. The SCGP continues to experience expansion, and further support may be required to effectively administer the program. The need for a second Coordinator as identified in the 2020 SCGP Review will continue to be evaluated and any additional requests will be submitted through the City's annual budget deliberation process.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The SCGP aligns with the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Map to ensure Active, Safe and Diverse Communities, supporting and promoting the City's commitment to the well-being of citizens, enriching their lives, and maintaining safety. The SCGP plays an integral role in road safety initiatives and works with all Regional stakeholders in the promotion and application of road safety and sustainable active travel programs, promoting walking and wheeling for children travelling to school.

Conclusion

The safety of our most vulnerable road users is paramount to the City and is the foundation for the School Crossing Guard Program.

SCGs continue to play a vital role in road safety and the promotion of active and safe travel to school. The new SCG Policy uses evidence-based data to determine warrant. It aligns warrants with the latest standard guidelines in Ontario adopted by many municipalities creating uniformity in the allocation, removal, or reallocation of a SCG. It provides a sound framework, greater clarity in process and a robust communication plan that engages all vested stakeholders and citizens. It is recommended that Council approve the 2020 SCGP Policy and Procedures in full, and that the Deputy City Manager of Public Works be authorized to fully administer and implement the Policy and Procedures based on the newly established EI warrant method.

For more information, please contact Peter Pilateris, Director of Transportation and Fleet Management Services, ext. 6141:

Attachments

1. School Crossing Guard Warrant Exposure Index Executive Summary Report, True North Safety Group (TNS), November 2022.
2. School Crossing Guard Program Policy and Procedures, November 2020.

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