

Safe Routes to School Fact Sheet

(as of October, 2024)

Background

Fifty years ago, walking and biking to school were commonplace – in 1969, roughly half of all students between the ages of 5 and 18 either walked or biked to school. Indeed, times have changed. According to data from the 2015 Colorado Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, only 18.6% of students engage in walking, biking, boarding, or other forms of active transportation to and from school. Many factors, including distance to school, safety concerns, and increasing amounts of time spent in sedentary activities, have contributed to greater reliance on vehicles for student commutes. This in turn negatively impacts overall student health and activity levels. The change in transportation mode has added to traffic congestion, a reduction in air quality, and the deterioration of our children’s health.

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) concept began in the 1970s in Odense, Denmark, springing from concern for the safety of children walking and biking to school. It was not long before momentum caught on, spreading internationally. Here in the United States, the first SRTS program was started in the Bronx, a borough of New York City, in 1997. That same year, the State of Florida implemented a pilot program. In August of 2000, the U.S. Congress funded two pilot SRTS projects through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). These successful pilots served to generate interest in a federally funded national program, and in 2003, advocates convened to talk about SRTS issues and ideas for developing a national program. By August 2005, federal transportation legislation SAFETEA-LU devoted \$612 million for the National Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program to be managed through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Goals

The goals of SRTS are:

- 1) To enable and encourage children in grades Kindergarten through 12, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school.
- 2) To make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing and
- 3) To facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic and congestion, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

Program Foundation

Communities use different approaches to make it safer for children to walk and bicycle to and from school and to increase the number of children doing so. The Colorado Safe Routes to School (CSRTS) program was designed around key components put forth by the Safe Routes

Partnership, a national organization working to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools. These components provide an organizing framework and are known as the five E's.

They include Encouragement, Education, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Engineering. In recent years a 6th E, Equity, was added to bring the focus towards creating healthy, thriving communities for people of all ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities.

In June 2020, the Safe Routes Partnership dropped Enforcement from the framework, replacing it with Engagement. Subsequently, applicants for Colorado Safe Routes to School grant funding are encouraged to consider project components holistically, utilizing the revised "Es", though Enforcement can still be included based on the community and project needs.

Organizing Framework Descriptions

- **ENGAGEMENT** is the foundation and starting point of all Safe Routes to School initiatives. Engagement is about listening to a potential project's most impacted community members—the students—as well as families, teachers, school leaders, and community organizations. Engaged coalitions work to identify the issues they are facing in their community and thereby help build intentional and strong program structures.
- **EDUCATION** provides students and community members bicycle and pedestrian safety skills and awareness, as well as knowledge of the broad range of benefits afforded by walking and bicycling to school. Educational programs and initiatives may include bicycle and pedestrian safety education curriculum and workshops, and hands-on activities that enable a child to practice in a facilitated, "real world" setting such as through bicycle rodeos or simulated traffic crossings.
- **ENCOURAGEMENT** helps to inspire students and parents to try bicycling and walking to school, and to make active transportation a regular part of their routines. Encouragement incorporates special events such as Walk or Bike to School Days, as well as ongoing activities and promotions like SRTS walking/biking route maps, Bicycle Trains, and Walking School Buses.
- **ENFORCEMENT** intends to encourage all road users to obey traffic laws and to share the road safely. While school crossing guards, police involvement, and policies that encourage walking and biking to school can all be contributors to this goal, the desired outcomes may equally be accomplished through engagement activities.
- **ENGINEERING** is a key element that enables more children to walk and bike to school safely by addressing the specific needs of a school. Engineering activities may include replacing or adding sidewalks, installing pedestrian activated signals, creating bike lanes, school zone signs, etc., to help achieve school goals.
- **EVALUATION** helps to identify specific issues that pose barriers to students walking and bicycling to school and monitoring trends over time in order to ensure that initiatives are effective. Evaluation includes assessing which approaches are accessible; ensuring that a program or initiative is decreasing health disparities and increasing equity; identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of approaches for specific communities.
- **EQUITY** is present in all the E's, specifically supporting the goal of ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives and resources benefit all demographic groups. Equity recognizes that different people have their own unique barriers when it comes to benefiting from Safe Routes to School initiatives, and that communities may be disproportionately impacted by health, safety, and transportation inequities, among other

obstacles. With this mindset, a key focus on Equity means paying particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for students with disabilities, low-income students, Native American students, students of color, female students, LGBTQ students, students whose families speak a language other than English, homeless students, and other demographic groups.

Funding

Funding of the Safe Routes to School program has evolved since its inception. Beginning in 2005 and through 2012 and again in 2014, the Safe Routes to School Program was 100% federally funded under the federal transportation bill known as SAFETEA-LU. Under SAFETEA-LU, each state was guaranteed at least \$1 million each year for five years for the Safe Routes Program. This was considered a Federal Aid program and required the administration and oversight as such.

While under SAFETEA-LU, this 100% federally funded program required no match. Projects funded in FY2013 were funded with money from the new federal transportation bill, MAP-21, as approved by the CDOT Transportation Committee on a one-year basis. In order to be considered for funding, these projects required a 20% cash match from the applicants.

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or the FAST Act, signed into law in December 2015, continued the SRTS program but did not dedicate specific funding for the program. For projects selected in Fiscal Year 2015, funding came from Colorado state appropriated funds in the amount of \$700,000 for non-infrastructure projects only. There was not a match requirement and the geographic distribution criteria was not applied. Consideration was given to schools with greater than 50% eligible free and reduced-price students.

Safe Routes to School projects are still eligible for funding under all highway programs. Colorado's resolution directed the Office of Financial Management and Budget (OFMB) to find funding for the Colorado SRTS program where it is able. Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) funds were used to fund projects beginning in Fiscal Year 2017 and continue to be used today.

According to FHWA guidelines under SAFETEA-LU, it was originally required that not less than 10% and not more than 30% of total funding was allocated for non-infrastructure projects. Remaining funds were allocated toward infrastructure projects and staffing a full-time Safe Routes Coordinator position at CDOT. This requirement was eliminated with passage of HB14-1301. For years 2006-2018, infrastructure projects received 77.4% of funding, and non-infrastructure 22.6%.

In addition to federal requirements, Colorado statute previously required funds to be distributed based on the geographic distribution of the K-8 student population. HB14-1301 eliminated this requirement. In Colorado, approximately 75% of the projects have been awarded to urbanized areas (MPOs) and 25% in rural areas (TPRs). There is not a formula that provides funding for every TPR.

Colorado's apportionment has ranged from \$1.0M in 2005 to a high of \$3.02M in 2011. SAFETEA-LU funding was available for SRTS through 2012 when the new transportation bill was authorized, MAP-21. Under MAP-21, Colorado SRTS infrastructure projects were combined with other programs and included within the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Because the amount of Federal funding for TAP was reduced from the level formerly

allocated to Transportation Enhancement (TE), the CDOT Transportation Commission decided not to designate a specific portion of TAP funds for SRTS past FY13. Therefore, funds available for projects in FY14 were the remaining SAFETEA-LU funds resulting from project savings or project withdrawals.

In November 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) was signed into law. This Bipartisan Infrastructure Law expanded the eligibility of the Safe Routes to School Program to schools through 12th grade and added eligibility for Safe Routes to School projects through the nearly \$17 billion-per-year Highway Safety Improvement Program, including for use in training and education. In response to the new legislation, Colorado Department of Transportation began exploring ways of supporting Safe Routes to School programming from Elementary through High School as part of its planned Strategic Plan update.

Commitment to Supporting Communities

Typically, grant-funded Safe Routes to School projects require a 20% cash match from the local agency. Shortly after releasing our call for Fiscal Year 2021 Safe Routes to School Projects however, the decision was made to earmark approximately \$2M of \$7M available for grants to support communities experiencing hardships due to COVID by covering 100% of the project budget. In order to be considered, the applicant had to meet initial eligibility by demonstrating a 75% or higher Free and Reduced Lunch Rate at *each* school they plan to work with and demonstrate how COVID has financially impacted the community within the narrative sections of the online application.

Furthering CDOT's commitment to supporting communities with additional need, the Fiscal Year 2023 funding cycle introduced the ongoing use of the thoroughly researched and vetted Multimodal Transportation and Mitigation Options Fund (MMOF) funding matrix as a mechanism to identify communities eligible for 100% funding for their SRTS project. To qualify for the no-match requirement, applicants' communities for Colorado Safe Routes to School grant funding must be one of the municipalities determined by utilizing the matrix, which uses a combination of criteria representing various population characteristics, transit ridership, and other factors. Included criteria are school-aged population, bicycle and pedestrian crashes, disproportionate impacts on communities, and more.

Grant Management

The CSRTS Program is managed through the CDOT Bike/Ped/Scenic Byways Section of the Multi-modal Planning Branch in the Division of Transportation Development. CSRTS funds are awarded through a statewide competitive process.

CSRTS developed an application to solicit project proposals from statewide stakeholders. In order to apply, applicants must be a political subdivision or tribal entity of the state. Nonprofits can apply by partnering with the school district or local government for the administration of the program. The applicant must demonstrate their project need through data, narrative and budget while also demonstrating project support within the community.

A nine-member Advisory Committee, which is appointed by the CDOT Executive Director, reviews and scores all applications and recommends projects to be funded. All capital project applications are also reviewed by appropriate CDOT regions for feedback to the Advisory Committee on the project including pricing, timeline, and issues around right-of-ways and easements.

The timeline for releasing the projects to contracting them takes about 9-10 months. Non-Infrastructure Grantees have two years to complete their projects while Infrastructure Grantees have three years for completion. Once selected, the infrastructure projects are managed by the CDOT region offices. All other projects are managed within the CDOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Unit.

From 2005 through 2023, 573 applications were received from all regions of the state requesting more than \$80 million in funding. One hundred forty-one (141) infrastructure projects and 147 non-infrastructure projects (including 3 statewide projects – bicycle/pedestrian curriculum, classroom curriculum related to bicycling and walking that match to the state education standards, and a current project to develop SRTS coalitions in five communities across the state) were awarded \$36,303,932.

Projects

CSRTS funds two types of projects:

- Infrastructure (capital) such as lighting, street striping, bicycle racks, sidewalks, signing, etc. In addition to these capital improvements, all infrastructure projects must also complete an educational component in their award.
- Non-Infrastructure (education, encouragement, and enforcement) programs.

Education projects may include pedestrian safety training, bicycle safety training. Encouragement may be bike rodeos, walk/bike to school day.

Strategic Plans

2017-2022

The first Colorado Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan is a five-year plan that began in 2017 and continued through 2022. Guided by this plan's vision for how CSRTS can comprehensively get more children walking and bicycling to and from school, CDOT and its program partners made notable strides throughout the duration of its implementation. Select specific accomplishments made in relation to the key goals are noted below.

Goal One: Demonstrate that more children are walking and bicycling to and from school as a result of CSRTS.

CSRTS conducted a full analysis to discern what data is available, understand the current baselines, and establish bold and specific targets

Goal Two: Establish a user-friendly grant making process that makes it easier for more agencies to apply and compete for funding.

CSRTS revised their grantmaking approach by moving the application to an online, digital experience. Additional efforts to create a streamlined process leading to a more efficient and transparent process were also employed. One on one grant consultations were implemented. Criteria was established and implemented that allowed communities that qualify to receive 100% funding (local match of 20% waived).

Goal Three: Raise awareness of the effectiveness of the program in getting children walking and biking to school.

Colorado SRTS produced the first ever Colorado Census Report that provided an overview of the status of SRTS in Colorado.

Goal Four: Influence policy decisions that promote and support more children walking and biking to/from school.

SRTS developed the Supporting Safe Routes to School Through Smart School Siting report to identify how local stakeholders can site (locate) schools to better support walking, biking, and rolling to school.

Goal Five: Develop capacities of communities to launch, maintain and sustain SRTS.

CDOT developed and disseminated a broad range of resources, including free webinars, newsletters, and toolkits, to help communities throughout Colorado start, sustain, and grow Safe Routes to School efforts.

2023 – 2028

In December of 2022, the Colorado Department of Transportation began the process to develop a new Five-Year Strategic Plan with the goal of completion by the end of 2023. Consultant Michael Baker International was brought on board to actively seek input from people throughout the state. Efforts included broad survey distribution, small focus groups, and individual interviews. The resulting diverse input was utilized to help guide the development of priorities, goals, and specific strategies to be included for the new plan, which provides a guiding framework for the safety of Colorado's students from **Kindergarten through twelfth grade** in walking and rolling to school, as well as for communities-at-large.

The new plan established three central goals to propel forward the overarching vision of making Colorado a safe place for all kids, Kindergarten through 12th grade, to walk, bike, and roll to and from school regardless of where they live. These goals, each with their own unique objectives and strategies, are included reflect the priorities expressed by partners, stakeholders, and all those who engaged in the plan's development. Together, these goals are designed to broaden the reach and impact of the Colorado Safe Routes to School program throughout the state; and to further support communities or schools that already have Safe Routes programs in place and welcoming new communities, schools, and coalitions into the program.

The three goals are as follows:

Goal One: Continue to grow the capacity of all Colorado communities related to Safe Route to School.

Strategies include hosting regular trainings on topics relevant to the Safe Routes to School community; provision of toolkits and other downloadable resources on the CDOT website; provision of technical assistance on Safe Routes to School grant funding to interested community; and determining and developing an approach regarding program expansion to grades nine through twelve.

Goal Two: Advance the Safe Routes Program to meet the diverse needs and varying capacities of Colorado communities.

Strategies include identifying disproportionately impacted communities through use of evidence-based tools; and creating a comprehensive approach for identified impacted communities that includes technical assistance on Safe Routes to School grant funding, incorporation of an equity scoring matrix or its equivalent, communication strategies, and strengthening partnerships.

Goal Three: Expand collaborative partnerships to advance the SRTS program.

Strategies include expanding partnership with Colorado Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) through collaboration on mutually reinforcing activities; and creating and developing national, state, and/or local partnerships with a shared goal of elevating evaluation efforts throughout the Safe Routes Program due to the closure of the National Evaluation System Database.

Colorado Historical Timeline and Current Status

June 2004 Colorado legislature passes the Safe Routes to School law mandating CDOT develop and implement a program with federal funds. No federal funds authorized.

May 2005 Colorado Safe Routes Rulemaking is approved outlining program basics.

August 2005 Congress passes SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users), authorizing funding for local programs.

August 2005 Advisory Committee appointed by CDOT Executive Director to implement the program. Made up of 9 people representing: educators, parents, bicyclists, pedestrians, law enforcement, two MPOs (Metropolitan Planning Organizations) and two TPRs (Transportation Planning Regions) who serve for two years.

May 2006 Transportation Commission approves first Colorado SRTS Grants.

October 2007 Revised 2 CCR 602-4 with CDOT contact and advisory committee term of service.

April 2012 Rulemaking hearing was initiated as part of the global review of all CDOT rules, and updated terminology and eliminated information that concerns the rule making process in 2004 and 2007.

May 2014 Colorado State legislature passed and Governor signed into law HB14-1301 that provides \$700,000 from state general funds for non-infrastructure projects for the SRTS program.

October 2014 Rulemaking hearing was initiated to bring the rules in alignment with HB14-1301 requirements.

September 2015 CDOT Transportation Commission passed Resolution TC-15-9-8 which approved the continuation of the SRTS program by committing to fund the program with \$2 million for infrastructure projects and \$0.5 million for non-infrastructure projects annually, beginning in FY 2016.

April 2017 CDOT Transportation Commission passed Resolution #TC 17-4-3 which approved that in years when funding requests in one category are less than the funds available, funds may be shifted between categories to meet project needs.

June 2017 CSRTS 5-Year Strategic Plan developed providing goals and strategies to move CSRTS forward through 2022.

August 2018 An online application and management program was developed for the CSRTS program. A two-year grant making process was developed so there will be a call for projects

every two years in even numbered years. The minimum amount that could be requested for infrastructure projects was increased to \$100,000 and the maximum increased to \$500,000.

May 2019 MPower Consulting, LTD hired as CSRTS Consultant; Up to this point management was conducted through a full-time position within CDOT; this move allowed for placement of a strategic, remote team member with extensive experience in growing broad based coalitions and implementation of strategic plans.

June 2020 The first-ever statewide assessment of Colorado Safe Routes to School programs was released as part of the report, “Safe Routes to School Programs in Colorado: 2020 Statewide Program Assessment Report”.

July 2020 CSRTS partnered with the Safe Routes Partnership to investigate and understand the landscape of School Siting in Colorado. School Siting refers to the bundle of decisions that affect where schools are located. Based on the findings of this initiative, a School Siting Fact Sheet was prepared including an overview of the current state of the state of Colorado’s school siting policies and practices. School districts, local governments, and permanent policy structures can all play a role in setting up smart school siting.

August 2020 The maximum amount that could be requested for Colorado Safe Routes to School grant funded infrastructure projects was increased to \$750,000. This maximum amount was later increased to \$1M beginning with the Fiscal Year 2025 Grant Cycle.

November 2021 CSRTS released “**Working Together to Make Meaningful Change: A Toolkit for Engaging Communities Across Colorado.**” Created by the Safe Routes Partnership with support from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and Colorado Safe Routes to School, this toolkit provides a community engagement framework for individuals, organizations, and government agencies, along with additional tools and resources to support communities. Safe Routes to School Resources, including a separate page of COVID-19 specific resources to offer guidance for as long as was pertinent. Multiple webinars were offered providing a thorough overview of the toolkit in ensuing months.

January 2023 CSRTS launched new and updated, free School Crossing Guard Training materials, including a PowerPoint School Crossing Guard Training Presentation; a School Crossing Guard Training Manual including testing, practical training guidance, and field assessment guidance; and a Handbook for School Crossing Guard Sponsors, to provide consistent guidance in hiring and training new and existing school crossing guards. Content aligns with the current edition of the Federal Highway Administration’s Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and Colorado State law.

May 2024 CSRTS introduced the new five-year Strategic Plan, providing a guiding framework for promoting the safety of Colorado’s students from Kindergarten through 12th grade in walking and rolling to and from school, as well as communities-at-large, through the year 2028.