

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETER A. DEFazio
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

HEARING ON
THE FEDERAL SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

October 2, 2007

In 2005 this committee created the Federal Safe Routes to School Program as part of SAFETEA-LU. It was intended to encourage kids to bike or walk to school and to provide communities with the resources to make walking or biking to school safer.

SAFETEA-LU reaffirmed the Federal government's commitment to make America a safer, healthier nation through broad funding eligibility for bicycling and walking projects.

The law provides \$612 million for the Safe Routes to School Program, with a full-time Safe Routes coordinator in each state and a national clearinghouse and task force to provide program leadership.

According to the Department of Transportation, in 1969 42 percent of children walked or rode bicycles to school. By 2001 that percentage had dropped to less than 15 percent.

Additionally, according to the "Safe Routes to School: 2007 State of the States Report" as much as 20-30 percent of morning traffic can be generated by parents driving their children to school.

Encouraging kids to bike and walk to school has the potential to help ease congestion. It can also help our kids lead healthier lifestyles.

Some studies predict that obesity will soon overtake smoking as the most important cause of premature death in the U.S. It is time for the transportation and public health community to undertake a vigorous campaign to promote physical exercise similar to the decades-long campaign against smoking. Safe Routes to School can help in that effort.

We have a real opportunity here to change the habitats of a generation by encouraging kids to walk or bike to school.

This is the first hearing this subcommittee has held on the Safe Routes to School program since its inception. With two years of experience implementing the program, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what successes the program may be having and where there is room for improvement.