

Chapter 4 – The Safe Routes to School Plan: Writing The Action Plan

“I think the Plan was a great way to document the proposed changes and outcomes. It was something that all Team members could easily understand, and because it was all encompassing, it was a quick way to evaluate our efforts.”
- Mason Elementary SRTS Team member

Once your Team has gathered and analyzed all necessary data, it's time to sit down and write your action plan. An example Safe Routes to School Action Plan can be found in the Appendix, a-21.

SRTS Goals and Objectives

Safe Routes to School programs have two types of overarching goals:

- 1) to improve the safety of those who walk and bike to and from school and
- 2) to increase the numbers of those who walk and bike to and from school;

Every school is unique, however, so it is important to tailor your program objectives and action steps to meet the needs of your community as you work to achieve these goals. In an area where walking and biking is quite prevalent, for example, your initial objectives may focus largely on improving safety. A school community with adequate sidewalks but few children walking might develop objectives with a strong focus on increasing physical activity. In a community where long car lines form in the morning and afternoon, the objectives may be targeted to decreasing traffic congestion around the school. Each type of objective suggests different action steps and different methods of evaluation. Use your School Transportation Assessment to identify your community's most prominent needs and then write objectives to address those needs.

Writing Your Objectives

Objectives define what you want to see happen, who it will affect, and how success will be

Sample Safe Routes to School Objectives

- Implement 75% of high-priority infrastructure projects within two years
- Reduce the average speed in the school zone by 50%
- Provide bicycle and pedestrian safety information to all members of the school community on a yearly basis
- Increase by 50% the numbers of walking and bicycling trips made to and from school by students and parents living within one mile of the school
- Promote physical activity among 3rd through 5th graders by providing monthly walking and bicycling events
- Reduce drop-off and pick-up car traffic by 25% over the school year



Walkers cheer the Bike Train as it makes its way toward Mason Elementary. Mason set the reduction of car traffic by 25% as one of its objectives.

measured. The program's activities, or action steps, will follow from these objectives.

As you write your objectives, consider your target audience. An objective might be "To reduce morning traffic congestion around the school by 25%." This likely means that your program will seek to address all motorized vehicle traffic at peak morning commuter hours. A more specific objective would be "To reduce traffic congestion around the school by 25% as measured by car drop-offs/pickups." This means, then, that your program efforts will be directed at changing the behavior of families that drive their children to school. If your objective is to increase the percentage of school community members who walk or bicycle to school by 50%, this means that your program efforts might address all students in the school, including those who might ride the bus, as well as parents and school staff. Including a more specific target audience, such as "students who live within one mile of the school" or "all third graders" will likely limit your program outreach to those students.

As you write your objectives, consider how you will measure success in quantifiable ways. Some objectives set target percentages for

change, others lend themselves to counting numbers of participants or people reached by information. When an objective includes a before - and after - comparison (increase or decrease in percentages), be sure that you have the appropriate baseline information to be able to compare conditions before and after your program. If, for example, you intend to reduce the average speed in the school zone, you will need to have a well-defined school zone and accurate speed data for that area. Similarly, if you are counting the number of journeys made on a certain route, you will need to collect before and after data. (See Chapter 11, Evaluation)

Action Steps

Your action steps should follow directly from the goals and objectives. What will it take to achieve them? Typically it takes a combination of engineering, enforcement, education, and encouragement to get it all done.

Engineering Measures

Your SRTS Team should review the report submitted by the Engineering and Enforcement Task Force (see Chapter 3) and discuss adopting the recommendations regarding infrastructure changes into the Plan. It is useful to have the engineer or another member of the Engineering and



Crosswalks and clear signage are basic elements of engineering measures around schools.

Enforcement Task Force present for this discussion. The Team should determine and designate the priority of each adopted engineering measure (high, medium, or low).

The Team should also determine which infrastructure projects are “short-term” and which - generally those that require significant funding - should be designated as “long-term” projects.

See Chapter 7 for descriptions of Engineering measures.

Enforcement Measures

The Engineering and Enforcement Report will provide your Team with recommendations on enforcement measures for identified “Hot Spot” areas. Again, the Team should review and prioritize these items before adopting them into the Safe Routes to School Plan. (It is also helpful to have a law enforcement officer or another member of the Engineering and Enforcement Task Force present for this discussion.) The Team



Speed trailers near schools help enforce speed limits by showing motorists how fast they are going compared to the posted speed.

should also consider other enforcement items that impact safe bicycle and pedestrian travel to and from school that are not specific to a particular “Hot Spot.” These may include issues related to enforcement of policies,

such as school arrival and dismissal policies or district-wide transportation policies. Your Team may want to address city, county, or state policies or legislation that impact enforcement issues around your school as well.

See Chapter 8 for descriptions of Enforcement measures.



At B.B. Harris Elementary, the SRTS Plan includes pedestrian safety training through PE classes for all students.

Education Activities

It is very important to work closely with the school staff in planning education activities. Some of the activities may be integrated into the school day, and others may be extra-curricular. Even when extra-curricular activities are planned, it is critical to consult the school’s calendar. If possible, create a plan for a full school year; be prepared, however, to be flexible, as situations and schedules often change within a school. (See Chapter 6, Working with Schools.)

See Chapter 9 for descriptions of Education activities.

Encouragement Activities

Encouragement activities often reflect the interests and “flavor” of a school; this is where school community members can get



Students in Decatur gather to meet their "Walking School Bus" early in the morning. Walking School Buses make walking a social and fun encouragement activity.

quite creative and have a lot of fun. It is important to remember, however, to keep your activities connected to your goals and objectives and within range of what can be accomplished with the time and material resources available to you. It is also very important to work closely with school staff to plan these activities.

See Chapter 10, for descriptions of Encouragement activities.

Timelines and Task Assignments

As you write your Plan, include a category that indicates a timeline for completion. Create another category that outlines specific tasks needed to accomplish the action steps and who will be responsible for carrying out the tasks. For example, if one of your action steps is to provide bicycle parking, you will need to determine funding for a bicycle rack, site the rack appropriately, make the purchase, and install the rack; different individuals may be assigned to complete each one of those steps.

Methods of Evaluation

Include in your Plan specifics on how you will evaluate your progress. What tools will you use? How often will you collect data? Though results may seem a "long way down the road," as you initiate your program, it is important for your Team to agree on your measures of success and methods of evaluation from the outset and state them clearly in your Safe Routes to School Plan.

It is also helpful to build in methods to evaluate the program on an on-going basis. Include in your written plan a column called "Status." (See Sample Action Plan in Appendix, a-21). This column will help you keep track of your progress on your action items, providing a place to record results. By conducting on-going evaluation, your Team can decide along the way if modifications to the Plan are needed. See Chapter 11, Evaluation.

Putting it All Together

Your School Transportation Assessment, other supporting documentation (maps, aerial photos, concept drawings) along with your written action plan, comprise your Safe Routes to School Plan. Put all the pieces together in an organized way to form an attractive and easy-to-use document. Your Plan will serve as both an internal working document as well as a public document. When seeking funding, the Plan will show funders what the problems are, what you intend to achieve and how you arrived at your objectives and action steps.

Publicize Your Plan

Your Safe Routes to School Plan is an organized and concise way to show your stakeholders, as well as the general public, what you are doing. Be sure to send copies to all members of the Safe Routes to School Team, the Engineering



The SRTS Plan for two schools is presented to the Decatur City Commission.

and Enforcement Task Force, and all of your potential partners. To let the broader school community know of your Plan, you can post it on the school's website; use school and community newsletters to refer readers to the site. It may also be important to present the Plan at a PTA meeting, neighborhood meetings, or a meeting of the City Council or County Commissioners.

If your Plan involves any strongly contentious issues around infrastructure changes - issues involving street design, trails or sidewalks that might impact neighbors - it is important

to hold a public input meeting. Be sure to have in attendance members of your Engineering and Enforcement Task Force who can address technical issues or political issues.

Use Your Plan!

The Safe Routes to School Plan should guide your activities as you move into the implementation phase of the program. It will help you prioritize your action steps and organize who will do what. At SRTS Team meetings, the Plan is a good visual to keep everyone "on the same page." It is often helpful to revisit the overall goals and objectives periodically to be sure that your activities continue to support your objectives.

Use the Plan as a flexible, working document. Revise and update it as necessary. Periodically update the column entitled "Status" so that you can keep track of progress on each of the activities. You can also use the "Status" column to record outcomes of the activities; this will help you to evaluate your program at each step of the way.

Tips!

- Include in each of your "E's" some short-term, easily achieved activities that can be implemented within the first months of the start of your program. This will give your efforts some positive visibility in the school community, and build momentum within your SRTS Team.
- Publicize and celebrate successes; let the school community know when you have achieved something.