Statement of

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Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Duncan, and Members of the Sub-Committee. I am honored to be here today to testify on the success of the federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program.

The Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization with the mission of creating healthier, more sustainable communities by making bicycling safe, convenient, and accessible. We open minds and roads to bicycling in Oregon and SW Washington by representing bicyclists and the bicycle industry. The BTA has over 4,500 members and runs programs and projects statewide.

The BTA is Oregon's pioneer of SRTS and youth bicycle safety education programs. In 1998 the BTA received and I managed a NHSTA grant to develop a 10-hour Bicycle Safety Education (BSE) program and implement it statewide. The program has reached over 40,000 children in 20 Oregon cities. As part of this effort we also began promoting bicycling and walking to school and pushed the Oregon legislature to create an Oregon SRTS program.

The BTA continues to run the BSE program statewide, supports the Oregon SRTS program as technical advisor, chairs Oregon's coordinated effort to run an annual statewide Walk and Bike to School Day, and manages the daily operations of the Portland Safer Routes to School program. We also bring transportation planning expertise to the program, with innovative work on increasing low-traffic bicycle and pedestrian boulevards that would cost-effectively transform local neighborhood streets into safe routes for families and children.

Our goal is the shift the behaviors of a generation. While the statistics vary, about 60% of children bicycled and walked to school in 1970 while 15% do today. And from a practical point, that means that Oregon spends $300 million per year on school bus transportation; it means that over 50% of children are driven to school; it means that we are in the midst of a generation of

children that missed something that you had – independence and mobility. Consequently our children are increasingly inactive and overweight which leads to unprecedented health problems including diabetes, hypertension, and the inability to concentrate. My direct experiences and related research find that children are losing their ability to navigate their communities. Children are not learning how to pedal a bike to accomplish an independent task.

I believe that the Federal Safe Routes to School program is a critical effort to influence the behaviors of a generation. The SRTS program provides a flexible framework and financing that allows schools, municipalities, parents, teachers, children, and community members to work together to develop a multi-tiered effort to increase bicycling, walking, and non-motorized transportation to school.

OREGON BEGAN RUNNING SRTS IN 1998

Starting in 1998, the BTA's BSE program included a promotional element aimed at increasing bicycling to school. In 2001 the first bicycling school bus – a promotional element of SRTS – was run in Eugene in a partnership between the City of Eugene and the Center for Appropriate Transport. A year later the first SRTS Action Plan was developed in Bend, a partnership between the Department of Public Works and the School District. The Lane Transit District soon after received an Oregon Department of Energy Grant to promote transit to school. In 2003 the City of Portland began earmarking traffic fine revenue increases for a test pilot SRTS program.

FEDERAL SRTS PROGRAM PROVIDES ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

While Oregon has been working on SRTS for almost a decade, the federal SRTS program has provided real money to implement solutions and ideas. The federal program is the key reason for the formation of the Oregon SRTS Advisory Committee (SRAC). The SRAC, which has a diverse array of members and liaisons from the transportation, health, education and police departments, has met for over a year to develop an Oregon SRTS strategy and the grant program.

The federal SRTS program provides real resources for local communities to start working on ideas that have been incubating. It offers resources that communities have never had before. It provides real opportunities for schools and cities that are interested in tackling their school-commute problems.

Today, many communities view their efforts as test pilots. These pilots are successfully changing behaviors and building community support. The interest in and experience implementing SRTS programs continues to grow and will lay the foundation for a more success and hopefully robust effort moving forward.

SCHOOLS NOW CARE ABOUT A CHILD'S COMMUTE

The SRTS program is unique because it is based on the premise that commuting to school is an activity that schools should care about. As the education, engineering, and promotion services are being developed, school principals are becoming enthusiastic in their efforts to care for children during their commute to and from school. In Portland, for example, the city and the

school sign an agreement that lays out program goals and the specific services that will be rendered.

SCHOOL AND MUNICIPALITY RELATIONSHIPS ARE BEING BUILT

SRTS builds new partnerships between schools and local city and county government. Many of these relationships did not exist, in fact, in my thirteen years in the transportation planning profession, I had never been in a meeting with a public school transportation service provider. This new consideration about children bicycling and walking to school is making its way to the school district's administration.

These new relationships are helping establish a new level of integrated planning among municipalities and schools. All of Oregon's SRTS applications are required by Oregon law to have a coordinated plan between schools and municipalities. In many cities, like Bend, Eugene, Portland, Corvallis, and Albany, school districts are participating in meetings with city planners to discuss community-wide SRTS strategies and solutions for specific schools.

At the Oregon level, the SRTS Advisory Committee has representation from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Oregon Department of Education. Discussions about statewide law and policy, and ultimately transportation services and financing, are happening. The federal SRTS program provides real resources that give these statewide forums teeth. The federal SRTS program is helping expose the magnitude of the issue that we face.

FHWA CONSTRUCTION RULES ARE CHALLENGING

For Oregon, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rules are the most challenging part of the federal SRTS program. According to the Oregon SRTS Manager, all infrastructure projects are subject to FHWA rules on contracting and the environment. These rules require a high level of oversight and grant administration.

These rules are especially challenging for minimum allocation states like Oregon – the minimum amount a state can receive is $1 million per year. The Oregon SRAC encouraged communities to submit smaller projects, including speed bumps, lane restriping, median islands, and curb extensions as solutions to fix the most dangerous crossings and important street safety issues; funding smaller projects allows the SRAC to distribute grants to a larger number of communities. Unfortunately, ODOT highway grant managers believe that local project estimates may need to be doubled or tripled; administration is a contributing factor to this increase.

Oregon is working to reduce these regulatory costs by developing a bundling system and by streamlining the process for certain project types. The bundling system would allow a local community to include projects at more than one school in a single application, thus reducing the total administrative costs. This works well for larger cities and school districts. ODOT is working to develop a streamlined process for the most straightforward projects that clearly do not have an environmental impact and that most municipalities can contract in house. An example might be a school seeking to build five speed bumps, stripe two new sidewalks in a school zone, add ten bike racks, and infill 30 feet of missing sidewalk.

SUPPLANTING RULES ARE CONFUSING AND LIMITING

Supplanting is another federal granting issue that Oregon is struggling with. Communities are confused about supplanting rules and in many cases have been test-piloting programs in the hopes of a finding additional funding source to help run them. Perhaps the federal SRTS program was never intended to provide ongoing funds, but in many cases the supplanting rule requires a school or community to apply for a new concept with zero or limited track record before funding a proven program.

The supplanting rules also lead to confusion about the length of time that a federal SRTS grant can support a school in its efforts to shift behavior and increase bicycling and walking. Oregon's experience is that this work takes time and is challenging. Federal rules should be loosened to allow local communities to apply for multi-year grants under the SRTS program.

DEMAND GREATLY OUTPACES RESOURCES

In the communities that have started promoting SRTS, the demand strongly outweighs the resources for the program. The City of Portland and its partners are currently serving 26 schools--providing education, encouragement, and quick engineering fixes. Twenty additional schools are on the program's waiting list. Furthermore, almost all of the participating schools have identified a list of engineering fixes that will not be built because of a lack of funds. Oregon cities including Bend, Eugene, Corvallis, Springfield, and Albany applied for only a portion of the potential SRTS projects because of limited funding.

VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES ARE INVALUABLE

Oregon's SRTS programs rely heavily on the resources of community volunteers including parents, students and advocacy organizations. The Oregon program has done an excellent job of building new relationships with health professionals, foundations, and institutions.

Through SRTS programs, agencies that have not always worked together in the past now join forces to improve the health and safety of school children. Many successful SRTS activities include encouragement and education programs that are largely run by volunteers. They are often associated with school groups, including wellness councils and/or parent-teacher associations.

Partnerships add value to federal funding and are essential to the success of SRTS. In Oregon, the Walk N Bike to School Committee convenes to develop a statewide strategy and support the implementation of the International Walk and Bike to School Day. Bicycle safety education programs, walking school buses, and route-planning walkabouts are all activities that Oregonians have volunteered for time and again.

Local agencies and businesses support these efforts with donated materials, printing, marketing, and staff support. In Benton County, the County Health Partnership is taking the lead to leverage many community partnerships in order to develop a countywide strategy for SRTS. In Ashland the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee has partnered with BTA instructors to coordinate bicycle safety programs and promotional efforts.

OREGON'S UNIQUE PLANNING REQUIREMENT

In 2001 and 2005 the BTA advocated and helped pass two Oregon laws that require school districts and city or county governments to identify barriers and hazards to bicycling and walking to school. The law also requires them to develop an Action Plan in order to receive SRTS funds. This requirement builds in protections that SRTS funds will be strategically used according to these coordinated plans.

These laws also slow down the Oregon SRTS program. ODOT did not provide any funding for local staff to develop action plans; a number of communities do not have the staff resources to analyze and engage the community to create these plans.

PLANNING IS IMPORTANT AND TAKES TIME

Planning is important to understand the opportunities and constraints that each community faces. Planning also takes time, and in Oregon the SRTS program will take a while to establish. Communities are moving forward with the development of Action Plans now that federal money is available. Cities are starting to post successes and more people are learning about this work.

It takes time to set up these coalitions, and even more time to develop a strategic plan for any given school. Therefore, communities that had started planning before the federal program was created are in line to receive implementation money first. **The federal program should provide flexibility and direction to DOTs to authorize community-planning grants to help generate a robust SRTS process.**

OREGON SRTS SUCCESSES ARE ONLY BEGINNING

The Oregon SRTS program, with support from the SRAC, will announce the first round of federal SRTS grants in the fall of 2007. We have already seen many successes in Oregon and look forward to participating in the implementation of the new projects.

Oregon is also in the process of developing a more robust statewide encouragement program to supplement its existing educational program. The Oregon Walk and Bike Committee is working with ODOT to increase resources to this successful event.

Schools around Oregon are waiting on federal funds to continue the good work that they began with the development of their Action Plans. Schools applied from across Oregon; from La Grande to Eugene, from Independence to Portland, and Springfield to Veneta.

In conclusion, Safe Routes to School is an important program that is laying the foundation for changing the habits of an entire generation. We are pleased to work within Oregon and proud to work with other states in making our nation safer and healthier for families and children.

Safe Routes to School is creating a stronger America; a healthier America.

I am excited to work with you and the committee in strengthening the program even further, and I look forward to your questions.