01 Introduction and Overview

The NJ School Zone Planning Guide provides guidance for the community of people, government and schools involved in the effort to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school.

Purpose of the New Jersey School Zone Planning Guide

This Guide is intended to be used as a resource for school boards, school administration, police, parents and engineers to advance the goals of the NJ Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program.

The focus of the School Zone Planning Guide is on engineering measures that can be utilized to make the environment to, from, and around schools a place where students, their parents and caregivers feel safe and want to walk and bicycle. Engineering measures include physical improvements to the transportation infrastructure in the vicinity of the school and on school property. These improvements are intended to improve access and safety for travel by walking and bicycling and to minimize conflicts with motorized traffic. They are typically designed to address specific problems or needs that have been identified and can range from simple sidewalk replacement/ repair to more complex traffic-calming devices, such as roundabouts or speed humps. Additionally, there is some programmatic guidance in the Planning Guide.

The Planning Guide is based on:

- NJDOT Complete Streets Design Guide
- NJDOT Roadway Design Manual
- The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) 2023 Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD),
- The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) 2024 Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities
- 2021 AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities
- National Center for Safe Routes to School Online Guide
- The National Center for Safe Routes to School and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) SRTS Briefing Sheets
- The Target Zero strategy and the Safe System Approach

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (SRTS) PROGRAM MISSION

The NJ Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Mission is to partner with schools and communities to prioritize and implement opportunities for people to walk, bike or travel by other wheeled devices. By focusing on improvements to support active travel by youth, we believe we can create conditions that are safe, healthy, equitable, and appealing for all. [1]



Students walking to school in Woodbridge, NJ. Image: VTC

[1] About New Jersey's Safe Routes to School Program, https://www.saferoutesnj.org/about-safe-routes-to-school/

Health, Safety, and Transportation

Building an environment that supports children's ability to walk or bicycle to school safely achieves a wide range of benefits for students, the school, and the community. These benefits include reduced traffic in the vicinity of schools, improved air quality, creation of safer, calmer streets and neighborhoods, and increased physical activity among students and families, contributing to healthier lifestyles.

Today, fewer children are walking and bicycling to school, and more children are at risk of becoming overweight and obese compared to children 30 years ago. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children engage in 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day and that the bulk of this physical activity comes through aerobic exercise. By walking or bicycling to school, children can easily incorporate exercise into their day and increase their overall physical activity. Children who walk one mile to and from school each day get approximately two-thirds of the recommended level of 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Plus, research shows that children who walk to school have higher levels of physical activity throughout the day and are more likely to get the full 60 minutes of activity in a day.

Many children do not currently walk or bike to school due to safety concerns. This guide is intended to assist communities in identifying and developing solutions to those safety concerns. Proper design and focus on the school zone through the SRTS Program can lead to a decrease in the number of pediatric pedestrian injuries for school-aged children.

[1] The Five (5) Es include: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, and Evaluation.

In New Jersey, the SRTS Program was centered around a comprehensive 5Es[1] approach in the past. Since 2020, SRTS has continued to value and incorporate the 5Es program while expanding to embrace the SAFE framework. The SAFE framework represents Sustainable, Accessible, Fair, and Engaging. The new framework expands the concept of "safe." The SAFE framework not only helps students bike or walk to school safely but also ensures that designated routes are supported by all affected constituencies. The program aims to create an inclusive and fair environment for all while building meaningful community connections.

Walking and bicycling are important to New Jersey because they...



Image: New Jersey Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan (2016)

NJ Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Overview

History of the NJ SRTS Program[1]

In 2003, the New Jersey Department of Transportation's Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs utilized on-call consultant support and a statewide Technical Advisory Committee to develop a SRTS Program. In 2004, NJDOT launched a series of SRTS pilot demonstration programs in varied community settings around the state. At the same time, the Department initiated the Safe Streets to School Program and in 2006, awarded approximately $5 million in state funds to 60 infrastructure projects to improve safety around schools.

Safe Routes to School was established as a federal program under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005. The NJDOT designated a full-time SRTS Coordinator, developed its first SRTS Strategic Plan, and initiated a competitive grant Program to fund local and statewide engineering, enforcement, education, and encouragement projects to enable elementary school students to walk and bike to school safely.

In 2012, Congress passed a new transportation bill: Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). Under this legislation, SRTS has been combined with two other programs (Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails) under the Transportation Alternatives Program.

NJDOT has elected to continue SRTS as a standalone federal-aid program. It is currently administered by the NJDOT, in partnership with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) and the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO).

As of October 2014, NJDOT had awarded more than $19 million in federal SRTS funds to 129 projects at 212 schools in 98 communities across New Jersey. Another $5 million supported these local projects with statewide programs.

In 2015, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) act, maintained the Transportation Alternatives structure and continued eligibility for SRTS projects.

In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) codified the SRTS Program in the U.S. Code and expanded eligibility for projects to include high school students (grades K-12), whereas the prior program only covered grades K-8.

In 2024, NJDOT announced $21.1 million for 23 grants under the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. The Department also announced the SRTS Design Assistance Program, which makes consultant engineering services available to assist Local Public Agencies (LPAs) with the development of plans, specifications, and estimates (PS&E) for their SRTS projects.

[1] NJDOT Safe Routes to School Programs. https://www.nj.gov/transportation/community/srts/programs.shtm

NJ Safe Routes To School Program Timeline

2004 — SRTS pilot demonstration programs launched in New Jersey.

2005 — Safe Routes to School was established as a federal program under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005.

2006 — About $5 million awarded to fund 60 infrastructure projects to improve safety around schools in New Jersey.

2012 — Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) bill passed. NJDOT elected to continue SRTS as a standalone federal-aid program under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

2014 — Awarded $19 million in federal SRTS funds to 129 projects at 212 schools in 98 communities across New Jersey.

2015 — Safe Routes to School remains eligible across federal transportation programs.

2021 — The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) codified the SRTS Program in the U.S. Code and expanded eligibility for projects to include grades K-12.

2024 — NJDOT announced $21.1 million for 23 grants under the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program.

WHY IMPROVE WALKING AND BICYCLING ROUTES TO AND FROM SCHOOL?

- Improvements provide a safer environment for the whole community — 24 hours a day, not just before and after school.
- Walking and bicycling to school reduces the amount of greenhouse gas emissions released as it reduces the number of students that are driven to school.
- Over time, bicycle and pedestrian improvements can save tax dollars.
- Walking and bicycling are fun, healthy, non-polluting, friendly, educational, and economical!



A Walking Shuttle in Livingston, NJ.

How does the NJ SRTS Program work today?

The overall SRTS Program is overseen by the SRTS Coordinator in the NJDOT's Bureau of Safety Improvement Programs (BSIP). The SRTS Coordinator is responsible for monitoring all aspects of the program. This includes managing the non-infrastructure program, participating in the SRTS infrastructure grant program solicitation and selection process and helping to ensure that state and federal requirements are met. The federally funded SRTS grant program is administered by NJDOT's Division of Local Aid and Economic Development. It is operated as a competitive grant program in which proposals from applicants to develop and implement infrastructure projects are solicited and evaluated.

The Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC), working closely with NJDOT, operates the NJ Safe Routes Resource Center (NJSRRC) which provides services, training, coordination, and technical assistance directly to regional planning organizations, schools and school districts, and local and regional governments.

In 2011, NJDOT implemented the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Technical Assistance Program. This program is a cooperative venture involving New Jersey's eight Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), the NJSRRC, and NJDOT. NJDOT provides federal funding, program administration and oversight; the NJSRRC provides services, training, evaluation, and technical assistance to all eight NJ TMAs.

As the primary point of contact for the SRTS Program in their service areas, SRTS Regional Coordinators at each TMA work directly with schools, local governments, and community organizations to advance walking and bicycling initiatives. TMAs provide educational programming, planning assistance, and technical support, including assistance with School Travel Plans. They also coordinate a variety of non-infrastructure activities and events, such as pedestrian safety assemblies, bicycle rodeos, walking school buses, and Walk and Bike to School Day celebrations, helping communities create safer and more accessible routes for students.

As part of this program, all New Jersey municipalities and K-12 schools are eligible to receive free, non-construction related services. TMAs are also charged with prioritizing disadvantaged communities in their outreach efforts to allow for an equitable distribution of services.

RESOURCES

NJ Safe Routes to School Program
Telephone: 609-649-9395
Website: https://njdotlocalhub.nj.gov/local-aid-econ-dev/grant-programs/federal-programs/safe-routes-to-school/

New Jersey Safe Routes Resource Center
Telephone: 848-932-7901
Email: srts@ejb.rutgers.edu
Website: www.saferoutesnj.org

The National Center for SRTS
Website: www.saferoutesinfo.org/

Safe Routes Partnership
Website: https://saferoutespartnership.org/

The Official Web Site of International Walk to School
Website: www.iwalktoschool.org/

Walk, Bike & Roll to School
Website: www.walkbiketoschool.org/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Kids Walk to School
Website: https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11316

Which New Jersey Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) Are Responsible for School Zone Improvements?

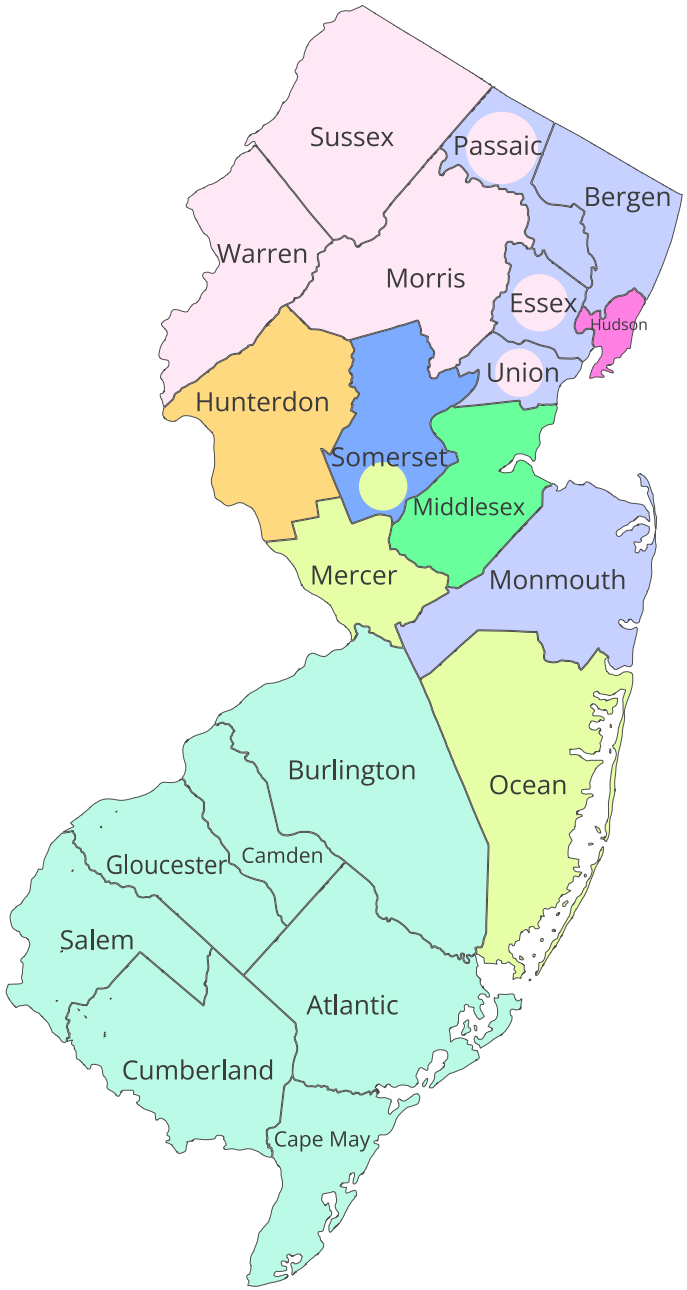
Avenues in Motion
Phone: (973) 267-7600
https://avenuesinmotion.org/

goHunterdon
(908) 788-5553
https://gohunterdon.org/

RideWise
(908) 704-1011
https://ridewise.org/

Greater Mercer TMA
(609) 452-1491
https://gmtma.org/

Cross County Connection TMA
(856) 596-8228
https://www.driveless.com/



EZ Ride
(201) 939-4242
https://ezride.org/

Hudson TMA
(201) 324-6222
https://hudsontma.org/

Keep Middlesex Moving
(732) 745-4465
https://kmm.org/

Note that Passaic County, Essex County, Union County, and Somerset County are served by two Transportation Management Associations (TMAs). Visit Find your Safe Routes to School Coordinator for detailed information.

Which Jurisdiction is Responsible for Improving School Zones?

This section identifies which governing body controls and has the ability to improve school property and the areas around the school property. It distinguishes between control of school property, control of the lands and properties around the school property, and the roads leading to and surrounding school property. Additionally, it speaks to private property in the area near the school zone.

Note, this section does not detail administration or rule setting for schools, rather, this section discusses the responsibilities of different levels of government in regard to the control of land and transportation in and around the school.

Introduction: The United States of America is a federal system, meaning that power is shared between the federal government and state governments[1]. Government is further divided at the state level. In New Jersey, there is the state government, county governments, local governments, and school districts. School districts are a distinct jurisdiction that are often, but not always, coterminous with the municipality in which they reside[2].

For the purposes of this Guide, it is important to make the distinction as to which level of government has control, and the ability to improve, a part of the School Zone or areas proximate to the School Zone.



School District



Municipal



County



State



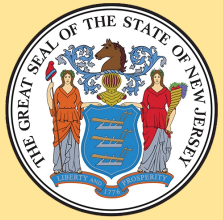
Federal

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1. Constitution Annotated: Analysis and Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution provided by the United States Congressional website (constitution.congress.gov). See Intro. 7.3 Federalism and the Constitution. Accessed on February 10, 2026.
2. See N.J.S.A. §18A:8-1 and N.J.S.A. §18A:13-34 (et seq). Accessed on February 9, 2026 via https://lis.njleg.state.nj.us/



Great Seal of the United States of America.
Image: National Museum of American Diplomacy



Great Seal of New Jersey Image: www.nj.gov

Five (5) Levels of Government: There are five (5) levels of government that are relevant to school zones and the surrounding area: school district, municipal, county, state, and federal.

School District

The **school district** controls the school grounds within the district. The school district and Board of Education are the primary stewards for improvements to the school grounds. School districts do not have control over public roads.

The logo for Lower Township School District. Image: Lower Township School District.

Municipal

The **municipality** controls and regulates land within its municipal boundaries. It is responsible for improvements within the right-of-way of locally controlled roads. For improvements to land in the municipality that is locally controlled, the municipality and its governing body are responsible for improvements.



Somerville High School in Somerville, NJ is located on local roads.

County

Schools are often located along **county** roads. In these instances, the road and right-of-way are controlled by the county, and improvements to them are the responsibility of the county-level governing body.



Walter F. Robinson School in Bayonne, NJ has frontage on John F. Kennedy Boulevard, a county road in Hudson County, and on West 31st Street, a local road controlled by the City of Bayonne. Image: www.homes.com

State

Schools are often located along, or near **state** roads. In these instances, the road and right-of-way are controlled and maintained by the state, and improvements to them are the responsibility of the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT).



Montague Township School in Montague, NJ is located on Route 206, a state road. Image: Nearmap, dated October 1, 2025.

Federal

The **federal government** controls federal properties, such as military bases, that may reside within a school district. The school district, municipality, county, and state do not control these facilities, even when within their geographic boundaries.



Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is a military base that spans Burlington and Ocean counties and is located within portions of eight (8) municipalities. Image: U.S. Army.

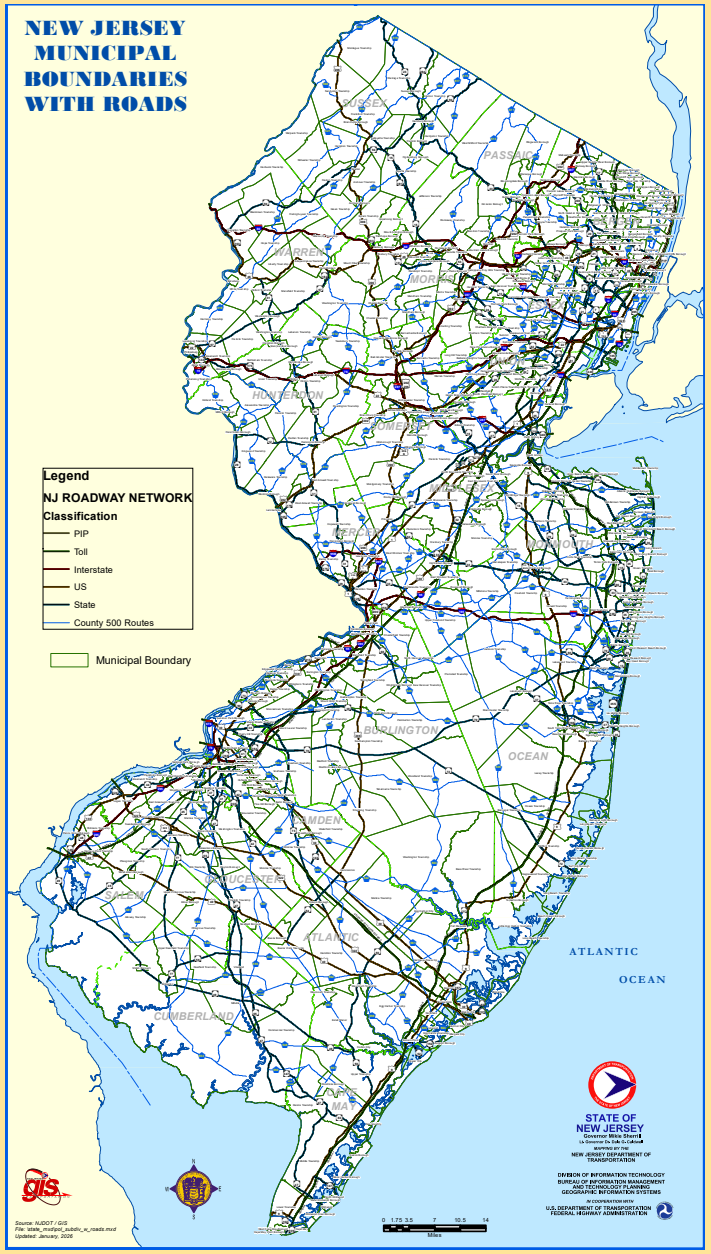
Road Jurisdiction: For the purposes of this guide, jurisdiction over roadways adjacent to the school grounds or proximate to the school grounds is critically important. For engaged stakeholders and members of the community that want to advocate or facilitate safety improvements, it is important to understand the jurisdiction of the road or roads that need improvement:

- Locally controlled roads are under municipal jurisdiction. Improvements go through the local governing body;
- County-controlled roads are under county jurisdiction. Improvements go through the governing body of the county;
- State roads are under state jurisdiction. Improvements go through the NJDOT.

Often, jurisdiction is complex, as different parts of the same road network may be controlled by different agencies or levels of government and school properties may have frontages abutting different roads under different jurisdiction. It is critical that all relevant stakeholders cooperate to make improvements. This includes representatives from the school district, municipality, county, and state, and where necessary the federal government, working together to improve roadways and routes near and adjacent to school zones to improve the safety and comfort of all routes to and from school zones.

Private vs. Public Property: It is important to distinguish between private and public property. Public property includes property owned by any of the levels of government discussed herein. Properties adjacent to, or proximate to, school zones are often privately owned. School districts do not have direct control over these properties, though these properties may impact commuting to and from school.

In some cases, the municipality may be able to regulate certain nuisances, or make improvements to mitigate nuisances, which may impact routes to school. In other instances, something seemingly benign, like a lawn sprinkler that activates during the time when students go to school and affects their walk to school, may not be controlled. In these instances, the school district may consider engaging in dialogue with neighboring property owners to resolve any conflict regarding commuting to and from school.



New Jersey Municipal Boundaries with Roads. Image: NJDOT