17 How to Start Improving Your School Zone

The safety, health and well-being of children are the concern and the responsibility of the entire community. Parents, school districts, city and county officials (including engineers, planners, public works and law enforcement) all play a role in student pedestrian and bicycle safety everywhere, and especially around schools.

Introduction

Community members must work together to develop and maintain walk and bike to school travel plans. This partnership approach to student pedestrian and bicycle safety benefits the entire community. Improving walk and bike to school routes with added sidewalks, widened shoulders, bicycle lanes or other improvements creates a safer environment for everyone 24 hours a day.

Working collaboratively with community members ensures that pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns can be addressed by a variety of solutions including engineering improvements, law enforcement efforts, and education. This section provides an overview of the steps involved in the creation of a comprehensive student pedestrian and bicycle travel plan.

School Travel Plan Process



Find a Champion

Start by taking the reins or finding an individual or group to take up the challenge to improve your school's travel environment.

Seek Out Your Regional SRTS Coordinator

Safe Routes to School Regional Coordinators from eight Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) throughout New Jersey are ready, willing and able to offer advice and assistance in kicking off Safe Routes to School programs in communities from all 21 counties. Find your SRTS Regional Coordinator at https://www.saferoutesnj.org/find-your-srts-regional-coordinator/

Prepare a School Travel Plan

A key question to be answered before moving forward is: Does your school have a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Travel Plan? If yes, collect as much information as you can based on previous SRTS efforts and build on those resources. You should also look to see what issues and solutions have been previously discussed and determine their status before moving forward. If you do not have a School Travel Plan, enlist your Regional Coordinator to help you create one.

Host a Kickoff Meeting

Once your champions have been identified and taken on the commitment to making changes, host a kickoff meeting for the project. Invite others who feel the same to form a task force. Be proactive about including people or organizations that can positively contribute to the process of implementing your vision such as your local department of public works. Together, craft your vision, establish next steps and assign responsibility.



Kickoff Meeting for the Borough of Collingswood Safe Routes to School Travel Plan.

Define your Vision

Creating a vision at the onset will lead to the setting of goals and determining strategies for implementing them. Use your vision statement as an expression of what you want to see in the long-term as a result of the task force's work. Your goals and strategies for implementation should be geared towards achieving that outcome.

Map the Issues

The first task should be to inventory the areas in the vicinity of the school, especially the primary access routes used by students. Task force members should walk the school neighborhood, identify the major issues and document all findings through photos or maps. There are many tools available to evaluate walking and bicycling conditions within the school zone. Before completing any walking or bicycling assessment, you will need to obtain two maps: A School Neighborhood Map and a School Site Map. These maps can be easily generated online at https://www.saferoutesnj.org/mapping-your-neighborhood/

Once your mapping exercise has been completed, identify high priority problem locations on a map and ask others in the community to contribute their thoughts on the issues.

Sample Vision Statement

The Anytown Safe Routes to School Task Force will strive to bring awareness of the Safe Routes to School Program to the schools, identify infrastructure improvements necessary to make walking and bicycling to school safer, encourage more students to walk or bike to school through activities and events, enforce traffic laws, and incorporate walking and bicycling education into the school curriculum.



Map Example. Image: Cross County Connection TMA

Consult with Others to Generate Solutions

There are numerous ways to approach solutions to school zone planning. Create one central list that starts with the high priority locations and works its way down to lower priority locations. Work with local experts, law enforcement or municipal, county and state engineers to identify strategies. Separate your strategies into short-term, low-cost solutions, and long-term, high-cost solutions.

After creating your prioritized list of improvements and locations, and discussing it with members of your community, you may find that some issues can be easily solved with either short-term or temporary fixes. For instance, if speeding is identified as an issue you may want to install a speed radar feedback sign in the school zone as one of your solutions.

However, there are some solutions that will require going through a more in-depth process. If changing the speed limit within the school zone is proposed as a solution, speeding must be verified through a speed study initiated by the police department. The results of that study will determine, for example, if a change in the speed limit is warranted or if the introduction of traffic calming is necessary to support a lowering of the speed limit.

If missing sidewalks are an issue, the municipal engineer will need to be contacted and included in the conversation (if they are not already on your task force). In general, anything that requires construction will require additional study and can take time to secure funding, create the design, and obtain the proper permitting necessary for construction.

Example of an Action Plan Matrix

Montclair Safe Routes to School Program
Safe Routes to School Travel Plan – Bradford Elementary School

Action Plan Matrix – Bradford School Neighborhood Specific

Timeframe Definition	Cost Definition
Short-term = less than 3 months	**Low** = Less than $2,000
Mid-term = between 3 to 6 months	**Medium** = between $2,000 and $10,000
Long-term = longer than 6 months	**High** = more than $10,000

No.	Action	Partners	Timeframe	Cost
Lead Entity: Principal				
1	Create a school pavement "quilt" to define the drop-off zone along College Avenue	Township/Board of Education/PTA	Mid-term	Low
2	Order and install "No Idling Zone" signs around the school	Township/NJDEP/ Board of Education	Short-term	Low
3	Install "Pull up" signage in the red zone to reinforce use of the entire curb length	Township/Board of Education	Short-term	Low
4	Invite NJ TRANSIT to give their SAFETY RULES! Assembly presentation every year	Board of Education	Short-term/ ongoing	Low
5	Utilize the school website to advance Safe Routes to School safety campaign/messages	Board of Education	Short-term/ ongoing	Low

Decide What, When and How to Collect and Measure

You will not be able to measure change in the school environment if you do not know what to look for and where to look for it. Set up mechanisms to establish your baseline so that you will be able to measure impacts before, during, and after changes have been made to the school zone. Information on traffic volumes, speeds, crashes, yielding percentage at crosswalks, and number of students walking or bicycling to school can all be relevant to measuring impact resulting from infrastructure improvements.



Pneumatic tubes can record speeds and volumes.

Use the Results of Initial Efforts to Inform Next Steps

Take the results you have identified and interpret the findings to inform the next steps. For example: Since the implementation of the use of temporary in-roadway "Stop for Pedestrian" crossing signs, has there been an increase in the percentage of motorists who stop for pedestrians in that particular crosswalk? If your results show a dramatic increase, it may show that a permanent installation is warranted. If there is no change in the percentage of motorists stopping for pedestrians, then you may want to consider other solutions for this site.

Be an Original

Transportation and safety issues are unique to each school zone. It is important to recognize that while your school zone and its physical attributes (crosswalks, traffic control signs, etc.) may resemble that of many other neighborhood streets, they are not the same. Your school zone is distinctive and should be designed to be the place where the safety of student travel takes precedence over a roadway's functional classification. The solutions proposed and implemented should be customized to fit your school neighborhood, population and priorities.

Start Small

Creating any type of program that is volunteer based or minimally funded is difficult. Instead of jumping in headfirst, take your time and start when and where you feel most comfortable. To build momentum, start with the little wins or the low-hanging fruit that you know can easily be attained in a short amount of time.

Bring in Reinforcements

Utilize available resources to build your program such as the TMAs and Safe Routes Resource Center. They currently offer assistance in hosting bicycle and pedestrian events such as a walk/bike to school day, organizing educational events such as bicycle safety lessons, and developing planning and policy documents such as a walkability assessment.

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

All your planning efforts are intended to lead to one ultimate goal: improving the overall access and safety conditions for families walking and bicycling to school. If implemented in conjunction with other programmatic strategies, these physical improvements will elevate walking and/or bicycling as safe, healthy and convenient options to getting to school.

WOODBINE SCHOOL DISTRICT: MAPPING INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Woodbine School District
Year plan was completed: 2024
Municipality: Borough of Woodbine,
County: Cape May

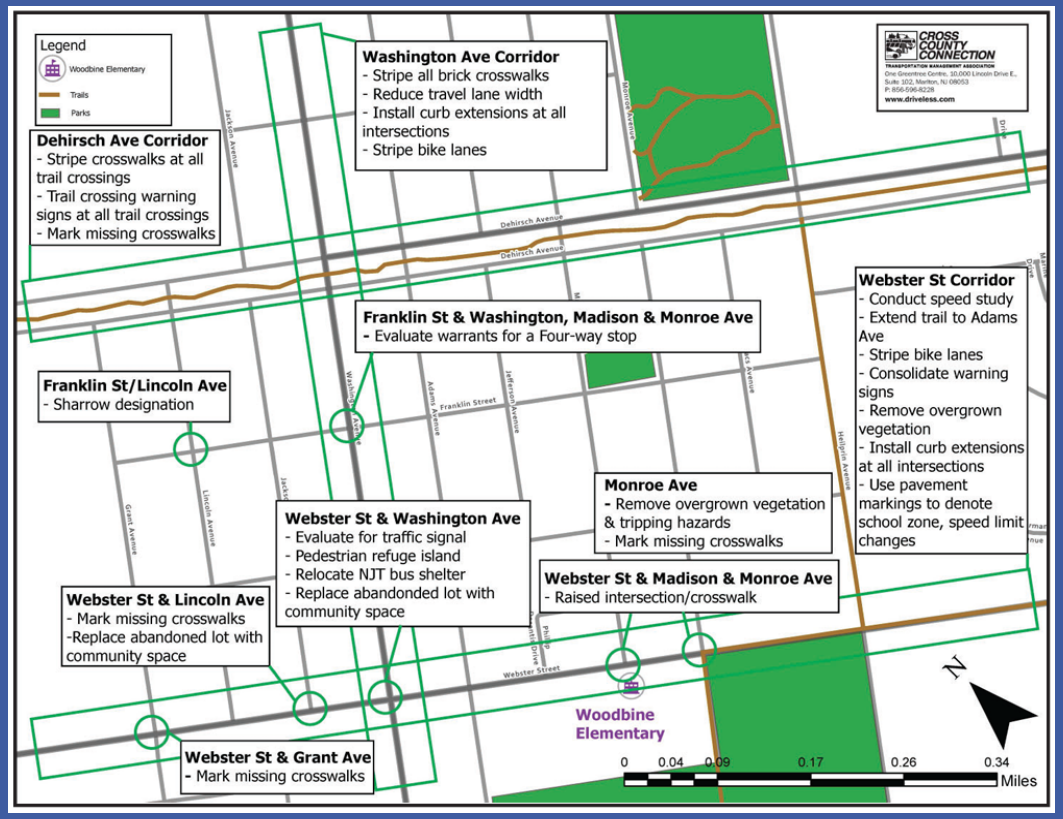
The Woodbine School District Travel Plan connects school policy, route analysis, and funding strategies in a clear and replicable way. The plan builds on existing policy and school travel planning going back over a decade. Infrastructure recommendations were made following an in-depth existing conditions assessment of the school's walking routes and walk audit.

In consultation with a Student Travel Plan Working Group, the project team for the plan provided infrastructure recommendations across six (6) categories, including:

Traffic Studies: Speed studies, warrant evaluations for traffic signals, and warrant evaluations for stop signs.

Traffic-Calming Measures: Reducing travel lane width, raised intersections and crosswalks, curb extensions, and pedestrian refuge islands.

Warning Signs, Pavement Markings, and Beacons: RRFBs, marking missing crosswalks, striping brick crosswalks, consolidating warning signs, and using pavement markings.



The Woodbine School District Student Travel Plan contains a map indicating the locations where infrastructure improvements are recommended. Image: Arterial

Removing Sidewalk Obstructions: Removing overgrown vegetation and tripping hazards.

Community Placemaking: Replacing abandoned lots with pocket parks or playgrounds and relocating bus shelters.

Improving Bicycle Facilities: Share the road designations using sharrows, striping bicycle lanes, extending multi-use trails, installing trail warning signs, striping all trail crosswalks, and revising the Borough Complete Streets Policy.

NETCONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: PRIORITIZING EDUCATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Netcong Elementary School Travel Plan

Year plan was completed: 2024
Municipality: Netcong
County: Morris

The Netcong Elementary School Travel Plan is a continuation of planning efforts dating back to 2006 and 2016. It showcases the School District and Borough's commitment to student safety, fitness and health, and reducing vehicular traffic.

The plan contains a robust set of encouragement and education programs including:

Ask the Community to Pitch In: The Administration will write to parents to suggest that their children walk, bicycle, or carpool as much as possible to and from school.

Netcong PTA Walk and Roll Club: The School District will continue to promote monthly Netcong PTA Walk and Roll Club events including International and statewide "Walk to School Day" events.

Bicycle Rodeos: The Administration will continue to work with the PTA, Borough Police Department, Northern New Jersey SafeKids, and Avenues in Motion to run annual bicycle rodeos.

Walking and Bicycling as Part of the Curriculum: The School District will promote walking to school by organizing bicycle and pedestrian lesson plans and education programs.

Partnering with Law Enforcement: The School District will partner with the Netcong Police Department on two (2) educational initiatives, leveraging school and municipal websites and social media to:

- Provide public anti-idling law education to parents, school staff, community members and delivery trucks/commercial vehicles, and;
- To provide education on traffic laws including no texting, cell phone use, stop and stay stopped for pedestrians and obeying crossing guards to school staff, parents and community members.

Finally, the School District will be active in distributing the School Travel Plan to the school community.



Where to Find Funding

There are several places to seek funding for SRTS infrastructure improvements including:

Federal Programs

There are several federal programs under which funding for infrastructure improvements would be eligible.

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TA or TAP) is the largest federal source for trail and greenway funding under MAP-21, the most recent federal transportation funding law. Transportation Alternatives is a combination of two core active transportation programs from SAFETEA-LU—Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School (SRTS). While Transportation Alternatives projects are federally funded, the funds are administered by the New Jersey Department of Transportation and the state's three Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs): the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). Funding categories include: bicycle and pedestrian facilities; safe routes for non-drivers; abandoned railroad corridors for trails; environmental mitigation activity including stormwater mitigation; and community improvement activities including vegetation management, historic preservation, archaeological activities related to transportation projects, and boulevard construction.

To the right is a table listing possible infrastructure improvements and corresponding federal programs under which they would be eligible for funding. Note: All federal funding comes with specific procedures and requirements so be sure to check eligibility prior to completing the application.

In New Jersey, the creation of school-related traffic regulations pertaining to mid-block crosswalks, school speed limits, bicycle lanes, etc. must follow a regulatory process. This regulatory process is set forth in N.J.A.C. 16:27-4.1 through N.J.A.C. 16:27-5.1.

Regulatory Process

Desired Improvement	Program Eligible for funding under MAP-21
Crosswalk, new or retrofit	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Sidewalks, new or retrofit	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Traffic calming	TAP, STP, HSIP
Police patrol	TAP, UZA
Trail/highway intersection	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, RTP, NHPP
Bicycle parking facilities	TAP, CMAQ, STP, UZA, SGR, 5311, BBF
Spot improvement program	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP
Bicycle lanes on roadway	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA,
Trail/highway intersection	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, RTP, NHPP
Signal improvements	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP
Curb cuts and ramps	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Paved Shoulders	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA
Safety brochure/book	CMAQ, STP, RTP, UZA, 402

Abbreviation	Program
402	State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program
5310	Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities
5311	Formula Grantsfor Rural Areas, Rural Transit Assistance Program, and Public Transportation on Indian Reservations
BBF	Bus and Bus Facilities
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
NHPP	National Highway Performance Program
RTP	Recreational Trails Program
SGR	State of Good Repair Grant Program
STP	SurfaceTransportation Program
TAP	Transportation Alternatives Program
UZA	Urbanized Area Formula Program

NJ SRTS Program

Federal funding is periodically made available for infrastructure projects through the NJ Department of Transportation. Infrastructure projects may include the planning, design and construction or installation of sidewalks, crosswalks, signals, traffic-calming and bicycle facilities. Visit the NJDOT website for more information, www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/ srts/funding.shtm

County and Municipal Funding

Many low-cost engineering solutions such as new signs or fresh paint on crosswalks can easily be incorporated into the work plan for a local or county public works department. Do research to identify existing funds that are currently targeted to transportation, safety or health issues - like Capital Improvement Projects and operating budgets.

Additional Funding Resources

- Funding Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning, Programs and Projects is a compilation of funding sources by the NJ Safe Routes to School; https://www.saferoutesnj.org/grants-funding-overview/
- NJ Local Aid Resource Center provides NJ counties and municipalities with project planning, grant applications, and project delivery guidance to help improve local transportation infrastructure; https://njdotlocalhub.com/local-aid-econ-dev/

Complementing Infrastructure Changes with Programmatic Efforts

SRTS continues to value and incorporate the 5Es program. Engineering solutions should be the result of a comprehensive planning process, guided by the SAFE framework (Sustainable, Accessible, Fair, and Engaging). Any physical improvements to the school zone should be accompanied by programmatic improvements.



International Walk to School Day in West Orange.

- Participate in International Walk to School Day and National Bike to School Day.
- Introduce bicycle, pedestrian and traffic safety into the curriculum.
- Utilize the school website to relay important information about changes to the school zone.
- Use the school handbook to include clear information about expected, safe behavior within the school zone for motorists, walkers, bikers, and bus riders. Ask that both the parent/guardian and the student sign off that they have read the information.
- Create and hang banners near school entrances that include the rules of the school zone.
- Create a school-wide pledge that asks parents and students to walk, bike, drive, take transit or the school bus safely.
- Ask the school board to pass a policy that supports walking and bicycling to school.
- Address walking and bicycling to school as a way to meet daily physical activity goals as part of your school wellness policy.
- Conduct school traffic counts.
- Host safety forums/presentations.

COMPLETE STREETS AND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL: BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users – pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Instituting a Complete Streets policy ensures that agencies routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users.

A community with a Complete Streets policy considers the needs of children every time a transportation investment decision is made. Roads near schools and in residential neighborhoods are designed and altered to allow children, the most vulnerable users of our streets, to travel safely. Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School have numerous synergies, so it is only natural for them to work together to advocate for and to strengthen the practice of safely walking and bicycling to and from schools and throughout our communities.



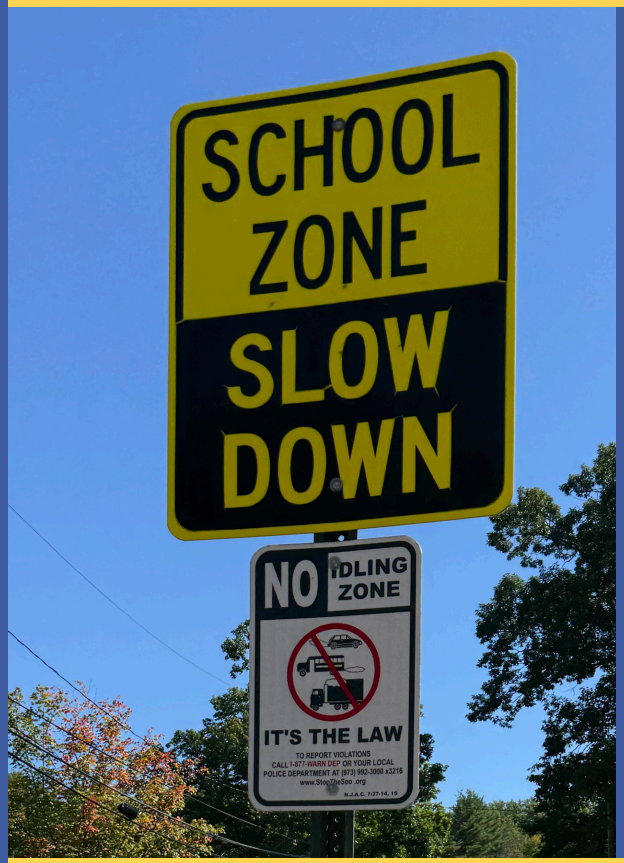
Ocean Avenue through Deal, NJ is an example of a Complete Street in a suburban setting with wide sidewalks and street lighting appropriate to the context. Image: Parsons Brinckerhoff

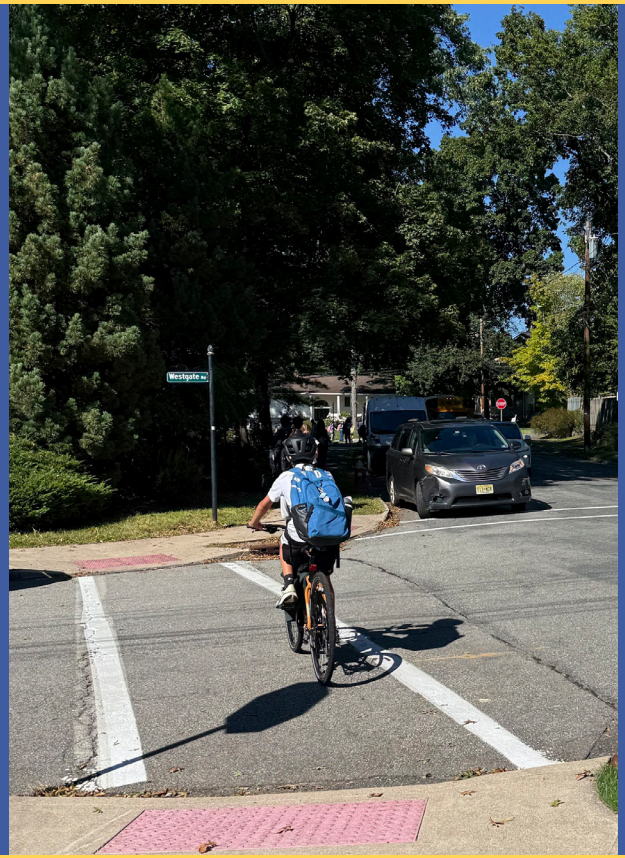


Main Street in Califon, NJ is an example of a Complete Street in a more rural setting. Image: Parsons Brinckerhoff

There are several resources in New Jersey that can help with developing and implementing local Complete Streets policies, including:

- The New Jersey Department of Transportation Complete Streets website includes information on success stories, workshops, etc.
- The New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center collects all adopted Complete Streets policies around New Jersey.







DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY