Safe Routes to School (SR2S) Programs
(Section 1404, SAFETEA-LU)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
November 1, 2005

These guidelines have been developed by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, a coalition of national, state and local organizations, agencies and businesses advancing the national Safe Routes to School movement. These guiding principles highlight the most important principles behind the execution of the national Safe Routes to School program established in section 1404 of the 2005 federal surface transportation authorization bill, SAFETEA-LU. This federal funding program is an important part of the larger Safe Routes to School movement.

The principles are divided into four sections:
*   Goals
*   Program Administration
*   Planning and Evaluation
*   Programs: Infrastructure and Non-Infrastructure

Goals

1. Purposes: According to the text of the legislation, the purposes of the Safe Routes to School program are:
   a) to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
   b) to make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
   c) to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce [automobile] traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

2. Outcomes: Desired outcomes of the Safe Routes to School program include:

- Increased bicycle, pedestrian, and traffic safety
- More children walking and bicycling to and from schools
- Decreased traffic congestion
- Improved childhood health
- Reduced childhood obesity
- Encouragement of healthy and active lifestyles
- Improved air quality
- Improved community safety
- Reduced fuel consumption
- Increased community security
- Enhanced community accessibility
- Increased community involvement
- Improvements to the physical environment that increase the ability to walk and bicycle to and from schools
- Improved partnerships among schools, local municipalities, parents, and other community groups, including non-profit organizations

3. <u>Leveraging Additional Resources:</u> The amount of funds available through the federal Safe Routes to School program will only scratch the surface for what is needed to achieve the program goals set forth in the legislation. Fortunately, there are many additional federal, state and local funding sources available to complement the federal 1404 Safe Routes to School resources. Funding resources which could be used to supplement the federal Safe Routes to School activities include but are not limited to health, recreation, transportation, physical education, law enforcement, and safety funds. Flexible transportation resources including the Transportation Enhancements Program, the Surface Transportation Program, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program, un-programmed bonus equity funds, and the new state Highway Safety Improvement Program are available and eligible to be used for certain Safe Routes to School projects. Successful state and local SR2S efforts will use Section 1404 funds to attract, combine and apply many resources for the furtherance of the program goals and objectives.

In addition, new programs in SAFETEA-LU such as the Projects of National and Regional Significance may reduce the competition for funding in some of the core programs (such as the STP) and could offer greater flexibility to fund Safe Routes to School projects and programs.

4. <u>Adding to Existing Resources:</u> Safe Routes to School funds are limited and therefore should be used to supplement, not to replace current funding streams that support non-motorized transportation. Existing state and local SR2S programs should be sustained and ultimately integrated into the new federally funded SR2S program, not abandoned. Existing programs and policies established in anticipation of the passage of the federal program should be continued and brought into conformity with these principles as well as the technical requirements of Section 1404.

Program Administration

5. <u>Statewide Coordination</u>: The process by which a state disburses Section 1404 funds and participates in statewide SR2S activities is fundamental to the success of SR2S programs throughout the state. State Departments of Transportation are encouraged to task their new full-time Safe Routes to School Coordinators to collaborate with other State agencies and interested organizations to create a plan for how to best accomplish the goals described in section 1404. Integrating the SR2S program with multiple state agencies, such as: bicycle and pedestrian programs, highway and traffic safety, environment and planning, health departments, and other related activities, will make the outcomes more comprehensive, and more effective.

6. <u>State Task Force:</u> To assist in the development of Statewide Coordination and to develop strategies for the long term success of Safe Routes to School programs, states are encouraged to form a "SR2S State Task Force." This Task Force should incorporate representation from a diverse array of SR2S stakeholders including: representatives from statewide agencies (such as transportation, health, environment, and education departments), bicycle and pedestrian organizations, teachers, parent teacher groups, education and school board members, school architects, local public transportation and school bus operators, traffic safety educators, law enforcement, public health officials and school students.

7. <u>Ease of Administration</u>: Program mechanisms at federal, state and local levels must be simple and easily understood in order for the Section 1404 program to quickly and efficiently meet Congress' intentions in establishing this new program. Vital accountability must be preserved, but the introduction of unnecessary red-tape must be resisted. Methods to ease implementation are as follows:
   a) Many eligible recipients of SR2S funds are likely to be small organizations with limited financial capacities. Implementation of SR2S programs will be faster and more efficient if states administer the SR2S program as grants, rather than reimbursable programs.
   b) SR2S projects and programs should be incorporated into the RTIP and the STIP as a single line item, rather than detailing each individual project.
   c) SR2S infrastructure projects are often small in nature. Streamlined project development procedures (PDP) for infrastructure improvements including "categorical exclusions" from the National Environmental Policy Act, should be utilized in administering environmental and other requirements of the law.
   d) Applicants should be permitted to submit multi-year applications and receive multi-year funding for multi-year projects, especially for the non-infrastructure activities which aim to shift behavior through long term community involvement.

8. <u>Project Selection:</u> The implementation of Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trail Programs has been greatly aided by the participation in project selection of Citizen Advisory Committees which include representatives of user groups and other affected parties. State Safe Routes to School programs could also benefit from Citizen Advisory Committees. Committees that rate and rank projects and activities for funding should assure that the implementation of the proposal will benefit current and potential bicyclists and pedestrians

accessing schools, boost the ability of children to walk and bike to school, increase their willingness and desire to walk and bike to school, address safety issues and other barriers for walking and bicycling, and reach the widest possible number of students and families.

Planning and Evaluation

9. <u>Participatory Process to Develop Safe Routes to School Programs</u>: Increasing the percentage of school trips made by foot and bicycle requires a broad set of complex actions on both public and private levels. Each community will require a different mixture of activities and interventions to advance a successful SR2S program which achieves the program goals. Because of the need for behavior change, success can be achieved only by using a fully participatory and consultative planning process which includes those people whom the program aims to affect. Stakeholders in SR2S programs include parents, students, teachers, school administrators, government officials, business leaders, school bus operators, community groups, advocates for bicycling and walking, law enforcement officials, advocates for health, environment and safety, and professionals in transportation, urban planning, engineering, and health. A participatory planning process will ideally result in an adopted Safe Routes to School Program that describes how the jurisdiction (whether it is the school or a municipality), will apply each of the 5 E's for Safe Routes to School. SR2S Programs ultimately describe how the jurisdiction aims to achieve the program goals by phasing-in each of the five E's. Safe Routes to School Programs identify the desired actions to be taken, what entities will be the responsible party for each intervention, and (ideally) under what time frame. The 5 E's include:

   a) Evaluation – Monitoring and researching outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of mode share data before and after the program intervention(s).
   b) Encouragement – Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
   c) Education – Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong safety skills, and launching school-bound and school area driver safety campaigns.
   d) Engineering – Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and establish safer crosswalks, walkways, trails and bikeways.
   e) Enforcement – Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure drivers obey traffic laws, and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs.

10. <u>Adopting Safe Routes to School Programs</u>: States are encouraged to give special consideration to grant applications which show that a community process has resulted in a documented SR2S Program in which all five E's are planned to be incorporated. Through the program design process, the community becomes vested, activities and actions are optimized, the effectiveness of all program elements are predicted, and program execution is coordinated and managed. SR2S Programs can be adopted by states, municipalities and/or schools (depending on the jurisdictional level of intervention) and should include many if not all of the following objectives:

   a) Encouragement of students, families and school staff to be physically active through walking and bicycling to and from schools more often,

b) Training parents to teach pedestrian and bicycle safety skills by example,

c) Teaching age-appropriate walking and bicycle traffic safety skills routinely in school,

d) Offering special events such as Walk and Bike to School Days, and other encouragement models including classroom participation and contests,

e) Evaluation of the barriers for walking and bicycling to school,

f) Providing opportunities for the community to participate in developing plans for making streets, sidewalks, pathways, trails, and crosswalks safe, convenient and attractive for walking and bicycling to school,

g) Ensuring that streets around schools have an adequate number of safe places to cross and that there is safe and convenient access into the school building from adjacent sidewalks,

h) Keeping driving speeds slow near schools, on school routes, and at school crossings,

i) Enforcing all traffic laws near schools and on school routes, and in other areas of high pedestrian and bicycle activity,

j) Locating and retaining schools within walking distance and bicycling distance of as many students as possible, not along busy streets on the edges of neighborhoods nor distanced or separated from neighborhoods,

k) Reducing the volume and speed of automobile traffic around schools,

l) Using trails, pathways and non-motorized corridors as additional travel routes to schools,

m) Providing secure, sufficient and convenient bicycle parking at schools,

n) Applying the use of human and technological resources, including volunteers, to provide routes to school that feel secure to both parents and children alike, and

o) Evaluation of changes in mode share as a result of the program.

While it is recognized that not all elements of the Safe Routes to School Program will be able to be implemented immediately, it is through the process of creating such a program that the important balance between infrastructure and non-infrastructure project elements and partnering agencies is established. Through ongoing community efforts, the various coordinated activities and projects undertaken in any jurisdiction should come to represent a fully comprehensive program with all 5E's.

11. <u>Performance Measures</u>: It is essential for the responsible management of public funds that an ongoing review and evaluation activity be associated with all SR2S programs. This is vital for the continual improvement of each program (and for the study and development of a strategy for advancing SR2S programs nationwide, as called for in Section 1404). Central to that evaluation effort are the metrics for success which can be measured in terms of:

a) Detailing improvements in safety (through crash data evaluation as well as an analysis of public perceptions),

b) Counting the number of children who have shifted behavior to begin biking and walking to school through measuring before and after the specific intervention (care should be taken to compare the outcomes that have similar conditions (i.e. time of year, weather, regular day or contest day, etc.),

c) Describing the number of new partnerships created as a result of the program,

d) Assessing the number of students and/or schools reached through the program,

e) Measurements of student health, air quality, congestion, and other metrics noted or implied by the legislative purposes of the program, and

f) Improvements to the built environment that benefit the ability to walk and bicycle to and from schools.

Federal program management practices should accomplish the maximum practicable data collection related to the status of funds and the activities and purposes to which the funds are committed. Sampling techniques might be appropriate in large scale applications.

All grants or contracts approved for funding should stress monitoring and evaluation, as well as reporting to a central entity to accomplish the reporting requirements of Section 1404. Partnering with higher education institutions for specific projects could help to achieve these goals.

Programs: Infrastructure and Non-Infrastructure Activities*

12. <u>Multi-Party Execution</u>: Safe Routes to School Programs are based on collaboration. As such, each element of a SR2S program is best executed by a particular type of organization or agency. This is especially true for infrastructure projects as opposed to non-infrastructure activities. While an infrastructure project will likely be constructed and maintained by a local or statewide road authority, educational and encouragement activities might best be administered by agencies or non-profits with specific expertise and larger jurisdictions, i.e. county-wide, region-wide, or statewide. Administrative procedures at both the state and local levels should be designed to encourage such multi-level execution as it will permit promotional and educational activities to reach a large audience through a coordinated approach.

13. <u>Infrastructure and Non-Infrastructure Activities</u>: The Congressional explanatory statement for section 1404 states, "The SR2S program funds two distinct types of projects: infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure related activities. States should be encouraged to create competitive application forms, criteria, and evaluations that are appropriate for the two different types of projects."

The distinction between infrastructure and non-infrastructure is clear and important. Each state should determine what percentage of funds should be allocated to the infrastructure (between 70-90%) and non-infrastructure (between 10-30%) activities each year. Non-infrastructure activity applications should compete separately from infrastructure projects, and the administration of the Safe Routes to School grants must enable both types of projects to be evaluated fairly. The types of activities that may be funded under each of the infrastructure and non-infrastructure activities include but are not limited to:

> **Infrastructure**: The planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school, including sidewalk improvements, traffic calming and speed reduction improvements, pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, secure bicycle parking facilities, and traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools.

> **Non-infrastructure**: Activities to encourage walking and bicycling to school, including public awareness campaigns and outreach to press and community leaders, traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of schools, student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and environment, and funding for training, volunteers, and managers of safe routes to school programs.

While infrastructure programs will largely focus on accessing one school at a time, non-infrastructure activities will be critical for the creation of statewide and community-wide educational and encouragement efforts that can be designed to affect wide geographic regions and change cultural norms and attitudes. There must be an annual accounting by the State DOT as to what percentage has gone to each of the two types of projects.

* The Safe Routes to School National Partnership will be providing additional information to FHWA on how the two different kinds of projects may be considered for funding, and why the distinction between infrastructure and non-infrastructure is important.