



WHAT IS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL?

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national and international movement to create safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for children to bicycle and walk to and from schools. The program has been designed to reverse the decline in children walking and bicycling to schools. Safe Routes to School can also play a critical role in reversing the alarming nationwide trend toward childhood obesity and inactivity.

Background

In 1969, approximately 50% of children walked or bicycled to school, with approximately 87% of children living within one mile of school walking or bicycling. Today, fewer than 15% of schoolchildren walk or bicycle to school. As a result, kids today are less active, less independent, and less healthy. As much as 20 to 30% of morning traffic can be generated by parents driving their children to schools, and nearly one-third of all children's traffic deaths happen when children are walking and bicycling and are struck by a car.

Federal Safe Routes to School Program

Concerned by the long-term health and traffic consequences of this trend, in 2005, the U.S. Congress approved \$612 million in funding for five years of state implementation of SRTS programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Congress has extended the program at \$183 million per year starting in FY2010 until a long-term transportation reauthorization is complete.

The purpose of this funding, which is available through state Departments of Transportation, is to allow and encourage more children to safely walk and bicycle to school. The bulk of these grants allow schools and communities to retrofit and build roads, sidewalks, bike lanes and pathways to allow children to more safely walk and bicycle to school. A smaller percentage of funding (10 to 30%) supports non-infrastructure activities, including walking and bicycling safety education, driver awareness campaigns, more robust enforcement of speed limits and traffic safety rules, promotional events to encourage more children to walk and bicycle, and more.

Benefits

States have awarded more than 70% of the currently available funding, and nearly 10,000 schools in every state in the nation are implementing federally-funded Safe Routes to School initiatives. The program is a proven strategy for getting more children to walk and bicycle to and from school, and provides an important tool in efforts to improve safety and address the daunting problems of physical inactivity, obesity, and poor air quality. Benefits include:

- Safe Routes to School programs can increase walking and bicycling in the range of 20 to 200 percent.
- Simply adding a sidewalk cuts in half the risk that a pedestrian will be struck by a car.
- Our country spends \$17.5 billion each year on school bus transportation, and school districts are increasingly struggling with school busing expenditures. Parents that switch from driving a child to school to walking or bicycling will save an average of 180 gallons of fuel and 3600 miles on their car per year.
- Walking one mile to and from school each day equals two-thirds of the recommended level of physical activity per day, and children who walk to school are more physically active throughout the day.
- Schools that are walkable and bikeable have measurably better air quality due to reduced traffic.
- Approximately 65.5 million people living within a half-mile of a school could benefit from Safe Routes to School projects that improve the environment for walking and bicycling.