

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, November 04, 2020

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD POLICY

FROM:

Zoran Postic, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To present the updated School Crossing Guard (SCG) Policy and Procedures to better align with the 2017 Ontario Traffic Council (OTC) SCG Guide and seek approval to implement the updated SCG Policy and Procedures on an interim basis while evaluating the implications of the new warrant methodology.

Report Highlights

- The SCG policy governs the School Crossing Guard Program (SCGP) for one hundred and fourteen (114) crossing locations and was last updated June 2011.
- The updated SCG policy employs warrants for new SCG locations from the 2017 OTC SCG guide which reflect the latest best practices and promotes uniformity across municipalities.
- Highlights of the proposed policy include:
 - Utilization of the Exposure Index (EI) warrant which measures risk to children based on conflicting traffic movements and traffic controls at each location;
 - A new threshold of forty (40) assisted and unassisted elementary school children (i.e. students walking alone and/or with a parent/guardian), from fifty (50) unassisted elementary school children (student walking alone);
 - New schools will continue to be assigned a SCG temporarily for one (1) year;
 - Existing SCG locations remain in place until reassessed with a new warrant; and,
 - Annual SCG location reassessments.
- Staff seek authorization to administer the proposed Policy and Procedures on an interim basis for up to two (2) years to allow for the development of the EI at existing school crossing locations and evaluate the implications of the new warrant methodology.

Recommendations

1. That Council approve the updated School Crossing Guard Policy as outlined in Attachment 1 on an interim basis for up to two (2) years;
2. That Council repeal the 2011 SCG Policy and Procedure;
3. That Council approve the School Crossing Guard Procedures as outlined in Attachment 2 on an interim basis for up to two (2) years;
4. That staff be authorized to administer the updated School Crossing Guard Policy and Procedures on an interim basis for up to two (2) years; and
5. That the City Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Region of York, York Regional Police, York Region Public District School Board and York Region Catholic District School Board.

Background

The Ontario Highway Traffic Act (HTA) assigns the responsibility for establishing and maintaining School Crossings to municipal government. The City's School Crossing Guard Program (SCGP) serves to promote active and safer travel for school aged children to and from school.

The Highway Traffic Act (HTA) is the legislative authority providing the rules of the road and the role of SCGs at school crossings. The City established the SCGP over thirty (30) years ago to assist children to safely cross roadways while walking to elementary schools. As of today, the City has assigned SCGs to assist children at one hundred and fourteen (114) locations.

The guidelines/Criteria for placement of a SCG were last updated in June 2011. The 2011 Guidelines/Criteria for placement of SCG include:

- a minimum of fifty (50) unassisted (student walking alone) elementary school children crossing in total over the school peak periods;
- one (1) of ten (10) other criteria related to daily or peak hourly volume of vehicles, traffic control type, insufficient sight distance or excessive operating speeds; and
- new SCG locations are currently permitted at uncontrolled intersections and mid-block crossings.

The 2011 Policy and Procedure is shown in the Previous Report/Authority section. The requirement of a minimum of fifty (50) unassisted elementary school children crossing was established in 2004.

The Ontario Traffic Council (OTC) has updated the School Crossing Guard Guide in 2017 to enable uniformity in the operation of School Crossing Guard Programs across the province.

The City of Vaughan and fourteen (14) other municipalities in Ontario participated in a project led by the Ontario Traffic Council (OTC) to update the OTC's School Crossing Guard Guide (SCGG) in 2017. The updated SCGG is to promote uniformity in the operation of School Crossing Guard Program and the implementation of SCGs across the Province.

The current City SCG policy and procedure approved in 2011 does not include the recent OTC SCG guide.

Previous Reports/Authority

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

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

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of May 29, 2012 Meeting – Establishment of the School Crossing Guard Task Force:

https://meetingarchives.vaughan.ca/council_2012/pdf/0529-12%20council%20minutes.pdf

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of April 23, 2013 – Deferred School Crossing Guards Annual Review to Focus on Active Routes are the Way to Go Program:

https://www.vaughan.ca/council/minutes_agendas/AgendaItems/CW0409_13_8.pdf

Provincial legislation, HTA Section 176 School Crossing Guards:

[Ontario's Highway Traffic Act](#)

[Vaughan School Crossing Guard Policy and Procedure June 2011:](#)

https://www.vaughan.ca/services/residential/transportation/traffic/school_crossing_guards/Documents/School%20Crossing%20Policy%20Procedure%20June%202011.pdf

Analysis and Options

The updated policy is consistent with industry best practices and aligns with the 2017 OTC SCG guide that includes warrants based on pedestrian exposure to risk and incorporates made-in-Vaughan indices.

The 2017 OTC School Crossing Guard Guide is based on updated industry practices. It provides criteria for two additional traffic control types: new Ontario Pedestrian Crossovers (PXOs) and roundabouts. The 2017 OTC Guide also recommends the use of an Exposure Index (EI) warrant. The EI quantifies the level of interaction and potential

conflict between vehicular and child pedestrian movements at a given crossing. It provides an empirically based value which can be used to objectively determine if a SCG is warranted at a location.

The updated policy includes the use of EI warrants, which reflect exposure to risk. Staff is establishing the EI thresholds consistent with City of Vaughan context. A benchmarking study found that over sixty percent (60%) of all surveyed municipalities were already using warrants based on the new OTC SCG guide.

Aligning the updated policy with the 2017 OTC SCG Guide provides a clear framework to assess potential locations.

The updated policy determines whether a location may be warranted using a count of all elementary school children crossing at a location, whether assisted by an adult or unassisted. This recognizes that parents may be walking with their children prior to an SCG being provided.

The screening threshold for warranting a SCG will be reduced from fifty (50) unassisted children to forty (40) unassisted and assisted children (i.e. with a parent/guardian) crossing with the SCG in total (daily). This new threshold reduction may increase the number of warranted SCG locations across the City as well as promote and enhance the community's active travel by providing a SCG in observed lower demand locations. Sightlines must be adequate for the conditions of crossing location.

The policy and related procedures provide details in determining a SCG location and specify some physical locations where it is inadvisable to place SCGs, including at uncontrolled locations. Marked crosswalks may give pedestrians the incorrect impression that vehicles must stop for them, even when an SCG is not present. The new Pedestrian Crossovers introduced in Ontario in 2016 provide more options for controlled crossings and will be considered together with SCG requests at uncontrolled locations. Adequate sightlines must also be present to and from the crossing. The screening criteria for uncontrolled crossings specifies that there should be no more than one lane of travel in each direction at the crossing location, and that the speed limit be less than or equal to 50km/h on the roadway approaching the crossing.

SCGs are also not to be considered at locations abutting residential driveway aprons or where the posted speed limit is above 50 km/h.

The procedures now specify that a single guard may cross two legs of an intersection (an "L") if the minimum screening criteria, such as speed limits (less than or equal to 50 km/h), at controlled intersection, and with adequate sightlines, at two lanes roadway are met. This allows a SCG to assist children with more crossings when they can do this

safely, even if the minimum number of children to warrant the second crossing are not present.

Finally, the updated policy includes the same process currently used for new schools in Vaughan: a SCG is provided temporarily for one (1) year, as the location is assessed to determine whether warrants are met.

The updated policy includes a process for school crossing guard removal /reallocation, with a communication plan.

As neighbourhood demographics and travel habits change, the number of elementary school children using each route to school may also increase or decrease. The 2017 OTC SCG guide recommend regular reassessment of school crossing locations.

The current policy specifies that there will be an annual review of twenty-five (25) SCG locations to determine whether fifty (50) unassisted school children are crossing daily, with removal of the SCG at locations where this does not occur. However, the effort to review and communicate proposed removals is significant and recommendations to remove SCGs have been highly sensitive for citizens in the past. As a result, SCGs are maintained at locations that do not meet the criteria, even where the City has been unable to attract new SCGs for warranted locations with much greater numbers. The reassessment process in the updated policy has been designed to maximize student safety throughout the City and align with the 2017 OTC SCG guide. All existing school crossing guard locations will remain in the program until reassessed under the new warrant methodology.

Consistent with the 2011 SCG Policy and Procedure, twenty-five (25) SCG locations will be reviewed annually, selected based on known lower numbers of students crossing. The reassessment criteria will change to correspond to the new warrant screening criteria. The threshold for removal will be reduced from fifty (50) unassisted children to forty (40) unassisted and assisted children, (i.e. with a parent/guardian) crossing with the SCG in total (daily). Each reviewed location will be studied twice on normal, non-consecutive, school days. If an SCG location fails to meet the threshold, the SCG Supervisor and Traffic Engineering staff will also assess if other traffic safety measures would be appropriate. If a school crossing location is to be removed/reallocated, appropriate stakeholders will be notified and the guard will be removed/reallocated from the crossing at the start of the following school year.

A preliminary review of the existing SCG locations found that close to eighty percent (80%) of current SCG locations will meet the new threshold of forty (40) unassisted and assisted children (i.e. with a parent/guardian) crossing, as opposed to only fifty percent (50%) meeting the current threshold of fifty (50) unassisted children crossing. Staff is

establishing the EI thresholds and will use them to evaluate and assess the implications of the new warrant criteria in the updated SCG Policy and Procedures.

All existing SCG locations will remain in place until such time as the locations are due to be studied under the new warrant and policy. There will be no blanket application of the new warrants.

If the warrant of ten (10) assisted / unassisted crossings is not met during lunch time periods based on two studies, they will be removed at the beginning of the next school year. Any removal or reallocation of SCGs will be communicated to all stakeholders based on the criteria of the updated policy and procedures. All existing SCG locations will remain in place until such time as the locations are assessed under the new warrant in the updated policy.

The updated policy requires extensive communications in advance of SCG removal/ reallocation and other changes.

The current policy does not address SCGP communication, except for annual meetings with both School Boards. However, communication is essential for community engagement and to safely implement changes.

The updated policy specifies communication with all applicable internal and external stakeholders, Mayor and Members of Council, citizens, School Boards, school parent councils, senior leadership, etc. via written communication and/or meetings. They must be informed of any intention to implement, not implement, remove or reallocate SCGs, as well as any changes impacting the SCGP, operating procedures and policies.

The updated policy is proposed to be administered on an interim basis for up to two (2) years to evaluate the staffing and financial impacts of the new warrant.

To apply the proposed new warrant methodology, staff must perform studies at SCG crossing locations and use the data collected to develop EI Thresholds. The studies will require several months to complete and review, as will subsequent evaluation of current crossings against the developed EIs to determine if a SCG is warranted.

Application of the new warrant is likely to result in a change in the required number of school crossing guards. Administering the interim Policy for two (2) years will allow staff to develop the referenced relevant EI thresholds, assess which SCG locations meet warrant and require a SCG, and evaluate the financial implications should there be a change in the number of warranted locations. Staff will then consider if adjustments are required to the Policy and Procedures, and report back with a final document for Council consideration.

During the time that the interim Policy is in effect, all existing SCG locations will remain in place. Newly requested locations will be evaluated using the new warrant methodology with currently developed sample EI Thresholds.

The updated policy and procedure enable program sustainability and provide a framework for continuous program improvements to meet the City's rapid growth.

Finally, the School Crossing Guard Procedures have been revised to align with the updated Policy's directives regarding warrants and reassessment. Procedures related to SCG training and inspections have been added to maximize public and staff safety.

The updated policy and procedures enable program sustainability and provide a framework for continuous program improvements to manage the City's rapid growth.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact as a result of this report. Any additional funding requirements to administer the SCGP will continue to be submitted through the City's budget deliberation process.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/ Strategic Plan

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 wellbeing of citizens, enriching their lives and maintaining safety.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The SCG Program impacts overall road and school safety and there are several Regional stakeholders that assist with championing the program who will benefit from the recommendations made in this report:

- Both YRDSB and YCDSB assist in obtaining information pertaining to new schools and their catchment areas to aid in identifying the most appropriate location for a school crosswalk.
- York Regional Police (YRP) aid the City in addressing safety concerns in school zones brought to their attention.
- York Region Public Health promotes walking and cycling as healthy methods for children to travel to school.

Some municipalities in the Region already use the 2017 OTC SCG warrants modified to their requirements. The Ontario Traffic Council School Crossing Guard Committee creates standard practices and procedures based on up-to-date industry guidance. Use

of tailored OTC SCG Guide warrants enables all municipalities in the Region to improve consistency.

Conclusion

Safety for elementary school children is the SCG program's top priority. SCGs play an important role in road safety and the promotion of active and safer travel to school. The new SCG policy seeks to improve road safety using warrants for new locations that include evaluation of a crossing child's exposure to conflicts with vehicles. It aligns warrants with the latest standard guidelines for Ontario – as well as with most benchmarked municipalities – while using “made-in-Vaughan” thresholds. It provides greater clarity in the process for new requests, reassessments and communication, and an improved framework for the SCGP. It is recommended that Council approve the updated SCG Policy and Procedures on an interim basis to enable staff to evaluate the implications of the new warrant methodology on the number of crossing guard locations, and report back within two (2) years.

For more information, please contact Donald Eta, Director Transportation and Fleet Management Services ext. 6141

Attachments

1. School Crossing Guard Policy 2020
2. School Crossing Guard Procedures 2020

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Approved by

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Zoran Postic,
Deputy City Manager, Public Works

Reviewed by

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Jim Harnum, City Manager