Safe Routes to School and Policy 101: Why and How to Develop Policies that Support Safe Routes to School

Colorado Safe Routes to School Program
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MISSION

The mission of the Safe Routes Partnership is to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools and in everyday life, improving the health and well-being of people of all races, income levels, and abilities, and building healthy, thriving communities for everyone.
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Today’s Agenda

1. Why Policy?
2. City and County Policies
3. Policy Highlight - Denver
4. School District Policies
5. Q&A
What is a policy?

- A statement in writing
- Binding
- Sets out a general approach to be applied broadly

Policy Examples

- School Board Policies
- Local State Laws
- Resolutions
- Zoning Language
- Contracts
Who is in the room?

- State
- District
- City
- County
- Nonprofit
- Community Member
- Planners
- Transportation Personnel
- Public Health
- Lawyers
- Parents
- Students
What Are the Benefits of Policy Change?

Policy can:

• Institutionalize good ideas
• Reach more people
• Lead to more consistent implementation
• Create accountability
• Establish relationships and responsibilities
Policy and Programs

Programs, like walking school buses, can lead to policies that support walking and rolling.
Safe Routes to School Policy Levels

- Federal
- State
- Region
- Town/City/County
- School District
- School
Safe Routes to School initiatives require support from school districts and local jurisdictions.

- Geographical Authority – Each needs to act on those areas in their own jurisdiction
- Data – Each use data to inform program and policy needs (new developments, new schools, hazardous conditions)
- Different Perspectives – Elementary/middle/high school, school release times, needs of residents
- Access to Different Resources – Money, volunteers, community partners, expertise, etc.
City and County Policy Options

• Incorporate into the Comprehensive Plan
• Stand Alone Safe Routes to School resolution
• Incorporate into other Plans and Policies
Comprehensive Plan

- Blueprint for future development in a community
- Opportunity for residents and leaders to think about what they value about their community and what changes they’d like to see, and create a plan to accomplish that
- Guides future policy decisions and investments
- Long term vision
Incorporating Safe Routes to School in a Comprehensive Plan

Vision

- How community residents want to see their community evolve
- Can include walking and rolling generally as well as safe walking and rolling to school

Core Elements
- Transportation/Circulation
- Public Facilities

Additional Elements
- Land Use, Housing
- Recreation and Tourism
- Health
Transportation/Circulation Element

- Identify steps to reduce speed near schools, both through lowering speed limits and through design changes

- Prioritize safe infrastructure near schools; fill gaps on school routes

- Local funding for Safe Routes to School
Public Facilities Element

How local jurisdiction works with school district:

• Walking and bicycling events
• Crossing guard program
• Location of development in context of services
Land Use & Housing Elements

School location policies are important and long term.

- Emphasize the importance of in-fill development near schools

- Call for zoning updates that support connectivity and good walking and biking infrastructure
Recreation and Tourism Element

- Routes to school through parks and trails
- Locate schools and parks next to each other
Example: Fort Collins City Plan

**Transportation**

**Principle T 6: Support bicycling as a safe, easy and convenient travel option for all ages and abilities by building a connected network of facilities.**

**Policy T 6.1 - Connected Bicycle Facilities**
Build and maintain bicycle facilities that form a continuous and dense low-stress bicycle network with seamless connections to public transit, bike-share and other shared-mobility vehicles, schools, neighborhoods, community destinations and the regional bicycle network.

**Policy T 6.2 - Bicycle Facilities and Programs**
Implement appropriate, well-designed bicycle facilities; encourage low-stress bicycling; and encourage bicycling programs.

**Policy T 6.3 - Bicycling for All Ages and Abilities**
Increase bicycle ridership by creating a welcoming environment for people of all bicycling levels in all parts of the city.

**Policy T 6.4 - Bicycling to Promote Physical Activity**
Increase access to bicycling as essential to an active and environmentally healthy community.

**Policy T 6.5 - Facility Maintenance**
Identify opportunities for additional year-round maintenance of bicycle facilities to provide safe bicycling in winter months.

**Policy T 6.6 - Adaptive Bicycling**
Increase programming and infrastructure focus on adaptive bicycling to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

**Principle T 7: Support walking as a safe, easy and convenient travel option for all ages and abilities by building a connected network of sidewalks, paths and trails.**

**Policy T 7.1 - Pedestrian Facilities**
Implement ADA-accessible pedestrian facilities as detailed in the Pedestrian Plan and Sidewalk Prioritization Program.

**Policy T 7.2 - Safe Pedestrian Facilities**
Develop safe and secure pedestrian settings by designing and maintaining a pedestrian network, ensuring snow removal on sidewalks adjacent to residential properties and mitigating the impacts of vehicles. Connections will be clearly visible and accessible, incorporating markings, signage, lighting and paving materials.

**Policy T 7.3 - Neighborhood Streets for Walking**
Provide an attractive, safe environment for pedestrians, bicyclists and others on neighborhood streets with well-designed streetscapes, including detached sidewalks, pathways and well-defined crosswalks.

**Policy T 7.4 - Pedestrian Connections**
Provide direct and visible pedestrian connections between cut-throughs, transit stops, schools, activity areas, public facilities, recreational trails and other key pedestrian destinations.

**Policy T 7.5 - Infrastructure for Disabled Community**
Increase programming and infrastructure focused on providing the best environment to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

**Principle T 10: Support and enhance safety for all modes.**

**Policy T 10.1 - Toward Vision Zero**
Develop a safety enhancement action plan for all modes based on the City’s commitment to Vision Zero.

**Policy T 10.2 - Education and Enforcement**
Promote the development of educational programs and ensure the appropriate utilization of traffic enforcement.

**Policy T 10.3 - Safety and Respect**
Develop and support education and enforcement programs that promote safety and encourage respect for traffic laws among drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, long boarders and e-scooter riders.

**Policy T 10.4 - Pedestrian Traffic Laws**
Partner with community stakeholders to develop education and enforcement programs that promote safety, encourage respect for pedestrians and encourage pedestrians to respect traffic laws.

**Policy T 10.5 - Street Crossings**
Design street crossings at intersections consistent with the Fort Collins Traffic Code, the Land Use Code, the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), ADA and the Larimer County Urban Area Street Standards (LUCASS) with regard to crosswalks, lighting, median refuge, bike boxes, corner sidewalk widening, ramps, signs, signals and landscaping.

**Policy T 10.6 - Safe Routes to School Program**
Continue the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, which focuses on educating all children, teachers, parents and schools about safe walking and bicycling as a mode of travel to and from school. Ensure that SRTS materials and activities are inclusive of people with disabilities.

**Policy T 10.7 - Personal Safety**
Design infrastructure and programs to promote personal safety through lighting, the activation of public space and police presence.

**Policy T 10.8 - Data-Driven Approach**
Utilize an annual, data-driven, citywide safety review that helps inform all projects.

**Policy T 10.9 - Safety Project Implementation**
Focus improvement efforts on projects that enhance transportation safety.

**Policy T 10.10 - Underresourced Communities**
Consider prioritizing safety improvements in marginalized and underresourced communities, including the disability community.
In many communities, roads, schools, and neighborhoods have developed in ways that make it difficult, unsafe or impossible for children to get to school by foot or bike. However, some communities are taking steps to make streets and neighborhoods safer. One key way that communities go about determining how they want to change and develop in the future is through a process known as comprehensive planning. Many communities are revising their comprehensive plans to include Safe Routes to School concepts and address walking and bicycling to school. Safe Routes to School describes the initiatives that focus on encouraging students to walk and bicycle to school and making it safer for them to do so, as well as the movement of advocates and stakeholders who support these efforts. Safe Routes to School projects are eligible for funding under federal transportation programs and may be eligible under some state programs. By including considerations and action steps on walking and bicycling to school in comprehensive plans, decisions about the future of our communities can include safe and active travel to school.

What Is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan acts as a blueprint for a community’s future. A comprehensive plan is a written document that starts with residents’ vision for how they want the community to look and feel in the future – what kind of place they want it to be. Building off of the current community conditions, the comprehensive plan details the specific goals, objectives, policies, and action steps that, if implemented, will lead to a realization of that vision. Does a midsize town in an agricultural region want to stay aligned with its rural culture while becoming a home to specific new industries? Does a small city want to revitalize its downtown and maintain the peaceful feel of its neighborhoods? The comprehensive plan is the place where the large and small steps necessary to achieve these kinds of goals are spelled out.

Comprehensive plans vary in their legal strength and effect from state to state. In some states, zoning codes must conform to comprehensive plans, and development that is contrary to a plan is illegal. In other states, comprehensive plans provide a vision and guidelines, but may not be enforceable. State law or regulations may spell out how frequently a comprehensive plan must be updated, and will likely set out the topics that must be addressed by the comprehensive plan. But whatever the legal weight of a comprehensive plan, all comprehensive plans play a role in articulating how a community should develop and in guiding investments and action by private individuals and local officials.

Terminology:

Safe Routes to School or Walking and Bicycling to School

In some communities, the phrase “Safe Routes to School” is widely used and well known. In others, the term may be unfamiliar or too jargon-y and it makes more sense to just say “walking and bicycling to school.” When thinking about language for the comprehensive plan, the goal is to be clear for present and future readers while capturing the full spirit of what is envisioned, so a community can pick whichever phrase resonates more for them.
Could include support for Safe Routes to School events, actions that can be taken by local agencies, and a commitment to revise existing policies to improve their support for Safe Routes to School.

Strong policy sets out specific actions the city or county will implement.
Additional City and County Policies

- Safe School Zone Policy
- Complete Streets
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Plans
- Vision Zero
- Zoning and Subdivision Codes
Safe School Zone Policy

• Reduce speed

• Prioritize new walking and biking infrastructure near schools
Complete Streets

Policies that ensure that all new construction and renovation of streets creates streets that are safe, comfortable, and convenient for everyone using them.

Who? People walking and biking, cars, public transportation riders, disabled people, and people of all ages.
Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans

• Can stand alone or be incorporated into transportation plan or comprehensive plan

• Planning process for walking and biking

• Include Safe Routes to School
Zoning & Subdivision Codes

- Require
- Incentivize (e.g. density bonuses)
- Restrict
Vision Zero

- Prioritize children as vulnerable users and schools as key destinations
- Identify Safe Routes to School investments
- Include bicycle and pedestrian safety for children in education component
How do school districts benefit from Safe Routes to School?

- Physical activity supports academic achievement
- When children are healthier, they learn better
- Physically active kids have better attendance rates
- Safe Routes to School helps children arrive safely at school
How do you get school board policies adopted?

- **Engage:** Get people excited about their vision for change.
- **Assess:** What’s the problem? What solutions are there?
- **Propose:** Draft a strong policy that expresses the vision.
- **Advocate:** Identify and meet with decision makers.
- **Implement:** Stay focused after a policy gets adopted.
Working with School Boards

- To start: Do some basic research & get the inside scoop on school board members.
- Build relationships with board members by first looking to inform and engage them.
- Figure out what a board member wants. What is important to them? Would they like to serve on your task force? Ask!
- Meet with board members before presenting your ideas at a board meeting.
- Keep your superintendent in the loop.
- Offer your resources & recognition & SRTS photo ops.
Topics for Safe Routes to School Policies

- Support
- Guidance and Authorization
- Logistics
- Planning and Design
Support Statements

- Support for Safe Routes to School
- Policies that Limit School Restrictions
- Student/Parent Handbook
Guidance and Authorization for Safe Routes to School Components

- Walking School Buses
- Bike Trains
- Walk and Bike to School Day Events
- Recommended Routes
- Traffic Education
- Shared Use
Logistics

- District Task Force
- School Teams
- Duties of School and Transportation Departments
- Wellness Committees
Planning and Design

- School Travel Plans
- Site Design
- Bike Parking
- School Siting
School District Policy Opportunities

- Wellness Policies
- Board Policies
- Administrative Regulations
District Wellness Policies

- Required by federal law for schools participating in federal student nutrition programs
- Widely present
- Historically weak on physical activity
- Good opportunity to incorporate language about kids walking and biking
- Wellness policies or traditional board policies both effective.
Less formal school policies can be key:

- Families and student handbooks
- Webpages
- Transportation department policies
- Curricula (e.g. health and PE)
- Other plans or policies required by state law (safety plans, etc.)
- Remember to actively include students and give them decision-making power
The Policy Workbook

- **Free online tool** that lets you review different possible policy provisions

- Allows creation of very own policy tailored to your local needs

- Educational resource & national tool

- Joint project between Safe Routes Partnership and ChangeLab Solutions
How did the policy workbook come about?

- Need was seen by policy people & lawyers at ChangeLab Solutions and by issue experts at Safe Routes Partnership.
- Developed in 2012-2013 with funding from CDC.
- Reviewed every district Safe Routes to School policy we could find.
- Input from over 25 advocates, district administrators, school board members, and other experts.
- Breaks down policies into beginner, intermediate, and advanced.
Beginner Policies

- Support for Active Transportation
- Support for Safe Routes to School
- Roles of Districts, Schools, Students, Parents/Guardians
- Minimizing Driving
- Following the Law
- District Task Force
- School Teams
- Traffic Safety Education
- Walking School Bus and Bike Trains
- Walk/Bike to School Day
- Student/Parent Handbook
- School Wellness Policy
Intermediate Policies

- Limiting Restrictions on Active Transportation
- Assessing Recommended Routes to School
- Crossing Guards
- Student Arrival and Dismissal
- No Idling Policy
- Bicycles, Scooters, and Skateboards on Campus
- Bicycle Parking and Storage Facilities
- Student Transportation Department: The Bus Stops Here
Advanced Policies

- School Travel Plan: Moving Beyond the Bus
- Busing
- School Design
- School Siting
- Attendance Zones and Assignment Policies
Why use the Policy Workbook?

• Presents a wide array of policy options

• Assists districts in committing to strong policies

• Helps avoid problems and liability concerns by ensuring a well thought-through, vetted approach
Healthy Students, Thriving Districts: Including Safe Routes to School in District Policies

Key Facts for School Board Members and Superintendents

Activating Support for Safe Routes to School: moving from Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents

Your Homework:

1. Explore the Basics:
   - When you work on any school safety plan, you should discuss what the benefits are. Benefits are always a topic of interest for any school board. Why wouldn’t you want to talk about it? Benefits are minimal when used properly and can be hard work when used incorrectly. Why aren’t these the benefits of a school board?

2. Determine Your Goal:
   - What are your goals in identifying the benefits of a school board? What would you like to do with the school board? What is your strategy for identifying the benefits of a school board?

3. Make Connections:
   - Meeting with Board Members and Explore Their Interests and Concerns
     - How can you identify your goals in identifying the benefits of a school board? What are the benefits of a school board? How can you determine your strategy for identifying the benefits of a school board?
Reminders

• Sign up for the Colorado Safe Routes to School Newsletter – email Wendy McMillan at wendy.mcmillan@state.co.us

• Upcoming SRTS Grant Cycle

• Next Webinar – Action Planning and Sustainability, July 15, 11am MT

• **Colorado SRTS Contact:** Melissa Trecoske Houghton melissa.houghton@state.co.us
Please take our survey!
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