

Safe Routes to School

Helping All Students Walk and Bike Safely



Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs promote health and physical activity among children of all ages and abilities by encouraging travel to school via safe, active transportation.¹ It emphasizes collaboration and often includes health officials, educators, planners, elected officials and community leaders.² SRTS programs may include infrastructure improvements such as the construction of new bike lanes, sidewalks and other pathways; they incorporate education, engineering, evaluation and enforcement.³ These programs may include activities such as walking school buses. APHA

supports changes to the built environment that encourage active transportation and ensure the safety of all users. Safe Routes to School is a program that dovetails seamlessly with this standpoint.

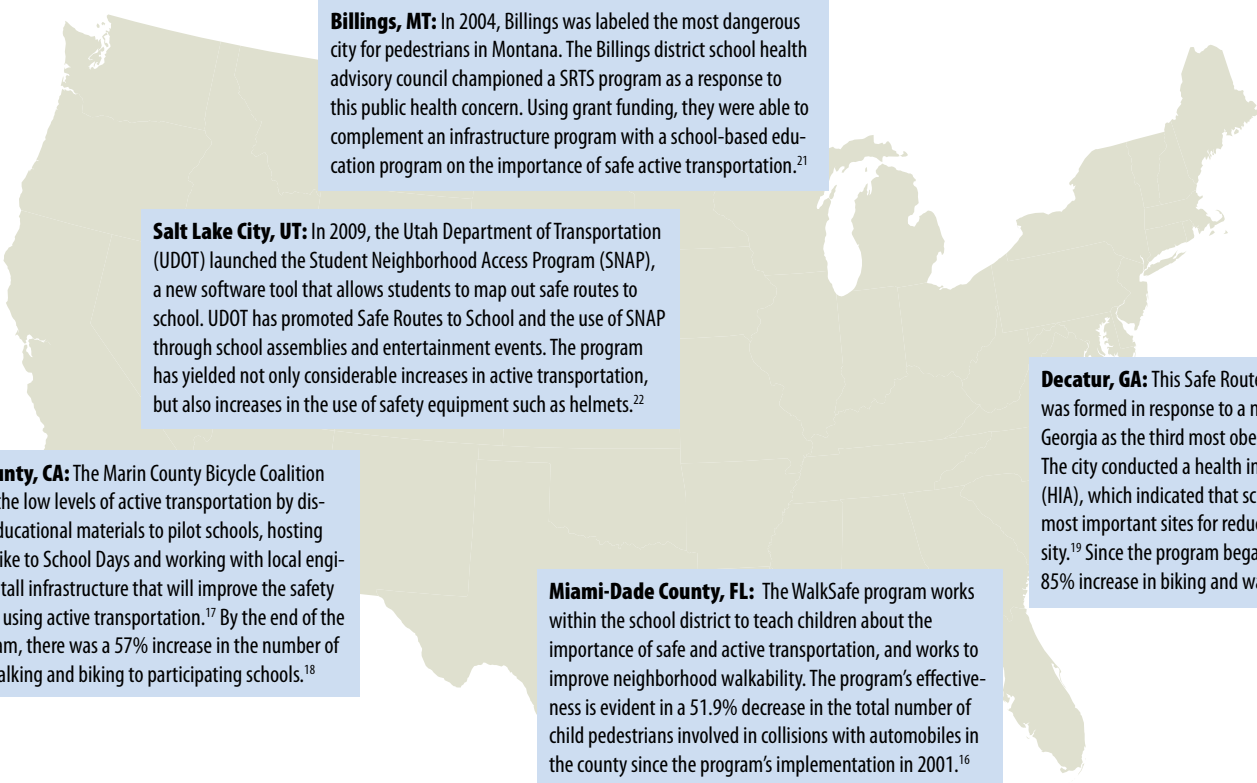
Why we need Safe Routes to School:

- Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death among children ages 3 to 14; in 19% of these fatalities, the children involved were pedestrians.⁴
- In 2009, 32,236 children under the age of 20 were hospitalized for non-fatal traffic-related injuries.⁵
- In 40 years, the percentage of children using active transportation to get to school has fallen from 48% in 1969 to 13% in 2009.⁶
- Since 1980, obesity rates for adolescents and school-aged children have tripled.⁷ In 2008 between 14.1% and 19.6% of children and adolescents between ages 2 and 19 were considered obese.⁸
- In 2010, 9.6% of children in the U.S. had asthma.⁹ The prevalence of asthma is higher among children than adults, and higher among black populations than white populations.¹⁰

How Safe Routes to School can help:

- In California, students whose routes to school were improved through SRTS programs were over three times more likely to begin bicycling or walking than those whose routes were not.¹¹
- Safe Routes to School programs have been associated with 20–200% increases in biking and walking.¹²
- Active commuting to and from school has been associated with an increase in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and a decrease in body fat in children between 12 and 19 years old.¹³
- Schools designed to encourage active transportation as a form of commuting can have significantly better air quality due to the decrease in nearby traffic.¹⁴
- Studies have shown that the more pedestrians and bicyclists are in a given area, the less likely each is to be involved in a motor-vehicle crash.¹⁵

Below are some examples of specific Safe Routes to School programs:



Billings, MT: In 2004, Billings was labeled the most dangerous city for pedestrians in Montana. The Billings district school health advisory council championed a SRTS program as a response to this public health concern. Using grant funding, they were able to complement an infrastructure program with a school-based education program on the importance of safe active transportation.²¹

Salt Lake City, UT: In 2009, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) launched the Student Neighborhood Access Program (SNAP), a new software tool that allows students to map out safe routes to school. UDOT has promoted Safe Routes to School and the use of SNAP through school assemblies and entertainment events. The program has yielded not only considerable increases in active transportation, but also increases in the use of safety equipment such as helmets.²²

Marin County, CA: The Marin County Bicycle Coalition addressed the low levels of active transportation by distributing educational materials to pilot schools, hosting Walk and Bike to School Days and working with local engineers to install infrastructure that will improve the safety of students using active transportation.¹⁷ By the end of the pilot program, there was a 57% increase in the number of students walking and biking to participating schools.¹⁸

Miami-Dade County, FL: The WalkSafe program works within the school district to teach children about the importance of safe and active transportation, and works to improve neighborhood walkability. The program's effectiveness is evident in a 51.9% decrease in the total number of child pedestrians involved in collisions with automobiles in the county since the program's implementation in 2001.¹⁶

Decatur, GA: This Safe Routes to School program was formed in response to a national report labeling Georgia as the third most obese state in the country. The city conducted a health impact assessment (HIA), which indicated that schools were among the most important sites for reducing childhood obesity.¹⁹ Since the program began, the city has seen an 85% increase in biking and walking to school.²⁰

Sources:

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