



WINTER 2012



Coordinator's Corner

This month's newsletter continues the theme of our most recent newsletters that talk about the elements of a sustainable SRTS program. However, in contrast to the three items I discussed in our November newsletter - identify and support local champions; create and encourage partnerships; and Promote, Promote, Promote - this issue talks about how unanticipated events can trigger a really great SRTS program. The key is to recognize these triggers and act on them!



In this issue you'll hear about three SRTS programs that are benefitting from these unanticipated events. Jeff Anderson is featured in our Friends & Faces Column. Jeff got involved in the SRTS program at his daughter's school almost by accident and has established an on-going program that includes a successful bike train. You'll also hear how a member of the Loudoun County School Board asked about SRTS, setting in motion a look at walking and biking routes to school. Lastly, an article on a public meeting for the Fairfax County bicycle plan shows how even the youngest of transportation planners - students - can help identify safe routes to schools as part of a larger transportation project.

We also have some news about the latest round of infrastructure grants. The selection is complete and the recipients have been notified, so we can share the good news with you!

Finally, thanks to all who provided comments on our draft Virginia Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan. The review period is over and we anticipate publishing the final plan in mid-March. The next step is to begin implementing some of the short term action items; we will continue to use this newsletter to inform you of the changes that will occur as we implement those items.

-Rob Williams
VDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator

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CALENDAR

*Dates specific to VDOT SRTS Program are indicated with **

May 2012

9: First Ever Bike to School Day

Let us know about SRTS events in your community!

Click here to send your information so we can include it in our calendar.

Friends and Faces

Jeff Anderson is a parent of three children, all of whom bike to school at Wolftrap Elementary School in Vienna. Jeff spearheads the school's Safe Routes to School program, and as his photo shows, is a cyclocross racer in the mid-Atlantic region.



How did you get involved in SRTS?

It was by accident, really. My wife, kids and I are great bike enthusiasts. So when my oldest child started first grade at Wolftrap Elementary School, biking to school was a given. The only glitch was that the school lacked a bike rack. Two weeks after asking the principal about it, the rack appeared! Shortly after that I started a bike train, comprised mostly of my daughter's friends and some neighborhood kids. The bike train now operates monthly over a nearly 2-mile route.

I wasn't totally unaware of SRTS at the time, so I talked with someone at another school about their SRTS program. That got things started for me and now I understand what the states' SRTS program is and how the program can help Wolftrap. I work with the school's PTA to promote SRTS. The PTA is very supportive and is an outlet to the school community about SRTS events and activities.

Other than enjoying biking, why is SRTS important to you?

I am committed to getting more students to walk and bike to school as a way to reduce the number of cars

around the school during arrival and dismissal. All three of my children are at Wolftrap - in 5th, 3rd and 1st grade - so I'm in it for the long haul and believe that by the time my 1st grader leaves Wolftrap, things will be very different. My vision is for 20 or more bikes in the racks most days. We now have two racks, but we'll need a third with that many kids biking to school. And, I would like to see kiss and ride used as a convenience, not as the main mechanism for kids getting to school. This would greatly reduce the 90-100 cars using Wolftrap's Kiss & Ride each school day.

Is the school principal supportive?

Because principals have a lot of decision-making power, they can often influence decisions parents make about how their kids get to school. Our school principal has been great. She really understands SRTS and supports the program. Most importantly, she trusts parents to do the right thing in setting up and running programs and activities. This is key for SRTS successes at any school. Our principal's support for SRTS comes from her own active lifestyle. She runs marathons and is very visible about promoting health and well-being in the school. She understands the importance of educating the whole child. For example, she didn't object to the bike/walk challenge we held during SOL testing week, joining in our walking and biking to school activities.

How do the students feel about SRTS?

They love it. They get very excited about the bike and walk challenge, creating meeting points for walking and biking to school. They especially love the comraderie that comes with walking and biking to school together. Unlike the past, this initial socialization happens on the way to school, not in homeroom. Our students' enthusiasm is contagious! School board members, state delegate (Mark Keem), and a couple local professional bike racers have all joined in.

Have you applied for infrastructure funds to improve the walking and biking conditions around Wolftrap?

No, Wolftrap has good sidewalks around the school. The infrastructure is the easy stuff; county engineers know how to do this. It's the education and encouragement which is harder.

So, how have you tackled the need for education and encouragement?

We received a \$2,000 grant from Prevention Connections and will host our first bike rodeo in April 2012. This is a logical growth of our past work. For example, in 2010 we held a series of events during the May National Bike to Work week, such as a bike education workshop for students and parents, and after school events with the police department. It was the second year of our Bike and Walk Challenge Week, which we have continued since its inception in 2009. I started the Bike and Walk Challenge Week with the goal of creating a friendly competition among classes at Wolfrap Elementary School and other Vienna schools to see which could get more kids to walk or bike. During the week, we challenged parents to not drive their kids to school. We counted kids walking and biking to school, and those arriving by car. As the week progressed, we reached a 50% reduction in the number of students arriving by car and about ½ the kids either walked or biked to school by the end of the week.

Who else do you work with on SRTS at the school and in the larger community?

I am really proud to say that the entire Wolfrap Community has been involved, including the PTA. PTA members help get out information about our SRTS program and actively participates. For example, PTA members count kids and cars during the challenge week. A couple of parents help - regardless if the temperature is 19 degrees or 90 degrees!

What about the school division?

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is really beginning to engage in SRTS. Working with the Fairfax Advocates for Better Bicycling (FABB), Trails for Youth, the Washington Area Bicyclists Association (WABA), FCPS supported International Walk to School Day in October 2011, resulting in 26 schools participating in event activities. Our goal is for 50 schools to participate in the 2012 event. Another sign of their support is a change in the criteria for the division's Golden Wellness Award. Schools apply for the award, ranking themselves in areas such as recycling and student health. In the past, the application didn't provide credit for walking and biking to school. But, we successfully lobbied for a change in the application. Now, walking and biking to school is included

in language for the health and well-being awards. In addition, the FCPS School Board recently passed new school policy that puts decision-making about how children get to school firmly in the hands of parents. The policy also adds bicycling education to the existing pedestrian and bus safety education.

Is your school board "on board"?

At a January 2012 school board budget work session, the Loudoun County school board chair asked about the school district's support of walking and biking to school. While the division's safety engineer works with the County public works and transportation staff to make walking conditions safe, the board chair expressed concerned that, for cost saving purposes, that the school system as a whole lacked a consistent approach to regarding walking and biking to school. The chairman asked the superintendent if anything was being done to support SRTS-related activities, especially towards the goals of expanding the walk boundaries, with safe infrastructure.

Jeff Platenburg, Assistant Superintendent of Support Services, and his staff work with principals of schools in Loudoun County that are interested in SRTS to establish new routes and review the safety of existing routes within the schools' walk boundaries. They also help resolve issues such as the coordination of modes and the need for on-campus bike racks.

In the Friends & Faces column above, Jeff Anderson talked about the importance of their school division's support for SRTS. As in this case from Loudoun County, ideally, this support begins at the top, with the school board and superintendent, and is evident in practices and programs.

(Go to the following link to see the video and begin viewing at 4 hours 13 minutes 50 seconds: http://cps.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=23&clip_id=1536.)

SRTS Opportunities in Larger Transportation Plans

Developing a community's master transportation plan can be a great way to increase opportunities for SRTS - either purposefully or serendipitously! Participants at a recent public meeting in Burke included two 5th graders who came with their grandparents and were encouraged to share their thoughts. The students had great suggestion for new path cut-throughs and a path upgrade. Several of their requests were confirmed by other adult participants. Their grandmother sent photos of them at the public meeting showing where biking improvements are needed.

Kids know a lot more about how transportation works in their neighborhood than we may realize. Public meetings that provide this type of mapping exercise are perfect opportunities to include kids. It helps them know that they matter and may spark a commitment to public engagement as they become adults. Including students in walk audits is another way to find out what is working and what is needed in the pedestrian and biking network. Middle school students may be the "right" age to include in walk audits, but younger students can be an important part of the process, too.



To see how one community in Michigan included students in a walk audit go to www.grandhaventribune.com/content/officials-researching-walking-audit-studies-near-2-local-schools?similar.

First Ever Bike to School Day!

The National Center for Safe Routes to School is coordinating the first-ever National Bike to School Day on Wednesday, May 9, 2012.



Bike to School Day builds on the popularity and success of the October International Walk to School Day, which is celebrated across the country - and the world - and encourages a bike-focused celebration in the month of May. Bike to School Day is part of the National Bike Month and will be held on Wednesday, May 9, the week before Bike to Work Week and Bike to Work Day.

There are lots of ways to participate in Bike to School Day, including hosting a bike parade, conducting a bike rodeo or other safety training. Choose what works best for your school and get started planning now. Information on starting a bike train is included below. Resources for other bike-related activities are available through a number of websites, including the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and Live Strong (www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/BSKitBoth/3152BSKit/pages/GenIntroduction.html).

Tips for Starting and Sustaining a Bike Train

Many Virginia students bike to school, especially when parents can organize and lead bike trains. Spring is a great time to start or revive a bike train. Start planning now so you'll have a successful event on Bike to School Day. Here are some tips to get started:

- Decide some of the basics of the bike train, such as how often it will operate and where the meeting places will be. Parents may be willing to bike to a meeting place in order to join a bike train.
- Pick a safe route, starting at a point with enough space for everyone to gather and safe places to enter the roadway or path. Biking on wide sidewalks or shared-use paths may be easiest, otherwise, choose streets with minimal traffic and enough space for bicyclists riding single file. Other items to consider with respect to safety are:
 - Bicycle-friendly crossing locations, e.g. intersections with push button pedestrian signals that cyclists can easily reach.
 - How the bicycle train will enter and exit school grounds. Pick a route that avoids school traffic as much as possible.
- Be sure to test the route during arrival and dismissal times to make sure it works, before making it official. You'll have plenty of time to do this for Bike to School Day if you start now!
- Provide adequate adult supervision, using the rule of thumb of one adult for every three to six children. More information on the roles and responsibilities of adult volunteers is available as a guidebook for bike 'train engineers' and 'caboozes' created by the Metro Atlanta Safe Routes to School program (www.atlantabike.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20WaRtS%20Bike%20Trains.pdf).
- Emphasize safety first! Children should practice bicycle safety and handling skills before joining the bike train. Review the rules of the road before each ride. Children should also wear a helmet and brightly colored or reflective clothing for

increased safety. Many Virginia jurisdictions require children under the age of 14 to wear a helmet (www.virginiadot.org/programs/bk-laws.asp#Helmet%20Use). Adults should set a good example by wearing one too. Finally, make sure shoe laces are tied, pant legs are tucked in, and bicycle equipment is checked before heading out.

Round Five of SRTS Infrastructure Awards Announced

On January 18, the Commonwealth transportation Board formally accepted the latest Safe Routes to School projects into the Six-Year Improvement Program (www.virginiadot.org/projects/syp-faq.asp), thereby granting final approval and culminating a six-month effort to select the projects that would have the biggest impact on SRTS in Virginia. As a result, VDOT will provide \$5.9 million for the design and construction of infrastructure projects at 28 schools in 18 localities around the state.

Congratulations to the following schools for being selected and for demonstrating a commitment to safe walking and bicycling (you can find this list along with project descriptions on our website: www.virginiadot.org/programs/ted_rt2_school_pro.asp).

City of Alexandria

Matthew Maury Elementary School
Mount Vernon Community School
William Ramsey Elementary School
James Polk Elementary School

City of Colonial Heights

Colonial Heights Middle School
City of Falls Church
Mt. Daniel Elementary School
Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School

City of Galax

Galax Elementary School
City of Manassas Park
Manassas Park Middle School

City of Roanoke

Garden City Elementary School

City of Staunton

McSwain Elementary School

City of Waynesboro

Westwood Hills Elementary School

William Perry Elementary School

Wenonah Elementary School

Kate Collins Middle School

Fairfax County

Terra Centre Elementary School

Fauquier County

Cedar Lee Middle School

City of Lynchburg

Perrymont Elementary School

Thomas C Miller Elementary School

Dearington Elementary School

Town of Ashland

Henry Clay Elementary School

Town of Blacksburg

Harding Avenue Elementary School

Margaret Beeks Elementary School

Town of Chincoteague

Chincoteague Elementary School

Chincoteague Community School

Town of Colonial Beach

Colonial Beach Elementary School

Anatomy of SRTS in Virginia

SRTS in Virginia is funded through a federal program and influenced by several organizations. Each organization has a distinct role to play, but all work together to help create and support local SRTS programs.

The Virginia Department of Transportation receives federal SRTS funds to support local programs through infrastructure grants through the multi-year federal "transportation bill" called SAFETEA-LU, adopted on July 29, 2005 was set to expire in 2009. Congress extended the program several times at \$183 million per year starting in FY2010 until a long-term transportation reauthorization is complete. The current extension is through March 31, 2012. Additional action by Congress is needed to extend the program beyond that date.

VDOT's SRTS program relies on resources from the National Center for Safe Routes to School (www.saferoutesinfo.org/), which is funded through the federal transportation bill to oversee SRTS programs in all states.

Local programs may find additional resources from the National Safe Routes to School Partnership (National Partnership www.saferoutespartnership.org/), which is separate organization from the National Center for Safe Routes to School. The National Partnership's primary role is to advocate for SRTS programs nationally, and to help local programs advocate locally. This is an important role, especially since the federal transportation bill has not been re-established for another five-year period.

Safe Routes to School programs are built on collaborative partnerships among many stakeholders that include educators, parents, students, elected officials, engineers, city planners, business and community leaders, health officials, and bicycle and pedestrian advocates. So, we encourage you to get involved with the Partnership. Start by joining their email list (www.saferoutespartnership.org/resourcecenter/enews) and the listserv (www.saferoutespartnership.org/resourcecenter/srts-list-serve) to stay up to date. Then, see how you can make a difference!