



Talking Points on Safe Routes to School

Background

The federal Safe Routes to School Program was created in 2005 through SAFETEA-LU. The goals of the program relate to improving safety and increasing opportunities for children to safely walk and bicycle to schools, which reduces traffic congestion. The program was funded at a level of \$612 million over five years, representing just 0.2 percent of the federal transportation budget, and has been continued at an annual level of \$183 million into 2010 and 2011.

More than 10,000 schools and communities have benefited from the federal Safe Routes to School funding across all 50 states. The program is building sidewalks, pathways and safe street crossings that serve children while also improving safety for other community members. *By improving the safety and prevalence of walking and bicycling to and from school, children and their communities benefit from reduced traffic congestion, better air quality, and healthier lifestyles.*

Benefits of Safe Routes to School

Infrastructure and Safety:

- For just 0.2% of federal transportation funding, Safe Routes to School is helping to improve safety around more than 10,000 schools nationwide—critical since one-third of children’s traffic deaths occur when kids are walking and bicycling and are struck by cars.
- The infrastructure improvements made through Safe Routes to School are targeted to address high-risk areas where a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, traffic volumes and traffic speeds create unsafe conditions for children.
- Simply adding a sidewalk reduces by half the risk that a pedestrian will be struck.
- For each collision avoided, communities save money and tragedies are avoided.

Economy and Jobs:

- Safe Routes to School is a smart use of dollars—making a one-time, low-cost investment like adding sidewalks can reduce long-term school busing costs and ease financial burdens on schools.
- A recent study of infrastructure jobs in Baltimore, Maryland showed that pedestrian and bicycle construction projects generated nearly twice as many jobs as road construction.
- Communities of all shapes and sizes—rural, suburban and urban—are competing for these dollars, and in some small towns Safe Routes to School funding has resulted in the town’s first set of sidewalks—which also helps support access to local businesses.

Traffic:

- Approximately 15-25% of morning traffic is generated by parents driving their kids to school, so the choices parents make about the trip to school affect other drivers trying to get to work.
- Nearly half of kids that live between one-quarter and one-half of a mile from school are currently driven to school, and the most commonly cited reason for driving is a lack of safety.
- These short trips can be shifted to walking and bicycling with Safe Routes to School, easing the morning commute.

Childhood Obesity:

- A lack of physical activity among children has fueled the childhood obesity epidemic, which has huge economic costs to America as more children develop diseases like type II Diabetes.
- Safe Routes to School infrastructure gets children moving, creating an opportunity for daily physical activity and improved health through self-responsibility.