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North Carolina Safe Routes Action Plan

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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 North Carolina state and regional networks support the National Partnership's work and are 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 North Carolina Team comes primarily from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (statewide work) and Kaiser Permanente (regional work). We are grateful for our funders' generous support. The North Carolina Team is comprised of :

- [Kris Kessel](#) Network Director Safe Routes to School National Partnership
- [Terry Lansdell](#) North Carolina Advocacy Organizer

The Plan

The North Carolina State Network has been in existence since January 2012. In early 2012, the first new full time staff position was added in March, thereby significantly expanding the National Partnership's reach throughout North Carolina. This plan is intended to guide the National Partnership's North Carolina Advocacy Organizer, to share our goals and objectives with external partners, and to facilitate

collaboration and mutual support of our partners' efforts to support the creation of walkable and bikeable communities and access to schools in North Carolina.

Partners

Implementation of the North Carolina State Action Plan requires the coordination of partners at local, county, regional and state levels to ensure the coordinated implementation of our policy goals. The North Carolina State 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](#) was crafted after much public outreach and careful analysis of supporting 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 North Carolina Advocacy Organizer'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 North Carolina, essential State and Regional Network tasks for each of the five focus areas comprise our North Carolina Action Plan.

1. Opening Minds through Research and Communications

A. Research

- i. Identify additional research/fact needs for policy advancement and work with partners to get the research completed.
- ii. Publish e-news and research e-news templates (state and regional).
- iii. Learn how North Carolina DOT research projects get funded and partner with Universities to explore ways to collect data that is needed.

B. Communications

- i. Strengthen THE MICROSITE(state and regional) and social media with blogs, calendar listings, best practices, and more

- ii. Connect the National Partnership’s website and the North Carolina microsite and social media sites.
- iii. Review and update current statewide media list.
- iv. Cultivate partnerships with statewide and regional media contacts to advance news and research coverage.
- v. Capitalize on opportunities for media coverage and OpEds (state and regional) 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 North Carolina communities.
- vi. Foster peer exchange /learning (state and regional).
- vii. Incorporate rural/urban/suburban models into communications.

2. Changing Policy and Infrastructure

The North Carolina State Network will focus its efforts on three main policy areas and associated data collection and evaluation, specifically: (A) leveraging funds for Safe Routes to School; (B) promoting Complete Streets/street-scale improvements; (C) capitalizing and promoting shared (or joint) use 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 North Carolina. 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 state and 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 NCDOT towards vastly improving award, obligation and encumbrance rates of the state and 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.
 - 1. Regional: In addition to ensuring that SRTS projects are obligated, the National Partnership works to increase overall funding levels for bicycling and walking by working with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) to

- ensure that cities and counties have the funding necessary to implement complete street/street-scale improvement projects.
2. Within NCDOT: promote and support the Divisional progress and management of SRTS projects both in the rolling cycle and the scheduled call for applications. Promote and support efforts to create new SRTS positions in all ten Department of Health and Human Services regions across the state through 2015.
 3. At the state level: Continue to review policies related to Complete Streets, identify pilot projects for implementation of final guidelines, participate and encourage planning, regional, engineering and divisional training and reporting that will complete 50% of the Complete Streets training module in 2013.
- iii. Tactics (Obligation): To ensure SRTS grants are awarded, obligated and implemented in a timely manner, the National Partnership will work closely with [NCDOT](#) and the [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#) to:
- a. Convene State Network meetings every 4-6 weeks to discuss status and challenges with current status of obligation and implementation of state and federal funds.
 - b. Work with NCDOT and Divisional Managers to determine to get the existing \$19 million Safe Routes to School and Transportation Enhancements funding spent (funds from SAFETEA-LU are still available).
 - c. Partner with local cities and counties that have grants to help them move through the process.
 - d. Determine roadblocks to successful implementation and highlight success stories.
 - e. Engage nontraditional partners to encourage the success of non-infrastructure grants (School Districts, Public Health Agency, etc.).
 - f. Work with State Network and equity partners on outreach to lower-income and rural 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.
 - g. The North Carolina Advocacy Organizer will actively participate in the SRTS Grants, as reviewers or commenters. Additionally, the North Carolina Advocacy Organizer will encourage NCDOT to focus grants to enhance lower-income communities and equity issues.
 - h. Local jurisdictions with remaining grants and obligations will be provided technical assistance from the North Carolina Advocacy Organizer and NCDOT to spend down their obligations.

- vii. 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 Alternatives program and the larger 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 remaining funds from the Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School and Recreational Trails programs.
 - d. Work in collaboration with state partners and stakeholders to set recommended performance criteria that favor bicycle and pedestrian projects, and ensure that locals are well poised to propose good projects and work with MPO's 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, advocate shifting funding priorities from other modes as well as, fully account for all funds being spent now on bicycle and pedestrian projects.
 - f. Develop messaging to current and new partners on the need for more active 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 and the continued advancement of Safe Routes to School.
 - h. Support the adoption and implementation of Complete Street/street-scale improvement policies that use highway maintenance dollars to create Complete Streets when bridge work and design, road repairs and reconstruction is undertaken.

- viii. Leads: National Partnership, NCDOT, National Center for Safe Routes to School, and implementing agencies and partners across the state.
 - a. State Focus: Working with NCDOT, NCDOT Divisional Managers, Department of Health and Human Services and implementing partners
 - b. Regional Focus (Mountains, Piedmont and Coast): Working with MPOs and CTCs.

B. Complete Streets/Street-Scale Improvements

- i. Background: Complete Streets policies seek to ensure that all transportation projects are safe for all users. Throughout North Carolina, many regions' MPOs, counties and local jurisdictions have, or are in the process of implementing, Complete Streets policies. At the state level NCDOT, in its role as stewards over the over 80,000 miles of transportation infrastructure, is committed to: providing an efficient multi-modal transportation network, caring for the built environments and recognizing transportation improvements contribution to quality of life and economic development objectives and working in partnership to plan, fund, design, construct, and manage complete street networks that sustain mobility while accommodating walking, biking, and transit opportunities safely.
- ii. Goals: To support an increase in Complete Streets policy, design, training statewide. The National Partnership will support implementation of Complete Streets efforts of NCDOT across North Carolina 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 regardless of age, income and/or abilities for children, families and community members in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of transportation improvement projects.
- iii. Tactics: The State Network uses multiple strategies for the implementation of Complete Streets policies.
 - a. Convene regular State Network 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.
 - b. Work with the NCDOT to fully maximize the state's investment in safe, accessible streets by utilizing all MAP-21 funding programs, to include biking and walking in all transportation projects. Support NCDOT's efforts to update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Design Guidelines.
 - c. Encourage the implementation of new Complete Streets policies by educating partners, engineers, planners and transportation agencies about the benefits of Complete Streets.
 - d. Share best practices at the city, county, MPO and RPO levels.

- e. Identify the challenges faced by jurisdictions currently implementing policies to determine successful strategies and systemic policy obstacles.
 - f. Track the implementation of Complete Streets training across the state.
 - g. Analyze how Complete Streets is 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.
- iv. Leads: National Partnership, Advocacy Groups, Planners and partners across the state.

C. 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 agreements 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 at the time of design and school policies at the school district level.
- iii. Tactics: The State Network uses multiple strategies for shared use.
 - a. Convene regular State Network meetings every 6 weeks, working closely with the Joint Use Task Force and other partners involved in promoting and documenting joint use agreements. 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 Change Lab Solutions (Formerly known as NPLAN), specifically targeting lower-income schools and communities as the highest priority.
 - b. Work with the North Carolina Department of Education to publish joint use and school siting guidance, either as stand-alone documents, or by including guidance into any updated policy manuals.
 - c. Determine if joint use can be folded into regional planning and sustainable community's strategies at the regional level.
 - d. Work with officials and partners to determine opportunities to expand joint use and open community based schools for neighborhood as well as existing enrollment use.
- iv. Leads: National Partnership, Prevention Institute, NPLAN, North Carolina Department of Education.

D. Data Collection and Evaluation

- i. Background: There exists an important need to ensure that our transportation strategies and investments are 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, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, technology, academic and research and more. As funding becomes increasingly based on performance outcomes, now more than ever it is critical that North Carolina 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 State Network uses multiple strategies for data collection and evaluation.
 - a. Partner with the National Center for Safe Routes to schools and capitalize on existing and future studies validating program and policy impacts.
 - b. Create a “Regional Score Card” for the state to measure active transportation policies, bikeability and walkability orientation of regions and cities, and potential for development. Metrics in scorecard will include: cities that are in progress or implemented Complete Streets, Safe Routes to School programs and plans, surveys on bicycle and pedestrian, first and last mile connection to public transportation, active transportation friendly policies within general, bicycle and pedestrian plan updates, healthy city elements (optional), and bicycle parking.
 - c. Prepare a summary of current state and regional data collection efforts on bicyclists and pedestrians, such as bicycle and pedestrian counts, Health Impact Assessments, intersection surveys, joint use agreements and active transportation planning.
 - d. Collaborate with the MPOs to maximize on opportunities for data collection and evaluation, and seek ways to partner with health agencies and universities to analyze data and project cost /benefits.
- iv. Leads: National Partnership, NCDOT, Departments of Public Health, MPOs and CTCs and partners across the state.

3. Building the Capacity for Leadership

A. Background

The National Partnership’s North Carolina Advocacy Organizer 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 used to grow our network and increase the capacity for leadership amongst our partners, both at the state and regional levels:

- i. Track our partners by maintaining an online database of contacts and affiliates for each region that we work in.
- ii. Educate our partners through workshops, network calls and individual communications builds expertise and allows stakeholders to better understand the transportation planning process. Key topic areas include:
 - a. Transportation finance
 - b. Complete Streets/Street-scale Improvements
 - c. Safe Routes to School awards and obligation process
 - d. Health impact assessments
 - e. Joint Use/School Siting policies
 - f. Data collection
- iii. Develop county leaders, particularly in the MPOs and CTCs, in each of the following areas:
 - a. Elected officials
 - b. Agency staff leadership
 - c. Health
 - d. Transportation
 - e. School districts
 - f. Equity groups
 - g. Youth engagement

D. Leads

National Partnership, local jurisdictions tasks forces and action teams, Departments of Public Health, Public Works, Planning and Recreation Departments, city staff/MPO/County 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.

B. Goals

Recognizing serious hurdles in addressing not only transportation-related concerns, but also personal safety concerns, the Safe Routes to School North Carolina Network supports efforts that address the disparity between population groups.

C. Tactics

- i. Establish strong working relationships with city, health and community-based organizations, collaborate with state and national equity groups in North Carolina.
- 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 by 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. Include health and environmental justice metrics 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. Ensure that engineering assistance is available for lower-income communities and by strengthening partnerships with NCDOT and equity groups at the state and regional levels. *Focus outreach and technical assistance activities at low-income communities in the regions.*
- vi. Request regional, county, cities, and local jurisdictions to develop specific and measurable equity measures at a neighborhood level, including affordable housing, gentrification, and accident and injury data.

- vii. Utilize Childhood Obesity GIS tool from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to aide all partners in identifying low income metrics for prioritization of projects.

D. Leads

National Partnership, non-profit health organizations such as American Lung Association, American Heart Association, Departments of Public Health, Hospitals and Community Clinics, Community Health Organizers, North Carolina Prevention Partners.

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 North Carolina 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 successes 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 work 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, partners across the state, relevant city staff, such as Departments of Health, City and County Public Works, City and County Traffic Engineers, and City Manager's Offices.

Appendices (to be provided)

- List of partners.