

CHAPTER I

Introduction

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“ Base your vision on how you
want to live, not what you’ve
learned to live with. ”

– *Anonymous*





CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Safe Routes to School (SRTS), generally, refers to programs that promote walking and biking to school to achieve a wide range of benefits for students, school and community. These benefits include reduced traffic in the vicinity of schools, improved pedestrian/bicycle access and safety and increased physical activity among students, contributing to healthy lifestyles. By incorporating each of five “E’s” – Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering and Evaluation – SRTS addresses a wide variety of topics relevant to journeys to and from school within a municipality, district or school.

In May of 2005, the Morris County Division of Transportation (MCDOT) selected MacKinnon Middle School and Duffy Elementary School, which occupy the same building, to be pilots for their Morris County Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Program, which was funded by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). Wharton Borough was selected by MCDOT for the pilot project for a number of reasons. First, Wharton is a compact community where the students are not bused to school and safe alternatives to driving are needed. Second, both school and municipal officials enthusiastically supported community participation in International Walk to School Day (the first Wednesday in October). They had demonstrated that they were ready, willing and able to participate and were prepared to maintain SRTS momentum.

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of the Wharton Schools SRTS Pilot Program was the dedication demonstrated by their project team. The SRTS team – led by the School District Superintendent, with support from Borough, County, parent, and community representatives – made it their mission to complete a successful and meaningful SRTS program that encouraged students to work with team leaders in both the classroom and at special events. The MCDOT facilitated the program with help from a local and a national consultant team, led by The RBA Group of Morristown. Together, the local and national consultant teams worked to develop an SRTS program unique to the needs of Wharton schools. They sought to develop a program that would engage the entire community in improving the physical environment and encouraging a social climate to support children’s ability to walk, bicycle, carpool or take transit safely to school – all while gaining added health, air quality, traffic safety, and quality of life benefits.



Purpose

The program's overall purpose involves building a physical environment and encouraging a social climate that supports children's ability to walk, bicycle, carpool or take transit safely to school. This includes such goals as:

- Reducing traffic congestion around schools
- Creating safer, calmer streets and neighborhoods
- Improving air quality and provide a cleaner environment
- Increasing physical activity for children
- Fostering a healthier lifestyle for the whole family

Another purpose of this SRTS program was to ensure that the results – both the successes and challenges – of the Wharton experience were recorded and published in order to assist both the Wharton schools in advancing their SRTS Program and to serve as a resource to guide future projects in other communities in Morris County and New Jersey. This included:

- Providing Morris County with a database of SRTS programs
 - Program outreach and educational materials
 - Infrastructure treatment options for preferred routes
 - Potential performance measures
- Preparing a SRTS Plan for MacKinnon and Duffy Schools that incorporates findings and feedback from prior tasks and provides for a sustainable, long-term program



While this plan focuses specifically on the Wharton Borough Public Schools, a complementary How-To guide serves as the main document to aid other Morris County Schools in beginning and implementing their SRTS programs.

Methodology

The Wharton SRTS Program planning effort included several broad work tasks. They included:

Background Documentation

Background documentation for the SRTS program was collected from the perspectives of the health, enforcement, educational, engineering and encouragement fields to identify some of the best practices in SRTS programs in the United States and worldwide. The technical memorandum that resulted from this effort is intended to provide both Wharton Public Schools and schools throughout Morris County with a menu item of program ideas in the SRTS realm. Furthermore, an



update of potential funding/grant program information, which was previously developed for the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Plan, was provided to direct SRTS advocates towards potential funding opportunities.

Existing Conditions Evaluation

Existing conditions were documented by utilizing a combination of information available from Wharton Borough and/or Morris County and field information was collected on site by the consultant team. This included an evaluation of roadway width, pavement condition, curbing, sidewalk condition, traffic volumes, truck percentage, speed limits, lighting, parking restrictions, and crash data. Students aided in this process of evaluating existing conditions through the following activities:

- Creating Time-Radius Maps
- Performing Walkability Audits
- Measuring Cross Sections
- Camera Exercise (The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly)



Public Visioning Meeting

In April 2006, the SRTS project team hosted a public visioning meeting where community members had the opportunity to learn about the SRTS Program and share their ideas on what types of events, projects and activities were of most interest to the Wharton community. At this meeting, adults and children were led in various exercises fashioned to garner their perspectives on what they envision an effective SRTS Program to be. These activities included:

- **Visioning:** Those present were asked to describe their dreams for the future.

Responses included broad, long-term goals like fewer autos on the roads and improved environmental health as well as specific improvements like clearly marked crosswalks. With their visions in mind, participants took part in subsequent activities geared to help develop their School Travel Plan.



- **Route Planning:** Participants were asked to begin to bring their visions to reality through a route planning exercise. Using the same base map that was used for the student field exercise, they identified where students currently walk or bike, where they could if conditions were improved, major obstacles and attractors to walking and biking.



- **Voting on Preferred Treatments/Programs:**

Finally, solutions were categorized according to the “5 E” approach to implementing a SRTS Program: Encouragement Programs, Education Programs, Enforcement Programs, Engineering Treatments and Evaluation Measures. Each person was asked to rank the actions that they thought would best help the Wharton Schools realize their SRTS goals. By using color-coded stickers, participants could indicate for each solution whether they “loved it,” “hated it” or “would consider it.” Walk to School Days, Assemblies/Guest Speakers, and *Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25* Campaigns were voted among the top programmatic solutions, while traffic calming and facility improvements ranked highest for preferred engineering treatments.



By pulling together representatives from the school and community, the SRTS project team was able to refine their program goals, expand their understanding of optimal routes to school, brainstorm solutions, and further develop their ideas for an ideal SRTS program.

Strategy Meetings and Briefings

Strategy meetings were held throughout the Plan Development phase and will continue to be held during the Plan Implementation phase of the project. The purpose, focus and attendees varied with each meeting. Meetings included:

- TAC Meeting (August 29, 2005)
- TAC Meeting (September 14, 2005)
- SRTS Program Kick-Off Meeting (December 12, 2005)
- TAC Meeting (March 28, 2006)
- Joint Board of Education/Borough Council Meeting (March 30, 2006)
- PTA Briefing Meeting (April 4, 2006)
- TAC Meeting (July 12, 2006)
- Joint Board of Education/Borough Council Meeting (August 24, 2006)

In addition, four strategy meetings and a training session will also be held during the Plan Implementation Phase.

Student and Parent Surveys

Both student and parent surveys were distributed during the spring of 2006. Student surveys were used to quantify the ways children typically travel to and from school and why. Parent surveys were used to obtain information about how children travel to school and what affected their choices, ultimately attempting to address what can be done to help parents become more comfortable with allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school. The surveys elicited information and ideas that helped shape the recommendations and strategies presented in this SRTS Plan. For complete results of the spring 2006 survey, please see Appendix III.



Best Practices

A variety of improvements and program activities that both create improved walking and bicycling environments, and facilitate walking and bicycling to school, can be included in a SRTS Program. They include: improving sidewalks and crossings, enforcing speed limits, educating students and parents, and addressing issues of personal safety. Successful programs include the following elements, known as the Five E's – Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Encouragement and Evaluation.

1. **Engineering:** Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.
2. **Education:** Teaching children and parents about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.
3. **Enforcement:** Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (this includes enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crossings, and proper walking and bicycling behaviors), and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs.
4. **Encouragement:** Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
5. **Evaluation:** Monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data before and after the intervention(s).

Although each element can stand alone, the most successful SRTS programs have integrated elements from all approaches.

Engineering

Engineering elements include physical improvements to the transportation infrastructure in the vicinity of the school or on school property that are intended to improve access and safety for travel by walking and bicycling and 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. The following engineering treatments have been identified as positive contributors to SRTS goals:

- Sidewalks/Bike Lanes
- Crosswalks
- Bike Racks
- High-Visibility Crosswalks
- Advance Warning Signage
- Traffic Calming Measures
 - Curb Extensions
 - Speed Humps (Speed Tables)
 - Raised Intersections
 - Gateways





Enforcement

Enforcement generally involves three facets: police, community design and local policy. First, the local police should be an integral part of the SRTS program as a valuable resource for both program implementation and data collection. The police understand travel patterns in the community and have access to crash data, which can be helpful in planning walking routes. Second, quality community design can guide and support desired behavior in an effort to develop a culture where pedestrians and cyclists are respected and their mobility is given priority. Finally, both school and municipal policies and procedures that pertain to walking, bicycling, busing, parking and pick-up/drop-off issues need to be supportive of the SRTS plan. The following enforcement programs have been identified as positive contributors to SRTS goals:

- School Safety Zones
- Pedestrian Sting Operations
- Speed Trailers
- Sidewalk, Building and Property Maintenance Laws
- Neighborhood Watch/Escort Programs
- Law Enforcement Presence
- Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25
- Photo Enforcement (Red Light Camera)



Education

Education is another key component of a SRTS Plan. A variety of educational components can be included in a plan. This refers not just to the education of students through curriculum changes and extracurricular activities, but the education of all parties involved in making the SRTS plan work. Students walking and biking to school must know how to act responsibly as users of the public right-of-way. Parents can also be educated about school and other policies regarding student safety. Student bicyclists need to know appropriate bicycling skills. Parents, teachers, and law enforcement officials all must thoroughly understand this information since they will be responsible for imparting it to students and reinforcing appropriate behavior by students. The following education programs have been identified as positive contributors to SRTS goals:

- Neighborhood Working Groups
- Walk or Bike Across America
- Walking Math
- Classroom Activities
- Guest Speakers
- Campus Walks
- Walking Education Programs
- Auto Emissions Exercises
- Walkability/Bikeability Audits





Encouragement

Throughout the process of developing and implementing a SRTS program, it will be necessary to encourage participation in the SRTS activities. Many media tools can be used to do this, including posters, e-mail, newsletters, flyers, and school notices (backpack mail). Existing school and community communication resources include:

- School newsletters
- Board of Education/School District newsletters
- Local newspapers (opinion-editorials)
- Community newsletters
- Neighborhood list-serves (email distribution lists)
- Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on local television and radio stations
- School public information/public relations officer

A variety of contests, which have encouragement (and sometimes educational) aspects to them, can be incorporated into a SRTS program. Many of these contests are based on students tallying their miles for walking, biking, and busing to school to win points for prizes or recognition, either individually or for their class. Art contests and essay contests are also possibilities for independent or classroom activities. The following encouragement programs have been identified as positive contributors to SRTS goals:

- Walking School Bus or Cycle Train
- Walk-to-School Days
- Proclamations/Resolutions
- Pace Cars
- Bicycle Rodeos
- Walk to School Contests
- Frequent Walker Cards
- Golden Sneaker Awards
- Walk and Wave/Walking Wednesday
- Walk and Roll School Days
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Quiz Show



Evaluation

Evaluation is necessary to:

- Assess progress in implementing the plan
- Progress towards the completion of each element, especially those of significant duration
- Identify success in the achievement of the overall goals and objectives

This includes developing a monitoring schedule and identifying who is responsible for carrying out the monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring and evaluation process can be the basis for establishing new goals and objectives and revising or updating existing ones. The first step involves collecting baseline data in the forms of travel mode surveys, attitudinal surveys, bicycle counts, walkability/bikeability audits and any other measurement tasks. Each of the selected tasks should be performed regularly to track the progress of the SRTS program as a whole.