Safe Routes to School

What is it?
Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs are designed to address transportation safety issues in and around school zones and to promote biking and walking to school. SRTS programs help identify and build new bicycling and walking infrastructure to access school facilities and provide education and encouragement to parents and children about walking and bicycling to school. The most common SRTS program elements are: sidewalk improvements (19%), traffic calming (14%), pedestrian/bicycle access projects (14%), and education (13%). SRTS programs can improve safety for individuals walking and biking to school; enhance mobility and air quality near schools; and also increase childhood physical activity levels.

What are the benefits?

- **Mobility:** Encourages mode shift from driving to walking or bicycling by improving the user experience for active transportation users while helping reduce congestion and vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

- **Accessibility:** Increases travel options available to students, parents, and faculty/staff for short and medium distance trips.

- **Environmental:** Reduces the emission of criteria air pollutants and greenhouse gases that are harmful to the environment and human health by encouraging shifts to more sustainable transportation modes.

- **Safety and Security:** Creates a safer and more comfortable environment for all pedestrians and cyclists in the immediate area, whether or not they are trying to access school facilities.

- **Quality of Life:** Facilitates the use of active transportation modes and makes it easier to get exercise while also meeting travel needs.

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Where is it being used?

SRTS programs are implemented in communities across the country. Examples in the Pacific Northwest include:

- Roosevelt Middle School Kidical Mass, Eugene, OR
- Monmouth-Independence SRTS Program, Independence, OR
- Corvallis-Philomath SRTS Program, Benton County, OR
- Lincoln Elementary School Healthy School Pilot, Mount Vernon, WA
- Longview School Path and Crossing, Moses Lake, WA

How effective is it?

Quantitative data on the effectiveness of SRTS programs are currently limited. Launched in 2005, the U.S. federal SRTS program is not yet at a stage where results can be gauged at a broad-based national level, although baseline data and an evaluation plan have been published. At the state and local levels, various success stories covering individual programs are available, though these focus primarily on encouragement and rarely report empirical findings. However, a few case studies, as noted in a recently released TCRP report provide outcome data "sufficient to gauge, with caution, basic travel behavior changes."

- A SRTS Program in Marin County that focused on “soft” program elements (outreach, promotion events, and mapping safe routes) plus crosswalk and signage improvements experienced the following 21-month mode shifts for students at the 6-7 school surveyed (results based on 3-day averages in Fall 2000 compared to Spring 2002):
  - Walking to school increased from 14% to 23%
  - Biking to school increased from 7% to 15%
  - Carpooling to school increased from 11% to 21%
  - Single-student-occupancy private vehicles decreased from 62% to 38%

- Among four Corvallis elementary schools participating in the SRTS program, tallies taken between Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 (on 1 day during each season – so results should be used with caution)

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3. [https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Regions/Pages/Region-4-Central-Oregon.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Regions/Pages/Region-4-Central-Oregon.aspx).
4. In this summary, the best available data on program effectiveness is used. Whenever possible information is provided for the referenced examples; however, that information was not always available.
showed that walking increased by 4 percentage points, biking increased by 2 percentage points, and motorized modes (school bus, transit, and family vehicle) showed slight declines.11

- Counts taken before and after sidewalk improvements on the approaches to California elementary schools showed a weighted-average five-site 46% increase in schoolchild walking. Similar counts at intersection signalization projects indicated a weighted-average two-site 24% increase. Results for other crossing improvements were inconclusive.12 Among forms of encouragement programs, multifaceted approaches and “walking school bus” programs achieved walking and bicycling increases within 6% to over 60%, omitting outliers.13

- A Boulder, Colorado, SRTS program at the Bear Creek Elementary School included intersection safety improvements and education and encouragement programs. Before any SRTS activities, 25% of students walked or biked to school, which increased to 41% after the SRTS program was funded. After 2 years of the program, 70% were making walking or cycling “a daily habit.” Additionally, the city study found a 36% reduction in vehicular traffic (presumably in the school vicinity) after 1 year.14

- A safety analysis by the California Department of Transportation estimated that the safety benefit of the Safe Routes to School program was a 49% decrease in childhood bicycle and pedestrian collision rates.15

Additionally, a summary of what has been observed about walking and bicycling to school and physical activity levels in elementary and middle school children includes: 16

- Overall, children who actively commute to school seem to obtain more daily physical activity than those who ride in a car or bus.
- School trip lengths greater than half a mile are more likely to result in significantly higher levels of daily physical activity.
- Children who walk or bicycle to school are more likely to walk or bicycle to other destinations in their neighborhood than children who are driven to school.


**How much does it cost to implement?**

SRTS programs vary in cost, depending upon the number of schools and students served and the types of projects and programs being implemented (infrastructure, education and outreach). Across all states, the average SRTS grant as of December 2008 was approximately $154,000. For comparison purposes, this is the average cost required to build about 1.5 miles of sidewalks.

In Oregon, between 2005 and 2012, a total of 123 SRTS grants totaling more than $13 million have been awarded. This equates to an average grant award of $106,000 for all project types (infrastructure, non-infrastructure, and planning/start-up). Specifically, the dollar amount ranges of SRTS grants awarded in Oregon by project type are:

- Infrastructure projects: $116,000 – $500,000
- Non-infrastructure projects: $1,300 – $100,000
- Planning/start-up projects: $1,000 – $3,000

It should be noted that the grant dollar totals described above may be complemented by additional local funding support.

Additionally, SRTS programs have been shown to be highly cost effective. For example, the Auburn School District in Washington state initiated a pilot SRTS program in the late 1990s to address childhood obesity and the high cost of running school buses. The school district was able to reach a milestone of 20% walk mode share and was subsequently able to scale back school bus service, reducing transportation costs by $220,000 annually. This savings equated to 180% each year of the one-time pilot grant award amount of $121,770.

**Implementation resources**

SRTS programs are a partnership between city and county agencies, schools, community organizations, neighborhoods and schools that share the goal of making walking and biking to school fun, easy, and safe for all students and their families. As of October 2012, SRTS activities are now eligible to compete for funding alongside other programs (including activities formerly eligible under the Transportation Enhancements program and Recreational Trails program) as part of the new Transportation Alternatives program in the MAP-21 transportation bill.

For information on how to implement SRTS program in Oregon, including information on how to complete a SRTS Action Plan and available grant resources, please see the Oregon SRTS Program website. In Oregon, creating an action plan is the first step in the application process for SRTS funding. In addition to funds secured through the federal-aid state SRTS program, SRTS programs may also benefit from local funding. While some communities have implemented complex local government financing tools (such as sales tax funding or bonds) to fund SRTS programs, the easiest and most common way to access local funding is to identify existing pots of money that are currently flowing to transportation, safety, or health issues and tap into them, as appropriate.

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The following list includes additional SRTS program guidance and implementation resources that may be of assistance:

- [FHWA Safe Routes to School Program Guidance](#)
- [National Centre for Safe Routes to School](#)
- Center for Disease Control - Walking and Bicycling to School Community Presentation
- Sample Oregon SRTS Action Plans
  - Rural Example: Malin K-6, Malin, Oregon
  - Urban Example: Sexton Mountain Elementary, Beaverton, Oregon
- Safe Routes to School National Partnership - [Getting Students Active through Safe Routes to School: Policies and Action Steps for Education Policymakers and Professionals](#)