

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL:

A Primer for Governors and State Agency Leaders



SAFE ROUTES
to School
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



Governors and state agency leaders throughout the country have successfully adopted policies and practices that support and encourage walking and bicycling, and have seen improvements in safety, health, transportation, student educational performance, and the economy. This action brief is designed to provide the governor or state agency leader with an understanding of the benefits of Safe Routes to School and policy opportunities to improve walking and bicycling to school and in daily life.

Introduction to Safe Routes to School

In 1969, almost half of all students walked or bicycled to school, and most lived within a mile of the school they attended. Today, fewer than 1 in 6 students walk or bicycle to school. The decrease in walking and bicycling can have a long term, negative impact on the livability of an area, affecting important issues such as health, education, land use, safety, and the environment. Safe Routes to School, a fast-growing national and international movement to increase physical activity, improve health, reduce traffic congestion, and address air quality by getting more students walking and bicycling to school and in daily life, has been gaining momentum at the local, regional, state and national levels. This momentum accelerated in 2005 with the passage of the federal transportation act SAFETEA-LU (Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users), which dedicated \$1.1 billion to Safe Routes to School and opened the door for innovative Safe Routes to School programs throughout the country. To date, well over

12,000 schools and over 5 million children nationally have benefited from Safe Routes to School projects and programs that work to provide an affordable, accessible and convenient alternative to driving.

In 2012, the passage of a new federal transportation law, [Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century \(MAP-21\)](#), significantly decreased dedicated funds for Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails programs, all now reduced to eligible categories in the new Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Additionally, each state has the flexibility to transfer TAP funds to other uses. Per MAP-21, state departments of transportation now retain 50 percent of TAP funds for use in a competitive grant process that can include funding for important walking and bicycling programs and projects. While this funding stream can be allocated for continued Safe Routes to School projects and programs, governors and state agency leaders can bolster Safe Routes to School by creating or reallocating additional funding streams, enacting advisory coalitions or committees, and adopting supportive policies.

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State Level Policies and Funding

The following strategies are excellent opportunities to boost bicycling and walking and Safe Routes to School as fully funded transportation priorities of the state. These strategies are not intended to be a comprehensive list, but can provide a glimpse into some of the potential for improving the state's transportation systems, funding, and policies:

Strategy: Allocating Funding for a Statewide Safe Routes to School Program

While federal funding is still available for Safe Routes to School through MAP-21, some states have taken the initiative to fund their own stand-alone state Safe Routes to School program. By following the lead of the federal program and investing a relatively small amount

of transportation dollars in walking and bicycling to school projects, these states continue to address the long term issues of safety, traffic congestion and air quality as well as the health needs of their residents.

Case Study: California

In 1999, California was the first state in the country to create a state-funded Safe Routes to School program. Recognizing the benefits of getting more students walking and bicycling to school, California continued to fund these important projects and programs in 2007 by extending the funding indefinitely through their State Highway Account. Evaluation of the impacts of the state funded Safe Routes to School program have shown increases in walking and bicycling ranging from 20-200 percent.

Strategy: Statewide Complete Streets Policy

As states consider allocating funding for Safe Routes to School projects, it is ideal to ensure that future road construction or rehabilitation doesn't hinder walking and bicycling by instituting a statewide [Complete Streets policy](#) and implementing it locally. Complete Streets policies ensure that every project accommodates all modes and users — including automobiles, transit, bicyclists, pedestrians, children, older adults and people with disabilities — when new projects are being built or renovations are being made. Adopting a statewide Complete Streets policy sets the standard for municipalities within the state and ensures that state roads accommodate all users when practical.

Case Study: Colorado

On October 15, 2009 the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) Transportation Commission adopted a [statewide Complete Streets policy](#). The policy is the result of two years of hard work by the state's bicycle and pedestrian planner, other CDOT staff and participating stakeholders from state departments, local governments, and the public, in a process that refined the language used in the policy. The policy is currently under implementation as key stakeholders work to ensure that "the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians shall be included in the planning, design, and operation of transportation facilities, as a matter of routine."

Strategy: Fund the 20 Percent Match Required Under MAP-21

With the implementation of MAP-21, communities applying for Safe Routes to School funding are required to provide 20 percent of the funds for the project. This can have a stifling effect on the number of applications submitted but also limits the applications from under-resourced lower-income schools and communities. States that would like to bolster Safe Routes to School can provide funding for the required 20 percent match, removing a major hurdle to interested communities lacking the funding.

Case Study: Ohio

With the implementation of MAP-21, the state of Ohio decided to fully commit to Recreational Trails, Safe Routes to School, and other Transportation Alternatives programs. As a part of this commitment, the Ohio Department of Transportation recognized the challenge that under-resourced communities might face in meeting the new requirement of a 20 percent match for Safe Routes to School grant applications. To address this issue, the department committed to maintaining a 100 percent funded Safe Routes to School program using flexible toll revenue funds. The application process allows applicants to request a percentage of state funds between 80 and 100 percent, encouraging communities that can leverage additional local funds to do so, while providing a fully funded grant for under-resourced communities to improve walking and bicycling to school in Ohio.

Strategy: Fine-Based Mechanisms for Bicycling and Walking Safety

There are many opportunities to improve traffic safety for walking and bicycling, especially near schools, and at the same time raise funds for Safe Routes to School safety projects. One consideration is that states can allocate, or re-allocate, funding received from traffic violations. This funding can be raised by either doubling the fines in school zones or reallocating an already increased fine to create a safer environment for those that are endangered by traffic safety violations in these areas.

Strategy: Traffic Safety Training Programs

It is critically important to train children and youth on how to safely walk, bicycle and behave around buses and automobile traffic – it can save lives! Investment in a comprehensive traffic safety curriculum in the classroom is an investment in a lifetime skill and pastime for students. After all, everyone is a pedestrian at some point in their day, and these skills make for better drivers in the future, too. Many states have taken on this challenge by integrating and funding traffic safety courses in and after school, or funding the creation of state-approved curriculum that can be administered in PE, health or other classes and programs.

Case Study: Hawaii

Safe Routes to School recently came to the forefront in Hawaii as a Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant began to focus on increasing walking and bicycling to school on the islands. Inspired by this program, the state decided to assess a surcharge of \$25 for traffic violations in a school zone and \$10 on various other traffic violations that could be immediately deposited into the state's new Safe Routes to School special fund. The goal was to "enhance traffic safety around Hawaii's schools, enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle to school, and make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative." These funds are helping to sustain Hawaii's Safe Routes to School program.

Case Study: Florida

The Florida Traffic and Bicycle Safety Education Program, based at the University of Florida, provides training for physical education teachers and other interested parties on how to administer traffic safety courses in the classroom. The Florida Department of Transportation funds this project through their human resource development funds, which pay for the trainers, travel and expenses incurred. In exchange for this small investment, schools across Florida are staffed with thoroughly trained teachers and armed with a robust curriculum to teach walking and bicycling safety skills and knowledge to the younger generations.

Strategy: Lower-Income Communities

Children from lower-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families, but typically face greater personal and traffic safety risks on their route to school. It's critical that Safe Routes to School funds reach lower-income schools and communities to help improve traffic safety and reduce injuries. This [resource](#) can help state departments of transportation develop proactive policies that will assist the most vulnerable communities in planning for, applying for, and implementing Safe Routes to School grants.

Case Study: California

Early in 2010, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's California network worked with Active Living Research and the California Department of Health to provide requested information to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's office about how lower-income communities should be better served through the state Safe Routes to School program. In February 2010, as part of his childhood obesity initiative, the governor issued a directive to the health and transportation departments to produce a report on how they would address the challenge of equal funding distribution. The report was released in November 2010, and showed that the percentage of lower-income schools being funded is in fact higher than the percentage of schools being funded overall. Even with that positive result, the report pledged the state's backing to continue to increase support and provide more technical assistance to lower-income schools and communities.

Strategy: School Siting Policy

When thinking long term about the ability of children and families to safely walk and bicycle to schools, it is essential that schools are located within a reasonable distance. The location of the school dramatically affects a student's ability to walk or bicycle there. Unfortunately, many state departments of education have increased school minimum acreage requirements, using long-outdated [school siting principles](#), prompting many schools to be built or moved to the outskirts of neighborhoods – and even out of towns - where larger parcels of land may be more readily available. But the long term costs of transportation such as busing, congestion, new infrastructure (e.g., sewage, electricity, new roadways, ongoing maintenance), and other costs absorbed by the municipality aren't considered. Per the [Environmental Protection Agency's resources on school siting](#), states can address school siting issues by improving coordination across state programs, creating staffing and financial resources to address the issue, increasing state participation in public meetings and providing easy access to state information on school siting.

Case Study: Washington

In 2002, the Department of Ecology in Washington State began a review process that identified the potential environmental impacts made from government decisions. This process is initiated when, among a number of other things, a permit is applied to construct a project. The [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\)](#) then requires that the environmental impacts of a project such as constructing a new school are reviewed, identified, and evaluated. This process allows the applicant, often another government agency, to fully understand the environmental impacts of the project in tandem with the technical, economic, or other information, and then to adjust the project criteria to avoid negative impacts such as excessive traffic congestion and air quality costs to a poorly located school.

Additional Regional Strategies and Approaches:

Strategy: Maintain Full-Time Safe Routes to School and Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinators

State funding programs need dedicated staff to carry them out. Bicycle and pedestrian and Safe Routes to School programs and projects benefit from full-time staff who manage application cycles, provide resources and training to applicants, monitor progress and ensure that funds are expended within federal and state guidelines and without delay.

Strategy: Award and Obligate Funds

Even when statewide funds are available to make safety improvements and launch Safe Routes to School programs, delays can result, leaving critical funds sitting instead of improving the safety and health of local communities. Governors and state agency leaders can help to ensure that the state prioritizes bicycle and pedestrian safety programs such as Safe Routes to School, that funds are awarded to local communities, and that education programs are launched and infrastructure projects are built.

Strategy: Bring Experts and Communities Together to Inform State Decisions

If a governor or state agency plans to make decisions regarding bicycling, walking, or Safe Routes to School it is ideal to enlist technical expertise and community perspectives through advisory groups such as a Bicycle and Pedestrian or Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee or Council.

Strategy: A Fair Share for Safety

Each state department of transportation is required to develop a data-driven Strategic Highway Safety Plan for programming their federal [Highway Safety Improvement Program](#) funds. Some of this funding can be spent on bicycle and pedestrian projects, especially near schools. The plan should prioritize and establish statewide goals, objectives, and funding strategies to address bicycle and pedestrian safety needs – a fair share for safety.

Conclusion

Getting children walking and bicycling to school safely is a good way for governors and state agency leaders to improve livability, safety, and health, save lives and boost local economies. Fortunately, Safe Routes to School is an ideal way to achieve these goals. State leaders can utilize different approaches to making sure that this popular and effective program is prioritized and funded, and that supportive policies exist to help get projects and programs on the ground.

Resources

What is Safe Routes to School?: Quick Facts
(Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

State Level Safe Routes to School Involvement
(Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Safe Routes to School: Helping Communities Save Lives and Dollars
(Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Best Practices for Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committees
(Advocacy Advance, 2012)

Getting A Fair Share for Safety From the Highway Safety Improvement Program
(Advocacy Advance, 2012)

State Level Complete Streets Policies
(Smart Growth America, 2012)

School Siting Guidelines
(Environmental Protection Agency, 2011)

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership works 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 children, and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

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