

Cobb County Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan Interim Safe Routes to School Plan



Cobb County...Expect the Best!

**Prepared February 2009 by
Sprinkle Consulting, Inc.**

Cobb County Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan
Safe Routes to School Plan

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Introduction

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program in general, helps create an environment for walking and bicycling to school to become safer for children, which could also result in encouraging a wide range of associated benefits for students, schools, and communities. Created by the federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, SRTS's goal is to *“enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing; and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of the school.”*

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is designed to fund comprehensive programs that include the 5 Es (Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Engineering) throughout Georgia to encourage and facilitate more children to walk and bike to school safely. The funds are intended to start an SRTS program in communities and assist community members in sustaining successful SRTS programs. Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is managing Georgia's SRTS program as well as actively participating in implementing many of the program goals. Georgia is also one of ten jurisdictions nationwide participating in the SRTS National Partnership's State Network Project.

An estimated 31% of all elementary students in Georgia live within 1 mile of their local elementary school and are able to walk to school. (Data provided by Georgia Institute of Technology, from a Georgia Division of Public Health funded study, published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, Oct. 2007). However, only 13% bike or walk nationally, compared to 66% thirty years ago (Centers for Disease Control). By incorporating the SRTS program in Cobb County, the percentage of children walking and bicycling to school should improve which will not only benefit the children, but the communities involved in the program as well.

The Program's enabling legislation instructs that implementation should be carried out by increasing awareness, developing locally-driven and supported programs, improving bicycling and walking conditions near qualifying schools, and evaluating results at the project and program levels. This can be accomplished by incorporating the 5 E's:

Encouragement - Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling

Education - Teaching the school community about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important life-long safety skills and offering school-bound and school area driver safety campaigns

Engineering - Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that result in reduced speeds and establishment of safer crosswalks, walkways, trails and bikeways

Enforcement - Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure drivers obey traffic laws, initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs and ensuring that policies are enforced

Evaluation - Monitoring and researching outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of mode share before and after the program intervention(s)

By incorporating the 5 E's Cobb County will have a framework for establishing a SRTS program based on what has worked in other communities.

Purpose and Goals

Cobb County's SRTS program will result in building a physical environment and encouraging a social climate that supports children's ability to walk and bike to school. Specific goals of the program reflect the many benefits SRTS has to offer, including:

- Reducing traffic congestion in the area of schools;
- Reducing the speed of traffic in school zones;
- Increasing accessibility for walkers and bikers at schools;
- Increasing street connectivity to improve accessibility to schools;
- Increasing the level of safety for children who walk and bike to school;
- Increasing drivers' awareness of pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Increasing children's physical activity; and
- Fostering partnerships among schools, governments, communities and businesses to create sustainable programs

Program goals should be made measurable through specific objectives for evaluation purposes.

Program Implementation

This Interim Cobb County Safe Routes to School Program Plan proposes a phased approach to implementation.

Phase I – Interim Safe Routes To School Plan

To get the program underway we recommend Phase I be a fast-paced “get-the-ball-rolling” effort. To this end, county staff would provide briefings to elected officials, identify up to five pilot schools, and begin SRTS programs at those schools. Brief descriptions of the tasks associated with phase I are provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

Brief Elected Officials

The concept of a SRTS Program will be introduced to the County Commission. This introduction, in either a one-at-a-time format or to the assembled Commission, will allow County staff to present the benefits a countywide SRTS program would provide the citizens of Cobb County. At these briefings County staff will listen to the Commissioners input and document

their comments and the degree to which each would like to be involved in the SRTS program. Additionally, County staff will seek input into which agencies, groups or individuals the Commissioners may wish to have represented on the SRTS Task force.

After briefing the County Commissioners and incorporating their comments into this document, County staff will brief the members of the School Board, again focusing on benefits of the program. The School Board will likely have special insights into potential opportunities and potential obstacles for the SRTS Program. They may have specific schools which they feel would realize immediate benefits from participating in the SRTS Program. Additionally, they may wish to designate a specific liaison or coordinator for the SRTS Program.

Identify Pilot Schools

To create momentum and build support for the SRTS Program, it is recommended that up to five schools be selected for *Quick-Start* SRTS Program implementation. Ideally these schools would have been identified by the County Commissioners and/or School Board as having a clear potential for implementing safe walking and bicycling campaigns.

If schools are not identified during these initial steps, the County will work with School Board staff to identify several schools with a high walking and bicycling potential and solicit their participation via a letter. The purpose of the letter would be to help identify schools that are ready to go to work and get the program rolling and could be sent jointly from the County and the School Board or by either entity. A sample of a solicitation letter is attached.

Once schools have responded to the solicitation letter, a review of those schools expressing an interest in the program will be considered based upon their proximity to neighborhoods and sidewalk / path availability. The schools will be notified of whether or not they were selected as pilot schools.

Pilot School Activities

Once identified Cobb County staff will work with each school to get the program rolling. Staff will meet with each school to outline a set of tasks and a schedule implementing the program. A preliminary schedule with recommended tasks is provided below:

Prior to June

- Kickoff Meeting
- Safe Routes to School Parent Survey
- Safe Routes to School In-Class Data Collection

Through September

- Prepare School Walk / Bike Maps
- Identification of infrastructure needs
- Identification of enforcement needs
- Identification of educational programs
- Identification of encouragement programs

August to October

- Safe Routes to School Parent Survey

- Safe Routes to School In-Class Data Collection
- Begin Targeted enforcement
- Begin Educational programs
- Distribute School Walk / Bike Maps
- Prepare GDOT grant applications
- Media Outreach

October

- Walk / Bike to Work Day
- Focused Educational Programs
- Focused Encouragement Programs
- Focused Enforcement Campaigns
- Submit GDOT Grant Applications
- Media Coverage

The above recommended schedule, while compressed, will result in the Cobb County Safe Routes to School Program getting off to a quick start and realizing real, tangible benefits within the next school year. Data and information gathered from the Pilot Programs will be incorporated into the final SRTS Plan for Cobb County.

Conclusion

This Interim Safe Routes to School Plan represents the first of two recommended phases in the implementation of a comprehensive, sustainable Cobb County Safe Routes to School Program. Phase II, the full Cobb County Safe Routes to School Plan will be completed in concert with the Cobb County Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan to be completed in early fall of this year.

March XX, 2009

RE: Cobb County Safe Routes to School Program Invitation

Dear _ School Principal,

Cobb County is pleased to announce the kick-off of their Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. This program will promote walking and bicycling to school which will in turn, provide a wide range of benefits for students, schools, and communities. Created by the federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, SRTS's goal is to increase the number of children in grades K-8 who bicycle or walk to school by making it safer and more accessible to do so.

The Program's enabling legislation instructs that implementation should be carried out by increasing awareness, developing locally-driven and supported programs, improving bicycling and walking conditions near qualifying schools, and evaluating at the project and program levels. This can be accomplished by incorporating the 5 E's:

Encouragement, Education, Engineering, Enforcement and Evaluation

We would like to invite ____ School to participate in this exciting new program that can assist you in building a better physical environment and encouraging a social climate that supports children's ability to walk and bike to school. The specific objectives of the program reflect the many benefits for ____ School by participating in Cobb County's SRTS program, they include:

- Reducing traffic congestion in the area of your school;
- Reducing the speed of traffic in your school zone;
- Increasing accessibility for walkers and bicyclists;
- Increasing street connectivity to improve accessibility to your school;
- Increasing the level of safety for children who walk and bike to _School;
- Increasing drivers' awareness of pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Increasing children's physical activity; and
- Fostering partnerships among _ School, government, adjacent communities and businesses to create a sustainable program.

Funding for this program is available from a number of resources. The Georgia Department of Transportation's (GDOT) Safe Routes to School program is a new source of funding for infrastructure improvements that benefit children who walk and bike to school. The first call for applications was released in October of 2008. GDOT plans to release a second call for applications in 2009. Schools must be participants of the Safe Routes to School in order to be eligible. Furthermore, applications can only be submitted by school boards or districts and local governments.

In addition to Federal SRTS funds, State and municipalities can also rely on local and federal projects and programs to support their SRTS programs, they include:

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- Section 402 Safety Funds
- Smart Growth Community Schools Planning Grants
- Smart Growth Planning Grants
- Surface Transportation program
- Transportation Enhancements
- Hazard Elimination program
- Local bicycle/Pedestrian Planning Assistance
- Local Scoping and Local Lead projects
- County Aid program
- Developed-provided facilities
- Comprehensive Traffic Safety Programs
- Locally Initiated Bicycle projects
- Municipal Aid program
- Municipal Development Impact Fee Authorization Act
- National Highway System
- National Recreation Trails Fund
- Pedestrian Safety Grant
- Discretionary Aid program
- Federal Community Development Block Grant Program
- Green Acres program

We are hopeful that we have provided you enough information for you to better understand the many benefits this program has to offer, and that you also understand that the source of funding is readily available. Since the Cobb County School District is the second largest in Georgia with over 106,000 students in 67 elementary and 24 middle schools, we are hopeful that a large percentage of these schools will participate and become a large “voice” in the nation, one that seeks to improve our children’s ability to walk or bike to school. If you have any questions or would like to register to be a part of this growing program please contact Ms. Laraine Vance of Cobb County Department of Transportation at lvance@cobbcounty.org. Our deadline for your response is March_2009.

Thank you for your interest! We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Laraine Vance
 Planning Division Manager
 Cobb County Department of Transportation

You can fax your response to _ or email your response to _ using the following format:

PROGRAM: Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Program – Cobb County, Georgia

SCHOOL NAME:

SCHOOL ADDRESS:

SCHOOL PHONE NUMBER:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL NAME:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL EMAIL ADDRESS:

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ATTENDING THIS SCHOOL: