



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION

Bicycling and walking to school as a community

Takoma Park, MD

The City of Takoma Park Safe Routes to School program won special recognition from the National Center Safe Routes to School James L. Oberstar Awards Committee in summer of 2012. The program works with four elementary schools and one middle school in Takoma Park. In addition to bicycle and pedestrian safety education, the program includes Crossing Guard Appreciation and a community 5K in the spring. A major trail rehabilitation project was completed in the community to make the walk or ride to the middle school safer for students.

Background

The City of Takoma Park Safe Routes to School program was created in 2007. Even with a part-time Safe Routes to School coordinator, the program offers a menu of options for schools interested in promoting walking and bicycling to school. For example, the program recognized the trend of skateboarding as transportation to school and started a safe skateboarding workshop and plans to install racks for skateboard parking in front of two schools. Each spring, the entire community comes together to celebrate walking and bicycling in the Takoma Park 5K Challenge. The Challenge offers four running/walking events with proceeds supporting Safe Routes to School safety and wellness activities at individual schools.

Program Implementation

The City of Takoma Park offers many ways to be involved in safe walking and bicycling to school. All schools participate in International Walk to School Day (IWTSD) with resources such as pencils, coloring books and lights provided by the program. IWTSD is used as a spring board to encourage more walking and bicycling every day. Coordinator Lucy Neher invites schools to request Safe Routes to School activities and keeps in regular contact with the schools. Regular communication establishes the relationship and allows Lucy to learn how best to fit Safe Routes to School programming into existing school routines.

The City of Takoma Park Safe Routes to School program offers the following programs to encourage safe walking and bicycling:

International Walk to School Day: All schools in Takoma Park participate. The coordinator does outreach every year to help schools organize. This event serves as a kick-off for walking and bicycling every day.

Bike Safety: In partnership with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), bike safety rodeos are offered free of charge to Takoma Park schools. The workshop features a safety presentation and helmet fitting followed by a bicycle course where students demonstrate safe practices. Bike to School Day was piloted at one school in May, 2012. Over 160 students and parents biked to school that day. New bike racks will be installed to accommodate the growing number of students biking to school regularly.

Walking School Bus: The coordinator will help organize Walking School Buses in neighborhoods. Parents can rotate the responsibility of walking with the students and designated meeting place and time will be set for each Walking School Bus. The electronic matching service, SchoolPool, has been introduced to assist parents with finding nearby students to join a Walking School Bus. SchoolPool is a project of Metropolitan Washington Region Council of Governments [Commuter Connections](#) program.

Crosswalk Simulation Activity: Developed by the Takoma Park program, this new pedestrian safety program reinforces safe pedestrian practices. The kit includes a mock crosswalk, cars, traffic signs and signals. Students play the role of a pedestrian or car. They also learn a song that reminds them to “walk in the middle of the crosswalk.”

Crossing Guard Appreciation: In collaboration with Parent-Teacher Associations(PTAs), one day is dedicated in the spring for school families to show their appreciation to their cross guards. Students and families are encouraged to say a special “thank-you” with small gifts for the crossing guards.

The program is willing to work with schools on specific issues. For example, at Takoma Park Middle School, parents were not following the rules for drop off and pick up. With funding from the local Safe Kids program, a barrier was installed to enforce proper drop off and pick up. Additionally, behind the school, two trails connected to the soccer fields. The trails were not well maintained and parents were concerned about student safety. With the help of a local business, students, Public Works Department and school staff, one trail was cleaned up and the other blocked so no one would use it.

The Takoma Park Safe Routes to School program has developed partnerships with groups and organizations such as Safe Kids Montgomery County, Boy Scouts, school PTAs, local and county police forces and local businesses. Sharing resources and expanding the reach and scope of the program are some of the benefits.

Sustainability

The Takoma Park 5K Challenge brings the entire community together around Safe Routes to School, walking and bicycling. The event includes a 5K run or walk, 1 mile fun run or ¼ youth run. Each school has started a running club to train for the race! Schools that participate in the planning committee share the 5K Challenge profits. Funds are used for Safe Routes to School,

safety, and wellness activities at individual schools. Community businesses donate funds, food, and services to help make the event a success.

To enable schools to host bicycle rodeos at their convenience, the coordinator offered the opportunity to be trained by the Washington Area Bicycle Association (WABA). The “train the trainer” workshop teaches volunteers how to conduct a bike rodeo. Once parents are trained, they have access to the WABA trailer full of bikes and supplies to host bike rodeos at their own schools.

Next Steps

Recognizing the new trend in skateboarding at Takoma Park Middle School, the Safe Routes to School coordinator designed a workshop for skating skills and safety. Special racks will be installed at two schools to store skateboards securely.

[Lose the Training Wheels](#), a bike riding training program for students with special needs will be offered at a week-long camp in the summer of 2013.

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