



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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September 28, 2007

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
FROM: Subcommittee on Highways and Transit Staff
SUBJECT: Hearing on the Federal Safe Routes to School Program

PURPOSE OF HEARING

The Subcommittee on Highways and Transit is scheduled to meet on Tuesday, October 2, 2007 at 10:00 a.m., to receive testimony on the progress of the Federal Safe Routes to School program, created under the most recent surface transportation authorizing legislation. The Subcommittee will hear from the Kansas Safe Routes to School State Coordinator and officials with the National Center for Safe Routes to School, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance.

BACKGROUND

The Federal Safe Routes to School ("SRTS") program was created in section 1404 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users ("SAFETEA-LU"). Congress funded this program at \$612 million over five years. The objectives of the program, as stated in section 1404, are: to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

The U.S. Department of Transportation ("DOT") reports that in 1969, 42 percent of children walked or rode bicycles to school.¹ By 2001, that percentage had dropped to less than 15

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation's 1969 Nationwide Personal Travel Study

percent.² A variety of factors have contributed to this decline, including a lack of adequate infrastructure near schools and in neighborhoods and parental concerns over safety.

The Federal SRTS program grew out of an earlier pilot program administered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (“NHTSA”). Marin County, California and Arlington, Massachusetts were chosen as pilot cities, and in the year 2000, each received a one-time grant of \$50,000 from NHTSA. Both pilots were considered successful by those involved.

In Marin County, the number of students walking to school rose by 57 percent, the number of students biking rose by 57 percent, and the number of kids being driven to school dropped by 29 percent.³ The Arlington program, which focused solely on walking, resulted in 268 less cars trips each day: a vehicle miles traveled (“VMT”) reduction of 840 miles each day.⁴ In addition to these pilots, several other countries have had success with similar programs. In the 1970s, Odense, Denmark initiated a safe routes program to combat their child pedestrian fatality rate, and succeeded in lowering accidents by 82 percent.⁵

Safe Routes to School Projects

A variety of infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects are eligible for Safe Routes to School funding. Eligible infrastructure projects include: sidewalk improvements, traffic calming, speed reduction improvements, pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, secure bicycle parking, and traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools. Eligible non-infrastructure projects include: public awareness campaigns, traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of schools, student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and environment, and funding for training, volunteers, and managers of safe routes programs. Infrastructure projects may be carried out on any public road or any bicycle or pedestrian pathway or trail in the vicinity of primary and middle schools.

Safe Routes to School is guided by the Federal Highway Administration’s (“FHWA”) Office of Safety, and is administered by state departments of transportation. Program funds are apportioned to the States through a ratio that accounts for the total student enrollments in primary and middle schools in each state. SAFETEA-LU provides a minimum apportionment of \$1 million for each State in each fiscal year, and directs the Secretary to set aside not more than \$3 million for administrative expenses before the State apportionment occurs. States are then required to use not less than 10 percent, and not more than 30 percent, of their apportioned funds for non-infrastructure projects. SRTS funds are 100 percent Federal, are non-transferable, and are available until expended.

² U.S. Department of Transportation’s 2001 National Household Travel Survey

³ Marin County Bicycle Coalition’s Safe Routes to Schools Demonstration Project Final Report

⁴ Arlington, Massachusetts Safe Routes to Schools Demonstration Project Final Report

⁵ Andersen, Troels. “Safe Routes Give Healthy Cycling Children”

The principles of the “5 Es” are often applied to SRTS projects. The 5 Es are:

- **Engineering:** Various design and engineering techniques can lead to a safer walking and biking environment, including sidewalks, bicycle parking, crosswalks, paths, and speed bumps.
- **Enforcement:** Enforcement strategies aim to deter unsafe behaviors by motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians. In the context of SRTS, this generally entails law enforcement agencies working alongside parents, students, crossing guards, and school personnel to enforce safe habits by all transportation users.
- **Encouragement:** Encouragement strategies aim to raise enthusiasm about SRTS through special events, ongoing activities, and contests.
- **Education:** This strategy involves teaching pedestrian, cyclist, and traffic safety. This can range from teaching elementary school children how to safely cross the street to teaching older students how to follow traffic rules when cycling.
- **Evaluation:** Surveys reveal attitudes about walking and cycling, and can be helpful in shaping a program in its early stages. Subsequent tally sheets and travel surveys are key elements to determine the effectiveness of a SRTS program. In addition to the broad goals laid out by Section 1404, FHWA has issued SRTS program guidance which lists a variety of desired outcomes. Since SRTS programs can vary between communities, the desired outcomes are a broad list of factors by which the success of the program can be gauged, such as:
 - Increased bicycle, pedestrian, and traffic safety
 - More children walking and bicycling to and from schools
 - Decreased traffic congestion
 - Improved childhood health
 - Reduced childhood obesity
 - Encouragement of healthy and active lifestyles
 - Improved air quality
 - Improved community safety
 - Reduced fuel consumption
 - Increased community security
 - Enhanced community accessibility
 - Increased community involvement
 - Improvements to the physical environment that increase the ability to walk and bicycle to and from schools
 - Improved partnerships among schools, local municipalities, parents, and other community groups, including non-profit organizations
 - Increased interest in bicycle and pedestrian accommodations

Safe Routes to School Coordinators

Section 1404 requires States to use a sufficient amount of their apportionment to hire a full-time Safe Routes to School State Coordinator. This position is modeled after, but must be separate from, the State Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator. State SRTS Coordinators are responsible for the implementation of the program within their State. The coordinator works in cooperation with others in the State DOT, including the Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator and safety personnel, and community officials, local schools, law enforcement, and non-profit organizations to establish their State's SRTS program.

Currently, all 50 States and the District of Columbia have hired either a permanent coordinator or an interim point-of-contact. Additionally, the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maine, and South Dakota are the only States with interim points-of-contact; all other States have full-time SRTS coordinators.

The Safe Routes to School Clearinghouse

SAFETEA-LU also directs the Secretary to make grants to a national nonprofit organization for the creation of a SRTS clearinghouse. The purpose of the clearinghouse is to develop informational and educational programs on SRTS and to provide technical assistance and disseminate techniques and strategies used for successful SRTS programs. FHWA issued a request for applications for the clearinghouse in January 2006. The University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center was selected, and the National Center for Safe Routes to School was established in May 2006.

The clearinghouse acts as a repository for a wealth of information on all aspects of the SRTS program, and issues quarterly reports tracking topics including state-by-state breakdowns of funds invested, the number of schools involved with SRTS, and the program status in each of the States. The clearinghouse provides tools for collecting data on SRTS, including student travel tally sheets and parent surveys to aid in determining the success of the program. It also provides training and media support to state and local agencies.

The clearinghouse's most recent tracking report, for summer 2007, reported that \$94.5 million of funding has been spent or committed to SRTS projects. This number does not include money that States are spending for administrative purposes, or salaries for SRTS coordinators. Twenty-nine States have announced funding for local or statewide SRTS programs, and each State and the District of Columbia have active SRTS programs in various stages. Almost 700 schools are now participating in the program.⁶

Safe Routes to School Task Force

The Federal SRTS program also provides for the creation of a SRTS Task Force. The task force is charged with developing a strategy for the advancement of SRTS nationwide. The task force is comprised of leaders in health, transportation, education, safety, and law enforcement. Thus far, the task force has held three meetings, with another meeting scheduled for November 2007.

⁶ National Center for Safe Routes to School Summer 2007 SRTS Program Tracking Brief

The task force's upcoming report will detail the need for the Federal SRTS program, an assessment of relevant data, a look at the challenges that the program faces, and its vision and future strategy for the program. This document will provide direction to Congress and help to lay the groundwork for the future of the Federal SRTS program.

PREVIOUS SUBCOMMITTEE ACTION

This will be the first Subcommittee hearing on the Federal Safe Routes to School program.

WITNESS LIST

PANEL I

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National Center for Safe Routes to School
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Ms. Deb Hubsmith

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