



Safe Routes to School in Action

Takoma Park, Maryland

Background

Takoma Park, Md., a town of only 2 square miles, has over 17,000 residents and 5,000 students enrolled in local schools. Nearly forty percent of students live within one mile of their school. The Takoma Park Safe Routes to School Program serves seven area schools. Three of them, Takoma Park Elementary (grades PK-2), Piney Branch Elementary (grades 3-5) and Takoma Park Middle School (grades 6-8), are located within a half a mile of one another. The primary obstacle preventing families from choosing walking to school is the lack of sidewalks. In 2007, the City applied for Safe Routes to School funding and received a grant of \$147,000 for infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.

Details

While the Takoma Park Safe Routes to School Program serves seven area schools, the infrastructure projects target students who travel within the city limits to school. By completing a sidewalk improvement project on Grant Avenue, a road connecting students' homes to the three schools, the SRTS program improved safety for student pedestrians ranging in age from early elementary school through 8th grade. Additionally, an intersection renovation project at Maple Avenue and Sligo Avenue reduced the amount of time the students are in the street while crossing and also improved the visibility of pedestrians for drivers.

Safe Routes to School also completed a unique infrastructure improvement project in 2008. Many parents and community members expressed concerns about a trail behind Takoma Park Middle School. Students used the overgrown, eroded and littered trail to walk to school, even though there was evidence of drug and alcohol use in the adjacent

woods. Takoma Park Safe Routes to School, the City of Takoma Park Public Works Department, and Takoma Park Middle School students worked together to make the trail safer for student and community use, providing an additional safe walking route to school.



Making the off-road trail safer for students to use at Takoma Park Middle School.

The Safe Routes to School coordinator's relationship with school administration and the PTAs, community groups, organizations and businesses has increased credibility, improved identity branding and allowed opportunities to promote the goals of Safe Routes. To promote a healthy lifestyle, walking and running clubs are held before and after school and most schools participate in National Walk to School Day. In May of 2009, the SRTS program hosted its first annual 5K run/walk with over 350 participants including students (K-8) and their families and the first Crossing Guard Appreciation Day. One veteran crossing guard was recognized for 37 years of keeping kids safe as they walk to school.

To publicize the program, Takoma Park SRTS produces an annual newsletter for distribution via backpacks to all families and includes an article in the city newsletter each month. A page on the City web site highlights activities and upcoming events.

As a new Safe Routes to School program, Takoma Park has focused on pedestrian education and encouragement to build program awareness and safe practices for teachers, students and their families. SRTS Program Coordinator Lucy Neher believes, "without awareness and education, you lose the safe routes message of safety, health benefits and protecting the environment. Education allows us to paint the whole SRTS picture." And the Takoma Park SRTS program has done just that!

What's Next

Education and encouragement have built a solid foundation for the Takoma Park SRTS program to grow. Over the past two years the SRTS program has worked hard to create enthusiasm and name recognition. Currently the City has contracted with Toole Design Group to complete a missing sidewalk study that will identify priorities for future sidewalk installation projects. Takoma Park has been granted \$127,800 in 2008 and \$129,600 in 2009. The Takoma Park Safe Routes to School Program will continue to address the needs of the community by focusing on infrastructure, comprehensive programming and direct out reach. In 2009, the spirit is spreading.

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http://www.takomaparkmd.gov/safe_routes/index.html