



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





Relation to School Bus Cuts

- 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





Changing the Paradigm

- 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
 - Half of children struck by cars near schools are hit by parents driving other children to school
 - 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





Benefits from SRTS

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





Benefits from SRTS

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





Short-Term, Low-Cost SRTS Solutions

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
 - Ask your local police department to provide basic training in safely crossing the street and avoiding "stranger danger"
 - See if the local bike shop or bike advocacy group can provide bicycle safety education





Short-Term, Low-Cost SRTS Solutions

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!*"





Long-Term, More Costly Improvements

- 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
- **National Center for Safe Routes to School**
 - Wealth of how-to resources and support
 - www.saferoutesinfo.org
- **Each state's SRTS coordinator**
 - May have statewide conferences and support, guidebooks, toolkit available online
 - Source of federal SRTS funding





For More Information

- Questions or comments? Contact:
Margo Pedroso
Policy Manager
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
margo@saferoutespartnership.org
301-292-1043
- Go to www.saferoutespartnership.org
and sign up for our e-news!

