



Mississippi Safe Routes to School State Network Action Plan

The [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#) (National Partnership) is a fast growing network of more than 500 organizations, government agencies and professional groups. Our mission is to advocate for safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's students and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

The Mississippi Safe Routes to School state network (Mississippi network) supports the National Partnership's work and is tasked with:

1. Changing policy and built environment infrastructure investments to support increases in physical activity for children, especially on the route to school.
2. Implementing Complete Streets/street-scale improvements.
3. Fostering joint use policies.
4. Increasing the capacity for data collection and evaluation.
5. Building the capacity for leadership.
6. Advancing social equity.
7. Assuring sustainability.

Funding for the Mississippi network comes primarily from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (statewide work through 2014). We are grateful for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's generous support. The Mississippi team is comprised of:

- [Jay Thompson](#), Mississippi Advocacy Organizer
- [Kristine Kessel](#) Network Director

The Plan

The Mississippi state network has been in existence since spring 2009. In early 2012, a full time Mississippi advocacy organizer position was added, thereby expanding the National Partnership's reach throughout Mississippi. This Mississippi Safe Routes to School State Network Action Plan (Mississippi Action Plan) is intended to guide the National Partnership's Mississippi staff, to share our goals and objectives with external partners, and to facilitate collaboration and mutual support of our agreed-upon targeted efforts to develop equitable, walkable and bikeable communities and access to schools in Mississippi.

Partners

Implementation of the Mississippi Action Plan requires the coordination of partners at local, county, regional and state levels to ensure the coordinated implementation of our policy goals. The Mississippi network is grateful for the leadership and efforts of many individuals and organizations who participate in monthly meetings, action teams and more. The success of the network rests on successful collaborative efforts.

National Partnership's 2011-2015 Strategic Plan

[The National Partnership's Strategic Plan](#) guides the national efforts of the National Partnership and was crafted after much public outreach and careful analysis of what is need to support and lead the overall Safe Routes to School movement. The five-year plan prioritizes five strategic focus areas, these are:

1. Opening Minds through Research and Communication
2. Changing Policies and Infrastructure
3. Building Capacity for Leadership
4. Advancing Social Equity
5. Assuring Sustainability

These five national strategic focus areas guide and shape the Mississippi team's efforts in order to create a comprehensive strategy infused at all staffing levels - these are the goals of all National Partnership staff.

For work in Mississippi, essential tasks for each of the five focus areas comprise our Mississippi Action Plan.

1. Opening Minds through Research and Communications

The Mississippi state network seeks to continuously educate our partners and the public about the need for and the benefits of Safe Routes to School. This is done by highlighting cutting edge research and best practices from around the country. We seek to share the stories of our partners and Safe Routes to School practitioners with a wide variety of stakeholders through social media, conference calls, journal and newspaper articles, presentations and meetings. The Mississippi network will focus on these priorities:

A. Research

Using research to educate our partners allows the National Partnership to build a solid empirical argument for the need and benefit of Safe Routes to School. Research augments our communication efforts by providing key facts to support our goals. In Mississippi we will:

- i. Identify additional research/fact needs for policy advancement and work with partners to implement research
- ii. Share information and research via email, e-news, websites and other communication forums.

- iii. Learn how [Mississippi Department of Transportation](#) (MDOT) research projects get funded and partner with MDOT, universities and to explore opportunities for research and data collection.

B. **Communications**

The Mississippi state network uses a wide variety of media to connect with our partners. Media is key to sharing best practices, educating partners of strategic opportunities, and creating consensus. Our communications efforts also serve as a medium to bring to stories of inequity and opportunities for transportation investments to improve conditions for underserved communities. In Mississippi, we will:

- i. Routinely update the [Mississippi state page](#) with current information
- ii. Develop the Mississippi state site (microsite) with blogs, calendar listings, best practices and more.
- iii. Connect the [National Partnership's website](#), the [Mississippi state page](#), and the Mississippi state site (when developed).
- iv. Review and update current statewide media list
- v. Cultivate partnerships with statewide and regional media contacts to advance news and research coverage.
- vi. Capitalize on opportunities for media coverage (locally and statewide) through these expanded relationships with media contacts and by continuing to build leadership capacity with partners with focused messages on funding and call for project opportunities as well as why Safe Routes to School efforts and investments matter and the benefits they bring throughout Mississippi communities.
- vii. Foster peer exchange /learning (statewide).
- viii. Incorporate rural/urban/suburban models into communications.

2. **Changing Policy and Infrastructure**

The Mississippi state network will focus its efforts on: (A) leveraging funds for Safe Routes to School; (B) promoting Complete Streets/street-scale improvements; (C) capitalizing and promoting shared (or joint) use agreements for community-based schools; and (D) data/evaluation for these three main policy areas. Addressing the needs of lower-income communities shall be infused in each of these policy areas. The specific aspects of the National Partnership's work are as follows:

A. **Leveraging Funds**

- i. **Background:** Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and safety programs have historically been underfunded across the United States and in Mississippi. As a result, most communities lack safe bicycle networks and connected sidewalks and children do not receive the safety education they need. The National Partnership seeks to increase government funding for bicycling and walking and works to ensure that these funds are spent efficiently and in a timely manner. A key focus area for the National Partnership is the obligation of federal Safe Routes to School grants which provide funding for infrastructure improvements and educational programs.
- ii. **Goals:** It is the National Partnership's number one priority to work with MDOT towards vastly improving award, obligation and encumbrance rates of the federal Safe Routes to School grants. It is critical to see Safe Routes to School funds, once awarded, implemented in a timely manner (obligation rates). It is also imperative that lower-income communities and schools are served through Safe Routes to School grants, and that this progress is measured. It is also critical that lower-income communities and schools are served through Safe Routes to School grants, and that this progress is measured.
 - 1. **Regional:** In addition to ensuring that SRTS, and TE projects are obligated, the National Partnership works to increase overall funding levels for bicycling and walking by working with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Mississippi Transportation Commissions (MTCs) to ensure that cities and counties have the funding necessary to implement complete street/street-scale improvement projects.
 - a. **Local Area:** The Mississippi network is working to continue the efforts of creating awareness of complete street initiatives around the state. Although the state does not currently have policy this gives us a goal to work toward. We are reaching out to MPOs for desired language they would like to see in a state policy.
 - b. **Delta Region:** The Mississippi network currently has three major cities that have adopted Complete Street initiatives. We will continue to network with and join forces with the powers that be to adopt the same strategy throughout the state. To achieve this goal, the network is collaborating to identify and connect common relationships.
- iii. **Tactics (Obligation):** To ensure SRTS grants are awarded, obligated and implemented in a timely manner, the National Partnership will work closely with MDOT and other network members to:
 - a. Convene Action Team network meetings every 4-6 weeks or as necessary to discuss status and challenges with current status of obligation and implementation of federal SRTS funds.

- b. Work to get the existing Safe Routes to School and Transportation Enhancement funding spent (funds from SAFETEA-LU are still available).
 - c. Work with MDOT managers and the MDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator to determine obligation rates.
 - d. Partner with local cities and counties that have grants to help them move through the process.
 - e. Determine roadblocks to successful implementation, work with appropriate entities to address the roadblocks and highlight success stories.
 - f. Engage nontraditional partners to encourage the success of non-infrastructure grants (School Districts, etc.).
 - g. Work with Mississippi network and equity partners on outreach to lower-income communities to help them to apply for Safe Routes to School grants, to ensure that help is provided to implement grants, and to measure how the state is serving our most vulnerable populations.
 - a. The Mississippi advocacy organizer will actively participate in the Safe Routes to School grants process as reviewer or commenter. Additionally, the Mississippi advocacy organizer will encourage MDOT to focus grants to enhance lower-income communities and equity issues.
 - h. Local jurisdictions with remaining grants and obligations will be provided assistance from the Mississippi advocacy organizer and MDOT to spend down their obligations.
- iv. Tactics (Leveraging Funding): To ensure that equitable funding levels are provided for bicycling and walking, the National Partnership will work with state and regional partners to influence policy change and implement existing policies as follows:
- a. In the context of the new federal transportation bill—Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)--work with partners to maximize bicycling, walking and Safe Routes to School investments, both under MAP-21's new Transportation Alternative program and the large core transportation and safety funds. Specifically, work with state partners to:
 - Fully fund: Do not transfer any funds away from Transportation Alternatives or opt-out of the Recreational Trails program.

- Fully staff: Preserve or increase staff support for Transportation Alternatives by maintaining state Safe Routes to School coordinators and bike/ped coordinators.
 - Fully implement: Promptly award Transportation Alternatives grants with participation of relevant stakeholders.
- b. Work with state partners to fully maximize the state’s investments in safe, accessible streets: utilize all MAP-21 funding programs to include biking and walking in all transportation projects.
 - c. Work with state partners to fully spend the remaining funds from the Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School, and Recreational Trails programs.
 - d. Work in collaborations with state partners and stakeholders to set recommended performance criteria that favor bicycle and pedestrian projects, and ensure that locals were well poised to propose good projects and work with MPOs and all key decision makers.
 - e. Work with partners to identify existing and future funding sources that can be used for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Where necessary and appropriate, advocate shifting funding priorities from other modes.
 - f. Develop messaging to current and new partners on the need for more activity transportation dollars.
 - g. Through the use of data-driven analysis, provide elected leaders, transportation planners and other partners compelling arguments and examples that illustrate the benefits of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
 - h. Support the adoption and implementation of Complete Streets/street-scale improvement policies that use highway maintenance dollars to create Complete Streets when road repairs and reconstruction is undertaken.
- v. Leads: National Partnership, MDOT, and other partners across the state.
 - a. State Focus: Working with MDOT, MDOT Divisional Managers and implementing partners
 - b. Regional Focus (Delta Region or Northern Mississippi): Working with MPOs and county transportation authorities.

B. Complete Streets/Street-Scale Improvements

- i. **Background:** Complete Streets policies seek to ensure that all transportation projects are safe for all users. Throughout Mississippi, MPOs, counties and local jurisdictions have, or are in the process of implementing, Complete Streets policies. At the state level MDOT, in its role as stewards of the transportation infrastructure, is committed to: (a) Identifying and updating existing transportation plans , (b) continuing to cultivate and embrace its role as a planning partner with the four MPOs and (c) continue involvement on air quality initiatives to stay prepared for potential air-related environmental quality issues that may lie ahead.
- ii. **Goals:** To support an increase in Complete Streets policies statewide, and improvements to design guidelines. The National Partnership will support implementation of Complete Streets efforts across Mississippi and draw the link between Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School. This is achieved by expanding conversations and practices of transportation planning to include the needs of all users in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of transportation projects.
- iii. **Tactics:** The Mississippi network uses multiple strategies for the implementation of Complete Streets policies. The Mississippi network will support and join the efforts of the American Heart Association, the MS State Department of Health, Bike Walk MS to encourage local jurisdictions to hold public meetings. We anticipate identifying elements of a good and acceptable Complete Street policy.
 - a. Develop a baseline list of Complete Streets policies, and identify key role players and lead staff in the development of the policy. From this baseline list, we will also review to identify polices comparative to the needs of Mississippi.
 - b. Convene regular statewide Action Team meetings every 4-6 weeks to discuss the status and challenges of current of Complete Streets policies, and to develop and implement a plan to expand Complete Streets policies throughout the state.
 - c. Encourage the implementation of new Complete Street policies by educating partners and transportation agencies about the benefits of Complete Streets
 - d. Identify the challenges faced by jurisdictions currently implementing policies to determine successful strategies and systemic policy obstacles.
 - e. Track the implementation of Complete Streets Policies across the state
 - f. Analyze how Complete Streets are being implemented in lower-income communities and what types of technical assistance are needed to achieve improved infrastructure. Work with partners to prioritize implementation on Complete Streets in lower-income communities.

Leads: National Partnership, Disability Rights of MS, American Heart Association, Bike Walk MS, MDOT and Mississippi Transportation Commission and partners across the state.

C. Joint (Shared) Use and Community Based Schools

- i. Background: Shared use--or joint use--is a way to increase opportunities for children and adults to be more physically active. It refers to two or more entities (usually a school and a city or private organization) sharing indoor and outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields and playgrounds. The concept behind joint use is that share resources keep costs down and increases access for the health and well-being of communities. Schools in lower-income urban areas may not have space for school fields and may lack urban parks, thus making it important to find ways to create safe places for children to engage in healthy physical activity after and during school hours. School-site selection also becomes critical to ensure school grounds are within walking distance to students, families and public transportation options.
- ii. Goals: To increase the number of joint use policies in the state and the total space available to communities to have safe places to play and engage in physical activity by creating a statewide policy environment that facilitates joint use and community based schools, and encouraging the adoption of local joint use agreements and school policies at the school district level.
- iii. Tactics: The State network uses multiple strategies for joint (shared) use.
 - a. Develop a baseline list of joint use agreement policies, including copies of those policies, and who was the staff lead in the development of the policy. From this baseline list, we aim to continue with the momentum the Governor has created in making joint use agreements more accessible and increase by 10 percent the number of joint use policies in the state by December 2014.
 - b. Convene regular Mississippi network meetings every 6 weeks or as needed, working closely with the Joint Use Task Force. Encourage the implementation of new joint use agreements and policies by sharing best practices, and model tools and agreements, such as those published by the ChangeLab Solutions (formerly NPLAN), specifically targeting lower-income schools and communities as the highest priority
 - c. Work with the Mississippi Department of Education to publish joint use guidance, either as stand-alone documents, or by including guidance into any updated policy manuals.
 - d. Determine if joint use can be folded into state wide planning and a sustainable community strategy at the state level.

- e. Work with officials and partners to determine opportunities to expand joint use and community based schools in lower-income communities.
- iv. Leads: National Partnership, American Heart Association, MS Dept. of Health, ChangeLab Solutions (formerly NPLAN), Mississippi Department of Education and the state and local PTAs.

D. Data Collection and Evaluation

- i. Background: Our transportation strategies and investments must be data driven, especially in regards to safety and health for all community members. In addition, many decisions on government funding are predicated upon evaluation and modeling, which requires good data and the ability to project outcomes based on improvements in infrastructure. A multi-disciplinary perspective needs to inform this framework – with input from safety, transportation, health, air quality, technology, academic and research and more. As funding becomes increasingly based on performance outcomes, now more than ever it is critical that Mississippi develop standards to ensure competitiveness and its ability to measure and forecast programmatic success and challenges in the field of walking and bicycling. Addressing the needs of lower-income communities shall be infused in each goals and tasks.
- ii. Goals: Foster discussions on how to best engage the state and other key partners in setting frameworks for active transportation and Safe Routes to School data collection, modeling and evaluation, and make changes to create models for data collection, modeling and evaluation. Ensure widespread distribution and the standardization of data and tools currently available for use by local jurisdictions and MPOs.
- iii. Tactics: The Mississippi network uses multiple strategies for data collection and evaluation.
 - a. Partner with MDOT, MPO's, Mississippi State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State Department of Health, and other key entities and capitalize on existing and future studies on Safe Routes to School program and policy impacts.
 - b. Track and create a summary of joint/shared use policies, Complete Street/street scale improvement policies and infrastructure improvements, such as sidewalks, multi-use paths and bike lanes.
 - c. Collaborate with the state's three MPOs to maximize on opportunities for data collection, evaluation and modeling, and seek ways to partner with health agencies and universities to analyze data and project cost /benefits.
 - d. Work with network partners on the development of the activity based model to ensure optimal projections for bicycle and pedestrian activity.

- iv. Leads: National Partnership, MDOT, Departments of Public Health, MPOs, county transportation authorities and partners across the state.

3. Building the Capacity for Leadership

A. Background

The National Partnership's Mississippi staff collaborates with and relies on partners to achieve policy change. By fostering leadership with our partners, we are able to mobilize diverse coalitions that articulate the benefits of Safe Routes to School, an improved built environment, active transportation and equity from a variety of viewpoints. In addition, the development of leadership capacity in our partners expands the reach of our efforts by creating more local champions and ensures the sustainability of our efforts and Safe Routes to School goals.

B. Goals

The National Partnership creates networks of local elected officials, non-profit organizations, health professionals, community members and a wide variety of stakeholders through education and encouragement, and builds the capacity for leaders within these groups to champion the policy efforts listed above.

C. Tactics

By educating our partners on the importance of walking and bicycling as tools for community change, we encourage them to bring their own personal experiences and expertise to the table regarding the types of policy goals and infrastructure investments are necessary for creating equitable, walkable and bikeable communities. The following tactics are being used in Mississippi to grow our network and increase the capacity for leadership amongst our partners at the state level:

- i. Track our partners by maintaining an online database of contacts and affiliates for each region of the state that we work in.
- ii. Educate our partners through workshops, network calls and individual communications to build expertise and allow stakeholders to better understand the transportation planning process. Key topic areas include:
 - a. Award and Obligation (leveraging funding) and associated SAFETEA-LU and MAP-21 processes
 - b. Complete Streets/Street-scale Improvements
 - c. Safe Routes to School programs
 - d. Health impact assessments
 - e. Joint Use/School Siting policies
 - f. Data collection

- g. Serving lower-income communities
- iii. Develop county leaders, particularly in the MPOs and county transportation authorities, in each of the following areas:
 - a. Elected officials
 - b. Agency staff leadership
 - c. School districts
 - d. Health
 - e. Transportation
 - f. Equity groups
 - g. Youth engagement
 - h. Environmental groups
 - i. Mississippi Municipal League (Chip Johnson, President)

D. Leads

National Partnership, local jurisdictions tasks forces and action teams, Departments of Public Health, Public Works, Planning and Recreation Departments, city staff/ MPO/ Mississippi Transportation Commission/ Transportation Authority staff and positions dedicated to healthy communities or active transportation programming

4. Advancing Social Equity

A. Background

Quality transportation options are a lifeline to opportunity. Transportation gets people to work, to school, to the grocery store, and to the doctor’s office. And while billions of public dollars are invested in our nation’s transportation system each year, studies are showing that a disproportionate amount of burden and injury from these investment choices are falling on people living in lower-income communities. In addition, lower-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and other health conditions that could be improved by increasing options for physical activity and active transportation.

B. Goals

Recognizing serious hurdles in addressing not only transportation-related concerns, but also personal safety and public health concerns, the Safe Routes to School Mississippi network supports efforts that address the disparity between population groups.

C. **Tactics**

- i. Establish strong working relationships with city and community-based organizations and collaborate with state and national equity groups in Mississippi.
- ii. Inventory the barriers and obstacles for lower-income and rural communities and schools implementing Safe Routes to School programs, Complete Streets and joint-use agreements, and develop strategies and partners to overcome these hurdles.
- iii. Encourage communities to implement crime prevention strategies through design landscaping techniques. These techniques contend that law enforcement officers, architects, city planners, landscape and interior designers, and resident volunteers can create a climate of safety in a community right from the start by striving to design a physical environment that positively influences human behavior.
- iv. Work to ensure that healthy and environmental justice metrics are included into transportation planning and investment allocations, and ensure that grants to lower-income communities and schools are tracked for all Safe Routes to School awards.
- v. Work to ensure that engineering assistance is available for lower-income communities and by strengthening partnerships with MDOT, City Engineers, and equity groups at the local and regional levels. Focus outreach and technical assistance activities at low-income communities in the regions.
- vi. Request regional, county, cities, and local jurisdictions develop specific and measurable equity measures and policies at a neighborhood level, including assessments of injury and collision data, and the adoption of affordable housings, gentrification and accident and injury data.

D. **Leads**

National Partnership, non-profit health organizations such as American Heart Association, Office of Preventive Health, Fayette Community Service Organization, Departments of Public Health, Hospitals and Community Clinics, Community Health Organizers, such as Community Health Coalition and Mississippi Municipal League.

5. **Assuring Sustainability**

A. **Background**

The long-term viability of Safe Routes to School is dependent on the movement's ability to leverage additional funds, build capacity, ensure collaboration among leaders in the field and integrate Safe Routes to School within the plans and goals of a wide range of partners and government agencies.

B. Goals

Continue to grow support for Safe Routes to School so that funding diversifies beyond federal and state resources and strengthens and supports public agencies and community based organizations throughout the state who are implementing Safe Routes to School efforts. Another goal is to sustain our Mississippi Safe Routes to School advocacy efforts after current grants expire.

C. Tactics

- i. Update funders and elected officials on the progress, the benefits and the needs to continue to support Safe Routes to School.
- ii. Publicize successes to continue to expand the network of support and partners for Safe Routes to School beyond the traditional partners.
- iii. Publicize the success and best practices of Safe Routes to School efforts throughout the state in order to continue to foster peer to peer learning and also to continue to demonstrate and champion the added value of all Safe Routes to School efforts and leaders in order to support future funds for efforts.
- iv. Continue to foster and strengthen relationships between transportation agencies and health partners.
- v. Market National Partnership technical assistance services as a strategy to help communities develop a successful Safe Routes to School program and situate themselves for leveraging additional funds.
- vi. Identify new sources of grant funds
- vii. Work with the media to publicize successes and how Safe Routes to School touches many policy goals.

D. Leads

National Partnership, National Partnership, American Heart Association, Mississippi State Department of Health, city of Jackson, MS, Jackson City Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Greater Jackson, Neel-Schaffer, Inc., Blue Cross Blue Shield, Mississippi Transportation Commission

Appendices

- Appendix A. Network Member List (attached)

Appendix A—Network Member List

[Mississippi State Department of Health](#)

[Mississippi Department of Public Safety](#)

[Mississippi Department of Education](#)

[Fayette Community Service Organization](#)

[Mississippi Department of Transportation](#)

[City of Hernando](#)

[Blue Cross Blue Shield](#)

[Representative Toby Barker](#)

[Starkville in Motion](#)

[City of Madison](#)

[City of Greenwood](#)

[University of Southern Mississippi/Office of Sustainability](#)

[Neel-Schaffer, Inc.](#)

[City of Ridgeland](#)

[City of Tupelo](#)

[Central MS Planning and Development District](#)

[Action for Healthy Kids](#)

[Safe Kids MS](#)