

MASSACHUSETTS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY:

Improving Safe and Active Transportation for Students, Schools, and Communities



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program is a federally funded initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). SRTS encourages students to walk and bike to school, thereby increasing physical activity, enhancing academic achievement, improving air quality, and easing traffic congestion while fostering the growth of safe and sustainable communities.

This guide is intended to support schools and municipalities in creating a sustainable SRTS program that is embedded in the core of the community. Each section provides strategies and guidance that support sustained and continued operations of an effective SRTS program, split by audience, including:

PARTNER SCHOOL

MUNICIPALITY

SCHOOL DISTRICT

STATEWIDE

PARTNER SCHOOL

Because every student must travel to and from school, each partner school plays a crucial role in building a successful SRTS foundation. Managing student transportation safety on school property is complex and includes planning, education of expected behavior, and encouragement of desired modal use for students and parents/guardians.

Develop and distribute partner school arrival/dismissal plans.

SRTS can develop an arrival/dismissal plan based on school observations and best practice recommendations. All efforts are made to limit areas of conflict between transportation modes on and abutting school property. To increase student and staff safety, SRTS recommends featuring the school's arrival/dismissal plan on the school website, in school handbooks, and in school newsletters. Ideally, each plan will contain a map, corresponding text, and school hours.



Develop adequate and signed bus lanes, bike rack areas, and pedestrian plazas.

School property and its abutting municipal property are finite: the task is allocating space for all transportation modes to manage the safe transfer of students. A pedestrian plaza can be a designated meeting spot, bus loading zone, recess area, and/or emergency readiness space. Ideally, it serves as an inviting gathering location near the school's main entrance. Placing bike racks in front

of the school encourages students and staff to ride bikes. School buses/vans are required by law to utilize flashing lights to stop through-traffic when loading/unloading students. Having a separately signed, dedicated location ensures student safety by allowing buses/vans to operate without conflicts with family vehicles. Whenever possible, front door access for mass transit modes such as buses/vans and carpools is encouraged.



Ensure that regulatory and informational signage is utilized properly on school property.

Unlike municipal property, schools use both regulatory—Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)—and informational signage; however, only the police can enforce regulatory signage. Informational signage serves to add clarity to a school's arrival/dismissal plan by adding helpful language to encourage expected behavior.



Encourage regular walking and biking to school.

SRTS offers a toolbox of tested concepts to encourage safe and active transportation. In addition to leading the celebration of three yearly flagship events, SRTS provides free pedestrian and bike safety education, walking/biking route mapping and assessment, Park and Walk development, and Walking School Bus (WSB)/Bike Train (BT) guidance. If walking/biking to school is not possible, SRTS has smart tips for organizing student walks at school before the school day begins, during physical education/health classes, or at recess time.



Develop Walking School Buses/Bike Trains from walking/biking route maps.

Getting to school is always more fun with a friend. Using the results of an SRTS Parent/Guardian Travel Survey or school attendance area map, SRTS can create route maps with labeled locations showing where students can meet on their way to school. Additionally, SRTS walking school bus kits offer items such as spray chalk and chaperone safety vests to make this a safe experience for all involved.



Organize Park and Walk or remote drop-off locations to alleviate family vehicle congestion.

Parents/guardians are not IN traffic — they ARE the traffic. While not all students can walk or bike the entire way to school, SRTS helps customize Park and Walk strategies to encourage physical activity and decrease traffic congestion around schools. A Park and Walk utilizes designated locations for parents/guardians to park their vehicles and then walk their students to school. Sites may include parks, parking lots, and local streets based on student walking/biking routes.



Example of a WSB path created based on survey responses for students who live within ½ mile of school.

Educate caregivers and students on the safe way to enter/exit a vehicle.

SRTS offers educational resources about how to safely enter/exit family vehicles as well as appropriate driver behavior. Safety rules include: placing a vehicle in park when loading/unloading students; loading/unloading students only from the passenger side of the vehicle; students who are old enough to attend school should be able to buckle their seatbelts independently and only when the vehicle is stationary; students should not wear backpacks inside a car; all doors must be closed before a vehicle moves; and caregivers should not exit their vehicles when unloading/loading a student unless the vehicle is legally parked.

SCHOOL DISTRICT

The implementation of uniform SRTS programming throughout a school district provides all students with equitable educational benefits, while still allowing focus on each school's unique challenges.

Include pedestrian and bike safety education as part of the PE/Wellness curriculum in all schools.

The adoption of bike safety instruction and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-approved pedestrian safety curriculum throughout a school district provides all students with this educational benefit. Mentoring programs for parents/guardians and secondary school students are available.



Include SRTS and active transportation in the school wellness policy.

SRTS, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, offers examples of school wellness policy amendments that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of each school district. The goal is to formalize the benefits of active transportation as well as any associated infrastructure elements. Similarly, the mitigation policy seeks to codify arrival and dismissal site design and procedures so that the same rules apply to everyone across all district schools.

Ensure that operators of pupil transportation vehicles understand and comply with the use of flashing lights for loading/unloading.

School buses/vans, along with public safety vehicles, can legally stop traffic using their flashing lights. To reinforce the federal law, use of flashing lights by pupil transportation vehicles in student bus evacuation drills, district-contracted pupil driver in-services, and school newsletters, educates students, bus/van drivers, and parent/guardians.

Work with the police department to enforce regulatory signage.

Through the development and communication of arrival/dismissal plans, both informational and regulatory signage can be used on school property to inform expected pedestrian, bicyclist, and driver behavior. Since only regulatory signage is enforceable by local police, partnering with the police department can help ensure safer school zones and neighborhoods for all students.

Enhance school grounds to create a safe pedestrian plaza.

A designated outdoor school area can be developed into a safe pedestrian plaza by incorporating elements that invite family socialization. Tactical urbanism examples include places to sit, shade trees, a stroller corral, or the painting of a ground/wall mural. This space can double as a physical education and recess hardtop space, as well as a dismissal or emergency staging area.

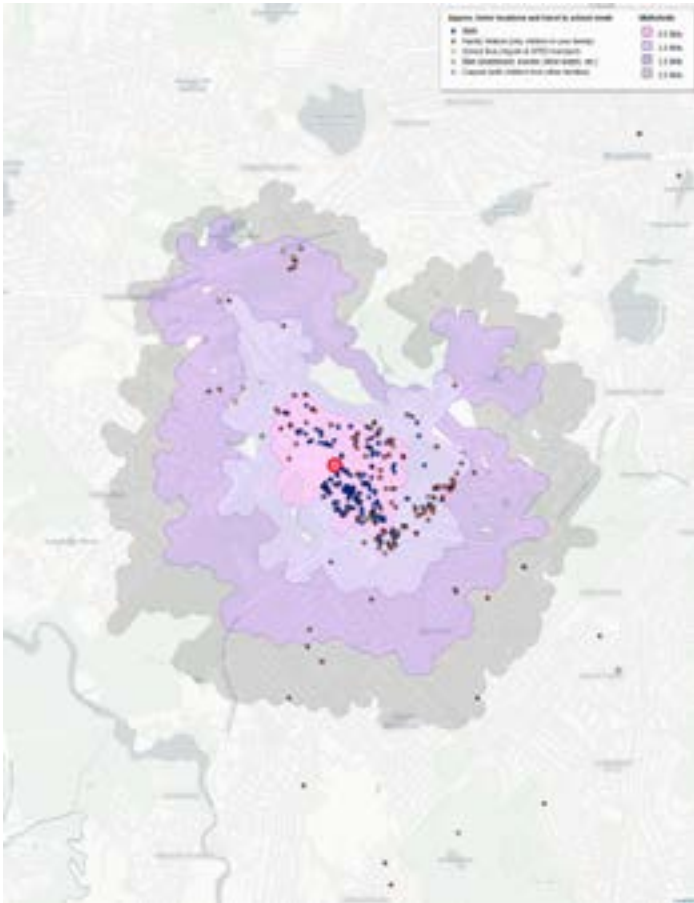
Evaluate lighting around all schools.

Lighting on and around school property is an important safety consideration. Improved visibility helps to increase student pedestrian and bicyclist safety around crosswalks and intersections, compensates for limited sunlight during winter months and weather events, and builds a feeling of security.



Conduct an SRTS Parent/Guardian Travel Survey every two years.

Collecting data on how students arrive to and depart from school and approximately where they reside is valuable for encouraging active transportation. Not only does this information help to assess the general effectiveness of existing SRTS programming, but it is also useful for developing walking/biking route maps. Over time, data trends can help to expand knowledge of a school's environment as well as to track progress towards its goals.



Example of a survey map with a walkshed produced by the SRTS survey tool. This can be used to identify WSB/BT routes that will connect the highest concentrations of student residences to school within the appropriate distance radius.



MUNICIPALITY

The condition of the municipal property that abuts a school is just as important as that of the school property. Bringing together municipal and school administration stakeholders within individual communities creates a collaborative template for success in addressing safe and accessible student transportation.

Increase school zone visibility with uniform signage and crosswalk markings.

Installing uniform school zone signage across a district not only serves to identify school zones but creates a traffic calming effect by employing the same visual indicators consistently for all schools. This includes the associated lower speed limit, regulatory signage, and pavement markings. With increased congestion on municipal roads, installing the highest-grade crosswalk design with approaching crosswalk signage helps keep students who walk and ride bikes safe.



Increase pedestrian visibility by partnering with the public works department.

Sidewalks are hard to navigate when encroached upon by shrubbery, leaves, tree limbs, and debris. Increase pedestrian accessibility by troubleshooting common student walking/biking routes and supplying this information to your local public works department. Pedestrian and bicyclist visibility in crosswalks is also enhanced via portable, in-road, Yield to Pedestrian crosswalk signage.

Formally train and outfit all crossing guards and applicable individuals.

Whether budgeted through the local police or school district, ensuring that all crossing guards are formally trained using SRTS materials provides standardization of quality service across a community. This includes having all personnel properly attired in OSHA reflective gear and the use of standardized stop paddles. Any school staff who work arrival/dismissal should also wear reflective gear for increased visibility and to be identified as working staff.



Encourage all schools to join the DEP's (Department of Environmental Protection) Green Team to be eligible for their free air quality resources, including signage.

For more information, visit: <https://thegreenteam.org/>



Improve school air quality: Install “No Idling” signage.

“Asthma is a leading chronic illness among children and adolescents in the United States. It is also one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.”¹ One of the contributors to poor air quality near schools is idling family vehicles. Help educate students, families, and the community of the state law prohibiting excessive idling by installing regulatory *No Idling* signage on and abutting school property. Consider installing SRTS No Idling-themed lawn signs and utilizing SRTS middle school-related curriculum.

Address snow removal: Work with private contractors and local public works departments.

School accessibility should not depend on the weather. Before the snow falls, implement a plan with your local public works and school facilities department to keep school and municipal crosswalks, pedestrian-activated crossing buttons, and student walking routes clear of snow and ice. Snow piles should not obstruct crosswalk landings or school bus stop locations.

Promote and regularly communicate Complete Streets and wellness policies.

Active transportation is the term used to describe walking and rolling (wheelchairs, bicycles, skateboards, and scooters) and is a focus for federal community infrastructure funding. Its principles are embodied in the municipal Complete Streets policies and amendments. Sample amendments can be found on the MassDOT SRTS website under Equity.

Attend SRTS workshops, seminars, and webinars to stay informed of current approaches, technologies, and funding opportunities.

SRTS hosts a wide variety of free educational events that provide safe and sustainable student active transportation tools and information on best practices for SRTS programs. SRTS updates and innovations are shared with interested

parents/guardians, community members, schools, municipalities, and regional government agencies via electronic newsletters, emails, the SRTS website, and webinars.

STATEWIDE

Massachusetts has a strong voice in active transportation funding, policy, and laws.

Understand and comply with all ADA regulations.

SRTS works to support safe, active, and healthy transportation options regardless of a student’s level of mobility. The American Disabilities Act (ADA) provides accessible design guidance for community infrastructure. SRTS programming is designed to help students become independent, mobile citizens. It includes pedestrian and bike safety lessons on the use of tactile pads, curb cuts, and pedestrian-activated crossing buttons; the siting of handicapped parking during circulation planning; and infrastructure grant funding to bring local infrastructure deficiencies into compliance.

Maintain signage, sidewalk, and general infrastructure in a state of good repair.

Regular investment in infrastructure benefits all communities. Maintaining and updating the public elements needed to keep pedestrians and bicyclists safe encourages their use as accessible and efficient alternative modes of transportation for all ages. Examples include regular crosswalk and fog line striping, regulatory sign updating and repair, street cleaning, shrubbery trimming, and street drain cleaning.

Work with your regional Metropolitan Planning Organization to support active student transportation.

There are 13 regional Massachusetts MPOs that provide collaborative transportation planning and policymaking for the state’s allocated federal resources. Each supports student active transportation in its local transportation

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/asthma/index.htm>

improvement plans. Many have periodic grant opportunities that can be used for student-centric infrastructure improvements.

For more information, visit the website:
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/regional-planning>

Work with SRTS Alliance Partners to support active transportation efforts.

SRTS Alliance Partners are local, regional, or statewide businesses and organizations that work alongside SRTS to actively promote student active transportation. They range from local volunteer groups to statewide membership organizations. Examples include local pedestrian-bicycle committees, YMCA, Mass in Motion (a program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health), Massachusetts Association for Pupil Transportation, and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.

