



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Safe Routes to School Primer

Today, just 13% of children ages 5 to 14 walk and bicycle to and from school—a dramatic drop from 1969 when nearly 50% of children walked to school. As a result, our children aren't getting the physical activity they need, and as much as 25% of morning traffic can be attributed to children being driven to schools in private vehicles. In addition to the health impacts of inactivity, school districts and families spend billions on transportation, and the volume of vehicles around schools creates traffic congestion, air pollution, and wear and tear on our expensive infrastructure.

Safe Routes to School initiatives look at student travel within one mile of elementary schools & 1.5 miles of middle and high schools. These successful programs do not supplant the federally regulated yellow school bus program.

The essential elements of a Safe Routes to School program are geared toward students in elementary and middle school (K-8). Here are some things to consider when planning a new program.

Pre-planning

Choosing schools

Things to consider: schools with known traffic problems; schools where this concern has been expressed by parents, students, teachers, or the community; schools where infrastructure improvements around schools are not being utilized.

Data gathering

Things to consider: number of students living in the non-bus zone; free & reduced fee lunch needs and other equity issues; willing school participation.

Establishing relationships

Things to consider: you must have the support of the school's principal; hiring a dedicated "SRTS coordinator" is helpful to establish a SRTS task-force and implementation of School Action Plans; task force should be comprised of the school principal, PTA/PTO, parents, students, city staff, police, business, etc.

Getting Started

Surveying

Things to consider: establish communication lines to school website and newsletter; coordinating with school for paper and/or online parent surveys; classroom tallies.

School Action Plan (SAP)

Things to consider: utilize parent survey data; walking audit; discussions with city or county engineers; the SAP will be the basis of the proposed activities rolled out at the school.

Equity & Inclusion

Things to consider: online/paper outreach; translations; special needs students.

Getting Going

Encouragement

Things to consider: newsletter blurbs & updates; established encouragement days and challenges in October, May, etc.; start small; Walking School Bus; Bike Train; Bike Rodeos; regular celebratory events.

Education

Things to consider: target one grade level for education programs (Pedestrian ed. in early elementary & Bike ed. in intermediate grades); train the trainer or contract services; whether students have bikes, or if you will need to buy or borrow a bike fleet.

Safe Routes to School addresses 6 Es:

Evaluate the safety of school travel routes. Promote safe walking and bicycling through consistent **enforcement** of traffic laws. **Edu**cate students, parents, and drivers about safe travel. **En**courage more walking and bicycling to school through fun promotions and events. Make **engineering** changes such as building sidewalks, improving street crossings, and training crossing guards. Ensure **equity** by providing safe routes to school for all students.

Enforcement

Things to consider: crossing guards at key intersections (frequently volunteer); police presence focused on speed and traffic safety.

Engineering

Things to consider: incorporating identified needs into city/county planning process to be eligible for funding; school drop-off/pick-up zone changes in traffic flow.

Additional considerations & pilot ideas

- School staff: Including school staff, teachers and administrators in your action plan. Subsidized transit passes, access to showers, carpooling incentives, etc.
- High schools: Subsidized transit passes; transit rider education programs; bike clubs and bike repair clubs; mentorship programs.
- Light infrastructure: Installing "light infrastructure" such as bike racks, bike shelters, or carpool signs.



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Helpful Statistics

Traffic Congestion: Neighborhoods are becoming increasingly clogged by traffic. By boosting the number of children walking and bicycling, Safe Routes to School projects reduce traffic congestion.

- While distance to school is the most commonly reported barrier to walking and bicycling, private vehicles still account for half of school trips between 1/4 and 1/2 mile—a distance easily covered on foot or bike.
- In 2009, American families drove 30 billion miles and made 6.5 billion vehicle trips to take their children to and from schools, representing 10-14 percent of traffic on the road during the morning commute.
- A California study showed that schools that received infrastructure improvements through the Safe Routes to School program yielded walking and bicycling increases in the range of 20 to 200 percent.

Safety: Safe Routes to School projects focus on infrastructure improvements, student traffic education, and driver enforcement that improve safety for children, many of whom already walk or bicycle in unsafe conditions.

- Pedestrians are more than twice as likely to be struck by a vehicle in locations without sidewalks.
- In 2009, approximately 23,000 children ages 5-15 were injured and more than 250 were killed while walking or bicycling in the United States.
- From 2000-2006, 30% of traffic deaths for children ages 5-15 occurred while walking or bicycling.
- The medical costs for treating children's bicycle and pedestrian fatalities cost \$839 million in 2005 and another \$2.2 billion in lifetime lost wage costs.
- A safety analysis by the California Department of Transportation estimated that the safety benefit of SRTS was up to a 49 percent decrease in the childhood bicycle and pedestrian collision rates.

Environment: Safe Routes to School projects increase the number of children walking and bicycling to school, which also cuts down on the number of cars. As cars emit pollutants for each mile traveled, reducing traffic can improve the quality of air that children breathe in and around their schools.

- Children exposed to traffic pollution are more likely to have asthma and a higher risk of heart and lung problems as adults.
- Over the last 25 years, among children ages 5 to 14, there has been a 74% increase in asthma cases. In addition, 14 million days of school are missed every year due to asthma.
- One-third of schools are in "air pollution danger zones."
- Schools that are designed so children can walk and bicycle have measurably better air quality.
- Returning to 1969 levels of walking and bicycling to school would save 3.2 billion vehicle miles, 1.5 million tons of carbon dioxide and 89,000 tons of other pollutants—equal to keeping more than 250,000 cars off the road for a year

Health and Obesity: Children today are simply not getting enough physical activity, contributing to growing rates of obesity and obesity-related health problems, such as diabetes. Safe Routes to School projects make it safer for more children to walk and bicycle to school, which will help address this obesity crisis among children by creating increases in physical activity.

- Over the past 40 years, rates of obesity have soared among children of all ages in the United States, and approximately 25 million children and adolescents—more than 33%—are now overweight or obese or at risk of becoming so.
- Kids are less active today, and 23% of children get no free time physical activity at all.
- The prevalence of obesity is so great that today's generation of children may be the first in over 200 years to live less healthy and have a shorter lifespan than their parents.
- Today, approximately one-quarter of health care costs in the United States are attributable to obesity, and health care costs just for childhood obesity are estimated at approximately \$14 billion per year.
- People living in auto-oriented suburbs drive more, walk less, and are more obese than people living in walkable communities. For each hour of driving per day, obesity increases 6 percent, but walking for transportation reduces the risk of obesity.
- Walking one mile to and from school each day is two-thirds of the recommended sixty minutes of physical activity a day. Plus, children who walk to school have higher levels of physical activity throughout the day.