



Safe Routes

PARTNERSHIP

Active Paths for Equity & Health

www.SafeRoutesPartnership.org

Introduction to Safe Routes to School

Over the past two decades, Safe Routes to School projects and programs have grown larger and more sophisticated. Walking and rolling to school has attracted great interest from leaders and decision-makers at the local, regional, state, and federal levels.

As such, Safe Routes to School practitioners have been expanding their efforts to encompass policy, systems, and environmental changes in their work. While there is federal, and sometimes state, support for Safe Routes to School, projects and programs are implemented at the local level – in neighborhoods and with schools. The municipal transportation department is one ally that can help advance efforts to support transportation options for students that include walking and rolling.

Safe Routes to School: A Primer to Understanding the Role of the Municipal Transportation Department



Municipal (city and county) transportation departments aspire to move people safely from one place to the other no matter how they choose to get there. Safe Routes to School practitioners can connect with transportation departments to affect long- and short-term planning and ensure that the vision for future transportation improvements includes opportunities for safe and accessible connections to schools and other places via walking and rolling.

Understanding the Roles and Responsibilities of the Student Transportation Department

Municipal transportation departments often vary in structure based on the priorities of the city, their location, and the amount of tax dollars that are allocated toward local transportation planning and projects. These departments are sometimes housed under the Department of Public Works which focuses on broader infrastructure policies, planning and projects that concentrate on public spaces, buildings and services – including water, electric and sewage – that are essential to the welfare and quality of life of its citizens. Other times, transportation departments are not intertwined with other infrastructure planning departments and stand alone as their own city office. In either case, the role of the transportation department is to evaluate problems and develop policies and plans that improve livability by working to reduce congestion, create safer streets and ultimately make it easier for people and goods to travel to their destinations. Transportation departments pursue this goal by ensuring that they are responsive to the future transportation needs of the community while maintaining the existing (and expensive) infrastructure investments of the municipality.

The process with which municipal transportation departments achieve this higher goal also varies depending on location. The transportation department often employs short-term, stopgap measures to increase safety and improve traffic flow – including the installation or timing of lights, additional signage, striping or other traffic calming devices – while simultaneously facilitating a long-term planning process that takes into consideration the community's future growth, transportation priorities and mobility needs, and invests in larger scale infrastructure improvements. Short- and long-term measures require funding. In the case of the transportation department, funding can be robust or slim depending on the funding priorities of the mayor and city or county council. In addition to local funding from the general budget, or special local taxes that fund walking and rolling projects, the transportation department can access grant funding from regional, state and federal sources including their metropolitan planning organization, state department of transportation or the Federal Highway Administration. Given these financial limitations, transportation departments need to make key decisions about prioritizing funding for short- and long-term projects based on the amount budgeted, the priorities of city leadership and, of course, the will of their community members. Safe Routes to School practitioners can provide input to their city government and transportation department to prioritize projects that improve safety and encourage more students to walk and roll to school.

When working with municipal transportation departments, Safe Routes to School practitioners should keep in mind that the departments have to deal with competing pressures from city government, involved community members, highway, freight, business, transit, bicycle and pedestrian proponents while adhering to local, state and federal mandates. The best way to ensure that decisions made by the department will not adversely affect walking and rolling opportunities is to educate each stakeholder involved on the numerous ways that active transportation can be seamlessly integrated into their day-to-day operations, and the relatively low costs and long-term benefits of active transportation on the transportation system, especially for reducing congestion and capital and maintenance expenses.

Gather information from the steps below, combine it with some of the outlined talking points, and familiarize yourself with the strategies that are included in the companion document, "[Safe Routes to School: A Primer for Municipal Transportation Departments](#)."

Safe Routes to School: An Issue of Equity

Children from lower-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families but typically face greater personal and traffic safety risks on their route to school. It is critical that Safe Routes to School initiatives reach lower-income schools and communities to help improve traffic safety and reduce injuries. Ensure that bicycling and walking improvements, whether infrastructure or program related, benefit all schools, especially those with the greatest needs.



What You Can Do

As with most successful work, success is predicated on knowledge of the processes and the people involved. Use the following tips as a starting point for engaging municipal transportation departments:

LEARN

- Talk to the transportation department staff and conduct research to learn about the city's past involvement in walking and rolling efforts, if any.
- Check with individual schools to see their perception of the transportation department's involvement in creating safe places to walk and roll.
- Research how the transportation department receives and allocates funding – look into any transportation planning documents, including the comprehensive plan, bicycle and pedestrian master plan, and transportation improvement plan.
- Talk with a city council member, agency staff person or community group to learn about any policies and laws that dictate the actions of the transportation department.
- Identify existing committees, coalitions and other community organizations that focus on walking and biking to school.

REVIEW

- Become familiar with the city's written bicycle and pedestrian master plan, comprehensive plan, Complete Streets plan, or any other related transportation policies.
- Review the transportation department's website and other public materials to better understand its stated priorities and find opportunities for synergy.
- Attend or review the minutes of any committees that may advise the city or its transportation department, including the Mayor's Bicycle or Pedestrian Advisory Committee, traffic safety committee, and health or other relevant advisory groups.
- Utilizing all the information learned and reviewed, put together a strong case for Safe Routes to School that will resonate with the city and the transportation department staff.

CONNECT

- Develop relationships with leaders and educate on key issues that are relevant to stated priorities and positions.
- Connect with previously identified coalitions, committees, and community organizations to bring transportation department staff into the discussion.
- Invite transportation department staff to join the district or community-wide Safe Routes to School task force (if one exists) or to attend a school team meeting so that they might learn and see more opportunities for collaboration.
- Don't stop at the transportation department staff! Connect with city council, the mayor, and other relevant city departments, such as the health department, to get buy-in at all levels for improved conditions for walking and rolling.

PARTICIPATE

- Inform transportation department directors and their staff about the priorities and benefits of bicycling, walking, and Safe Routes to School. Participate in relevant committees, coalition meetings and bicycle and pedestrian or Safe Routes to School advisory councils.
- Regularly meet with transportation department staff and relevant elected officials to serve as an expert and a resource on developing walking and rolling to school programs and projects.
- Ask the transportation department to publicize walking and rolling initiatives on their websites as viable transportation modes.
- Invite transportation department staff to participate in Safe Routes to School events and include them in the planning process. Offer public acknowledgement of their support and utilize opportunities to demonstrate the positive outcomes of their work.
- Be persistent, but professional and understanding. Municipal transportation departments can be very busy while juggling multiple interests.

Align Talking Points with the Stated Priorities of Municipal Transportation Departments

In addition to providing the transportation department with the companion [Safe Routes to School: A Primer for Municipal Transportation Departments](#) action brief, and reviewing the strategies outlined within the document, customize talking points by considering the following common priorities of municipal transportation departments and how they align with Safe Routes to School priorities. After choosing impactful talking points, supplement those with photos and real-life situations that outline the hazards students face while walking or rolling, or successful Safe Routes to School projects in cities that include collaboration with municipal transportation departments.

Increased Walking and Rolling

Studies have shown an increase in walking and rolling to school through Safe Routes to School projects and programs.

- > A study of 801 schools in Washington DC, Florida, Texas, and Oregon showed an average 25 percent increase in walking and rolling to school over a five-year period associated with education and encouragement programs, and an average 18 percent increase associated with infrastructure improvements. This means that a school that combines infrastructure improvements with education and encouragement programs is likely to see increases in walking or biking of up to 43 percent.¹
- > A study of 53 schools in four states (FL, MS, WA, and WI) found that schools with Safe Routes to School funded projects increased walking and rolling to school by 37 percent.²



Traffic Safety

Safe Routes to School addresses traffic dangers and improves safety for students as well as other community members.

- > A New York City study found a 44 percent decline in pedestrian injury in areas with Safe Routes to School projects, compared to no change in locations without. The costs savings associated with injury reduction would achieve an overall net societal benefit of \$230 million over a projected 50-year period.³
- > A study of 47 schools in California found that Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements resulted in a 75 percent reduction in collisions involving people walking and rolling of all ages.⁴
- > Increasing the number of people using the streets, better lighting, and better street design can increase individual sense of safety as well as decrease actual criminal activity. Data shows that the safer that people feel in their neighborhood, the more time they spend walking.⁵

Economy

Walking and rolling are low-cost options for students to get to and from school, reducing the amount of money needed to purchase and maintain personal and school vehicles.

- > Transportation is the second-highest household expense in the United States. In 2019, Americans spent an average of \$10,742 to purchase, fuel, and insure their vehicles.⁶
- > Safer options for commuting to school can save people from the emotional and financial cost of injuries and fatalities. In New York City, the total cost of implementing SRTS was just over \$10 million, but it produced estimated cost reductions of \$221 million by reducing costs associated with injury, lifelong disability, and death.⁷



Health

Safe Routes to School supports increased physical activity, helps form healthy habits that can last a lifetime, and decreases the risk of chronic disease.

- > Walking and rolling to daily destinations, like school, provide an opportunity for physical activity outside of school time, augmenting physical education in school. Walking one mile to and from school each day is two-thirds of the recommended sixty minutes of physical activity a day. Children who walk to school have higher levels of physical activity throughout the day.^{8,9}
- > People who live in places that support walking, rolling, and public transportation get more physical activity and are less likely to be overweight than those who live in automobile-oriented communities.¹⁰
- > People with access to more and better-quality sidewalks are more likely to walk and meet physical activity recommendations.¹¹ Similarly, people with access to bicycle lanes and paths are more likely to bicycle and meet physical activity recommendations.¹²
- > Safe Routes to School is one of the most effective evidence-based children's health strategies in the chronic disease realm. As one of only a handful of approaches that the CDC has selected as cost-effective measures that have a health impact in five years (known as HI-5 interventions).^{13,14}



Traffic Congestion and Air Quality

- > Neighborhoods are becoming increasingly clogged by traffic. By boosting the number of students walking and rolling, Safe Routes to School projects and programs reduce traffic congestion and benefit the environment.
- > School travel by private family vehicle for students grades K through 12 accounted for 10 percent of all automobile trips made during the morning peak period (7:00am to 9:00am) in 2017 and 1.5 percent of the total annual trips made by family vehicle in the U.S.^{15,16}
- > If more children walked or rolled to school, it would reduce the number of cars near the school at pick-up and drop-off times, making it safer for active travelers and reducing congestion.¹⁷
- > Safe Routes to School programs can improve air quality by reducing vehicle trips and miles traveled. Over the last 25 years, among children ages 5 to 14, there has been a 74 percent increase in asthma cases.¹⁸ In addition, 14 million days of school are missed every year due to asthma.¹⁹
- > Children exposed to traffic pollution are more likely to have asthma, permanent lung deficits, and a higher risk of heart and lung problems as adults.²⁰

Conclusion

Considering the transportation department's goals of streamlining traffic flow, reducing congestion, and improving safety, there are many opportunities to integrate walking and rolling to school in existing projects, plans, and policies. Safe Routes to School practitioners can advance this relationship toward a shared cause by carefully considering the municipal transportation department's responsibilities, reviewing the talking points and potential department strategies to bolster walking and rolling, and utilizing the suggestions in the above "What You Can Do" section to develop relationships with the municipal transportation department staff and achieve mutual goals.

Additional Resources

- > [Benefits of Safe Routes to School](#)
- > [Integrating Safe Walking and Bicycling to School into Comprehensive Planning](#)
- > [Vision Zero and Safe Routes to School: Partners in Safety](#)
- > [Federal Funding for Safe Routes to School: Evolution Through Four Transportation Bills](#)
- > [Investing in Walking, Biking, and Safe Routes to School: A Win for the Bottom Line](#)
- > [Policies to Support Safe Routes to School](#)
- > [Safe Routes to School Policy Resources](#)
- > [Complete Streets and Bicycle Master Plans](#)

References

1. Noreen McDonald, Ruth Steiner, Chanam Lee, Tori Rhoulac Smith, Xuemei Zhu and Yizhao Yang (2014). "Impact of the Safe Routes to School Program on Walking and Bicycling." *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Vol 80, Iss 2, p 153-167.
2. Orion Stewart, Anne Vernez Moudon, and Charlotte Claybrooke (2014) Multistate Evaluation of Safe Routes to School Programs. *American Journal of Health Promotion*: January/February 2014, Vol. 28, No. sp3, pp. S89-S96.
3. Peter A Muennig et al., 'The Cost-Effectiveness Of New York City's Safe Routes To School Program', *American Journal Of Public Health*, iss 0 (2014): 1-6.
4. David Ragland, S Pande, J Bigham and FJ Cooper. (2014, January). Ten years later: examining the long-term impact of the California Safe Routes to School program. Presented at the Transportation Research Board 93rd Annual Meeting, Washington DC. Available at <http://docs.trb.org/prp/14-4226.pdf>.
5. Foster, S., Hooper, P., Knuiman, M. et al. Safe RESIDential Environments? A longitudinal analysis of the influence of crime-related safety on walking. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 13, 22 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-016-0343-4>
6. Consumer Expenditures--2019. (2020, September 9). <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nr0.htm>.
7. Muennig PA, Epstein M, Li G, DiMaggio C. The cost-effectiveness of New York City's Safe Routes to School Program. *Am J Public Health*. 2014;104(7):1294-1299.
8. Alexander et al., The broader impact of walking to school among adolescents. *BMJonline*.
9. Cooper et al., Commuting to school: Are children who walk more physically active? *Amer Journal of Preventative Medicine* 2003: 25 (4)
10. Litman, Todd., *Evaluating Transportation Benefits and Costs*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, February 2015, <http://www.vtpi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf>.
11. See, e.g., Addy C, Wilson D, Kirtland K, et al. "Associations of Perceived Social and Physical Environmental Supports with Physical Activity and Walking Behavior." *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(3): 440–443, March 2004; Rodriguez D and Joo J. "The Relationship between Non-Motorized Mode Choice and the Local Physical Environment." *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 9(2): 151–173, March 2004; Sharpe P, Granner M, Hutto B, et al. "Association of Environmental Factors to Meeting Physical Activity Recommendations in Two South Carolina Counties." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 18(3): 251–257, January/February 2004; Owen N, Humpel N, Leslie E, et al. "Understanding Environmental Influences on Walking; Review and Research Agenda." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 27(1): 67–76, July 2004; Reed J, Wilson D, Ainsworth B, et al. "Perceptions of Neighborhood Sidewalks on Walking and Physical Activity Patterns in a Southeastern Community in the US." *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 3(2): 243–253, April 2006; Ewing R, Schroeder W and Greene W. "School Location and Student Travel: Analysis of Factors Affecting Mode Choice." *Transportation Planning and Analysis* 2004, 1895: 55–63, 2004.
12. See, e.g., Boarnet M, Day K., Anderson C, et al. "California's Safe Routes to School Program-Impacts on Walking, Bicycling, and Pedestrian Safety." *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(3): 301–317, September 2005; Hoehner C, Ramirez L, Elliott M, et al. "Perceived and Objective Environmental Measures and Physical Activity Among Urban Adult." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28(2): 105–116, February 2005; Sharpe P, Granner M, Hutto B, et al. "Association of Environmental Factors to Meeting Physical Activity Recommendations in Two South Carolina Counties." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 18(3): 251–257, January/February 2004; Krizek K, El-Geneidy A and Thompson K. "A Detailed Analysis of How an Urban Trail System Affects Cyclists' Travel." *Transportation* 34 (5): 611–624, September 2007; Garrard J, Rose G and Lo S. "Promoting Transportation Cycling for Women: The Role of Bicycle Infrastructure." *Preventive Medicine*, 46(1): 55–59, January 2008; Wardman M, Hatfield R and Page M. "The UK National Cycling Strategy: Can Improved Facilities Meet the Targets." *Transport Policy*, 4(2): 123– 133, April 1997.
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Impact in Five Years," <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hst/hi5/index.html>.
14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Impact in Five Years: Safe Routes to School," <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hst/hi5/saferoutes/index.html>.
15. Kontou, E., McDonald, N. C., Brookshire, K., Pullen-Seufert, N., & LaJeunesse, S. (2020). U.S. active school travel in 2017: Prevalence and correlates. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2019.101024>
16. Brookshire, K., LaJeunesse, S., & Pullen-Seufert, N. (2019). Who is Walking or Biking to School: Patterns from the 2017 National Household Travel Survey and Future Directions. *Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center*.
17. Vanwolleghem, G., D'Haese, S., Van Dyck, D., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Cardon, G. (2014). Feasibility and effectiveness of drop-off spots to promote walking to school. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 11, 136. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-014-0136-6>
18. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Surveillance for Asthma—United States, 1960-1995: CDC Surveillance Summaries, April 24, 1998. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Vol. 47 (SS-1), 1998, pp. 1-27.
19. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Youth! Health Topics: Asthma. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/asthma/index.htm>.
20. Gauderman, W. J., E. Avol, F. Lurmann, N. Kuenzli, F. Gilliland, J. Peters and R. McConnell, "Childhood Asthma and Exposure to Traffic and Nitrogen Dioxide," *Epidemiology*, Volume 16, No. 6, November 2005. AND Gauderman, W.J., H. Vora, R. McConnell, K. Berhane, F. Gilliland, D. Thomas, F. Lurmann, E. Avol, N. Kunzli, M. Jerrett, and J. Peters, "Effect of exposure to traffic on lung development from 10 to 18 years of age: a cohort study," *The Lancet*, Volume 368, February 2007.