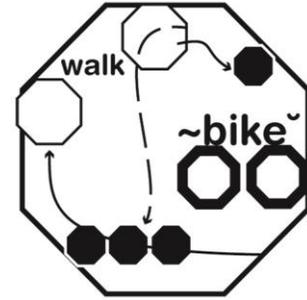


Safe Routes to School



Background

Definition

Safe Routes to School (Safe Routes) programs are designed to make it easier for more children to walk and bike to school safely and easily. They use a variety of equity, education, encouragement, engineering, evaluation, and enforcement strategies that help make routes safer and entice more children to walk and bike. SRTS programs focus on students in kindergarten through grade 8. SRTS programs have grown popular in recent years with the increasing emphasis on:

- benefits children receive from increased physical activity
- growing congestion issues around schools
- the increasing cost to operate school buses

Health, equity and sustainability considerations

Low-income neighborhoods or communities, particularly in urban settings, often have greater traffic-related risks. Residents in low-income urban areas are more likely to report significant neighborhood barriers to physical activity, such as higher numbers of busy through streets and poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. SRTS programs can mitigate these safety risks and promote more active forms of transportation.

A 5% increase in a neighborhood's "walkability" reduces vehicle miles traveled by 6%.

Children who walk and/or bike to school are more "ready to learn" – they have better academic performance, school attendance, and better behavior and concentration in class – than those who do not. Students also get the health benefits of more active forms of transportation. Cardiovascular fitness and weight are better in students

who walk or bike to school versus those who do not.

Traditionally, schools occupied a central place within compact neighborhoods and community centers. Many students could conveniently walk or bike to school. In some areas, there has been a trend toward building larger schools on large sites in low density areas remote from existing population centers.

Washington's SRTS program, administered by the Washington State Department of Transportation, has awarded projects that serve approximately 230 schools statewide, making walking and biking conditions safer for about 100,000 children. Since its inception in 2005, the number of children biking and walking has increased by approximately 20%. However, the need is much greater. Approximately \$50 million has been awarded, but requests to the Washington State Department of Transportation exceeded \$195 million.

Program and Policy Examples

Program examples

There are many creative ways of implementing SRTS programs.

- Infrastructure Investments: Improving the sidewalks, bike facilities and crossings
- Speed control and signage: Flashing light beacons, narrowing lanes, speed bumps or roundabouts
- Walking School Bus: A group of children walking to school, usually with one or more adults, picking up students along the way
- Bicycle Train : Similar to a Walking School Bus but on bicycles
- Walk to School Celebrations and other events: Throughout the school year
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Education Classes: Training sessions for adult volunteers, teachers and students
- Walking field trips around school campuses: Appropriate learning stations around the school
- Safe Routes Mapping: Walk and bike route maps using a community engagement process
- Drop-off and Pick-up Zone Improvements: Morning and afternoon car count, observation and a report quantifying walking hazards and troublesome driving patterns with tools for schools to follow up on recommendations and measure progress
- Social Marketing Plan: Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with walking to school and conduct focus groups with parents and staff
- Walking Audit: A walking audit involves training for parents, school officials and students on walking safety and identifying safest walking routes to school
- Parent Involvement: Increasing parent involvement helps to promote a culture shift- a change in attitude towards walking and biking as a safe way to get to school. Involving parents and caretakers may help garner support and implement low-cost improvements that do not require additional funding

How is it used locally?

Mark Twain Elementary in the City of Federal Way implemented a variety of traffic calming measures to encourage safe walking routes. The Star Lake Road school speed zone is directly in front of the elementary school and serves as the sole crosswalk for the school entrance. School zone flashing beacons and two solar powered LED rectangular-shaped rapid flashing crosswalk beacons were installed at this location. The school speed zone and speed emphasis patrols helped to reduce vehicle travel speeds and calm traffic. A multi-use path between the crosswalk and the entrance to the school building was installed to provide students with a walk/bike route separated from the cars. Children were encouraged during a school assembly and with educational materials to walk and bike safely. The program was completed as a [Transportation Capital Improvement Project](#).

The Mountlake Terrace Elementary school purchased 42 new bikes to support their bicycle education program. These bikes stay at school and allow the school to expand bicycle education to every elementary school in the district. The bikes were purchased through a [Safe Routes to Schools](#) grant, which was obtained through a partnership between the City of Mountlake Terrace, Cascade Bicycle Club and the Edmonds School District. The grant also paid for a new sidewalk, two bike trailers, a free bike helmet for

every child at Mountlake Terrace Elementary, a weekly Wheels Club, a Bike Rodeo in May, and an inspiring school assembly with mountain biker Ryan Leech.

Implementation

Developing policy language

The Safe Routes to School [Local Policy Guide](#) helps practitioners in making the transition from working on strictly “programs” to championing and implementing “policy” which can lead to lasting changes, increased funding, and also support programs for the long term.

Safe Routes to Schools policy can be included in a variety of local and regional plans. These plans include:

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans. These plans define existing bicycle and pedestrian paths, lanes and routes and develop plans for where future bicycle and pedestrian improvements should be made
- Capital Improvement Plans. The Capital Improvement Plan is a short- or long-term plan for towns or cities that is a blueprint for planning a community’s capital expenditures and is one of the most important responsibilities of government officials.
- Regional Transportation Plans. The Regional Transportation Plan is a federally required document that must be adopted at least every four years. The plan is usually not very well-known to the public, but is vital to the economy, community and lives of its residents. A region’s long-term transportation priorities are represented in their regional transportation plan. Conducted by a region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization or similar entity, these transportation plans are designed to plan for transit, highways and local roads – and should include bicycle and pedestrian needs.
- General Plans/Comprehensive Plans. The General Plan (sometimes referred to as a Comprehensive Plan) exists to create a “planning toolbox” for the government staff to use in guiding the writing of ordinances and codes.
- Safe Routes to Schools Jurisdiction Wide Plans. Implementing school district-wide and/or city or countywide Safe Routes to School programs is by far one of the most powerful ways to effect broad based policy change. Through federal Safe Routes to School funds available through state DOTs, or a variety of potential local funding sources, cities, counties or school districts can choose to hire a full-time Safe Routes to School coordinator to manage volunteers, and implement educational programs, infrastructure planning and implementation, and evaluation across an entire jurisdiction.
- Complete Streets. Complete Streets policies work to reverse this trend by ensuring that roads that are “designed to be safe for drivers, bicyclists, transit vehicles and users, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities”.
- School Wellness Policies. School wellness policies are an important tool to address childhood obesity and promote healthy eating and physical activity through changes in school environments.. [The Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#) emphasizes that the need for schools to develop wellness policies provides a great opportunity to insert Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs and goals into school district plans.

Opportunities for funding

Safe Routes to School is a Washington state and [Federal Highway Administration](#) funded program which was created to enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle to school safely, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age. Due to changes in MAP-21, the federal SRTS program is no longer a specific standalone program, but each state has the opportunity to maintain the SRTS program. Washington state decision makers have maintained both the state and federally funded SRTS program in Washington.

The City of Seattle also offers a [variety of grants](#) that can provide funding for a Safe Routes to School program.

Washington state school zone safety legislation, or “fine based funding” ([RCW 46.61.440](#)), provides double fines for speeding in school crosswalks and playground zones. This legislation dictated that half of the doubled fine be attributed to improving safety in school zones. More than \$3 million was given to local communities in 2009. The project aims to increase children’s safety in these zones by funding law enforcement agencies to enforce speed limits, fund radar trailers, public education campaigns, minor engineering enhancements and additional funding for school zone improvement projects.

The Seattle Department of Transportation’s [School Road Safety Initiative](#) partnered with the Seattle Police Department to install and operate speed cameras in school zones to enforce the 20 mph speed limit in effect while school zone beacons are flashing. Revenue from the speed cameras goes into safety improvements around schools.

Considerations for local implementation

[Feet First](#) is a Seattle-based non-profit organization that specializes in SRTS education and encouragement programs, grant services, materials development and policy advancement. Feet First provides assistance for anything from one-day walk-to-school campaigns to comprehensive, multi-year plans to establish SRTS programs in communities. They provide training on best practices, as well as technical assistance to enrich new and existing programs, many of which are noted below. Feet First manages the Safe Routes to School Action Network, a coalition of grass-roots stakeholders working in communities around the state of Washington.

[The Cascade Bicycle Club](#) also provides bicycle education and safety training for Safe Routes to Schools programs and events, including the “Basics of Bicycling” skills education curriculum taught in many local schools, an after school urban bicycling club and bike rodeo community events.

[Washington Bikes](#) is the statewide non-profit focused on bike advocacy, education and outreach. They support communities, schools, and bicycle organizations in improving the riding conditions around schools and encouraging more students to ride to or from school. Washington Bikes provides trainings and technical assistance to school districts for the Bike and Pedestrian Safety Education Program, bike to school encouragement activities, best practices with policies and programs, and assessments of bicycle infrastructure.

Challenges to implementation

It is important to note that in some cases, you may not be able to implement a desired local policy unless a state law or state policy is first changed. This is because sometimes state policies put parameters around what local municipalities and school districts can do. This may be the case when working on policies such as school siting, speed limits, or creating new funding mechanisms through fines or transportation sales taxes.

The Washington State Safe Routes to Schools program offers funding and additional support for schools with students in kindergarten through grade 8. Programs for high school aged students should look for other sources of funding and support.

Resources

The [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#) has developed an online resource developed by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) in collaboration with SRTS experts from around the country and support from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). This [Safe Routes to Schools Guide](#) includes a wealth of resources for communities planning their own SRTS programs.

The [Washington State Department of Transportation \(WSDOT\) Safe Routes to Schools](#) provides no-cost technical assistance to past, current and future funding recipients, applicants and interested communities. It helps fund cost effective projects within two miles of primary and middle schools (K-8) to provide children a safe, healthy alternative to riding the bus or being driven to school. Technical services include assistance developing walk route plans as a way of helping schools and communities identify safe walking routes and locations that need improvements. WSDOT collaborates with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Washington Bikes to implement the SRTS Bike and Pedestrian Safety Education Program. The program provides curriculum and materials for physical education classes about bicycle and pedestrian safety for students in grades 6- 8 across the state.

[SafeRoutes WA.org](#) has a wealth of resources including Safe Routes to School information for multiple stakeholders and a bike and pedestrian safety curriculum for teachers. The website is managed cooperatively by Feet First and Washington Bikes, and was initially funded by a grant from the Washington State Department of Transportation.



Resources

[Bike and Pedestrian Safety Education Program Evaluation Report](#) (January 2013)

[Center for Safe Routes to School in Washington State](#)

[Healthy Places for Healthy People](#) (2012)

MRSC's [Transportation Efficient Land Use: Planning and Land Use Strategies that Reduce the Need to Drive](#) (2014)

[National Center for Safe Routes to School](#)

[Rethinking Community Planning and School Siting To Address The Obesity Epidemic](#) (2004)

[Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#)

[Safe Routes to Schools WA - Curriculum](#)

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department’s Healthy Community Planning Toolbox—Policy Intervention Tools: [Access to Opportunity](#) (2013)

[Walk Bike Schools](#)

[Walk Bike to School \(additional resources from the National Center for Safe Routes to School\)](#)

[Washington State Department of Transportation – Safe Routes to School Flier](#) (January 2013)