

October 8, 2026

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Virtual Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report  
Thursday, October 8 at 5:00 p.m.  
Broadcast from the Media Studio 454  
Broadway, Cambridge, MA**

Called for the purpose of providing an update on transportation following the start of the school year and discussing matters related to Amigos School playground.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Jaikumar, (Chair), Member Hudson, Mayor Siddiqui

Others Present: Vedad Konjic, Director of Facilities; Lee McCanne, Chief Information Officer; Maggie Rabidou, Operations Manager; Damon Smith, Chief Operating Officer

**Chair Jaikumar** started the meeting at 5:03 p.m. and read the call of the meeting.

Following a roll call of subcommittee members present, Chair Jaikumar opened the floor for public comment.

Amanda Beatty, an Amigos School parent, expressed concern about the playground surface, which was damaged during snow removal in February 2026 and had not yet been repaired. She emphasized safety concerns for students and requested that the rubberized surface be restored rather than replaced with asphalt.

Mr. Smith reported that CPS had been working with the City's Department of Public Works (DPW) to but repairs had been delayed due to vendor complications and coordination issues. DPW had recently confirmed that installation of the replacement rubberized surface was expected to take place on October 9 or 10. Mayor Siddiqui had assisted in coordinating efforts on the City's side. Ms. Beatty requested planning for winter snow removal to prevent future damage, including coordination with the principal regarding snow placement.

Following the Amigos playground discussion, Mr. Smith presented an overview of transportation operations, improvements implemented for the 2026–2027 school year, ongoing challenges, and planned next steps. The presentation can be found on this [website](#).

Highlights of Mr. Smith's presentation include:

**Transportation Operations**

- Eastern Bus Group: Provides general student transportation, with approximately 68 routes and 124 daily runs.
- NRT Transportation: Provides door-to-door transportation, using more than 75 vehicles and approximately 92 daily routes/runs.
- CPS also transports 87 students to out-of-district schools.
- The district reduced school start times from three tiers to two: 8:00 a.m. and 8:45 a.m.
- The revised schedule has helped improve morning arrival times and route efficiency.

**General Transportation Improvements**

- CPS continues to monitor bus arrival and departure times daily to identify recurring delays.
- The Athena bus-tracking system is fully operational following technical challenges during the previous school year.
- Families are encouraged to reinstall the tracking application if they experience difficulties.
- An additional full-time employee was added to support transportation operations.
- The Transportation and Communications departments have increased coordination to provide more timely notifications to families about delays.
- CPS is working to separate public school routes from charter and private school routes where possible to reduce scheduling conflicts.

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**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE****On-Time Performance**

- The district has made progress in reducing the number of buses consistently arriving after the start of the school day.
- During the first week, six morning runs were consistently late, representing approximately 9% of runs.
- By the fifth week, one of 66 runs was arriving after the bell on three or more days, approximately 1.5%.
- CPS revised its arrival-time benchmark from 10 minutes before the bell to 15 minutes before the bell, effective September 22.
- The longer-term goal is to provide sufficient time for students to participate in breakfast and other activities before instruction begins.
- Traffic congestion, particularly along the Route 2 corridor, Alewife Brook Parkway, Rindge Avenue, and Massachusetts Avenue, remains a challenge.

**Door-to-Door Transportation (NRT)**

- The Beacon Connect tracking platform is operational, although reliability and communication issues remain.
- Thirteen routes were identified as areas of significant concern: four minibus routes and nine van routes with recurring late arrivals.
- Some routes have arrived after the school bell on approximately half of the school days reviewed.
- Challenges include student transition needs, long-distance transportation, traffic congestion, driver availability, and last-minute vehicle substitutions.
- Accurate and timely student eligibility information remains an operational challenge when assigning transportation services.
- CPS meets with NRT every three weeks to review performance, address concerns, and establish expectations for improvement.
- The current NRT contract expires in June 2027 and CPS is reviewing its approach for the 2027-2028 school year including researching other vendors.

Following the presentation, the group discussed ongoing transportation challenges, including traffic congestion, student safety, bus stop locations, communication with families, and afternoon transportation reliability. Particular attention was given to routes traveling along Massachusetts Avenue and Rindge Avenue, where traffic and restrictions on students crossing major streets complicate routing decisions. The administration emphasized the importance of gathering family feedback before considering changes to bus stop locations or existing safety practices. Committee Members also raised concerns about afternoon delays, including those affecting the Dragonfly and Fire Engine routes. Mr. Smith explained that afternoon transportation presents different logistical challenges because buses must complete one school route before reaching another school for pickup. Adding vehicles or separating routes may improve service but would have financial and operational implications.

Regarding next steps, Mr. Smith shared that the district would continue monitoring daily bus performance and addressing routes experiencing recurring delays, including working with NRT to improve the 13 routes identified as having significant on-time performance concerns. Efforts will also focus on improving transportation tracking systems and communication with families, gathering feedback on bus stop locations, safety, and potential route adjustments, and reviewing afternoon transportation schedules for opportunities to improve efficiency. Additional priorities include planning for the 2027–2028 door-to-door transportation contract, providing school-based staff with updated transportation information and training, and coordinating with DPW on the completion of Amigos playground repairs and future snow removal practices.

**Chair Jaikumar** thanked the administration for their presentation and ongoing work. The meeting concluded at 6:30 p.m. with a roll call of subcommittee members.