

∴ City of Marshfield Safe Routes to School Plan (SRTS)

Introduction

SAA was the SRTS planning consultant selected by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to assist the City of Marshfield with its Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan. Marshfield was one of 15 communities throughout the state to receive 100% state funded assistance to create a plan. SRTS programs are sustained efforts to improve the health and safety of children through the application of “The Five E’s”. These include Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation. This SRTS plan includes recommendations from each of these five core areas.

Nationally, there are more parents driving their children to school today than ever before, and this has dramatically increased the amount of traffic congestion and air pollution around schools. Childhood obesity rates are similarly on the rise. From 1963-2004 the prevalence of obesity among children has tripled. Similarly, participation in organized physical activity during non-school hours has decreased, and most children are not getting the 60 minutes of physical activity per day recommended by experts (Chapter 1).

Today, fewer children walk and bicycle to school than ever before. Many school officials, health advocates, and transportation professionals feel that increasing walking and biking to school can positively contribute to the well-being of children and reverse recent trends. SRTS programs are sustained efforts to improve the health and safety of children through the application of “The Five E’s”. These include Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation. This SRTS plan includes recommendations from each of these five core areas.

The Marshfield Task Force was comprised of representatives from the schools, school district, and City, as well as parents, interested citizens and others. Generation of this plan included:

- A review of present policies and conditions (Chapter 2)
- A biking and walking audit as well as student, parent, and teacher surveys (Chapter 3)
- A comprehensive listing of recommendations and an action plan (Chapter 4)
- Additional resources and program ideas (Chapter 5)

Audits

In November of 2007, audits were conducted for the 8 Marshfield Schools included in the plan: Grant, Lincoln, Madison, and Washington Elementary; Marshfield Middle School and St. John the Baptist, Our Lady of Peace Intermediate and Columbus Catholic Middle Schools.

Audits consisted of the analysis of a ½ mile radius around each school – examining conditions that might impede the ability of students to walk or bike to school. One consistent issue that arose was the congestion and chaos at arrival/dismissal times at each school. In addition, gaps in the sidewalk network, speed and volume of motorized traffic, and parent driver behavior were also noted.

Surveys

Student, parent and teacher surveys were all conducted in the fall/winter of 2007. Students were asked to indicate how they arrived/left school over the period of a week. Parents were asked to identify issues that prevented them from allowing their children to walk or bike to school and teachers were asked to identify if their curriculum included any biking and walking lessons and if they noted any specific problems around their schools in terms of the walking/biking environment.

The following chart illustrates the results of the student survey as a district. The overwhelming majority of students were driven both to and from school in family vehicles (63%). The school bus had the second highest percentage of use at 20%.

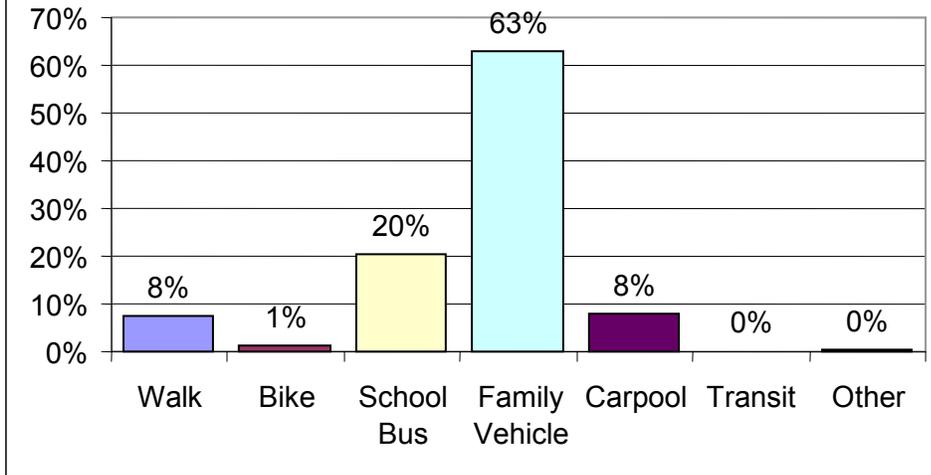


Official WisDOT
Safe Routes Consultant



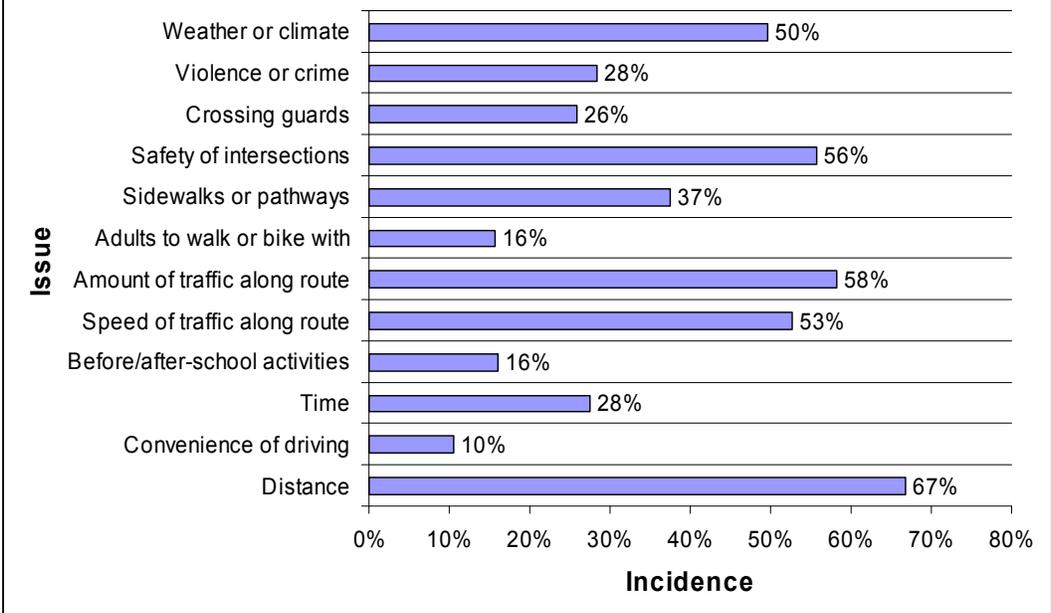
Member
APBP
Wisconsin Walks
Bicycle Federation of WI

Chart 1.1 District-wide Travel Summary (AM & PM)



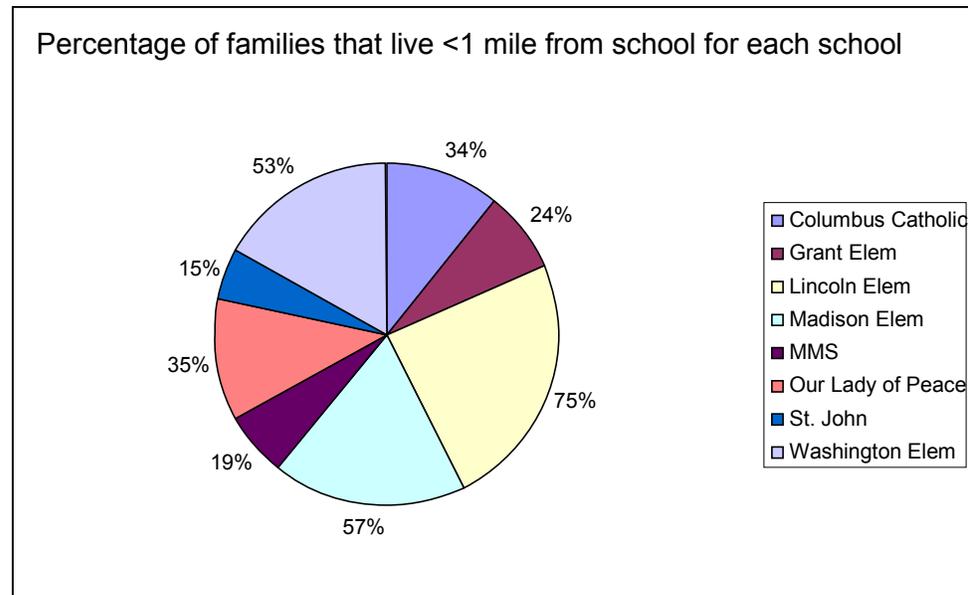
Parents were asked to identify issues that affected their decision to allow their children to walk or bike to school. The following chart illustrates the concerns and their related percentages.

Issues Affecting Decision to Allow Walking/Biking



What is interesting to note is that the primary reason that parents do not allow their children to walk or bike to school is the distance between their house and the school. For most of the schools

included in the plan, a sizable percentage of families live within 1 mile of their school – which is considered a reasonable walking distance for children. Parents were also asked to identify how far they lived from school and the following chart illustrates the number of respondents that live less than 1 mile from school.



Teachers cited a number of concerns regarding the walking and biking environments of their schools, most were behavioral. Issues included:

- Inattentive driver behavior, especially the use of cell phones while driving
- Arrival and dismissal traffic congestion
- Inappropriate student behavior such as not utilizing crosswalks, not wearing helmets and darting between cars and buses to reach their destinations

Site and Community-wide Recommendations

All of the surveys, site assessments and audits were used to generate recommendations for improving the walking and biking environment for the City of Marshfield. Recommendations were broken down into three areas: Communitywide, General Site and Neighborhood and Specific School Site. All of the recommendations can be found in Chapter 4 of the plan. The following list includes some of the more general recommendations for the City of Marshfield.

- Complete the sidewalk systems on all school properties
- Update all crosswalks within 1/2 mile of each school to ladder type for increased visibility
- Include classroom curricula on the benefits of walking and biking to school
- Include bicycle and pedestrian education as part of the Driver Safety Education programs held at the high school
- Consider the use of Keep Kids Alive: Drive 25 campaigns
- Enforce crosswalk and pedestrian laws throughout the city
- Develop school based incentive programs to encourage more students to walk or bike to school
- Develop walking school bus programs at each school
- Prohibit parking within 20' of crosswalks; add signage to prevent vehicular stopping or standing in crosswalks, especially in school zones

Specific recommendations for each school can be found in Chapter 4 of the plan as well - and are available for review on the City's website <http://ci.marshfield.wi.us/planning/?id=10384>

Implementation

The action plan in Chapter 4 prioritizes important components of the SRTS program for the City of Marshfield. Groups assigned to implement portions of the plan include the City of Marshfield, Marshfield School District, Parochial School Administration and volunteer groups.

Generally speaking, this plan recommends starting at the school site and then branching out into the community. For example, start with the sidewalk system on the school site, then work to install sidewalks and school zone signage on surrounding streets, then work to connect the pedestrian network within the community. Education, enforcement, and encouragement activities also need to occur throughout the community.

Potential funding sources for implementation strategies are also listed in the action plan, and detailed in Chapter 5. Primary funding sources are anticipated to include federal funding through Safe Routes to School. This fund includes monies for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure improvements and programs. Other grants are available through the Wisconsin Department of Transportation including Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds for larger infrastructure programs. Some other programs may be implemented through volunteer efforts or fundraising, or can be earmarked as part of an approved expenditure in local municipal or school district budgets.

