

Reporter



La Crosse Bike to Work Week Event

Welcome

Welcome to the fifth edition of the Safe Routes Reporter.

SRTS projects are underway, more communities are completing their SRTS plans, and the second round of funded projects is getting started.

It's exciting to see such a large interest in making it safer and more appealing for kids to walk and bike to school.

We hope you enjoy this fifth edition of the Safe Routes Reporter and we welcome your feedback.

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Local Highlights

La Crosse Bike to Work Week

Contributed by Virginia Gates Loehr,
 La Crosse County Safe Routes to School Coordinator

IN LA CROSSE, COULEE BIKE TO WORK WEEK kicked-off with a Bicycle Rodeo held in conjunction with the La Crosse Fitness Festival. Children who attended the rodeo received a bike safety talk from a police officer, a bicycle helmet fitted by a local bike shop, and a basic bike check from local bicycle mechanics. Children participated in a bicycle skills course, which focused on several important skills, such as quick

braking, balance, and riding in traffic. Finally, children could decorate their bikes for the bike parade, led by a local police officer.

In an effort to involve youth in Coulee Bike to Work Week, students from six area schools participated in the 2nd annual *Walk and Bike to School Challenge*, hosted by *Safe Routes to School*. Students were encouraged to actively commute to school every day of the week. Each day they participated they could enter their name in a drawing for prizes that included bike accessories and outdoor equipment. Several walking school buses were also organized to encourage participation. In all, over 3,000 trips to school were logged among the students and many parents and siblings joined in the fun.

Using *Safe Routes to School* funds, a bicycle training for educators was organized in coordination with *Coulee Bike to Work Week*. The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin came to La Crosse to train staff on ways to incorporate bicycle education activities in and out of the classroom. Participants received classroom instruction and went on an afternoon ride through the city. Thanks to this training, staff members from several schools in the La Crosse School District are better equipped to take students on biking field trips and after-school events.

Thank you Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin!



Local Highlights (continued)

Marshfield Driver Pledge Program

Contributed by Bonnie Curtiss,
Marshfield Planner/Zoning Administrator



Walking School Bus at Franklin Elementary, La Crosse, Wisconsin

WHEN MARSHFIELD'S SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL Task Force surveyed parents at nine elementary schools, parents identified "traffic-related issues" as a major concern. The concerns were with motorists who speed or drive dangerously or do not yield right of way to pedestrians in crosswalks.

To help address the issue and related concerns, Marshfield's SRTS Plan recommended creating an awareness campaign to promote safe driving on school grounds and in school zones. The *I'm an SRTS Driver* program was started this year to serve as a positive reinforcement of good driving behavior.

Parents are asked to sign a pledge form stating they will:

- » Become familiar with and follow the school's arrival and dismissal policies
- » Slow down in the school zone and adhere to the posted speed limit (15 mph) when children are present
- » Be alert and watch for pedestrians and bicyclists
- » Use caution when approaching crosswalks, look for children and adult crossing guards and stop when directed to do so
- » Be courteous and share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians.

Parents turning in signed pledge forms are given a Marshfield SRTS window cling for their car. SRTS drivers are encouraged to display the window cling to bring awareness to safe driving in the school zones. Children whose parents participate are entered in a drawing for prizes.

Marshfield is producing tv, radio and print Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to promote school zone safety. These PSAs will start running before school starts and into the beginning of the school year. The PSAs will reinforce the messages that are part of the ongoing *Driver Pledge Program*.

Madison's Spring Harbor Middle



Spring Harbor students get out and bike

School students go biking

AT SPRING HARBOR MIDDLE SCHOOL, students were allowed to choose from a number of environmentally friendly activities this spring, and 22 choose to go biking. Teacher Jen Vena, herself an avid cyclist, invited members of a local woman's cycling club to help chaperone the trip. Luckily for everyone involved, rain in the morning passed through, and a nice day ensued. The students set out from the school to the popular Capital City Trail, a multi-use trail that makes a loop from Madison through Fitchburg and back to Madison.

Although a few of the students also participate in an after school bike club, many were less experienced riders. In addition, few students had ever ridden 20 miles, so the ride was a good challenge for the group. Some students complained about the hills, but the presence of plenty of snacks ensured that energy levels remained high and everyone completed the full ride. This ride helped show the students that they could ride farther than they thought and that a trip of a few miles to school, the pool or park was very doable for them.

Local Highlights (continued)

Trips for Kids comes to Ladysmith

TRIPS FOR KIDS HAS ESTABLISHED its 68th chapter in Ladysmith, Wisconsin, in conjunction with the Ladysmith-Hawkins School District. The *Trips for Kids Ladysmith Chapter* will serve the district's disadvantaged youth.

"Working directly with a school district enables a chapter to connect immediately with kids who can benefit from the program. It also instantly establishes *Trips for Kids* as a community-based youth development resource," said Marilyn Price, *Trips for Kids* founder and director of the organization.

Price added, "Since bicycles and kids are a natural match, young people can be more open to learning when bikes are involved. An ultimate goal would be to integrate bicycling into the physical education departments of schools throughout the country."

The *Trips for Kids* chapters formed in conjunction with a school have found that it is easier to reach some students on the trail than it is in the classroom. Students at schools affiliated with *Trips for Kids* have improved behavior, attendance and relationships with their teachers.

Matt Bunton, president of the Ladysmith *Trips for Kids* chapter, said, ***"The effort to involve the students in Trips for Kids will ultimately increase their ownership of their school and further their academic and social development. As they participate in this program, the students will learn how to successfully conquer challenges on the trail and in other areas of their life."***

Operating in the United States, Canada and Israel, *Trips for Kids* has opened the world of cycling to over 50,000 at-risk youth through mountain bike rides and *Earn-A-Bike* programs. The more than sixty *Trips For Kids* chapters combine lessons in personal responsibility, achievement and environmental awareness through the development of practical skills, and the simple act of having fun.

News from around the Country

Burlington, Vermont's Walking School Bus

C.P. SMITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S WALKING school bus has operated every Wednesday in Burlington, Vermont, since March 2005, as part of a *Safe Routes to School* program.

While the bordering neighborhood has a fairly complete sidewalk system, some families were concerned about their children walking to school due to considerable traffic congestion along their route. Parents initiated and continue to lead the school's walking school bus. In winter 2005, they organized a meeting with other interested families to discuss their concerns and develop guidelines for a walking school bus. The group determined the route, departure time, meeting points and other details.

Now, every Wednesday morning the bus departs from a walk leader's house with a small group of children. For late arriving students, a closed garage door indicates that the bus has already departed. The group continues along a major roadway picking up children along the way. Some parents join in the walk while others drop their children at the stop and leave when the bus arrives. There is no written schedule; however, organizers hope to install signs along the route indicating stops and schedules. Before the walking school bus began, approximately six children walked this route to school. Now on *Walking Wednesdays* there are between 25 and 40 children and the traffic congestion along the route has all but disappeared.

Engaging Middle School Students in SRTS

THE FOLLOWING TIPS OFFER WAYS to engage students in a Safe Routes program. In most cases, the ideas require coordination with the school, so it is a good idea to discuss options with administrators and teachers before getting started.

Tip 1: Provide opportunities for self-expression and self-determination.

- » Ask students to design logos, posters, computer animations, and web sites with SRTS messages.
- » Put students in charge of planning SRTS-related activities, such as assemblies, fundraisers and publicity campaigns.

Tip 2: Create hands-on learning experiences that are personally relevant.

- » Ask students to identify locations where changes like sidewalks or crossing guards would improve walking conditions using GPS devices, digital cameras or checklists for assessing walkability and bikeability.
- » Establish a build-a-bike program, where students can learn about bicycle repair, maintenance, and safety by fixing up used or donated bikes, which they then get to keep.
- » Encourage students to voice their need for improved walking and biking conditions. Suggest a presentation at a public meeting or a letter writing campaign to local decision-makers.

Tip 3: Highlight the connection between SRTS and social, cultural, or environmental issues that may be important to students.

- » Organize lessons, activities, and events about climate change and the benefits of walking or bicycling for transportation.
- » Invite local sports personalities to talk about how walking and biking to school promotes physical fitness and health.

Tip 4: Foster positive interactions between middle school students and their peers and provide opportunities for peer identification and acceptance.

- » Start a club with a mission that ties into SRTS, such as an after-school bicycling or environmental club.
- » Plan events that emphasize fun but also deliver relevant SRTS messages, such as a *Walk to School Day* or *Walk and Roll Day*, celebrating walking and biking to school.
- » Develop a cross-age teaching program, where older students teach bicycle and pedestrian safety skills to younger students. High-school students can be recruited to teach middle school students and middle school students might decide to teach elementary school kids.

Tip 5: Be sensitive to the vulnerability, awkwardness, and self-consciousness that often accompany the middle school years.

- » Avoid putting middle school students in situations where they may be exposed to ridicule or embarrassment, such as contests that identify losers on an individual basis or where students are allowed to choose teams.
- » Be extremely sensitive when addressing the issue of obesity.

