Safe Routes to School

Saving Schools
Transportation Dollars

Alleviating Parental Concerns about Student Safety
What is Safe Routes to School (SRTS)?

- Goal is to create safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to and from school
- Seeks to reverse the decline:
  - In 1969, 50% of children walked or biked to school, including 87% of those living within 1 mile
  - In 2001, less than 15% walk or bicycle to school, including just 50% of those within 1 mile
School districts all across the country are cutting back bus routes and trimming bus stops:

- In summer of 2008, high fuel costs caused one-third of schools to consolidate bus routes.
- Due to the worsening economy and state budget crises, 20 states have implemented or proposed budget cuts to K-12 education per-pupil funding and local education grants.

- Based on nationwide averages, a school district saves approximately $37,000 per bus route eliminated.
Relation to School Bus Cuts

- When bus routes are eliminated, parents often react with anger and concern:
  - Lack of safe infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks, crosswalks) for students to walk or bicycle
  - Perceived lack of safety from “stranger danger”
- The likely result? Parents with the means to do so substitute the family car for the bus:
  - Shifts transportation costs & time burden to parents
  - Increases traffic congestion and air pollution around the school
  - Missed opportunity for physical activity
  - For families without the means to drive, an increase in children walking/bicycling in potentially unsafe conditions
Safe Routes to School can help school districts manage and address parent concerns when bus routes are consolidated or eliminated.

- Focus is on making it safe for children to walk and bicycle
- Key is collaborative approach engaging parents and children along with school and city officials to productively solve parent safety concerns
- Schools can start immediately with small, simple steps and plan for longer-term, grant-funded improvements
Benefits from SRTS

1. A strategic approach to student safety
   - Safety is a real concern for parents, and they need reassurance that the school is being proactive:
     - Approx. 23,000 children injured and 429 children killed while walking and bicycling in 2006
     - Pedestrians are more than twice as likely to be struck by a vehicle in locations without sidewalks.
     - Many communities do not have sidewalks, crosswalks, paths
   - SRTS engages parents and school officials in identifying safety concerns and developing a plan to address safety issues
   - Can help schools address and mitigate liability risks and concerns
   - Studies of existing SRTS programs show approximately a 50% decrease in child cyclist and pedestrian collisions
2. A healthier trip for students

- SRTS can play an important role in school wellness plans by increasing physical activity:
  - One-third of all children are now obese, overweight, or at significant risk of becoming so
  - Just one-third of children meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity a day
  - Obesity leads to diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma, and greater risks for health complications

- Students who walk 1 mile to and from school get two-thirds of recommended levels of physical activity
- Children who walk to school are more physically active throughout the day
- Physically active children tend to have better academic achievement, enhanced concentration, and better classroom behavior
3. A way to reduce traffic congestion

- Many schools already struggle with chaotic traffic congestion and idling cars during drop-off/pick-up:
  - As much as 20-30% of morning congestion is due to parents driving children to schools
  - One-third of schools are in “air pollution danger zones”—increasing the risk of asthma and permanent lung deficits
- If parents switch from the bus to the car, congestion and safety incidents will rise while air quality drops
- SRTS engages parents in developing alternatives, i.e. carpooling, remote drop-offs, walking school buses
- SRTS programs can increase walking/bicycling by 20 to 200%, reducing traffic congestion
- Schools that are designed so children can walk have measurably better air quality
Benefits from SRTS

4. A means of strengthening community involvement

- SRTS stresses the need for communities to **work together** to solve student safety issues
- Parents that get involved in SRTS often end up more involved with the school overall
- Redirects parent anger about bus cuts into constructive planning and implementation
- Can build critical relationships between the school and local planning authorities, local businesses, health departments, and law enforcement
Short-Term, Low-Cost SRTS Solutions

1. Create a Safe Routes to School team
   - Get the right partners involved from the start
   - Parents, students, mayor/city manager, local engineers and planners, school nurse and health officials, school transportation officials and personnel

2. Document safety problems and parent concerns
   - Walk the streets around the school with parents, school officials, and city personnel to note missing or poor sidewalks, lack of crosswalks, poor visibility
   - Survey parents to identify their concerns

3. Make needed short-term improvements
   - Ask city officials to make small improvements around the school—like painting crosswalks, installing signage, trimming branches, and repairing sidewalks
4. Map safe walking routes or create walking school buses
   - Identify crossing guards, crosswalks, and sidewalks around a school with “safe walking maps”
   - Organize parents and volunteers to escort groups of students walking/bicycling to and from school (walking school buses or bike trains)

5. Hold pedestrian and bicycle safety education workshops
   - See if the local bike advocacy group or bike shop can provide bicycle safety education
   - Ask your local police department to provide basic training in safely crossing the street and avoiding “stranger danger”
6. Step up traffic safety enforcement
   - Ask local law enforcement to place mobile speed trailers around the school to show drivers their speed and to increase patrols during arrival and dismissal
   - Engage the media in encouraging drivers to pay attention and obey the speed limit around schools

7. Build excitement through small promotional contests and activities
   - Run a small promotional content to get parents and students excited—punch cards, walking mileage contests, etc.
   - See if a local business will donate a small prize
   - Consider the slogan “Lost the bus? Short on bucks? Come walk and bike with us!”
Congress created the federal Safe Routes to School program in 2005 through the federal transportation bill

- $612 million is authorized over 5 years
- Each state receives a portion based on their population of children grades K-8

Each state has a SRTS coordinator who administers the program

- 70-90% of funds are for infrastructure
- Remaining portion is for non-infrastructure (i.e. enforcement, encouragement, and education)

These funds are an important source for a school’s long-term SRTS program and plan
Local SRTS Examples

- **Auburn, WA**
  - Each school in the district has a Safe Walking Committee to assess needed improvements
  - Used $300,000 in SRTS grants to build sidewalks, bike lanes and crosswalks
  - Has increased walking/bicycling to 20% of students—decreasing bus use and saving $220,000 per year in school transportation costs

- **Miami-Dade County, FL**
  - Mandated “WalkSafe” child pedestrian education and traffic safety course in all schools
  - Made infrastructure and safety upgrades by schools
  - 41 percent decrease since 2001 in the number of child pedestrians injured in Miami Dade County
Resources and Support

- **Safe Routes to School National Partnership**
  - Advocate and resource for SRTS programs
  - Will be posting bus cut/SRTS resources in February
  - [www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)

- **National Center for Safe Routes to School**
  - Wealth of how-to resources and support
  - [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

- **Each state’s SRTS coordinator**
  - May have statewide conferences and support, guidebooks, toolkit available online
  - Source of federal SRTS funding
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