



## Safe Routes to School in Action

*Shelby, Montana*

### Background

Located 45 miles south of the Canadian border, Shelby is a rural community in North Central Montana situated on both sides of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Rail Line and home to over 3,300 residents. The Shelby school complex is located in the northwest corner of the city and can be difficult to walk or bike to, even though approximately 120 of the 285 elementary school students live within one mile of school. The rail line limits main access paths to school to two routes: a narrow viaduct, Coyote Overpass, and sidewalks along narrow streets with fast-moving traffic.

To educate children about safe commuting practices, encourage students to walk and bike to school, and improve the infrastructure of these two routes, the Shelby School District #14 formed a Safe Routes to School Task Force in fall 2007 and charged it with creating a Safe Routes to School Program. Task Force members include representatives from School District #14, the City of Shelby, Toole County Sheriff's Office, Shelby Home and School Parent Organization, and Marias Medical Center. The mission of the Shelby SRTS program is to build program awareness and encourage kids to safely bike and walk to school, and in just 2 years, the program has already demonstrated success.

### Details

Initially, addressing infrastructure improvement was a priority for the Shelby SRTS program. A survey on the walkability and bikability to school was done during Shelby's first International Walk to School Day, prior to receiving federal SRTS funding. Data from the survey identified the priorities of the community as slowing traffic and improving walking routes by improving sidewalks. The Montana DOT awarded the Shelby School District #14 \$150,000 in infrastructure funding from 2007 -2009. Beginning with the projects closest to school and of highest priority, infrastructure funding has supported sidewalk improvements including construction of missing sidewalks and ADA-compliant ramps, and completion of alley aprons. In rural Montana many alleys are not paved. Alley aprons connect the alley to the sidewalk and street in place of loose gravel.



**Shelby has participated in International Walk to School Day for the past three years and in 2008 had its greatest participation yet with more than 150 people, including 120 children.**

A grant of \$10,055 for noninfrastructure projects from 2007-2009 provided Shelby with the resources to grow their SRTS program by hosting International Walk to School Day; implementing Walk'n Wheel Wednesdays, walking school buses, and bike fairs; and distributing a SRTS newsletter. The first step was to spread the word about the SRTS program and encourage participation. School District #14 and the City of Shelby each publish a newsletter in which safety information and program information is included. Mayor Bonderud and Sheriff Mattoon have radio time to relay safety information as well as encourage students and their families to walk or bike to school. The local newspaper also markets the program by including pictures of the students participating in SRTS activities and announcing SRTS events. Additionally, Task Force members attend the Parent Open House at the beginning of each school year to explain the program to parents and hand out surveys. Aside from persistently building program awareness and encouragement, the Shelby SRTS program has successfully engaged the children in walking and bicycling to school.

The Shelby SRTS Program hosts Walk 'n Wheel Wednesdays every Wednesday during the fall and spring. Students join a walking school bus led by the mayor, sheriff, or high school athletes. During the 2008-2009 school year, students who walked or biked to school twice a month received a rubber bracelet and their names went in a drawing for prizes at the end-of-the-year assembly. End of the year prizes included swimming pool passes, Shelby Coyote T-shirts, bike helmets and inexpensive digital cameras. Teacher tallies from the beginning of the school show that Walk n' Wheel Wednesdays averaged approximately 60 students walking with adults from a two-mile radius of school. Walk 'n Wheel Wednesdays and walking school buses have provided students who live farther from school with the opportunity to safely walk or bike to school, instead of driving.



The SRTS Program also offers a Bike Fair to educate area children on bike safety, maintenance, and care of their bikes and helmet use. Helmets are given to every child that participates.

A Shelby student enjoys the Bike Fair on the new bicycle he won in the raffle.

### **What's Next**

In 2009, the Shelby SRTS program would like to increase walking throughout the winter. Students will be able to join a walking group that walks laps in the Elementary School halls. The walking group will participate in a virtual walk across America through Health Enhancement classes. A United States map will be posted in the gym where the children will plot the distances they walk during P.E. and follow their virtual progress across America.

With additional funding, the Shelby SRTS program would like to complete other sidewalks along paths to bus routes and Walk 'n Wheel starting locations. Additionally, to address the problem of drivers speeding along major routes to school, the program would like to purchase digital speed signs to post along the pathways leading to school. Implementing a crossing guard program is one of several safety measures the program hopes to pursue in upcoming years.

### **Contact information:**

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