



S. 1156

The Safe Routes to School Reauthorization Bill: Helping America's Children Take Steps to a Healthy and Green Future

On May 21, 2009, Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), Richard Burr (R-NC), Bernard Sanders (I-VT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Susan Collins (R-ME) joined together to introduce S. 1156, the *Safe Routes to School Program Reauthorization Act*.

First created as part of the SAFETEA-LU transportation bill in 2005, the federal Safe Routes to School program (SRTS) provides over \$600 million from FY2005-2009 to State Departments of Transportation. With this funding, elementary and middle schools and communities throughout the country are constructing new sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways, and crossings, and launching Safe Routes to School education, promotion and law enforcement campaigns.

These Safe Routes to School efforts are making it safer and more common for children to walk and bicycle to and from schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The program has far-reaching implications for helping communities address childhood obesity and physical inactivity, traffic safety and congestion, and air quality. In addition, with our difficult economic times, school districts that are cutting bus service are relying on Safe Routes to School to address safety concerns for the increased numbers of children walking and bicycling.

The Safe Routes to School program is due for reauthorization as part of the next transportation bill. S. 1156 proposes to build on successes around the country and strengthen and expand the federal Safe Routes to School program. The bill would:

- Triple funding for the program, from the FY2009 level of \$183 million to \$600 million per year to meet the high demand and need for the program;
- Expand eligibility to include high schools and to allow a state to spend a portion of its funds to address bus stop safety and improved access in more rural communities;
- Improve project delivery and reduce overhead by addressing regulatory burdens; and
- Add a research and evaluation component.

A fuller explanation of the bill's provisions is below.

S. 1156 would retain the core structure of the existing federal Safe Routes to School program.

Under the existing program:

- Each state Department of Transportation (DOT) is required to appoint a full-time Safe Routes to School coordinator to administer the program.
- State DOTs receive an annual apportionment of SRTS funds based on the state's share of the overall population of school children. Between 70-90% of a state's funds must be used on infrastructure improvements like sidewalks, bike lanes and crosswalks, and the remaining 10-30% is for non-infrastructure activities including education, enforcement, encouragement and evaluation.
- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) supports a SRTS Clearinghouse to disseminate best practices and provide technical assistance to state DOTs and local projects.

The changes proposed by S. 1156 would strengthen and expand the existing program:

- *Increase funding to \$600 million per year to meet the high demand and need for the program:*
 - Set the annual authorization level for FY10 to FY14 at \$600 million, up from the FY09 level of \$183 million.
 - Change the minimum state apportionment and administrative set-aside from a flat dollar amount to a percentage of the overall funding level [0.5% for minimum apportionment and 1.5% for administration].
 - Allow the Secretary to use up to 10% of the overall authorization to create an incentive fund to encourage states to add state funds to the federal SRTS funds.
 - *Expand eligibility:*
 - Expand eligibility from grades K-8 to grades K-12.
 - Allow states to use up to 10% of infrastructure funding to improve bus stop safety.
 - *Improve project delivery and reduce overhead by addressing regulatory burden:*
 - Exempt non-infrastructure projects from title 23 highway regulations.
 - Require the Secretary and State DOTs to use existing practices and precedents to improve infrastructure project delivery and reduce overhead.
 - Require FHWA to redistribute any funds that are not obligated by states within three years.
 - *Add a research and evaluation component:*
 - Require the Secretary to develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation plan and to conduct research into Safe Routes to School and school siting.
 - Add an administrative set aside of 1.5 to 2.5% for research and evaluation.
 - Establish a permanent national task force to oversee national implementation.
 - *Make technical clarifications to align the statute with existing practice:*
 - Clarify that local SRTS managers and planning grants are eligible uses of funding.
 - Require states to ensure equitable distribution of funds to low-income communities and among urban, suburban, and rural districts.
 - Require states to convene advisory committees to guide state implementation.
 - Add additional duties to the clearinghouse, including collecting data, carrying out a driver safety improvement campaign, and maintaining a national database of funded projects.
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