

Safe Routes to Schools

Education, Engineering and Enforcement for California Communities.

Not so long ago, a vast majority of children routinely roamed their neighborhoods on foot or bicycle almost as a rite of passage. Today, a new generation of moms and dads chauffeur their kids to nearly all their activities, fearing for their children's safety on streets due to perceived dangers from both crime and traffic. The common sight of children walking and cycling has vanished in many communities. Now only 13% of all trips to and from school are by foot or bicycle.¹



With less kids on foot, there are more cars on the road. Parents driving their children to school make up 20-25 percent of the morning commute.² The more the traffic increases, the more parents decide it is unsafe for their

children to walk, adding even more cars to the morning chaos.

There is a way to break the cycle. A new movement is emerging that is focusing on getting kids back on their feet and their bikes again. Parent and neighborhood groups, school and local officials, law enforcement officers and traffic engineers are working together to make streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists along heavily traveled routes to school, while encouraging both parents and their kids to take advantage of the many benefits of getting around on foot or by

bike. With new transportation funding available specifically for this purpose, communities all across California are discovering the many benefits of providing "Safe Routes to Schools."

WHY WE NEED SAFE ROUTES:

CHILDREN ARE AT RISK FROM UNSAFE STREETS

- ✦ In California, as many as 5,000 child pedestrians are injured each year.³
- ✦ Pedestrian accidents are the second leading cause of fatal injuries among 5-12 year olds statewide; bicycle crashes are fifth.⁴
- ✦ Children and seniors on foot and bikes are at greatest risk relative to the overall population; children in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are at even greater risk.⁵

CHILDREN ARE LOSING THEIR INDEPENDENCE

- ✦ Children are unfamiliar with their neighborhood, isolated from people and the environment.
- ✦ Children are not acquiring traffic skills critical to their own safe mobility.
- ✦ When restricted by bus or parents' schedules, youngsters who cannot bike or walk miss out on sports and enrichment programs after school.

CHILDREN ARE LESS ACTIVE

- ✦ 78% of children fall short of the recommended minimum dose of activity: 30-60 minutes a day plus 20 minutes of vigorous exercise.⁶
- ✦ 70% of children watch at least one hour of TV each day; 35% watch five hours or more.⁷
- ✦ One in five children and one in three teens is overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. These rates reflect a 50-100% increase in just the past 10 years.⁸

OUR ENVIRONMENT IS DEGRADED

- ✦ Auto emissions are the largest cause of air pollution in California.⁹
- ✦ More than 90% of all Californians live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution.¹⁰ Children's respiratory systems are especially at risk.

Walking + Biking = Healthy, Alert Children

Moderate to vigorous physical activity such as walking and biking positively affects academic performance and skill development. It stimulates and maintains muscular strength and good joint function. Children are better able to tackle the academic day. They have improved concentration, enhanced memory and learning, enhanced creativity and better problem solving ability. Studies have shown that their mood is improved for up to two hours following exercise.¹¹

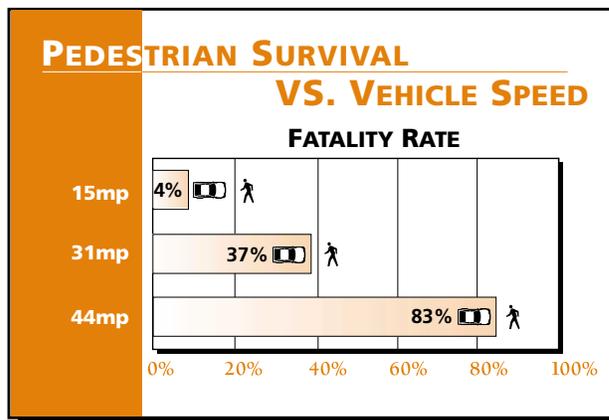


Creating Safer Routes to School

In order to encourage more children to walk or bike, parents need to trust that it's both safe and convenient from a variety of perspectives. Parents surveyed by the California Department of Health Services noted the importance of stronger traffic education programs, better enforcement of traffic laws, and projects and programs to help slow down the speed of residential traffic. Indeed, it's exactly this type of comprehensive approach to traffic safety problems that's been shown to be most effective in creating safer streets and promoting increased walking and bicycling for Californians of all ages.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: 20 MPH VS. 40 MPH

A driver's speed can mean a world of difference for pedestrians and bicyclists. The fatality rate increases quickly as vehicle speeds exceed 15 miles per hour. Pedestrians hit by a car traveling 44 mph have a mere 17% chance of survival.¹²



TRAFFIC CALMING

Engineering approaches with tremendous potential for cost-effective speed reduction are known as "traffic calming." These practices focus on physical design changes to residential streets and intersections that can slow traffic to acceptable speeds and better balance the needs of vehicle flow and traffic safety. The City of Seattle reported a 77-91% reduction in



traffic collisions after it implemented

a citywide traffic calming program including 700 new residential traffic circles.¹³ For more information about traffic calming contact the Local Government Commission, www.lgc.org/clc or (800)290-8202.

DESIGNING FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

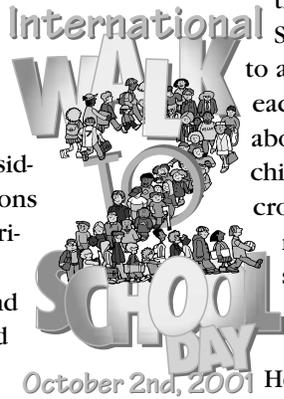
Safety, access and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists bring quality of life to neighborhoods. With wider sidewalks, more visible pedestrian crossings, clearly marked bike lanes or separated pathways and trails, and slower traffic speeds, children have more independence to roam. Parents are also freed from chauffeur duty and adults venture out more often for their own recreation. Studies have shown that residents of streets with low level traffic have three times as many friends on the street and two times as many acquaintances as streets with high levels of traffic.¹⁴ Neighborhoods with high levels of pedestrian activity have more "eyes on the street" to protect against crime.

Safer streets require:		Examples:
Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering approaches reduce speed, narrow crossing distances and improve children's visibility and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design streets that calm traffic. Install walkways and bike paths. Improve safety where pedestrians cross streets.
Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement increases awareness of and reduces the frequency of crime and traffic safety problems. Both citizens and local police can be enlisted to focus efforts around schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post visible speed limits and school crossing signs. Aggressively enforce traffic violations. Foster "walking school buses" and "neighborhood watch" programs.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education trains motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists about their rights and responsibilities Education promotes intermodal travel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide public traffic safety courses. Teach safety programs in the classroom. Promote walking and biking.

LEARNING FROM THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Safe Routes to School programs in Canada and England are guiding the way for California's success. England has been evaluating their programs since 1995. Bicycle lanes, traffic calming and raised crossings have cut traffic speeds considerably, making conditions much safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Promotional events and incentives have tripled bicycle use over two years. Bicycle parking capacity has been doubled. Residential speed zones in England (20 mph) are associated with reduced child pedestrian casualties by 70% and child bicycling casualties by 28%.¹⁵ Learn more at: www.sustrans.org.uk.

"Walk to School Day" is an international event that communities host in order to highlight the need for safer, accessible and more enjoyable walking routes. Checklists allow parents and children to give their routes a "walkability" score and make specific suggestions for route improvements. In the U.S. Walk to School Day is promoted by the



Partnership for a Walkable America.
www.walktoschool-usa.org

WALK TO SCHOOL DAY INSPIRES CALIFORNIA TO ACTION

Over 800 schools in California are participating annually in Walk to School Day. Events are designed to address the individual agenda of each neighborhood, whether it is about children's traffic safety skills, childhood obesity, funding for crossing guards or sidewalk maintenance, reducing congestion, or separating drop-off areas to protect children who walk and bike. The Department of Health Services and the Highway Patrol provide checklists, in multiple languages, and promotional assistance to local coordinators. Checklists completed by students and parents have

provided data compelling enough to be featured in proposals for engineering and enforcement funding, e.g., the Safe Routes to Schools grant program at Caltrans. The entire City of Oakland introduced the event as part of its ongoing work with a community-based Pedestrian Safety Project. In the Central Valley, Reedley's participation alerted their police department to the numerous problems surrounding

its schools. Reedley police have beefed up enforcement and the town is improving its crosswalks and street lighting.

CALIFORNIA'S HOME GROWN SUCCESS STORIES

Engineering, enforcement and education projects are taking place in neighborhoods throughout California. In Los Angeles county, a very aggressive pedestrian safety sting operation issued 7,200 citations in one year alone. The City of Glendale attributes dramatic reductions in the number of



Bike Train from Mill Valley Middle School with Vice Principal John Carroll at the lead.

pedestrian fatalities to its sting operations.¹⁶ The town of Escalon is redesigning its main streets around its high school to reduce traffic speeds and allow safer passage for pedestrians. Towns in the Sierra Nevada foothills near Sonora are in the process of converting an abandoned railroad bed into a walking and bicycling trail that will connect nearly a dozen of the area's schools.

HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

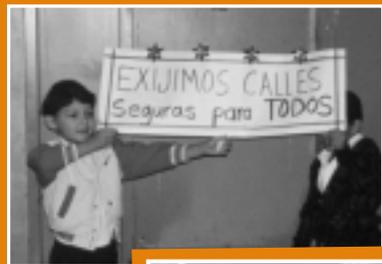
Students, parents, teachers, local officials - anyone - can initiate a Safe Routes to School program. **Walk to School Day**, during the first week of October, can be a starting point. The event brings together the "right" mix of individuals and organizations that have responsibility for routes to schools: students, school administrators, local officials, public works & traffic department staff, parents and law enforcement.

✎ **Start a Walking School Bus.** Adult supervision of children as they walk and cycle is critical if not essential. According to research conducted by the California Department of Health Services, innumerable safety fears compel parents to drive their children. A walking version of the carpool, dubbed the Walking School Bus, has been successful in Canada and England. Parents share the responsibility of escorting children to and from school by foot or bike. A guidebook that details how to start the program is available from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk.htm or by calling 1-888-232-4674.

✎ **Join Walk to School Day.** Contact California's Walk to School Headquarters for promotional materials, event ideas, and suggestions for getting the community involved, first with Walk to School Day, and then with additional school or community-based projects. Phone: 1-888-393-0353, email: walkday@dhs.ca.gov, or web: www.dhs.ca.gov/routes2school.



A successful Safe Routes to School program will improve the health and safety of pupils by reducing traffic around school facilities and encouraging greater physical activity among students. It has the potential for improving pupils' behavior in school and on the school journey; it provides opportunities for learning, particularly under the theme of citizenship. In addition, a program that reduces school traffic improves relations with the school's neighbors.



City and county governments also recognize the benefits of participating in and implementing a safe routes program. Local jurisdictions will experience reduced traffic congestion, collisions and related costs. Slower speeds in neighborhoods will help to improve the quality of life for all residents. More people will be able to walk and bicycle as a result of improved access. And the community's children will experience greater independence as well as learn valuable traffic safety skills.

GETTING YOUR PROJECT FUNDED

Multiple funding opportunities exist for Safe Routes to Schools projects in California.

Education & Enforcement: Traffic safety grants are awarded annually by the California Office of Traffic Safety. See eligibility and project criteria at www.ots.ca.gov/grants.

Communities with innovative childhood safety projects, including Walk to School Day events, may be eligible for grants awarded annually, thanks to the buyers of California Kids license plates. See details at: www.cccip.org/

Community-wide planning: Grants are occasionally available for communities that want to conduct initial assessment and mobilization of partners, prior to requesting funds for engineering projects. Contact the Safe Routes

to Schools initiative at the Department of Health Services: 916-323-4808 or visit www.dhs.ca.gov/routes2school.

Engineering: Local and regional transportation agencies all across California spend more than \$10 billion annually on transportation projects - the vast majority of which is flexible enough to spend on pedestrian and bicycle safety and neighborhood livability projects if public and political support can be generated. Contact your local public officials or public works department and ask about opportunities to obtain "enhancement" (TEA) funding, TDA Article 3 funds, Regional Transportation Improvement Program funds (RTIP or STIP), county transportation sales tax measures, and local Capital

Improvement Program (CIP) funds from cities and counties.

Since 2000, the "Safe Routes to School" bill in California provides \$20 million a year for construction projects through the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The legislation may end in 2002, unless in 2001 Senate Bill 10 (Soto) successfully extends this funding permanently. More information is available through the Caltrans Office of Local Programs at 916-653-4727 or on the web at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/.

Contact the Local Government Commission or the Surface Transportation Policy Project at the addresses below for further details about funding opportunities.

End notes

- 1 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 2 Dept of Environment, Transport and the Regions, London/Greater Vancouver Regional District: Morning Peak Trip by Purpose
- 3 California Department of Health Services
- 4 California Department of Health Services
- 5 Latino Issues Forum
- 6 1996 Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health
- 7 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 8 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 9 The California 2000 Project
- 10 The California 2000 Project
- 11 The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
- 12 Rudolph Limpert, 1994.
- 13 Institute of Transportation Engineers
- 14 Natural Resources Defense Council, June 1994
- 15 Department for Environment, Transport Regions London, England 1999
- 16 Surface Transportation Policy Project

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

California Department of Health Services. State public health agency with staff dedicated to active communities programs, safe routes to school projects, and Walk to School day. Phone: 1-888-393-0353, email: walkday@dhs.ca.gov, or web: www.dhs.ca.gov/routes2school.

California Highway Patrol. State law enforcement agency supporting Walk to School Day in each of its 115 local jurisdictions. Contact your local community outreach officer or phone 916 657-8810 for a referral to a local CHP office.

Local Government Commission and its Center for Livable Communities. A non-profit organization serving local elected officials and agencies with an interest in livable communities, traffic calming, and walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. Contact 916-448-1198 or visit www.lgc.org.

Surface Transportation Policy Project. National non-profit advocacy organization with offices in Sacramento, the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Excellent source of information for transportation funding opportunities, regional planning initiatives and local groups throughout California involved in transportation reform initiatives. Contact 916-447-8880 or 415-956-7795 or visit www.transact.org/ca/.

California Bicycle Coalition. Statewide membership organization which mobilizes local bicycle advocacy coalitions for legislative campaigns to make California more bicycle-friendly. Contact 916-446-7558 or visit www.calbike.org.

Rails to Trails Conservancy. National non-profit advocacy organization with a California field office in the Bay Area. Detailed information on developing bicycle and pedestrian trails, particularly from abandoned railroad right-of-ways. Contact 415-397-2220 or visit www.railtrails.org.

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