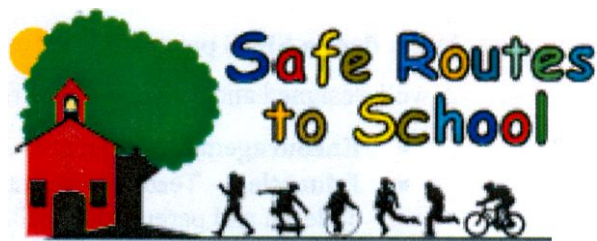


SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS

SR2S

AN OVERVIEW



What is the Federal Safe Routes to Schools program?

The new federal surface transportation authorization, SAFETEA-LU, provides funding for Safe Routes to Schools improvements. The purposes of the federal aid program are as follows:

1. Enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school.
2. Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.
3. Facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

Every state will receive at least \$1 million per year. The amount is based upon the number of elementary and middle school aged children in the state. The state must hire a Safe Routes to schools coordinator to oversee the program. 10 to 30 percent of the funding must be used for non-facility improvements (education and encouragement activities, for example.) In CT, the program is administered by the Transportation Safety Unit, within the Bureau of Policy and Planning. The CT Safe Routes coordinator is Sharon Okoye.

What is a Safe Routes to Schools program?

A comprehensive program designed to make walking and bicycling to school safer for children. The program originated in Europe and SR2S has been implemented in many US communities.

Why pursue a safe routes program?

Reasons for setting up a Safe Routes program vary, but the following are some of the motivators cited in cities and towns with successful programs:

- To improve traffic safety in the school vicinity.
- To improve air quality.
- To encourage children to be physically active.
- To improve safety in high crime neighborhoods.
- To implement the physical activity aspect of the school wellness plan.

What are the benefits of a safe routes program?

- Children who are more active are more alert in school:
- Active children have improved self-image and independence.
- Children are healthier.
- Children take a first step to learning to make their way in the world.
- Congestion and pollution are reduced.
- Caregivers are relieved of the need to deliver children to the school:
- Community safety can improve with more eyes on the street.

What does a SR2S program involve?

A well-designed and successful safe routes to schools program will address the four "E's":

- Encouragement - special events and activities that encourage children to walk or bicycle.
- Education - Teaching pedestrians and motorists how to operate safely. Also, teaching children and parents the health benefits of walking.
- Enforcement - Enforcing existing traffic laws to make it safe to walk and bicycle.
- Engineering - building a better environment for walking and biking. This can include traffic modifications and sidewalk construction.

How will we measure success?

- More children walking and biking to school.
- Children have improved safe walking and biking skills.
- Fewer vehicles dropping off and picking up at the schools.
- Improved walking/biking environment.
- Fewer crashes/injuries/conflicts between motorists and pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Increased parental and community buy in to the notion of SR2S.
- Improved air quality in school vicinity.

What is needed to insure a successful SR2S program?

The following elements should be in place to insure success for the pilot program:

- A champion, someone who is interested in the program and will insure that it moves forward.
- A reason (or several) for pursuing a safe routes to schools program.
- A coordinator, someone who will work with CRCOG on the details (could be the same person as the champion.)
- A school for the pilot project to focus upon. Select a school at which you would like to increase the number of students walking (and or biking). The school staff should have an interest in this topic and there should be some interest on the part of parents, also.
- Ability to get the right people involved. Safe Routes to Schools involves all of the following:
 - » Parents
 - » Students
 - » Law enforcement (including crossing guards)
 - » Staff of the selected school
 - » Representation of the school administration
 - » Municipal engineering staff
 - » Health advocates
 - » Walking/biking advocates

What is happening state wide and in our region?

The state intends to oversee the development of Safe Routes plans in one school in each of the 15 planning regions in the state. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has contracted with the University of Connecticut to provide educational and evaluation tools. CRCOG will be provided with funding to hire a part-time Safe Routes coordinator who will oversee the local program. Nomination forms will be sent to all the school superintendents in the region in March with schools selected in June. While the state program is designed to provide technical assistance to one school only in each region, we hope to be able to assist more than one school by providing resources and advice.

What should you do? Provide CRCOG with a contact person who is interested in the program being implemented in your town. Contact Sandy Fry 522-2217, X20, sfry@crcog.org.