Walking, Bicycling, & Safe Routes to School in Rural Communities

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About the National Partnership

We are a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting **active, healthy lifestyles** and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking.
What We Do

• Create support for safe, healthy, active communities
• Support policy change
• Advance equity
• Share expertise as we learn from the field
Walking & Biking in Rural Areas

It’s possible!

People want it!

It’s happening!
Rural communities have potential for walking & biking.

In rural areas:
• Nearly 40% of trips are shorter than 3 miles.
• Nearly 20% of those trips are shorter than 1 mile.
There is interest by rural Americans in walking & biking.

Sidewalks were rated the highest transportation priority by rural Americans, from a list that included major roads and long-distance travel.
Rural Americans are walking.

Within small towns of 2,500 to 10,000 residents, people walk for work purposes at a rate almost identical to urban core communities.
Rural Americans are biking.

The share of work trips made by bicycle in small rural towns is nearly double that of urban centers.
Rural Americans are biking.

The share of work trips made by bicycle in small rural towns is nearly double that of urban centers.

For all trips taken in small rural cities (between 10,000 and 50,000 residents), just as many people bike as in urban centers.
High Needs for Safe Opportunities for Physical Activity

We need this!
• High levels of physical inactivity in rural communities
• 40-50% of rural kids overweight or obese
• 1.6 million rural households without access to cars
• High transportation injury & fatality rates in rural areas: for people walking, bicycling, and driving
• Common features of rural areas add danger for people walking & biking
Strengths of rural communities

• Schools often already community centers
• People know each other
• Decision makers are more accessible
• Low traffic roads and access to nature
• High satisfaction with rural living
What works to get people walking and biking in rural communities?
2 pronged approach for rural areas

- Hub
- Spokes

*Then, need to plan & prioritize*
Walkable & Bikeable Hubs

- Walkable environments
- Compact development
Spokes connecting to the hub

- Walkable or bikeable corridors
- Programs that encourage people to park & then walk
Improving walking & biking in rural communities

- Components of each prong
- Policy approaches
Safe Routes to School in Rural Communities: Best Practices

What really works?
Wide variation in walk/bike to school rates:
• West coast: 12% rural students
• South Atlantic region: 1.1% rural students
Successful Rural Strategies for Safe Routes to School

- Be opportunistic!
- Assess your community.
- May start with schools where students live nearby
- Be strategic & identify key logjams that prevent walking & biking
Strategies to Deal with Distance

- Remote drop off programs
- Walk to school bus stop groups
- Identify other destinations
- Walk on campus programs
- Smart school siting
Political Will

- Resources on working to engage school boards on SRTS
- Tips & case studies all came from rural communities
Federal Funding for SRTS, Walking & Biking in Small Rural Communities

- Populations under 5,000; not in an urbanized area (outside of MPO jurisdiction)
- $335 million available
- Some states not moving this funding
Resources

Safe Routes to School in Small Rural Communities: Challenges and Strategies to Accessing Funding

Under the last two Federal transportation law, States have been required to set aside a portion of their funding for active transportation projects. This has been a major opportunity for rural communities to support rural children in safely walking and bicycling to school, and a variety of challenges will need to be addressed to ensure that communities can access these funds and more. Communities, whether rural, urban, or suburban, benefit from increased safety and improved health outcomes for children who walk and bike to school. Many small rural school districts have limited resources and are unable to access these funds due to budget constraints and other barriers. This report provides an overview of the challenges facing rural communities and offers strategies to help communities access these funds and improve safety for children who walk and bike to school.

Rural Communities: A Two Pronged Approach for Improving Walking and Bicycling

This two pronged approach to improving walking and bicycling in rural communities focuses on both planning and funding. The first prong involves creating safe and accessible routes for children to walk and bike to school. This includes identifying routes that are safe and convenient for children to use, and working with local officials to ensure that these routes are well-maintained and free from hazards. The second prong involves securing funding for these improvements through federal and state programs.

Checklist: Working With Your School District Board to Support Healthy, Active Students

This checklist offers guidance for working with your school district board to support healthy, active students. It includes tips for engaging board members in the process of improving walking and bicycling in your community, and suggests ways to measure and report on the success of these efforts.

Safe Routes to School Program

In over 17,000 schools around the country, it is safer for students to be healthy and active. This is due to the important considerations for how to implement active transportation programs, and the many already in place. This fact is supported by the School initiatives are important, and how to get started.

What is a Safe Routes to School Program?

Safe Routes to School programs aim to make it safer and more convenient for children to walk and bike to school. They often involve creating safe routes for children to use, as well as securing funding for these improvements through federal and state programs. The programs also aim to engage communities in the process of improving walking and bicycling in their area.

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