



Safe Routes to School

An Overview for California Advocates



Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is an international movement to change communities and make children healthier by getting kids to use their own power to get to and from school. Thanks to SRTS programs, communities become better places for everyone to be physically active, kids become healthier and happier, and air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions decrease. California has led the way for SRTS programs in the United States.¹

How Does SRTS Work?

SRTS improves communities in California in two ways:

1. *SRTS programs* encourage, teach, and lead children in walking and bicycling to school, and
2. *SRTS infrastructure initiatives* physically improve streets and sidewalks, increasing the safety and physical comfort of the trip to and from school.

A SRTS program can be run by the school district, a local nonprofit, a parent group, or a partnership of these groups. SRTS programs use different approaches to encourage children to walk and bike to school. At the initial stages, a school may simply host a Walk to School Day once a year, for instance. Other programs are more robust. Popular features are “walking school buses” or “bicycle trains,” in which adults supervise groups of children as they walk or bike to school together. Walking school buses train children on safety rules, make it more fun for them to walk to school, and allay parental fears about traffic safety or unaccompanied children. Strong SRTS programs may also involve safety audits, maps and recommendations for safer routes, and improved infrastructure and law enforcement near schools.



What Are the Benefits of SRTS Programs?

SRTS programs help children, communities, and the environment in a variety of ways:

Health: By walking or bicycling to school, children get more physical activity, lower their risk of obesity and diabetes, and improve their overall health.² Healthier children miss fewer days of school.

Learning: When children exercise before school, they arrive focused and ready to learn.³ By adopting SRTS programs, schools can increase students' health and readiness to learn without taking time away from existing school-day activities or placing additional burdens on teachers.

Environment: Because fewer car trips mean lower greenhouse gas emissions, walking and bicycling to school reduces air pollution and helps the environment.⁴

Community: Ten to twenty-five percent of morning rush-hour traffic is attributable to families driving their children to school,⁵ so getting children walking and bicycling reduces traffic congestion. In addition, children and families get to know each other as well as other neighbors encountered on the trip, increasing the feeling of community and social support in a neighborhood. With more people out walking and bicycling, streets become safer and more welcoming for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities.

SRTS Infrastructure Programs

Streets in California often lack features like well-maintained sidewalks, safe street crossings, and separated bicycle lanes or multi-use paths that make it safe and pleasant to walk, bicycle, skateboard, or roller-skate to school. State and federal funding for SRTS infrastructure projects allows cities and counties to install or upgrade street infrastructure near schools. This money can also fund other important features for safe streets, like traffic calming, street trees, and landscaping barriers separating traffic from sidewalks. Together, these features can make the difference between a pleasant, peaceful walk and one that is dangerous and disagreeable.

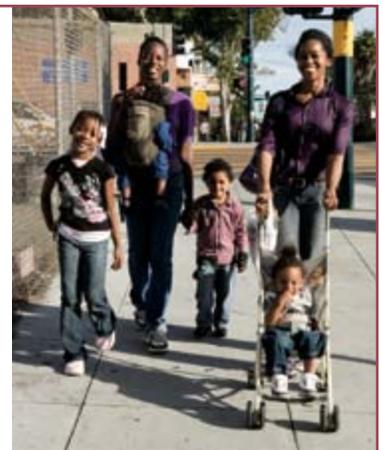
SRTS Funding

In California, Safe Routes to School programs can be funded by the state⁶ or the federal⁷ government. In some cases, local funding may also be available.⁸

State and federal funds are administered by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Cities and counties apply directly to Caltrans for state or federal funds. State-funded infrastructure projects can receive up to \$450,000, must be coordinated with local school and law enforcement officials, and require a 10 percent local match. Federal funds, which do not require a match, may be awarded for infrastructure work or encouragement programs. Federal funds may be awarded to cities or counties or, with the support of a local responsible agency,⁹ to school districts, nonprofits, tribes, and others. For more information, see www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm.

Overcoming Barriers

Many communities embrace SRTS programs as a way to increase children's physical activity. Occasionally, however, SRTS promoters will run into resistance—such as when a school or district has an existing policy that disfavors walking or bicycling to school. Under such circumstances, parents and others can work together to get a policy that supports SRTS adopted. Another barrier may be a district's fear of increased liability exposure. Such liability fears are largely unwarranted and can be managed through commonsense precautions, addressing hazards responsibly, and ensuring that insurance or risk pools cover SRTS activities. For more details, see our fact sheet "Safe Routes to School Programs: Minimizing Your Liability Risk in California."



For more information on Safe Routes to School:

California Information and Advocacy

The *California Department of Public Health's Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center* (TARC) assists local communities with SRTS programs by answering questions and providing targeted trainings and other resources:

www.caactivecommunities.org/safe_routes.html

www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/injviosa/Pages/SafeRoutesToSchool.aspx

Caltrans administers both the state and the federal Safe Routes to School programs. For more information about SRTS grants from these programs:

www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm

The *California SRTS State Network* brings together a wide coalition of groups interested in supporting SRTS:

www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/network/california#network

For more information on Walk to School Day, visit *California's Walk to School Day Headquarters*:

www.cawalktoschool.com

California Policies from the California School Board Association

The *California School Board Association* has developed a policy brief, model administrative regulations, and a model policy to assist school districts in supporting SRTS:

www.csba.org/EducationIssues/EducationIssues/Wellness/PhysicalActivity.aspx

Walkability/Bikeability Resources

To help you assess how walkable or bikeable your community is download a checklist:

www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf

www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf

National Information and Advocacy

More resources on SRTS are available from the *Safe Routes to School National Partnership*, which advocates for safe bicycling and walking to and from school at local, state, and national levels:

www.saferoutespartnership.org

The *National Center for Safe Routes to School* has tip sheets, reports, trainings and many other resources relevant to many aspects of starting and expanding SRTS programs:

www.saferoutesinfo.org



- ¹ California was the first state in the country to pass a law setting up Safe Routes to School programs, enacting AB 1475 in 1999. The state has now made the program a permanent fixture through AB 57, passed in 2007, which ensured funding through the State Highway Account.
- ² Active Living Research. *Walking and Biking to School, Physical Activity and Health Outcomes*. May 2009. Available at: http://216.92.169.205/files/ALR_Brief_ActiveTransport.pdf.
- ³ See, e.g., Sibley, B & Etnier, J. "The relationship between physical activity and cognition in children: A meta-analysis." *Pediatric Exercise Science*, 15: 243-256, 2003; Safe Routes to School National Partnership. *Getting Students Active through Safe Routes to School: Policies and Action Steps for Education Policymakers and Professionals*. June 2010, pp. 6-12. Available at: www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/file/EducatorsGuide.pdf; see also Active Living Research. *Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance*. Summer 2009. Available at: http://216.92.169.205/files/Active_Ed_Summer2009.pdf.
- ⁴ US Environmental Protection Agency. *Climate Change – What You Can Do*. Available at: www.epa.gov/climatechange/wyecd/road.html.
- ⁵ Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. *Safe Routes to School Guide: Introduction to Safe Routes to School*, 2007. Available at: www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/pdf/SRTS-Guide_Introduction.pdf (citing Highway Transportation Administration); *Solving Traffic Problems in Mill Valley: A Community Responsibility*. Mill Valley Transportation Committee. 2001, pp. 1-25 at p. 6; Peddie, B & Somerville, C. *Travel Behavior Change Through School Travel Planning: Mode Shift and Community Engagement – Results from 33 Schools in Victoria*. Melbourne: Department of Infrastructure, p.1 (analyzing commuter traffic in Melbourne, Australia). Available at: [www.travelsmart.vic.gov.au/doi/doiect.nsf/2a6bd98dec287482ca256915001cff0c/99f6c1c3c42769f5ca25709700032658/\\$FILE/School%20Travel%20Planning%20Pilot.pdf](http://www.travelsmart.vic.gov.au/doi/doiect.nsf/2a6bd98dec287482ca256915001cff0c/99f6c1c3c42769f5ca25709700032658/$FILE/School%20Travel%20Planning%20Pilot.pdf); U.S. Department of Transportation. *National Household Travel Survey: Congestion – Who is Traveling in the Peak?* Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Transportation. August, 2007, p. 1 (finding that 10.8% of peak commute traffic is due to school drop-offs after which the parent or driver does not continue on to work or another destination). Available at: <http://financecommission.dot.gov/Documents/NHTS%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Congestion%20and%20Peak%20Travelers.pdf>.
- ⁶ See note 1, *supra*; more information available at: www.ebbc.org/?q=node/152.
- ⁷ Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), 23 U.S.C.A. §§ 148(a)(3)(B)(xix), 402 (West 2010).
- ⁸ See, e.g., the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's funding program: www.mtc.ca.gov/funding/STPCMAQ/6_SR2S_Comparison.pdf.
- ⁹ A city, county, metropolitan planning organization (MPO), or regional transportation planning agency (RTPA) must agree to act as a responsible agency for the project.



ChangeLab Solutions

changelabsolutions.org

ChangeLab Solutions formerly existed under the name Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP). Any references to PHLP in this publication should now be understood to refer to ChangeLab Solutions.

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