



**Safe Routes to School National Review Group
National Center for Safe Routes to School
First Meeting: March 10, 2009**

Meeting Location: Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center
Washington DC

The first meeting of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) National Review Group was held from 2:00pm to 5:00 pm on March 10, 2009 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center located at 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC, 20004. A conference call line was also made available at 888-810-9642.

Review Group Members Present:

Barbara Alberson (by phone)
State and Local Injury Protection
California Department of Public Health

Roger Allen (by phone)
Evanston/Skokie School District 65

Leon Andrews
National League of Cities

Elizabeth Blackburn
Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Children's Health Protection and
Environmental Education

Dana Carr
US Dept of Education
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Andy Clarke (present for introductions)
League of American Bicyclists

Sarah Coakley
Delaware Department of Transportation

Esther Corbett
Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona

Matthew Dalbey
Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Smart Growth

Richard Dolesh
National Recreation and Park Association

Moira Donahue
Safe Kids Worldwide

Martin Gonzalez (by phone)
California School Boards Association

Philip Haberstro
National Association for Health and Fitness

David Henderson
Miami-Dade MPO

Deb Hubsmith
Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Kit Keller
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle
Professionals

Mary Pat King
American Diabetes Association

Renee Kuhlman
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Tracy McMillan, PhD
PPH Partners

Whitney Meagher
National PTA

Lois Thibault
US Access Board

Lt. Rick Reynolds
Hagerstown Police Department

Ian Thomas, PhD
PedNet Coalition

Sharon Roerty
National Center for Walking and Biking

Arthur Wendel, MD
CDC National Center for Environmental Health

Sandy Schefkind
American Occupational Therapy Association

Paul Zykofsky (by phone)
Local Government Commission

Stephanie Shipp
Federal Transit Administration

National Center Staff Present:

Lauren Marchetti, Director

Raquel Rivas, Marketing Manager

Nancy Pullen-Seufert, Associate Director

Austin Brown, Program Manager

Pam Barth, Project Manager

National Center Partners Present:

Tom Brahms
Institute of Transportation Engineers

Tony Kane
American Association of State Highway and
Transportation Officials

Ian Thomas
America Walks

Jennifer Toole
Toole Design Group

Barbara Harsha
Governors Highway Safety Association

Diane Lambert
Toole Design Group

US DOT Representatives Present:

Becky Crowe
Federal Highway Association

Paula Bawer
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Others present for all or a portion of the meeting:

Charlie Zeeger
UNC Highway Safety Research Center

Barbara Duerk
Connect Now

Laura Sandt
Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center

Lisa Sharma
National League of Cities

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Lauren Marchetti, Director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School (NCSRTS). Ms. Marchetti briefly welcomed National Review Group (NRG) members and introduced Ms. Becky Crowe, Safe Routes to School Program Manager from the Federal Highway Administration.

Ms. Crowe welcomed NRG members and thanked them for being a part of the success of the Federal SRTS program. She explained that the program has received a great deal of positive attention, and that a Senator has recently assembled a package for reauthorization.

Ms. Marchetti introduced Mr. Andy Clarke, Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists and organizer of the National Bike Summit, and thanked him for allowing the NRG meeting to be held in conjunction with Bike Summit. Mr. Clarke briefly described the Bike Summit and highlighted key events.

Ms. Marchetti introduced NCSRTS staff and Partners (see attendance list above), and reviewed the purpose of the National Review Group and the meeting goals:

Purpose of National Review Group

- Provide general guidance to help the NCSRTS in its mission to promote safe walking and bicycling to school. This includes
 - Helping to generate new ideas
 - Providing insight into local needs
 - Providing feedback on existing efforts and proposed courses of action
- Identify ways in which members' programs and activities can help advance SRTS initiatives.

Goals for March 2009 NRG meeting

- Establish a common knowledge of SRTS, and understand issues and potential benefits from multiple perspectives.
- Gain an understanding of what needs to be done over the next two years so that the SRTS legislation and movement can reach their potential.
- Establish a base for working together to further common goals.

Ms. Marchetti facilitated member introductions, with each member answering the question "What is it about SRTS that made you or your organization agree to be a part of this group?" Ms. Marchetti then delivered a Power Point presentation providing an overview and status update on the Federal SRTS program. Members were provided hard copies of the presentation slides. During the presentation, members and staff provided the following comments:

- During the discussion of current NCSRTS activities, a member commented that a guide for students to bicycle more safely as they grow and develop (similar to the soon-to-be released walking safely guide) might be beneficial.
- NCSRTS staff emphasized that if NRG members have any ideas for web-based trainings or topics for CAN webinars, please talk with Nancy Pullen-Seufert. NCSRTS will also seek NRG input on the image campaign.
- During the discussion of the newly launched NCSRTS State project list, NCSRTS staff clarified that projects would be identified by geographic location and not name or sponsor, but would list the names of schools that benefited from the project. There was brief discussion of needing more

specific project information for research projects, balanced with the NCSRTS's desire to avoid putting information in the public domain that may inconvenience local projects.

A break was taken at 3:25pm.

Discussion on Evaluation and Research

Ms. Pullen-Seufert and Mr. Brown facilitated a discussion on SRTS evaluation and research, seeking information on the types of research we might want to know. After reviewing NCSRTS's work to build a national database of Parent Surveys and Student Travel Tally Forms, the discussion started with a brief explanation from NRG members of current research projects they are currently pursuing.

- Dr. McMillan reviewed her work with the SRTS National Partnership and the University of California Berkley Traffic Safety Center to evaluate local SRTS projects. The study includes 10 local schools local in 10 states affiliated with the Partnership's State Network Project, and involves technical assistance for those schools in collecting surveys, vehicle counts/traffic observations, and focus group data. In 4 of the 10 states, the Partnership has paid technical service providers to support the schools. Baseline data was collected in fall 2008, and follow up data will be collected this spring. Ms. Hubsmith contributed to the explanation.
- Mr. Kane explained a research idea to develop a guidebook for SRTS State Coordinators. It would involve evaluating comprehensive state programs in order to develop guidance on components of successful programs. While there may be more than one model for a successful program, Congress is seeking performance measures. This research would aim to ensure that every State program incorporates certain steps in their SRTS planning process and that they monitor and evaluate their programs.
- Dr. Thomas explained that PedNet will be evaluating a walking school bus program in Columbia, MO, comparing this group against kids being bused to school. They will look at attendance, education achievement, and total physical activity levels using accelerometers.

Ms. Pullen-Seufert asked members to identify key research or evaluation questions that need to be addressed for SRTS, focusing on what is going to help improve or sustain SRTS. Responses were as follows:

- Understand how SRTS programs influence education and academic performance. Measures could include attendance data, behavioral data, and parental involvement – as surrogates for academic benefits. Academic performance is what local officials and school administrators want and need to see.
- For children with disabilities, does having structured walking programs during school recess impact academic performance?
- Bicycles, strollers and backpacks can be modified so they are easily useable by children with disabilities.
- How does the use of safety patrols benefit children with disabilities and benefit those students who are part of the safety patrol?
- How is student mental health impacted by physical activity? Are there other factors beyond physical activity, such as independence, freedom, decision making, which explain the mental health effect on students?

- Examine how SRTS increases student connectedness to schools and community.
- Understand the economic benefits of SRTS on the school system and the community—the return on the whole.
- Provide guidance detailing what makes a successful program.
- Need to determine what individual and combinations of strategies within E’s work in various situations.
- Since each local community operates differently there is a need to have process-driven evaluation to better understand what is working and why it is working. A first step to this is gauging social capital and then building on it.
- Identify groups that come together for SRTS that also work on other efforts that benefit the community (i.e. partnerships that are established)?
- Sustaining a program/intervention. Once the program begins what is the critical mass of people needed and what work is needed to care, develop and grow it—parent driven, school supported...who are the key partners?
- Because perception often drives behavior there is a need to identify parents’ perceptions of the barriers that drive parental decisions to allow or not allow their child to walk/bicycle to school. Knowing this will help inform what interventions (infrastructure and non-infrastructure) need to be addressed first in that community.
- In late 2009, the National Household Travel Survey will release their walk and bicycle to school data. The numbers will probably show that the journey to school by walking and bicycling has changed very little since 2001. We need to be able to compare numbers for local sites that have SRTS programs to the NHTS data. The idea is to illustrate that communities that have programs have greater numbers of walkers and bicyclists than the national average, and the SRTS is working.
- Need for more tightly controlled research. Properly designed and controlled studies. Look at total physical activity data, not just the journey to/from school.
- At a national level, need to identify data from various sectors, such as national and regional health, land use and transportation data, and determine how they can be used together to answer some of our questions.
- U.S. Dept of Transportation will be moving more toward performance based measures so there is a need to evaluate the program using such measures. Some of the measures listed in the current federal SRTS legislation are air quality, traffic congestion, changes in walking and bicycling.

Ms. Pullen-Seufert closed the session by calling on Members to contact NCSRTS if they have any interest in jointly pursuing any of the research areas just mentioned.

Small group breakout discussions on selected topics

Members voluntarily joined one of five breakout groups for discussion of the following topics (notes from these discussions are included below):

Strengthening Partnerships: Environmental

This group addressed connections between SRTS and the health of the environment, such as air quality, climate change, etc.

- Project:
 - Provide a calculation for the amount of greenhouse gases released for miles walked or bicycled versus school buses versus cars.
 - A possible way to achieve a baseline for these calculations is to partner with a set of test schools and study their greenhouse gas output via sensors for the various modes of travel.
 - Potential Resources:
 - Go for Green Canada
 - EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection and Environmental Education has a calculator for kids based on an individual's choices.
 - The Alliance for Biking and Walking has a section on their website that addresses the air quality benefits of bicycle to work days.
 - The Safe Routes to School National Partnership published a report detailing five case studies of SRTS programs and how they reduce GHG emissions.
- Potential connections:
 - Make connections with existing healthy homes/schools/communities programs.
 - Perhaps build partnerships with environmental justice organizations to capitalize on opportunities to bring good things into neighborhoods and create healthier communities.
 - Determine how to partner with student environmental groups in order to nurture the next generation of environmental activists and ensure that pedestrian/bicycle issues continue to be part of the solution.
 - Partner with public transportation agencies to strengthen the case for multi-modal transportation solutions to air quality issues.
 - When engaging potential partners, utilize *Winning with Aces'* website that shows common terms that might help to emphasize commonalities.
- General comments/suggestions:
 - Focus on positive environmental messages and actions/activities.
 - Traditional environmental focus tends to be negative, which can overwhelm people in general and kids in particular, especially around global implications of problems.
 - Change the conversation from "the sky is falling" to "what can we do around 'the sky is falling.'"
 - Create a case study on why SRTS is an environmental issue. A case study can help make the case with student groups.
 - Make a connection between school climate ambassadors and SRTS.
 - EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection and Environmental Education has a new initiative around climate change and youth and with working with common partners to help this initiative succeed. Website is a resource.
 - Partnering with EPA on their new initiative could be beneficial for SRTS.
 - Focus on mobility training generally.
 - Reach kids who grow up in rural areas but who may not live rurally always.

Strengthening Partnerships: Health

This group addressed the relationship between health status and transportation mode.

- Discussed the differences between the public health providers and private practice health care providers in the context of spreading the SRTS message. The health care provider has opportunity for one on one interaction with parents and children via the office/clinic visit and could write walking prescriptions or encourage walking to school. Working with the health care provider can be particularly useful influencing behavior if he/she has standing in his/her community.
- Discussed making efforts to get walking and bicycling to/from school in national level plans like the National Physical Activity Plan and Healthy People 2020.
- Research - there is a need to measure the short and long term health outcomes associated with walking and bicycling to school such as physical activity levels, BMI, disease prevention as well as some of the safety related measures. Does participating in SRTS programs influence their behavior when they become drivers?
- Research should include longitudinal studies that include children participating and those not participating in SRTS programs. One issue that was mentioned when conducting national level studies involving child data is privacy, (particularly data collect by others, such as Hospital ER.) This issue needs to be addressed and understood to best gauge the limits of what can and can't be collected.
- Discussed that not all health professional are convinced that SRTS is a positive activity. Some professionals see the school bus and driving as safe options. Another concern is exposing the children to areas with poor air quality—although the actual benefits of the physical activity probably more than offset the exposure to “bad air.”
- Efforts are needed to better understand engagement strategies—how do national and state level personnel tell their staff working throughout the country to actually get involved at the local levels.
- Once the messages that need to be communicated are formulated then strategies for marketing messages are needed. Possible marketing outlets to reach children and adolescents include PBS, YouTube, and Twitter.
- Another avenue that needs exploring is tying SRTS to other issues like education performance and mental health.

Strengthening Partnerships: Education

This group addressed engaging educational institutions at national, state, and local levels

- Ways to engage partners:
 - How do we get schools to realize SRTS is important enough to address during the school day?
 - Can “sell” it by using the five E’s as a way to message – shows that education is one part of a multi-faceted effort that involves several strategies and disciplines – the intention is not to single out schools to do all the work.
 - Schools are looking for ways to engage parents – SRTS can serve this need.
- What is important to do around this topic in the next two years?
 - Try to directly relate it to curriculums – track concrete examples at the national level. Is there a way to give examples of academic learning requirements and how they are addressed in different pedestrian/bicycle curricula as a reference for local programs?
- Research needs around this topic:
 - Sustainability of programs – what are all factors involved.

- Connect SRTS directly to student achievement but also factors that contribute to student achievement.
- What is impact on the school's budget? (if SRTS improves attendance, some schools receive funding based on attendance so they may receive more money)
- Demonstrate the return on investment across a variety of audiences.

Members participating via conference call added the following:

For most education institutions, funding is strapped. How could we fund them to be a part of SRTS? How could SRTS become a formal piece of their program? Need to do some research – how much better will schools do if they have technical support for SRTS? Maybe fund someone at district level, or work through school wellness coordinators or similar designation. Also need consistent SRTS messages to go out – need to find what's going to resonate with school boards, principals, etc.

Strengthening Partnerships: Empowering Youth

This group addressed initiatives that directly engage youth in SRTS.

- Efforts to get children involved in identifying issues and advocating:
 - Middle School aged youth need to own the program, it needs to be cool, have peer support
 - Creative ways to get buy-in: connect to existing programs with the school, clubs, etc.;; embed SRTS into the curriculum, build skateboards in shop.
 - Indirect education – find ways to send message subliminally
 - Send messages to parents through youth
 - Connect SRTS advocacy to government education/curriculum
 - Involve youth leadership in local, state and national discussions
 - Have youth represented on National Review Group
 - Have a youth spokesperson; can represent a variety of topics – disabilities/accessibility issues, injury prevention, etc.
- Barriers to engaging youth
 - Social acceptance
- Marketing strategies
 - Celebrity representation (possibly BMX or cycling?)
 - Use different mediums to reach youth – You Tube, My Space, interactive technology, etc.
- Partners
 - Other organizations targeting youth, such as National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS)
 - Education institutions
 - Health agencies
 - IDEA Partnership (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
- Research
 - Impact of youth perception of social acceptance on behavior
 - Youth acceptance of messages from adults versus peers

Policy Challenges

This group addressed state, local or national policies that prevent or encourage SRTS.

- Policy Challenges that the SRTS should attempt to overcome:
 - Busing for various reasons results in kids attending non-neighborhood schools:
 - o To mix demographics

- Kids with health problems (i.e. diabetes) are bused to schools with nurses, instead of their home schools.
 - Minimum acreage requirements – but one NRG member says that in some cases, it’s more about the State’s educational capacity requirements (i.e. classroom size)
 - Policies on school walk zones – arbitrarily assigned distances that don’t account for conditions
 - Laws that don’t favor pedestrians and bicyclists (i.e. yielding versus stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks, passing distance laws, etc.)
 - Maintenance (or lack of maintenance) policies – i.e. snow removal – that make it very difficult to provide a safe pedestrian environment
 - Design and plan review policies for new developments – residential and commercial
 - At the State level, policies that require local governments to build a new school if they rise above a certain percentage cost for renovating an existing school
 - Policies in some States that prevent combining schools with community center, libraries, etc.
 - Policies within school district transportation departments that cause them to focus exclusively on bus travel, rather than the safety of ALL modes of travel.
 - State DOT policies that do not provide equitable treatment to pedestrians and bicyclists on State roads, particularly in rural areas.
 - Planning policies that don’t integrate school planning (i.e. where new schools will be located) with community planning – the two operate in wholly different universes in many communities throughout the U.S.
 - Funding formulas that discriminate against smaller schools and encourage megaschools.
- Strategies for overcoming policies that prevent SRTS:
 - We need better research on benefits of neighborhood schools based on their proximity to parks, school age, lot size, neighborhood density, etc. to determine the impacts of neighborhood based schools versus those on the fringes.
 - We need to inventory and evaluate existing local policies that negatively impact SRTS programs
 - Reassess min. acreage policies
 - Look at the defined objectives of these policies and work backwards – do they really accomplish what they were intended to accomplish?
 - Need to develop model school site design policies

Wrap up and future plans for National Review Group

Ms. Marchetti called the meeting to a close by reminding members that safety is at the heart of the Safe Routes to School program and is intertwined with all topics, which is why there wasn’t a breakout group to discuss safety specifically. NCSRTS staff will pull together comments and ideas gathered from the meeting and will propose action ideas for NCSRTS over the next two years. Members will be invited to comment and to establish partnerships.

Upcoming communications will be via email, then possibly a conference call. An informal poll revealed that approximately a third of members plan to attend the SRTS National Conference, so consideration will be given to holding the next meeting there.

A member noted that the National Review Group contains no representation of the private sector and expressed an interest in recruiting such representation – such as the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety and the National Chamber of Commerce.

As the meeting was concluding, a member expressed that there were two items that were not on the National Review Group agenda but should be considered: project eligibility in existing neighborhoods and administrative streamlining. These items were submitted in writing after the meeting and are included at the end of the minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.

Comments submitted after the meeting on additional items to be considered:

Eligibility of projects in existing neighborhoods: The SRTS program is biased against older schools in existing neighborhoods because the current interpretation of the rules sees improvements to existing sidewalks, crosswalks or signage along an identified "safe route" as maintenance. In this region, neighborhood schools in older areas have very high numbers of children walking on existing but deficient infrastructure. Investing in safe routes in these areas will bring the greatest gains in improving safety and increasing the number of kids that walk.

Administrative streamlining: The competitive grant process for awarding SRTS funds does not support prioritizing needs across the region. Encouraging project applications at the school level benefits schools that have the political and organizational resources to chase funds but does nothing to make sure that schools with the greatest needs are prioritized. A better system would start with a regional assessment (including variables such as the locations of juvenile pedestrian crashes, poverty, transit dependence, zero-car ownership, school transportation data, and school-based surveys) to identify existing problem and opportunity areas and use those results to prioritize schools for more detailed engineering analysis. By certifying the SRTS planning process, state DOTs might have the confidence to allocate infrastructure funds to the implementing agencies for permitted activities at priority schools. An annual audit of program funds would show if they were being used correctly or if program training was needed or if fraud was being committed. The current system of random applications forces schools and local groups to expend scarce resources on a complicated application. This process introduces a political element into the funding decisions that could be minimized by requiring coordinated planning using objective data.