



STRENGTHENING AND GROWING SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Transportation Bill Reauthorization Recommendations

Background

The federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program was first created in August 2005 through Section 1404 of SAFETEA-LU, and authorized at \$612 million in funding over five years, through September 2009. Congress has extended the program at \$183 million per year starting in FY2010 until a long-term transportation reauthorization is complete. Already over 7000 elementary and middle schools around the country are benefiting from millions of dollars made available through SRTS, which are awarded through each state's Department of Transportation.

The purpose of this funding is to allow and encourage more children to safely walk and bicycle to school. The bulk of these grants allow schools and communities to retrofit and build roads, sidewalks, bike lanes and bikeways to allow children to more safely walk and bicycle to school. A smaller percentage of funding (10 to 30%) supports non-infrastructure activities, including walking and bicycling safety education, driver awareness campaigns, more robust enforcement of speed limits and traffic safety rules, promotional events to encourage more children to walk and bicycle, and more. By improving the safety and prevalence of walking and bicycling to and from school, children and their communities benefit from reduced traffic congestion, better air quality, and healthier lifestyles.

Congress wisely required each state Department of Transportation to appoint a full-time Safe Routes to School coordinator to administer the funds, created a Safe Routes to School Clearinghouse to disseminate best practices and provide technical assistance and support to state agencies and local projects, and established a Task Force to develop strategies to advance SRTS nationwide.

Reauthorization Recommendations

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership (SRTSNP) is extremely pleased with the impact that the SRTS program is having around the country. In a very short period of time, the Federal Highway Administration issued guidance to the states to help them establish their program guidelines and processes. Three years after the law was originally passed, all states now have coordinators in place and all have issued at least one round of application guidelines. Hundreds of grants have already been awarded, totaling over \$200 million and benefiting over 3,000 local schools across the nation.

Safe Routes to School is critical to helping schoolchildren be safe, healthy, and active on their way to and from school. It also helps communities find solutions to traffic congestion, poor air quality, and high rates of childhood obesity and related diseases. **That is why we strongly urge Congress to continue and increase its support for Safe Routes to School in the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU, and make some small improvements to the operation of the SRTS program.**

SRTSNP has spent several months consulting with hundreds of stakeholders in the SRTS movement to develop a series of recommendations for the upcoming reauthorization of the transportation bill. Our

recommendations focus on increasing funding for the program so more schools and communities will benefit, streamlining bureaucratic issues that have delayed local projects, and adding a stronger emphasis to evaluating SRTS programs. Specifically, STRSNP urges Congress to:

- **Increase Funding:** At its current funding level of \$612 million over five years, just 6% of schools around the country can benefit from SRTS funding. And, even in these 6% of schools, they are receiving funding for only a small portion of the needed upgrades and activities to truly make them safe for student pedestrians and cyclists. We recommend Congress provide increased funding for SRTS. The bulk of this funding would be awarded to the states by formula, but 20% would be reserved for those states that provide matching funds, thereby increasing the reach of federal dollars.
- **Reduce Overhead and Delays:** Ensure effective use of federal dollars and avoid unnecessary delays in local project implementation by requiring the Federal Highway Administration and states to streamline the process and ease administrative burdens posed by title 23 and the Common Rule guidelines, while retaining protections for labor and the environment. Currently, even small projects are subject to the same rules and regulations as multi-million dollar highway projects, posing challenges for cities, schools, and nonprofits that implement these projects.
- **Support Evaluation and Research:** Add a strong emphasis on research and evaluation. We recommend Congress require regular and reliable data collection that will allow for the evaluation of the impact of SRTS at the local, state, and national level. The Federal Highway Administration strongly encourages states to evaluate their projects, but does not require it.
- **Build it Right:** Ensure that new roads and schools are built right the first time, with attention to the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists. We recommend that Congress require an intergovernmental working group with representatives from relevant federal and state agencies and other stakeholders to issue recommendations on siting schools in the neighborhoods they serve. We also recommend that Congress require state Departments of Transportation and local planning authorities adopt “complete streets” policies to consider the needs of all users—whether walking, bicycling, taking public transportation, or driving—in all transportation projects. This will reduce the number of schools that need SRTS funding in future years to retrofit existing roads and paths.

For more information on these recommendations, including a more detailed legislative proposal, please contact Margo Pedroso, Policy Manager, with Safe Routes to School National Partnership, at margo@saferoutespartnership.org or 301-292-1043.

About the Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Launched in August 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of hundreds of organizations, government agencies and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding, and provide educational materials to agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership’s mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States.

www.saferoutespartnership.org