Active Journey to School and the Safe Routes to School Program

Regular physical activity is important for health. Among children and adolescents, walking and bicycling to school can contribute to physical activity levels and fitness (1-4). However, the proportion of children who walk or bicycle to school dropped from 40.7% in 1969 to 12.9% in 2001 (5). Several factors may shape trends in physically active transportation to school including increasing travel distances and car ownership (6), safety, and the physical infrastructure supporting physically active trips (6-8). Creating child-friendly settings around schools and providing skills to safely negotiate the environment can be keys to promoting an active journey to school (9).

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program was created as part of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005. The U.S. Congress initially authorized $612 million to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of infrastructure improvements and other initiatives in and around schools to enable and encourage all children to walk and bicycle to school. This state data summary provides local information on how the SRTS program has been implemented using data on project obligations between fiscal years 2005 and 2009 from the Fiscal Management Information System of the Federal Highway Administration.

Inside this brief you will find a snapshot of characteristics of the SRTS program, a geographic look at obligation rates per student nationwide, and a summary of the types of projects that were implemented by improvement type, geographic level, and year.

Demographic and Geographic Characteristics and Federal Funding for Safe Routes to School in the United States, FY 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic and Geographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Median among States</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent change in K-8 student enrollment (2004-2005 to 2008-2009)</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>-8.93 — 14.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of counties that are rural</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0 — 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance to school in counties</td>
<td>2.8 mi.</td>
<td>0.8 — 4.4 mi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of children living in poverty</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8 — 27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Federal Funding Outcomes for Safe Routes to School, in States

| Percent of available funds that were obligated | 38% | 6 — 100% |
| Total per student funds available            | $15.02 | $5.97 — $81.35 |
| Total per student funds obligated            | $6.41 | $0.83 — $68.04 |
| Total number of projects obligated           | 36.5 | 3 — 154 |
| Percent of funds obligated to non-infrastructure projects | 18% | 0 — 91% |
| Number of years funding was obligated        | 3 | 1 — 4 |

Federal Funding Outcomes for Safe Routes to School, in Counties

| Percent of funds obligated in counties        | 74% | 0 — 100% |
| Number (percent) of counties obligating projects | 14.5 (25%) | 0 — 46% |
| Percent of funds obligated in low resource counties | 34% | 0 — 100% |
| Percent of counties implementing projects that had any mix of infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects | 35% | 0 — 100% |

Definitions and Data Sources: Demographics

Rural: Counties that are not in a metro area and that do not contain an urban area of at least 10,000 people (“non-core counties”). Source: 2003 Urban Influence Codes from the US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

Average distance to school: Population-weighted average distance from census block group centroids to the nearest school in the contiguous U.S. Source: Common Core of Data, 2004-2005 National Center for Education Statistics and 2000 U.S. Census

Poverty: Living in a household with income below the poverty level in 1999 ($16,895 for a family of four). Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Low resource counties: Counties having child poverty rates higher than the state-specific median. Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Funding obligations: Commitments from the federal government to reimburse states for eligible project costs. Source: Fiscal Management Information System (FMIS) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Other Sources: All other demographic data was obtained from the U.S. Census. Student enrollment data was obtained from the Common Core of Data, 2004-2005 and 2008-2009, from the National Center for Education Statistics.
Nationally:
◆ Overall, $221 million was obligated to implement 2,298 SRTS projects in the 50 U.S. states during fiscal years 2005-2009.
◆ Overall, the largest category of funding for local projects was ‘facilities for pedestrians and bicycles’, whereas for statewide/multi-county projects it was ‘preliminary engineering’.

The Typical State* Obligated:
◆ 38% of available funds, or $6.41 per student.
◆ 18% of funds to awareness, education, and enforcement activities to encourage walking and bicycling to school.
◆ 74% of funds to local projects (projects that were funded in a specific county).
◆ 34% of local project funding in counties with a high child poverty rate.

*For the purpose of this analysis, a typical state is one at the median, or midpoint of the distribution. Half the distribution is above this value and half is below.
Proportion of Available Safe Routes to School Funds that were Obligated and Total Funds Obligated, by Region and in the U.S., FY 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total Funds Obligated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>$20.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>$43.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>$90.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>$67.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$221.2 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions: Improvement Types

18: Planning — For planning related purposes.
15: Preliminary Engineering — For the preparation of plans, specifications, and estimates (PS&E), traffic, and related studies including field inspections, surveys, material testing, and borings.
17: Construction Engineering — Oversight of construction of roadways, structures, and traffic services facilities including additional design work after construction project is let.
28: Facilities for Pedestrians and Bicycles — For independent projects (not part of any other federal-aid highway project) to construct a facility to accommodate bicycle transportation and pedestrians.
21: Safety — For projects or a significant portion of a project that provides features or devices to enhance safety. For example, expenditures on projects designed to improve the safety of at-grade railroad crossings or for the construction of facilities dedicated to the enforcement of vehicle weight regulations.
38: Safety and Education for Pedestrians/Bicyclists — Safety and education for pedestrians and bicyclists

Other (all other codes) — All other improvement type codes.

Source: FMIS 4.0 Users Manual, Appendix F: Improvement Type Codes

Definitions: Program Codes

SAFETEA-LU legislation required that SRTS programs include both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects, and devote 10-30% of funding to non-infrastructure activities. Projects can be designated as infrastructure, non-infrastructure, or either.

Non-infrastructure activities include activities to encourage walking and bicycling to school, including public awareness campaigns, traffic education and enforcement, student education, and training of program staff (10-30% of funds).

Infrastructure activities include the planning, design and construction of infrastructure-related projects, such as sidewalk improvements, traffic calming devices, pedestrian/bicycle crossing improvements, and bicycle parking and facilities (70-90% of funds).

Either is a designation used for any activities falling into the discretionary 20% of funds.

Federal Funds Obligated for Safe Routes to School, by Program Code and Improvement Type, in the U.S., FY 2005-2009

[Diagram showing distribution of funds by program code and improvement type]
Definitions: Geographic Levels of Funding Obligation

“County-Level” projects are associated with a single county, while “Statewide/Multi-County” projects are indicated as being statewide or implemented in multiple counties.

Federal Funds Obligated for Safe Routes to School, by Fiscal Year and Improvement Type, in the U.S., FY 2005-2009

More Information and Links

To learn more about the Safe Routes to School program, visit:
- Federal Highway Administration http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes
- National Center for Safe Routes to School www.saferoutesinfo.org
- Safe Routes to School National Partnership www.saferoutespartnership.org

For resources and research on supporting active communities:
- Active Living Research www.activelivingresearch.org

References


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