

Mansfield Safe Routes to School Task Force

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Safe Routes to School Program, (SRTS) is a community-based initiative where the community works together to create the SR2S Improvement Plan for our community.

In October of 2006, a pilot “walk to school day” was held with Carpenter and Prospect Elementary Schools to determine if this program was of interest to our schools and the community. In November, stakeholders were invited to attend a meeting to discuss the results of the “walk to school day”, and explain the potential benefits of the Safe Routes to School Program for the city of Mansfield. The meeting led to the formation of the Mansfield Safe Routes to School Task Force in November of 2006.

The Safe Routes to School Task Force is committed to the development of a Safe Routes to School Improvement Plan. The Task Force is also committed to ensuring all our students, including those with disabilities, can utilize walking and bicycling as a safe and enjoyable transportation alternative to get to school. The Task Force has created this plan by seeking community input and working with a diverse of community representatives to identify obstacles along primary routes to school and to propose recommendations to improve safety. Additionally, the Task Force sent out surveys to parents and neighborhood associations, and has aimed their studies to promote public and student safety education efforts regarding bicycle and pedestrian laws.

The Safe Routes to School Task Force

The Safe Routes to School Task Force is comprised of representatives from all sectors of our community, as the plan is a community based initiative

Members of the city of Mansfield Safe Routes to School Task Forces include:

Ms. Andrea Moyer, Principal Hedges Elementary School
Mr. Dennis Armstrong, City of Mansfield Project Planner
Mr. Paul Bender – RCRPC, Transportation Planner
Sgt. Shari Robertson, Mansfield Police Department
Sgt. Dan Martincin, Mansfield Police Department
Ms. Brenda Phillips, RCA
Mr. Michael Bichsel, Mid Ohio Heart Clinic
Ms. Diane Shambaugh, Community Resource Specialist, Mansfield City Schools
Mr. Joseph Wyka, City of Mansfield, Chief Deputy Engineer
Ms. Lacey Rust, city of Mansfield – seasonal employee assisting with SRTS
Ms. Selby Dorgan, Mansfield/Ontario/Richland County Health Dept.
Mr. Gaylord Rice Jr., city of Mansfield, Codes & Permits
Mr. James DeSanto, city of Mansfield, Chief Engineer/Public Service Superintendent
Ms. Mary Amber Hughes, Dunbilt Ct. Neighborhood Watch

Ms. Amanda Stanfield, North Lake Park Neighborhood Watch
Mr. Greg Kahl, Richland County Children Services, Communications Director
Ms. Patsy Rambo, Citizen
Ms. Elaine Murphy, Parent
Mr. Terry Conrad, Friendly House, Executive Director
Ms. Bobbie Gerhardt, Woodland Elementary School, Principal (School representative)
Ms. Linda White, Woodland Elementary School
Ms. Katherine Schiraldi, Richland County Children Services

The primary contact person for our SRTS plan is:

Kim Hildreth, Program Coordinator
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PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

The task force has held monthly meetings to gather input from the community and keep them up to date on the SRTS Plan for our community. They have also:

- ♦ Administered parent surveys
- ♦ Hosted public meetings
- ♦ Administered Walk-ability surveys to neighborhood watch groups
- ♦ Provided public presentations on the SRTS Program
- ♦ Conducted initial engineering studies
- ♦ Conducted sidewalk assessments and sent out notices to residents needing to repair sidewalks.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Our SRTS Plan addresses the needs of the following schools:

The Mansfield City School District

Hedges Elementary
Prospect Elementary
Newman Elementary
Woodland Elementary
Brinkerhoff Elementary
Malabar Middle School

Private schools:

St. Peter's
Discovery
Mansfield Christian

Grade levels: K-8

Other characteristics of our schools are as follows:

PreSch 59
KDG 463
1st 410
2nd 371
3rd 346
4th 331
5th 327
ELem Special Education 187

Elementary Enrollment is 2,494

6th 356
7th 325
8th 322
MS Special Education 157

Middle School Enrollment is 1,127

(Note: MCS Student Enrollment for March is 5,150)

of buses -40
Bus Routes -28

At the start of each school year we will request updated data on our schools demographics by the end of September to evaluate changes in enrollment, etc. to assure we are meeting the needs of our community.

Components of the Mansfield Safe Routes to School Plan and Creating Solutions

- I. Goal(s)**
 - a. increase number of students walking and bicycling to school
 - b. improve safety of students walking and bicycling to school
 - c. Increase public awareness of traffic safety
 - d. Engage the community in SRTS

The SRTS Plan contains five (5) components, which include Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation. The Task Force initiated evaluation of existing conditions and utilized public input to develop the goals and strategies for our initial plan.

Strategies

The strategies to be used to meet our goals are outlined in our five (5) components, but we needed baseline data to develop our components. Baseline evaluations are as follows:

BASELINE EVALUATIONS ADDRESSED TO DATE

- ♦ Parent Surveys (sent out with help of schools in home room)
- ♦ Traffic Counts (during arrival and dismissal times at each school)
- ♦ Map of Current Walking/Busing Routes
- ♦ Inspection of sidewalks
- ♦ Walk-ability surveys – handed out at neighborhood watch meeting.
- ♦ Codes has walked school routes to assess sidewalk safety
- ♦ Collection of traffic counts, speed and injury data

ENGINEERING

The city of Mansfield Engineering Department is a key stakeholder in the development and ongoing successes of our SRTS Improvement Plan. The Engineering Department is committed to continue in the following:

Purpose: A variety of techniques (outlined below), will be utilized to help improve safety by reducing traffic volumes, decreasing speeds, and improving the physical surroundings in which safety issues occur.

Applicability: – In any neighborhood or area where there is a high occurrence of traffic violations that go un-enforced thus increasing the traffic and safety issues in the area.

- Review school zone signs and pavement markings and replace or erect if necessary.
- Review school area speed limit and signing.
- Review school advance warning signs and school crosswalk signs and replace or erect if necessary.
- Review for need of overhead signs and beacons.
- Review on-street parking and signing.
- Review for need of additional No-Parking Restrictions at street corners.
- Review to confirm school signs and crossing signs are upgraded to retroreflective yellow-green school signs.
- Review curb paint, signs and school pavement legends.
- Monitor and inspect sidewalks for replacement or repair along school walking routes.
- Review sidewalks for handicap access compliance.
- Review for need of specialized traffic control at intersections (Signals, 4-way stop, etc).

- Review traffic signal timings/phasing.
- Review if pedestrian signals are in operation or needed at existing signal installations.
- Review street lighting in all school area. Install, upgrade or repair as needed.

EDUCATION

The SRTS Task Force is committed to educating the public and students the importance of traffic rules and safety. The Task Force has decided Education is one of the key components in our improvement plan, and will involve all members of the Task Force. A “separate” marketing/awareness campaign will be developed to ensure we stay on course in our education efforts the public and parents about traffic rules and will occur prior to enforcement

Purpose: To teach pedestrians, motorists, and bicyclists about traffic rules and safety, while also promoting activities that encourage walking and biking.

Applicability: This can be applied to all neighborhoods around schools, parks, and other areas such as public pools where the likelihood of kids walking or biking is greater.

Target Group #1: Students

- ♦ Explore possibility of integrating with DARE program
- ♦ Tie into wellness programs at schools (P.E. teacher involvement)
- ♦ Walking School Bus
- ♦ Repeat of “safety town” – including possibility of specific neighborhoods
- ♦ Walk days to schools
- ♦ Enlist student senate in creation of educational programs for kids
- ♦ Educate students on crime prevention/materials

Target Group #2: Parents

- ♦ Programs after school for parents
- ♦ Present at PTO meetings
- ♦ Educate parents and caregivers about traffic safety around schools (includes following procedures for dropping off/picking up students)
- ♦ Create bicycle and pedestrian safety educational materials
- ♦ Train school and community audiences about SR2S.
- ♦ Provide Crime Prevention education/materials/campaign

Target Group #3: Motorist

- ♦ Create educational materials for distribution about traffic safety – not just during school but in summer months as well
- ♦ Create an awareness campaign on traffic laws around schools and residential neighborhoods

Target Group #4: Teachers

- ♦ Provide in-service training to teachers on SR2S
- ♦ Educate teachers and staff about safety around schools (including procedures, etc.)
- ♦ Provide crime prevention education/materials/campaign.

Timelines and action plan to be developed upon completion of our October 2007 Walk to School events.

ENCOURAGEMENT

The SRTS Task Force is committed to encouraging our community members by demonstrating the benefits of walking/biking through special events and programs throughout the year.

Purpose: To encourage residents and renew their interest in walking and biking by focusing on the enjoyment, health, and environmental benefits you can receive from these activities and the long term benefits of making your community one that is pedestrian and bicyclist friendly.

Activities include:

- ♦ Walking Wednesdays
- ♦ Points/Reward system for traveling so far on foot or bike
- ♦ Bicycle Trains
- ♦ Announcements, banners, posters around schools
- ♦ Walking School Bus
- ♦ Neighborhood Challenges
- ♦ School Challenges

Timelines and action plan to be developed upon completion of our October 2007 Walk to School events.

ENFORCEMENT

The SRTS Task Force is pleased our local police department and schools have committed to serve on our task force to address enforcement issues surrounding schools. Our local Codes and Permits Department is also serving on the Task Force to address violations occurring on private property that directly affects the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Codes and Permits

The Bureau of Building and Codes is actively issuing correction-violation notices for the following violations along with each sidewalk inspection investigation:

- ♦ Dilapidated, open and vacant building
- ♦ Overgrown weeds and grass
- ♦ Litter, junk, trash and garbage accumulation
- ♦ Overgrown bushes which obstruct sidewalk area
- ♦ Illegal dump sites.

The Bureau of Building and Codes is committed to the ongoing efforts to make our neighborhood safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. During the winter months, the issue of snow removal will also be addressed.

Mansfield Police Department

The Mansfield Police Department is actively serving on the committee and will work with schools to develop proper safety procedures. They are also committed to assisting in the development of educational materials, as they are truly the experts when it comes to traffic and safety.

The police department has and will continue to support this program with our local neighborhood associations, moving us in the direction of creating Safe Havens in the future.

EVALUATION

The elements of the Evaluation Framework described below are both independent and interacting; constructing a safer, more walk able street intersection is a discreet task, performed routinely will the time and skill of traffic engineers and some hardware, asphalt and concrete- but the safer intersection doesn't get built as a matter of routine, and it alone won't ensure the desired social objective- greater levels of walking and biking to our elementary schools. It can be a one-time ad hoc decision, or part of a larger plan that both steers and reflects changes in a number of environments: the Physical, Policy/Informational; Perceptions and Attitudes, and ultimately, Behavioral.

This framework should therefore not be seen as a simple linear checklist, but one containing ongoing feedback loops of measurement, adjustment, and remeasurement.

Time Frames:

- Past
- Present (Baseline)
- Future 1/5/10 years?

Three time frames will or can be used in Evaluation- the Past includes any data available within the last 30-40 years. The Present (Baseline) is the immediate past/present/future, perhaps a window of one year past and future from the current date. Future can be several years to a full decade into the future.

Evaluation of the success of the Safe Routes to School means looking at the CHANGE in a number of key variables. Below are the areas we want to see change, and measure change of/in:

Physical Environment

Much of the Safe Routes to School Plan is aimed at directing improvements in the physical environment of Mansfield that directly impacts on the ability of children and companions to safely, securely, and **with confidence** navigate an unbroken route from home to school.

Do sidewalks exist, and do they form a relatively direct and continuous route? Are walkways clear walkways of overgrown plantings and habitually parked vehicles? Are school drop-off points designated, clearly marked, and in the optimal location? Because of the network nature of any ground transportation route, intersections and other crossings that are current or potential barriers should be identified, and recommended routes either rerouted, or deficiencies corrected.

Defined Variables to measure over time:

- Sidewalk network
- Intersections
- School Drop Off Zones
- Clear passage way enforcement (is it being enforced, and % or number of violations?)

Tools to Use:

- GIS mapping software
- Spreadsheet

Informational/Policy Environment

The physical environment and the SR2S program exist within Informational and Policy Environments. Improvements and efforts made on behalf of SR2S could be of minimal effectiveness if Information about these improvements and efforts is not made available and promoted within the community. Existing and new Route information (safe walking/biking/bus) needs to be developed and shared for each school. Students, parents, teachers, and route residents need to be educated about the purpose and opportunity of the SR2S program, and any changes being made or proposed in the physical environment. An evaluation can be made to determine whether information dissemination has increased, and by how much. School policies will likely have changed as well. Media reporting about the SR2S program can be logged, measured, and evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Defined Variables to measure over time:

- Route information (safe walking/biking/bus)
- Student/Parent/Teacher information and education
- School policies
- Government/Business policies and plans
- Media reporting (TV/radio/print)

Tools to Use:

Surveys

Logbook/spreadsheet/database

Perceptions/Attitudes

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of SR2S to monitor and evaluate will be that of perceptions of key primary actors- students, parents, teachers; the general public, informed by the media response support, and policy makers. Attitudes and Perceptions shape and reinforce one another, ultimately leading to a feedback loop with the Informational/Policy Environment and the other environments by extension. This is a uniquely challenging environment, and difficult to both influence and measure.

Defined Variables to Measure

Opinions/Perceptions/Attitudes of:

- Student/Parent/Teacher (“think walking now feasible”). Perception of increased safety and security.
- General public/media response
- Policy and Plan makers

Tools to Use:

Surveys

Qualitative assessment techniques

The Big One- Behavior

Ultimately, SR2S is about ***Changing Behavior-Increasing the mode split share of walking/biking to school***, in planning parlance. While all aspects of SR2S have potential secondary benefits (increased public awareness of their community and public involvement), to judge SR2S as successful, there needs to be measurable increases in the numbers/percentage of children walking or biking to school. So, key measurable Outcome variable for SR2S: Actual changes in Walking and Biking BEHAVIOR, as measured in increased ***number of trips*** and ***number of participants***. It may be perfectly acceptable that the existing base of children

walking/biking simply makes more non-motorized trips per measured time period than before, but a truly successful program will also increase the number of children walking or biking.

Variables to measure, statistics to calculate and Benchmark

- # Children participating in program
- Trips per child (avg)
- Total trips
- Walking
- Biking
- Reduced drop-off Congestion
- Safety Stats

Benchmarks

Benchmarks are an important component of the SR2S Plan Implementation Evaluation. They need to be set at reasonable levels, not too high nor too low.

One caveat- *Changing and consolidating local school boundaries, as well as busing for special programs, can easily confound the data and mask any real improvements in bike/walk numbers.*

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