

**Safe Routes to School**  
**National Review Group Meeting**  
Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center  
Washington DC  
Tuesday, March 9, 2010

**Review Group Members Present:**

Barbara Alberson  
California Department of Public Health  
(present via telephone)

Leon Andrews  
National League of Cities

Dana Carr  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Andy Clarke  
League of American Bicyclists

Sarah Coakley  
Delaware Department of Transportation

Esther Corbett  
Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona  
(present via telephone)

Richard Dolesh  
National Recreation and Park Association

Martin Gonzalez  
California School Boards Association  
(present via telephone)

David Henderson  
Miami-Dade MPO  
(present via telephone)

Deb Hubsmith  
Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Tina Lankford  
CDC Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity  
(present via telephone)

Tracy McMillan, PhD  
PPH Partners  
(present via telephone)

Whitney Meagher  
National PTA

Lt. Richard Reynolds  
Hagerstown Police Department

Sharon Roerty  
National Center for Walking and Biking

Sandy Schefkind  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
(present via telephone)

Lisa Sharma  
National League of Cities

Ian Thomas, PhD  
PedNet Coalition and America Walks

Arthur Wendel, MD  
CDC National Center for Environmental Health  
(present via telephone)

Paul Zykofsky  
Local Government Commission  
(present via telephone)

**Invited Guests Present:**

John Bolecek  
U.S. DOT  
Office of the Secretary

Pat Childers  
U.S. EPA  
Office of Air and Radiation

Martin Schubert  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

**National Center Partners Present:**

Jennifer Toole  
Toole Design Group

Diane Lambert  
Toole Design Group

**U.S. DOT Representatives Present:**

Becky Crowe  
Federal Highway Administration

Paula Bawer  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

**National Center Staff Present:**

Lauren Marchetti, Director  
lauren\_marchetti@unc.edu  
919/962-7412

Pam Barth, Project Manager  
barth@hsrc.unc.edu  
919/962-8717

Austin Brown, Program Manager  
brown@hsrc.unc.edu  
919/843-6794

Caroline Dickson, Communications and Marketing  
Manager  
dickson@hsrc.unc.edu  
919/962-5235

**Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order by Lauren Marchetti, Director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School (National Center). Ms. Marchetti and Rebecca Crowe, the FHWA Program Manager for the Federal Safe Routes to School Program, briefly welcomed National Review Group (NRG) members. Ms. Marchetti facilitated member introductions, noting the breadth of partners in the group.

**Highlights of 2009 and YTD**Overview of Accomplishments

Ms. Marchetti introduced the first item on the agenda, referencing a memo in the meeting packet which summarized highlights of National Center activities from March 2009 through February 2010 and indicated activities done in partnership with NRG members. She thanked NRG members for all of their efforts in partnering with the National Center and noted that the list of partnered activities is impressive.

U.S. DOT, U.S. HUD, and U.S. EPA Livability Initiative

Rebecca Crowe provided information on a new initiative of the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT), U.S. Housing and Urban Development, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She reported that the Livability Initiative aims to help improve access to affordable housing, provide more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment in communities nationwide. Creating livable communities will result in improved quality of life for all Americans and create a more efficient and more accessible transportation network that services the needs of individual communities. Fostering the concept of livability in transportation projects and programs will help America's neighborhoods become safer, healthier and more vibrant. Ms. Crowe noted that as reauthorization of the transportation bill is being discussed, the livability initiative is high on list of priorities for many agencies under U.S. DOT.

Let's Move Initiative and Task Force

Pam Barth, Project Manager for the National Center, called on two audience members to explain their involvement in the First Lady's Let's Move Initiative. Meeting guest John Bolecek of the U.S. DOT explained that he is representing the U.S. DOT on the Let's Move childhood obesity taskforce, which held its first meeting two weeks prior to the NRG meeting. The taskforce is charged with writing a report that identifies

research gaps and provides suggestions for administrative policy and legislative needs related to improving childhood obesity levels. Mr. Bolecek will be writing the built environment section of the report.

NRG member Dana Carr from the U.S. Department of Education is also on the taskforce and will be writing the physical activity section of the report. Ms. Carr reported that the report will focus on four pillars: 1) empowering parents/consumers; 2) improving school food and access to school foods; 3) improving access to healthy foods in communities; and 4) physical activity, which will include the built environment, outdoor recreation, and school and community options. The report, which was to be due 90 days from the first meeting, will also contain a summary of promising practices.

Ms. Marchetti commented that SRTS has a logical connection to the Let's Move initiative, and referenced an insert in the meeting packet which summarized a recent interview the Dallas News conducted with the National Center. The newspaper had noted the Let's Move initiative's call to have more kids walking and bicycling to school and interviewed the National Center about how that matches the goals of the SRTS program.

#### School Climate Initiative

Ms. Barth called on meeting guest Martin Schubert of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools to discuss a new initiative. Mr. Schubert explained that the Department of Education is in the process of developing a school climate survey as part of efforts to address challenges in the school environment that impact learning. This survey of students, teachers and parents will assess areas such as engagement (do students feel they belong, that teachers care), safety (looking at indicators around drug use, violence, etc.), and environment (classroom lighting, safe travel to and from school, classroom size, etc.). Mr. Schubert noted that such a survey has never been done before on federal level. States will apply for grants, develop their own survey using a template created by the Department of Education, and implement it statewide. Funding and technical assistance will be tied to survey results, and results will be posted online for public review. The Department of Education sees SRTS as a partner in this effort and as a in the identification of potential solutions for issues identified.

#### National Center's Mini-Grants

Ms. Barth thanked all of the NRG members who had helped to promote the National Center's mini-grants last fall. She informed the group that at the end of the last year, the National Center awarded 25 mini-grants of \$1,000 each to recipients in 20 states. The mini-grants will fund a variety of SRTS activities, including efforts to promote physical activity, protect the environment, and promote safe walking and bicycling to school. A press release in the meeting packet includes a paragraph describing each awarded mini-grant. Ms. Barth noted that the National Center was impressed by what communities can do with a relatively small amount of money. A second call for applications was currently underway, and a third round could be offered in the fall of this year.

#### 2009 Walk to School Day

To round out the highlights from 2009, Ms. Barth asked Caroline Dickson, the Communications and Marketing Manager for the National Center, to report on 2009 Walk to School Day. Ms. Dickson began by showing a Walk to School Day video clip created by StreetFilms of New York. The video was made during a special Walk to School Day event held in New York City as part of the Walk21 Conference. After the video, Ms. Dickson reported that Walk to School Day 2009 was a record breaking event with a total of 3,369 Walk to School Day events registered through the National Center's Web site. This number represents an increase of 481 events (17 % increase) from last year.

## Status of the Federal Safe Routes to School Program

Ms. Barth introduced the second item on the agenda by stating that before we start talking about future plans for the National Center, it will be helpful to get an update on the status of the Federal program and perspectives on the reauthorization of SRTS legislation.

### Status of the Federal Program

Ms. Marchetti provided the following statistics related to the status of the Federal SRTS program:

- At least 6,489 schools are participating
- All states and DC have announced funding
- Approximately \$427 million has been announced (72% of apportioned funds available)
- 54 percent of states had made awards for their third, fourth or fifth funding cycles
- 39 percent of applications are selected for funding
- \$27.8 million was rescinded September 30, 2009.
- \$26.1 million was apportioned through a 79-day Continuing Resolution that expired on December 18, 2009.

She referenced a map included the meeting packet that represents the school funding announcements to date. She also displayed a graph showing cumulative announced funds versus obligated funds. The graph demonstrates the time it takes for new Federal programs to ramp up and get funding to communities.

### Perspectives on Reauthorization of Surface Transportation Legislation

*FHWA* Ms. Crowe explained that the Monday before the NRG meeting, for the first time in history, U.S. DOT employees were issued furlough papers because of a lapse in continuation of the surface transportation legislation. While the furlough was brief – employees returned to work on Wednesday after a continuing resolution was signed by the President – it highlighted the challenges of the delay in reauthorization of surface transportation legislation. She also noted that that several State SRTS coordinators have been furloughed regularly in recent months. Ms. Crowe explained that the current SRTS program was created under SAFETEA-LU, which expired September 1, 2009. Since then, there have been three continuing resolutions to extend the legislation. The latest was just passed and expires in December 2010. While new legislation which extends surface transportation (including SRTS; the Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment bill, also known as the “jobs bill”) is currently being discussed, it will be a while before anyone sees legislation that reauthorizes the breadth of surface transportation. Ms. Crowe asked Deb Hubsmith, Director of the SRTS National Partnership, to provide additional information. The SRTS Partnership is an advocacy organization that is not funded through the Federal program and can therefore deal with reauthorization in ways that the National Center cannot.

*SRTS Advocate* Ms. Hubsmith noted that the current extension continues through December of this year at 2009 funding levels. The previous extensions were for much shorter timeframes, so this longer extension is a big relief for States as they can now more effectively continue to get funding out to communities. She mentioned that the jobs bill also redistributes high priority project money over all programs and will add to existing SRTS funds.

*State SRTS Coordinator* Ms. Crowe asked NRG member and Delaware SRTS State Coordinator Sarah Coakley to speak about what coordinators are encountering with regards to reauthorization issues. Ms. Coakley explained that the continuing resolutions have been challenging for State SRTS programs. Out of twenty coordinator responses about how their program was affected, twelve stated that they are moving forward with new awards. Of those twelve, ten were using only funds remaining from the first legislation, and two were using continuing resolution funding. While several are considering offering future award cycles based on existing funding, no states are counting on future money at this point and are operating as such.

### Evaluating the SRTS Program

*NHTS and Baseline SRTS Data – What the Numbers Say* Austin Brown, Program Manager for the National Center, provided an overview of the latest National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) and baseline student travel tally and parent survey data. Regarding the NHTS, Mr. Brown explained that the NHTS is conducted every 7 years by the U.S. DOT, and school travel is a specific question in the survey. Most notable of the findings is that over the last 15 years, walking has been hovering between 11-13%, biking has been hovering around 1%, school bus travel seems to be holding steady, but travel by car has been steadily increasing. It was noted that the National Center would like to see SRTS and the Livable Communities Initiative move the walking and bicycling statistics up out of the plateau. While the statistics presented represented children ages 5-14, an NRG member inquired if there was a difference in travel modes between elementary and middle school children. Mr. Brown replied that there is a difference, and that information will be included in the National Center's final report on the NHTS statistics. Mr. Brown also referenced a report included in the meeting packet summarizing baseline results from Parent Surveys and Student Travel Tallies. While questions asked are not identical and cannot be directly compared, the baseline data and the NHTS data seem to be in line.

*Evaluating Health and Environmental Impacts* Diane Lambert, Senior Planner with Toole Design Group and support staff with the National Center, provided information on two National Center projects related to evaluation of SRTS. She reported that the National Center is working on a project that aims to understand two things: 1) can local SRTS programs feasibly and accurately evaluate health and environmental impacts of SRTS, and 2) what might be some methods to evaluate these impacts on a national scale. Interviews with local SRTS programs and meetings with an expert panel consisting of partners such as the CDC, EPA, and Department of Education have identified recommendations for local program evaluation as well as perspectives on national evaluation methods. Ms. Lambert referenced a draft resource included in the meeting packet that summarizes methods for local programs to evaluating physical activity benefits of SRTS. A similar resource will be created for environmental impacts, and a report summarizing the project will be available this summer.

*Noteworthy Practices of State SRTS Programs* Ms. Lambert also briefly discussed a project that the National Center is developing in conjunction with the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO). In an effort to understand how to evaluate state SRTS programs, AASHTO is compiling information on the various structures and processes state programs are using to administer SRTS funds to local communities. Simultaneously, the National Center is working with FHWA and other partners to identify indicators of success for the federal SRTS program. The AASHTO findings will be overlaid with these indicators of success to identify noteworthy practices that can be communicated to all state programs. An NRG member commented that it may be helpful to gather process information from local SRTS programs/funding recipients as well as the State Coordinators.

*National Evaluation Plan* Ms. Marchetti informed NRG members that discussion is underway regarding a national evaluation plan. She explained that when the SRTS legislation was enacted, evaluation was not interpreted to be mandatory. The Government Accounting Office then released a report that stated that evaluation should be mandatory and that a comprehensive evaluation plan is needed. The USDOT has since asked the National Center to begin development of such a comprehensive evaluation plan.

Early in the SRTS program, the National Center developed standardized methods, including the student travel tally and parent surveys, provided an online submittal system and a data processing option, and encouraged states to have their local programs evaluate using these resources. The current discussion is to determine what can and should be evaluated now, and what could be evaluated in the future. The reality, however, is that local and state SRTS programs not yet evolved enough to evaluate outcome measures. Ms. Marchetti reported that the National Center is identifying measures that need to be put into place in the

future in order to have similar data collected across all states and to have a system that provides the ability to analyze the data to examine for outcomes. For example, in order to understand outcomes, we need programs to input what SRTS strategies they are implementing and when they are completed. In the meantime, the National Center is planning to conduct a process evaluation of state SRTS programs. State processes for distributing funds will be compared to obligation rates and other indicators to determine noteworthy practices and share this information among states. Ms. Crowe added that it is important to remember that SRTS is a state administered program, and therefore a logical step is to look at the differences in state processes (this is the AASHTO noteworthy practices project). She stated that it is known that in the future Congress is going to ask for outcome and impact data, and possibly even health and environmental outcomes. The National Center aims to identify standard methodologies for programs to use for these types of evaluations. An NRG member asked if there is a working group for this national evaluation plan. Ms. Marchetti responded that the National Center has just started the process and intends to reach out to a larger group of experts.

## **Moving Forward: 2010 and Beyond**

Ms. Barth introduced the final agenda item by indicating that to this point in the day we have been looking back, but now it is time to talk about where we want the National Center to go.

Ms. Dickson presented a new advertising campaign the National Center is developing entitled “Every Step Counts.” The campaign addresses two main topic areas: 1) Safety, which includes personal and traffic safety; and 2) Encouragement, which includes messages appealing to health, environment, livability, policy, etc. Ms. Dickson stated that the key target populations are children, parents and school administrators. Working with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Center convened focus groups of parents to identify what messages resonate with parents and what resonates with their children. The focus groups indicated that they thought “norms” messages (i.e. “50% of kids your age...”) would not appeal to children, that environmental messages can be seen as “guilt trips” to children (that they have to fix the things adults have broken), and that specific calls to action or directives (i.e. “walk with your child today”) are not appealing. Motivators that appealed to the focus groups were the social benefits of walking or bicycling and messages that suggest that walking and bicycling to school can contribute to better lifelong habits. Additionally, important messages for parents include the opportunity for kids to learn responsibility (not independence), health messages, and safety messages (distracted driving).

Example advertisements using existing images and draft messages were presented, and members were asked to provide feedback on the message, the image and the tone. Group viewing of advertisements and subsequent discussion with each other and with the National Center occurred at this time.

The decision was made to continue the lively discussion of the advertising campaign beyond the allotted time. It was determined that the remaining agenda item of providing an overview of the pending National Center resource projects would be provided in an email to NRG members.

## **Wrap up & Adjourn**

Ms. Marchetti thanked the NRG for another productive meeting. She added that the feedback provided during the meeting was very valuable and that it was good to hear the perspectives of such important partners. At the request of a NRG member, Ms. Dickson will send all NRG members a list of National Center staff with contact information and a description of their principal area of work as it relates to the upcoming resources.