



Safe Routes to School State Network Project:
2007 Annual Progress Report
Building Diverse Partnerships and Action Plans



Changing the habits of
an entire generation.

March 2008

In May 2007, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership launched a three-year Safe Routes to School (SRTS) State Network Project to leverage resources in nine states and the District of Columbia. This report summarizes the progress that the State Network Project has achieved in its first year of operation, outlines lessons learned, highlights accomplishments in each State Network and suggests next steps to maintain the momentum to build the SRTS program nationwide.

Safe Routes to School is a growing movement to get more kids walking and bicycling to school, and to make it safer and more convenient to do so. SRTS programs combine evaluation, education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement, and are typically led by parents, teachers, students, agencies and community members. Benefits of SRTS programs can include reduced traffic congestion; improved safety, air quality and community livability; and improved health—an important consideration now that more than 33 percent of U.S. children and adolescents are considered obese or overweight.

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The Safe Routes to School State Network project recognizes that in order to get more children to walk and bicycle to school, we must ensure that the \$612 million in 2005-2009 federal SRTS funds are spent, and spent well, and we must leverage additional resources that will create policy changes.

The State Network Project goals are to:

- 1 increase physical activity in school-age children grades K–8 by increasing the number of children walking and bicycling to schools in 10 key locations;**
- 2 facilitate success of the federal SRTS program in the key locations; and**
- 3 institutionalize SRTS state-level programs in the key locations so they are sustainable and are not dependent on and do not end after one short burst of funding.**

The SRTS National Partnership is a network of more than 300 nonprofit organizations, government agencies, schools, and professionals working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding, and provide educational materials to agencies that implement SRTS programs. Since its inception, the SRTS National Partnership's Robert Ping, state network manager, has led the State Network Project in collaboration with Deb Hubsmith, director, and Brooke Driesse, program associate. The SRTS National Partnership selected California, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia and the District of Columbia for the State Network Project based on each jurisdiction's need for the program and capacity to support it. The State Network Project considered the number and percentage of overweight and obese children within the jurisdiction, as well as the number and percentage of minority children in low-income families. Other criteria included the jurisdictions' ability to leverage strategic partnerships and make a national impact. In each jurisdiction the SRTS National Partnership contracted with a lead organization to provide a State Network organizer for at least 10-hours per week. The organizers recruit Network partners and manage the State Networks, which leverage assistance from their numerous statewide and local partner organizations to advance state policy changes.

First Year, Major State Network Accomplishments:

- Assembled 10 SRTS State Networks, which includes more than 170 partner organizations and agencies representing public health, transportation, smart growth education and the environment.
- Developed State Network Action Plans that outline policy objectives and tasks.
- Prioritized the success of the federal SRTS funding program as the number one policy issue in each of the nine states and the District of Columbia, which will positively affect the distribution of more than \$216 million.



Lessons Learned

In the first year of operation, the State Network Project formed partnerships with many organizations and agencies, and has been researching and prioritizing SRTS-related policies and practices. During this initial phase, a learning network was established between participating State Networks, and below is a list of their mutual lessons learned in 2007.

1 Recruit diverse organizations and individuals for State Networks and consider nontraditional partners.

Some partners to consider include: state Departments of Transportation, Health and Education; bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups; the PTA state chapter; universities; medical, nurse and teachers' associations; SafeKids Coalition groups; state representatives from national advocacy groups such as American Heart Association or Alliance for a Healthier Generation; and SRTS National Partnership affiliates. To learn more, please visit www.saferoutespartnership.org/state.

2 Elected officials and legislators are powerful allies and partners.

Policy-makers can provide accurate information about the history of a policy or help the group communicate more effectively with the Department of Transportation. A single phone call from a state-level legislator to a Department of Transportation official can be as effective or more effective than an intensive letter-writing or media campaign by multiple organizations. Having a powerful legislator as a partner or chair of a State Network increases the status of the group and makes it easier to generate media attention and action by state agencies.

3 Work with the media to create change and build credibility for the State Network.

A well-developed press release or press event can generate media attention, and therefore focus public attention to an issue. For instance, if the goal of a press release is to get the word out about available Safe Routes to School funding,

then an article in a relevant newspaper or trade publication could be an inexpensive and effective way to build network recognition and credibility.

4 Assign tasks that fit your Network partners' skills, interests and capacity, and utilize outside experts, when needed.

Some of your Network partners will be interested in all aspects of SRTS-related policies and practices, but many partners will only be interested or have expertise in a few specific issues. Find out what your partners' interests and missions are and give them leadership roles within the appropriate issue areas. Keep in mind that there may be other organizations and individuals who would be valuable to the Network, but only on one particular issue. Keep these organizations on your contact and outreach lists, and ask them to help when that issue becomes a priority. A subcommittee is a good way for these limited partners to stay involved.

5 Be flexible: constantly monitor policies and take quick action on new opportunities and issues when they surface.

Even though your Action Plan may reflect a prioritized list of objectives and activities, sometimes a new issue will arise, or an opportunity to contribute to a discussion on an issue will appear suddenly. For instance, the Network may learn that a new but important SRTS-related policy is being reviewed soon, so expert partners on that issue may choose to reach out to the agency and get involved in the review process. Or the Network may conduct a campaign to convince the agency to make the review a public process.

State Summaries

The following summaries include highlights on progress made in the 10 jurisdictions from May through December 2007. During that period, all participating states and the District of Columbia assembled SRTS State Networks, which include multiple organizations working to achieve mutual goals established through SRTS State Network Action Plans. In all jurisdictions, we are collaborating directly with the State Departments of Transportation and Public Health, as well as other agencies and organizations.

Each Network is working to improve policies in their state to make it more convenient, safe and efficient for children (and their parents) to walk and bicycle to and from school. In addition to the federal funding program, the State Networks have examined policies in their states that affect the ability of kids to walk or bicycle to school, such as school siting, Complete Streets, school wellness policies, additional SRTS revenue from other government funds and traffic fines, and bicycle and pedestrian safety education. The Networks created detailed Action Plans, identified Network partners to take the lead on primary policies, and when needed, formed subcommittees to work on relevant policies. The State Networks also researched and began work on policy issues and opportunities that are unique to their state.

California

The California State Network is made up of 26 organizations, and the SRTS National Partnership serves as the lead agency for the Network. Some of the organizations involved with the California State Network Project include: Active Living Research Center; Cities Counties Schools Partnership; Local Government Commission and the Prevention Institute. Top priorities outlined in California's State Action Plan include: revision of school siting guidelines from the California Department of Education in order to reduce the distance from schools to students' homes; securing funds through the Strategic Highway Safety Implementation Plan for SRTS programs and projects; and development of evaluation procedures for SRTS. The Network crafted a framing brief with school siting recommendations to present to the Department of Education along with a sign-on letter of support from more than 40 organizations throughout California. If incorporated, these changes will influence California school districts to consider walkability and bikeability when building or remodeling schools. The Network also scheduled a meeting with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to discuss ways to facilitate the administration of awarded SRTS funds to non-infrastructure program grant recipients. One of the early successes of the California Network was its work with Caltrans to get the word out about \$52 million in available state legislated SRTS funding to thousands of organizations, school districts and engineers, thus increasing demand for the program.

District of Columbia

The District of Columbia State Network is made up of nineteen organizations, with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association serving as lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: D.C. Public Schools, D.C. Office of Planning and two Ward 6 Councilmembers. Top priorities that emerged in the D.C. State Action Plan include: inclusion of Complete Streets in community

design so that bicycling and walking are considered in all street designs, and doubling fines in school zones to reduce speed limits, which is a major strategy for injury prevention. The D.C. Network is already working to increase knowledge of Complete Streets within the planning and engineering departments. One of the Network partners hosted a Complete Streets seminar in December 2007. Another recent Network accomplishment includes the hiring of the new SRTS Coordinator at D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT). This position had been open since 2005, and the Network urged DDOT to fill this position through a letter writing campaign, which had a significant influence on DDOT's decision to hire the permanent SRTS Coordinator without further delay.

Georgia

The Georgia State Network is made up of sixteen organizations, with Georgia Bikes! serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the Georgia State Network Project include: the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, PEDS, Georgia Tech Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development and SafeKids Georgia. A priority that emerged through Georgia's State Action Plan include: the inclusion of SRTS goals within state guidelines for wellness policies and promotion of the health benefits of Georgia's SRTS program. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has not yet released SRTS application guidelines. As a result, the SRTS National Partnership coordinated meetings with key State Network partners and sent a detailed letter to the GDOT's commissioner, encouraging the Department to release their application guidelines and streamline the overall process, and to meet with a Network subcommittee. The response from GDOT was that they will be releasing a request for proposals within the first quarter of 2008 and that SRTS was a top priority. An early Georgia network success was the publication of a national SRTS article by the Associated Press. An Atlanta-based Associated Press reporter learned about the Georgia Network

from a Network-distributed press release, interviewed the Network members including the chair, and wrote a detailed article on the national SRTS program and its implementation in the state of Georgia. The story was printed in numerous papers and distributed to news outlets nationwide. As a result, it generated a lot of interest in the Georgia SRTS program from local communities that are now considering applying for program funds.

Illinois

The Illinois State Network is made up of nineteen organizations, with the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: Action for Healthy Kids—Illinois, the American Heart Association, the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign, and the Office of Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn. The top priorities that emerged through the Illinois State Action Plan include: implementation of the delayed Illinois SRTS federal funding program, implementation of the new Illinois Complete Streets policy, and review of school facilities planning and construction. The Network succeeded in obtaining twenty signatories to a sign-on letter sent to Illinois' Department of Transportation Secretary recommending three main actions related to expediting the SRTS funding program. The secretary offered a non-committal response, so the Network developed a strategy to convince the Department to take action in early Spring 2008. Illinois recently passed a Complete Streets law, and the Network will work with the DOT on regulatory issues concerning the implementation and enforcement of Complete Streets in Illinois.

Kentucky

The Kentucky State Network is made up of fourteen organizations, with the Kentucky Rails-to-Trails Council serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: the Governor's Office of Wellness and Physical Activity,

the Kentucky Bicycle and Bikeway Commission, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Ohio/Kentucky/Indiana Regional Council of Governments. The top priorities of Kentucky's State Action Plan include: insertion of SRTS goals and activities into School Wellness policies and the inclusion of SRTS funding in Kentucky's Strategic Highway Safety Plan, since bicycling and walking were not included in the 2007 plan. The Network decided to review the 2006-2007 SRTS funding awards to assess how well they meet Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance and SRTS National Partnership goals. This review will be presented to the state Transportation Cabinet. The Network also requested that the current SRTS Advisory Committee add Network members.

Louisiana

The Louisiana State Network is made up of thirteen organizations, with the Louisiana Public Health Institute serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the Louisiana State Network Project include: Action for Healthy Kids, the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and the Laboratory of Preventive Medicine, Pennington Biomedical Research Center. The top priorities of the Louisiana State Network Project include updating the 1998 State Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and getting SRTS pedestrian and bicycle pathways and improvements integrated into Hurricane Katrina-related roadway repair projects. One of the Network's accomplishments includes inspiring the state Department of Transportation to host a collaborative problem-solving session about agency policy improvements, scheduled for the spring of 2008. The Louisiana Network is also represented on the Advisory Committee for the upcoming State Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan update

New York

The New York State Network is made up of twenty-two organizations, with Be Active New York State

serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, NY Department of Transportation, New York State Parent Teacher Association, and Parks and Trails New York. The New York State Network was able to work with the Department of Transportation to release SRTS program application and guidelines for the state. The Network is now building demand and program knowledge for the \$32 million in available SRTS funds. The Network is promoting SRTS best practices to communities across the state, and is developing and publicizing a list of New York state SRTS resources that will be distributed and posted on various state Web sites. The New York Network helped to host a highly publicized press conference in the fall of 2007 in collaboration with State Senator Antoine Thompson, which generated several newspaper stories, including prominent coverage in the New York Times. The goal of the press conference was to advertise the SRTS program in New York in order to notify local communities of the availability of SRTS funds, and to build demand for the program.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma State Network is made up of twenty-one organizations, with the Oklahoma Bicycling Coalition serving as the lead agency. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: the Indian Nation Council of Governments, the Department of Education, the Oklahoma Department of Health's Physical Activity and Nutrition Program, Oklahoma Neighborhood Alliance and the Oklahoma State University Wellness Center. The top priorities of Oklahoma's State Action Plan include: creation of SRTS program evaluation methods, development of statewide youth bicycle and pedestrian safety curriculum and additional state funding sources. The Oklahoma State Network achieved an early success by meeting with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and convincing it to release SRTS applications and guidelines without delay. The call for application proposals was released on October 1, 2007.

Texas

The Texas State Network will be led by the Texas Transportation Institute and will be a unique collaboration among three existing groups—the Texas Active Living Network, Texas Action for Healthy Kids Alliance, and the Partnership for a Healthy Texas. Although not finalized at the time of this publication, the Texas Active Living Network plans to convene a SRTS subcommittee to focus on State Network policy objectives. Representatives from each of the three groups will participate in Network activities and form a learning network among their respective groups.

Virginia

The Virginia State Network is made up of eight organizations, with BikeWalk Virginia serving as lead agency for the Network. Some of the organizations involved with the State Network Project include: Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation, Kubilins Transportation, and SafeKids Virginia. The top priorities of Virginia's State Action Plan include: strengthening pedestrian safety laws and enforcement in school zones by working with regulatory agencies and developing statewide bicycle/pedestrian safety curricula and other education programs. Virginia's General Assembly created a Joint Subcommittee to explore options to reduce childhood obesity. The Network recognized this as an opportunity to educate the Subcommittee on the role that SRTS can provide in preventing childhood obesity. The Network is now actively working with the Department of Transportation to identify relevant policy options for the state. The Virginia Network is also providing SRTS technical assistance and leadership to schools in Martinsville/Henry County with supplemental funds from the Harvest Foundation. This effort is part of a partnership with the League of American Bicyclists, National Complete Streets Coalition and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, with the goal to transform this rural, low-income county into a bicycle and pedestrian friendly community.

Next Steps

1 Implement and revise SRTS State Network Action Plans.

Now that states have created their SRTS Action Plans, objectives and tasks will be implemented, and as milestones are reached, the Action Plans will be modified to reflect new priorities. State Networks may decide to add new issues, or remove those that have been successfully completed from the active list.

2 Grow and diversify the State Networks and their policy action teams.

Even in a state where there is a robust and diverse Network partner list, there may be organizations or individuals who are not yet directly involved with SRTS but who could become valuable partners or advisors. Also, personnel periodically changes within organizations, which creates the need to recruit a new representative from the organization. Network organizers will constantly recruit new partners and maintain and develop relations with groups and individuals who may be valuable at some point during the project.

3 Develop an SRTS program in a low-income school in each state with quantitative and qualitative evaluation processes.

This process began in the fall of 2007 and at the time of this publication, several states have identified schools to work with and had begun working with the school and local partners. Schools are selected based on criteria that demonstrate the need for Network assistance and capacity to support a program. In 2008, the Networks will help the schools build interest and expertise in SRTS, assemble local school teams, and apply for federal and other SRTS funds.

4 Create model policies and/or improving existing policy language.

In a best-case scenario, the State Network will be asked by a State Department of Transportation, Health Department or Education Department to come up with specific recommendations for a policy change. Network partners will then create a model policy or policy recommendations to encourage or enable children to walk or bicycle to school safely. *Note: Networks will not sponsor, oppose or support any local, state or federal legislation due to the federal lobbying restrictions applied to the State Network Project's private foundation funding sources.*

