

# SafeRoutes

National Center for Safe Routes to School



To: Members of the National Review Group  
From: National Center for Safe Routes to School  
Re: Update on National Center's Plans, Spring 2010 through Spring 2011  
Date: May 2010

As promised during the March 2010 National Review Group meeting, below is a list of some of the National Center's planned resources for the next year. As work on these projects begins and/or continues, we look forward to working with our NRG members who have previously expressed interest in a topic. If you would like to partner with the National Center on one or more of these projects, please contact us – we are always happy to collaborate towards common interests.

## **Integrating Students with Disabilities into SRTS**

The National Center is working on a variety of efforts to ensure that children with disabilities are included in Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs. This issue is very important for several reasons:

- 1) Children with disabilities are a part of every school population – typically one out of every seven students has disabilities.
- 2) Children with disabilities are more likely to rely on walking and bicycling in order to live independently later in life.
- 3) Children with disabilities are at a higher risk for sedentary behavior than their non-disabled peers.
- 4) Safe Routes to School programs offer opportunities for children with disabilities to develop social skills and interact with their peers – and vice-versa!

Involving children with disabilities is a very complex issue due to the wide range of disabilities, and the fact that schools already have many programs and policies in place to address the needs of students with disabilities. In light of this, we are working on several simultaneous efforts:

- 1) We are reviewing materials produced by the National Center to ensure that the materials are inclusive and that every opportunity is taken to encourage local programs to involve students with disabilities.
- 2) We are creating a new resource that specifically addresses the inclusion of children with disabilities in SRTS programs, including an overview of why it is important, as well as practical examples of how it can be done.
- 3) We are preparing case studies of programs throughout the U.S. that have included students with disabilities.
- 4) We are actively integrating a focus on students with disabilities into the National Center's existing programs. For example, one of the highlights of Walk to School Day 2010 will be students with disabilities, which will enable us to reach over 3,000 schools in the U.S. with this important message. Additionally, we have encouraged programs that involve students with disabilities to apply for the 2010 Mini-Grant program.

### **Mini-grants**

On the heels of the enthusiastically received mini-grant call for applications in Fall 2009 (activities to be completed by June 2010), the National Center closed a call for applications for the second round of mini-grants on April 7, 2010.

The National Center will award up to thirty-five \$1,000 mini-grants for creative, youth-focused ideas that support safe walking and/or bicycling to school. Eligible activities will occur at an elementary or middle school and will support the overall goal of Safe Routes to School programs — to enable and encourage children nationwide to safely walk and bicycle to school. We will announce recipients by May 26, 2010. Activities will occur during the Fall 2010 semester, and recipients' final reports will be due to the National Center by mid-February, 2011.

In the application we supply examples of eligible activities. These may include, but certainly aren't limited to, the following:

- Students encouraging peers/parents to find opportunities to walk or bicycle to school.
- Students working to increase safe driving in school zones and neighborhoods. Issues addressed could include speeding, cell phone usage, texting, etc.
- Students developing and/or promoting school or district policies which are supportive of safe walking and bicycling to school.
- Students of all abilities working together to identify and resolve safe walking/bicycling accessibility issues.
- Students and teachers working together to integrate walking and bicycling into the general curriculum (math, social studies, English, science, etc.).
- Students connecting the choice to walk/bicycle with better health or with helping the environment.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us to publicize our mini-grant program!

### **Personal Security Resource**

The National Center is developing a resource for local programs to address issues of personal security through their SRTS programs. It is known that SRTS programs can provide many benefits to children and communities, such as improved safety, reduced traffic congestion, and opportunities for physical activity. In some communities, however, student and parent concerns regarding personal security — including bullying, drug dealing, crime, or “stranger danger” — can present real obstacles to encouraging families to walk or bicycle to school. In some communities these concerns may be based on perception, while in others the personal security concerns are far too real. Whether real or perceived, personal security concerns can present significant challenges for local SRTS organizers.

The Personal Security resource will discuss resources available to assist with gathering information on local crime issues, present practical strategies to approach and discuss personal security issues with members of the community, and showcase local SRTS programs and strategies that have been successful in addressing personal security concerns. The resource is slated for completion by June 2010.

### **Supportive Policy Resource**

Last summer, the National Center and the SRTS National Partnership jointly released a resource entitled *School Bicycling and Walking Policies: Addressing Policies that Hinder and Implementing Policies that Help*. Earlier this year, the National Center and America Walks held a webinar presentation on the same

topic. It was learned during and following that presentation that, while the issue of school barrier policies is pertinent, many more local SRTS programs face the challenge of local schools and school districts having no policy whatsoever to address walking and bicycling to school. Many SRTS programs would like to pursue having a supportive policy put into practice, but fear opening the doors to potential barrier policies.

In response, the National Center is partnering with Voorhees Transportation Institute to develop a companion resource to the resource mentioned above. This supportive policy resource will explain common challenges related to establishing policies, outline steps to facilitate discussion and pursue new policy adoption, present examples of model supportive policies, and highlight local programs that have had success in getting supportive policies enacted. The resource is slated for completion in Summer 2010.

### **School Transportation – Partnering with the School Bus Industry**

As the National Center noted during the March 2010 meeting, the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) data from 2009 have been released, and some interesting comparisons can be made between these data and the 1969 school transportation data\*. As Austin Brown presented, the school bus ridership data among children ages 5-14 have remained fairly constant; however, in the intervening 40 years, the school arrival mode for walking/bicycling and single family vehicle ridership has nearly flipped.

These data indicate that efforts to reduce private automobile transportation to school could reduce congestion on school campuses and thereby improve the safety for students arriving at school. This could be done by encouraging students who live near schools to walk or bicycle to school and by encouraging children who live greater distances from schools to ride school buses.

In an effort to promote the common goals of the SRTS movement and the school bus industry, the National Center will work in conjunction with school bus transportation industry representatives to develop an article that discusses (a) that a common concern for both parties is the large increase in single family vehicle ridership, and (b) the ways in which SRTS and school bus transportation can meet students' and families' various needs. The goal is to have this article published in a school transportation magazine or journal, such as *School Transportation News*.

\* More details about the 2009 NHTS data can be found here:

[www.saferoutesinfo.org/news\\_room/2010-04-08\\_2010\\_nhts\\_release.cfm](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/news_room/2010-04-08_2010_nhts_release.cfm)

### **Safety Index**

The goal of the National Center's Safety Index project is to provide local communities and engineers with a set of tools to prioritize Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements based on existing safety concerns. In an effort to meet this goal, the National Center is developing three tools, each of which is described in more detail below.

*Assessing Walking and Bicycling Routes: A Selection of Tools:* The first of the National Center's set of tools provides a list of existing walking/bicycling route assessment tools which can support local programs that would like to assess the routes students currently—or could in the future—walk and bicycle to school. This resource lists the assessment tool's name, where it can be found, its intended audience, and the physical area it addresses (e.g., school zone, school route, specific intersection, etc.).

The resource also provides some key points about each assessment tool listed. The resource was released in April 2009 and is available in the National Center's online library.

*Safety-based prioritization of schools for Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects: A process for engineers:* The second tool helps transportation engineers and professionals to identify and prioritize elementary and middle schools in a city, school district or other local jurisdiction for pedestrian infrastructure improvement. The process described in this resource is intended to assist transportation professionals who are preparing a Safe Routes to School funding application for infrastructure improvements. It could also be useful when applying for funds from sources such as Transportation Enhancements, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, local government capital improvements, or other funding sources. Using information that can be obtained from one's desk or from short onsite visits, this process is meant to be the first step in determining which schools and locations have the most urgent safety needs. A worksheet accompanies this tool and is useful for collecting, organizing, and comparing data. This resource is under review and should be available by Summer 2010.

*Pedestrian Road Safety Audit for School Routes:* The Federal Highway Administration provides a Pedestrian Road Safety Audit\* (RSA) tool for State and local jurisdictions and Tribal Governments. Based on FHWA's RSA, the National Center is creating a *Pedestrian Road Safety Audit for School Routes*, which focuses specifically on child pedestrian safety concerns along school routes. After schools have been prioritized for safety improvements, engineers can use these audit tools to identify and better understand safety concerns along specific road segments or at intersections. These audits are currently in development and should be available by August 2010.

\* Background: A Road Safety Audit is a formal safety performance examination of an existing or future road or intersection by an independent, multidisciplinary team. It qualitatively estimates and reports on potential road safety issues and identifies opportunities for improvements in safety for all road users. A pedestrian RSA focuses on safety performance areas that are specific to pedestrians.

### **School Siting**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Center are working on a school siting resource entitled *The Real Cost of School Siting*. The target audience includes local decision-makers – school board members, county commissioners, city council members, school transportation professionals, etc. This resource will consist of explanatory text plus a worksheet that aids the user in assessing a more comprehensive list of the direct costs of school siting. Worksheet items will include references not only to the reader's own existing school construction and/or school renovation cost lists but will also include direct cost items such as transportation infrastructure, utilities infrastructure, etc. Indirect costs – such as health care costs for obesity reduction and asthma and greenhouse gas emissions from single-family vehicles and school buses – will not be included in the worksheet but will be discussed in the text. The text may also discuss potential savings available with formal joint use agreements for recreation space with the local or state parks and recreation department, for example.

### **State SRTS Coordinators' Collaborations with Tribal Nations**

During Fall 2009, the National Center conducted several interviews with State SRTS Coordinators regarding implementing SRTS on Tribal lands. These interviews provided valuable information on the unique characteristics of Tribal Nations as beneficiaries of the federal Safe Routes to School program. The National Center is in the process of developing a resource to assist State SRTS Coordinators in reaching out to Tribal Nations with their safe routes program. This resource will provide tips and

guidance to State SRTS Coordinators regarding ways to engage leaders of Tribal Nations, common challenges the coordinators may face in providing state- and community-level services to sovereign nations, and ways in which other coordinators' efforts have been successful. This resource is slated for completion in Summer 2010.

### **SRTS and Academics**

In late summer 2010, the National Center will begin working on an Issue Brief that summarizes existing research that links academics and/or school behavior to physical activity. The resource will also provide suggestions about ways in which Safe Routes to School can contribute to increasing students' physical activity levels. Some NRG members have expressed interest in this resource. If you are one of these people, please note that the National Center will contact you as work on this resource begins.