

## **2009 RHODE ISLAND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Steering Committee announce a call for proposals to participate in the 100% federally funded national Safe Routes to School Program. It is an exciting opportunity to have schools and communities work together to make walking and bicycling to school a safe and routine activity. The Program is a reimbursement program for a wide variety of projects and activities, both infrastructure and non-infrastructure, with the goal of creating comprehensive SRTS initiatives in individual elementary and middle schools (kindergarten through eighth grade).

Many of us remember a time when walking and bicycling to school was a part of everyday life. Today the majority of U.S. children do not walk or bike to school, approximately one-third ride a school bus, and half are driven in a private vehicle. This is true even of children who live close enough to the school to walk or bike. Today, more than ever, there is a need to provide options that allow children to walk and bicycle to school. Many communities struggle with traffic congestion around schools and motor vehicle emissions polluting the environment. At the same time, children in general engage in less physical activity and lead an increasingly sedentary lifestyle. As a result, many children are now at risk for a variety of health problems such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Experts believe that if the trend continues children today may be the first generation to not live as long as their parents. At first glance, these problems may seem to be separate issues, but SRTS programs can address all these challenges through a coordinated action plan. There are positive tangible and intangible results, such as children learning independence, to be gained by going back to the way it was when most of us walked or biked to school.

### ***History of SRTS Program***

Safe Routes to School is an international movement designed to reach communities. The goal, simply stated, is to increase the number of children safely walking and biking to school. The movement began in Europe and has spread to the U.S. as a means to encourage and enable children to walk and bicycle to school safely. The SRTS movement began in Denmark in the 1970's due to concern about an increase in accidents. Traffic calming measures and separate foot and bicycle paths were instituted. Early efforts included a program begun in the Bronx, N.Y. in 1997. At that time while most children walked to school there was a high rate of pedestrian accidents. The program focused on making the travel safer while maintaining the high number of children walking. Environmental changes and traffic-calming measures were implemented that made the walking routes safer. California started SRTS because of a special interest in promoting physical activity for health. In Toronto, the major impetus was air pollution from vehicles. Successful programs include areas where the climate is not always ideal such as in Maine. Techniques such as "Walking School Buses" have been used where groups of kids walk with parents or other adults.

The Marin County, California SRTS Program reported that after the first year of the pilot program in its 16 participating schools there was a 57% increase in the number of children walking and biking to school and a 29% decrease in the number of children being driven alone in

a car. The Toronto, Ontario program targets auto air pollution by reducing auto idling. This resulted in an estimated 210.5 fewer metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

After the success of several state and local pilot programs, federal legislation establishing SRTS Programs in every state was passed. That legislation is Sec. 1404 under SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users). The National Center for Safe Routes to School Website, which can be viewed at: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org> is a great source of information with a wealth of ideas and numerous links to detailed on-line guides, resources, training, etc.

### ***What is the RI SRTS Program?***

In Rhode Island, SRTS is a collaborative effort between the RI Statewide Planning Program and the RI Department of Transportation (DOT) working with other state and community entities such as the RI Department of Health and RI Department of Education, local municipalities and school systems. The SRTS Program is established for the benefit of children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The purposes of the program are to:

- Enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
- Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
- Facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of elementary and middle schools (Grades K-8).

Some eligible activities include:

- **Infrastructure Projects:** The planning, design, and construction of infrastructure projects such as sidewalk construction or repair, traffic calming, and crosswalks that improve the ability of students to safely walk and bicycle to school.
- **Non-infrastructure related activities:** The undertaking of non-infrastructure activities such as walking school buses, bike rodeos, walking clubs and safety curriculum that are designed to encourage walking and bicycling to school; as well as activities such as police details near the schools during the student travel time.
- **SRTS National Course:** Usually a one-day training course held on the school site.

Successful projects include the following components, referred to as the 5 E's:

- **Education:** pedestrian and bicycle safety curriculum, speaking programs, driver safety campaigns;
- **Enforcement:** working with local law enforcement to improve traffic law enforcement and crossing guard programs;
- **Encouragement:** initiatives and incentives to get children to bicycle and walk to school such as "bike rodeos" and "frequent walking clubs" with prizes;
- **Engineering:** physical improvements to enhance safety such as speed humps and median refuges;
- **Evaluation:** collection of data before and during the implementation of the program.

***What levels of funding are available?***

It is currently estimated that approximately two million dollars will be made available for this round of funding. The program is 100% federally supported, therefore, there is no “matching” requirement and selected participants will be reimbursed for 100% of their costs. This means that the selected applicant will be entitled to reimbursement for eligible work performed under a Project Agreement up to the amount agreed upon at the time of selection and contract agreement. The applicant must have the cash flow to implement the project and then request reimbursement; the Rhode Island SRTS program will not provide cash advances. Any work on the project that was performed prior to the execution of a Project Agreement and the Notice to Proceed is not eligible for reimbursement.

***How to apply?***

Included with this application packet is the Application and the other contents as listed in the enclosed letter. Applicants should read the entire packet and browse the national SRTS website before filling out your application. There are numerous steps you need to take before you are ready to fill out the application. All application materials are also posted on the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program website at:

<http://www.planning.ri.gov/transportation/srts/srts.htm>.

***How will applications be selected?***

After a preliminary review by Statewide Planning and DOT, the applications for funding will be forwarded to the RI SRTS Selection Sub-committee. This is a sub-committee of the RI SRTS Steering Committee, the latter representing several different interests including the RI Department of Health, municipal engineering/public works, traffic safety agency (i.e. Governor’s Office of Highway Safety), school representative, town planner, non-profit organization, bike/walk advocacy group and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Project Selection sub-committee reviews the applications and scores them according to the Project Evaluation Criteria, which are detailed in the associated Application Guide.