



Memo

To: Cook County Schools, Interested Parties, General Public
From: Transportation & Environment Staff, Southern Georgia Regional Commission
CC: Chelsea Carter, Georgia SRTS School Outreach Coordinator – South Georgia
Date: 3/10/2020
Re: Safe Routes to School 5-Year Crash Trends in Cook County, GA from 2015 to 2019

Introduction

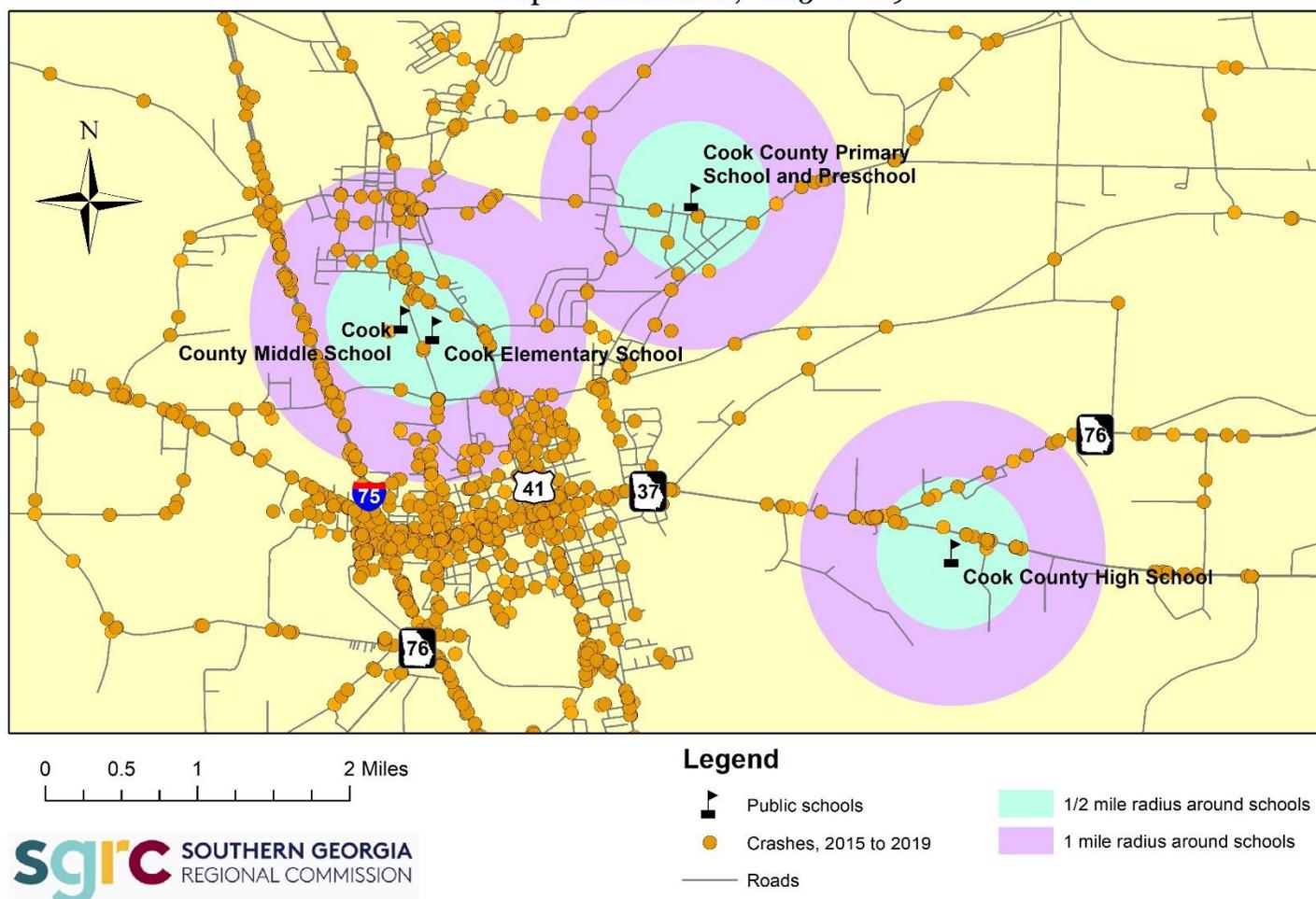
The Southern Georgia Regional Commission and the state of Georgia's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program partner with local governments and agencies to determine how to make roads and public right-of-way safer for all users. Traffic safety around schools is a key concern due to the combination of vulnerable road users (in particular, children who walk or bike to school), periods of high traffic volume (e.g., school pick-up and drop-off times), high-risk drivers (e.g., high school students), and school bus traffic. The purpose of this memo is to provide information regarding traffic safety around schools in Cook County. This information may be used to help determine future investments in transportation infrastructure; to identify priorities for road user education and law enforcement; and to inform future transportation plans and policies.

This memo examines crash trends for locations within 1 mile of Cook County public schools. Over the past five years, from Jan. 1, 2015 to Dec. 31, 2019, according to the most recent data provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation, Cook County experienced 2,939 crashes in the public right-of-way. Out of this total, 358 crashes occurred within 1 mile of a school and 92 occurred within ½ mile of a school.

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Crashes within 1 mile of Cook County Schools

Map 1: All Schools, 2015 - 2019



Map 1: Crashes within ½- and 1-mile radii of Cook County schools.

Data Source: Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).

Map 1 shows crashes from 2015 to 2019 along with ½- and 1-mile radii around all Cook County public schools. As was mentioned above, there were a total of 358 crashes within the 1-mile radii of the schools, and 92 within the ½-mile radii. There were two crashes in which drivers struck pedestrians, both of whom were children; these are discussed in more detail below. According to the data, there were no crashes involving bicyclists.

In all of Cook County in 2015-2019, there were 10 crashes involving school buses. Only one of these involved a minor injury, and no students or school employees were injured. The remainder involved property damage only. 4 crashes involved a school bus colliding with a private vehicle while making a turn. One involved a school bus backing into a private vehicle. One involved a driver failing to yield to a school bus. One crash, on 12/8/2016, involved a collision between two school buses as one driver failed to yield to another. 3 crashes involved school buses slipping into ditches, at least partly due to road conditions. Only one crash involving a school bus occurred in close proximity to a school (in front of Cook County High School on 11/9/2017, with no injuries reported).

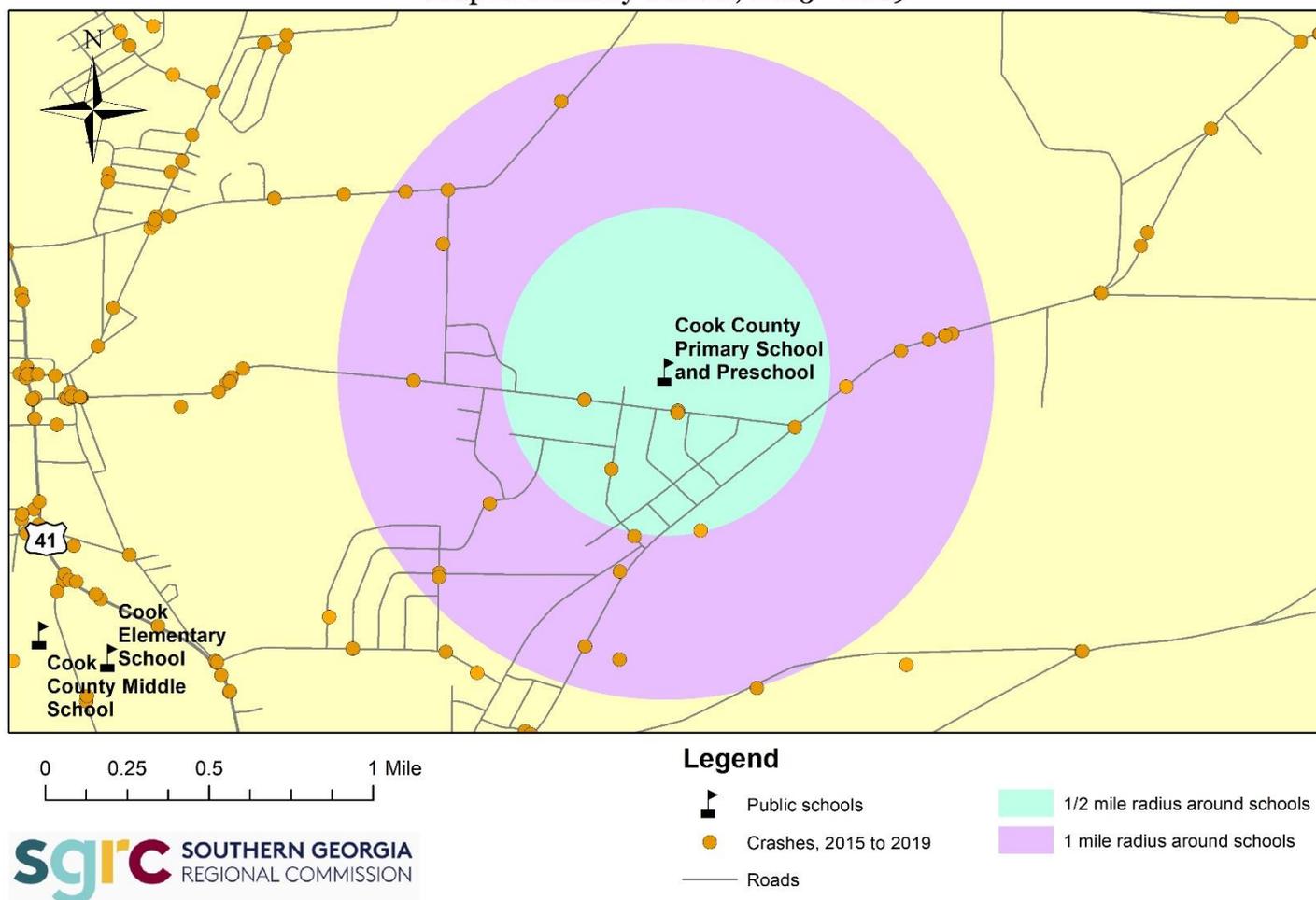
Only one fatal crash occurred within 1 mile of schools during this time period. It occurred on I-75 and was not related to school traffic.

439 of the 2,939 total crashes (15%) involved drivers under age 18, highlighting the need for better training and safety measures for teen drivers. In total, these crashes resulted in 103 injuries, but no fatalities.

In the remainder of this memo, we discuss transportation safety around each school in more detail.

Crashes within 1 mile of Cook County Schools

Map 2: Primary School, 2015 - 2019



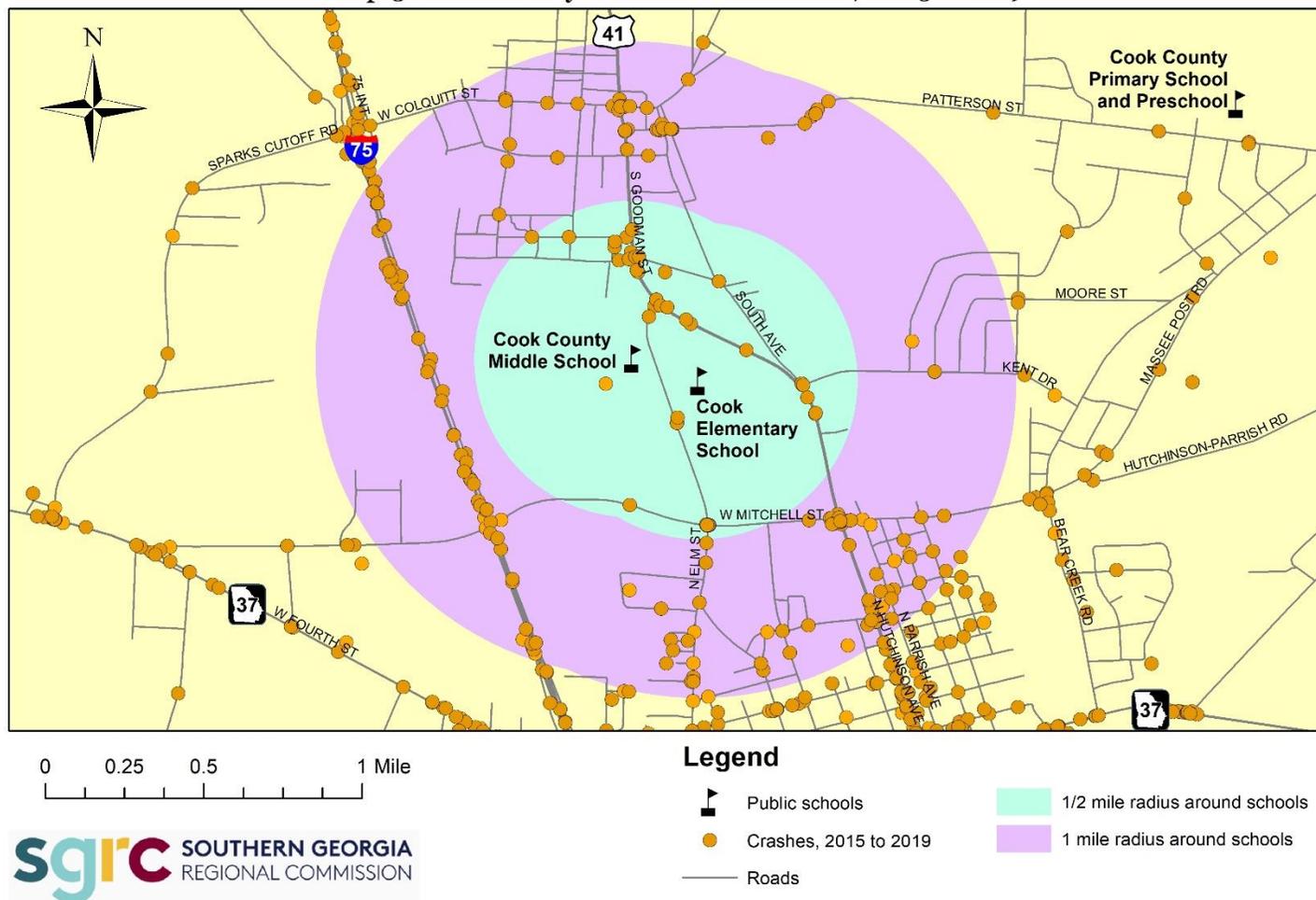
Map 2: Crashes within ½- and 1-mile radii of Cook Primary School.
Data Source: Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).

Map 2 shows crashes near Cook Primary School. From 2015 to 2019, 9 crashes occurred within ½ mile of this school, and 27 within 1 mile. Relatively few crashes have occurred around this school. The two serious injury crashes that have occurred within the 1-mile radius involved relatively young drivers (one was 19 and one was 22), highlighting the need for better driver training and other safety measures for the younger age group.

One crash (on 10/21/2016) was clearly related to school traffic, and involved one driver rear-ending another in the school drop-off line. There were no injuries.

Crashes within 1 mile of Cook County Schools

Map 3: Elementary and Middle Schools, 2015 - 2019



Map 3: Crashes within 1/2- and 1-mile radii of Cook Elementary and Middle Schools.
Data Source: Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).

Map 3 shows crashes around the elementary and middle schools. These schools are analyzed together in this report due to their close proximity to each other. The combined area of 1-mile radii around the two schools includes a 1.5-mile section of Interstate 75. From 2015 to 2019, 274 crashes that occurred within the combined 1-mile radii around the two schools. Of these, 83 crashes (30%) occurred on I-75 and were likely unrelated to school transportation. 56 crashes occurred between the combined 1/2-mile radii.

One crash within these radii involved a driver striking a pedestrian. On 6/25/2015 at 3:31 p.m., there was a serious injury to a 6-year-old child who was reported as having darted into the road and was struck by a 70-year-

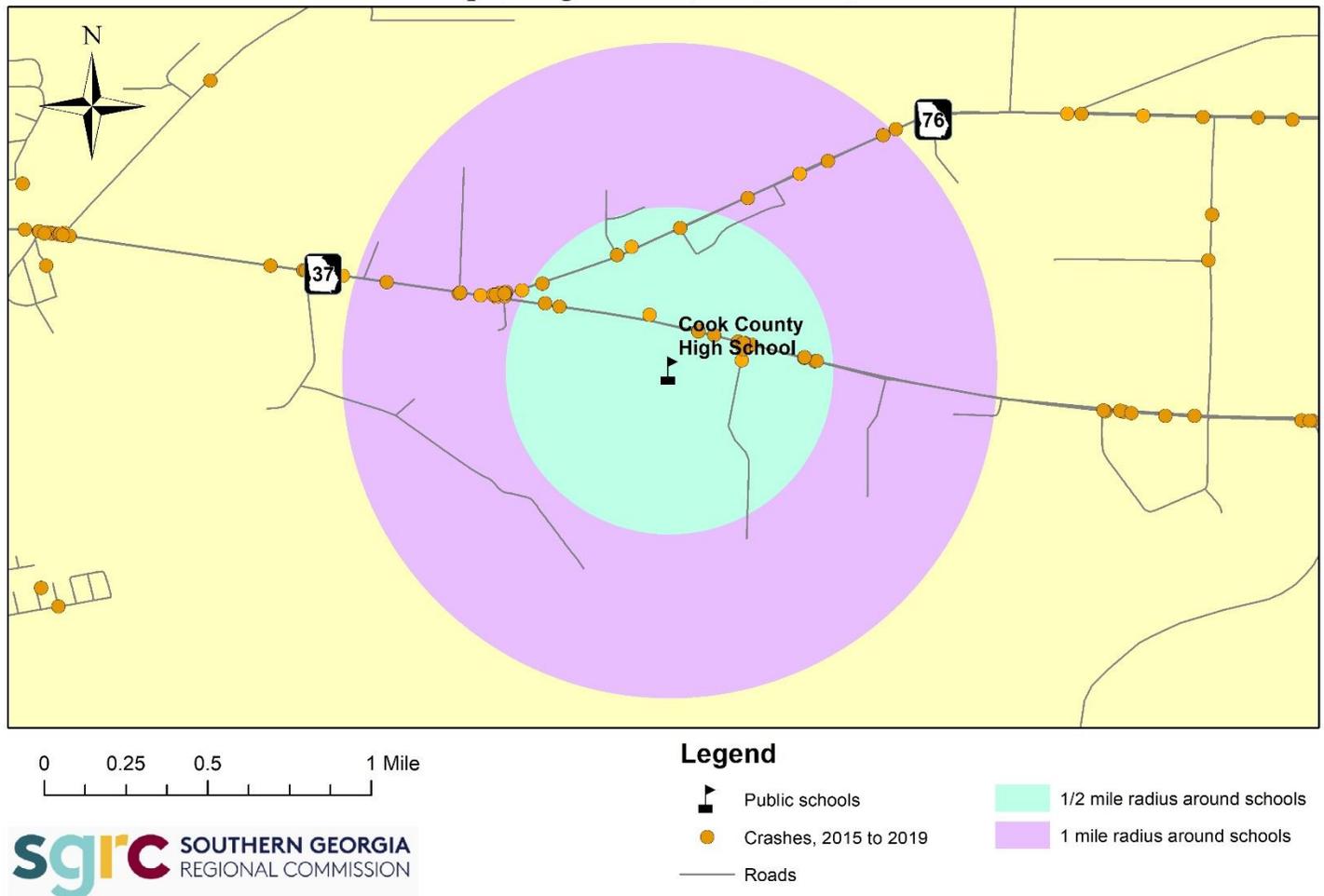
old driver. This occurred in Downtown Sparks on US-41 and the child may have been walking home from school (the police report does not indicate this). This was the only pedestrian crash within the combined 1-mile radii.

One crash took place on the Middle School campus (on 12/24/2019) and involved a 20-year-old driving recklessly. Also, out of 7 crashes that took place along Elm Street between the two schools or at the intersection of Elm Street at US-41, 3 crashes occurred during or near to the morning drop-off time.

It is also worth noting that the 1-mile radii include Community Christian Academy, a private school on the north side of Adel, located near the intersection of US-41 and Mitchell Street. 26 crashes occurred within a 0.1-mile radius of this intersection during the 2015-2019 period. 6 of these crashes occurred during or near school drop-off and pick-up times (between 7:00 and 8:30 a.m. and 2:00 and 3:30 p.m.). Beyond this, no definite crash pattern associated with this private school can be established at this time.

Crashes within 1 mile of Cook County Schools

Map 4: High School, 2015 - 2019



Map 4: Crashes within ½- and 1-mile radii of Cook County High School.

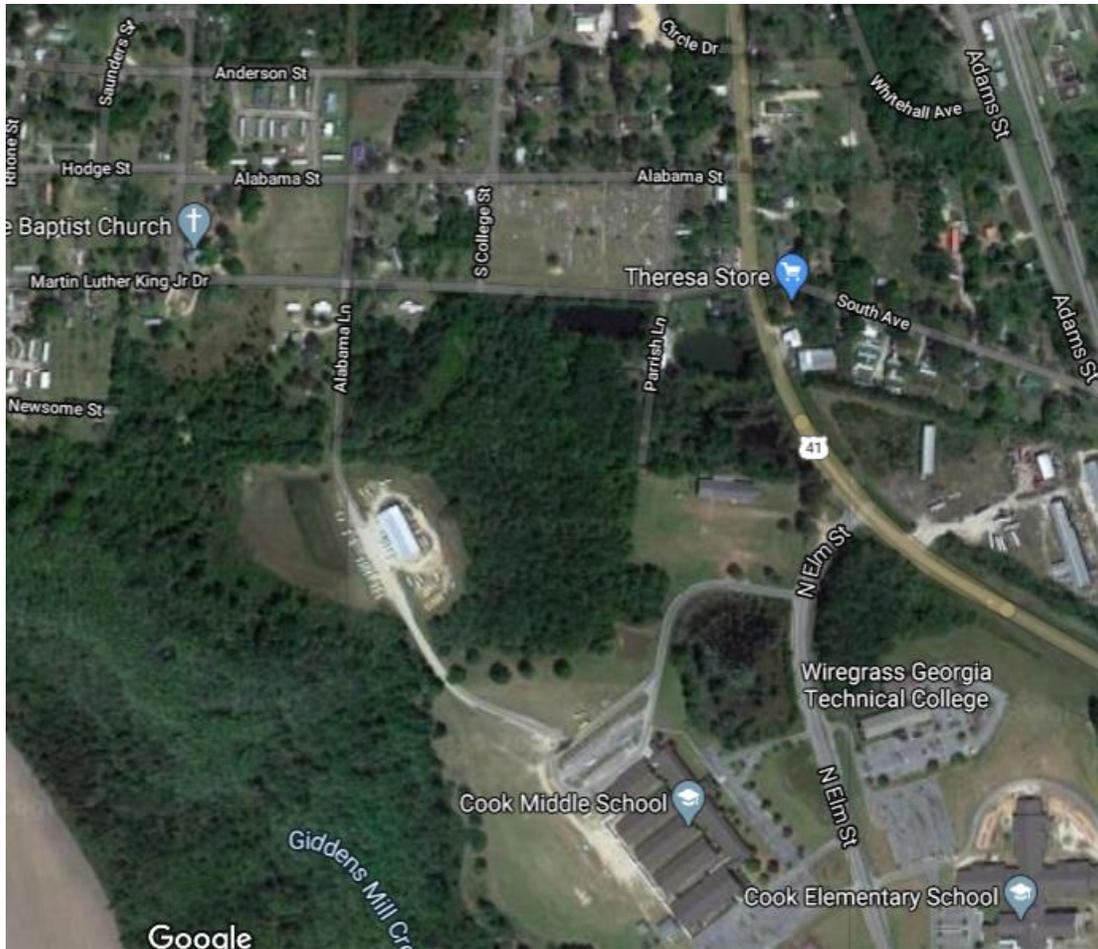
Data Source: Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).

Map 4 shows crashes within 1 and ½ mile of the high school. There is a clearly visible cluster of crashes around the high school entrance. 55 crashes occurred within a 1-mile radius of the high school, and 26 within a ½-mile radius, from 2015 to 2019. Of these, 25 crashes (45%) involved a driver under age 18.

One crash involved a 15-year-old pedestrian, struck by an 18-year-old driver while crossing State Route 76 in front of the high school. This was the only pedestrian crash in the area.

Actions and Looking Ahead

Students at Cook County Middle School use Alabama Lane to access the Middle School by foot and bike. Alabama Lane provides a safe and convenient low-traffic connection to residential neighborhoods in Sparks. Most of the residences on the west side of Sparks are located within 1 mile of the middle school and many are located within ½ mile of it. These are low-income neighborhoods and students have limited options other than biking and walking to school. The only alternative access to school from these neighborhoods is via US-41, a high-traffic, high-speed road with no sidewalk that is not suitable for children biking or walking (see Map 5). However, there is a fence and gate blocking Alabama Lane that students jump over and lift their bikes over to access the school, according to school staff. Since Alabama Lane is already being used as the safest and most convenient route to school for some students, and the gate is already being surmounted, it is recommended that the gate should be opened in order to facilitate students' access to the school. The gate and the road (Alabama Lane) are both on the same land parcel on which the Middle School is located, owned by the Board of Education.



Map 5: Alabama Lane route from Sparks residential areas to Cook Middle School.

Source: Google Maps

For middle school students coming from the South, a new 1-mile sidewalk on Elm Street provides safe access. However, it only goes as far south as Levind Way on the far north side of Adel, and does not connect to any other sidewalks, so there is not yet a true pedestrian/bicycle connection from Adel to the Middle School. (This sidewalk also connects to the Elementary School, which is across Elm Street from the middle School.) Extension of the Elm Street sidewalk is recommended as funding becomes available.

School staff noted that there is a traffic problem at the intersection of State Route 37/76 (E 4th St.) and Bear Creek Road (see Map 6). Drivers on the state route fail to yield to school buses at and around this intersection. Increased law enforcement is recommended for this intersection.



Map 6: Bear Creek Road and SR-37/76 intersection.
Source: Google Maps

The Cook County High School is in a rural location that few, if any, students can easily access by walking or bicycling. The Cook County Comprehensive Plan contains a Land Use Element with character areas to guide future development, including a vision for keeping public/institutional uses conveniently accessible. Access to the multimodal transportation network should be considered in future school siting decisions.

Due to the number of incidents involving school buses that were at least partly attributable to driver action, it is recommended that driver training practices should be reviewed. Due to the 3 incidents that ended with school buses in ditches, it is recommended that bus routes and turnaround points should be reviewed for safety.