



September 19, 2008

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Re: Top Priority Data Collection Needs

Dear Lauren:

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership staff appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and National Center for Safe Routes to School staff in Seattle during Pro Walk/Pro Bike to discuss data collection and evaluation efforts associated with the three-year-old federal program.

Thank you for inviting me to formally share our recommendations for the top-priority evaluation efforts to be addressed this fall. Our recommendations are based on these needs:

- provide solid numbers demonstrating that Safe Routes to School programs are fulfilling the three goals of the 1404 legislation; and
- fulfill the requests for data and infrastructure project quantification called for at the Highways and Transit sub-committee hearing in October 2007, where we both testified.

There are many needs for data collection and evaluation associated with SRTS, but what follows are what SRTSNP deems as the top three priorities for the fall of 2008:

- 1) **Process the Student Tallies and Parent Surveys to Calculate Increases in Walking and Bicycling:** We understand that hundreds of schools have submitted data to NCSRTS in the form of parent surveys and student tallies. We encourage you to process that data to develop examples of schools receiving federal money that are having success shifting children from cars (and buses) to feet and bikes. Currently, there is no data that we are aware of from any program funded with federal dollars that shows how the \$612 million

allocated to SRTS is achieving the goal of increasing walking and bicycling. Now that we are three years into this program, it is paramount that these examples surface this fall. If possible, we would also like to see some examples to fulfill other goals associated with section 1404 including increases in physical activity, improvements in safety, and decreases in air pollution. We understand that there are limited instances where you have more than one set of data, but we ask that you prioritize any programs that have collected the tallies and surveys at the beginning of their project and at some point during project implementation.

2) **Develop a National Database to Categorize all Infrastructure and Non-Infrastructure Projects funded with the 1404 federal monies:** At the October 2, 2007 Highways and Transit sub-committee meeting, Ranking Member Duncan made it clear that he was not interested in websites, trainings, or conferences associated with SRTS – he wanted to know what was being built with these valuable federal safety funds. Other Members of the Committee echoed his comments, and many other constituencies are interested in this too. We recommend that the NCSRTS create a standardized excel spreadsheet or similar data collection instrument and ask the SRTS DOT Coordinators in each state to fill it out each quarter with projects that they are funding (or have funded previously). As states are awarding the funds, they should have this information. NCSRTS would be the master keeper of this information, and would be able to make it publicly available. This would enable NCSRTS to quantify not only the number of projects being funded (and schools being served), but miles of sidewalk, bike lanes, and pathways; the number of students being served; what communities are benefiting; and the types of projects being constructed. This information is critical to quantifying the scope and success of the SRTS program, and SRTSNP was quite surprised that it was not already being collected. Collecting this data will be beneficial for other reasons as well. For example, it would enable you to create a map for your report due to Congress in 2009 and show locations throughout the country that have received SRTS funds. Having contact information for all SRTS projects around the country would also allow NCSRTS to directly engage project staff in data collection and training support. We recommend that NCSRTS consult with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy on the format for their Transportation Enhancement database which is similar in nature. At a minimum, we suggest the following fields for the proposed state-award excel spreadsheets be created:

- Award amount
- Year awarded
- Infrastructure, Non-Infrastructure or Combined
- School(s) project is serving
- Name of grantee (if different than school)
- City and zip code where project is located
- Congressional District number
- Components included in the project (check all that apply): education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering, evaluation
- Type of infrastructure being constructed (check all that apply): N/A, sidewalk, bike lanes, pathway, traffic calming, street crossing, signage
- Linear feet of facility being constructed: _____ feet for _____ (type of facility – pull down menu)

- Number of students being served through the program
- Grant start date
- Grant end date
- Anticipated completion date for infrastructure
- Project focus (check all that apply): safety improvements, increasing walking/bicycling, health improvements, environmental improvements
- Contact person with contact information
- 100 word description of project

Collecting this type of information nationally will also help substantially for future research and evaluation efforts.

3) **Collect Anecdotal Data to Show Additional Benefits of the Federal SRTS Program:**

The NCSRTS seems to be doing this through your case studies, but many of these focus on programs that have not received federal funding. We encourage you to develop case studies of federally-funded programs that include hard data and tangible benefits in the following categories:

- Increases in mode shift
- Improvements in safety
- Increases in physical activity
- Decreases in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- How SRTS is leveraging additional community resources and creating partnership

The SRTSNP appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the NCSRTS. We have the same goals. After all, if we want SRTS to continue and grow, we must be able to demonstrate to Congress this fall—as well as other funders and others interested in SRTS—that the \$612 million is achieving the programmatic goals called forth in the legislation.

Please let me know if you have any questions on these recommendations. I look forward to hearing back from you about next steps for your fall 2008 evaluation work plan, and how the SRTSNP and NCSRTS can continue to work together on SRTS and evaluation efforts. We also look forward to future opportunities to continue this discussion about other data collection and evaluation issues beyond these immediate fall 2008 needs.

Best regards,



Deb Hubsmith, Director
Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Cc: SRTSNP Staff: Margo Pedroso, Robert Ping and Brooke Driesse
NCSRTS Staff: Austin Brown and Nancy Pullen-Seufert