

ORANGE COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: May 28, 2013

AGENDA ITEM No. 13-05-(2)-13

ACTION ITEM: (Y/N) N

**SUBJECT:** Safe Routes to School Initiative Update

**INFO. CONTACT:** Pam Jones, Interim Exec. Dir. Aux. Services **PHONE:** (919) 732-8126

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Safe Routes to Schools PowerPoint.
2. Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Action Plan OVERVIEW.

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**PURPOSE:** To receive information regarding the Safe Routes to School Initiative from Abigaile Pittman with the Orange County Planning Department.

**BACKGROUND:** Community representatives, county, town and school staff have collaborated to facilitate a report regarding the Safe Routes to School initiative. This initiative was begun in Denmark about 30 years ago to promote children walking or bicycling to school; and was established in the United States via the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU). The program, while Federally funded, is administered by the North Carolina Department of Transportation in this state.

Ms. Abigaile Pittman, a Transportation Planner with the Orange County Planning Department, will present a brief report regarding the current status of the initiative as well as plans for implementation and follow up in the future.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** There is no financial impact at this time.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Superintendent recommends the Board receive the information regarding the Safe Routes to School Initiative, and comment as desired.

## Orange County received a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Action Plan Service Award in July 2013.

The Plan development process included visioning and goals, and map working sessions with the project staff, and the steering committee. OC Schools was represented in this process.



In 2009 MCDOT contracted Greenways, Incorporated and Greene Transportation Solutions to work with County staff, local agency representatives, and Orange School Team leaders to develop the final draft of the SRTS Plan, which was completed in December 2012.

[www.ocgov.com/transportation](http://www.ocgov.com/transportation)



## The Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Program is a federally funded grant reimbursement program providing an opportunity for communities to improve conditions for bicycling and walking to school.



[www.ocgov.com/transportation](http://www.ocgov.com/transportation)



## The Safe Routes to School Program . . . . .

works with schools, local governments and agencies, advocacy and nonprofit organizations, and public health professionals at a grassroots level to identify improvements that can help make bicycling and walking to and from school a safe and healthy transportation alternative.



www.nhtsa.gov/safeschools

SAFETY

## Safe Routes to School Goals

- Where it's safe, get kids walking and biking
- Where it's *not* safe, make changes
- The primary reason for this is to promote and improve pedestrian and bicycle travel for supported schools.



www.nhtsa.gov/safeschools

SAFETY

## Benefits of SRTS Program

- Improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Reduce traffic congestion around schools
- Reduce emissions
- Improve children's health



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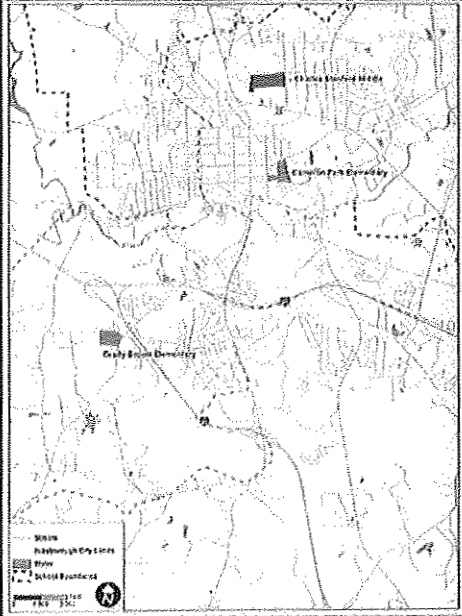
## SRTS Program Project Funding

- ☑ SAFETEA-LU funds are available for the program under its non-competitive rolling grant cycle.
- ☑ 100% grant; no local match required
- ☑ At least 70% must be spent on infrastructure
- ☑ At least 30% must be spent on non-infrastructure activities

SAFETEA-LU is Title 23, Subtitle A, Chapter 555 of the U.S. Code, 23 U.S.C. 555.




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**3 Chosen County School Sites:**


- Charles Stanford Middle
- Cameron Park Elementary
- Grady Brown Elementary

- K-8 Schools
- Located inside or adjacent to the Town of Hillsborough
- A thorough inventory of existing conditions demonstrated a high measure of possible results and outcomes of the SRTS Program and projects

National Center for Safe Routes to School | [www.safesitesinfo.org](http://www.safesitesinfo.org) 

### Examples of SRTS Projects

- All projects must be within two miles of a K-8 school
- Both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects
- Sidewalks and Multi-use Paths
- Crossing Improvement Projects
- Traffic Calming Measures
- On-campus Improvements: sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle racks, curb ramps
- Off-campus Improvements: bicycle racks, crossing guards, left-turn restrictions, alleviating conflicts with parking areas
- Pedestrian signals at signalized intersections
- Training volunteers



## Immediate Future Steps for SKYS

↳ Start final review of Plan

↳ Late summer into the fall – adoption of the SKYS Plan by OC Schools, the Town of Hillsborough, and the OC Board of County Commissioners

↳ Establish joint SKYS Action Plan Advisory Committee that would be responsible for advocating plan implementation and assist with programming and grant writing, evaluating plan progress, and assessing plan priorities

↳ While subsequent implementation action steps are outlined and prioritized in the Plan, all of which would be subject to the recommendations of the SKYS Action Plan Advisory Committee and the approval of the BOCC, School Board, and Town of Hillsborough

## **Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Action Plan OVERVIEW**

May 28, 2013

### **SRTS PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program was established in the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). It is a federally-funded grant reimbursement program providing an opportunity for communities to improve conditions for bicycling and walking to school. Section 1404 of SAFETEA-LU mandates that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) administer this program within the state, providing financial assistance to state, local, and regional agencies, including non-profit organizations that demonstrate an ability to meet the requirements of the program.

The purposes of the SRTS program are to:

- Enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school.
- Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.
- Facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

The NC SRTS Program works with schools, local governments and agencies, advocacy and non-profit organizations, and public health professionals at a grassroots level to identify improvements that can help make bicycling and walking to and from school a safe and healthy transportation alternative.

### **ORANGE COUNTY SRTS ACTION PLAN BACKGROUND**

Orange County received a Safe Routes to School (SRST) Action Plan Service Award in July 2008 for planning assistance to prepare an Action Plan for Grady A. Brown Elementary School, Cameron Park Elementary School and C.W. Stanford Middle School.

In 2009 NCDOT contracted Greenways, Incorporated and Greene Transportation Solutions to work with County staff, local agency representatives, School Team leaders and principals of the three schools to identify non-motorized infrastructure improvements that enhance safety for walking and bicycling.

The Plan development process included a visioning and goals session and map working session with the project staff, steering committee, and consultants. This was followed by comprehensive fieldwork and a public workshop that sought input from residents,

including parents, teachers, principals, children, Town of Hillsborough staff, and Orange County staff. This input and analysis led to the development of a draft plan that consisted of an analysis of existing conditions, and recommendations in the areas of engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation (the essential '5 E's' of the program).

A draft Plan was completed, reviewed locally, and comments were submitted to Greenways, Incorporated for inclusion in the final draft.

The draft Plan was reviewed by the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Division and a final draft was completed and returned to the Planning Staff in December 2012.

Staff has been reviewing the final draft and developing recommended initial actions for adoption.

Orange County Schools, the Town of Hillsborough, and Orange County will be asked to adopt the Plan. Following adoption, the next recommended step in the Plan will be to establish a SRTS Action Plan Advisory Committee that would be responsible for advocating plan implementation and assist with programming and grant writing, evaluating plan progress, and assessing plan priorities.

#### SRTS Action Plan Framework and Goals

The Action Plan with its recommendations was developed with a comprehensive, framework approach addressing all 5 E's of the SRTS program – engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOSEN SCHOOL SITES**

The three schools chosen for the SRTS Action Plan are part of the Orange County school system, and all are located inside or adjacent to the Town of Hillsborough: Grady Brown Elementary School; CW Stanford Middle School; and Cameron Park Elementary School. A comprehensive, multi-faceted approach was taken to examine existing conditions including the collection of data from parent surveys and student travel tallies, site work and field interviews, and area mapping. A thorough inventory of existing conditions was assembled at each school site to provide a baseline by which to measure the results and outcome of the SRTS Program at the community, school and street levels.

Grady Brown Elementary School – located on New Grady Brown School road just off Orange Grove Road

- The school is south of I-40 and the roadway bridge has very narrow shoulders
- There are multiple two-lane rural roadways that pose safety barriers for school-age cyclists and pedestrians



- There are no sidewalks or pedestrian sidewalks or pedestrian facilities of any kind leading to and away from the school
- There are no bicycle racks on campus
- There are no crossing guards
- Tallies: 240 students were driven by their parents; 225 students took the bus; 0 students walked; and 0 students bicycled
- Unofficial bus stops lack clear designation and safe harbor in some locations
- Existing safety concerns expressed by parents: distance; traffic speeds along routes (45 and 55 mph); traffic volumes along routes; lack of sidewalks or pathways; and unsafe intersections and crossings
- Crime not a significant issue of concern based on field analysis and public input
- Motorist's behaviors observed as "good" on campus and "fair" along Orange Grove Road.
- Pedestrian behaviors observed to be generally safe around the school
- Minor backups of automobile traffic during drop-off times, with more congested backups during pickup times (causing some thru-traffic weaving and blind spots)
- There is a clear school zone and pedestrian crossing signage along New Grady Brown School Road
- There are on-campus sidewalks along the building front, adjacent to the car drop-off line

CW Stanford Middle School – located next to Orange High School inside a neighborhood with residential roads

- The school is flanked by US 70 and Orange High School Road
- There is no sidewalk connectivity to neighborhoods and streets in the vicinity of the school; and the residential land use and street pattern on the eastern side of the school prevents a direct connection to the school, currently requiring students to use US 70
- There are no bicycle racks on campus
- US 70 presents a serious safety threat for pedestrians and bicyclists because of its lack of infrastructure, high speeds, and high traffic volumes.
- There are very few traffic calming facilities in the area of the school
- Tallies: 357 students were driven by their parents; 211 students took the bus; 3 students walked; and 0 students bicycled
- Existing safety concerns expressed by parents: distance; traffic volumes along routes; traffic speeds along routes; safety of intersections and crossings; and the lack of sidewalks or pathways
- Motorist's behaviors observed as "good" on campus, "fair" along Orange High School Road, and "bad" on US 70
- Crime not a significant issue of concern based on field analysis and public input
- Minor backups of automobile traffic during drop-off and pickup times
- There are possibilities of connecting neighborhoods to the school using trails and greenways along current easements and "cut throughs"
- On-campus sidewalks and crosswalks are adequate

Cameron Park Elementary School – located next to St. Matthews Episcopal Church on St. Mary's Road near downtown Hillsborough, with adjacent small businesses and low density residential development

- The traffic volumes are very high on St. Mary's Road, especially during commuter hours
- There are no sidewalks or bicycle lanes in the vicinity of the school
- There are multiple roadways that pose safety barriers and challenges for elementary school age pedestrians and bicyclists
- Tallies: 237 students were driven by their parents; 187 students took the bus; 19 students carpooled; 3 students walked; and 0 students bicycled
- Existing safety concerns expressed by parents: traffic speeds along routes; traffic volumes along routes; distance; safety of intersections and crossings; and the lack of sidewalks or pathways
- Motorist's behaviors observed as "fair" on campus, and "bad" on St. Mary's Road
- Significant backups of automobile traffic during drop-off and pickup times that impact off and on-site traffic, turning movements, and relate to dangerous vehicular maneuvers
- Not all curb ramps comply with ADA regulations
- The existing bicycle rack on the school's campus is situated where only one side can be used and is not covered
- There is a clearly defined school zone on St. Mary's Road
- Besides the crossing on St. Mary's Road at Thomas Ruffin Road, there are no marked crosswalks in the vicinity of the school
- There is an established trail connecting to the adjacent property to the school grounds that can give children access without having to walk along St. Mary's Road

## **SRTS PROJECTS**

The SRTS program allows for a great variety of programs that can be implemented. Eligible SRTS projects can be bundled as infrastructure and non-infrastructure. Funding can include training volunteers, street crossings, safety and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), bicycle/pedestrian lanes, etc. All projects must be within two miles of a K-8 school.

However, there are projects that are not allowed. The following are ineligible activities:

- Recurring costs, such as school crossing guards
- Pick-up and drop-off sites
- Educational focus buses
- Bus stop improvements

The NCDOT SRTS Program will fund only those activities that specifically plan for improvements and programs that promote safe, active travel to K-8 schools and while project inclusion in the adopted plan is encouraged, not all projects must be included in the adopted SRTS plan.

A variety of sources were consulted during the development of the infrastructure recommendations:

- Plans and studies
- Existing conditions
- The Consultant's fieldwork inventory
- Public input
- Noted patterns of development

Grady Brown Elementary Projects Identified in the SRTS Action Plan:

- Project #1: New Grady Brown School Road Sidewalk and Midblock Crossing
- Project #2: Orange Grove Road / I-40 Bridge Pedestrian Facilities
- Project #3: Oakdale Road Safety Improvements
- Project #4: Patriots Pointe Trail Connection

CW Stanford Middle School Projects Identified in the SRTS Action Plan:

- Corridor Improvement Projects (8) (sidewalks, multi-use paths) along Orange High School Road, US 70, Harold Latta Road, Miller Road, NC 86, NC 57, and along new off-road multi-use paths.
- Crossing Improvement Projects (9) along US 70, Orange High School Road, NC 86, and Gwen Road.
- Traffic Calming Measures along US 70.
- On-campus Improvements (sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle racks, curb ramps).
- Enhance 'cut throughs' to school from neighborhoods to the north and west.
- Follow Town of Hillsborough's sidewalk/greenway planning.

Cameron Park Elementary School Projects Identified in the SRTS Action Plan:

- Corridor Improvement Projects (11) (sidewalks, bicycle lanes, greenway trails) along Cameron Street, St. Mary's Road, US 70, Queen Street, Thomas Ruffin Street, and several new off-road sites.
- Crossing Improvement Projects (4) along Thomas Ruffin Street, St. Mary's Road, Cameron Street, and Churton Street.
- Traffic Calming Measures along Queen Street, Thomas Ruffin Street, Cameron Street, and St. Mary's Road.
- Off-campus Improvements (bicycle racks, crossing guards, left-turn restrictions, alleviating conflicts with parking areas).
- Pedestrian signals at signalized intersections along Churton Street.

## **PROJECT FUNDING**

The adopted plan will enhance opportunities for Orange County and the Town of Hillsborough for obtaining Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grants to implement the Action Plan. While adoption is not a requirement for project funding, it does demonstrate to NCDOT local commitment to the objectives of the SRTS program, and would serve to enhance project funding consideration in a competitive atmosphere.

There were some revisions to federal and state funding sources in December 2012 that will impact the funding sources for the Safe Routes to School program. Specifically, the federal Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bill (MAP-21) SRTS program direct allocation funds were removed. However, NCDOT staff has advised the Planning staff that there will continue to be SAFETEA-LU funds available for the program under its non-competitive rolling grant cycle. It is anticipated that these funds will be continued on an annual basis. The SRTS program is a reimbursement program that does not require a local match (100% federally funded). When applying for federal reimbursement grants, the County and the Town should budget funds for projects within their respective jurisdictional limits, and set up accounts for expending those funds until NCDOT has reimbursed project costs. Although no local match is permitted, local governments are allowed to contribute to a project.

After identifying projects from the Plan to implement, the County would apply through the NCDOT Division 7 office. Project funding is based on project priority with as much local support as possible (Schools, PTA, Superintendent, municipalities, BOCC, supporting plans, etc.), and projects from the Plan with multiple purposes/greater impact are favored. If, for example, a proposed project for CW Stanford Middle School met the objectives of the SRTS program, but also happened to provide a benefit to the Orange High School, that is acceptable and even encouraged.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The SRTS Action Plan emphasizes that successful implementation will require the dedication of local government staff, commitment of the school system and local schools, the creation of a SRTS Advisory Committee, and the continued support of local advocates and parents. The recommended first step is the adoption of the Plan by Orange County, Orange County Schools, and the Town of Hillsborough. Adoption of the SRTS Action Plan demonstrates local commitment and incentivizes NCDOT to fund local projects. The second recommended step is to establish a SRTS Action Plan Advisory Committee (SRTS APAC). Planning staff's initial thought is that the SRTS Advisory Committee be a sub-committee of the OUTBoard, supplemented by additional staff from other agencies/jurisdictions as needed. The Advisory Committee would be responsible for advocating plan implementation and assist with programming and grant writing, evaluating plan progress, and assessing plan priorities. Multiple subsequent implementation action steps are outlined and prioritized in the Plan, the fruition of which would be subject to the recommendations of the Advisory Committee and the approval of the BOCC, School Board, and Town of Hillsborough.

### Lead Planning Agency Role

NCDOT recommends that the County serve as the Lead Planning Agency, but the details of this responsibility will need to be worked out between Orange County, Orange County Schools, and the Town of Hillsborough as an initial step in advancing implementation of the SRTS Action Plan.