



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

Making Our Communities Healthy Through Bicycling and Walking to School



Safe Routes to School: Addressing Many Community Problems

The number of children who bicycle or walk to school in the United States has plummeted, due to a lack of safe infrastructure and concerns about distance and safety. Meanwhile, childhood obesity has skyrocketed and school-related road traffic has dramatically worsened. Many factors point to the severity of this problem:

- Evaluation: Today, one-third of children in the U.S. are overweight or obese, more than triple the number 40 years ago.¹
- Engineering: With 10-14 percent of morning rush hour traffic generated by parents driving children to school, decisions about school travel affect all drivers.²
- Environment: Nearly one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions result from transportation.³
- Education: Students who are less fit and have lower muscular strength and endurance perform less well on math and other tests;⁴ in contrast, teens who were active in school were 20 percent more likely to earn an “A” in math or English.⁵
- Equity: Teens who live in poor or mostly minority neighborhoods are 50 percent less likely to have a recreational facility near home.⁶
- Encouragement: When people live in neighborhoods that are not walkable, they are half as likely to get enough physical activity as residents of walkable neighborhoods.⁷
- Enforcement: Thirty percent of traffic deaths for children under the age of 15 happen while walking and bicycling.⁸

The Solution

Safe Routes to School addresses these problems by making it safer for more kids to walk and bicycle to and from schools. Currently thriving in more than 15,000 schools nationwide, Safe Routes to School is a national movement that makes bicycling and walking to school safe, convenient and fun for children. Walking one mile to and from school each day can provide children with two-thirds of the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Children who walk to school are more physically active and have higher levels of cardiovascular fitness; studies also show active students perform better academically.

Safe Routes to School programs encourage children to walk or bicycle to or from school. Some programs simply focus on getting students to walk or bicycle on National Walk to School Day and provide educational materials on safe walking and bicycling for PE classes. Other programs establish walking school buses and bicycle trains, with parents or volunteers who accompany groups of children on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis as they walk or bicycle to and from school. Federal or state funding is often available to support Safe Routes to School programs and to make safety improvements to street crossings, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes on the route to school.



What Can I Do Now?

- Build a coalition that can develop a Safe Routes to School plan that identifies potential safety problems and prioritizes needed improvements.
- Identify state, regional and local funding opportunities for Safe Routes to School from regional transportation agencies, state departments of transportation, and/or elected bodies.
- Encourage parental involvement in schools, with its many benefits for long term student success and health, through Safe Routes to School.
- Cultivate relationships with neighborhood revitalization, community development, faith based, smart growth, law enforcement and other community groups to promote Safe Routes to School.

Additional resources and information about Safe Routes to School are available from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership.

Improving Safety for Walking and Bicycling in Asian American Neighborhoods in New York

Transportation Alternatives, a safe streets advocacy organization, took a hard look at crash data in New York City. Their findings showed that the Woodside community, with high Asian American and Pacific Islander populations, was especially unsafe for people walking and bicycling. For example, over a 10 year period, a particularly dangerous stretch of Queens Boulevard between 51st and 68th Avenues saw pedestrian and bicycle fatalities and 356 non-fatal collisions.⁹ This street passes through neighborhoods with between populations between 24 and 63 percent Asian American, with roughly one-third of residents earning under \$30,000 per year.¹⁰ In 2014, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) hosted a community town hall and walk audit to educate the community on the barriers to walking and biking and to brainstorm solutions to address biking and walking in the Woodside community. This area is the target of ongoing campaigns to calm traffic and improve safety and physical activity.

Notes

1. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Weight-control Information Network, <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/statistics/>.
2. National Center for Safe Routes to School, "How Children Get to School - School Travel Patterns from 1969-2009," page 5, http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/NHTS_school_travel_report_2011_0.pdf.
3. United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions," <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/sources/transportation.html>.
4. Coe, D. P., Peterson, T., Blair, C., Schutten, M. C., & Peddie, H. (2013). "Physical fitness, academic achievement, and socioeconomic status in school-aged youth." *J Sch Health*, 83(7), 500-507. doi: 10.1111/josh.12058.
5. Active Living Research, "Active Education Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance: Building Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity and Support Active Communities," page 3. http://activelivingresearch.org/sites/default/files/ALR_Brief_ActiveEducation_Summer2009.pdf.
6. Active Living Research, "The Role of Communities in Promoting Physical Activity: Infographic," http://activelivingresearch.org/sites/default/files/ALR_Infographic_Communities_June2012.jpg.
7. Id.
8. Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "Changing the Habits of an Entire Generation through Bicycling and Walking," <http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/SRTS-Promo-Piece-Final-1.pdf>.
9. Queens Blvd. Crash Stats: 2002-2011. Page 2 of 4. Accessed at: http://transalt.org/files/getinvolved/neighborhood/campaignmaps/Queens_Bld_Corridor_Crashes_2002-2011.pdf
10. American Community Survey, based on samples from 2005-2009. Accessed at: <http://projects.nytimes.com/census/2010/explorer>.