



## Making the Most of Non-Infrastructure

### Safe Routes to School Funds

A report compiled by the [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#)

Last updated November 3, 2009

#### Introduction

The most effective Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs incorporate the “5 E’s” – evaluation, engineering, education, encouragement, and enforcement. It is of critical importance to have good engineering/infrastructure in place that supports safe walking and bicycling, but as practitioners continue to realize, even with fantastic infrastructure in a community, there is no guarantee that children and parents will actually use it. The built environment isn’t the only part of the solution. There are many other barriers in parents’ minds– stranger danger, distance, convenience, traffic safety, time, and habits – to name a few. Non-infrastructure techniques can help to overcome these barriers.

Within the non-infrastructure “E’s” (evaluation, education, encouragement, and enforcement) it is crucial to have organized programs that support walking and bicycling to school and provide safe, convenient ways to do so – e.g., walking school buses, bicycle trains, enforcement of speed laws, traffic safety education and skill building, promotional activities, and other programs that bring parents and children together to walk as a group. These programs also help to:

- Address stranger danger and traffic safety concerns by having adults walk and bicycle with groups of children,
- Cut down on potential crime and bullying with more eyes and more people on the street who are organized groups, and
- Reduce the probability of traffic collisions with parents helping kids cross streets, and providing children with skills and knowledge of traffic safety.

Very often, getting parents and students to change their habits requires an organized promotional program with incentives that encourage participation. Even with good infrastructure, education, and enforcement, encouragement may be necessary to change behaviors. In addition, if older children are going to be walking and bicycling independently, they need to know the rules of the road and be armed with pedestrian and bicycle skills. Therefore, the education component is also critical. Also, remember that even confident parents are challenged to cross the street in speeding traffic, so enforcement of traffic speeds is important to the overall success of a program. Infrastructure can calm traffic, but a combination

of infrastructure and enforcement can assist even more with calming traffic, especially if there aren't enough federal, state, or local funds to pay for all of the needed engineering improvements near a school.

Because traffic issues are one of the primary concerns of parents, traffic calming is a critical piece of any SRTS program. True experts on traffic behavior are local law enforcement. Having them at the table brings a valued perspective on crime and traffic safety while developing SRTS programs. Once a program is launched, law enforcement can provide resources for traffic calming and improving traffic safety in the neighborhood around the school, such as speed reader boards and ticketing enforcement campaigns. Law enforcement often requires little or no funding from grant sources such as state SRTS programs because the city or county may already have funding to do traffic enforcement in the area. Since law enforcement officers are already paid to be on the job, it may simply take a policy decision to make it a priority for law enforcement to participate in the SRTS program.

Ultimately, the long-term success of SRTS is based on convincing parents and policy makers that the program can make the necessary changes to achieve results. Without evaluation data and analysis, it is hard to convince policy makers that the program works. Programs should do baseline data collection ([parent surveys](#) and [student tallies](#)) at the beginning of the school year and student tally data collection at the end of each school year to measure results. This information can then be used for gaining additional investment in the program by diverse partners.

In many states, applications for non-infrastructure funding have been low or of poor quality. The federally-funded SRTS program requires that at least 10% of a state's SRTS funding and at most 30% of the funding be spent on non-infrastructure activities throughout the state. And while non-infrastructure is critical to the success of SRTS programs, many states have not been able to reach that minimum of 10%, much less reach the maximum of 30%.

*Why is this the case?* A lot of schools and jurisdictions starting programs are interested in getting more children walking and bicycling to school, and/or improving safety for those who do, but don't know much about how to create a sustainable SRTS program, and need to know more about the "5 E's", especially the non-infrastructure components. With more statewide leadership to provide outreach, training, and material resources, more local communities will begin to understand the importance of the non-infrastructure side of SRTS and apply for funding for comprehensive programs. Below are some examples of tactics various states are using to help increase the number and quality of non-infrastructure programs in states, which could also lead toward more walking and bicycling to school in a safe manner, goals of the federal program.

**Training.** It can be intimidating to get started if you are uninformed about all of the elements that go into a comprehensive SRTS program. Local community champions may not have any knowledge about walking or bicycling, how to organize parents and volunteers, how to work with other community leaders, or how to even approach a school. Good SRTS trainings provide at least a technical expert and a state program representative who can talk about these issues and how to apply for funds. Federal SRTS funding can pay for contractors to provide training

education, encouragement, and technical support services to local communities. A single statewide contractor for training can make it easier for the state to go through the process. However, some larger states may find that they need multiple contractors. Trainings can be held in person in locations around your state, and/or through webinars, conferences, or by other means. Illinois is one example of a state using non-infrastructure funds towards training.

*Illinois:* The Illinois Department of Transportation (DOT) funded a series of regional trainings, as well as a statewide conference. During 2007 and 2008, the Illinois DOT hosted twenty-one five-hour [training sessions](#) around the state to help promote the Illinois SRTS program, and to prepare communities to develop high quality programs and funding proposals. In 2008, a two-day conference was held in Bloomington, Illinois, bringing a wide cross-section of SRTS stakeholders together to learn about both national and Illinois-specific strategies and best practices. This commitment to training and continuing education generated hundreds of well-informed funding proposals and greatly raised awareness of SRTS around the state.

**Local Program Managers.** In the training section, we discussed that having a statewide contractor is an important tactic that can be used, however, at the local level, volunteers may not have capacity or expertise to launch a comprehensive SRTS program. Therefore, it is important that funds be available to hire local program managers. This creates capacity to guarantee leadership at the local level to launch SRTS programs – a local program manager can manage SRTS efforts at several schools simultaneously, or manage efforts for small school districts or cities. A best case scenario is for the local program manager to be funded for three years to get the program up and running. Eventually local volunteer parent champions, the PTA chapter, or others will hopefully take the reins and begin leading the program. Paid leadership is especially important in low-income, underserved school communities, which typically have much less volunteer leadership capacity. The federal legislation permit for Local Program Managers, and many states including California and Oregon are using their federal funds for this purpose.

*Sacramento, CA:* The Natomas Unified School District in Sacramento, California received non-infrastructure funding to pay a Safe Routes to School Coordinator/Local Program Manager who manages the non-infrastructure “E’s” in the school district. This Local Program Manager provides technical assistance to school champions and assistance in coordinating volunteers, linking of schools to community resources, the creation and distribution of marketing tools, informational flyers, and incentives. These resources support month-long and year-long incentive-based promotions, such as “Walktober” and “March-On” events, and often include participation in International Walk to School Day. A bi-monthly newsletter highlights specific school site efforts and provides useful information and encouragement to the school and district community. Additionally, skill building classes and bicycle safety events, such as helmet fitting events, bicycle P.E. and traffic safety curriculum provide educational opportunities for students and parents to learn appropriate uses of safety equipment and to enhance skills that build children’s abilities to use active modes of transportation to and from school. Probably the most significant evaluation component they are looking to conduct within the district is the ability to coalesce data on the participation rates of students in these walking programs by identifying their place of residence, and linking that information to student attendance and achievement data, down to the individual. Additionally, subsequent reports will be used to monitor which students are walking on program days versus non-program days, with all data visually presented

on an interactive map. The Local Program Manager is responsible for compiling this data and disseminating subsequent reports to all the distinct departments within the district.

**Encouragement and walking school buses.** Specific program elements, such as walking school buses and weekly/daily encouragement programs can take a great deal of effort and expertise to launch and manage over time. Having technical experts, trainings, and materials available to help local leaders figure out how to run these program elements is critical, and an effective way to spend these vital non-infrastructure funds. States such as Massachusetts, Michigan, and Missouri have statewide contractors who provide these technical services to local communities.

*Missouri:* The Missouri Department of Transportation subcontracts with [The PedNet Coalition](#), based in Columbia, Missouri, to provide one day trainings across the state on walking school bus programs.

*Massachusetts:* The Massachusetts SRTS program offers schools technical assistance with designing, implementing, marketing, and evaluating SRTS initiatives tailored to each school's needs and priorities through a statewide contract with [MassRIDES](#), the Commonwealth's travel options program. Participating schools receive free promotional materials to implement a program, plus no-cost educational materials targeted to students, parents, and community leaders. Training prepares school stakeholders to identify school access challenges and design solutions. School partners qualify for infrastructure improvements to enhance safety along school routes.

*Michigan:* Michigan's Safe Routes to School program is managed by the Michigan Department of Transportation, with training, logistical, administrative, and technical support from the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports and the Michigan Fitness Foundation. All schools enrolled in [Michigan's Safe Routes to School \(SR2S\) program](#) receive the following at no charge: 1. A SR2S Handbook that contains templates for creating flyers, invitations, surveys, and more. 2. Training sessions offered periodically throughout the year to help school teams develop effective, sustainable programs. 3. If registered for Walk to School Day—a one day event—an event-planning guide, brochures for every child/family, stickers for all walkers, a certificate from the Governor upon completion, and more. 4. A quarterly newsletter that contains tips and ideas on how to build your program. 5. Telephone assistance from the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports/Michigan Fitness Foundation.

*New Jersey:* The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) had already formed a SRTS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and initiated a SRTS Demonstration Program when federal funding became available in 2005. They were able to hit the ground running with a website and a strategic plan in 2006. The process was made easier by the establishment of a [NJ SRTS Resource Center](#) at the Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers University. The Resource Center assisted with conference presentations and informational open houses across the state to get the word out about the program. Resource Center staff initiated a SRTS list serve and help desk for New Jerseyans working on SRTS issues. They also launched a quarterly newsletter, The Safe Routes Scoop, and facilitated the meetings of the NJ SRTS Coalition. Along with the RBA Group and the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, VTC also assisted

NJDOT with a training session for Local SRTS Program Coordinators (2007), a Walking School Bus Training and a School Travel Plan Template (2008), and a Federal Aid Workshop for Grant Recipients (2009). The response to the program has been overwhelming. NJDOT received 274 applications requesting over \$75 million in funds for projects in their first competitive grant cycle. Demand has not waned. As of May 2009, the Department has awarded over \$13.5 million in federal SRTS funds to projects in 83 communities, involving almost 200 schools across the state. NJDOT has also initiated an Urban SRTS Demonstration Program to identify and help address the special needs of disadvantaged cities in New Jersey.

**Education in schools.** If children are going to be out on streets walking and bicycling, they need to understand the rules of the road and how to behave safely while traveling around the neighborhood. Traffic safety education is important not just for SRTS programs, but as a general life skill. Since everyone is a pedestrian at some point and most children end up being drivers in the future – the more traffic safety education they receive, the better pedestrians and drivers they will be in the future, creating more knowledgeable citizens. The District of Columbia and Maine are two states that expend non-infrastructure funds providing bicycle and pedestrian education.

*Florida:* Florida has several examples of successful education within schools that can be seen through different District strategies. District 1 has trained each county in the [Florida Traffic and Bicycle Safety Education Program](#) so they are ready to teach the program. District 2 has designed and implemented a bicycle/pedestrian education program, and worked through their Community Traffic Safety Team partners to go into the schools (an estimated 625 schools so far!) to do educational programs. District 4 has done an education program, partnering with Publix Supermarkets, to insert walking and bicycling tips in brochures available in the stores. The program includes a cute walking challenge pendant for those who pledge to walk more. District 6 has the [WalkSafe Program](#) through University of Miami, which is educating children how to cross the street safely, targeting the high risk areas of Miami-Dade County each year. The program is one of the few which has been heavily tested and has been proven to be successful. They will be expanding to Monroe County (Key West) in 2009. District 7 has a successful education program done through Safe Kids Tampa. They organize walk to school events, bicycle rodeos and more, to get the children excited about the program.

*Maine:* Since 2000, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine has been contracted by the Maine Department of Transportation to teach [Bicycle Safety Education Program](#) in schools across Maine, and to date more than 80,000 students have been trained statewide. This is now partly funded with SRTS non-infrastructure funding. A BCM Bicycle Safety Instructor spends a day with each school giving a series of 45-60 minute classroom presentations. The program is targeted towards 4th and 5th grades to teach bicycling safety before they enter the highest risk age group of 12-15 years old. In addition to the presentation, students are given a copy of the *Be a Safe Bike Driver* handout, which offers children tips on how to practice with their parents, as well as a Share the Road brochure for parents with safety tips for both bicyclists and motorists. A series of six week after school bike clubs are also organized in middle schools throughout the state in which students learn bike safety and riding skills on public roads. Students bring in their own bicycle and helmet. The Maine Program also funds two 20 hour/week Encouragement

Coordinators who work directly with communities and schools on walk and bike to school events, programs, and school travel plans.

*District of Columbia:* Since 2003, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation has funded [traffic safety education](#) in elementary schools. This is now funded with SRTS non-infrastructure funding. Kindergarten, first, and second graders learn pedestrian safety, while third through eighth graders learn bicycle skills. Experts from the Washington Area Bicyclist Association give the training at twelve or more schools per year and at local events, utilizing their comprehensive curricula. In 2008, they trained over 3,500 District of Columbia children.

**Mini-grants.** There are two main ways that mini-grants can be put to work to expend non-infrastructure funding.

- *Helping local communities to develop and submit an application.* Often rural or low-income communities will not have local champions or paid staff able to do this, so mini-grants are a great way to help expand SRTS programs to these areas.
- *Getting promotional events to help build interest in SRTS in communities.* Some examples of promotional events include: funding for data collection; a Walk and Bike to school day grant; purchasing incentives to put together an event and help build support; and media campaigns.

*Pennsylvania:* In fall 2007, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation contracted with the [Penn State Hershey Children Hospital's Center for Nutrition & Activity Promotion \(CNAP\)](#) to develop statewide resources and a mini grant program. Through this contract, CNAP leads walk to school day, provides competitive mini grant funding to schools, and maintains a website with resources for all Pennsylvania schools.

There were two types of SRTS Academy mini-grants available in 2008: 1) A Capacity Building Mini-Grant (\$5,000) that included seed money plus a technical assistance provider to guide partnerships through the development of a thorough SRTS action plan and 2) An Education and Encouragement Mini-Grant (\$5,000) that included seed money for communities with basic walking infrastructure in place, but that need assistance promoting and educating parents, kids, and community members on safe walking to school. 10 awards have been provided to date, five Capacity Building and five Education and Encouragement.

In August 2009, the SRTS Academy launched a new round of grants. The \$5,000 grants are available to K-8 schools (public or private) to help improve the safety of walking and bicycling to school. In addition to the \$5,000 grant, schools will be eligible to receive a two day walkability audit, during which a team of trained experts will observe main walking routes to school and develop a comprehensive plan on how to improve the safety of those routes. This service will be provided free of charge to all schools selected for a grant.

*Arizona:* The [Arizona Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School Planning Assistance Program](#) is for small or resource-poor elementary and middle schools, school districts, non-profit organizations, and communities. State, local, and regional agencies, including non-profit organizations, that demonstrate an ability to meet the SRTS requirements, may apply for funding for K-8 schools. The program provides the applicant with the technical

resources needed to plan and implement their own SRTS projects. As a condition of the program, the applicant applies for the next cycle of SRTS infrastructure and/or non-infrastructure funding. If the application is selected, the state's designated consultant may provide some of the following services: conduct site/needs assessments of school areas, develop school walking and bicycling route plans and maps, recommend infrastructure solutions and locations, recommend and provide guidance for non-infrastructure solutions, develop school bicycle/pedestrian education, enforcement, encouragement programs, conduct pre- and post-program/project evaluations, conduct SRTS training sessions and community meetings, and provide grant writing assistance for the next SRTS grant application.

## **Conclusion**

Non-infrastructure elements of SRTS programs are cost-effective and important for achieving the goals of the program. There is a great need to have states and practitioners share more information about successful SRTS non-infrastructure strategies that are already in place. If you have additional examples, please contact Brooke Driesse at [info@saferoutespartnership.org](mailto:info@saferoutespartnership.org) and we will make periodic updates to this paper. Thank you!