

Transportation Practitioners— Stakeholders in Safer Routes to School

An ongoing partnership between ITE and the National Center for Safe Routes to School has fostered the development of outreach, education, and training materials for ITE members to better advise, participate, and communicate when involved in safe routes to school activities. The most recent product from the partnership is a series of informational/instructional briefing sheets designed to support transportation practitioner leadership and engagement in establishing safer walking and bicycling routes in the vicinity of schools.

BY KAY FITZPATRICK, PH.D., P.E., ALIYAH N. HORTON, CAE,
AND DAVID PARISI, P.E., T.E.

TRANSPORTATION PROFESSIONALS work in an arena that must address a broad range of customer needs to provide safe access and mobility for all users. ITE works to forge this connection by broadening informational support for the design and construction of safe and accessible routes for walking and bicycling that can have a positive impact on communities.

For the past several years, ITE has maintained a partnership with the National Center for Safe Routes to School to develop outreach, education, and training materials for ITE members to better advise, participate, and communicate when involved in safe routes to school (SRTS) activities. The most recent product is a series of informational/instructional briefing sheets to support transportation practitioner leadership and engagement in SRTS programs.

Among the many SRTS goals, a key objective is to encourage communities to create safer walking and bicycling routes in the vicinity of schools. The program supports the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve the safety and accessibility of pedestrian and bicycle facilities to meet the needs of children and to enhance understanding of safer walking and bicycling practices. Benefits of the program include promotion of more healthy and active lifestyles and reductions in traffic congestion, fuel consumption, and air pollution near schools.

Briefing Series

The series of briefing sheets are a hands-on reference—tools and techniques that a transportation professional can refer to while implementing a specific SRTS program. The series includes the following topics:

- Introduction
- School Site Selection and Off-site Access
- Walking and Bicycling Audits

- School Routes Maps
- School Strategies to Improve Traffic Operations and Safety
- School On-site Design
- School Area Traffic Control
- Reduced School Area Speed Limits
- Traffic Calming Near Schools

The briefing sheets can be accessed at <http://www.ite.org/safety/default.asp>. Below is a brief overview of each of the topics.

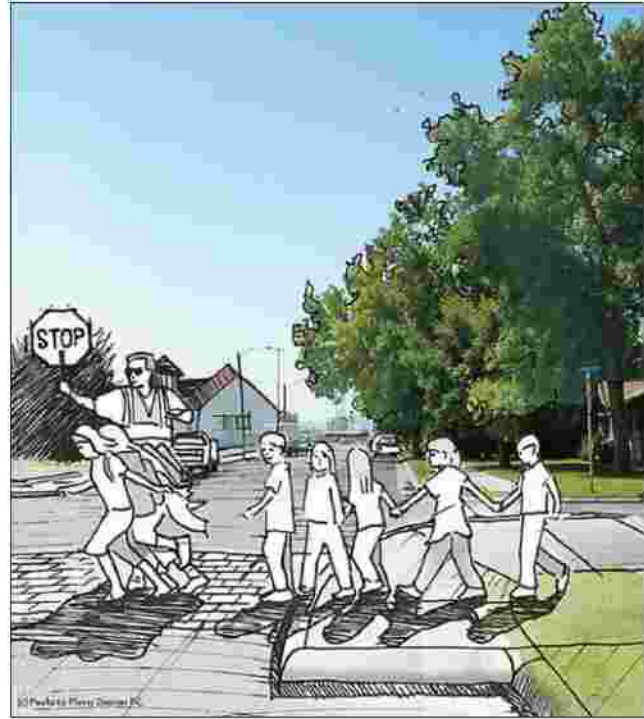
Introduction

A successful SRTS program requires a multidisciplinary team effort that engages stakeholders early in the process. Transportation professionals are a critical part of that stakeholder mix.

The “Introduction” briefing sheet identifies the stakeholder team and provides an overview of the SRTS program. It walks the reader through the Five Es—Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, and Evaluation—and identifies how they relate specifically to transportation professionals and the implementation of a SRTS program. The document also provides references to online resources that can be used to expand upon best practices identified in the overall series.

School Site Selection/ Off-site Access

Schools should be situated to allow easy walking and bicycling for the population of children that will attend the school. A central principle of traffic safety is to eliminate or minimize conflicts; therefore, when designing a new school site, the various design components (for example, buildings, driveways, walkways, bus loading areas, parking lots) should be positioned to achieve this principle. It is desirable to locate school sites with appropriate access from the adjacent roadway, walkway, and bikeway networks.



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The “School Site Selection and Off-site Access” briefing sheet provides an overview on key issues to consider when selecting a school site, along with how to plan off-site access to the school. Topics discussed include sidewalks, major crossings, road alignment, turning lanes, and one-way operations.

Walking and Bicycling Audits

Walking and bicycling audits are field visits to identify barriers or challenges to students using these modes to travel between home and school. Audits generally include a tour of the school area, where participants identify issues related to walking and bicycling, followed by a debriefing and brainstorming session to rank high-priority concerns and identify potential solutions. Participants systematically document information about the social, built, and natural environments that affect students walking or bicycling to and from school.

The “Walking and Bicycling Audits” briefing sheet discusses how to identify stakeholders to involve in the audit and provides direction on how to prepare for the audit, detailed instructions on conducting the audit, ways to conduct a focused debriefing after the audit with participants, and means to complete the audit and potential next steps.

School Route Maps

School walking/bicycling maps are effective tools for informing parents and students of traffic conditions and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure around their children’s schools. The maps can indicate the preferred, most convenient, and most accessible walking and bicycling routes to and from school and identify areas to avoid because of high traffic volumes, lack of walkways, absence of controlled street crossings, and other conditions. Effective maps can show off-street trails, marked crosswalks, crossing guards, and pedestrian/bicycle facilities that assist students in walking or bicycling, as well as challenging intersections, sidewalk gaps, and other barriers.

The “School Route Maps” briefing sheet provides insight on qualitative and quantitative background information that can be useful in developing maps, guidance on working with the community, and tips to make school route maps that both students and their parents will find useful.

School Strategies to Improve Traffic Operations and Safety

High volumes of traffic at schools during arrival and pickup times can lead to poor traffic circulation and often unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, queued vehicles dropping off

or picking up students may be excessive, school parking lots may lack traffic controls, and students walking or bicycling to or from school may not use designated sidewalks or crosswalks—or sidewalks and crosswalks may be unavailable to them.

The “School Strategies to Improve Traffic Operations and Safety” briefing sheet discusses ways of improving traffic operations on the school grounds and outlines how issues can be identified, how policies and engineering solutions can be developed, and how solutions can be selected to address the issues.

School On-site Design

A well-designed school site should support the safe arrival and departure of pedestrians and bicyclists. From a traffic operations perspective, increased walking and bicycling to school has the added benefit of decreasing the need to accommodate long parent vehicle queues at drop-off and pickup times. Building entrances should be located with consideration for pedestrian “desire lines.” This entails determining the directions and points from which pedestrians and bicyclists are likely to approach the building and then identifying whether the design has inadvertently placed any unacceptable traffic conflicts or obstacles in their routes.

The "School On-site Design" briefing sheet discusses separation of pedestrians, bicycles, parent vehicles, and buses; bicycle access and storage; location of school entrances; bus-related design and operations; design and operation of parent vehicle zones; loading locations; driveways and internal roadway network; parking; supplemental devices to minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflicts; and traffic control devices.

School Area Traffic Control

To achieve uniformity of traffic control in school areas, comparable traffic situations need to be treated in a consistent manner. Tools used to manage traffic near and at schools include signs, pavement markings, beacons, and traffic signals. Part 7 of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*¹ and the *ITE Traffic Control Devices Handbook*² provide information on traffic control devices related to schools.

The "School Area Traffic Controls" briefing sheet provides an overview on signs, pavement markings, signals, and beacons being used near schools. Treat-

ments discussed include school signs, changeable message signs or driver feedback signs, in-street pedestrian crossing signs, advance stop or yield line and signs, marked crosswalks, rectangular rapid-flashing beacons, pedestrian hybrid beacons, and traffic signals.

Reduced School Area Speed Limits

Higher vehicle speeds are strongly associated with a greater likelihood of both a crash and serious injury to pedestrians and bicyclists. Tools used to reduce vehicle speeds in school zones include police enforcement, public awareness campaigns, and engineering countermeasures such as school speed limit zones.

The "Reduced School Area Speed Limits" briefing sheet explores the principal issues to addressing speed limits near schools, including when speed limits should be reduced in the vicinity of a school, appropriate school speed limits, where the reduced school speed zone should begin and end, and when the reduced school speed limits should be in effect.

Traffic Calming Near Schools

Parents often cite high vehicular travel speeds and traffic volumes as impediments to allowing their children to walk or bicycle to and from school. Calming traffic through the application of engineering tools can help to reduce vehicular speeds and volumes. Traffic calming is the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for nonmotorized street users.

The "Traffic Calming Near Schools" briefing sheet is focused on the application of physical changes to roadways to achieve traffic calming. Such changes are generally more self-enforcing than traditional education and enforcement efforts, and they usually do not require continued intervention. The briefing sheet provides guidance on collaborative planning and information on traffic calming techniques often applicable near schools, including measures to control vehicle travel speeds and traffic volumes.

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KAY FITZPATRICK,

Ph.D., P.E., is a senior research engineer at the Texas Transportation Institute, which is part of the Texas A&M University System.

She has led several state and national projects on pedestrians, driver speed, safety, and geometric design. She has undergraduate and graduate civil engineering degrees from Texas A&M and a doctorate from Penn State University. She is a member of ITE.

ALIYAH N. HORTON,

CAE, is senior director, external affairs, for the Institute of Transportation Engineers. Her decade at ITE has included her leadership of the



professional development, government affairs, chapter, and council services divisions of ITE. She holds a B.A. from Smith College, Northampton, MA, and is a Diversity

Executive Leadership Program Scholar of the American Society of Association Executives.



DAVID PARISI,

P.E., T.E., is an expert in the national safe routes to school (SRTS) movement. He has managed several SRTS programs throughout

the United States, including the award-winning Marin County SRTS program for the Transportation Authority of Marin. He led the development of SRTS engineering toolboxes for ITE, the National Center for Safe Routes to School, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. He is a certified national trainer for SRTS. He is a member of ITE, and has prepared SRTS-related publications and webinars for ITE.



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