Eagle Lake
Safe Routes to School Plan

May 2015

Eagle Lake Elementary School

REGION NINE
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Executive Summary

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national program which assists communities and schools districts in enabling and encouraging children to walk and bike to school and making it a safer, healthier, and more appealing transportation option. The program facilitates the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution near schools. The program seeks to reverse the national trend which has seen the number of children walking or biking to school decline over the last 60 years. During this time, childhood obesity rates reached over 33%.

The planning process completed by the City of Eagle Lake consisted of setting out a vision and goals for the process, collecting and analyzing information, determining barriers and challenges to walking and biking, determining strategies, and creating an action plan to implement the identified strategies. Strategies are divided into five core categories of engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation known as the Five E's of the Safe Routes to School program.

The planning process took place from September 2014 through June 2015 and included three team meetings. The project kickoff meeting was held on September 23 at Eagle Lake Elementary School to cover an introduction and purpose of the project, develop a vision statement, identify top barriers, and create goals for the planning process. From September 2014 through March 2015 a community assessment was completed, which included: school observations, walking audit, parent survey, student travel tally, and interviews with the Parent Teacher Organization and community wellness group. From this assessment, strategies were presented, reviewed, and prioritized by the SRTS team in March 2015 and added to the action plan. The action plan includes steps to consider for implementing strategies and resources which can be leveraged for the Eagle Lake Safe Routes to School program.

Based off of the current conditions analysis, strategies and recommendations were created to address the barriers and concerns for walking and biking to school. An action plan was created for implementation prioritization. Key recommendations, strategies, and an implementation matrix are explained in this plan. Project leaders are identified on a matrix who may be in the best position to implement those strategies. Key partnering organizations are also listed who may be able to help with implementation.

The creation of the SRTS plan is the first step to creating a successful SRTS program. With this plan, the SRTS team can leverage resources for implementation of the strategies and recommendations identified in this plan. To be successful, it requires the continuation of partnerships created during the planning process. The SRTS team is encouraged to continue to meet to discuss implementation of the plan and evaluate their progress using the parents survey and student travel tally.

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Overview

Today, more than ever, schools and communities are facing challenges in protecting the safety of children who walk and bike to school. Numerous communities struggle with traffic congestion, enforcement, and inadequate infrastructure around schools. Concurrently, children are becoming less physically active, which contributes to the growing epidemic of obesity and health concerns. These problems may seem to be separate issues, but Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs can address all these challenges through an organized action plan. This introduction provides the history of SRTS and an overview of the program.

History

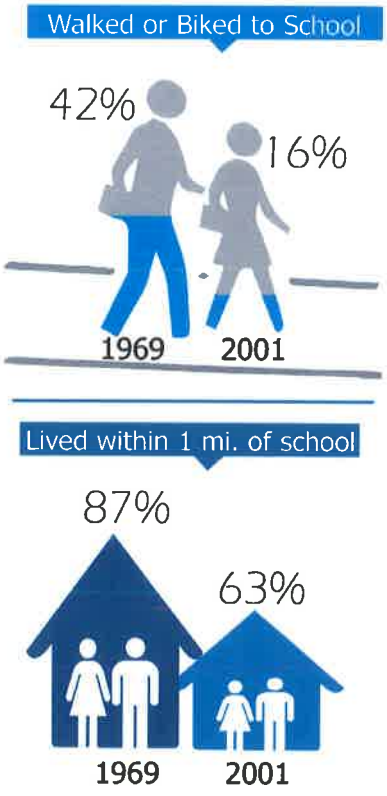
In the 1970s, the SRTS concept was introduced in Odense, Denmark, over a growing concern for the safety of children walking and biking to school.

Following the success of Denmark's SRTS program, SRTS programs quickly spread to parts of Europe, Australia, and North America. Similar to Denmark, these places were experiencing a mounting concern with the safety of children walking and biking to school and desired to take immediate action to mitigate the problems plaguing communities.

The first SRTS program in the United States was implemented in Bronx, New York in 1997. That same year Florida commenced a pilot program. In 2000, the U.S. Congress funded two pilot SRTS projects through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. These pilot projects eventually led to the nationwide growth of SRTS concepts and efforts in the United States. The Federal Transportation Legislation dedicated $612 million for The National Safe Routes to School Program from 2005 through 2009. All states would receive more than $1 million per year to be used for infrastructure and non-infrastructure needs. The national program continues to increase the number of SRTS programs around the country as communities value the importance of safe walking and biking to school.

Decline of Walking and Biking

Historically, the main mode of transportation to school was walking or biking. Schools were strategically placed in the center of communities to be easily accessible. Transportation to school has greatly changed. Today schools are being located farther away from the center of the community, traffic speeds have increased, and sign-age and sidewalks are disappearing. More than ever before, children are being driven to schools or taking the bus.



The decline in walking and biking to school did not occur overnight. In fact, it has been created by a self-perpetuated cycle. More parents are becoming convinced it is unsafe for their children to walk or bike to school. In turn, this creates more traffic congestion and traffic problems. With the present dangers, parents worry most about the following barriers: distance to school, traffic-related danger, weather, crime, and opposing school policies. (U.S. CDC, 2005)

Health Risks

Obesity rates are at all-time highs for all ages, but especially for children. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years. In 2010 more than one third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese. This pandemic can be attributed to children not getting enough physical activity.

The CDC reported that of children ages 9 to 13 years 62% do not participate in any organized physical activity and 23% do not engage in any free-time physical activity outside of school hours. (Prevention, 2002) During the school day, only 8% of elementary schools and 6% of middle/junior high schools provide daily physical education classes, and recess is no longer provided in some elementary schools. (Brener N, 2000)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 60 minutes of physical activity for children all days of week. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture) One way to help achieve this goal is for children to walk and bike to school.

Regular physical activity is proven to build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, reduce risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases, reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and promotes psychological well-being. (Physical activity and health: A report of the Surgeon General, 1996) Those who are not physically active have the possibility of developing heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, and osteoarthritis.

Despite the positive benefits of staying active, many children are still not getting daily physical activity. Some parents do not encourage or teach their children about the benefits of staying active.

SRTS Health Benefits:

- Build and maintain healthy bones and muscles
- Reduce obesity and chronic disease
- Reduce depression and anxiety
- Promotes psychological well-being

Environmental Risks

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that transportation is the fastest-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. In 2012, greenhouse gas emissions from transportation accounted for nearly 28% of overall U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. An increase in greenhouse gases can be contributed to a growth in population, urban sprawl, and economic prosperity.

With children breathing faster and inhaling more air than adults, they become particularly more vulnerable to air pollution and its effects on health. Exposure to air particulates increases the frequency of childhood illnesses, such as asthma. Looking at most schools, we can observe idle vehicles surrounding schools that greatly contribute to pollution among the school zone.

Environmentally friendly options, such as walking and biking to school, can help curb some of the environmental impacts of increased greenhouse gases. According to the League of American Bicyclists, 60% of pollution created by automobile emissions happens in the first few minutes of operation.

Land Use Patterns

Traditionally, schools were located in the center of communities allowing children to safely walk and bike to schools from most areas. Introduced in the 1970s, schools began building closer to the edges of communities rather than renovating their current building structures. Schools across the nation are also experiencing increases in student population due to a decrease in the amount of public schools. This requires larger buildings which can only be built on the outskirts of communities. The result of this is an increase in the flow of traffic to school sites because more children have to be driven.

Safety

Safety is often a top priority for most communities. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), motor vehicle traffic crashes were the leading cause of death for ages 3 through 14 in 2007. In 2012, there were a total of 33,561 traffic-related fatalities, which is a slight increase from previous years.

According to NHTSA, 677 bicyclists were killed and an additional 48,000 were injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2011. During the same year, bicyclist deaths accounted for 2% of all motor vehicle traffic fatalities and made up 2% of the people injured in traffic crashes.

Most often, vehicle crashes occur at morning and afternoon peak periods, when traffic levels are highest and children are out of school. The 10 – 15 age groups have both the highest fatality rate and the highest injury rate.

Children have a limited understanding of traffic safety which therefore increases their likelihood of an accident. Specifically, children have one third narrower field of vision than adults, cannot easily judge a car's speed and distance, and are typically concentrating on something other than the traffic.

Elements of Safe Routes to School Programs

Every community uses a diverse approach to make it safer and to encourage more children to walk and bike. The federal SRTS program outlines five core areas of strategies called the Five E's of SRTS. The core areas are: evaluation, engineering, education, enforcement, and encouragement.

Evaluation

Evaluation is generally the first E school districts will be involved with. Many schools begin by collecting and analyzing data through a planning process to create strategies. After the planning process is completed, evaluation strategies are used to monitor the success and document the effects the implementation of strategies has on the number of children walking and biking to school. Evaluation strategies include completing yearly student tallies and parent surveys to document changes over time.

Engineering

Engineering strategies include planning, designing, and constructing physical improvements around schools and surrounding neighborhoods. Engineering improvements are generally the most desired strategies to many communities and schools. These improvements can be maintenance, operational, or construction projects. Some common projects may include construction of sidewalks or multi-use trails to improve connectivity between the neighborhood and the school, improvements of street crossings, traffic calming measures, and sign-age. However, engineering strategies alone do not always produce safer routes or encourage an increase in walking and biking. It is important to tie this strategy to the other E's to ensure the new improvements are utilized.

Education

Education is increasingly important due to a lack of understanding about how to safely walk and bike in the community. Everyone can play a crucial role in the development of safe walking and biking to school for their children. Education messages to parents and community members remind them to take caution around schools and routes where students walk and bike. Drivers need to be aware and practice safe driving skills when entering these areas. Education activities often times complement other strategies to make those strategies successful. It is important to educate children on the benefits of walking and biking and how it can be done safely.

Encouragement

Parents, educators, and community members can help foster excitement in children to help them want to walk or bike to school through encouragement. Encouragement strategies tend to involve programming and activities that promote walking and biking to school. They build interest and enthusiasm to help ensure the SRTS program's continued success. Activities may include mileage clubs and contests, walk and bike to school day, walking school buses, and remote drop off sites. SRTS encourages parents, educators, and community members to also become involved in similar events. Encouragement strategies can be offered at little-to-no cost and should revolve around fun.

Enforcement

Enforcement strategies are in place to change unsafe behaviors of pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. Typically enforcement is related to law enforcement and applying the rules of the road. Crossing guards can also serve as an important facet of enforcement. Importantly, enforcement should also include all individuals to ensure that everyone is following the rules.

Safe Routes to School Programs are Part of the Solution

SRTS programs are part of the solution to increase physical activity, improve unsafe walking and biking conditions, and improve air quality. The school setting should provide a safe opportunity that encourages walking and biking. Walking and biking to and from school can contribute towards the development of a lifelong habit and a community-wide norm of incorporating physical activity into daily routines.

Mankato Area Public School's Safe Routes to School Plan

In 2013, the Mankato Area Public School's completed a Safe Routes to School Plan for the six elementary schools located in the City of Mankato: Franklin Elementary, Jefferson Elementary, Kennedy Elementary, Roosevelt Elementary, Rosa Parks Elementary, and Washington Elementary. The planning process was facilitate by Region Nine Development Commission and was made possible through a planning assistance grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation through the Federal Highways Administration's Safe Routes to School Program. The process investigated the current conditions of walking and biking and developed infrastructure and non-infrastructure strategies. With the plan complete, the City of Mankato and the Mankato Area School District have leveraged additional SRTS grants to assist with implementation, including three infrastructure grants to add sidewalks around the Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Elementary Schools. The school district also received a grant to fund a SRTS coordinator to begin non-infrastructure strategies.

Eagle Lake Safe Routes to School Planning Process

With the success of the Mankato Safe Routes to School Plan, the school district was eager to complete a planning process which would develop SRTS strategies for Eagle Lake Elementary School. Eagle Lake Elementary School is the only Mankato Area Public School located in the City of Eagle Lake. The planning process brought together a variety of stakeholders including city staff, school staff, transportation professionals, parents, teachers, and law enforcement.

The planning process was kicked off with an initial meeting held at City Hall. During this meeting, a vision for the planning process was reviewed, as well as, an issues and barriers discussion.

Next, the plan entered the community assessment phase where current conditions were assessed during observations of the school's arrival and dismissal procedure and walking audits around the school and immediate neighborhood. The school also completed parent surveys and student tallies which gave feedback on how parents view conditions and perceptions of walking and biking to and from school in Eagle Lake, as well as, how students are currently arriving and leaving school.

Strategies and action steps were then developed and prioritized by the SRTS team into an action plan which will guide the implementation of this plan. Roles, responsibilities and funding sources were also identified in the action plan.

Vision Statement

During the initial kickoff meeting, the SRTS team agreed on using the existing vision statement from the original Mankato Area Public School's Safe Routes to School Plan. The group felt it was still relevant and could be slightly reworded for inclusion with the Eagle Lake Plan.

Vision Statement

Safe Routes to School will result in increasing opportunities for school children to safely walk and bike to and from school, thereby resulting in a healthier school-age population, an improved environment, and an enhanced quality of life in our communities.

City of Eagle Lake

The City of Eagle Lake is located in the northeast quarter of Blue Earth County, approximately 2 miles east of Mankato. Eagle Lake is one of four cities included in the Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization and is consider a part of the Greater Mankato statistical area. The city has seen significant growth increasing from a population of 1,797 in 2000 to 2,422 in 2010. Eagle Lake is also a young community with a median age of 31.7 years according to the 2010 census. There were 887 households in Eagle Lake of which 41.4% had children under the age of 18 living in them.

Sidewalk Policy

The City of Eagle Lake requires developers to construct sidewalks as a part of the development agreement process. Sidewalks are required on at least one side of the street. For this reason, sidewalks are predominately in the newer areas of Eagle Lake. To address the lack of sidewalks in other areas, the City of Eagle Lake, along with the assistance of Bolton & Menk, created a Sidewalk and Trail Master Plan. The map in Appendix X. The sidewalks in phase 1 have been implemented as of 2014. These sidewalks include completing the missing link on the north side of Le Sueur Avenue next to the school, completing sidewalks on Plainview Street, and along Diane Drive. As of April 2015, Eagle Lake has a bid out for construction of sidewalk along one side of Linda Drive from County Highway 17 to Thomas Drive and on Thomas Drive from Linda Drive to County Highway 27. While the city does not have enough funds to complete all of the segment, the bid asks the construction company to complete as much of the segment as possible with available funding. The city is funding these sidewalk projects with city funds and have not applied to any outside funding sources.

Mankato Area Public School District

Overview

The Mankato Area Public School District has a total of 17 schools in the Greater Mankato Area. The District employs approximately 500 licensed teachers and about 430 non-licensed staff in the area. The Mankato Area Public School District has a little over 7,500 students serving the cities of Eagle Lake, Madison Lake, Mankato and North Mankato. The district covers 135 miles and extends service to Blue Earth and Nicollet counties.

The school district provides bus transportation to grades kindergarten through sixth who live at least one and one-half miles away and to grades seventh-twelfth who live at least two miles away. There is no charge for bus service.

Mankato Area Public Schools Wellness Policy

The District adopted a Wellness Policy in 2006 that affects all of the schools in the district. The purpose of this policy is to *assure a school environment that promotes and protects students' health, well-being, and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity*. The school board recognizes that nutrition and physical education are essential components of the educational process, that good health fosters student attendance and education, and that healthy eating and physical activity can have a positive impact on student behavior.

The school district encourages the involvement of students, parents, teachers, food service staff, and other interested persons in implementing, monitoring, and reviewing school district nutrition and physical activity policies, which is detailed in their Wellness Policy. Children need access to healthy foods and opportunities to be physically active in order to grow, learn, and thrive.

The school district provides healthy school meal programs that strictly comply with all federal, state, and local statutes and regulations. Opportunities for physical activity will be incorporated into other subject lessons, when appropriate. The school district recognizes that parents and guardians have a primary and fundamental role in promoting and protecting their children's health and well-being. Currently there are no guidelines, policies, or promotion of a SRTS Program in the Wellness Policy.

Existing SRTS Activities

Based off of the original Mankato Area Safe Routes to School Plan, several programs have started district-wide, even at schools not originally involved with the original SRTS Plan. The SRTS activities listed below have been implemented:

- Walk and Bike to School Day celebrated yearly
- Pedestrian Safety Curriculum being implemented
- Plans are being made for community bicycle rodeos
- The Accelerated Learner Program encourages and incentivizes walking and biking to school

The school district has also created safe routes maps for each school which was involved with the original planning process and lists them in the District Wellness Booklet. Eagle Lake Elementary does not have a safe routes map.

Eagle Lake Elementary is a kindergarten through fifth grade school with an enrollment population of roughly 362 students. The school is a part of the Mankato Area School District and is the only school outside of the North Mankato and the Mankato city limits. Eagle Lake Elementary School's catchment area includes students from Eagle Lake, surrounding townships and the City of Madison Lake.

Surrounding Area

Eagle Lake Elementary is located in the center of Eagle Lake. The school is bordered by Le Sueur Ave to the south and east. Single-family housing borders the school on the northeast and west sides. An open field lies to the north. Visitor and staff parking can be found on the east side of the school property. The surrounding neighborhood of the school consists of single-family residential.

Walking and Biking Conditions

With the completion of phase 1 of the Sidewalk and Trails Master Plan, students have sidewalks leading off the school site into the neighborhoods in all directions. Sidewalks have been completed on the north side of Le Sueur Avenue along the entire length of the road. There is a safer route for students to walk to County Highway 17 with the completion of sidewalks on the east side of Plainview Street and cross to the residential housing to the north.

Sidewalks are still lacking on some streets including most streets south of the school. Linda Drive, Thomas Drive, and County Highway 27 are three major through streets with missing sidewalk connections. Even with sidewalk completed on Le Sueur Avenue, crossing Le Sueur Avenue, especially near the park, remains a concern for parents.

Traffic Conditions

Normally, MnDOT and the County Highway Department take traffic counts along main highways in their jurisdiction. Cities like Eagle Lake, which don't have the capacity to maintain a full time engineer, often do not have traffic counts on local roads. However, Bolton & Menk have been assisting the city with traffic counts on some of the local streets to identify the higher traffic routes and prioritize sidewalks along those routes.

Le Sueur Avenue, where the school's main entrance is located, has an average of 1,308 vehicles a day traveling near the school and is the busiest city owned road. Plainsview Drive, located to the east of the school, has the second largest traffic volume of any local road with 1,200 vehicles per day.

Further away from the school site, Blue Earth County Highway 17 provides the largest barrier to children walking and biking to school. The highway runs east-west from Mankato to the west connecting with U.S. Highway 14 west of Eagle Lake. The unofficial edges of the city are Blue Earth County Highway 27 to the east and 598th Ave to the west. Blue Earth County Highway 27 has a relatively high traffic count of 2,600 vehicles per day. A manufactured home park and new housing development are located on the east side of the highway which creates a barrier to children living in both those areas from safely crossing and walking or biking to school.

Arrival and Dismissal

The SRTS team observed arrival and dismissal at Eagle Lake Elementary on October 9, 2014. The team members spread out around the school site and into the neighborhood to observe the conditions, behaviors of walkers, bicyclists, drivers, and the traffic pattern. Below are the summaries based on the observations of various team members.

Walker/Bicyclists

During morning arrival, the team observed at least 40 children walking and at least 35 children biking to school. Most students arrived from the south along the new sidewalks on Diane Drive. Approximately 18 walkers came from the west along Le Sueur Avenue, with several students walking and biking from the east on Le Sueur Ave. At least two parents were observed walking with their children to school. Once bicyclists reached the school site, they immediately got off their bike and walked it to the bike racks. One parent was observed biking with their child to school. Most bicyclists used the sidewalk with only a few riding in the street.

During dismissal, walkers and bicyclists were allowed to leave five minutes early to allow for the children to leave the school site ahead of parents driving. Five parents were waiting near the entrance to walk with their child home. Some parents also parked on Diane Drive and waited for their children to cross the street and picked them up to avoid waiting in the parent pick up line. As in the morning, bicyclists walked their bikes until they were off the school site before riding them.

School Bus

The school bus dropped off and picked up on Le Sueur Avenue located west of the parking lot. Normally only one school bus drops off and picks up students, but on the day of the observations there were two buses as one was being used for a school field trip. Buses, like walkers and bicyclists, are allowed to leave five minutes before parent pick up in the afternoon.

Parent Drop Off/Pick Up

The parent drop off loop is constructed on the outer edge of the parking lot. The parking lot and parent drop off area are separated by a concrete median. In the morning, parents entered and dropped off their children in front of either east side entrances. Parents started to drop off only at the first door until a staff member came out and started encouraging parents to pull forward to the front of the drop off area. This allowed for more space for parents to drop off.

In the afternoon, parents started arriving in the parent drop off loop around 3:25 p.m. There were nine cars in the loop when the bell rang. Parents in the car loop are held an extra five minutes to allow for bused students, walkers and bicyclists to leave the school grounds before the car traffic starts to leave.

The school has a valet system for dismissing children. All children being picked up by a parent wait in the gym. Each parent has a number on their dash which corresponds to a number on their child's backpack. On this day, three staff members assisted with pick up. One staff member was located in the gym and two were outside in the drop off loop. The first staff member walked along the line of cars radioing the numbers on the dash boards of the vehicles to the staff member in the gym. The second staff member inside the gym would release the corresponding child and the child would head out to the loop. The third staff member, outside at the front of the line, would direct the child to the proper car. The operation seemed complicated, however, parent pick up moved steadily and was complete in about eight minutes.

Crossing Guards/Patrol

A paid crossing guard is usually stationed at the intersection of Blue Earth County Highway 17 and 3rd Street during both morning arrival and afternoon dismissal. Prior to the SRTS team's arrival and dismissal observations, the crossing guard had resigned. Until a replacement was hired, a police car was stationed at the intersection to be a reminder to drivers to slow down and yield for pedestrians in the crosswalk. The police car was present during arrivals but not dismissals on the day of the observations. During arrivals when children were present, the police officer would exit the car and escort the children across the crosswalk.

Parent Survey Results

A parent survey was distributed by Eagle Lake Elementary school during fall of 2014 to understand the factors affecting a parent's decision to allow children to walk or bike to school. The results of the survey helped to identify areas where improvements could be made to increase the amount of students walking or bicycling to school safely. The survey was available in paper form and electronically through an online survey website. The survey received 21 complete survey responses of which 81% of participants live within one mile of school.

Parents were asked to select their top concerns in allowing their children to walk or bike to school. They were asked to select all that applied. Parents responded their highest concerns affecting their decision to allow, or not allow, their child to walk or bike to school included *(see figure 3.1)*:

- Distance (52.6%)
- Amount of traffic along route (42.1%)
- Sidewalks or pathways (42.1%)
- No adults to walk or bike with (36.8%)
- Weather or climate (36.8%)

Parents were asked whether or not they would allow their child to walk or bike to school if their concerns were improved upon. Taking into account all of the concerns the parents listed, the following percentages of parents answered they would allow their child to walk or bike to school If conditions were improved *(see figure 3.2)*:

- Safety of intersections and crossings (92%)
- Adults to walk or bike with (91%)
- Sidewalks or pathways (87%)
- Crossing guards (83%)
- Amount of traffic along route (75%)

In the comment section of the survey, a majority of the comments from parents referenced the distance to school. Many said they lived too far away to allow their child to walk or bike. Parents were also concerned about having more sidewalks in town.

Figure 3.1: Eagle Lake Elementary School Parent Survey Concerns

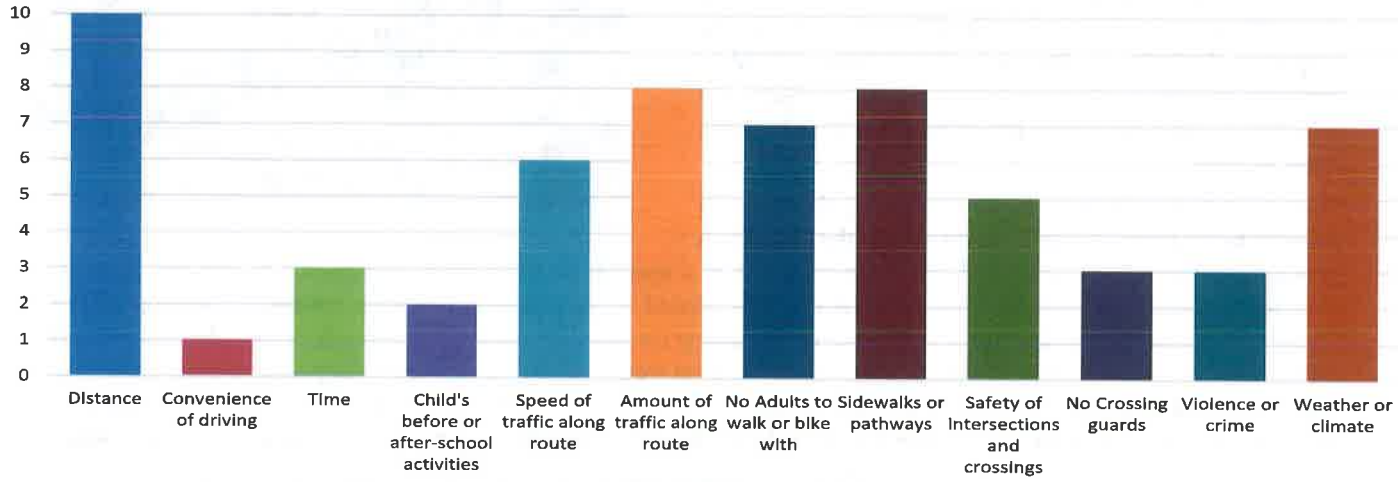
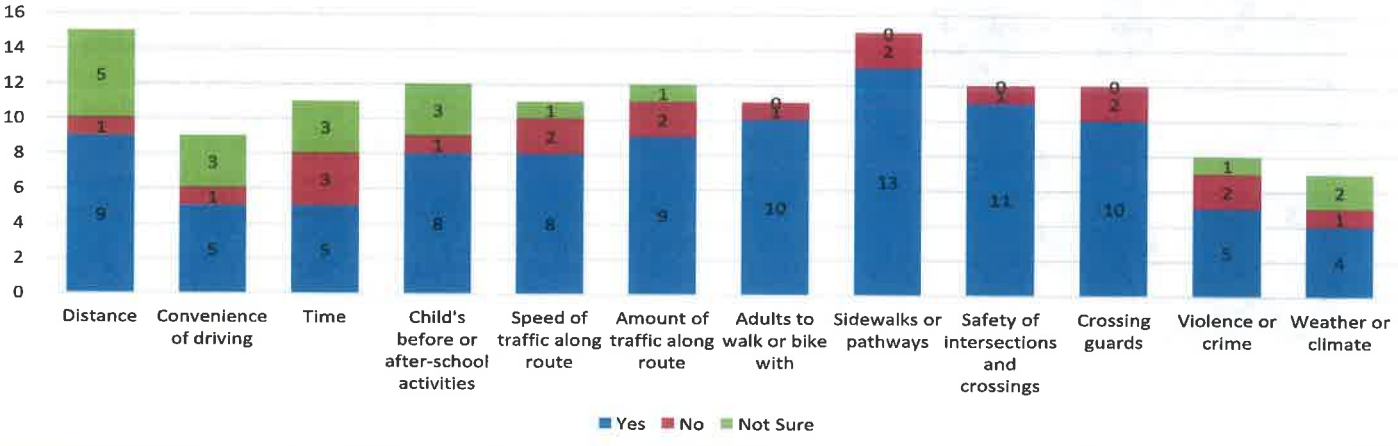


Figure 3.2: Would You Let Your Child Walk or Bike to School if Concerns Were Addressed?



Student Tally

Eagle Lake Elementary school completed a student tally during the week of October 22, 2014. Students were asked each day how they arrived and left school. The response totals were 240 responses for the morning arrival and 242 responses for dismissal *(see figures 3.3 and 3.4)*.

Figure 3.3: Eagle Lake Elementary School Arrival Tally

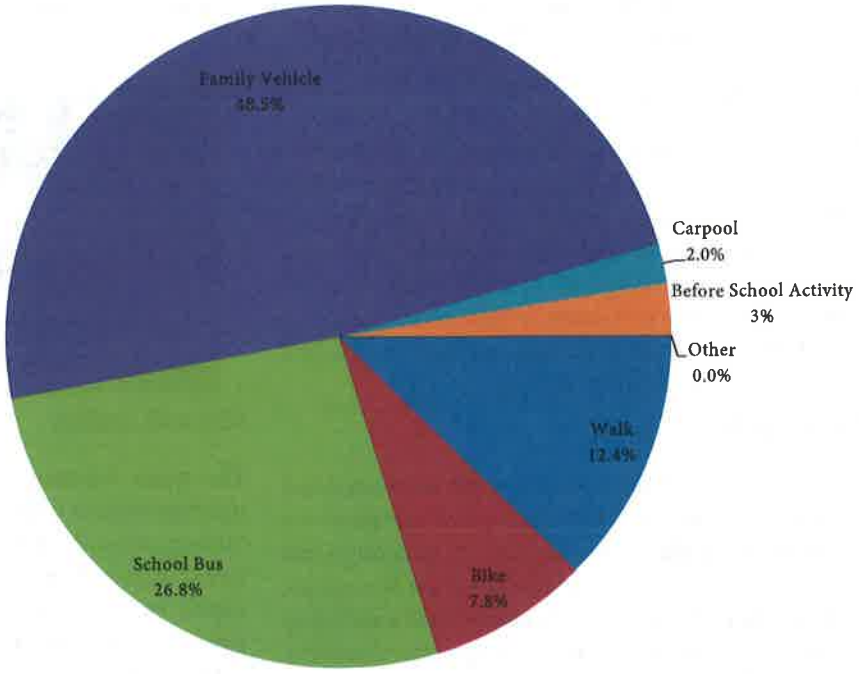
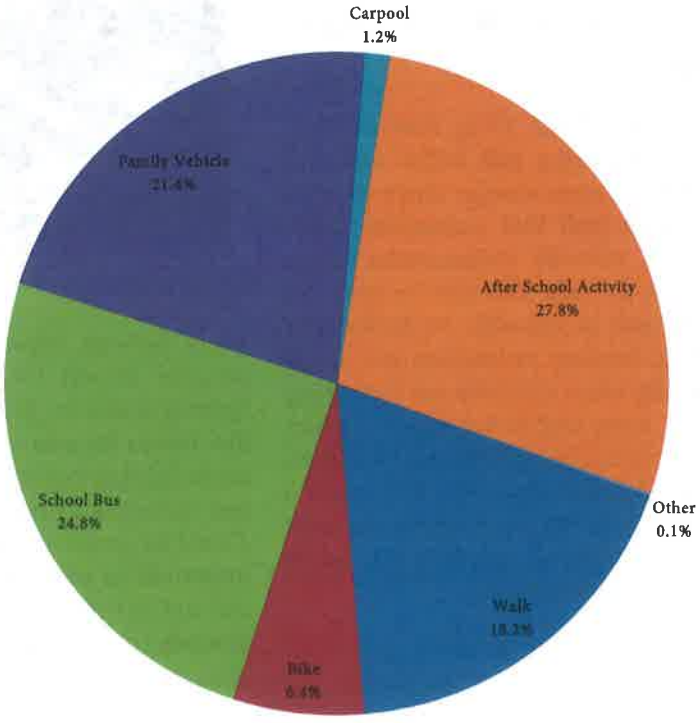


Figure 3.4: Eagle Lake Elementary School Dismissal Tally



This chapter provides information on best practices for SRTS programming and implementation as well as resources, ideas, case studies, and funding for SRTS projects and programs. Before moving to the recommendations specific to the community of Eagle Lake this chapter offers a variety of different bicycle and pedestrian facility types that could provide solutions to the problems identified throughout the district.

Engineering Solutions

This section of the chapter provides an overview of common bicycle and pedestrian facilities that the community may want to consider when carrying out the goals and recommendations of the SRTS Plan. These facility types are simply meant to give an idea of what other communities are doing to become more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. These solutions may not be an appropriate option for the cities.

Sidewalk Surface Types

Sidewalks can be surfaced with a variety of materials to accommodate varying budgets and contexts. While urban, suburban and heavily used sidewalks are typically made of concrete, less expensive walkways may be constructed of asphalt, crushed stone, or other materials. In more rural areas, a side path made of a material other than concrete may be suitable and be a better fit with a rural environment.

Sidewalk Width

The preferred minimum sidewalk width recommended for SRTS is five to six feet. Walking can be a social activity and therefore facilities are needed to accommodate social walking. The six-foot width allows for two people to walk comfortably side by side and provides sufficient space for pedestrians crossing in the opposite direction. Sidewalks with a width of eight to ten feet, or more, should be built where there is no sidewalk buffer along an arterial street and along roads adjacent to school grounds where large numbers of walkers are expected.

Sidewalk Placement

Sidewalk placement, or setback, along streets should take into account worn paths and buffer zones, as well as, provide room for snow storage where snowfall is prevalent. The worn path that pedestrians create when there is not a sidewalk demonstrates where people naturally want to walk. The area between the street and the worn path or sidewalk is a buffer zone which provides space between pedestrians and motor vehicles. Unfortunately, when sidewalks are built along major arterial streets, many tend to not include a buffer zone, thus placing pedestrians uncomfortably close to high-speed traffic. Sidewalks also need to provide a continuous path. Just as streets are designed and built to provide a continuous network, sidewalks too should provide users with a continuous path.

Sidewalk Buffers

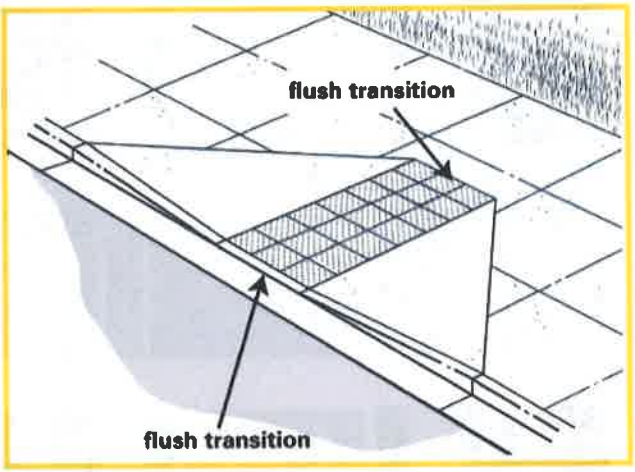
The space between the sidewalk and closest lane of moving vehicles is the sidewalk buffer. Wider sidewalk buffers allow for a pedestrian to avoid splash zones (areas adjacent to a motor vehicle travel lane into which water spray may occur) and provide a snow storage area and a more comfortable separation between moving vehicles and pedestrians.

Street Lighting

Street lighting improves visibility and helps with personal security. On streets with lots of trees, street lighting scaled to pedestrians (low to the sidewalk) illuminates the area even after trees grow big and tall. Street lighting improves safety by allowing pedestrians and motorists to see each other. Two sided lighting should be considered along wide streets. It is especially important to provide lighting at crossings. Lighting can also be helpful along streets adjacent to the school grounds to minimize school vandalism and improve security.

ADA / Universal Design

The purpose of universal design is to provide an environment that is equally accessible and comfortable for uses of abilities and ages. In 2004, the US Access Board released the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities to help ensure access for all. Sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities in the public right-of-way are subject to the requirements of the ADA. These guidelines contain scoping and technical requirements for accessibility to sites, facilities, and buildings by all users.



Curb Ramps

Curb ramps should be perpendicular wherever possible, where each corner has two ramps installed perpendicular to the face of the curb (vs. a single ramp facing diagonally at an intersection). A big advantage of having two ramps at the corner and small curb radii is the curb ramps can lead directly along the line of travel guiding pedestrians into the crosswalk rather than into the middle of the intersection. Two ramps, which end at the crosswalk, also provide directional guidance to pedestrians with vision impairments. When a corner is retrofit with new curb ramps, the crosswalk markings may have to be moved so that the curb ramp fully aligns within the crosswalk.

Warning Strips

Truncated domes are the standard design requirement for detectable warnings on curb ramps and at transitions from sidewalks to street crossings. These small, flattened domes provide a surface that is distinguishable underfoot and by cane. ADA guidelines require the use of a truncated dome warning strip at the bottom of every newly constructed curb ramp. These domes provide a tactile warning to pedestrians with a visual impairment who would otherwise be given warning by the presence of a curb. The truncated dome tactile strip should be two feet deep for the entire width of the ramp and should have a contrasting color with the adjacent sidewalk.

Narrow Lanes

There are several ways to narrow a street. Paint is a simple, low cost, and easy way to narrow the street or travel lanes. If the narrower lanes can result in a striped shoulder, the shoulder will provide a buffer for pedestrians, a place for bicyclists to ride, and a refuge for disabled motor vehicles. The shoulder stripe will also provide better motorist guidance. Interior traffic lanes can be narrowed to 10 feet wide to encourage slower speeds. Narrow lanes can also result from road-diet projects which can include painted medians, center turn lanes, bicycle lanes or parking lanes.

Chokers and Chicanes

Traffic calming can also result from narrowing the street through the use of chokers and chicanes. Chokers narrow both sides of the street to form a section about 20 to 24 feet wide. Chicanes provide alternating narrow and wide sections, and a curved driving path similar to a slalom. Chicanes work best when supplemented with centerline striping, and in some cases edge line striping. Both chokers and chicanes need to have a vertical element in the narrowed section, such as landscaping, so the narrowed section can be seen easily by approaching motorists.

Speed Humps

Speed humps represent one type of traffic calming measure which has been used by many local agencies for slowing traffic. Modern speed humps are 12 to 14 feet wide and have a rounded appearance, which is 2.5 to 4 inches high at the center. Longer and flatter speed humps are referred to as speed tables. Speed humps have been shown to reduce motor vehicle speeds on streets where they were installed.

Raised Pedestrian Crosswalks

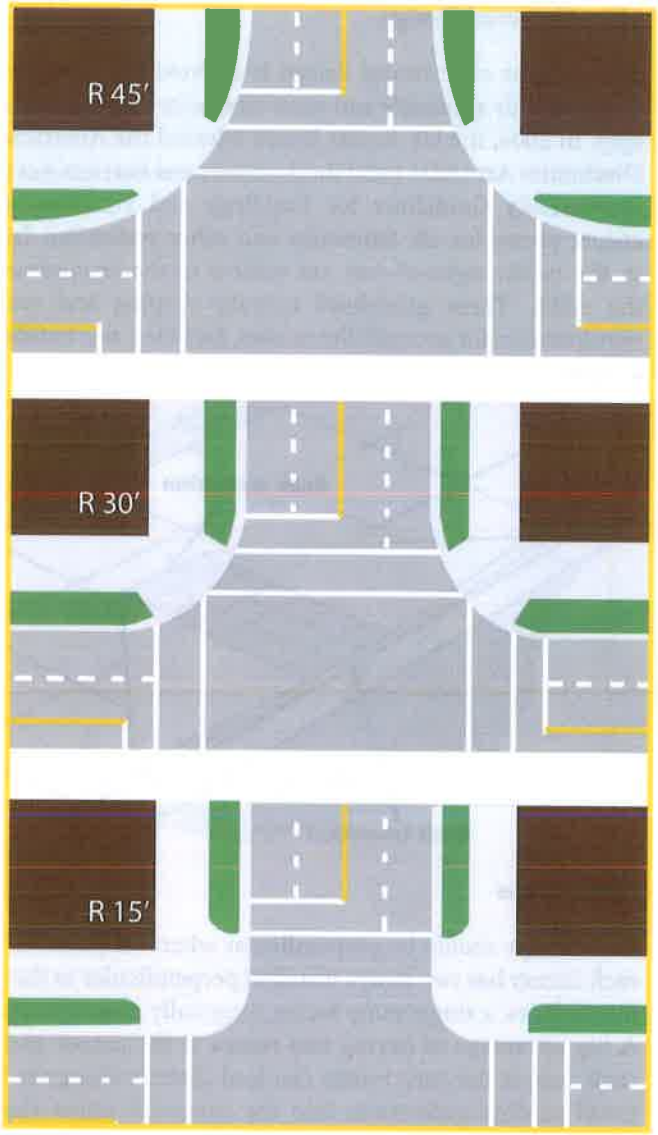
Raised pedestrian crosswalks serve as a traffic calming measures by extending the sidewalk across the road and bringing motor vehicles to the pedestrian level. Raised crosswalks also improve accessibility by allowing a pedestrian to cross at nearly a constant grade without the need for a curb ramp and makes the pedestrian more visible to approaching motorists. They have a trapezoid-shaped cross-section to slow motorists at the pedestrian crossing where the slowing will be most effective.

Roundabouts

The modern roundabout is a form of circular intersection in which traffic travels at low speeds counterclockwise around a central island. Vehicles entering a roundabout must yield, or stop if needed, to circulating traffic. Roundabouts allow for more continuous traffic flow compared to conventional stop or signalized intersections. Additionally, compared to conventional stop or signalized intersections, roundabouts reduce and simplify the number of places where motor vehicles would potentially conflict with other vehicles and pedestrians.

Traffic Circles

Traffic circles can help slow traffic on local and collector streets and calm traffic for pedestrians. Traffic circles typically have less of an impact on emergency vehicles than speed humps or speed tables, and can add to the aesthetics of the street. Neighborhood traffic circles on local streets do not need to have raised splitter islands, but they should be illuminated with streetlights. Landscaping also is important for aesthetics and making the islands visible to motorists.



Reduce Corner Radii

There is a direct relationship between the size of the curb radius and the speed of turning motor vehicles. A large radius may easily accommodate large fire trucks and other large trucks and school buses, but it also allows other drivers to make high speed turns and it increases the crossing distance for pedestrians. A small radius reduces the speed at which drivers are able to make the turn and reduces the crossing distance for pedestrians.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important component of any SRTS program. Evaluation is used to determine if the goals of the strategies are being met and to assure that resources are directed toward efforts that show the greatest likelihood of success. Also, evaluation can identify needed adjustments to the program while it is underway. This information describes how to conduct a SRTS program evaluation that is tailored to the program's objectives and strategies.

There are additional tools that schools and communities can use in conjunction with the student travel tallies and parent surveys to get a more robust idea of how the community is stacking up in terms of not only SRTS, but bicycle and pedestrian amenities more broadly. Three other areas to consider tracking are bicycle and pedestrian facilities, behavior and attitudes in the community, and broader measures of community performance.

Selected program activities need to have both process and outcome objectives. In general, objectives should include specific information about what is to happen, to whom, by when, and in what amount. These are sometimes called SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) objectives.

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are the easiest to measure and they provide a good sense of what exists in the community. Things to consider keeping track of in this category include, but are not limited to:

- Miles of: sidewalks, multi-use trails, bike lanes, sharrows, bike boulevards, etc.
- Number of bike racks, benches, waste receptacles, drinking fountains, informational kiosks, etc., or anything that supports a healthy bicyclist and pedestrian environment
- Number of improved intersections
- Number of traffic calming measures installed
- Number of road construction/reconstruction projects that have included bicycle and pedestrian needs
- The number of recommendations in the plan that have been implemented
- The number of crosswalks painted or repainted

Tracking behavior and attitudes can be a bit more difficult and less scientific; however it is important to know if improvements made have impacted community members. Measurements to track behavior and attitudes include, but are not limited to:

- Deaths and injuries by mode
- Crashes by mode and type
- Mode shift: tracking walking and biking trips over time
- Percentage of children walking and biking to school (student travel tallies)
- Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) or Single Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) trip reduction
- Incorporate multi-modal level of service into transportation plans versus only automobile level of service
- Bicycle and pedestrian counts through a city
- Number of participants at SRTS and bike/walk events
- Number of participants at bicycle and pedestrian education classes
- Surveys and their responses
- Groups participating in the maintenance of trails
- Volunteer hours for all bicycle and pedestrian activities
- Bicycle organization membership

Finally, while broader community performance measures may be harder to quantify and collect, they may show that walking and biking have had wide reaching positive impacts on the community. Broader community performance measures could include air quality improvement, specifically around the school (ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide).

Education

Education activities include teaching pedestrian, bicyclist and traffic safety and creating awareness of the benefits and goals of SRTS. Encouragement activities also offer teachable moments to reinforce pedestrian and bicyclist safety education messages. Education strategies include identifying:

- Who needs to receive information?
- When the education should be delivered?
- What information needs to be shared?
- How the messages will be conveyed?

Who

Audiences for SRTS education include, but are not limited to: children, parents, drivers, and neighbors. Once a community decides to begin a SRTS program, each of these audiences plays a role in receiving and/or providing related education. Some sub-groups may require particular attention, such as families who do not speak English as a first language, individuals with vision, hearing or mobility impairments, and families with low-incomes.

When

Before beginning encouragement strategies, children should receive pedestrian and bicyclist safety education. Sometimes education strategies need to begin quickly. For example, in areas with unsafe routes where children are already walking or biking out of necessity, education is urgently needed to reduce the risk of injury to children until other measures can be put into place. The timing for education activities can also depend on the issues in the community and how education fits with other parts of the SRTS program.

What and How

What information needs to be shared with each audience is presented in this section as key messages. How the information can be conveyed is described in strategies.

Encouragement

Encouragement is one of the complementary strategies that SRTS programs use to increase the number of children who walk and bike to school safely. In particular, encouragement and education strategies are closely intertwined, working together to promote walking and biking by rewarding participation and educating children and adults. Encouragement activities also play an important role moving the overall SRTS program forward because they build interest and enthusiasm which can buy support for changes that might require more time and resources. Some encouragement actives include, but are not limited to:

Walking School Buses and Bicycle Trains

A walking school bus and bicycle train both consist of groups of students accompanied by adults that walk or bike a preplanned route to school. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or, in order to include children who live too far to walk or bike, begin from a parking lot. They may operate daily, weekly or monthly. Often, they are started in order to address parents' concerns about traffic and personal safety while providing a chance for parents and children to socialize.

Park and Walk

A predetermined parking lot acts as the meeting area for families who drive and then park and walk the remaining distance to school. Some communities require parents to walk with their children to school while others have designated adult volunteers to walk groups of children from the parking area to school.

On-Campus Walking Activities

In situations where distance, safety concerns, or a disability prevents a child from walking or biking to school, communities can encourage walking on the school campus.

Enforcement

Enforcement used alone will not likely have a long-term effect. Communities must utilize a combination of enforcement, engineering, education and encouragement strategies to address the specific needs of their schools and achieve long-term results.

The public typically thinks of enforcement as officers writing tickets. In fact, enforcement, especially for SRTS programs, is a network of community members working together to promote safe walking, biking and driving. This can be accomplished through safety awareness, education and, where necessary, the use of ticketing for dangerous behaviors. Enforcement includes students, parents, adult school crossing guards, school personnel and neighborhood watch programs all working in conjunction with law enforcement. Working together to enforce rules for safe walking, biking and driving makes it safer and easier for everyone.

Active Speed Monitors

Active speed monitors are permanent devices to keep drivers aware of their speeds and the need to slow down near schools. They are typically mounted on a speed limit sign and visually display drivers' real-time speeds as they pass. Drivers see how fast they are actually driving compared to the posted speed limit.

Pedestrian Decoy Operations

Away to bring attention to problems with motorists not yielding to pedestrians is through a pedestrian decoy. This is when police officers in highly visible civilian clothes pose as pedestrians crossing the street while other hidden officers observe their attempts. If a motorist violates safe crossing rules by failing to yield to the pedestrian, the hidden officers pursue and apprehend violators.

Photo Enforcement

Automated photo speed enforcement takes a real-time photo of traffic to record vehicle speeds and behaviors. It can be used to document speeders and those who drive dangerously through crosswalks.

Progressive Ticketing

Progressive ticketing is a method for introducing ticketing through a three-staged process. Issuing tickets is the strongest strategy of an enforcement program and it is usually reserved for changing unsafe behaviors that other strategies failed to change or that pose a real threat to the safety of students. The three-staged process is:

Educating: Establish community awareness of the problem. The public needs to understand drivers are speeding around schools and the consequences of this speeding for children's safety.

Warning: Announce what action will be taken and why. Give the public time to change behaviors before ticketing starts.

Ticketing: Finally, after the warning time expires, hold a press conference announcing when and where the police operations will occur.

Speed Trailers

Portable speed trailers visually display drivers' real-time speeds compared to the speed limit. These devices may be effective in reducing speeds and increasing awareness of local speed limits. Portable speed trailers are most effective when the trailer flashes SLOW DOWN, flashes a bright white light that mimics a photo speed camera, or a blue and red light that mimics a police car when drivers are moving too fast.

Traffic Complaint Hotlines

A traffic complaint hotline allows community members to report traffic problems directly to police. It is used to identify the worst traffic problem areas and the most frequent traffic complaints.

Speed Enforcement in School Zones

Strict enforcement of speed laws in school zones is one law enforcement tool that can improve the safety for children walking and biking to school as well as motorists. A zero tolerance policy for speeders in school zones, and even an increase in fines for drivers who violate the posted school zone speed limit, are potential approaches.

The following strategies are possible solutions to alleviate, improve, or mitigate existing concerns, conditions, or barriers for children to be able to walk and bike to school safely. The overall goal is to increase the number of students who walk and bike to school. The strategies below have been suggested by Region Nine Development Commission to improve safety around the school and neighborhood based on the vision statement, community assessment, and identification of barriers and concerns. The strategies are listed under the goals determined during the kickoff meeting. Strategies below also include infrastructure and non-infrastructure recommendations. Not all of the strategies will be able to be implemented right away. Strategies may range from short-term to long-term projects. For instance, infrastructure projects are generally long-term strategies which require additional considerations while many strategies meant to education and encourage students to walk and bike to school can be completed with short-term planning and preparation.

Engineering *(see figure 4.3)*

1. Improve crosswalk visibility through continental striping at key crossings.
2. Consider mid-block crossing or curb extensions at trail entrance on Le Sueur Ave. *(see figures 4.1 and 4.2).*
3. Study the intersections along Blue Earth County Road 17 to determine if a rectangular rapid flashing beacon crosswalk is warranted.
4. Fill sidewalk gaps to the south of the school.
5. Consider a trail access sign alerting vehicle traffic to trail entrance on Linda Ave.
6. Continue to expand sidewalk and trail network as part of development agreements for new development.
7. Identify and install safe crossings as development expands passed the current edges of town (Blue Earth County Road 341 and Blue Earth County Road 27).
8. Restrict parking along the west side of Diane Drive for two blocks to create a bike lane to remove bicyclists from the sidewalk were children and parents are walking.
9. Consider improving connectivity of pedestrian and bicycle network by designated right of way for mini-trail connecting between cul-de-sacs.

Figure 4.1: Mid-block crossing

Figure 4.2: Curb extensions

Figure 4.3: Eagle Lake Elementary Recommended Improvements Map

Education

- Create safe routes to school maps for Eagle Lake Elementary.
- Distribute walking route information and walking safety information with back to school packets distributed to parents of all children.
- House a bike fleet to assist in implementation of bicycle safety into the physical education curriculum of the Mankato School District.
- Hold a community bicycle rodeo in Eagle Lake to support bicycle safety curriculum and to encourage parent participation and learning along with students.
- Through Community Education and Recreation Department, hold a family biking class which promotes safety and includes a family ride.
- Create a community wide messaging campaign using Safe Routes to School messages to educate and promote walking and biking to and from school. Look to messaging campaigns such as Rochester's SEE.SAFE.SMART. Campaign. Consider low cost ways of messaging through social media, local media, short videos of current activities, etc. to promote the campaign.

Encouragement

- Establish a walking school bus program as a way of providing adult supervision and safety at crossings at Lookout Drive for Hoover Elementary.
- Use remote drop off locations for parent and bus drop offs to incorporate students who cannot walk and bike to school to participate in Walk and Bike to School Day.
- Build on success of holding Walk and Bike to School Day by instituting monthly walk and bike to school days and eventually weekly Walking and Biking Wednesdays.
- Maintain and expand bicycle rack inventory and explore new design, function, and aesthetics as bicycle racks need replacement.
- Promote time for north side student to meet and walk and ride together to school crossing County Highway 17 in a large group.

Enforcement

- Work with local law enforcement to continue random enforcement efforts, monitor accident data within walking catchment area of each school, consider installation of digital speed signs in the school zones.
- Allow bicyclists to leave before walkers during dismissals to avoid conflicts between walkers and bicyclists on the sidewalks. Elementary school children are generally encouraged to still ride their bikes on the sidewalks. As they grow older, faster, and more experienced, children should be riding in the roadway on the far right hand side of the street.

Evaluation

- Collect data on how students arrive and leave school by mode on a yearly basis to continue to monitor effectiveness of implementation of strategies.
- Collect yearly parent's surveys evaluating parents change in perception of safety of walking and biking to and from school.

During the third meeting of the SRTS team, the draft strategies were discussed and prioritized. The following strategies were prioritized to be worked on during year one of implementation. Resources have also been identified to help guide implementation of the strategies.

Eagle Lake One Year Action Plan 2015-2016

Strategy	Strategy Lead	Partners	Actions in Year 1	Resources and Examples
Improve crosswalk visibility through continental striping at key crossings	School and City	SHIP*	Identify additional paint and maintenance costs and consider SHIP grant for cost of paint; city will have to provide labor and maintenance	
Hold a community bicycle rodeo in Eagle Lake to support bicycle safety curriculum and to encourage parent participation and learning along with students	School	City, SHIP, and Greater Mankato Bike/Walk Advocates	Involve walk and bike advocates into planning rodeo and solicit volunteers Identify material need for bicycle rodeo including helmets and secure small grant for cost Promote rodeo and require children be accompanied by a parent or guardian as parents understand of proper biking skills is need for the skills to be reinforced at home	National Center for Safe Routes to School's Map-a-Route Tool: http://maps.walkbiketoschool.org MnDOT SRTS Website: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/toolkit.html Bozeman, MT: http://www.bsd7.org/district/safe_routes_to_school
Establish a walking school bus or bike train program as a way of providing adult supervision and safety at crossings	School	SHIP and PTO	Solicit interested parents with children living on the north side of Eagle Lake to volunteer to walk with the group of children one day a week/possibly arrange a time for students to meet at the County Highway 27 crosswalk to cross as a group and arrive at school together	National Center for Safe Routes to School Messaging Guide: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/education/index.cfm National Center of Safe Routes to School Media Guide: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/media/index.cfm Rochester SEE.SAFE.SMART. Campaign: http://www.co.olmsted.mn.us/planning/programs_projects/ActiveLiving/Pages/SEESAFESMARTCampaign.aspx
Build on success of holding Walk and Bike to School Day by instituting monthly walk and bike to school days and eventually weekly Walking and Biking Wednesdays	Schools	PTO	Register walk and bike to school day with national walking day organization for promotion Encourage parents to walk and bike to school with children Test remote drop off side for bused students and possibly children dropped off by parents to incorporate them into the event	Walk and Bike to School Information: http://walkbiketoschool.org/
Create safe routes map to school for Eagle Lake Elementary	City	School	Seek map of all traffic signals, stop signs, yield signs, and crossings from city to use to help identify suggested walking routes Hold a meeting of key stakeholders on the SRTS team including the city engineer, superintendents, principals, and parents to help identify routes Finalize routes and create map for inclusion into Wellness Packet	National Center for Safe Routes to School Guide: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/dropoff_pickup/index.cfm

*Statewide Health Improvement Program

Engineering Implementation

For engineering strategies, the SRTS team needs to coordinate with their respective city and county as both will need to endorse and manage any infrastructure improvements along roadways. The SRTS team should foster a working relationship with both the city street supervisor and county engineer conveying to them the desires of the team when it comes to future roadway projects. If the team is interested in pursuing a standalone SRTS infrastructure project, such as applying for the Transportation Alternatives Program or State SRTS solicitations, it needs to also coordinate with MnDOT and Region Nine Development Commission. Engineering projects take time to plan and coordinate to see the project accomplished.

Non-Engineering Implementation

Non-engineering strategies can be implemented much easier than engineering improvements and do not necessarily need city or county approval. They may require coordination with other organizations and stakeholders to ensure participation and buy-in. For example, walking school buses need volunteer coordination, route identification, and buy-in from parents to allow the program to be successful.

MnDOT has created an implementation form to help identify action steps needed to implement strategies. This form is located in the appendices at the end of this plan. The form allows for brainstorming to identify the needs of a project or program including potential partners, supplies needed, resources, volunteers, and other considerations. Using this form can help to identify barriers or challenges early to allow them to be addressed and overcome. It can also help identify whether the program can be funded internally or if external funds need to be acquired for implementation.

Safe Routes to School Guide

The National Center for Safe Routes to School offers an online guide, tools, and best practice examples from other SRTS programs around the country to support the development of SRTS programs. Readers of the online guide can pick and choose specific topics based on their interests and needs, such as guidelines for creating a walking school bus program, tools to create school route maps, and ways to include parents in the SRTS program. The online guide supports SRTS programs by providing a one-stop shop on all aspects of SRTS under each of the *Five E*'s.

The online guide can be found at: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/index.cfm

Implementation Resources

Transportation Alternatives Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a federally-funded program through the most recent Federal Transportation Bill. The program combined the old Federal Safe Routes to School Program with the Transportation Enhancements program which funded many community trails in Minnesota and the Scenic Byway program. Many of the eligible uses of funding of those programs remain eligible under TAP. Eligible uses are bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, including trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, crossing facilities, and sign-age. Currently, the TAP is solicited by MnDOT District Area Transportation Partnerships (ATP) typically on a yearly basis with announcement of the solicitation in the fall. Eagle Lake is located within MnDOT District 7 ATP. Communities interested in applying for TAP funding should contact their Regional Development Organization transportation planner.

District 7 ATP website: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d7/atp/index.html

Statewide Health Improvement Program

Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is a statewide program funded by the Minnesota Department of Health and managed by the local county public health or county health boards. SHIP has funded smaller non-infrastructure projects for SRTS school programs and activities. Solicitations and timelines vary by SHIP group. Interested applicants should contact their county public health departments to receive specific information and timelines.

Blue Earth County SHIP website:

http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/ship/communities/blue-earth.html

Minnesota Safe Routes to School Funding

In 2013, state lawmakers supplied funding for a state program with funding potentially available for planning assistance and non-infrastructure implementation activities. This action was in response to the consolidation of the Federal SRTS program into the Transportation Alternatives Program. In 2014, the state legislature included funding for state SRTS infrastructure projects as a part of the capital improvement bonding bill. At the time of the drafting of this plan little information was available on the structure or timeline of any state SRTS grant solicitation. SRTS teams should continue to follow MnDOT announcements for details on any upcoming solicitations.

Minnesota Safe Routes to School website: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/grants.html

Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program

This funding source, dedicated for arts, culture, and natural resource projects, was created by state referendum. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages the trails portion of this fund, delivering grants for regionally significant trails and parks. The solicitation for these grants is statewide, making the funding competitive.

Legacy funding website: http://www.legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc

Local Trail Connections Program

This program offers grants to local units of government to promote relatively short trail connections between where people live and desirable locations, not to develop significant new trails. Eligible projects include acquisition and development of trails facilities. Projects must result in a trail linkage that is immediately available for use by the general public. The program is managed by the Minnesota DNR and is solicited on an annual basis in the fall/winter.

DNR Local Connections website: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_local.html

Regional Trails Grant Program

Trail projects located outside of the seven county Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area are eligible to apply for Regional Trails Grant Program funding if the project has regional significance. Regional significant trails draw users from not only the community but from the region and state. Trails connecting to a larger network or neighboring community may be considered regionally significant. Counties, cities, and townships are eligible applicants. The DNR manages this program with the solicitation generally in the fall/winter.

Regional Trials website: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_regional.html

Federal Recreational Trail Program

The Federal Recreational Trail Program is used for development of motorized, non-motorized, and diversified trails by providing funding assistance. Eligible uses include maintenance/restoration of existing trails, development of trails, and safety education programs related to trail use. Local units of government must be sponsors of the project and are encouraged to coordinate with a local trails organization. The program is managed out of the DNR in the Division of Parks and Trails and is solicited on an annual basis in the fall/winter.

Federal Trails website: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_federal.html

Highway Safety Improvement Program

This is a new program under the MAP-21 Federal Transportation Bill, which is used primarily for improving safety in and around state highways and county highways. Often, funding goes towards improving motor vehicle safety, but there is no clause that prohibits the use of funds to go towards bicycle and pedestrian safety. Cities and counties can combine Highway Safety Improvement Program funding for motorized vehicle, non-motorized vehicle, and pedestrian safety when looking to update state and county highways.

Highway Safety Improvement Program website: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng/safety/funding/

Local Funding

Use of local funds is required by nearly all funding sources to match the grants. Local governments and school districts need to consider how a match will be acquired before an application is submitted for infrastructure funding. Some communities implement complex local government financing tools such as local sales tax or bonding for SRTS programs and projects. There are two categories of local funding and budgeting through which to pursue SRTS funding at the local level: capital improvement projects and operating budgets.

Capital Improvement Projects

Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) are new infrastructure projects implemented using local public funds. These projects are identified through a capital improvement planning process which is tied to the local budget. During the planning process, the local government identifies and prioritizes capital improvements such as new roads and sidewalks, and then allocates funding for construction at least one year before the project is implemented.

Because CIPs may take a couple of years to complete, CIPs tend to have multi-year budgets. However, most CIPs have the capacity to make changes and fund newly identified projects and pressing needs. A local transportation planner or engineer serving on a SRTS team could assist in identifying infrastructure projects and including them in the capital improvement planning process.

Operating Budgets

Local operating budgets may provide avenues for non-infrastructure programs and infrastructure maintenance and repair. Transportation budgets may include funding for pedestrian and bicycle programs or school zone improvements. Police or public safety budgets may include funding for traffic law enforcement or school crossing guards. Public school budgets may include opportunities for safety education or walking and biking encouragement programs. Recreation budgets may include funding for after school programs. Including a representative from these departments on a SRTS taskforce or committee allows complementary sources of funding to be more easily identified.

Most local operating budgets include funding for general maintenance and repair of infrastructure. Depending on the size of the budget, these funds can be used for inexpensive projects such as striping crosswalks or installing sign-age, or more costly projects such as installing curb ramps.

Other Funding Sources

Foundations

There are institutions throughout the country that provide funding to non-profit organizations. The Foundation Center is an excellent source for potential funding sources. Narrow your funding possibilities by first using the geographic region of giving tab. Look under categories for transportation, health, environment, and community building.

Businesses

Local corporations and businesses could be a source for SRTS program funding assistance. Businesses may support your program with cash, prizes, event sponsorship, and/or donations such as printing services. It's good to ask your parent leaders where they work; they often can help you get a foot in the door. When contacting a company, ask for information about their community giving programs.

Fundraising

Statistically speaking, individuals give more money than corporations and foundations combined. You can begin a local fund drive by working within your existing network of team leaders, and outreach to the larger community. Many programs have raised funds by holding special events. Use the SRTS theme to attract funding, such as hold a walkathon or biking event. You can also choose more traditional fundraising efforts, such as bake sales, concerts, talent shows, etc. Many PTOs have funds to distribute to school programs and often schools have safety funding. Contact your local parent teacher organization and the school district to see if there is a method for applying for a grant.

The Safe Routes to School Plan for Eagle Lake provides the basis for implementing a successful SRTS program. The planning process consisted of setting out a vision and goals for the process, collecting and analyzing information, determining barriers and challenges to walking and biking, determining strategies, and creating an action plan to implement the identified strategies.

The plan is a living document, meant to guide the development of SRTS projects and programs. The plan determines suggested strategies and action steps to help reach the goals of the plan, as well as, walking and biking throughout the community. As implementation occurs, additional action steps may need to be discussed and determine. The success of the SRTS program relies on the continued work and commitment of the SRTS team. It is also dependent on the continued evaluation of the effectiveness of the SRTS strategies. Through continued evaluation, the SRTS team can quantify and qualify the benefits of SRTS program. With a successful SRTS program, there will be more children walking and biking safely to and from school, developing healthy choices from an early age, and enjoying a new standard of quality of life in the community.