



2011 Safe Routes to School National Partnership Annual Meeting Notes

Monday, August 15, 1-5pm

Safe Routes to School National Conference, Minneapolis, MN

Welcome and Introductions (Risa Wilkerson, Chair)

Risa welcomed everyone and introduced [steering committee members](#), thanking everyone for their service.

National Partnership Overview and Presentation of Meeting Theme: “Building the Movement” (Deb Hubsmith, Director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Deb shared that at last year’s annual meeting we were accepting input for our [2011-2015 Strategic Plan](#), and used the forum to find out what was important to people. This year, we have been focusing our work on the three overarching goals in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan that were decided on based on feedback we received throughout the year-long process, including 2010 Annual Meeting feedback: increasing walking and bicycling to school, improving safety, and decreasing distances to schools. Deb then introduced [National Partnership staff](#) and shared highlights of what each staff member has been working on over the last year.

World Café on “Building the Movement” and Plenary Discussion on World Café (Ian Thomas, Facilitator of World Café and Deb Hubsmith, Director)

A part of the world café, meeting attendees participated in short facilitated conversations and moved to different tables for each of the three questions. These meeting notes capture points from the group discussion that followed.

Question 1 - How do we establish strong and diverse local Safe Routes to School partnerships?

- Create a plug and play PTA/PTO folder with a program outline that gets handed to the incoming PTA/PTO president as part of a package of things they do.
- Work through existing wellness programs (mandated by federal government for free/reduced lunches).
- Spend time up front to recruit quality volunteers on a personal level. It can take more time up front, but if you get someone who can stick with the program this can benefit you at the back end. An example given was a direct marketing campaign through the City of Portland to find volunteers.
- Normalize walking/bicycling. An example given was a MN project with police, EMT and other public safety where the public safety officials have coupons (treats from local businesses) that they give out when they see a child walking or bicycling and wearing a helmet.
- Affirm the importance of school and government partnerships. Reach out to school administrators in school districts; bring developers on board and to the table to solidify partnerships.
- Work with superintendents at the city level. Find funding and champions at the regional level.
- Share facilities and form community partnerships. Create the joint use of parks next to schools that are owned by the city, students can use facility during the school day.
- Check out [Fire Up Your Feet!](#) to engage kids/parents.
- Look for new/different partners – older/retired adults or see if your school district has a sustainability coordinator.

Question 2 - What challenges are we experiencing and how can we overcome them?

- Funding challenges in all directions – schools/teachers and PE being cut. It feels like a burden to ask school staff to implement programming.
 - Some ideas to address this include the following:
 - Review the National Partnership’s [Educator Guide](#) for tips for working with educators and showing the link between academics and Safe Routes to School.
 - Target a champion and go outside the school (Boys and Girls Club or before/after school program) to integrate Safe Routes to School.
 - Lead a walk-a-thon as a fundraiser on Walk to School Day or use [Fire Up Your Feet!](#) as a fundraiser.
- Locals often have problems obligating funding because of red tape associated with it.
- Parent involvement. An idea to deal with this is lunch and learns at private businesses – an opportunity to educate parents that way instead of through the PTO.
- Real or perceived personal safety. We need to come up with alternatives and solutions like walking school bus to deal with societal fear.
- Lack of volunteers. The Columbia Chamber of Commerce has a family friendly business program. Businesses get this designation if achieve certain criteria. Safe Routes to School advocates are trying to get them to give staff paid time or flex time to be a walking school bus leader.
- Liability and how across the board it is. Risk manager was supportive but another risk manager was totally unsupportive. One idea is for networks to take liability issue on and talk at risk management conferences to level the playing field and find middle ground.
- It needs to be cooler to walk and bicycle to school. We need champions; there is no substitute for someone in school/school district/city/county owning the program. One idea: charge people for drop off of personal cars at the school.
- Non-infrastructure dollars are locked up because of Title 6 restrictions (in North Dakota), and they don’t know how to solve this issue. Title 6 has to do with meeting federal guidelines for diversity. Non-infrastructure funds have to go through as intense of a process as infrastructure funds. California created a checklist to get non-infrastructure projects obligated more quickly, and is an example folks can look at for ideas.
- Incentives and youth involvement. Getting older kids to inspire the younger. Incentives are double-edged sword. Use sustainable stuff like awards to inspire people.

Question 3 - How do we build momentum and institutionalize Safe Routes to School?

- Consider a project with youth engagement. Have kids survey walkability in their neighborhood. A successful example can be found in California. Youth advocated with local city officials and provided photos that were used at the state capitol. Kaiser Permanente’s Photovoice is another great idea to sell the concept.
- Engage student athletes, like a varsity ball player to get kids involved and build for future.
- Use the parent-to-parent model. Bring parents to do presentations in front of other parents who are on the fence. Oftentimes better support is built this way.
- Use social media more. Get videos out via youtube from community members and kids.
- Create student advisory positions for boards of organizations.
- Follow the money. Pay attention to when your locality and state are doing school bonds/transportation sales taxes/vehicle license fees and think about how to get Safe Routes to School into what they are raising money for. Show up at the meeting and share your idea. They’ll poll the public to find out what is most popular and kids’ safety always polls well. This is a good way to get long-term money and overcome funding obstacles.
- Don’t ignore policy initiatives. Check out the [National Partnership’s local policy guide](#) for great examples and a seven step process for implementing policy change.

Deb encouraged everyone to take these ideas back with them to the local level and put them into action!

Legislative update (Margo Pedrosa, Deputy Director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Margo gave an update on what's happening at the federal level. The federal Safe Routes to School program is up for reauthorization as part of the transportation bill—it's a very difficult Congressional environment. Many Members of Congress (particularly in the House) are focused on cutting spending. There is no longer enough revenue coming in from the federal gas tax to cover the current level of federal transportation expenditures. Bipartisan agreement is difficult to come by, yet that is what is needed to get a transportation bill passed. Funding for bicycling and walking has become a partisan talking point and is a major issue dividing most Democrats and Republicans.

Highlights from the House:

- Chairman Mica (R-FL) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee has released an outline.
- The outline is not specific on Safe Routes to School, but it seems clear that Safe Routes to School activities will only be eligible for federal transportation dollars, with no dedicated dollars.
- Mica specifically said that Transportation Enhancements is moved to eligibility only; and we assume Recreational Trails is similar.
- The overall outline calls for a six-year bill at a 35 percent cut from current federal transportation levels.
- All in all, this is likely to mean little funding for Safe Routes to School should the House draft move forward.

Highlights from the Senate:

- Chairman Boxer (D-CA) has released a short 1.5 page outline that does not mention any details on non-motorized transportation, however, Senator Boxer said at a hearing that Safe Routes to School, bike paths and Recreational Trails are "in her bill".
- The Boxer bill would be a two-year bill at current spending levels.
- We need to see language to determine the structure of the program, policy ramifications and funding level.

So what happens next? Congress needs to find \$12 billion just to keep funding levels at FY09 for two more years. The media has reported that Sen. Baucus (D-MT) has found the funding – but it is unclear what the source is and whether it is amenable to Republicans. This could enable the Senate to move forward in September on their bill. The current extension expires September 30, 2011 along with the bulk of the federal gas tax. There is a tussle between the House and Senate over the length of bill (six vs. two years) and size (level vs. 35 percent cut). Mica played hardball on the Federal Aviation bill and let it expire for two weeks and has threatened similar action on surface transportation to get his way. It is hard to see what exactly will happen, but it seems most likely that we will end up with another extension, possibly with some cutbacks in spending. Even if that is ultimately what happens – decisions that get made in September are likely to come back. We need to do everything we can to get Safe Routes to School back in the House bill and ensure it's in a good place in the Senate. Margo thanked the advocates who sent nearly 60,000 emails to Congress last month, but reminded folks that we have to keep the pressure up.

Menu of options to take action

- Use this Do Your Part flyer for ideas and for links to other resources for meeting with your Congressional member- <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/file/Doing-Your-Part-FINAL.pdf>
- Rally your local supporters to email and call Members of Congress to support dedicated funding for Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails.
 - [Easy to send link on our website](#)
 - Spread the word on Facebook, flyers and in newsletters
 - Engage political leaders to write/call with more personal outreach
- Plan an event and make Safe Routes to School *real to Members of Congress*.
 - Get a meeting with your Member's district staff to talk about your program and how federal funding helps.
 - Ask a couple community leaders and Safe Routes to School advocates to do the meeting with you.
 - Call the district office nearest you and ask to set up a meeting with the Member or their staff on bicycling and walking funding.
 - Prepare good examples of why Safe Routes to School and bicycling/walking money is important locally.
 - Report back on your meeting to margo@saferoutespartnership.org.
- Even better – get the Member out to see your program in action.

- WTSD or kick-off event
- Ribbon-cutting
- Groundbreaking
- Keep in touch with the Member's staff—share clips, stories, newsletters.
- For more on engaging your Member of Congress, [check out this toolkit](#) for step-by-step instructions and resources.

Margo thanked everyone in advance for what they are doing on behalf of Safe Routes to School. She encouraged people again to accept our challenge to get a Member of Congress to an event this fall to help save Safe Routes to School.

Breakout groups

Below are highlights from each of the 10 breakout groups.

Challenges in rural areas

- The main challenges in rural areas are the distance from home to school, traffic speed and traffic concerns with state highways running through towns. Also, there is rural and then there is REALLY rural – the problems are different in these two types of communities.
- Some solutions include: remote drop off locations; creating a toolkit specific to rural areas; reviewing trucking schedules to work directly with trucking communities.
- One positive thing about rural areas is that it can be easier to pull key players together in these areas to work together.

Challenges in urban areas

- One of the main challenges in urban areas is children traveling across the city to get to school.
- City specific examples for dealing with urban issues, include:
 - St. Louis – traffic calming on state highway
 - Chicago – parent patrols
 - Tacoma – money/grants to high school students to do bike to school programs with younger children
 - Miami – town hall meetings to improve traffic safety. This is specifically helpful here because of so many ethnic enclaves.

Creating long-term sustainability

- Add Safe Routes to School funding into the language for school bonds or a transportation tax.
- Find champions in high places and make use of their main interest(s) to get and keep them involved.
- Use Safe Routes to School training to get stakeholders in a room together to inspire them to use their expertise working together to fix infrastructure problems as a group.
- Institute policies, like Complete Streets policies in cities and counties and pro-walking and bicycling policies in schools.

Developing school policies, including school siting and joint use

- Integrate bike/ped curriculum into the school setting.
- National groups could help by collecting best practices and innovative ideas, like private schools that have been successful in getting money for joint use.
- What is needed: model policies around school siting and school closures; alerts for when schools will close; and model policies on collaboration between schools and cities.
- Compare data between different states.

Engaging youth

- Make it fun with incentives.
- Include Safe Routes to School in school announcements, with kids making the announcements.

- Give high school students credits towards graduation to encourage participation.
- Identify youth interests, instead of just telling youth why they should walk or bicycle.
- Provide funding to bring youth to events like our Annual Meeting and Safe Routes to School conferences.

Evaluation and research

- Parent surveys/student tallies – how to make them more beneficial tools.
- Utilize data relationship with the CDC. Reconcile data sources and provide one main reliable resource.
- Look for more vehicles for survey collection. School kids for each individual state.
- Produce a white paper on various evaluation tools.

Influencing state implementation and policies

- [Look at state network policies](#) – this group specifically talked about bike/ped curriculum/low income and Title 6 issues.
- It is really helpful to talk to other states and see how they solved problems.
- Identify decision makers and who can champion each policy you are trying to change to find solutions.

Other funding sources

- Some ideas of alternative funding sources include:
 - Grand Forks – a church funding their bike fleet with bikes/helmets
 - Bike to church programs
 - Cities of Promise
 - Working collaboratively with bicycle advocacy groups
 - Congestion pricing funding
 - Health departments and childcare
 - Hospitals have accreditation to get Safe Routes to School into injury prevention

Recruiting and retaining volunteers

- Sources of volunteers: parents and grandparents; employees of corporations; college students; seniors; high school students; local champions.
- Some ideas for retaining volunteers: celebrate them; have a meeting once a month; get administration at school to buy in and share with them; provide formal training to educate them.

School travel plans

- The benefits of a school travel plan including the following:
 - Involving local stakeholders early on
 - Helping build a vision
 - Thinking about priorities before applying for Safe Routes to School grants and working within school district
 - Helping fill in the blanks for applications with materials ahead of time
 - Thinking through school transportation plans and school bussing plans

Closing remarks (Risa Wilkerson, Chair)

Risa thanked everyone for their attendance, participation and for their support of the Safe Routes to School movement.