Saint Paul Public Schools

Independent School District 625
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May 24, 2023

To: Saint Paul City Council
From: Dr. Joe Gothard, Superintendent
RE: Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan

Dear City Councilmembers,

I am writing to express Saint Paul Public Schools' support of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan. Saint Paul Public Schools serves over 33,000 students and employs around 6,000 staff across St. Paul, and it is imperative that they are able to get to and from school and work safely.

Our students get to school in a variety of ways, from yellow buses and Metro Transit to personal vehicles, walking and biking. We are fortunate in St. Paul that all of these options exist for our students, and in many cases for our staff as well.

SPPS is part of a network of Minnesota school districts that participate in the Safe Routes to School program. Our district works with several partners on Safe Routes, including St. Paul Public Works, the St. Paul Police Department, the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota and St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, among others. Safe Routes to School is funded by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, SHIP and Allina Health.

Safe Routes programs bring many benefits to our community, including cleaner air, less traffic, and healthier students that arrive at school ready to learn. Research shows that being active helps kids learn and improves academic achievement. More walkers and bikers at a school also means less air pollution, according to the EPA. The City of St. Paul and other road authorities support Safe Routes in St. Paul by making streets near schools calmer and safer for everyone.

The Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan aligns with many of the goals and benefits of the Safe Routes program. SPPS has several schools located within what is called the "walk zone" of Summit Avenue (half a mile or less for elementary schools and up to a mile for middle and high schools), where students are ineligible for busing. These schools include Hidden River Middle School, Central Senior High School, Obama Elementary, J.J. Hill Montessori, Global Arts Plus Lower Campus, Groveland Park Elementary and Capitol Hill Gifted and Talented Magnet (middle school students). In total, these schools serve approximately 4,500 students, many of whom live within the immediate neighborhood.

The Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan will especially benefit these students, staff and area residents in many ways. For one, we know that separated bikeways are safer for bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers alike. This is especially important before and after school, but will also allow more opportunities for walking, biking and outdoor physical education activities during the school day. Safe walking and biking routes also provide an additional transportation option for students who participate in after-school activities or employment.

Thank you for the extensive planning and engagement efforts that have gone into this plan. The residents of our city, including our students, will greatly benefit from these improvements to the safety and usability of Summit Avenue.

Thank you,

Dr. Joe Gothard, Superintendent