Safe Routes to School April 2023

Walking and cycling to school offer a number of benefits. Beyond reducing school-related congestion, non-driving commutes offer kids who use them desirable physical activity, boosting health outcomes and translating into improved academic performance. A community may consider it beneficial to encourage walking and cycling to school, but safety concerns and a lack of information and needed infrastructure pose an obstacle to those otherwise eager to begin hitting the pavement. There is federal funding available for Safe Routes to School efforts, but some steps can be done by volunteers within a community without having to wait for a successful application in a future funding cycle. This resource sheet provides general information on the benefits of walking and cycling, funding sources and policies to better enable them, and select examples.

Activities that Support Safe Routes to School

Education: Providing students and the community with the skills to walk and bicycle safely, educating them about benefits of walking and bicycling, and teaching them about the broad range of transportation choices. Activities could include bicycle and pedestrian safety training in the classroom and in the field, driver safety campaigns, integrating bicycle education into physical education programs, etc.

Encouragement: Generating enthusiasm and increased walking and bicycling for students through events, activities, and programs. Activities could include ongoing opportunities for parents to walk and bicycle with groups of children who live together in a neighborhood, International Walk to School Day, walking school buses and bike trains, bike rodeo that can take advantage of temporary infrastructure, contests, competitions, and incentives, etc.

Engineering: Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient. Activities could include temporary installations to calm traffic using traffic cones, plants, colorfully painted tires, and spray paint to create temporary crosswalks, roundabouts, and narrow streets to slow traffic; create crosswalks and protected bike lanes, walking and biking audits, community assessment of the barriers for students and families walking and bicycling to school, etc.

Evaluation: Ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students of all genders, students with disabilities, and others. Surveys of families help to reveal why families are driving their children to school instead of allowing them to walk or bicycle, and will provide insight into what changes might encourage a shift in their behavior. Student surveys elicit the attitudes of the youth, and help demonstrate how to craft a program that will be appealing.

Federal Funding Sources

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is the primary source of federal funding for smaller-scale pedestrian, bicycle, and other automobile-alternative transportation projects. As it currently exists, the program's funding comes from the Surface Transportation Block Grant. Primarily distributed to states who award it through competition, TAP (also allows counties, cities, nonprofits, and school districts to apply for funding. Grants typically cover roughly 80% of a project's costs, with some flexible requirement of local match. TAP (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/) is a versatile funding source:

- *It can support infrastructure or non-infrastructure projects – including education.*
- *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has set-aside over $1.4 billion for 2023, up yearly through 2026 to nearly $1.5 billion.*
- *Historically, roughly half of annual TAP applications will be funded by the program.*

The League of America Bicyclists offers state-specific fact sheets https://data.bikeleague.org/show-your-data/state-data/new-for-2023-state-funding-fact-sheets/ on TAP eligibility and funding.

The BIL funding also established the new Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) https://www.transportation.gov/grants/SS4A. Eligible applicants can apply with projects meant to significantly reduce roadway injury or death. The SS4A program provides funding for two types of grants:

- *Action Plan Grants support development or supplementing of a comprehensive plan.*
- *Implementation Grants support infrastructure, tech deployment, and safety measures.*

The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grants (https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants) distributed by the USDOT encompass a broad range of infrastructure projects, which can include protected bike lanes that better enable bicycling to school. While FY23 applications have closed as of late February, taking early steps to prepare for FY24 applications can reduce future planning needs.

While not covering standalone bike projects, USDOT's

- INFRA https://www.transportation.gov/grants/infra-grant-program,
- Mega https://www.transportation.gov/grants/mega-grant-program,
- and Rural Surface Transportation Grants https://www.transportation.gov/grants/rural-surface-transportation-grant-program

can also incorporate multimodal projects including biking components.

State DOTs might offer resources and information on Active Transportation and Recreational Programs, including the state's TAP program. Additional programs that may be of interest include:

The **Recreational Trails Program (RPT)** provides reimbursement funding to projects that develop and maintain recreational trails and associated facilities, such as bike trails connected to schools.

The **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program** provides funding to transportation projects and programs that meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act (https://www.boem.gov/air-quality-act-1967-or-clean-air-act-caa). CMAQ's non-mandatory funding is

distributed to projects that improve air quality and reduce congestion, with applications in NM solicited every two years in coordination with state RTPOs and MPOs.

The **Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)** provides reimbursement funding to projects that reduce transportation CO_2 emissions from on-road highway sources. Program guidance is available at (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sustainability/energy/policy/crp_guidance.pdf).

The **Bicycle Counter Lending Program** provides pneumatic tube bicycle counting equipment to Tribal/Local Public agencies, MPOs, RTPOs, and NMDOT Districts for short/mid-term counts.

Additional information on programs providing federal funding can be found at the links below: https://www.peopleforbikes.org/news/billions-of-dollars-are-available-for-bike-projects funded by People For Bikes, https://www.railstotrails.org/policy/building-active-transportation-systems/obtaining-funding/ funded by Rails to Trails, and https://bikeleague.org/federal-transportation-funding/ funded by the League of American Bicyclists.

Non-Federal Funding and Models

The Complete Streets **(**https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-are-complete-streets/) approach to roadway infrastructure is centered on planning, designing, and building streets for safe access to all users – including pedestrians and bicyclists. Smart Growth America's National Complete Streets Coalition evaluates roughly 1,500 communities with Complete Streets policies, with case studies on the best policies in place are available at (https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-best-complete-streets-policies-of-2018/)

A December 2016 FHWA report titled *Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/page00.cfm)* explores in depth information on the common challenges of small towns and rural areas, then details the design, implementation, considerations, and benefits of various shared roadway designs classified as Mixed Traffic Facilities, Visually Separated Facilities, and Physically Separated Facilities. Additional information, including case studies demonstrating various designs, are also included.

Examples and Success Stories

Whatever the size of a community or its budget, there are possibilities for local walking and cycling to school initiatives, with the potential for support from state and federal grant funding.

In 2013, residents of Galax, VA established a "Bike Library" https://www.playcore.com/news/case-study-rural-virginia-community-rediscovers-the-joy-of-bike-riding for children to check out and in bicycles and safety equipment. With a VDOT SRTS non-infrastructure grant, Galax secured 30 initial bikes and helmets, with more coming from federal partners and private donations. A partnership with the local Parks and Recreation Department allowed them to acquire a storage facility, and volunteering from community members has assisted with repairs and continued growth.

Five years after the program began, over 145 students had checked out library supplies. Learn more about bike shares in the Western Transportation Institute report Bikeshare and Bicycle Libraries in Small

Communities http://ruraltransportation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Bikeshare_Bike_Libraries_2021.pdf

In Michigan's Highland Township —a suburb of Metro Detroit—the SRTS planning process (https://saferoutesmichigan.org/2020/01/22/case-study-highland-township/) presented its own strengths and challenges as the community navigated changes while working to preserve its rural character. Public engagement proved a critical factor, with the community rallying behind the project due to swift communication and receptive local government to any concerns or requests. This project created connectivity between each of three schools and nearby neighborhoods, demonstrating the extreme importance of engaging local communities.

North Carolina's Active Routes to School project deployed ten project coordinators to schools. Data from this project suggests that students from participating schools were between six and eight times more likely to walk between home and school than their peers, with training in safety skills and parental enthusiasm both being similarly strong factors in shaping commutes (https://www.communityclinicalconnections.com/active-routes-to-school/)

Studies from the National Center for Safe Routes to School on *Education* can be found at- (http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/case_studies/education.cfm)

Studies from the National Center for Safe Routes to School on *Encouragement* can be found at- (http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/case_studies/encouragement.cfm)

Studies from the National Center for Safe Routes to School on *Enforcement* can be found at- (http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/case_studies/enforcement.cfm)

Studies from the National Center for Safe Routes to School on *Engineering* can be found at- (http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/case_studies/engineering.cfm)

More Informational Resources

The NHTSA offers comprehensive pages on Bicycle Safety and Pedestrian Safety including various documents and fact sheets: https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/bicycle-safety; https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety

Resources for families and communities on school commutes include:

- *Prevent Pedestrian Crashes: Parents and Caregivers of Elementary School Children https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/811027.pdf*
- *Back to School: Keeping Children Safe, https://www.nhtsa.gov/school-bus-safety/keeping-children-safe*
- *A Kid's Guide to Safe Walking, https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/811026.pdf*
- *Tips for Preteens & Teens: Prevent Pedestrian Crashes, https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/11146b-preventpedestriancrashes.pdf*
- *Cycling Skills Clinic Guide, https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/811260.pdf*

These checklists on Bikeability, https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/bikabilitychecklist1.pdf, and Walkability, https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/walkingchecklist.pdf, may be of use in evaluating a community!

In addition, the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program **(**https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs) incorporates infrastructure, safety education, and incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School (https://www.saferoutesinfo.org/) operates with federal funding through a university center, with both data and resources available.

The Safe Routes Partnership, a nonprofit organization in the same issue space, offers a similar set of resources, including webinars (https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/browse/webinars) and a broad array of national or state-specific posts (https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/advanced-tool).

An example strategy under the SRTS approach is the Walking School Bus (http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/), where a group of students walk to school together in the company of one or more adults.

This guide (http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/pdf/wsb_guide.pdf) offers interested adults information on outlining, starting, and maintaining momentum for the model.

Additional Safe Routes Partnership resources which may be of use include:

- *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Background and Resources* (https://saferoutespartnership.org/healthy-communities/policy-change/federal/BIL-background-resources)
- *2022 Fact Sheet: Federal Funding Infographics* (https://saferoutespartnership.org/resources/fact-sheet/federal-funding-infographics)