

Why is Safe Routes to School (SRTS) so important?

More Physical Activity and Better Health

Over the past two to three decades, the childhood obesity rate in the U.S. has more than doubled for preschool children age 2 to 5 years and more than tripled for children age 6 to 11 years. The lack of physical activity among children contributes to obesity and health problems.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Many children could achieve this recommendation simply by walking, biking or using other active ways to travel to school. It's that simple.

Increased Safety

Parental concerns about traffic and strangers have reduced children's freedom to move about their neighborhoods on their own. Programs like the Walking School Bus — an adult-supervised walk to school — identify safe routes to school, and teach safe crossing practices and “street smart” skills. Appropriate infrastructure like sidewalks and bicycling paths is also important.

Less Traffic, Greater Sense of Community

When more students walk or bicycle to school, traffic volumes and congestion decrease during school drop-off and pick-up times, making the trip much more pedestrian-friendly.

A physically-active commute to and from school can be a fun social time for children. It's a chance for them to spend time with their families, neighbors and peers, while learning about their community.

With the Walking School Bus and Bike Train programs, parents share the responsibility of escorting a group of children to school.

A Reduction in Harmful Vehicle Emissions

Motor vehicle emissions have a harmful effect on the environment and personal health. These emissions contribute to poor air quality and urban smog, as well as a range of health problems, including bronchitis and asthma.

Short motor vehicle trips create more than their share of pollution because a cold engine does not fire efficiently. A SRTS program can reduce the number of short vehicle trips and improve air quality in your neighborhood.

Program Eligibility

The SRTS program can be tailored to meet the needs of your school and community. Initiatives include adult-supervised walks and bike rides to school, infrastructure improvements and safety enhancements, such as sidewalks, crosswalks and crossing guards, designated walking paths, and reduced speed zones.

Funding

Limited funds are available to schools and communities interested in participating in the SRTS program. Projects eligible for funding must be within two miles of an elementary and/or middle school (kindergarten through eighth grade).

Applications for Safe Routes to School funding are available at www.dot.state.ia.us/saferoutes.



Did you know Walking School Buses and Bike Trains burn no fuel, emit no exhaust, cut down on traffic congestion, and cost nothing to run? They are simple ways to reduce motor vehicle use and encourage more kids to get to and from school on their own with parental supervision.

The following are eligible for SRTS funding:

- planning, design and construction of projects that will improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school;
- sidewalk improvements;
- traffic calming and speed reduction improvements;
- pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements;
- on-street bicycle facilities;
- off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities;
- traffic diversion improvements within two miles of the school;
- public awareness campaigns and educational materials;
- traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of a school;
- student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health and environment; or
- training, including SRTS training workshops that target school and community audiences.



Photo courtesy of Dan Burden - www.pedbikeimages.org

Here are some key points about SRTS:

- eligible applicants are cities, counties, local governments, schools (both public and private) and nonprofit organizations;
- this comprehensive program includes the 5 Es: engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation; projects must address all five of these components;
- no local funding match is required;
- award recipients must comply with stringent federal and state funding requirements; and
- you can get started right now by coming up with a plan for your school, district, city or region. Develop an inventory of needed improvements and then prioritize. Be sure to involve parents and students in your process.

The SRTS program resulted from enactment of the federal transportation bill — the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The purpose of SRTS is to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing; and facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

Whether you are a parent, teacher or community volunteer, you can start a Safe Routes to School program in your community.

For ideas and resources, contact:



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Safe Routes to School is a national program that encourages youth and their families to choose walking, bicycling and other active ways to get to and from school.



Iowa Department of Transportation