



# 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
  - Pedestrians are more than twice as likely to be struck by a vehicle in locations without sidewalks.
  - 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
  - See if the local bike advocacy group or bike shop can provide bicycle safety education
  - Ask your local police department to provide basic training in safely crossing the street and avoiding “stranger danger”





# 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](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)
- **National Center for Safe Routes to School**
  - Wealth of how-to resources and support
  - [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://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:  
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