

NEXT STEPS

The most important aspect of implementing an SRTS program is demonstrating the initiative to make a positive impact in the community—within North Richland Hills and beyond. The following steps are a framework to expand the SRTS program from the pilot campuses to additional schools.

- **Get people involved.** Each school participating in the SRTS program (or at the very least, the BISD board) should create an SRTS task force. Task force stakeholders might include:
 - * School officials and teachers
 - * Parents and input from children
 - * Local elected officials
 - * Local law enforcement personnel
- **Get people together.** Hold a task force kickoff meeting to define a common program vision. Set goals and objectives.
- **Gather information.** Perform sidewalk audits and windshield assessments of participating campuses.
- **Identify solutions.** Solutions to the issues

- identified during the information-gathering process may include a combination of education, infrastructural or enforcement strategies.
- **Prioritize.** Prioritize improvements and make a plan to move forward.
 - **Apply.** Begin the state SRTS eligibility and funding application, but remember that funding comes from YOU – the locality – first. Plan for and develop a financial strategy.
 - **Fund an early win.** Publicizing the project may help the city and schools market the project's benefits, mobilizing community support.
 - * Distribute parent flyers
 - * Create static or interactive campus route maps
 - * Conduct public meetings

From there, the SRTS task force, BISD and all other stakeholders can engage the necessary resources to get the plan moving. To sustain the program, be mindful of public interest; consider recruiting additional program champions and highlighting project successes. It is crucial to consistently evaluate, adjust and adapt the program as needs and capabilities change.



CITY OF NORTH RICHLAND HILLS
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Safe Routes to School

Commissioned by the North Richland Hills Planning Department

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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

The City of North Richland Hills is seeking to implement a city-wide Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program to improve the health and well-being of its families by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to and from school. Through observation and study, the city plans to determine (1) how students commute to and from school, (2) infrastructure improvements that can be made on and around school campuses to improve the safety of walking and bicycling routes to school and (3) non-infrastructure improvements that will encourage children and families to travel between home and school using these modes.

The city recruited a team of Master’s of Public Administration students from the University of North Texas to complete walkability assessments and recommend policy and infrastructure improvements.

This report provides the information necessary to create and implement a successful SRTS program for the city. It includes the history of the program, funding sources and eligibility requirements, and recommendations for the three selected pilot campuses—Mullendore Elementary, The Academy at C.F. Thomas and Smithfield Elementary—and for future projects.



5 ES OF SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Framework for success

1. Education

Teach families and community members about transportation options (walking, biking, public transit) and ensure they know how to use them safely.

2. Encouragement

Activities that create excitement about bicycling, walking and other forms of physical activity.

3. Enforcement

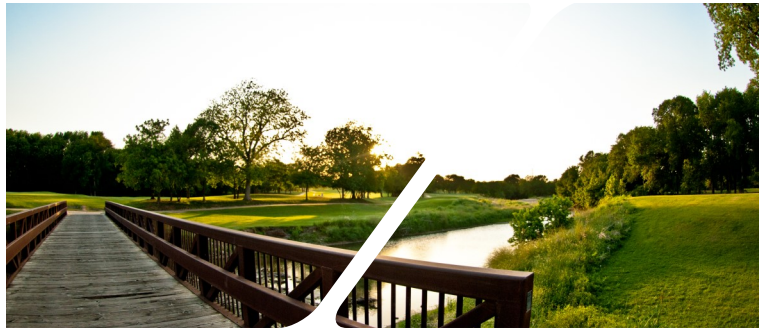
Partnering with local law enforcement and the community to address traffic and crime concerns around schools and along school routes,

4. Engineering

Implementing traffic control and other physical measures to promote the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

5. Evaluation

Monitor and assess outcomes of the other four elements and identify areas for improvement.



HISTORY OF SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

In 2005, Congress passed federal legislation to formally recognize and standardize a national SRTS program, aimed at improving safety for families walking or biking to and from school and encouraging such healthy pedestrian behaviors.

Under the law, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was charged with administering federal SRTS funds to state programs, and a total of \$612 million was dedicated to fostering the growth of school programs between 2005 and 2009. Between 2009 and 2012, federal SRTS funding to schools in Texas alone totaled more than \$60.5 million.

The most recent grantee was the City of Richland Hills in 2010 for its Type 1 (infrastructure; sidewalks, crosswalks, pavement, markings, signage, and ADA ramps) and Type 2 (non-infrastructure; safety education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation activities) improvements. Four awards totaling more than \$1.5 million were given to three schools, allowing the city to install more than 16,000 linear feet of sidewalks around those campuses and increase the overall walkability of the community.

In 2012, in the wake of recession, Congress passed a new transportation bill – Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) – in an effort to diversify available funding sources for eligible SRTS programs. MAP-21 redefined SRTS as an eligible activity, among many others, under the umbrella Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Currently, money is administered under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, which Congress passed in December 2015 to build on the success of the MAP-21 program. The FAST Act authorizes **\$305 billion** in federal funding for fiscal years 2016-2020 through the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG).

SRTS programs will compete with other transportation projects for funding through STBG.

NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS: CALL FOR PROJECTS

Locally, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) navigates the funding and application processes for interested municipalities, and a "Call for Projects" is expected to open in mid-December for the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) program. The NCTCOG has allocated about **\$23 million** in TA Set-Aside Program funds, which will be awarded in 2017.

The NCTCOG has also incorporated SRTS planning into its long-term transportation plan, Mobility 2040, emphasizing how important pedestrian and bicycle projects (and funding opportunities) will be for many years to come.

To be eligible for funding, the SRTS applicant must demonstrate that its proposal complies with Title 23 National Environmental Policy Act standards and ADA requirements, is included in the State Transportation Improvement Program and includes on- and off-infrastructure improvements.

Only costs incurred after (1) final project approval by the National SRTS Commission and (2) execution of both a Local Project Advance Funding Agreement and a Federal Project Authorization Agreement are reimbursable.

In addition to the STBG program, the FHWA offers other funding for local governments to implement Type 1 and Type 2 improvements the. A comprehensive list of funding opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian programs is posted on the FHWA website.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

A successful SRTS program depends on several factors:

- Sidewalk or pedestrian path availability in a two-mile radius of campus
- Traffic conditions during

arrivals and dismissals

- Availability of crossing guards
- Clearly marked pick-up and drop-off zones
- Obstructions or hazards near

or on sidewalks or paths

- Commuting behaviors to and from identified schools
- Traffic control measures and devices
- School policies





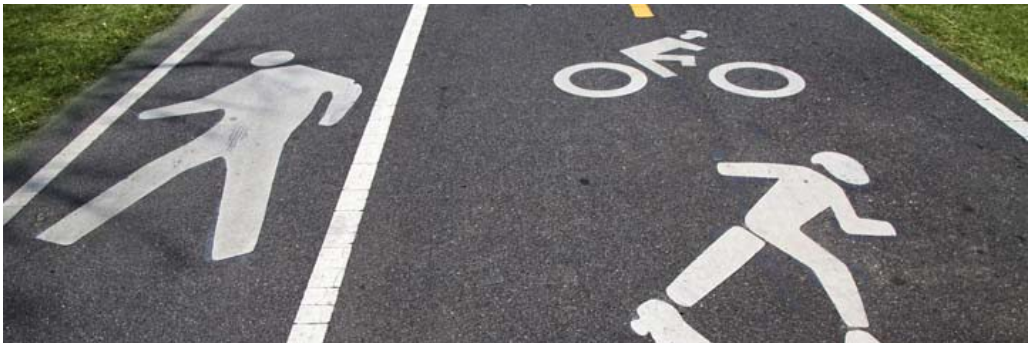
WALKABILITY ASSESSMENTS

The team utilized the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) SRTS guidebook to develop the standards and criteria used to assess each school's walkability and bikeability.

The assessment focused on the evaluation, enforcement, and engineering elements of the "five E's". The team conducted site audits at the three pilot schools during peak hours of morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up, using TxDOT's site audit checklist to evaluate six areas:

1. Student drop-off and pick-up locations
2. Bus loading zones
3. Sidewalks and bicycle routes
4. Adjacent intersections
5. Visibility distances
6. Traffic control measures

Enforcement measures assessed during the audit included identifying unsafe behaviors—speeding, parking and/or stopping in crosswalks, and running of red lights or stop signs—and community/law enforcement presence, including the use of school crossing guards and neighborhood speed watch programs; the number and frequency of police patrols were also noted. Assessed engineering standards were categorized as either Type 1 infrastructure or Type 2 non-infrastructure.



GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In many cases, the rapidly expanding network of streets and increased flow of traffic overwhelms the existing school zone safety infrastructure. This results in hazardous traffic conditions and/or control measures designed with traffic flow in mind, rather than for the safety of pedestrians. To resolve these issues, some general Type 1 and Type 2 improvement recommendations are offered below.

Type 1 Improvements

For improvements to infrastructure—street, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, repairing or adding signage, and complying with ADA standards—the city should:

- Consider adding bike lanes as part of the Davis/Mid-Cities street reconstruction; additionally, conduct traffic studies of other major roads and intersections to determine if smart streets (the incorporation of bike lanes and sidewalks into motor vehicle lanes) are a viable option.
- Review the BISD busing policy—the expected walking distance for SRTS is about 1/2 mile, but students must live more than two miles from campus to be eligible for busing

North Richland Hills already recognizes and uses a variety of Uniform Traffic Control and Calming Devices, as specified in city ordinance. The most appropriate infrastructure solutions would be Level 1 or 2 traffic calming measures (the "enforcement" element of SRTS). Level 1

traffic calming measures are recommended for traffic operation and safety improvements because they require no physical changes to the streets. A neighborhood speed watch program could also be implemented as a means of monitoring potentially unsafe conditions and supporting law enforcement. The addition and repair of Level 2 calming measures (such as rumble strips, buttons and reflective striping) is advised at the entrance to school zone areas, crosswalks and bike lane perimeters.

Type 2 Improvements

For non-infrastructure improvements, the SRTS team recommends developing a rigorous public education campaign. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) benchmarks into their classroom curriculum, specifically Chapters 113 and 115, relating to Social Studies and Health Education, respectively. These chapters emphasize the development of curriculum that reinforces the study of the self, home, family, and society. Lastly, BISD should consider promoting activities such as the National Walk/Bike to School campaign to encourage parents and students to walk to school. The national SRTS website offers several tools to help build and encourage a "Safe Routes" campaign, ranging from training materials to classroom and law enforcement resources. School administrators or the designated SRTS task force can access this data to help build and sustain their program.

COST ESTIMATES

Due to the many variables associated with Type 1 improvements, a subject matter expert must be consulted to calculate an accurate cost estimate for the recommended SRTS improvements. The SRTS team recommends working with the city engineer or a private contractor to complete engineering studies of the recommended Type 1 improvements. Further, the team recommends conducting the studies as individual projects so the findings can be used to support implementation of the SRTS program in stages as funding becomes available.



SMITHFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Based on the SRTS team's audit of the Smithfield Middle School, improvements should focus on the following areas:

Addition of crosswalks and crossing signals at Amundson Dr. and Main St. (1), as well as repainting of the crosswalks at Amundson Rd. and Mid-Cities Blvd (2).

Consider the construction of sidewalks along Martin Rd., Simmons Rd. and Main St. (3). Although Amundson Rd. has a sidewalk, most of the pedestrian traffic we observed was not via sidewalks. Building more walkable paths around the school will encourage more students to walk.

Hire and utilize more crossing guards. The only crossing guard observed during arrivals was along Main St. and Davis Blvd., and no crossing guard was posted during dismissal. While Davis Blvd. does have the highest traffic, Amundson Rd. and Main St. also have significant traffic, and adding crossing guards would increase pedestrian safety.

Trim trees and remove other obstructions from signage, sidewalks and pedestrian paths (4).