

6

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY



Chapter Outline:

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

This Action Plan provides the necessary guidance, tools, and steps for implementing a Safe Routes to School Program. By combining the action plan with the SRTS Program resources, both the school and the community benefit through increased awareness for healthful living and environmental stewardship. Likewise, the action plan and the SRTS platform provide avenues for capital improvements within the school's community by facilitating agency funding. However, actually implementing the plan and sustaining the program are really the critical components in accomplishing the community's goals. Once the Action Plan has been approved and adopted by the school, the task of implementing and sustaining the program begins.

Each school year brings new opportunities to revitalize the SRTS program as a visible and important part of campus life. Sustaining the SRTS program is a comprehensive phase of the community's project as it revisits some of the preliminary steps including Engineering, Encouragement, Education and Enforcement, but it also requires the introduction of Evaluation and stakeholder investment strategies to fund its implementation and infrastructure improvements. At the beginning of each school year, action items from the plan should be evaluated and assessed for effectiveness; improvement strategies monitored, staff and students challenged and engaged in promotional activities; and funding resources explored and reviewed.

6.1 EVALUATION

Evaluation is an important component of any SRTS program. It is used to determine if the aims of the strategies are being met and to assure that resour-

es are directed toward efforts that show the greatest likelihood of success. Also, evaluation can identify needed adjustments to the program while it is underway. There are four general benefits to evaluation (taken from <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/evaluation/>):

- 1) Making sure that the underlying problem is identified so that proper strategies to address the problem are picked. Sometimes a SRTS program begins without a good understanding of the underlying issues resulting in a less successful program.
- 2) Setting reasonable expectations about what the program can do. By knowing the starting point, SRTS programs can set specific and reasonable objectives.
- 3) Identifying changes that will improve the program. Part of evaluation is monitoring what happens throughout the life of a project so that mid-course corrections can be made, if needed, to improve chances of success.
- 4) Determining if the program is having the desired results. This is a primary purpose of any evaluation and can be used to inform funding sources, the media, and the public to help build support for SRTS.

Components of a SRTS Annual Evaluation Plan

- **Collect Parent Surveys and Student Tally Sheets Annually**
- **Perform Walkability Audits Annually**
- **Monitor Program Progress**
- **Make Changes Where Needed**

Evaluation occurs throughout the lifespan of the SRTS program within the each school's community before, during, and after the development of the action plan. In the developmental stages of the SRTS program, data through surveys and tallies is collected to provide a baseline profile of behaviors, attitudes, and deficiencies. During the implementation of the program, data is used to track progress and sustained challenges that require revitalizing the Action Plan. After the program is established, evaluation methods and monitoring can be used to benefit sustainability including involvement of the student body in the process, documentation of behavior patterns, and as an indicator for future decisions and project prioritization.

For the purpose of sustainability, evaluation after program implementation involves the annual distribution of the travel tally and parent survey information, data entry with the national SRTS Center, and assessment of any engineering improvements made through the Action Plan. Engaging students in the re-assessment can serve multiple purposes incorporating Education and Encouragement activities. Students can even provide valuable assistance in the collection of data using tools such as walkability check lists or contests to find new improvements.

Summary of Evaluation Recommendations:

Prepare a SRTS Evaluation Plan that will identify annual tasks to ensure that you have a successful program. Components of this plan should minimally include:

- Conduct Annual Parent Surveys and Student Tallies to send to the National Center for SRTS for processing.
- Conduct Annual Walkability Audits.
- Review surveys and audits to gather information and make changes for the following years.
- Follow step-by-step procedures on a detailed evaluation process developed by the National Center for

SRTS. Visit the Center's online guide to standard evaluation, including the six step methodology: http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/evaluation/evaluation_in_six_steps.cfm

Step one and step two of this six step process are addressed as part of this action plan.

6.2 PROGRAM MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

In order to facilitate implementation of this Plan and continue a successful SRTS program, it is critical to have a strategy in place. This planning process brought together stakeholders, partners, School representatives, Town government representatives, and citizens to determine SRTS needs and priorities. It is critical that these efforts and the resulting Action Plan implementation not lose momentum. In order to sustain SRTS success, consider the following list of strategies.

Sustainability/Program Maintenance Strategies:

- Form a permanent, active SRTS Committee in the community and/or school potentially made up of members of this Action Plan Advisory Committee and other interested parties. This group should meet monthly or quarterly to discuss pertinent issues, set goals, evaluate the program, assist with programming, and implement recommendations of this Plan.



An active SRTS committee is an important part of helping the program successfully reach its goals.

Sustainability Strategies

- **Form a permanent, active SRTS Committee**
- **Partner with local businesses for support**
- **Create and maintain an active SRTS website with a calendar of events and other pertinent SRTS news and information**
- **Re-evaluate the SRTS Program on regular intervals to celebrate accomplishments and redefine priorities**
- **Maintain a SRTS presence at school events throughout the year**
- **Continue relationships between the schools and the Town for Program support**

• Partner with local businesses for support. Local businesses can provide key items such as prizes for encouragement programs, bicycle helmet giveaways, sponsorship for bicycle/pedestrian events, etc.

• Create an easy to access SRTS Website with a calendar of events (make sure there is at least one event scheduled every month), walking maps, and useful links. This calendar should be made available in hardcopy and also on school websites, Town websites, and social networking sites.

• Re-evaluate your SRTS Program on regular intervals (1 – 3 years) to see what has been accomplished, what still needs to be done, and identify new projects or priorities.

• Maintain SRTS presence as an active and critical program each school year. This can be accomplished through regular handouts, presentations, PTA/PTO meetings, booths at school registration/events, and local media. Provide success stories/statistics to schools, parents, and community utilizing local media, websites, etc.

• Continue a relationship between local school leaders, school district leaders, and local government staff. Communication between local government and schools is critical for achieving community goals, ensuring SRTS projects are considered, and implementing programs.

6.3 FUNDING

When considering possible funding sources for SRTS engineering and program projects, it is important to consider that it is highly unlikely that all activities (construction and education/encouragement/enforcement programs) will be accomplished from a single funding source since these projects are expected to be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and accomplished over several years. It will be necessary to consider several sources of funding, that when combined, would support full project construction. It will also be critical for the local school and school system to continue working closely with local government to establish priority for SRTS projects through the local government's capital improvement program, grant efforts, and funding request lists.

Federal Funding

Federal funding is typically directed through State agencies to local governments either in the form of grants or direct appropriations. SRTS funding has been a major source of funds for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.

Federal Funding can be difficult and costly to pursue outside of the original SRTS grant. Federal-Aid highway funds are authorized by Congress and are used to support construction and improvements along routes that are considered part of our National System or provide connectivity to and within National Parks, Indian and other public lands. Bicycle Transportation and Pedestrian Walkways resources are also viable project types for funding resources. The following is a link to "A Guide to Federal-Aid Programs and Projects".

Link of Interest:

- <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/guide/>

State Funding

State Funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects in North Carolina began with the Bicycle and Bikeway Act of 1974. Under this Act, bicycle facilities were defined as a "bona fide highway purpose, subject to the same rights and responsibilities, and eligible for the

same consideration as other highway purposes and functions.” In short, this act enabled NCDOT to fund bicycle and pedestrian projects through the same funding resources that historically had been used for more traditional modes of transportation such as roadway, rail and transit.

Today, bicycle and pedestrian projects for new and existing facilities of significance are adopted in accordance with a Statewide prioritization process known as the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) that addresses the existing and emerging needs of communities across the State. As projects are adopted into the STIP, monies are allocated and set aside in the State budget to plan, design and construct the projects. This can take many years as the STIP has a 7-10 year planning period. However, NCDOT has many initiatives that are designed to help municipalities and agencies fund infrastructure improvements especially pedestrian facilities. A list of NCDOT programs is included in Appendix B.

Local Funding

Local funding for transportation projects can be generated from multiple sources including bonds, taxes, grants or even outside agencies that are indirectly connected with public transportation such as those involved with public health and safety. Likewise, municipal and departmental operating budgets may offer support for non-infrastructure programs like maintenance and repair, law enforcement, crossing guards, safety education and walking/bicycling program promotion. One example of a local funding source is in Portland, Oregon. They raised traffic fines and a portion of the revenue from the increased fines was dedicated to the City’s SRTS Program.

Local planning departments are another resource to consider since SRTS projects provide multimodal transportation facilities, greenways and sidewalks that fit municipal investment strategies for Capital Improvement Projects. Carrboro is a part of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) which is mandated by Federal and State laws to establish Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP’s) in cooperation with NCDOT. These plans develop and prioritize multimodal

projects for inclusion into the State Transportation Improvement Program. SRTS projects fit seamlessly into the goals and visions of these organizations making SRTS projects viable projects for incorporation into pedestrian and bicycle CTP’s. Note, these are long range plans and unless a project has immediate prioritization, project deployment may take many years. However, these organizations do have funding available and should be considered in the fund raising process. Funding is a political process and worthwhile projects require a lobbying effort proving an existing or emerging need with strong benefits for the community.

Link of interest: http://www.dchcmpo.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

Private Sector

The Private Sector is another viable means of funding non-infrastructure aspects of the SRTS program. Area businesses, eager to attract clientele, may be willing to host promotional events, donate merchandise, or even volunteer during special events. It is a great way to build professional networks, and having local officials participate in the SRTS activities is a successful way to attract the support of area businesses. Since SRTS projects promote safety, health and environmental stewardship, local corporations whose mission statements coincide with these principles may support the program with cash, sponsorships, discounts, printing services and the like in exchange for the promotional opportunity.

Institutions and Non-Profits

There are institutions and non-profits across the country, and even locally, that willingly support educational, community, health and environmental advocates. The National Foundation Center is an excellent data base to search for applicable funding resources as well as the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Even popular internet search engines can often find local foundations through public tax records.

Links of interest:

- <http://foundationcenter.org/>
- <http://nccs.urban.org/>

Grants

Grants are another way to help fund SRTS initiatives in your community. There are specific grants for SRTS projects which can be used for infrastructure or non-infrastructure priorities. Additionally, SRTS improvements may be eligible for any grant that would support healthy initiatives in a community.

Volunteers

Lastly, individuals make up the corner stones of the community and they are ultimately the parents and families of the children that attend the area schools. Local fundraisers serve multiple purposes with the SRTS program and have proven to be one of the best ways to raise funding, awareness and community support.

6.3.1 Recommended Sources of Funding for Infrastructure Projects

Funding specifically set aside for SRTS is going to be the best potential funding source for large infrastructure projects. These grants are offered periodically through NCDOT and the infrastructure projects can be as much as \$300,000 at this time. It is likely that the next call for projects will be in Fall of 2011. Contact information for this grant is included in Appendix B.

Several of the recommended projects could be funded through various NCDOT funds. The priority projects should be discussed with the NCDOT Division 7 Engineer and District Engineer for Orange County to explore potential funding sources. Contact information for these NCDOT Contacts is listed at the following links:

NCDOT Division 7 Engineer:
<https://apps.dot.state.nc.us/dot/directory/authenticated/UnitPage.aspx?id=646>

NCDOT District Engineer for Orange County: <https://apps.dot.state.nc.us/dot/directory/authenticated/UnitPage.aspx?id=2083>

Various sources of NCDOT funds are included in Appendix B, but the ones that are most likely to be used at this time are as follows:

Division SRTS Funds: Each Division has a limited amount of funding for small SRTS projects. This funding can be used for eligible projects up to \$100,000. The Division 7 Engineer would be the contact person to determine if a project is eligible and the funding is available from this source.

Contingency Funds: These funds can be used on State or Town Roads and must have a political sponsor. The funds are controlled by the North Carolina House of Representative, the North Carolina Senate, and the Secretary of Transportation. There is a lot of flexibility with these funds so they could potentially be used for several of the priority projects.

Small Construction Funds: These funds are controlled by the local Board of Transportation Member and can be used on projects up to \$250,000 per fiscal year. Coordination with the NCDOT Board Member from Division 7 is required. The most likely project for this source of funding would be installing pedestrian signals or flashers to alert drivers of pedestrians. The current Board Members are listed on the NCDOT webpage at the following link: <https://apps.dot.state.nc.us/dot/directory/authenticated/UnitPage.aspx?id=30>

Division Pedestrian Enhancement Funds: Each Division receives \$100,000 a year for pedestrian enhancements. Since these funds will typically be shared between several counties, they would typically be used for smaller projects. The Division 7 Engineer should be contacted to see if these funds could be used for improving any of the identified pedestrian crossings.

Contract Resurfacing Program: The District Engineer for Orange County will have a listing of the roads that are planned for resurfacing in the next two years. It is recommended that coordination be maintained with the District Engineer to determine if any roads in the SRTS Action Plan are included on this list. With coordination prior to the project beginning, additional pavement markings for pedestrian cross-

ings could be included in the project. Also, all curb ramps will be brought into ADA compliance when the road is resurfaced.

This would be a good source of funding to implement the road diet on West Main Street. The new striping could be done at the same time the road is resurfaced. Currently, this section of road is not scheduled to be resurfaced in the next two years. NCDOT is evaluating the feasibility of the road diet in this location. If the proposed improvement is approved, coordination should take place with the District Engineer to see if the road could be included in the next resurfacing program.

General Maintenance Funding: At this time, funding for maintenance is limited, but very small projects like striping crosswalks could potentially be funded through this source. The District Engineer would be the contact person for this funding.

Locally, Powell Bill funds could be used for projects on roadways that are not maintained by NCDOT. These funds would come from the Town of Carrboro.

6.3.2. Recommended Sources of Funding for Non-Infrastructure Projects

Non-Infrastructure projects tend to be significantly less expensive than infrastructure projects, so there are a lot of options for funding sources. Non-Infrastructure funds are offered periodically through NCDOT through a competitive grant process. NCDOT has awarded as much as \$50,000 for a non-infrastructure grant. As mentioned earlier, it is likely that the next call for projects will be in Fall of 2011. Contact information for this grant is included in Appendix B.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School periodically awards mini-grants (\$1,000) for non-infrastructure projects. During the spring and fall of 2010, 25 grants were awarded for qualifying projects. Based on last year's schedule, fall 2011 mini-grants would be announced in February. These grants are advertised at the following link:

http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/news_room/

There are numerous grants available for programs that will promote healthy lifestyles for children. These can all be tied into SRTS due to the fact that it encourages children to walk or ride their bicycle to and from school. The other health benefits outlined in this Action Plan will help to qualify for these grants. There is a listing of several grants in Appendix B and more becoming available due to new programs. It is recommended that grant sources be checked frequently for any that might apply to education, encouragement, and enforcement programs.

Public or Private Partnerships are a great way to secure funding for non-infrastructure programs. Nearby Universities or non-profit organizations may be interested in sponsoring programs. Also, local businesses are usually willing to get involved with school programs. Sometimes, all you have to do is ask! Local bicycle shops, nearby businesses, and businesses ran by parents of children are great places to contact.

Volunteers are also a way to get non-infrastructure programs started. For instance, the walking school bus program could be started by the SRTS Committee, the PTA, or families that are in the walk zone. This project could be done for a very small cost. The big effort is in the coordination... locating interested families, scheduling routes, and providing overall program guidance. Printing maps or advertisements could be done at a minimal cost.

For further information on these funding sources, please see Appendix B.

6.4 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In the shadow of looming statistics depicting our youth's obesity rates and the plummeting activity levels of our children over the last decades, SRTS is setting out to change the lifestyles and habits of a generation. The success of this mission depends ultimately upon the success and sustainability of the program school by school across the country and our state. So, engaging students to be leaders in their classroom communities is a goal that must be met. Elementary students are likely to follow their parent's lead and "marketing" strategies geared toward parents are effective for this age group.

Additionally, efforts must be made to ensure that information is provided in all major languages spoken at a school (in most cases English and Spanish). The programs should include all students regardless of their ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

These are a few suggestions compiled by the National Safe Routes to School success stories:

- Provide opportunities for self-expression and self-determination. Let the students take charge of designing logos, websites and events.

Student Involvement Strategies

- **Establish a routine "Walk/Ride to School Day"**
- **Hold annual events**
- **Send out newsletters**
- **Incorporate SRTS information and activities into classroom curriculum**
- **Have a place to communicate SRTS updates and events**

- Create hands-on learning experiences that are personally relevant. For example, using tools such as the walkability checklist, ask students to identify where changes in sidewalks, crossing guard locations and walking conditions should be improved using GPS devices and digital cameras. Encourage children to voice their opinions about walkability and bikability at public meetings or letter writing campaigns to local officials.

- Highlight the connection between SRTS and social, cultural or environmental issues that may be important to students. Organize lessons, activities and events about climate change and the health benefits of the program. Use sports celebrities to participate in promotional events as advocates for health and fitness.

- Foster positive interactions between peers and provide opportunities for peer identification and acceptance. Start an afternoon club with a mission that ties to SRTS. Perhaps a cycling club with scheduled field trips to trails and greenways. Develop a cross-age teaching program and/or mentorship program. This may be a good way to utilize high school students and get them involved in the program as well.

Student Involvement Strategies for sustaining/growing a SRTS program:

- Establish a routine "Walk / Ride to School Day" (either weekly or monthly).
- Hold annual events: Logo contests, mileage contests, etc.
- Send out newsletters on a consistent basis (quarterly / monthly).
- Incorporate SRTS information and activities into classroom curriculum.
- Have a place to communicate SRTS updates and events (ie. a website, a blog, or a Facebook page).

