

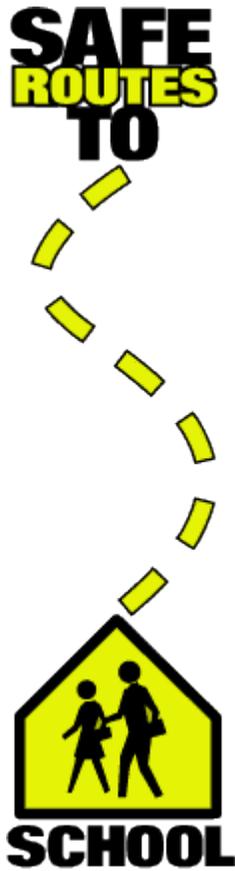
# SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PLAN

## Willmar Middle School

June, 2013

Willmar Public School District 347

Willmar, Minnesota



*THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK*

**Willmar Middle School  
Safe Routes To School Plan  
June 2013**



**Prepared for  
Willmar Public Schools District 347**

**Prepared by  
Mid-Minnesota Development Commission**



*THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Willmar Middle School**

**Safe Routes to School Plan**

**Section One: Introduction ..... 1**

    Purpose of Plan..... 1

    What is Safe Routes to School (SRTS)?..... 1

    National Health and Physical Activity Trends..... 3

**Section Two: Willmar School District’s Safe Routes to School**

**Vision and Goals ..... 5**

    Goals for the Safe Routes to School Programs:..... 5

**Section Three: Existing Conditions, Challenges & Opportunities ..... 6**

    Willmar Public School District ..... 6

    Willmar Public Schools Wellness Policy ..... 6

    Willmar School District’s Policy on Transportation of Public School Students ..... 7

    City of Willmar ..... 7

    Willmar Middle School ..... 8

    Accident Information..... 9

        City of Willmar Accident Data..... 9

        Vehicle Accident History for the Willmar Middle School Walk Zone ..... 10

    Parent Survey and Student Tally ..... 11

        Student Tallies..... 12

Parent Survey Result Highlights .....	13
Willmar Middle School’s Travel Environment .....	15
Willmar Middle School’s SRTS Needs Discussion .....	19
Engineering Needs and Measures Discussion .....	19
Enforcement, Education, and Encouragement Discussion .....	21
Enforcement Needs and Measures .....	22
City Police Department Enforcement Measures .....	22
School and Community Enforcement Measures .....	23
Education and Encouragement Needs and Measures .....	24
YMCA Assistance .....	24
Willmar Community Education and Recreation (WCER) .....	25
<b>Section Four: Willmar Middle School SRTS Action Plan .....</b>	<b>26</b>
I. Recommended Education and Encouragement Strategies .....	26
II. Recommended Enforcement Strategies .....	27
III. Recommended Engineering Strategies .....	29
IV. Recommended Evaluation Strategies .....	33
<b>Section Five: SRTS Implementation Resources .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Funding Sources .....	35
Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) .....	35
Other Transportation Funding .....	36
School District and City Funding and Other Local Government Funding .....	36
Private Sector Funding .....	36

## Appendices

<b>Willmar Middle School’s SRTS Team .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Surveys .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Willmar Middle School Student Tally Results.....	39
Willmar Middle School Survey Results.....	40
Parent Survey Results.....	41
Willmar Middle School Survey Comments.....	42
Observations of Willmar Middle School .....	50
<b>Maps .....</b>	<b>54</b>
Willmar Functional Classification Map.....	54
Intersection Accidents Willmar Map.....	55
Willmar Bike and Pedestrian Accident Locations Map .....	56
Willmar Middle School’s Summary .....	57
Willmar Middle School Needs on Map .....	59

*THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK*

## **SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION**

In 2012, the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) assisted the Willmar School District in successfully applying for funding to undertake Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plans for both elementary schools (Kennedy and Roosevelt) and the Willmar Middle School. Only school grades K-8 are eligible for program funding. The MMDC has continued to assist the Willmar School District in helping to prepare separate SRTS Plans for the three schools.

### **Purpose of Plan**

The Purpose of this Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan is to provide a long range plan for providing both improved safety for children who walk or bike to school, and to encourage more parents and students that walking and bicycling can be a beneficial alternative to being driven to school. The top priority of this plan is working on improving safety through needed infrastructure improvements, educating students and adults, and through better enforcement measures. The plan is designed under the National SRTS Program that utilizes “The Five E’s” of SRTS planning: engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation. This plan includes recommendations from each of these five core areas.

The plan is a fluid document that should be reviewed yearly and revised when needed. Both the Willmar School District and the City of Willmar will need to work together with the help of various community partners to make progress on plan implementation. The SRTS Team that was formed in preparing this plan will need to stay active, and take the lead role for the plan’s oversight to see that progress is being made on the Action Plan components found in Section 4 of this plan. The SRTS Team will need to work with the School District’s other two SRTS Teams to implement those action steps that are best implemented through a citywide scope. The three SRTS teams also need to work together in determining overall priorities on what projects should be pursued first in seeking funding to achieve needed improvements.

### **What Is Safe Routes to School (SRTS)?**

The Safe Routes to School Planning process purpose is to help create and implement a plan that will increase the number of children, who live within a reasonable distance, walk and bike to/from school. The implementation strategy will focus on infrastructure improvements, education, and enforcement activities to increase the safety level of students walking and biking to/from school. The strategy will also discuss promotional types of activities that will instill life-long habits that support physical activity and health. The SRTS plan is based upon the “5 E’s” of the National Safe Routes to School program, which include:

*Education* – providing the necessary materials to parents, educators, transportation providers, policy makers, and others regarding the benefits of students walking or bicycling to school;

*Encouragement* – providing opportunities to promote safe walking or biking through school and community level programs and incentives;

*Engineering* – identifying and correcting physical design deficiencies where children walk and bike to/from school, including pedestrian facilities, bike lanes, and street crossings;

*Enforcement* – ensuring that existing regulations regarding such issues as vehicular speeds and the clearing of walkways are enforced by the appropriate authorities;

*Evaluation* – reviewing the goals and initiatives of this SRTS program to benchmark progress over time and make adjustments that are necessary.

This plan will not require that students walk or bike to school, but rather will increase the desirability of choosing the walking and biking option as the plan's implementation improves the physical, policy, and perceptual barriers that currently prevent students who are within a reasonable distance from the school.

SRTS is a federally funded program through legislation passed in 2005 as part of the past federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU. The program is administered on the state level by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The new federal transportation bill passed in 2012 (MAP-21) did not fund a separate category of funding for the SRTS program, however, SRTS funding has been included in a new program called the Transportation Alternatives Program.

The SRTS program not only funds community efforts to prepare SRTS Plans, but also helps to fund implementation projects for those who have gone through the planning process in a competitive application process.

**The three primary purposes of the national SRTS program:**

- “To enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities to walk and bicycle to school;
- To make bicycling and walking to school safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
- To facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.”

## National Health and Physical Activity Trends

According to the National Centers for Disease Control (CDC), obesity now affects seventeen percent of all children and adolescents in the United States. “Since 1980, obesity prevalence among children and adolescents has almost tripled.” There is a need to focus attention on both promoting healthy eating and increased physical activity to fight these trends. The CDC in 2007 reported that nearly half of children aged 12 – 21 years are not vigorously active on a regular basis, and 14 percent of these young people report no regular physical activity at all.

Information from the US Department of Transportation shows that in 1969, approximately half of all the nation’s school aged children walked or biked to or from school, and almost ninety percent of students living within one mile of their school walked or rode their bikes to school. By 2001, these numbers dropped to where only seventeen percent of children walked or biked to school, and only 56 percent that lived within one mile. The 2012 SRTS survey of parents of Willmar School District children, K-8, demonstrated that only 13.8 percent of grade school children walk or bike to/from school, while Middle School students walk or bike to school at a 17.3 percent rate.

The CDC’s website ([www.cdc.gov//childhoobesityod/basics.html](http://www.cdc.gov//childhoobesityod/basics.html)) discusses the basics about childhood obesity and the consequences of childhood obesity. The CDC states the following:

### Health Risks Now

- “Childhood obesity can have a harmful effect on the body in a variety of ways. Obese children are more likely to have –
  - High blood pressure and high cholesterol, which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD). In one study, 70% of obese children had at least one CVD risk factor, and 39% had two or more.
  - Increased risk of impaired glucose tolerance, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.
  - Breathing problems, such as sleep apnea, and asthma.
  - Joint problems and musculoskeletal discomfort.
  - Fatty liver disease, gallstones, and gastro-esophageal reflux (i.e., heartburn).
  - Obese children and adolescents have a greater risk of social and psychological problems, such as discrimination and poor self-esteem, which can continue into adulthood.

### Health Risks Later

- Obese children are more likely to become obese adults. Adult obesity is associated with a number of serious health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.
- If children are overweight, obesity in adulthood is likely to be more severe.”

The benefits of regular physical activity, including walking and biking to school are numerous. Children build and maintain a healthy lifestyle, while directly helping to control weight, build lean muscle, reduce fat, and foster positive social, emotional, educational, and personal development. Research shows that starting an active lifestyle at an early age is crucial for children for their health now and into adulthood.

## **SECTION TWO: WILLMAR SCHOOL DISTRICT'S SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL VISION AND GOALS**

The Safe Routes to School Teams from Kennedy Elementary, Roosevelt Elementary, and the Middle School all met together at the beginning of the planning process to craft a Vision Statement that would guide the development of all three SRTS Plans.

### **Willmar SRTS Vision Statement**

The Willmar School District and the City of Willmar will offer a dynamic long-term strategy to create a safe and enjoyable environment for children to walk and bike to and from school, while increasing driver awareness, and educating and encouraging children and their parents to develop a more healthy and independent lifestyle.

### **Goals for the Safe Routes to School Programs:**

To help achieve the Vision Statement the three SRTS teams also discuss various goals for the Safe Routes to School Program. The primary goals that were discussed are as follows:

- Help foster physical activity of the students and take steps to improve their health and wellness.
- Overcome the notion that walking and biking are not viable options for travel to and from school.
- Learn what corrective measures are needed to establish safe walking and bicycling accommodations within all three of the schools' walk and bike zones, and work toward resolving these issues.
- Provide peace of mind to parents of students in the School District of Willmar by:
  - developing a safe network of bike and pedestrian routes in the City of Willmar;
  - educating and encouraging students to use these routes for their safety, health, and enjoyment, and
  - provide the necessary monitoring and enforcement of these routes to ensure safe and lawful practices and behaviors of all users.
- Provide a continuing process to evaluate, adjust plans as needed, and move forward to make progress on meeting the SRTS Vision Statement.

Unify the School District, City of Willmar, and all other stake holders to work together to make progress on meeting the SRTS Vision Statement.

# SECTION THREE: EXISTING CONDITIONS, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

(Description of the School, City, and the Travel Environment)

## Willmar Public School District

Willmar Middle School is part of Willmar School District, ISD 347. All schools in the district are located in Willmar, Minnesota. The school district’s population estimate in 2011 was 25,941, which has risen 5.7 percent since 2000. The 2011 household count for the district is 9,893, which has declined by 2.9 percent since 2000. In recent years the district has seen a large increase in its minority population, particularly with persons of Hispanic/Latino and Somali decent. The 2011 estimate shows 4,645 persons of Hispanic or Latino origin lived in the district. Medium Household income in 2011 was estimated to be \$46,687.

The school district’s territory takes in the City of Willmar, surrounding townships, and also includes the small cities of Pennock, Blomkest, and Kandiyohi. A school district map is shown in the Appendix.

Student enrollment in the Willmar Public School District is 4,079 students. Student ethnicity breakdown is as follows:

<u>Student Ethnicity</u>	<u># of Students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
American Indian	22	0.5%
Asian	30	0.7%
Hispanic	1,246	30.5%
Black	279	6.8%
White	2,438	60.0%
Other	64	2.0%

The following is the school district’s Mission Statement: “Preparing all students for a successful tomorrow.” The district’s goals are to:

- Improve student lives
- Achievement for ALL students
- Fiscally responsible stewardship
- Strengthen school/community relationships to improve learning for ALL students.

## Willmar Public Schools Wellness Policy

The Willmar Public Schools Wellness Policy is a district wide policy. The Policy was first adopted in 2006, with last revisions in 2012. The purpose of the policy is “to assure a school environment that promotes and protects students’ health, wellbeing, and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity.” The first part of the policy is primarily devoted to healthy eating. This summary of the policy will focus on physical activity. The Wellness Policy is posted on the School District’s web site.

Physical activity is first accomplished through Physical Education (P.E.) for all students K-12. All students include students with disabilities, special health-care needs, and in alternative educational settings. Students receive regular physical education that meets or exceeds state requirements. The physical education curriculum is coordinated with health education curriculum. The policy states that students should spend at least 50 percent of physical education class time participating in moderate to vigorous physical activity.

The policy also discusses the integration of physical activity into the classroom setting. “Classroom health education will reinforce the knowledge and self-management skills needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle and reduce sedentary activities such as watching television.” The policy discusses physical activity in classrooms, recess, and before and after school programs and interscholastic sports programs.

The policy also discusses communications with parents. The School District will provide information to families about the importance of healthy eating and daily physical activity. At this time, the Wellness Policy does not discuss Safe Routes to School, and does not promote walking or bicycling to and from school.

## **Willmar School District’s Policy on Transportation of Public School Students**

The school District’s transportation (bussing) eligibility of resident students will be highlighted in this section. Upon the request of the parent or guardian, the school district shall provide transportation to and from school, at the expense of the school district, for all resident students who reside two miles or more from the school, “except for students whose transportation privileges have been revoked or have been voluntarily surrendered by the student’s parent or guardian.” The school district reserves the right to provide transportation to students within the two-mile zone where they think the purpose to do so is appropriate. Within the two-mile zone, if space is available, students can be picked up along bus routes for a fee.

## **City of Willmar**

The City of Willmar serves as a regional center for a large geographic area in west central Minnesota. The community is located near the center of Kandiyohi County and shares borders with Willmar, Dovre, Green Lake, and Kandiyohi Townships. U.S. Highways 12, 71, and State

Highway 23 are the three major roadways. Willmar is situated near numerous lakes, with Foot, Willmar, and Swan Lakes all being located inside the City's corporate limits. The city encompasses 13.52 square miles.

According to the 2010 Census, the City of Willmar had 19,610 residents, which was approximately a 6.4 percent increase from the 2000 Census. The most recent population estimate shows 22,126 persons. The median household income in the community is \$36,961, which is less than the state's \$48,695 figure. The 2009 American Community Survey shows an estimate of 3,118 children between 5 to 17 years of age living in the city, and an estimated population of 1,315 residents 80 years old and older. The 2009 American Community Survey also shows that an estimated 16.14 percent of Willmar's population had incomes below the poverty level. In addition, 2,414 of the community's 7,458 households had incomes below \$25,000.

In 2011, the City of Willmar adopted a City Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. This plan was reviewed and utilized as part of the SRTS planning process. There are needs presented in that plan that are also addressed in this document. The one City policy worth discussing in this plan is the Snow Removal Policy. The City has a policy that all public sidewalks must be cleared of snow and ice 24 hours after a snowfall ends. The policy goes into more detail than stated here. The enforcement of this policy has not been very strong at this time. If complaints are sent in, action by the City will occur however.

The City of Willmar added a new section to their Comprehensive Plan in 2012 when it completed a Trails and Pedestrian Plan Addendum. The plan laid out priorities for both off road trails and on road bikeways. The Plan also set priorities for pedestrian improvements within the community.

## **Willmar Middle School**

Willmar Middle School is located at 209 Willmar Avenue SE. The school is located at a fairly centralized location within the community. The school has residential neighborhoods located on its north and east sides. To the south of the school is Willmar's primary business shopping district. One block away on the school's west side is the commercialized 1st Street, with residential neighborhoods located further to the west of this street. The school's property is four blocks in length and two blocks in width.



The school building is located on the northwest side and an athletic field on the east side of the property.

The Middle School has an enrollment of 889 students. The school has sixth through eighth grade. The population by grade is as follows: Sixth Grade 331 students, Seventh Grade 279 students, and Eighth Grade 279 students.

## **Accident Information**

### City of Willmar Accident Data

There are no hot spots for concern when it comes from analyzing vehicle accidents involving pedestrians or bicyclists. During the past ten years, records show that these accidents have occurred randomly throughout the entire community. Some busy streets had more accidents involving bicycles and pedestrians than other streets in the community. First Street, Willmar Avenue, Trott Avenue, Becker Avenue, and Highway 12 had the most accidents. While it is likely that not all instances have been reported to the Minnesota Department of Transportation State Aid Crash Tool Data site that was reviewed, the ten year record shows only two accidents that involve children going or coming from school in the ten year time frame of the review. One of these accidents occurred on the Middle School property. This accident happened to a 13 year old female, who was at fault for darting into traffic in the parking lot back in 2009. The other accident that may involve a child going to school happened at the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW and Willmar Avenue. The Bicyclist was 14 years old, and the driver was 16 years old. The driver was distracted and caused the accident. The Accident occurred in September of 2008 at 7:46 a.m.

During the period that was reviewed (2002 through 2012) there were a total of 93 accidents in Willmar that involved both a motor vehicle and a pedestrian or bicyclist. Fifty-three involved bicyclists and 40 involved pedestrians.

There were 14 accidents that involved both bicycles and vehicles with bikers between the ages of 5 years old and 14 years old during the period reported. Of these 14 accidents, 12 (86%) occurred at intersections. Ten of the 14 accidents were the bicyclists fault alone, 2 were the motorist's fault and 2 accidents were of joint fault between the participants. There were an additional 7 accidents involving children biking ages 15 to 18 years old, of which 6 happened at intersections. Three bicycle accidents occurred to children under 5 years old, none at intersections. All three of these accidents were the fault of the child.

Pedestrian involved with accidents between the ages 5 to 18 totaled 12 children during the 10-year time period studied. Of these accidents, 8 of the 12 were the full fault of the pedestrian. Two accidents were where both were at fault, one was solely the fault of the motorist, and the

other case is an unknown cause. Many of these accidents to children were the result of playing and darting out in front of a motor vehicle or playing in the street.

When looking at pedestrian and bicycle accidents involving motor vehicles, it is shown that 25 percent of the reported accidents had driver distractions involved and close to 10 percent had distractions of the pedestrian or bicyclist. For example a pedestrian or biker may have been playing loud music on headphones.

### Vehicle Accident History for the Willmar Middle School Walk Zone

When looking at all accidents involving motor vehicle during 2002 through 2012, it is possible to identify intersections with a greater accident history than others, and streets in general where traffic is higher and more accidents have occurred. While these accidents do not involve bicyclists or pedestrians, they do show areas where more awareness of potential walking and biking concerns are. Because the data includes ten years of traffic accidents there are accidents that occur most everywhere you look, but on an annual basis, many streets may not have any accidents.

Willmar Middle School's walk zone is approximately one-mile in radius. To get to or from school by walking or biking some students need to cross two of the City's busiest and most accident prone streets. Students that live on the west side of Willmar must cross First Street, the City's busiest street. The school is located two blocks to the east of First Street. The only nearby safe crossing of this street is the lighted intersection of First Street and Willmar Avenue. While this intersection has crosswalks and crosswalk lights, it is still perceived to be dangerous because it has the greatest volume of traffic and the most accidents of any intersection in the community. A total of 140 motor vehicle accidents have been reported at this intersection from the 10-year history starting in 2002. The entire length of First Street has a history of numerous accidents.

The second busy street with a significant accident history is Willmar Avenue, although not nearly as many of accidents that occur on First Street. The School's main entrance is off Willmar Avenue SE. East of First Street to Ninth Street SE there have been 76 reported accidents on Willmar Avenue SE. Twenty-two of these accidents have occurred at the 2nd Street intersection at the School's southwest property corner.

On the School's eastern border is 2nd Street SE. This road has seen six accidents north of Willmar Avenue until 11th Avenue SE. An additional 4 accidents have been reported at the 2nd Street intersection with 11th Avenue. Second Street SE does have a number of students who cross it, and the street is utilized by parents dropping and picking up their children. Behind the school is 11th Avenue SE. This street accesses the bus drop/pickup location and also has parents utilizing it for student drop offs/pickups. On this street in front of the School's backside

there have been six reported accidents within the 10 years the data was captured. The intersection of 11th Avenue SE and 6th Street SE has had 12 accidents in the ten year period.

Most of the students that travel by walking or bicycle live in the neighborhoods to the north and northeast of the Middle School. These students have much less busier streets to cross or travel on. The most significant street to cross on the north side of the school is Olena Avenue SE, which is one block north of 11th Avenue. From east of First Street to 12th Street, Olena Avenue has had only 38 reported accidents in the 10 years, most occurring at intersections. This is slightly more than 3 accidents a year for this approximate one mile stretch of road.

Seven blocks to the north of the Middle School is Trott Avenue SE. This Collector Street has the most significant traffic between Willmar Avenue to Highway 12. From east of First Street to Lakeland Drive the street has an approximate length of 14 blocks. The ten-year history shows a total of 48 reported accidents along this entire length. One block to the north of Trott Avenue SE is Becker Ave SE. This street has a smaller amount of traffic, but a slightly higher accident count of 59 accidents in the 10-year period.

Some intersections with higher accident counts within the Middle School's walk zone:

- Willmar Avenue and First Street had 140 reported accidents
- Olena Avenue and First Street had 31 reported accidents
- Kandiyohi Avenue and First Street had 24 reported accidents
- Trott Avenue and First Street had 45 reported accidents
- Willmar Avenue SE and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE had 22 reported accidents
- Becker Avenue and First Street had 33 reported accidents
- Minnesota Avenue and First Street had 24 reported accidents
- 6<sup>th</sup> Street SE and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue had 12 reported accidents
- Augusta Avenue SE and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE had 19 reported accidents
- 5<sup>th</sup> Street SW and Willmar Avenue SW had 24 reported accidents
- 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW and Willmar Avenue SW had 20 reported accidents
- Kandiyohi Avenue SW and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SW had 33 reported accidents
- Kandiyohi Avenue SW and 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW had 24 reported accidents

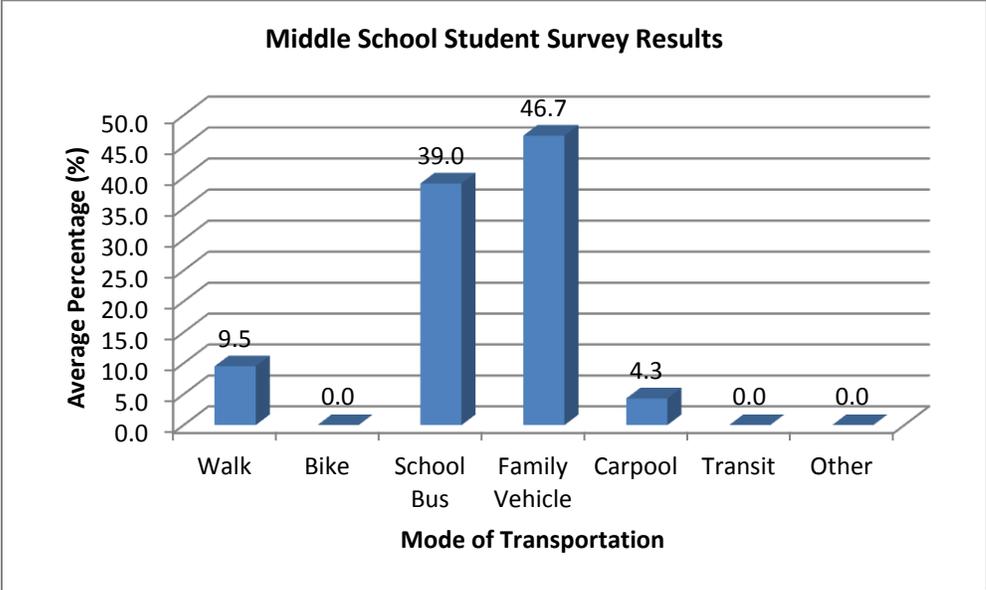
## **Parent Survey and Student Tally**

This section discusses what safety issues, attitudes, and barriers may exist within the community. The school conducted both parent surveys and in classroom student tallies as part of this planning process. This survey information, along with the route assessment evaluations, provide a baseline assessment and as a starting point for future deliberation, monitoring, and evaluation.

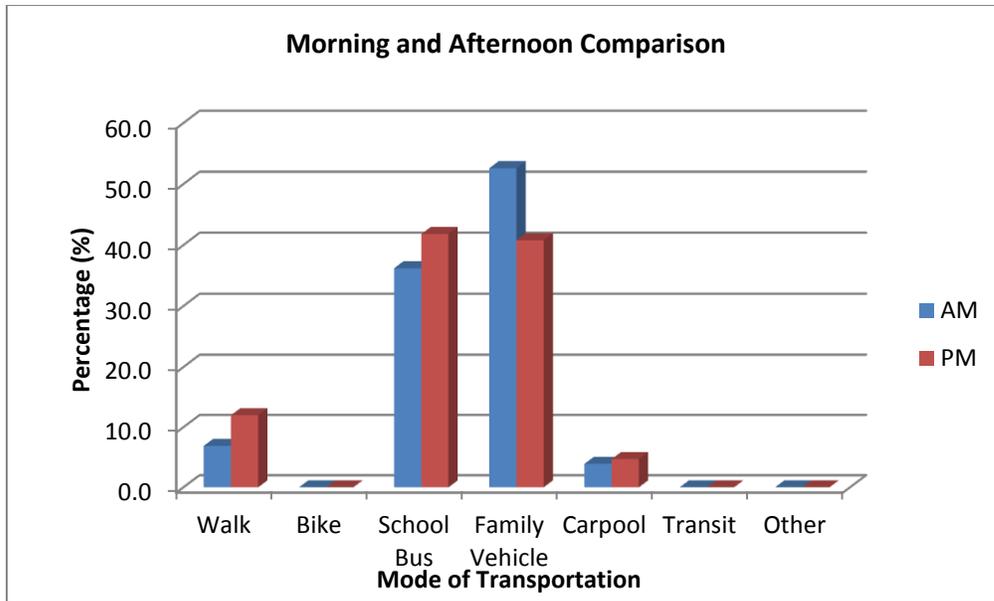
A complete analysis and results of the surveys can be found within the appendix of this plan. The student tally and the parent survey instruments were developed by the National Center for Safe Routes to School. Student Tallies were administered by teachers during the school week. The parent survey was brought home by students and was written in English, Spanish, and Somali. The Mid-Minnesota Development Commission tabulated the results of both surveys.

Student Tallies

Student Tallies were conducted in the beginning of February, 2013. The in classroom surveys were conducted in both the morning and afternoons during the middle of the school week. The survey tallies had 29 classrooms that participated. All three grades were included within the surveys, but there were more classrooms within the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. As the tallies were conducted in February, the results would have fewer students walking and biking than in the warmer fall or spring months.



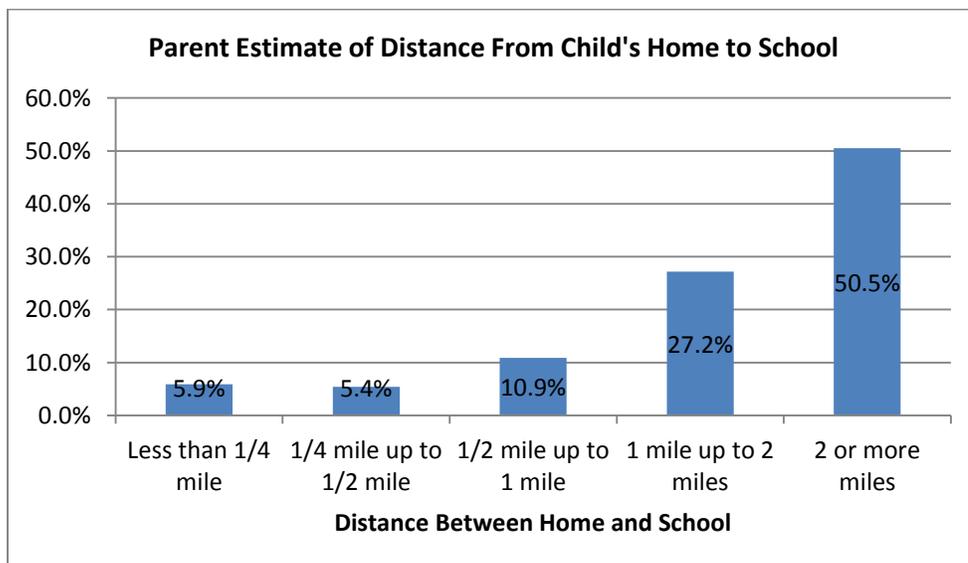
The above graph shows that both family vehicle and school bus are the two most frequently utilized modes of transportation to and from the Willmar Middle School. In the middle of winter, 9.5 percent of the students walked to school, with no students traveling by bicycle.



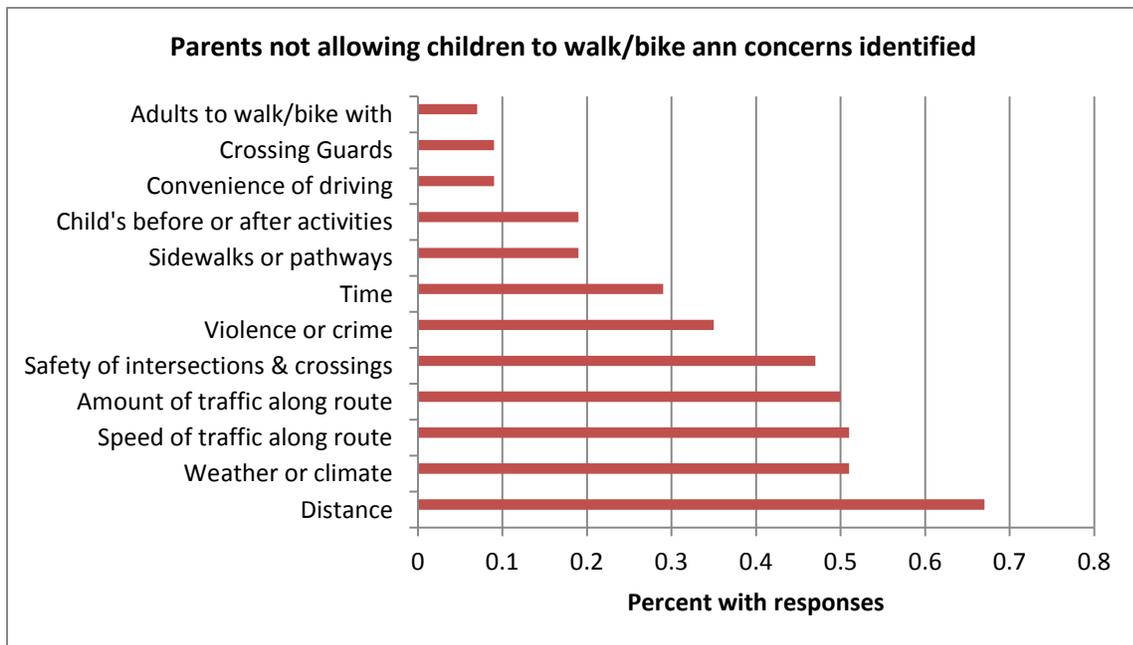
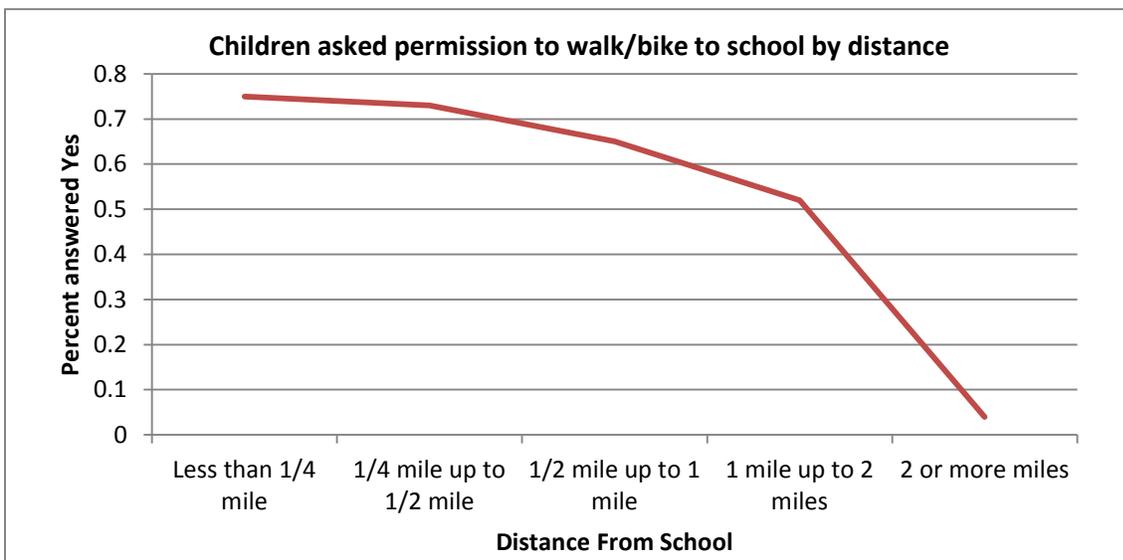
The above graph shows that more students walk home in the afternoon than arrive by walking in the morning. In the morning, the family vehicle is the most often used mode of transportation, while in the afternoon the school bus is slightly the most often used over the family vehicle.

### Parent Survey Result Highlights

The parent survey was conducted in the late fall of 2012. A total of 220 surveys were returned, with a fairly well distribution representing all three grades and about an equal number of boys and girls represented.



The above graph shows that a little over 22 percent of the students attending the Willmar Middle School live within the one-mile walk zone. Nearly 78 percent live one mile or more from the school. The classroom student tally and the parent survey both show similar results on the mode of transportation used for children getting to and from school. It is no great surprise to find that those that live closer to school have a much greater likelihood to walk or bike than students that live further distances. The survey showed that a majority of children that live within the walk zone have expressed interest in walking or biking to school as shown in the below graph. This information shows that if the parents can be shown that safety improvements are made, and if perceptions can be changed, there is opportunity for more children walking and biking to and from school.



On the survey, parents were asked what factors were they concerned about with allowing their children to walk or bike to school. Those families that lived far from the school site were most likely to state that the distance factor prohibits their children from walking or biking. Weather or climate, the amount of traffic, speed of traffic, and dangerous intersections were the most common worries of parents at all distances from the school. The above graph shows the parents attitudes of the reasons why they do not want their children to walk or bike to school.

The last three questions on the parent survey asked opinions on walking and biking to school. The vast majority of survey respondents (82%) view that the school currently takes a neutral view on either encouraging or discouraging children to walk or bike. Slightly more parents think the school encourages walking and biking as opposed to discouraging them.

Approximately 64 percent of parents also took a neutral opinion on if walking or biking to school is fun or boring for children. A little over 19 percent of the parents believe that walking and biking to school is fun or very fun, while almost 17 percent think that children walking or biking to school is boring or very boring. Seventy-two percent of the parents believe that walking and biking to school is a healthy or very healthy activity. Twenty-five percent were neutral on the healthy question, and only four percent thought that walking and biking to school were unhealthy activities. Comments show that those who answered it being unhealthy believe it is so because of the safety dangers that exist.

### **The Middle School’s Travel Environment**

The Middle School is bordered on all sides of its property with streets. The front (south) side of the school property is on Willmar Avenue, which is a minor arterial street. The annual average daily traffic (AADT) on Willmar Avenue in front of the school is 10,300 vehicles. Willmar Avenue SE has 4 lanes of traffic, plus a lane for left turns.



First Street, located one block to the west of the school has an AADT of 18,300 vehicles. This street is classified as a major arterial. First Street has four lanes of traffic, besides turning lanes at the intersection with Willmar Avenue. A picture of 1st Street is shown here.

The First Street and Willmar Avenue intersection is the busiest intersection in the community. The intersection has streetlights, crosswalks, and walk – don’t walk lighted signs. Even with

these safety features it feels uncomfortable to cross this intersection and many parents will not allow their children to do so. Heading north of this intersection, the next opportunity to safely cross 1st Street is the lighted intersection with Kandiyohi Avenue, which is 5 blocks away.

One block away from the school's north side is Olena Avenue SE, which is not an official collector street, but has the characteristics of a collector street. It has an AADT of between 1,000 and 2,200 near the school. On the school's property west, north and east sides are less traveled local streets outside of the traffic generated by the school itself. Second Street SE is on the school's west side, Eleventh Avenue is on the back (north) side, and Sixth Street on the east side of the property.

The parking lot and official student drop-off and pick-up location are located in the front side of the school, with the main entrance off Willmar Avenue. The parking lot may also be entered from the school property's west side off Second Street SE.

The school walk zone for the Middle School is approximately a mile in circumference. Directly to the south of the school's location is the city's major shopping area. This area does not have neighborhoods, but after school, some children will walk to the stores located in this vicinity. Most children who walk to school live in the neighborhood to the school's north and east sides. There are also large neighborhoods on the west side of the school, but as discussed, First Street is seen as a major barrier. Walkers and bikers have a more positive, safer commute from the north and east as these streets are primarily residential in nature with 30 mph speeds and not overly high average daily traffic counts. Most of the streets have sidewalks on at least one side, if not both sides of the street, but there are a few locations where sidewalks are missing.

The school has two locations with bike racks. There are bike racks located next to the tennis courts found on the front (south) side of the school property off the parking lot. The more secure bike parking is located on the northeast side of the school building. See Picture.



Willmar Middle School has classes start at 8:00 a.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The school has grades six through eight. Doors open early in the morning (5:00 a.m.) to allow the swimming pool to be utilized by swimmers. Because the school is opened for a period of time in the morning before classes begin, there is a fairly widespread of times that students arrive. The time children mainly arrive is from 6:15 to 7:45 a.m. Because of this extended arrival time, the school does

not have the degree of chaotic and congested problems as seen when school is let out in the afternoon.

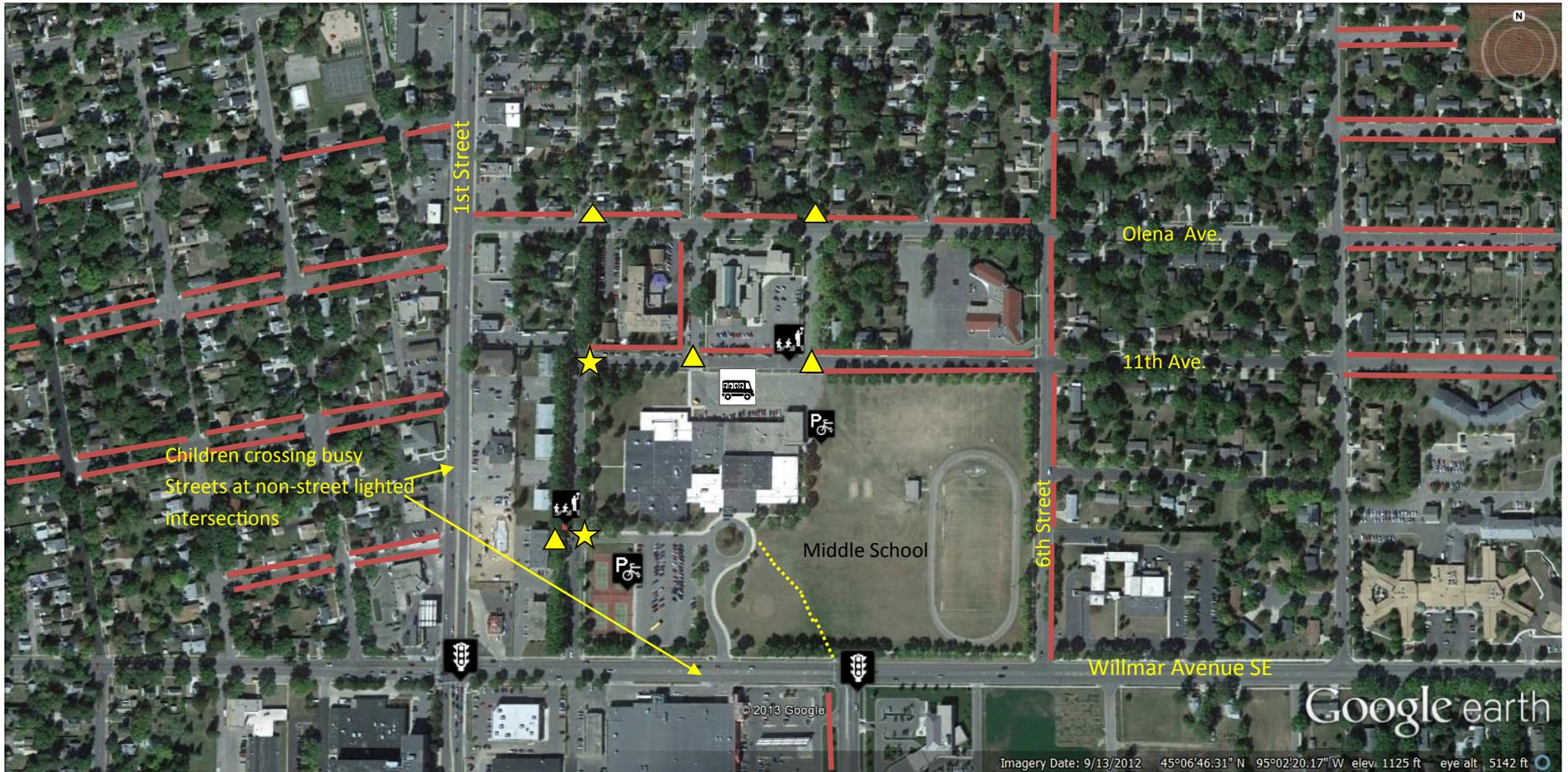
It needs to be noted that there are tentative plans for a school addition to be built on the school's southwest side in the future, possibly as soon as 2015. This will mean major changes in the current parking and entrances will likely be made. Due to this situation, some recommendations for needs that involve this location will need to be held off until an architect is hired to begin concept drawings. Problems found will need to be given to those designing the new addition to work on solutions at that time. These improvements will only have some effect on Safe Routes to School planning, as it is not the prime area that walkers or bikers utilize to enter or exit the school.

The school can be accessed in the morning from the front (south side) door or the rear (north side) door. Most doors can be exited at the end of the school. Buses have their own parking area on the north side of the building, off 11th Avenue SE, for both arrival and departure. In the afternoon, all buses load and exit the lot at the same time. This assures that all children are on all buses before any bus leaves. This is important as buses do not let children enter the buses from a curbside.

Parents drop-off and pick-up their children in several locations, as the designated location is very busy. This location is the safest for drop-off or pick-up as there is a curbside. In the afternoon there are vehicles usually stacked out onto Willmar Avenue waiting to take the turn into the entrance drive. Some parents drop their children off in the parking lot. This is not encouraged by the school. This can be a dangerous situation because it causes children to walk across traffic in the parking lot. It also causes some traffic congestion in the parking lot with cars going in many different directions. Parents also utilize Second Street SE (west side) and 11th Avenue SE (north side) for dropping children off and picking them up. Some let their children out on the opposite side of the street, which means their children need to cross against traffic.

Some Safe Routes to School steps have been taken already, or are scheduled to occur. The school has added crossing guards at two locations for afternoon let out. They are located on 2nd Street and behind the school on 11th Avenue. The City has plans for a new missing sidewalk along school property off of 11th Avenue from 4th Street to 6th Street, but is looking for the school to pay for the construction, and thus it is a top candidate for applying for the new Transportation Alternatives Program funding. There is a current sidewalk on the school's property on 11th Avenue from 2nd Street to 4th Street. 11th Avenue SE still lacks sidewalks on the street's north side.

# Willmar Middle School



- Missing Sidewalks
- Possible Pathway to Intersection
-  Street Lights
-  Bike Racks
-  Crossing Guard Locations in afternoon
-  Curb cuts needed
-  Marked Crossings Needed

# Willmar Middle School's SRTS Needs Discussion

## Engineering Needs and Measures Discussion

### Crossing 1st Street

First Street has the city's most traffic, as described above, and the intersection with Willmar Avenue is the busiest intersection in the City. The intersection has streetlights, and proper pedestrian crossing mechanisms. No pedestrian accidents have occurred at the intersection during the ten past years that have been investigated. Parents are still uncomfortable with their children crossing the intersection because of the amount of traffic. The City needs to conduct a crossing timing study to determine if any increased time is needed for pedestrians to safely cross 1<sup>st</sup> Street. If other affordable engineering options should arise to improve the intersection safety of pedestrians, while not interrupting needed vehicle flow, the City should look to add it to their construction work program.

Some students have been crossing 1<sup>st</sup> Street north of the Willmar Avenue intersection at unsafe non-intersection locations. Education and enforcement measures need to be taken first to try to remedy the problem. If this is not enough, an engineering solution may be to place a barrier in the way so students are better directed to safer intersections to cross. Adding fencing on the back property line of businesses on the northeast side of Willmar Avenue along 1<sup>st</sup> would help solve this problem. Some fencing already is in place. Where it is not businesses would need to agree to put in fencing, and would likely want to be compensated for their efforts.

### Sidewalks and Marked Crosswalks

The top sidewalk priority is the need to construct a sidewalk on the school's north side along 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue from the corner of from 4<sup>th</sup> Street to 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The City has drawn up plans for the sidewalk, but the cost of the project will be the school's responsibility. The sidewalk is important for keeping students off 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue as they walk to and from school to the neighborhoods to the northeast and east of the school's location.



Sidewalks are also lacking on the north side of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and should be considered for construction. A sidewalk at this location would not only assist walking students, but also students being dropped off or picked up along the avenue. For children that walk to the commercial businesses

after school to the south of the school property, there is a short missing sidewalk segment on the southwest side of the lighted intersection of Willmar Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE. This project is also identified in the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that was written in 2010.



In various other locations within the Middle School's one-mile walk zone there are locations where sidewalks are missing. All of these locations are on streets that are residential in nature. To add sidewalks in these locations would be beneficial to pedestrian traffic, however, many affected property owners would be opposed to their construction as an additional cost and maintenance concern. Where property owners are in favor of missing sidewalks

being constructed, the City should move quickly to do so.

There are a couple locations near the school that would benefit from adding marked crosswalks. The two most pressing need locations are where the school has posted the afternoon crossing guards. The first location is on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street at the T-intersection corner with the school's parking lot drive. To allow a crosswalk, a short segment of ADA compliant sidewalk would be needed to meet up with the sidewalk on the west side of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. The other crossing guard location is on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the intersection with 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Additional marked crosswalks would be beneficial at the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, depending if spacing is needed between marked crosswalks to be most effective. An additional marked crosswalk is needed in crossing Olena Avenue one block north of the school's location. The intersection to place the marked crosswalk across Olena Avenue should be investigated, but a likely location is the intersection with 4<sup>th</sup> Street, as it is the street with the crossing guard posted on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



#### ADA Needs

There are a couple of locations on the school property's west side. There are no curb cuts at the school's parking lot access road connecting to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Curb cuts are also missing at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The sidewalk along the school's northwestern property line has a hill. The slope of this incline needs to be investigated to determine if it meets ADA requirements. Steps on a sidewalk that lead to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street do not meet ADA requirements.



### Crossing Willmar Avenue

After school, some students will walk to the commercial businesses, such as the grocery store or the mall. Some of these students do not cross Willmar Avenue at the streetlight intersections of 1<sup>st</sup> Street or 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE. Instead, they will take the quickest route from the school and cross in the middle of street locations. This situation will not only be helped by better education and enforcement, but by placing a sidewalk/pathway angling from the school's front entrance to the 5<sup>th</sup> Street intersection. As was mentioned above, 5<sup>th</sup> Street has a sidewalk gap on the west side of the street that would also need to be addressed at the same time to move forward with this possible engineering solution.

### **Enforcement, Education, and Encouragement Discussion**

The needs and strategies for the SRTS Plan dealing with the categories of enforcement, education, and encouragement are all interrelated. There will be some planned measures that can easily fit and be discussed within more than one of these three categories. All three categories must be worked on together to reach the vision for this plan.

While the needs for engineering solutions are different at each Willmar School District site, the enforcement, education, and encouragement goals are basically the same. Because of this, there will be opportunities for the two elementary schools and the middle school to work together in some of action measures discussed below. The middle school may have greater differences in how it goes about encouraging and educating their students than the two elementary schools due to the age differences in the children.

In moving forward to implement SRTS Plans at each of the three school sites involved with SRTS, the SRTS Teams at each school will need to work with the other teams. Time, effort, and costs can be shared in working on some shared action steps together. For example, if someone is brought in to talk to children at a SRTS educational assembly, it can be arranged that the person could visit all three schools on the same day. SRTS media campaigns can be coordinated together between the three SRTS Teams as another example. In preparing the three SRTS plans for the Willmar School District, an effort has been made to keep each school aware of what the other school's strategies are so that coordination is thought about upfront. Many of the same

strategies and action steps discussed in all three plans are similar to allow this helpful coordination to occur.

### **Enforcement Needs and Measures**

The primary purpose of SRTS enforcement strategies is to deter unsafe behaviors of motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists and to encourage all road users to obey traffic laws and share the road safely. Enforcement measures are not only the responsibility of the local police, but with the school and the community at large as well. Enforcement measures go hand in hand with education and safety awareness measures that are also discussed within this plan.

Through the various needs identification steps taken in preparing this plan there have been unsafe behaviors that have been identified for streets around the school and on the school campus. Speeding is a concern on the streets surrounding the school, particularly on Willmar Avenue, 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, First Street, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Studies show that speed matters when it comes to determining if a pedestrian lives or dies in an accident. “At 20 mph, a pedestrian has a 5 percent chance of dying if he/she is hit by a car. At 30mph, the chance of dying increases to roughly 45 percent. If a pedestrian is hit by a motor vehicle traveling 40 mph, the risk of dying increases to 85 percent.”

Another enforcement concern is for motorists to follow the laws regarding yielding to pedestrians. All city street intersections are crosswalks, not just the marked crosswalks. The law unfortunately is often ignored. Concerns are also with motorists obeying crossing guards at the two afternoon posted locations. Also motorists need to make full stops at the marked stop signs, and the stoplights on the streets near the school. Additionally, motorists need to obey laws regarding passing stopped school buses and on school property drop-off and pick-up procedures.

Pedestrian and bicyclist poor behaviors are also a concern when it comes to traveling to and from school. This is especially true for children crossing busy streets at mid-block locations. While steps to correct these problems will be mainly addressed under education, it is proper under enforcement measures to stop children when seen not obeying laws to point out their errors, and take the appropriate corrective measures.

### **City Police Department Enforcement Measures**

Discussions with the Willmar Police Department show their willingness to be a partner in the Safe Routes to School initiative. The Police Department already takes an active role in working to provide a safe environment for students both at school and at commuting to and from school. School Resource Officers are assigned to Willmar schools to assist with safety, enforcement, and safety education needs. Willmar Police also already provide a stepped up

presence of patrols around the schools during the primary times when students are traveling to and from the schools. In addition, the police have set up a reporting program for both school bus drivers and crossing guards to utilize if they witness drivers not following traffic laws. All complaints are followed up on, and there have been tickets issued as a result.

As it is the case with many communities, the City budget restraints have an impact on the amount of assistance the Willmar Police Department can provide. The Department has seen cutbacks in their budget, and thus they have limits on how much service they can offer. The Department no longer is able to afford providing bike patrols and the Community Service Officer position was dropped.

With these budgeting limits being said, the Police Department is willing to work with the school and community if there is a desire to begin a progressive ticketing and media campaign. The Police Department can assist with the media efforts with placing news about the program on their internet and Facebook sites as well as utilizing the local television access channel. The Department does reserve the right to give out tickets as they determine are necessary, meaning they will not always give warnings to law violators during the beginning of the program. A progressive ticketing campaign involves first a full community awareness of safety needs and to discuss stepped up enforcement measures. Warning tickets followed by actual traffic citations are also part of the program. It should also be pointed out that a zero tolerance policy should be kept for those caught speeding within a school's speed zone.

The Willmar Police Department currently owns two portable speed trailers. They are willing to place these trailers at key locations from time to time to assist with SRTS enforcement efforts.

Lastly, the Willmar Police Department wants to be contacted and be made aware of any safety concerns the school has, and with any regular traffic violations being seen at a particular location. They will step up patrol action in areas where it is determined to be needed.

### **School and Community Enforcement Measures**

As described above under "The Middle School's Travel Environment" section, the school has two afternoon locations with trained adult crossing guards. The crossing guards do not only make it safer for the students in traveling to/from school, but also lead to more parents feeling comfortable about their children walking or biking to school. Proper annual education of the crossing guards need to be continued. Currently the crossing guards have proper flag equipment, but do not have safety vests that would assist in their visibility. This should be on the priority list of needs to purchase the clothing.

There are a couple of community enforcement programs that are available, and should be investigated to determine if volunteers are available and willing to participate. On the

neighborhood level, surrounding the school, some homeowners may put up yard signs or stickers to encourage drivers to slow down. Signs could possibly be designed and made ready by art classes at the schools. Another possible program would have parent volunteers who drop off and/or pick up their children at school to agree to be part of a “pace car” program. A pace car program uses volunteers who take a pledge to follow speed limits, stop at stop signs and obey other traffic control devices and school rules. The pace cars slow traffic down by modeling good behavior.

### **Education and Encouragement Needs and Measures**

Education and encouragement will be discussed together as they work hand in hand, and the activities involved often address both areas. The Middle School will play an important role with these activities, but other organizations in the community will also play important roles. The Kandiyohi County YMCA, the Kandiyohi County Department of Public Health, and Willmar Community Education and Recreation are three important partners in providing both education and encouragement for healthy living and lifestyles. Education not only involves children, but parents and the community at large, especially focusing on safe driving behaviors.

### **YMCA Assistance**

The Kandiyohi County YMCA, located in Willmar, is a willing partner with the Safe Routes to School Program. They have agreed to work with the schools to provide youth learning and encouragement opportunities in the programs that they operate. In April, the YMCA holds their Healthy Kids Day. It is a free event that is open to all children Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, but requires an adult to participate with a participating child. The program is designed to help keep children’s minds and bodies active during the summer months. Teaching bicycle safety is always part of the event. Willmar Police Department Officers assist with the effort.

The YMCA offers a Summer Day Camp Program for K – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade aged children. Each day different activities are planned for the children that have enrolled in the program. The YMCA is always looking for good activities for the Day Camp, and is willing to consider adding some SRTS activities that will both educate on safety and encourage walking and bicycling.

The YMCA has participated in the past with a Downtown Becker Market Family Bike Ride event. They are very willing to participate in such events in the future. The YMCA’s Healthy Family Home web site provides a variety of useful articles and information to promote and educate on healthy living. The Heart and Sole Running Club is open to children 9 – 14 years old that want to be part of a run for fun group, and get into the sport of running. The Club runs for 8 weeks during the year. The Youth Fitness program meets twice a week for six weeks, and is designed for youth ages 10 to 15 years old to gain a competitive edge in their respective sports by providing participants with increased strength and endurance through workouts using

resistance and plyometric based training. The free Active Teens Program is open to 7<sup>th</sup> grade and older aged children and is designed to orient participants to the Y's Wellness Center cardio and strength training equipment.

### **Willmar Community Education and Recreation (WCER)**

The City and School District have a Joint Powers Agreement in operating the Willmar Community Education and Recreation Department. The WCER provides a wide array of youth recreational opportunities, both for team sport and leisure-type non-team sport activities. Annually, in the fall, the WCER holds its Ride the Trails Event. This Bicycling event provides organized riding opportunities geared towards families and longer designated routes for those looking for a longer bicycle ride. Proceeds of the event help to pay for the expansion of trail facilities in the City.

WCER has just started a new program in 2013 called the "Wheels for Kids" Program. The program takes old bicycles that need repairs and fix them up to give away. Many of the bicycles will come from bicycles that would have been auctioned off by the City's Police Department from unclaimed bicycles. Other bicycles will be donated by the public. Seventy bicycles have been collected thus far. The bicycles are in fairly decent condition, needing only minor repairs or maintenance. The bicycles range from young children to adult sizes. The Willmar Kiwanis Club donated \$10,000 that was used to purchase the needed repair equipment and three bike racks. The program is currently seeking out volunteers that have the needed knowledge in repairing bicycles. The Best Buy store in town has signed up to have store employees volunteer for a day in June to help at getting the 70 bicycles ready to be given to children in need. A retired bicycle repair expert has volunteered to help guide the repair efforts. The plan calls for additional bicycles to be donated/collected so that during the winter months additional bicycles will be made ready to be given to children. It is hoped that some children that will receive a bike, will help make the repairs. This will allow these children to be educated on bicycle maintenance and how to make simple repairs. The program may also get the Boy Scouts involved for scouts that are interested in earning a Bicycle Merit Badge.

## SECTION FOUR: WILLMAR MIDDLE SCHOOL'S SRTS ACTION PLAN

### I. Recommended Education and Encouragement Strategies

Education includes identifying safe routes, teaching students safe walking and bicycling techniques, and informing the public about driver safety concerns near schools. Encouragement strategies are aimed at increasing the number of students who walk and bike to school. The two strategies are tied closely together and are thus highlighted together.

A. Objective: Educate students to follow pedestrian safety laws, and school rules pertaining to walking or biking to/from school in a way that is clear, hands-on, and consistent.

- Action: At school assemblies, and using other mass communication means, emphasize the need to follow school procedures and pedestrian laws regarding; particularly, only crossing streets at designated crossing locations or at intersection locations. Of special concern are students crossing 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Willmar Avenue at mid-block locations.
  - Who: Middle School
  - When: Ongoing with emphasis at the beginning of school year
  - Funding: No cost
- Action: Create a “Breakfast for Bikes” Program where the school’s assigned Police Officer, Officer Lapatka will discuss bike safety, and statutes regarding riding bicycles.
  - Who: Willmar Police Department and the Middle School
  - When: Ongoing, beginning in the fall of 2013
  - Funding: No cost
- Action: Willmar Ambulance Service has a Bike Helmet Program, funded through donations, where children’s bike helmets are given to families that cannot afford them.
  - Who: Willmar Ambulance Service
  - When: Ongoing, their EMS Open House in May is one of the major times where helmets are given out
  - Funding: Donations given to the Willmar Ambulance Service

B. Objective: Educate Parents on transportation related procedures, and all community drivers about the need for driving safely around the school to reduce the likelihood of accidents.

- Action: Provide parents with safety rules and school procedures dealing with students arriving and departing to/from school by all modes of travel, through parent informational packet and school web site.
  - Who: School
  - When: Ongoing, beginning at start of school year
  - Funding: Minor expense by the school
- Action: Promote safe driving around the school by newspaper articles and other means to be determined by the SRTS Team, with cooperation from the other School District SRTS Teams.
  - Who: All three school SRTS Teams
  - When: Ongoing, beginning at start of school year
  - Funding: Minor or no expense by the school
- Action: The school will look into having students participate in art projects involving preparation of posters that can be used for a media campaign to highlight SRTS and to encourage drivers to obey traffic laws near the school.
  - Who: School's SRTS Team
  - When: To be timed with other media efforts
  - Funding: Minor expense for school
- Action: Willmar Community Education & Recreation is in the process of beginning a "Wheels for Kids" program. Used bicycles will be repaired by volunteers and given to those who are in need. The program will include having children that will receive a bike, help out on the repairs, so they can learn about simple repairs and maintenance. The program may involve the Boy Scouts going for their Bicycle Merit Badge.
  - Who: Willmar Community Education & Recreation, Community Volunteers
  - When: Beginning in 2013 (20 bicycles to be fixed up to be given in the first round)
  - Funding: Willmar Kiwanis Club has donated \$10,000 for repair equipment and bike racks  
WCER will continue to seek donations of cash and bicycles for the program  
The program may seek SRTS funding to help assist with funding bike maintenance training and to help buy any additional needed bicycle repair equipment

## II. Recommended Enforcement Strategies

SRTS enforcement is a community effort that involves law enforcement, students, parents, school administration, and others. The strategies will target driver behavior as well as pedestrian and bicyclist behavior.

A. Objective: Reduce the possibilities of accidents by providing traffic enforcement measures within the walk and bike zone of the school.

- Action: Begin a “progressive ticketing campaign,” with assistance from the Willmar Police Department. Publicity of stepped up enforcement will be a combination of publicity using local media, school information, and police web sites. The Police reserve the right to decide to ticket before giving a warning. Step up patrols at school opening and closing after media campaign.
  - Who: School’s SRTS Team to contact media, Willmar Police
  - When: In the beginning of the school year  
Work on doing media campaign and stepped up enforcement annually
  - Funding: Small expense for media campaign development
- Action: Willmar Police Department will continue to respond to school bus driver and school crossing guard reports of motorists not following traffic laws.
  - Who: School Bus Drivers, Crossing Guards, Police
  - When: Ongoing
  - Funding: No added costs
- Action: Periodically utilize the Police Department’s two portable speed trailers, especially after school begins to remind drivers to keep within the posted speed limits.
  - Who: Coordinate with the Willmar Police Department
  - When: Periodically on an ongoing basis
  - Funding: No added costs
- Action: Develop a “pace car” program where parents volunteer to sign a pledge to obey traffic laws and school procedures to set a good example for other parents that drive their children to/from school. The school’s web site can be utilized to publicize the program.
  - Who: School’s SRTS Team
  - When: At times when parents are engaged with the school, such as parent teacher conferences
  - Funding: Minor expense for school

B. Objective: Help provide enforcement and increased safety through the use of two designated crossing guard locations during dismissal times.

- Action: Continue to provide trained adult crossing guards at the marked crossing at the two current locations. Investigate if any additional signs, vests, and other gear would assist in making the crossing guard and the crossing more visible.
  - Who: School and SRTS Team in investigating if added gear would help
  - When: Ongoing, with determining additional needs to be done in the short term
  - Funding: Low cost expense for school, over their current expenses

### III. Recommended Engineering Strategies

Engineering strategies are meant to improve the safety conditions within the physical walking and bicycling environment. The issues and recommendations that have been identified should be used for planning purposes only and may require further engineering analysis, design, and public input before implementation.

A. Issue: Students that live on the west side of the City need to cross the very busy 1<sup>st</sup> Street (Business Hwy 71). The road has 4 lanes of traffic and a center turn lane. Many parents feel uncomfortable with their children crossing the Street, even at lighted intersections. Some students have been seen crossing the street at unsafe mid-block locations.

- Action: The City will determine if the marked crosswalk stop light timing is adequate for students to walk across 1<sup>st</sup> Street at the Willmar Avenue intersection.
  - Who: City of Willmar
  - When: Late summer or early fall 2013
  - Funding: Minimal cost for the City
- Action: If, and when enforcement and education fail to keep children from crossing 1<sup>st</sup> Street at mid-block locations south of Willmar Avenue, seek permission from property owners to place fencing on back property lines where there is a lack of fencing.
  - Who: Businesses and School District
  - When: Long term project, only if other solutions of education and enforcement are unsuccessful
  - Funding: Would need to have grant funds to help pay for the fencing materials and labor

B. Issue: Sidewalks within the school's walk zone need to be in decent shape to protect against children tripping and injuring themselves. Sidewalks in good condition help improve the walk environment that can help lead to more students walking to school.

- Action: When poor sidewalk conditions become evident within the school walk zone, notify the City of the problem so they can be evaluated and placed in the City's capital improvement program.
  - Who: SRTS Team will help make recommendations as needed
  - When: Ongoing
  - Funding: Costs if needed repairs would be placed on property owners and/or City

C. Issue: On some key student travel streets there are no sidewalks or sidewalks on one side of the street only.

- Action: Construct a missing sidewalk on school property on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 4<sup>th</sup> Street to 6<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Who: Willmar School District and City of Willmar
  - When: Summer or Fall 2013
  - Funding: Bid for \$18,000  
School to pay back City over a 10 year time frame
- Action: Sidewalks are needed on the north side of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 6<sup>th</sup> Street. To move forward with any new sidewalks there will need to be the political will of the City Council to move forward on constructing new sidewalks.
  - Who: City of Willmar, with support from the school
  - When: Ideally short term, but likely long term
  - Funding: Major Cost  
As property owners would be mainly responsible for the expensive costs of adding sidewalks, it would be necessary to find grant dollars, such as the SRTS grant, to help pay for the improvements to have their support. Property owner support is likely needed to have City Council support for the project. No engineering cost estimates have been determined for these sidewalk improvements at this time.
- Action: Sidewalk/pathway is needed between the school's front door area angling to the southeast to the intersection of Willmar Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, where there are stoplights and a controlled marked crossing. This will provide a more direct route, which will make mid-block crossings less appealing to students.
  - Who: Willmar School District

- When: Long term project  
Should not be undertaken until after planned expansion of the school will be undertaken in 2016 or beyond  
The design of the front of the school may affect the location where this sidewalk/path would be placed
- Funding: As this would be an expensive undertaking, a SRTS grant would need to be successful to help pay for this project
- Action: There are a couple of missing block segments of sidewalk on the west side of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, beginning at the Willmar Avenue intersection. Students and other pedestrians walking south to the grocery store or mall are in need of this infrastructure improvement. This sidewalk expansion is also identified as a need in Willmar's 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
  - Who: City of Willmar and Cashwise Foods, Inc. (Property Owner)
  - When: Like to see within 2 to 5 year timeframe  
The project is identified in the Willmar's 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as a short term priority
  - Funding: This would be a cost of the property owner
- Action: The School District will be politically supportive of any project in the school's walk zone where plans call for constructing new sidewalks to streets that currently do not have them, and are not discussed above. While safety of pedestrians would improve with sidewalks along all streets in the walk zone, many of the streets that lack sidewalks are low volume residential streets that are of less concern for safety of middle school aged children. To move forward with any new sidewalks there will need to be the political will of the City Council to move forward on constructing new sidewalks.
  - Who: City of Willmar, with support from property owners
  - When: Long term
  - Funding: Major Cost  
As property owners would be mainly responsible for the expensive costs of adding sidewalks, it would be necessary to find grant dollars to help pay for the improvements to have their support, which is likely needed to have City Council support  
No engineering cost estimates have been determined for these sidewalk improvements

D. Issue: There are locations near the school where additional marked crosswalks would provide increased safety for students walking to school. Bump outs (curb extensions)

at some of the intersection locations of these marked crossings would also provide an additional safety element for pedestrians.

- Action: Crosswalks shall be added to locations where the school utilizes crossing guards. The first of two locations is on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street at the T-intersection corner with the school's parking lot drive. In addition to adding the crosswalk, a small extension of sidewalk is necessary on the west side of the street to tie into the existing sidewalk. The second location where crossing guards are posted and currently lack marked crosswalks is the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Who: City of Willmar and School District
  - When: Short term (1 to 3 years)
  - Funding: Low cost for the crossings, and an additional small cost to add a short sidewalk stub to the west side of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Action: Prepare an engineering study to determine if additional marked crossings within the school's walk zone would help improve student safety. Too many marked crossings may desensitize drivers to their use. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Olena Avenue Street SE intersections should be analyzed to determine which intersection(s) would best serve walking students walking to the Middle School.
  - Who: City of Willmar
  - When: Short term (1 to 3 years)
  - Funding: Minor expense, if city staff can undertake the study, and approximately \$10,000 for an outside consultant if it is needed to conduct the evaluation study  
A similar need for this type of study is called for in the Kennedy Elementary School's SRTS Plan, and both could be conducted together SRTS funds could be applied for as part of an overall SRTS application, if outside consultants are needed  
Once the locations are chosen a low cost to add the marked crossings would be needed

E. Issue: There are several areas around the school's property that do not meet ADA requirements that need to be addressed.

- Action: Curb cuts and ADA compliant ramps are needed at the school's 2<sup>nd</sup> Street parking lot access drive location.
  - Who: Willmar School District
  - When: Short term (1 to 3 years)

- Funding: Costs are approximately \$3,000 per curb cut  
Cost of project should be considered for part of a SRTS application
- Action: Curb cuts and ADA compliant ramps are needed at the southeast corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.
  - Who: City of Willmar
  - When: Short term (1 to 3 years)  
Should be done at same time as above curb cut project
  - Funding: Costs are approximately \$3,000 per curb cut  
Cost of project should be considered for part of a SRTS application
- Action: There are steps located on the west side of the school property at a mid-block location that do not meet ADA requirements. These steps are in a location where they are seldom used. It should be determined if they should be removed or made ADA compliant.
  - Who: Willmar School District
  - When: Long term (5 to 10 years)
  - Funding: Modest cost

#### **IV. Recommended Evaluation Strategies**

Evaluation is an important component of any SRTS program. There needs to be an objective review of what strategies that have been taken to determine if adjustments or changes are necessary to meet the goals and objectives laid out in the plan. In addition, new strategies may need to be developed to better meet the plan's objectives. The parent survey and student tally results may be utilized as a baseline to help measure student travel behavior and measure effectiveness of SRTS efforts over time.

##### Evaluation Strategy Action Steps:

- Keep the SRTS Team in place to meet periodically to work on encouragement, education, and enforcement goals and to evaluate and push for activity related to engineering action steps. There should be no cost for this strategy step.
- On an annual basis, conduct classroom student tallies to determine if progress is being made on the number of students walking and biking to school with the SRTS efforts being conducted. There should be no cost for this strategy step.
- After it is determine that an appropriate number of action steps have been taken under education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering, conduct another parent

survey to determine if attitudes are improving over children walking and biking to school. Resurvey every couple of years. This would involve a modest cost for making copies of the survey and for tabulating the results.

- After engineering action steps have been taken, the SRTS Team shall conduct a walking and/or biking audit of the improvement to see firsthand if the results of the new improvements have corrected the safety problems identified. There should be no cost for this strategy step.
- On an ongoing, periodic basis, ask the City of Willmar for both traffic count data and accident data to determine what changes are occurring over time. There should be no cost for this strategy step.
- Review and revise SRTS Plan. The SRTS Team should review how progress is being made on the action steps, and adjust efforts accordingly. Understanding that this Plan is created at a specific moment in time, the SRTS Team should review the Plan in detail periodically. Times, conditions, attitudes, and desires all will change over time. For this reason, the Plan should be revisited at least every 5 years to determine what changes are needed and what new action steps should be added to keep the Plan relevant in the future. There should be no cost for conducting this strategy step, however new activities will likely be added that will cost money when implemented.

## **SECTION FIVE: SRTS IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES**

A successful implementation of a SRTS plan will need the continued effort of the School's SRTS Team, along with the support from the School District, the City of Willmar, and various other organizations mentioned as part of this plan. The engagement of the parents and the general public will also be very important to successfully implementing the SRTS plan. There are both federal and state resources that can be utilized to assist with the plan. This section provides web addresses for some of the better-known websites. The SRTS Team may also utilize web search engines to look for issues specific in a particular activity that likely will result in finding additional resources.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School provides a very complete website with information and resources on all aspects of a Safe Routes to School.

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/index.cfm>

International Walk to School maintains a website that shares SRTS information along with their efforts in organizing the annual International Walk to School Day.

<http://www.iwalktoschool.org/index.htm>

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's SRTS website has general information and resources, grant information, success stories, on line webinars and many other topics to assist with SRTS.

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/>

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) maintains a useful SRTS website containing information about the program.

<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/>

The Safe Routes to School Partnership provides links and contacts to businesses and organizations in each state that support SRTS, along with other useful information.

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/>

### **Funding Sources**

A variety of resources can be utilized in funding SRTS activities. This includes both public grants as well as private sector funding.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

The new federal transportation act, MAP-21, combined the Safe Routes to School grant program in with several other grant programs into a new program called the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The Minnesota Department of Transportation will administer the program. With this being a brand new program, details about how the program will be funded were still being worked on at the time this plan was written. A new application process will be developed. An important change over the past SRTS Program application is that there will now be a match requirement of likely 20 percent on projects that are funded. The Minnesota Department of Transportation should be contacted to learn more about this competitive grant.

#### Other Transportation Funding

It may be possible to include a SRTS safety project as part of a planned road major repair or reconstruction project. The engineer for the government entity that jurisdictionally operates the road should be contacted to discuss SRTS safety needs early on when a road project is being designed. There may be sources of funding these engineers could also possibly apply for that would help pay for SRTS safety projects that involve the streets near the school.

#### School District and City Funding and Other Local Government Funding

The School District and the City have been mentioned in the Action Plan for helping to carry out various inexpensive activities. The School and the City may also be needed as a source for match dollars for grant dollars that are obtained. The County's Department of Health may have programs or resources available to assist with educating and encouraging more physical activity.

#### Private Sector Funding

Often, local SRTS programs can solicit funding from non-governmental resources within their own communities. The multiple benefits of SRTS programs, including the safety, health, environment, and community impacts, often align with the interests of the local community. Civic Organizations such as the local Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Jaycees, and others may be willing to help pay for a particular project.

Foundations and corporations/businesses may be willing to assist with a SRTS project. One example of this is Minnesota Blue Cross/Blue Shield that has helped fund SRTS activities in various communities in the past.

Individuals could be possibly approached for funding through beginning a local fund drive. Many programs have raised funds by holding special events. Use the SRTS theme to attract funding. Hold a walkathon or a bicycle event. You can also choose more traditional funding efforts such as bake sales, concerts, talent shows, etc.

# **APPENDIX**

## **Acknowledgements**

## **Surveys**

**Willmar Middle School Student Tally Results**

**Willmar Middle School Survey Results**

**Parent Survey Results**

**Willmar Middle School Survey Comments**

## **Observations of Willmar Middle School**

## **Maps**

**Willmar Functional Classification**

**Intersection Accidents Willmar**

**Willmar Bike and Pedestrian Accident Locations**

**Willmar Middle School's Summary**

**Willmar Middle School Needs on Map**

## **Willmar Middle School's SRTS Team**

- Justin Brown – Social Studies Teacher – SRTS Team Leader
- Tony LaPatka – Police Officer assigned to Middle School
- Brian Brandt – Lead Custodian
- John Kuznik – Science Teacher
- Trish Alsdurf - Parent
- Steve Brisdendine – Director of Willmar Community Education & Recreation
- Mark Miley – Middle School Principal
- Bruce Peterson – Willmar Planning Department
- Megan Sauer – Willmar Planning Department
- David Wyffels – Willmar Chief of Police
- Gary Danielson – Director of Kandiyohi County Public Works
- Theresa Wittenberg – Director of YMCA
- BobbiJo Berg – Kandiyohi County Public Health
- Donn Winckler – Mid-Minnesota Development Commission

## Willmar Middle School Student Survey Results

The school conducted the "Student Tallies" during the middle of February, 2013. The Survey was conducted in the mornings and afternoons of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays, however, some classrooms did not report on each of the six occurrences.

As the survey was conducted in February, weather was cold. There was snow on Tuesday and on Thursday.

Twenty-nine class rooms participated in the survey, with the following grade breakdown:

6th	6 classrooms
7th	11 classrooms
8th	12 classrooms

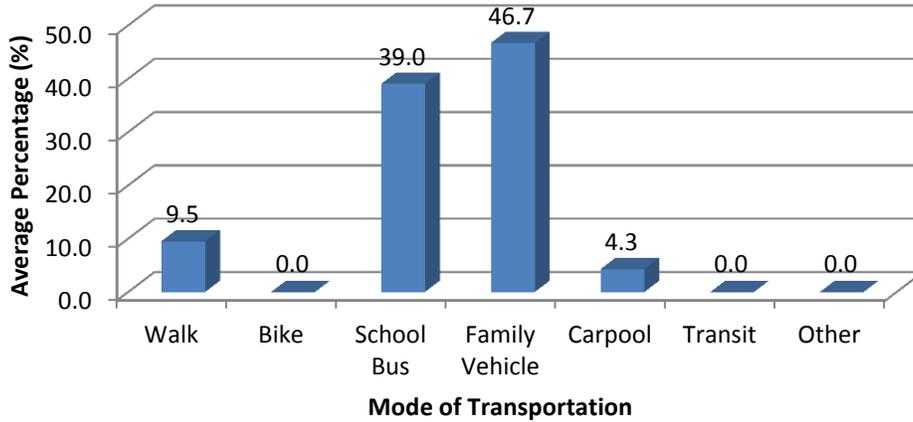
### Middle School Student Survey Results for all Six Survey Times

Mode	Average Percentage	AM	PM
Walk	9.5	6.9	12.0
Bike	0.0	0.0	0.0
School Bus	39.0	36.2	41.8
Family Vehicle	46.7	52.6	40.8
Carpool	4.3	3.9	4.7
Transit	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0

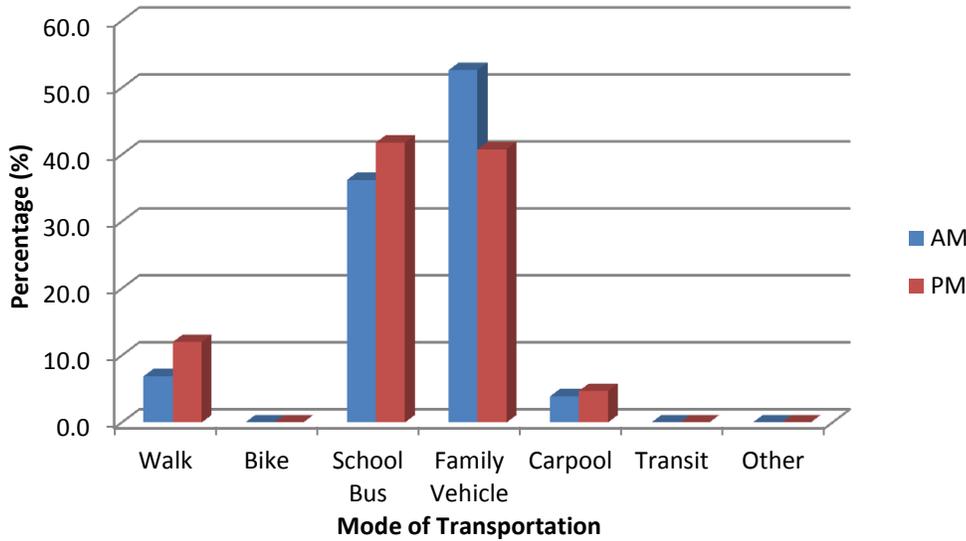
### Three Day Totals

Mode	Totals	AM	PM
Walk	352	128	224
Bike	0	0	0
School Bus	1,449	672	777
Family Vehicle	1,737	977	760
Carpool	160	72	88
Transit	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0

## Middle School Student Survey Results



## Morning and Afternoon Comparison



KEY	Reporting Number In Classrooms	Percentage						
		Walk	Bike	School Bus	Family Vehicle	Carpool	Transit	Other
Tues. AM	638	6.1	0.0	35.3	54.4	3.3	0.0	0.0
Tues. PM	637	12.4	0.0	41.8	41.1	4.1	0.0	0.0
Wed. AM	645	7.8	0.0	35.0	53.3	3.6	0.0	0.0
Wed. PM	646	11.3	0.0	41.0	41.6	5.1	0.0	0.0
Thurs. AM	573	6.8	0.0	38.6	49.9	4.9	0.0	0.0
Thurs. PM	578	12.5	0.0	42.3	39.6	5.0	0.0	0.0

Note: Approximately 40 children walk in the morning and over 70 walk or in the afternoon in January from these classrooms reporting.

## SRTS Parent Survey Tabulation for Willmar Middle School (220 Returns)

1. What is the grade of the child who brought home the survey?

6<sup>th</sup> = 82, 7<sup>th</sup> = 90, 8<sup>th</sup> = 42, No Answers = 6

2. Is the child who brought home the survey male or female? Male = 114, Female = 106

3. How many children do you have in k -8<sup>th</sup> grade?

One = 97, two = 83, three = 32, four = 3, five = 1, No answers = 6

4. How far does your child live from school?

Less than ¼ mile:	12
¼ mile up to ½ mile:	11
½ mile up to 1 mile:	22
1 mile up to 2 miles:	55
2 or more miles:	102
Don't Know:	14
No Answer:	4

5. Answers to what is the street intersection nearest your home are not shown here.

6. Arrive and leave at school method on most days:

	<u>Arrive at school</u>	<u>Leave from school</u>
Walk	14	29
Bike	2	4
School Bus	78	112
Family Vehicle	124	68
Carpool	13	19
Transit	0	0
Other	1	0

Note: Some answered more than one category.

7. How long does it normally take your child to get to/from school?

	<u>To school</u>	<u>From school</u>
Less than 5 minutes	37	24
5 – 10 minutes	83	65
11 – 20 minutes	42	50
More than 20 minutes	44	67
Don't know/Not sure	11	11
No Answers:	3	3

8. Has your child asked permission to walk or bike to/from school in the last year?

Yes = 77, No = 137, No Answers: 6

9. At what grade would you allow your child to walk or bike to/from school without an adult?

1<sup>st</sup> = 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> = 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> = 6, 4<sup>th</sup> = 11, 5<sup>th</sup> = 8, 6<sup>th</sup> = 35, 7<sup>th</sup> = 18, 8<sup>th</sup> = 10, 9<sup>th</sup> = 13, 10<sup>th</sup> = 4, 11<sup>th</sup> = 1

I would not feel comfortable at any grade = 94

No Answers: 17

10. What of the following issues affected your decision to allow, or not allow, your child to walk or bike to/from school? (select all that apply) (Number that checked shown)

Distance:	127
Convenience of driving:	23
Time:	60
Child's before or after school activities:	39
Speed of traffic along route:	85
Amount of traffic along route:	91
Adults to walk or bike with:	16
Sidewalks or pathways:	36
Safety of intersections and crossings:	90
Crossing guards:	19
Violence or crime:	60
Weather or climate:	108

11. Would you probably let your child walk or bike to/from school if this problem were changed or improved?

My child already walks or bikes to/from school: 38

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not sure</u>	<u>No answer</u>
Distance:	92	49	22	57
Convenience of driving:	26	46	14	134
Time:	50	42	17	111
Child's before or after school activities:	38	44	16	122
Speed of traffic along route:	58	52	20	90
Amount of traffic along route:	60	49	21	90
Adults to walk or bike with:	23	44	14	139
Sidewalks or pathways:	45	35	13	127
Safety of intersections and crossings:	71	47	17	85
Crossing guards:	28	40	12	140
Violence or crime:	46	46	15	113
Weather or climate:	72	55	17	76

12. In your opinion, how much does your child' school encourage or discourage walking and biking to/from school?

Strongly Encourages:	7
Encourages:	13
Neither:	161
Discourages:	11
Strongly Discourages:	4
No Answers:	24

13. How much fun is walking or biking to/from school for your child?

Very Fun:	9
Fun:	28
Neutral:	122
Boring:	19
Very Boring:	13
No Answers:	29

14. How healthy is walking or biking to/from school for your child?

Very Healthy:	62
Healthy:	78
Neutral:	49
Unhealthy:	4
Very Unhealthy:	4
No Answers:	23

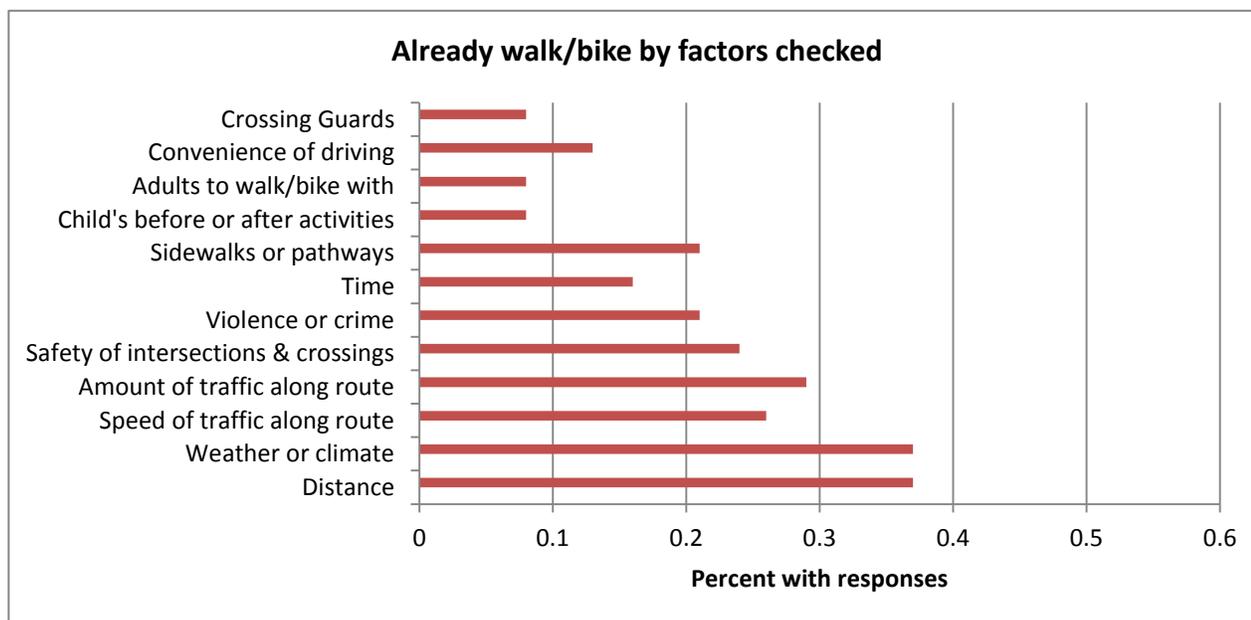
15. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

Grade 1 – 8:	18	Grade 9 - 11:	10	Grade 12 or GED:	21
College 1 to 3 or Tech:	70	College Graduate or more:	75	Prefer not to answer:	26

**Issues reported to affect the decision to allow a child to walk to/from school by parents of children who already walk or bike to/from school**

A total of 38 households reported that their child already walk/bikes to school.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
Distance	37%	14
Weather or climate	37%	14
Speed of traffic along route	26%	10
Amount of traffic along route	29%	11
Safety of intersections & crossings	24%	9
Violence or crime	21%	8
Time	16%	6
Sidewalks or pathways	21%	8
Child's before or after activities	8%	3
Adults to walk/bike with	8%	3
Convenience of driving	13%	5
Crossing Guards	8%	3



**Willmar Middle School Survey Response – Question 16**  
**Safe Routes to School**

Family vehicle – 1 to 2 miles

Sometimes my child is at my sister's house between 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Lakeland. I think that is still too far to walk/bike although it is a more direct path.

There were a number of similar comments from persons living 2 or more miles from school saying they live too far out to consider having child walk or bike to school.

School bus – family vehicle – 1/2 to 1 mile

Busing should still be made available to students who live within 1 mile of the school.

Walk and Family Vehicle – 1 to 2 miles

My son has walked until it got too cold, and he will walk again this spring when it warms up.

Walk – ¼ to ½ mile

I feel comfortable that my son walks to and from school. The activity gives him responsibility.

Family vehicle – ½ to 1 mile

If other students wouldn't run out into the streets it would be safer. They should know how to cross the streets.

Bus -2+ miles

Our son is extremely fit and eats healthy food. He works out.

Bus – 2+ miles

All answers are based on our home to the school. My two kids have walked to their grandmother's house after school on occasion, which is 5 -6 blocks from the school (5<sup>th</sup> St. and Willmar Ave.). It is based on if they walk together and the weather.

Family Vehicle – Bus- 1 to 2 miles

With the middle school letting out at 2:30 pm, and me working full time, and the extremely busy and unsafe roads my student would have to walk on/across, it is nearly impossible for me to figure out how to safely get my student home after school without the bussing option. I also will not allow my student to walk or bike to school in the morning because of the distance, the busy, unsafe roads, and the winter climate. Safety of the students needs to be the top priority for Willmar schools.

Family vehicle- walk – ½ to 1 mile

If busing was available without cost for my children, I would have them take the bus. I have had experience with my oldest child with strangers in cars and “hanging out” in neighborhoods talking to children.

A couple of persons objected to question 15.

Family vehicle – carpool – 1 to 2 miles

Since I now have 2 kids in different schools, with different start times, my kids were not able to walk or ride bike to school this year – because the older one lives further away from the school than the other one, but had an earlier start time – and my younger child could not get to the school by 8:00. It did not work to ride bike.

Family vehicle – 1 to 2 miles

Concern for bikes while parked at the school is a concern.

Carpool – family vehicle – ½ to 1 mile

We live close and are able to drive both directions so we chose to do so out of convenience and sometimes necessity. I find it rather cruel and dangerous in the Minnesota winter climate that some children have to walk up to two miles home because they have no other choice. 30 minutes of exposure to minus 20 temps could be quite dangerous – especially considering the way the middle school dress.

Family vehicle – carpool – 2+ miles

The bus provided to our area in the afternoon drop off is not a safe bus ride. Also the monitor is prejudice and racist. The Somali children often harass my kids and others. Calls have been made to the school and bus company. We have basically stopped using the bus because of this and will do whatever we can to drive our kids. Sad!

Bus - 2+ miles

My child rides the bus out of necessity. It is not, in my opinion, a positive environment.

Family vehicle – walk to YMCA – 2+ miles

We open enroll – Spicer address – child walks to YMCA with friends. I would not allow child to walk alone due to safety, but walks with one or more others.

Family vehicle – 1 to 2 miles

We strongly feel that we live far enough from school that we should qualify for the school bus program.

Bus – 2+ miles

I will not like my child to walk to or from school because of the train.

Carpool – Don't know Distance, but travel time is 5-10 Minutes

I wish there was bus service for my child. I did walk to pick them up one day after school and it took us 1 hour to get home and that was with me pushing them. I do not at all like the bus service is limited to where your family lives. The school has shown me that the wellbeing of our children is not at the best of their interest when it comes to walking distance. I am a single mother of two kids and I have to be to work by 6:45am. So if my child does not have a ride to school she would have to leave my house by 7:10 just to make it to school in time AND when it is 30 below zero who in their right mind would want their child to walk that distance? And also with any distance a child walking alone is a target for any type of crime. I believe that even 4 blocks can be pushing it when it comes to keeping my child safe when she is alone. To get home my child would have to cross 5 very busy intersections and not everyone driving keeps their surroundings to their best attention. Thank you for your time.

Family vehicle – carpool – ½ to 1 mile

Having someone to ride with is another issue – buddy system.

Family vehicle – 1 to 2 miles

My child is not provided bus service anymore so I have to drive her to and from school every day. It is very inconvenient but I feel we live too far from the school to be having her walk.

Family vehicle- 1 to 2 miles

My child only allowed to come home with parent only.

Bus – 2+ miles

Need more walkable access to Middle School. Designated trail – sidewalk without going through the parking lot. Walk signals at intersections.

Family vehicle -1/2 to 1 mile

The drop off at the Middle School is a mess. People should not be allowed to drop off children in the parking lot. If everyone used the circle drive, kids would not be running out in front of cars trying to exit. Idea: One lane drop off and if you are in the circle, kids exit the vehicle

whether you are # 1 - #10 in line (The person drew an illustration of a drop zone where drivers pull way ahead to allow multi drop offs at once.) All exit west end.

Bus – 2+ miles

My child lives too far to walk or bike to school, the route is too dangerous (traffic) and time of day is not good to be on the road getting to/from school.

Family vehicle – bus – 2+ miles

Safety is a huge concern. No matter how many stop lights there are there is always one or two drivers late for work or something that go through the stop lights. My child will not be a statistic.

Bus 2+ miles

With the taxes we pay all children should have a ride to school if needed.

Family vehicle – 2+ miles

I am not comfortable with biking just because of distance and safety – this time of year, it would be dark both ways. He is in sports so he's not done until evening.

Family Vehicle – Walk – ½ to 1 mile

If I could afford to pay for the bus, I would. He walks because he has to. I feel the bus is safer and quicker.

Bus – 2+ miles

Don't judge us. He gets plenty of activity. Train crossing hazardous. Transportation of school supplies amount and multiple instruments... Not happening. He would if I would let him. Please don't take bus away to save a few bucks, it would anger parents.

Bus – 1 to 2 miles

My child is very athletic. He is involved in different sports where he does a lot of walking/running. The weather is one of the biggest issues for him not to be able to walk to school even when they have to walk to the bus stop waiting under below zero temps.

Walk – 1/4<sup>th</sup> to ½ mile

Do not feel comfortable with child walking, it is just what we have to do because busing is not available and middle school gets out earlier than elementary school.

Family vehicle – bus – ½ to 1 mile

Children should not be expected or encouraged to cross First Street alone by foot or bike. It is very dangerous.

Bus 2+ miles

The gang activity in this area is the main reason I would not allow my child to walk/bike to school even under other circumstances.

Family vehicle – walk – 1 to 2 miles

I feel 2 miles is too far for 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders to walk. I think bus should be allowed for 1mile or greater for middle school students.

Bus – 2+ miles

We need a bike/walking path from Willmar past our home. Many people use the road... it is very dangerous!

## **Observations and Notes from Willmar Middle School Walking Audit**

Date of walking tour: December 5, 2012 - Observation of morning student arrival.

Date of Walking Tour: October 27, 2010 – Observation of school dismissal.

These notes are from the observation made by Donn Winckler of Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Willmar Police Officer Tony Lapatka (assigned to the Middle School) and SRTS Champion and Teacher Justin Brown, made on December 5, 2012. The observations also include information obtained by an October 27, 2010 Active Communities & Walkable Schools Workshop held for the Willmar Middle School. Over a dozen persons participated in this meeting and walking tour.

The Willmar Middle School is located in the center of the community on the very busy street of Willmar Avenue SE. The parking lot and official student drop-off and pick-up location are located in the front side of the school, with the main entrance off of Willmar Avenue. The parking lot may also be entered from the school property's west side off of Second Street SE. Two blocks to the west of the school's property is First Street, a minor arterial, which is the community's most busy and dangerous road. The intersection of Willmar Avenue and First Street is the busiest intersection in the community. The intersection has street lights, crosswalks, and walk – don't walk lighted signs. Even with these safety features it feels uncomfortable to cross this intersection and many parents will not allow their children to do so.

The school's property is two blocks wide (north to south) and approximately four blocks wide (east to west). The school is located on the northwest side of the property. Athletic field are located on the east half of the property.

The school walk zone for the Middle School is approximately a mile in circumference. Directly to the south of the school's location is the city's major shopping area. This area does not have neighborhoods, but after school some children will walk to the stores located in this vicinity. Most children who walk to school live in the neighborhood to the school's north and east sides. There are also large neighborhoods on the west side of the school, but as discussed, First Street is seen as a major barrier. Walkers and bikers have a more positive, safer commute from the north and east as these streets are primarily residential in nature with 30 mph speeds and not overly high average daily traffic counts. Most of the streets have sidewalks on at least one side, if not both sides of the street.

Willmar Middle School has classes start at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m. The school has grades six through eight. Doors open early in the morning (5:00 a.m.) to allow the swimming pool to be utilized by swimmers. Because the school is opened for a period of time in the

morning before classes begin, there is a fairly widespread of times that students arrive. The time children mainly arrive is from 6:15 to 7:45 a.m. Because of this extended arrival time, the school does not have the degree of chaotic and congested problems as seen when school is let out in the afternoon.

It needs to be noted that there are plans for a school addition to be built on the school's southwest side in 2015. This will mean major changes in the current parking and entrances will likely be made. Due to this situation, some recommendations for needs that involve this location will need to be held off until architect is hired to begin concept drawings. Problems found will need to be given to those designing the new addition to work on solutions at that time. These improvements will only have some effect on Safe Routes to School planning, as it is not the prime area that walkers or bikers utilize to enter or exit the school.

The school can be accessed in the morning from the front (south-side) door or the rear (north – side) door. Most doors can be exited at the end of the school. Buses have their own parking area on the north side of the building for both arrival and departure. In the afternoon all buses load and exit the lot at the same time. This assures that all children are on all buses before any bus leaves. This is important as buses do not let children enter the buses from a curb side.

Parents drop-off and pick-up their children in several locations, as the designated location is very busy. This location is the safest for drop-off or pick-up as there is a curbside. In the afternoon there are vehicles usually stacked out onto Willmar Avenue waiting to take the turn into the entrance drive. Some parents drop their children off in the parking lot. This is not encouraged by the school. This can be a dangerous situation because it cases children to walk across traffic in the parking lot. It also some traffic congestion in the parking lot with cars going in many different directions. Parents also utilize Second Street SE (west side) and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE (north side) for dropping children off and picking them up. Some let their children out on the opposite side of the street, which means their children need to cross against traffic.

#### Problems Identified At and Near the Middle School Location:

(Not discussed in any priority order)

1. In November of 2012, the school has hired crossing guards for the first time. They only are on duty at the afternoon let out. Crossing guard locations are at:

- North Side – at 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. There is a need to put in a short connector sidewalk on Second Street's west side to tie into the west side sidewalk. If this were constructed a cross walk could also be placed at this location.

- West side at Second Street and the corner of the school's west side entry. This is a T-intersection with no road intersection on Second Street's west side.

Neither location has official city cross-walks. There are no sidewalks on the north side of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. There would need to be a sidewalk constructed before a cross-walk could be placed.

2. There are curb cuts needed for the sidewalk on the east side of Second Street at the west side entrance drive into the school's parking lot. The sidewalk on the east side of Second Street has hills that may be too steep for ADA concerns. There are also steps that lead down to Second Street from the School's west side door that are not ADA compliant.

3. With buses, vehicle drop-off and pick-up and walkers/bicyclists utilizing 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to arrive and depart there needs to be improvements made for safety along this road. Currently there is no sidewalk on the avenue's north side. On the South side there is no sidewalk on the second half of the school's property from 4<sup>th</sup> Street to 6<sup>th</sup> Street. There are no cross-walks on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. There is also a lack of a sidewalk on the west side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The need to improve these safety factors along 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue is seen as one of the highest priority concerns.

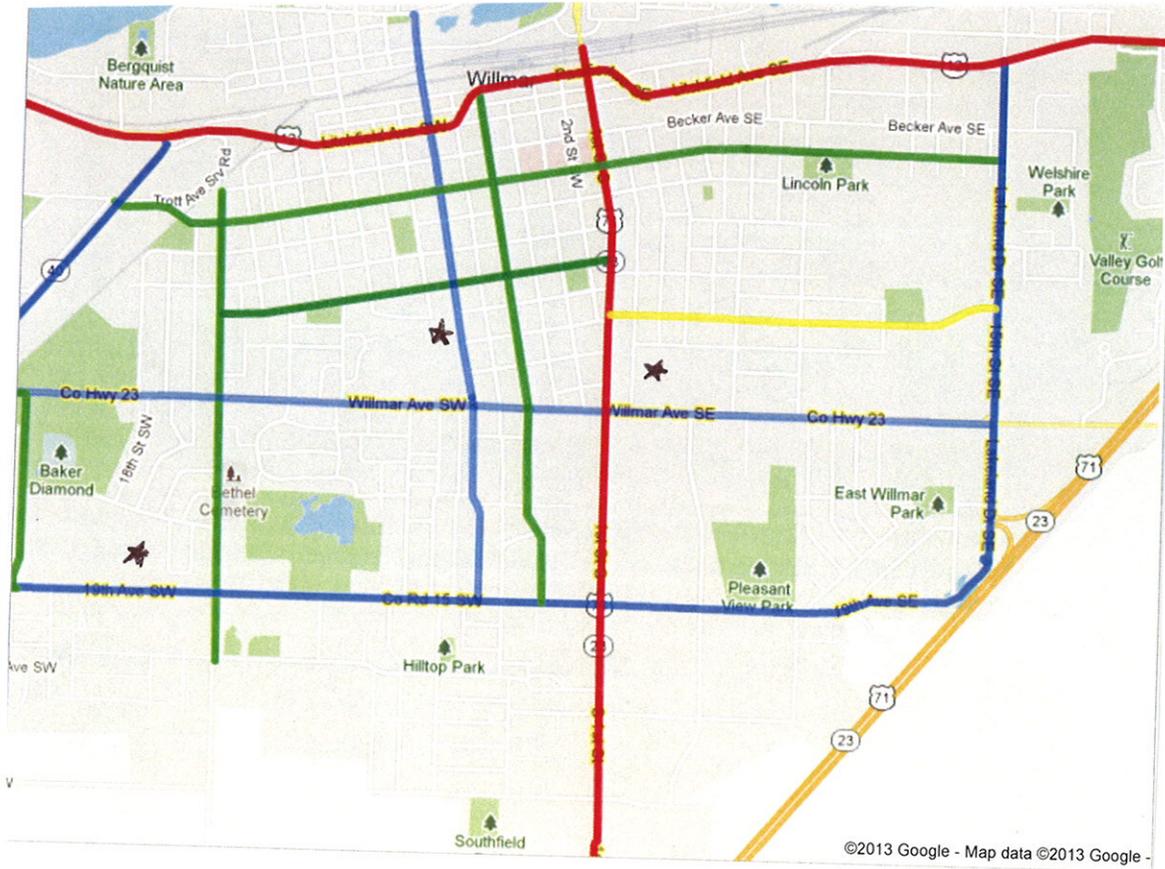
4. Two blocks north of the school property is Olena Avenue. This street is a collector that should be considered to have one or two cross-walks to assist children walking to school from the north. The only other collector route north of the school location is approximately 8 blocks to the north (Trott Avenue SE).

5. Crossing First Street needs to be studied to see what safety measures can be taken. At a minimum, the intersection of First Street and Willmar Avenue should have its stop lights timed to be sure there is enough crossing time given for children to cross the street without the need to feel rushed. Another problem is that not all children walk to this intersection to cross First Street. Some go directly west from the school and cross mid-block north of the intersection. This is not safe and more education and enforcement is needed to keep children from crossing unsafely. If students do not cross at the Street Lights at First and Willmar Avenue, it is another 5 blocks to the north for the next lighted intersection (Kandiyohi Avenue).

6. It would be helpful on the school's south side to have a sidewalk that goes from the front door at a somewhat diagonal route to the intersection of Willmar Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE. This intersection (T-intersection) has a stop light and cross-walks. A sidewalk that angles to the crossing would encourage children to take this safe way to cross Willmar Avenue to the stores located on the south side. Currently some children do not go to the intersection for crossing, but cross the busy Willmar Avenue to the intersection's west at a mid-block location. Another

problem that should be addressed at the intersection of Willmar Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE is a lack of a sidewalk on the west side of 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

## Willmar Functional Classification Map for Central City



### KEY:

Red = Major Arterial

Blue = Minor Arterial

Green = Collector

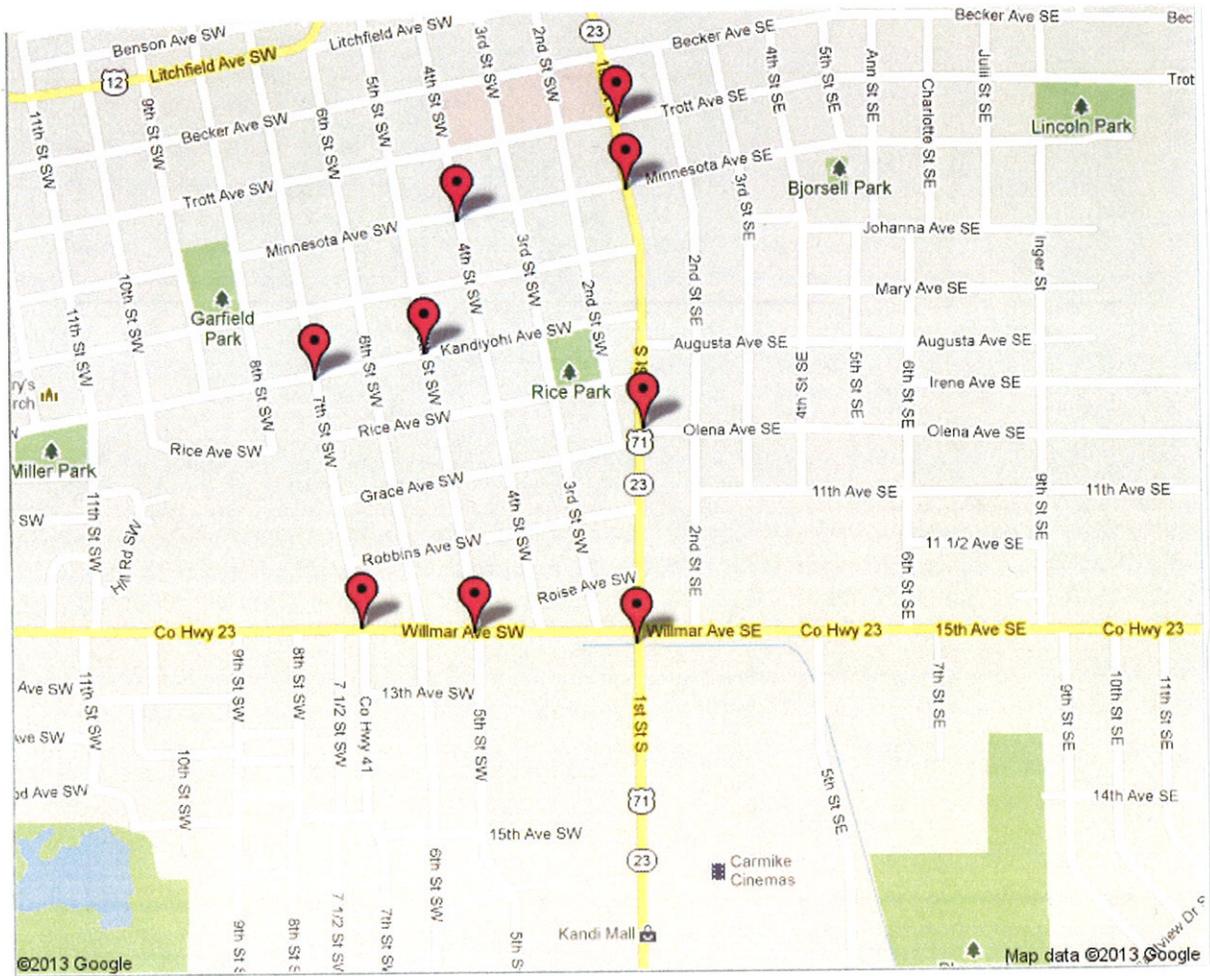
Yellow = Act like a Collector

Stars = School Locations

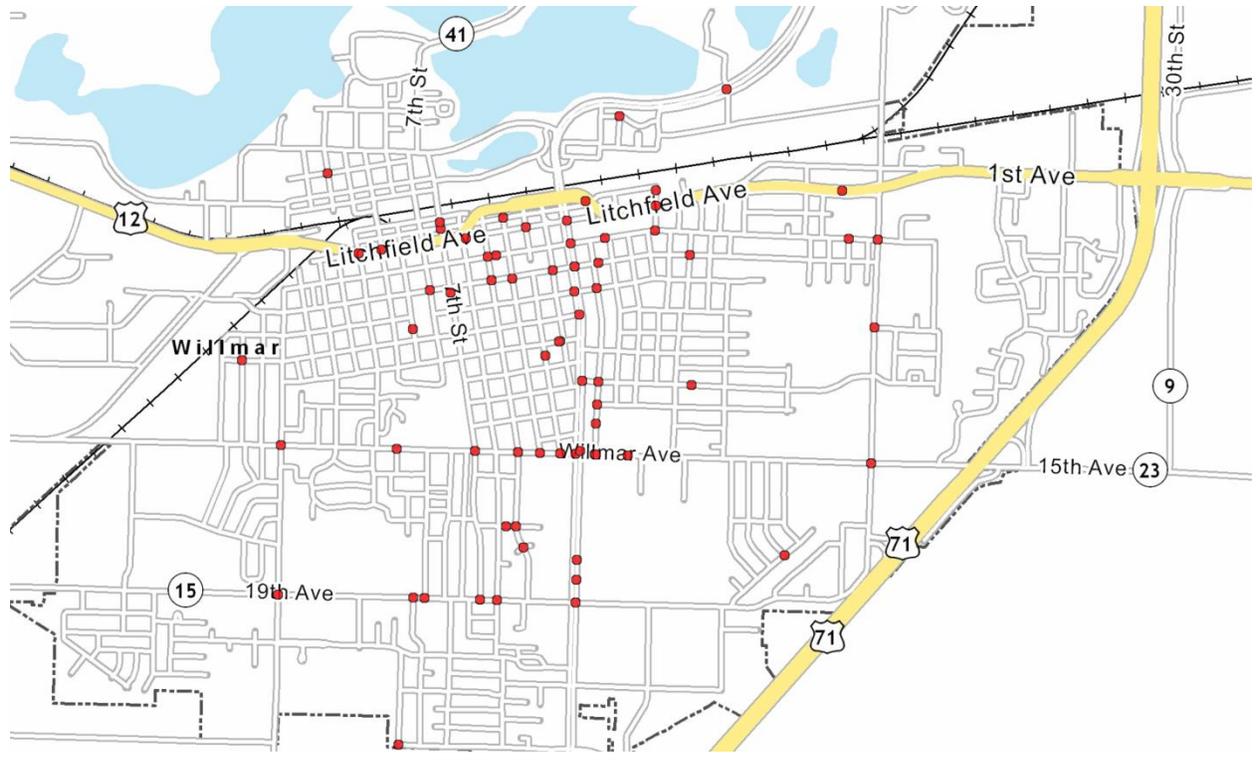
## Intersections with Higher Total of Reported Accidents from 2002 to 2012

The map below shows intersections within Willmar school walking zones areas that show higher accident histories over a ten year period. The intersections are:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Street & Willmar Avenue with 140 accidents
- 1<sup>st</sup> Street & Trott Avenue with 45 accidents
- 1<sup>st</sup> Street & Olena Ave. with 31 accidents
- 1<sup>st</sup> Street & Kandiyohi Ave. with 26 accidents
- 5<sup>th</sup> Street SW & Kandiyohi Ave. with 33 accidents
- 5<sup>th</sup> Street SW & Willmar Ave. with 25 accidents
- 4<sup>th</sup> Street SW & Minnesota Ave. with 29 accidents
- 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW & Willmar Ave. with 20 accidents
- 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW & Kandiyohi Ave. with 24 accidents



# City of Willmar Locations of Bicycle and Pedestrian Accidents From 2002 through 2012



## **Willmar Middle School**

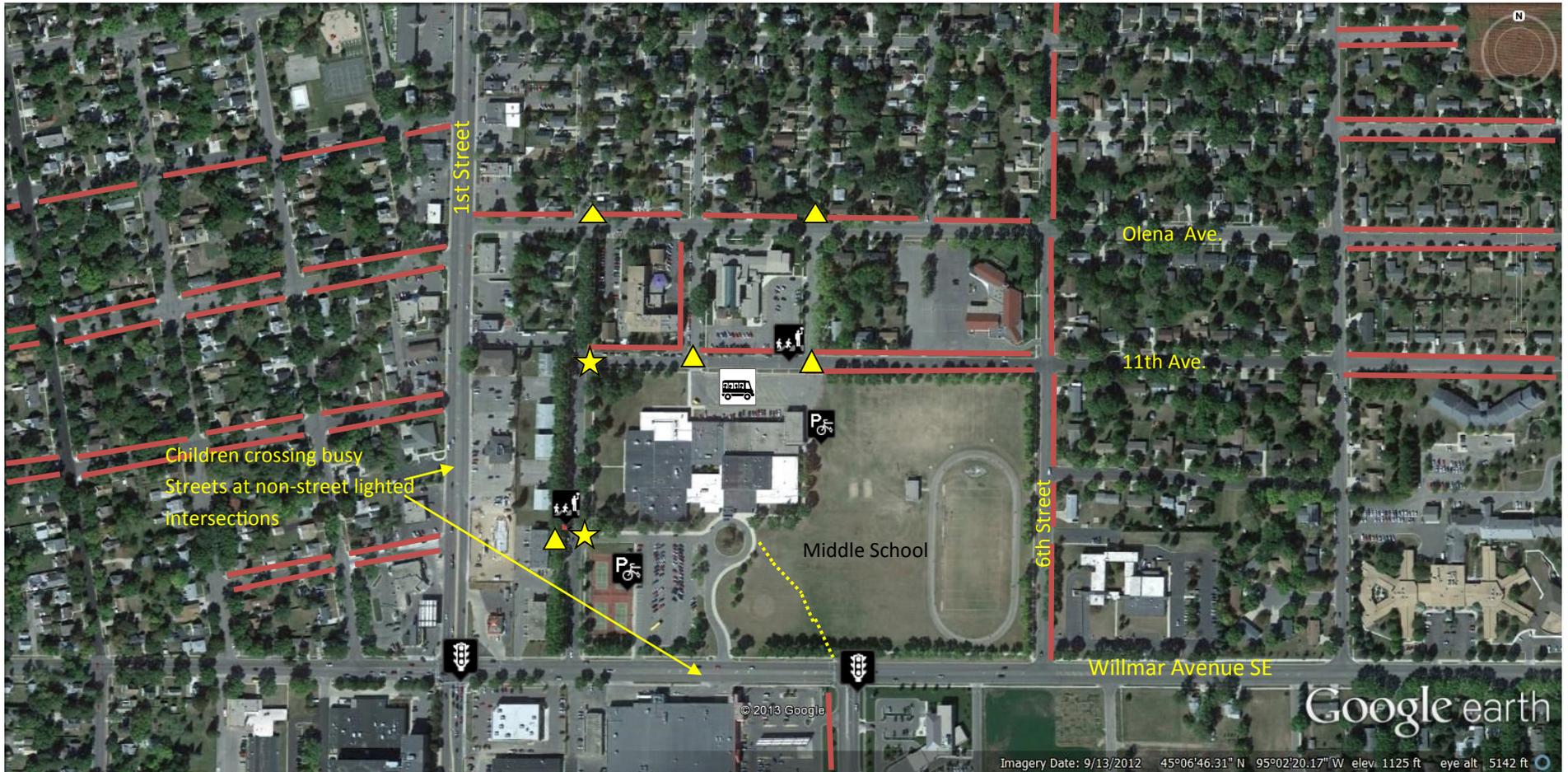
### **Identified Problems/Concerns/Needs/Barriers:**

1. There is a need to expand the sidewalk on the south side of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, especially where it borders school property. Sidewalks would also be helpful on the north side of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE also.
2. Crossing Guards have been hired for the first time this year for school let out only on the north side of the school on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and also at the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE. Sidewalks are missing at the crossing location, which makes it go against standards to place needed cross walks at these locations.
3. Crosswalks could also be used at 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SE, but with same issues as mentioned above.
4. Students that live on the west side of the City need to cross the extremely busy 1<sup>st</sup> Street. The corner nearest to the school is 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Willmar Avenue, which is the busiest intersection in the City. The intersection has street lights and timed lighted crossing. Street lights need to be timed to be sure students have the proper time to cross the street. There should be an investigation to see if anything else can be done to give students more sense of safety crossing this intersection.
5. There have been observations that some children cross 1<sup>st</sup> Street north of the Willmar Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Street intersection at unsafe mid-block locations. A possible solution to this problem is to construct a fence on the back property line of 1<sup>st</sup> Street Businesses north of Willmar Avenue for one block or possibly up to Olena Avenue.
6. Curb cuts are missing from the school's 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE driveway, which is an ADA problem.
7. The sidewalk on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE's west side on school property has a hill that might not meet ADA standards. The approach sidewalk to the west door of the school has steps that go down to the street that do not meet ADA requirements.
8. Some students cross Willmar Avenue SE to go to the shopping district at unsafe mid-block locations. It would be helpful to put in a sidewalk that goes from the school's front door and angles to the lighted intersection at Willmar Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE. This would encourage more students to take the safer route to cross Willmar Avenue.
9. 5th Street SE is missing a sidewalk on the west side. This sidewalk is needed to safely bring pedestrians to Cashwise Foods and to the Mall.
10. The afternoon parent pick-up of their children is very congested. Cars get stacked out onto Willmar Avenue. Parents also pick their children up on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 2nd Street.
11. The school has plans to expand the building on the southwest side in 2015. This will likely mean that the driveway and parking lot in front of the building will need to be

adjusted. The plans will need to be sure to cater to the needs of students that walk and bike to school when they are prepared. Until then, it would not be practical to make any costly improvements at this time that would improve walking and biking needs for this area of the site.

- 12.** There are 5 blocks in between stoplights on 1<sup>st</sup> Street between Willmar Avenue and Kandiyohi Avenue.
- 13.** There should be crosswalks on Olena Avenue and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets SE.

# Willmar Middle School



- Missing Sidewalks
- Possible Pathway to Intersection
- Street Lights
- Bike Racks
- Crossing Guard Locations in afternoon
- Curb cuts needed
- Marked Crossings Needed