



Safe Routes to School State Network Project: Building a Culture of Health through Active Transportation

2014 State Network Report



Catalyzing support for safe,
active and healthy communities

A photograph of several children on bicycles. In the foreground, a young boy with a blue helmet and a striped shirt is looking down. Behind him, a girl in a red shirt and red helmet is smiling. To the left, a boy in a dark blue t-shirt and blue shorts is leaning over his bike. Other children are visible in the background, some wearing helmets. The scene is outdoors on a paved path with green grass and trees in the background.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND BACKGROUND

This report was written by Ryan Day, state network manager for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, with support from Margo Pedroso, deputy director and Margaux Mennesson, communications manager.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting active, healthy lifestyles and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking. We advance policy change; catalyze support for safe, active and healthy communities with a network of more than 700 partner organizations; and we share our deep expertise at national, state and local levels with those who are helping propel our mission forward. Founded in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's mission is to advance safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

For more information visit www.saferoutespartnership.org.

Support for this document was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



A photograph of children on bicycles on a grassy area. In the foreground, a boy in a red shirt and black helmet is looking down. Behind him, other children in blue shirts and red helmets are on bikes. A man in a blue t-shirt and jeans stands to the right, watching them. The background shows a green lawn and trees.

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Overview of Safe Routes to School

Founded in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership (National Partnership) improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting active, healthy lifestyles and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking. We advance policy change; catalyze support for safe, active and healthy communities with a network of more than 700 partner organizations; and share our deep expertise at national, state and local levels with those who are helping propel our mission forward.

A core role for the National Partnership is to advance **Safe Routes to School** funding and programs. The federal Safe Routes to School program was created by the SAFETEA-LU transportation law of 2005. The program provides federal funding to state departments of transportation to increase the number of children walking and bicycling to and from school. The program awards local grants for infrastructure improvements and activities such as health and safety education and

traffic enforcement. In 2012, the new transportation law known as MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century) combined the Safe Routes to School program with other bicycling and walking programs to create the new Transportation Alternatives Program, under which Safe Routes to School projects are eligible to compete for funding.

Studies have shown that Safe Routes to School programs increase rates of bicycling and walking, and the more robust the program, the more dramatic the increase. One study evaluated the impact of the Safe Routes to School program in Eugene, Ore. and found that just introducing a program focused on education and encouragement increased bicycling to school by 5 percent each year. When programs also incorporated infrastructure improvements like sidewalks, crosswalks and covered bicycle parking, the rate of bicycling and walking increased by between 5 percent and 20 percent.¹ The results from Eugene may be on the lower end of potential gains as a Safe Routes to School program in Marin County, Calif. increased the number of children walking and bicycling to school between 64 percent and 114 percent.²

Safe Routes to School projects are also effective in reducing traffic safety risks to children: a recent study in New York City found a 33 percent decline in overall pedestrian injury among school children (including a 44 percent decline during school travel times) in areas where federally funded Safe Routes to School projects were implemented. In locations without Safe Routes to School interventions, the injury number remained almost unchanged.³ Studies clearly show that investments in robust Safe Routes to School programs increase walking and bicycling among children.

Safe Routes to School programs rely on grants and funding to be sustained and effective. To truly build healthy communities that support and encourage active transportation and physical activity, the National Partnership also focuses on influencing state spending on active transportation and on securing local policies that increase opportunities for physical activity over the long term. To advance these goals, in 2007, the National Partnership first partnered with the Robert

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Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to launch the **Safe Routes to School state network project**—a collaboration that would continue through 2014 in three different phases, with grants totaling more than \$5.1 million. Most of the National Partnership's

work focuses on non-legislative policy change; however, when lobbying or legislative changes are needed, the National Partnership has access to discretionary funding separate from RWJF grants.



Background and History of the State Network Project

The state network project brings key stakeholders together to improve the built environment for children and families and increase access to opportunities for physical activity—especially in low-income communities and communities of color. To achieve this objective, the project primarily promotes effective state spending of federal Safe Routes to School program funds to ensure that communities can build regular physical activity into children's daily lives. The project also focuses on

advancing Complete Streets and shared use agreements, two additional state and local policies that increase opportunities for children to be physically active outside of school.

Complete Streets policies institutionalize the concept that roads are for all users. When these policies are in place, transportation planners and projects factor in the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, public transit users and others along with

drivers. These policies are scalable and can be seen at the state, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), regional and local levels. Over the long term, it is much more cost-effective to put in sidewalks, crosswalks and bicycle lanes when road improvements are being made rather than having to go back and retrofit existing roads.

Shared use agreements seek to maximize the use of spaces available for physical activity. Often these agreements focus on schools that have outdoor and indoor facilities that could be put to beneficial use by the community during non-school hours. Examples of agreements include opening playgrounds to neighborhood children; allowing local leagues and residents to use athletic fields; and making gym, pool or fitness facilities available to community organizations. These agreements outline responsibilities for participants and may also shield facility owners from legal liability related to use of school facilities by community residents.

From 2007 to 2011, the state network project helped 20 states and the District of Columbia develop networks of organizations, agencies and advocates to advance Safe Routes to School programs and related policies.

Beginning in 2012, the project focused its efforts on more in-depth work in seven targeted states, while also providing some support nationwide through the stand-alone National Learning Network. The National Partnership's National Learning Network was designed to equip state and local advocates, agency staff and other partners with the tools to make change in their own communities, with support provided through monthly webinars, distribution of best-practice resources and customized technical assistance.

In the seven targeted states, in-depth policy work is conducted by full-time state advocacy organizers. The advocacy organizers fill a dynamic role based on the needs of the individual state. They constantly evaluate the policy landscape, bringing together diverse stakeholders and developing collaborative action plans to guide a coalition of advocates working towards strategic victories for active transportation policy.

The seven states selected for focused attention during this phase of the grant are California, Florida, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio and Tennessee. These states were selected after a careful evaluation of several factors including the political environment, opportunity for improving bicycling and walking infrastructure, socioeconomic and demographic factors, the size and reach of the state's department of transportation and the existing active transportation advocacy movement.

- **California** is on the cutting edge of active transportation policy, with significant state funding for Safe Routes to School, bicycling and walking plus pioneering transportation planning at the local level that is inclusive of the health, equity and climate impacts of transportation. The state has actively engaged communities of color while also dealing with stark divides between wealthy communities and poor neighboring communities. The state offers an incredible opportunity to experiment with new ideas and create best practices that can be replicated in other parts of the country.
- **Florida** has an area less than half the size of California but it is longer from end to end, creating geographic challenges for administering the transportation system. The state has a pronounced demographic divide with well-organized Hispanic communities in the southern part of the state, while the northern half of the state is demographically more like its regional neighbors, with much smaller minority populations. Most important, Florida is in desperate need of improvements to its infrastructure that will keep pedestrians and bicyclists safe. According to a 2014 report,⁴ the four most dangerous metropolitan areas in the nation for pedestrians are all in Florida.

- **Mississippi** is a state that is last or nearly last on many national measures of health, wealth and education. However, there is intense determination in the state to shake that reputation, and a willingness to embrace policy changes to achieve that goal. The state has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country and minority populations live in concentrated areas. Walking, bicycling and public transit are often the only options for these vulnerable populations. Improving the built environment to increase the safety of these options in low-income communities will have a significant impact on overall safety of walking and bicycling in the state.
- **New Jersey** is the most densely populated state in the country, making increased active transportation more viable and desirable. The state has had an impressive active transportation movement for many years, creating the opportunity for the National Partnership to both learn from and share new best practices with New Jersey's network of experienced advocates.
- **North Carolina** has the third-largest department of transportation in the country, despite being ranked tenth by population and twenty-eighth by area. In addition to the size of the department of transportation, the agency maintains a higher degree of control over the roads than do peer agencies in almost any other state. In 2007, the state's secretary of transportation acknowledged the links between transportation and health, providing an opening for dramatic policy victories.
- **Ohio** was chosen in part for the interesting opportunity it presented in reshaping a car-based society dealing with population loss. While many states are struggling to manage growth in a way that can promote active transportation, Ohio sits in the heart

of the Rust Belt, where many cities have shrunk dramatically from both a population and an economic standpoint. Most of its current infrastructure was built for a time when a sizable middle class depended heavily on cars. The demographics in many of the metropolitan areas of the state are now much poorer, with high concentrations of minorities in the urban cores who generally have lower levels of car ownership.

- **Tennessee** offers a unique opportunity in the South for advancing active transportation policies. The state does not borrow money to finance transportation, meaning that there is more competition for finite transportation funding. In addition, the four largest metropolitan areas of the state are all working to improve access to active transportation, and each is located in one of the four state transportation regions, making them

potential anchor points that could lead their individual regions towards more inclusive transportation planning.

In June 2012, just six months after this three-year project began, Congress made significant changes to the federal Safe Routes to School program under MAP-21 that required strategic changes for the network. Under MAP-21, the federal Safe Routes to School program was consolidated with other bicycling and walking programs into a new program called the Transportation Alternatives Program. As a result, the project's priorities shifted to not only leveraging more state dollars for Safe Routes to School, but also ensuring the effective use of any remaining federal Safe Routes to School program funds. The new focus also included influencing implementation of the new Transportation Alternatives Program to maximize spending on Safe Routes to School and active transportation projects.

In the absence of safe ways and places to be physically active, our children learn that riding the bus or being dropped off by their parents is the norm, that traveling even short distances requires a car and that fun and entertainment happen on a couch. Parents don't want their child walking to school on the shoulder of a road with cars passing them a couple of feet away, and families will not choose to walk or bicycle a few short blocks to schools or playgrounds along unsafe roads. Play spaces like school playgrounds, community parks and recreational facilities must be available to children so they have safe places to be active. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to create the infrastructure, programming and policies necessary to give children and families safe opportunities for physical activity—which is all critical to creating a culture of health that helps to make the healthy choice the easier and more accessible choice in communities across the nation.





Success of the State Network Project

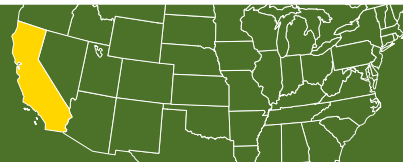
The National Partnership has demonstrated the power of our advocacy model to effect change in diverse states. We are the only national organization whose primary focus is on safe, active transportation options for children. We are able to capitalize on the interest of many partners on issues related to Safe Routes to School—such as health, safety, child welfare and more—to convene diverse, cross-sector stakeholder groups, bringing new energy to and support for active transportation. With staff on the ground in the targeted states, we create a unified voice around these issues and provide the high-level strategic planning and implementation necessary to secure these wins for children.

We have generated significant successes across each of our three target policy areas. Select examples include the following:

- In California, we secured a 35 percent increase in funding for active transportation with funds guaranteed to go to communities most in need.
- In New Jersey, we led a campaign for the department of transportation to release a previously stalled set of Safe Routes to School awards.
- In Tennessee, we leveraged rivalries between major cities to spur Chattanooga into adopting a strong Complete Streets ordinance.
- In North Carolina, we rallied a fractured advocacy community to coalesce around a strategy to raise the profile of active transportation among recalcitrant policymakers.
- In Mississippi, we engaged communities of faith to make their facilities and spaces available to the community for physical activity.
- In Florida, we developed a public service announcement to educate the public and policymakers about the value of shared use agreements.
- In Ohio, we secured inclusion of all three of our policy priorities in a statewide chronic disease improvement plan.

In each of these successes, the Safe Routes to School networks that we built played an important role. The state networks help to organize the voices of our stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of these issues to the transportation, health, education and safety communities. Our state advocacy organizers have strong voices and are catalysts for policy change. Finally, the relationships that our network organizers build lead to appointments on workgroups, boards and commissions that make policy recommendations.

Making Safe Routes to School and Underserved Communities a Priority in California



In September 2013, California Governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 99 into law, creating a comprehensive Active Transportation Program (ATP) that combined \$130 million in state and federal funds for bicycling and walking in California. The ATP consolidated pre-existing, separate funds—allotted to bicycle, pedestrian, trails and Safe Routes to School projects and programs—into one comprehensive program. This landmark legislation promises walking, bicycling and Safe Routes to School projects a 35 percent boost in state funding.

Just one year earlier, the future of Safe Routes to School in California was uncertain. After Congress made changes to active transportation funding in MAP-21, there was a movement in California to follow suit and consolidate some of its state programs as well. The first version of the ATP, proposed in 2012, combined funding for bicycles, trails and Safe Routes to School from state and federal sources, with no dedicated funds for Safe Routes to School. Without dedicated funding, projects that would help more California children walk and bicycle to and from school safely

would have been at risk of losing out to other competitive walking and bicycling projects.

There was also concern that the original proposal did not ensure equity by guaranteeing funding for underserved communities. Children in lower-income communities are more likely to walk or bicycle to school than children who live in more affluent communities, but are less likely to have safe streets.

The National Partnership's state advocacy organizer in California, Jeanie Ward-Waller, led a coalition that created public awareness on the importance of dedicating some ATP funds for Safe Routes to School and communities in need.

"Initially, policymakers wanted to consolidate ATP funds into one big competitive pot without priority for projects and programs that benefit children and lower-income residents, but our coalition alerted policymakers to the unique needs of these constituents and pushed for funding prioritization," says Ward-Waller. "Safe Routes to School is incredibly successful

and popular because it is community-based. Safe Routes to School projects create benefits for the larger community and garner support and ownership beyond parents and teachers. School-centered projects create a more connected, healthy community."

The coalition, California Active Transportation Leadership, included active transportation, public health and equity organizations. Members included the National Partnership, California WALKS, California Bicycle Coalition, California ReLeaf, PolicyLink, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, TransForm, California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, The Nature Conservancy, Prevention Institute and Public Health Institute. The coalition spent more than a year negotiating with staff and members of the legislature, the governor's office, the California Department of Transportation and the California Transportation Commission—a body that oversees implementation and allocation of transportation funding—to address all concerns and come up with a solution.

LOCAL LEADERS INSTRUMENTAL TO NETWORK SUCCESS: SARAH DE GUIA

Sarah De Guia is the executive director of CPEHN, the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. CPEHN is a multicultural health advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health of communities of color in California. CPEHN's mission is to eliminate health disparities by advocating for public policies and sufficient resources to address the health needs of communities of color.

De Guia has worked with the Safe Routes to School National Partnership to ensure the state Active Transportation Program is more responsive to community needs. She helped the National Partnership do education and outreach to CPEHN's network of health- and equity-focused community-based organizations throughout the state. She has helped develop sign-on letters in support of strengthening funding for active transportation, including one devoted to increasing the share of resources from cap and trade funds for active transportation.

The end result was a strong compromise agreement between the Governor, the legislature and the state department of transportation, which maintained California's commitment to Safe Routes to School.

The compromise agreement sets aside a minimum of \$24 million annually for Safe Routes to School projects and programs and a minimum of 25 percent that must specifically benefit underserved communities with great needs for walking, bicycling and Safe Routes to School projects.

"California's Active Transportation Program demonstrates our strong commitment to bicycling, walking and other human-powered transit," said State Transportation Secretary Brian Kelly. "When Californians have more options for active transportation—including new and safer trails and pedestrian routes—it helps the state achieve greenhouse gas reduction goals while enhancing public health and safety."

Leading up to the first round of applications under the new ATP program, the National Partnership's California team and partner organizations hosted webinars and in-person meetings and created an ATP toolkit to help communities successfully apply for funds. That education process paid off: of the \$221 million available through the ATP for walking and bicycling projects, \$119 million has been awarded to 94 Safe Routes to School projects and 110 projects totaling \$189 million benefit underserved communities. These totals far exceed the guaranteed minimums.



Reminding the New Jersey Department of Transportation that Safe Routes to School Matters



In 2012, when Congress was debating MAP-21, the advocacy community in New Jersey was concerned that the state's backlog of unspent Safe Routes to School funds was at risk of being reclaimed by Congress to close a transportation funding shortfall. New Jersey was particularly vulnerable as it had not made any new awards of Safe Routes to School funds in more than a year, meaning that any transportation cuts could come disproportionately from unspent Safe Routes to School money.

The National Partnership's state advocacy organizer in 2012, Laura Torchio, helped organize stakeholders, most of whom are members of our New Jersey state network. Our team of advocates met with

the transportation commissioner and presented him with a sign-on letter from 68 organizations asking the Department of Transportation to prioritize making awards with the SAFETEA-LU funds.

Shortly after that meeting, in January 2013, New Jersey announced \$5.7 million in SAFETEA-LU funds for new Safe Routes to School walking and bicycling projects, almost 20 percent of the \$31 million that New Jersey was allocated under SAFETEA-LU.

State officials believe that the network made an impact with key decision makers. It "has increased the number—and quality—of conversations between advocates, staff

and the front office," said Elise Bremer-Nei, the state's Safe Routes to School coordinator. The network "has helped to keep the program schedule moving and it has allowed us to do something we don't generally have time to do: tell the story of successes in New Jersey."

Funded projects included sidewalks in Nutley and Voorhees, bicycle and pedestrian path improvements in Bergenfield and Egg Harbor City and flashing school signs and high-visibility crosswalks in Garfield and Palisades Park.

INCREASING COMPETITIVENESS FOR FEDERAL FUNDS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

New Jersey had a very successful active transportation movement prior to the National Partnership establishing a network in the state. However, the New Jersey advocacy organizer Nora Shepard and our network partners noticed that a disproportionate amount of Safe Routes to School projects were awarded to more affluent communities. The New Jersey Department of Transportation was also aware of the issue as well as the cause: often, applications for Safe Routes to School projects submitted by disadvantaged communities tended to be of lower quality or incomplete, often stemming from a lack of professional staff like planners or engineers. The department could not provide preferential treatment for one community over another and felt that its hands were tied.

Shepard, working with network partners, spearheaded a program to help raise the quality of applications statewide, with special outreach to disadvantaged communities. When a new round of grant applications was solicited in 2014, the New Jersey network organized four training sessions to help grantees produce higher quality applications. The three regional sessions were attended by 130 people and another 40 attended a Safe Routes to School coalition meeting. When it became clear that applicants needed more time to produce more competitive applications, our network successfully persuaded the state department of transportation to extend the deadline by six weeks. Awards for this solicitation are expected to be announced in early 2015.

Using Competition to Spur Action in Tennessee



In August 2013, the National Partnership's Tennessee advocacy organizer, Christy Smith, wrote a letter-to-the-editor of the *Chattanooga Free Press*, asking Chattanooga city officials why they had not yet adopted a Complete Streets policy. Memphis had just become the 500th city in the United States to do so, leaving Chattanooga as the only major city in Tennessee without such a plan.

policy will improve community health by encouraging more active transportation and reducing pollution, increasing safety of people bicycling and walking and enhancing economic vitality by increasing foot traffic for businesses. Smith also noted that those who have the least access to safe bicycling, walking and public transit often need them the most. In the Chattanooga region, gaps in access to

In January 2014, the National Partnership and the Complete Streets Working Group presented a draft of the ordinance at a public meeting. "Most of those who attended were supportive," said Jenny Park, senior planner at the regional planning agency and member of the Complete Streets Working Group. "There is an awareness that younger people are wanting to utilize other modes of transportation and that the needs of older people and disabled citizens need to be accommodated."

In the Chattanooga region, gaps in access to safe, active transportation are often in the areas with the lowest household incomes.

The ordinance is well-written, recognizing that a downtown street is different from a two-lane rural road. The ordinance allows transportation planners to address different developments, neighborhoods and areas with context-sensitive solutions.

As word of Smith's Complete Streets challenge to the city spread, she was able to help form the Complete Streets Working Group, which brought together walking and bicycling advocate groups, local leaders in health, education and business and staff from the city of Chattanooga and the Regional Planning Agency. Led by the city transportation engineer Bert Kuyrkendall, the group reviewed highly-regarded Complete Streets policies from other cities to build a plan for Chattanooga with existing local codes and regional needs in mind.

Smith, along with the Complete Streets Working Group, was instrumental in building the case for why Complete Streets policies matter in a region with a widely distributed population even though most people own cars. A well-designed Complete Streets

safe, active transportation are often in the areas with the lowest household incomes, including individuals with disabilities and elderly residents. Without safe, active transportation options, these vulnerable populations are essentially stranded in their neighborhoods.

Creating an ordinance also codifies a thoughtful approach to transportation planning. "It establishes a philosophy for transportation decisions, so they don't vary with turnover of city employees or officials," said Kuyrkendall. "It gives it longevity and it tells the public that a balanced approach to transportation is a driving force for how we plan our roads."

The Chattanooga City Council passed the ordinance in April 2014. Now, any time a new road is built or an existing one is reconfigured, the design will have to take bicycle and pedestrian traffic into account.

LOCAL LEADERS INSTRUMENTAL TO NETWORK SUCCESS: JESSICA WILSON

Jessica Wilson is the Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). Wilson fosters partnerships between TDOT, other state agencies, nonprofits and the private sector in order to promote active transportation in Tennessee. It is Wilson's willingness to be a partner that has helped advance shared policy goals. In 2013, Wilson asked Tennessee advocacy organizer Christy Smith for contributions to the non-motorized component of the state's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). Wilson incorporated our suggestions, ensuring that in-depth best practice language around getting children to school safely by active modes is included in the plan.

Tennessee's new highway safety plan provides data on all roadways across the state—including fatalities and injuries by mode and location and roads and intersections that need improvements—regardless of jurisdiction. It will not only improve safety for people bicycling and walking, but also guide spending priorities for infrastructure improvements in the state around all vulnerable users of the roads—motorcyclists, bicyclists, pedestrians, the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

Putting these strategies in writing is key to getting active transportation projects funded because federal safety funds cannot be spent on anything that is not in the plan. The strong partnerships between staff at TDOT and groups like the National Partnership help to make lasting change happen in Tennessee. "It takes coordination and cooperation to turn these numbers around," says Wilson. "It can't just come from TDOT. It takes everyone to get the word out and partner to make sure the infrastructure is there, that people are educated on it and the laws are enforced. Engineering alone is not going to solve everything."



Regrouping, Rebuilding and Redoubling Efforts in North Carolina

Our work in North Carolina has been by far some of the most challenging we've experienced. North Carolina got off to a strong start with the state's departments of health and transportation developing a three-year collaboration to place staff in 10 regions around the state to work on health and transportation issues.

However, following the 2012 elections, partners in key state agencies were replaced and the legislature voted to severely limit state funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Approved in June 2013, House Bill 817 prohibits the use of state funds for stand-alone bicycling and walking projects. This meant that unless a road was undergoing maintenance for motorized traffic, no improvements for active transportation were permitted.

This change in funding policy has far-reaching consequences. For residents to use them, bicycle lanes and sidewalks need to connect homes to workplaces, schools and shopping destinations. By prohibiting the use of funds for stand-alone bicycling and walking projects, those connections cannot be made, resulting in unconnected patchworks of sidewalks and bicycle lanes.

Under MAP-21, Safe Routes to School projects require 20 percent local matching funds, which is cost prohibitive for many economically challenged communities that generally have the highest need for better active transportation infrastructure. House Bill 817 explicitly bars any state funds from being used to help those economically challenged communities make the match and take advantage of the program.

The developments necessitated a completely redesigned approach for

the state network. Our southern states coordinator, Carrie Turner, has been instrumental in our efforts to raise the profile of active transportation in the state. She has broadened our network, bringing together an even more diverse coalition of partners. This has included new participants from local, regional and state government, as well as private sector consulting firms. Staff from some of the state's Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) and MPOs attended workshops held this spring to engage advocates in setting priorities for action and have gone on to participate in ongoing North Carolina Workgroup calls. Examples include a RPO Planner at Isothermal RPO, one of the state's most rural RPOs, as well as the MPO Director for the Capital Area MPO in Raleigh.

By including private sector partners in this work, Turner has been able to partner with Matt Hayes of Alta Planning+Design to present information about Complete Streets to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Committee in the town of Mebane. Hayes is leading the bicycle and pedestrian planning effort for the town, as well as several others in North Carolina. By partnering with private consulting firms conducting these plans, we are able to reach jurisdictions at a time when they are open to discussion of Complete Streets and incorporate policy language into planning documents.

Subsequently, the National Partnership is developing a report demonstrating the need for renewed state investment in active transportation programs. In addition to calling for more investment in active transportation, the report will emphasize the equity issues at play in North Carolina. Although African-Americans are 21.5 percent of the state's population, they

represent 40 percent of victims of all types of traffic crashes, and 50 percent of child crash victims. Some areas of the state are especially inequitable. In Wilmington, African-Americans represent less than 20 percent of the city's population yet account for 72 percent of the child pedestrian crash victims; similarly, in Chapel Hill, African-American children make up 9.7 percent of the population but account for 60.9 percent of child pedestrian crash victims. We plan to leverage our network of advocates to garner media coverage about the report and highlight the need for the state to commit to supporting active transportation. In addition, we will coordinate with stakeholders to educate key legislators about the findings of the report.



In Mississippi, You Gotta Have Faith



While shared use is most often associated with schools, these types of agreements can also be applied to other settings such as faith-based institutions, libraries and municipal buildings. In Mississippi, where obesity rates are among the highest in the country and opportunities for physical activity are often lacking, churches play an especially important role in addressing health and physical activity needs in the community.

Since 2012, the National Partnership's Mississippi advocacy organizer, Jay Thompson, has helped three churches in the city of Jackson open their facilities to the larger community by introducing them to the concept of shared use and the far-reaching benefits it provides. After getting buy-in on the idea, Thompson has helped them set up the framework necessary to put the idea into practice. Once church leaders understood how they could provide spaces for members of the broader community to exercise, they were very receptive.

Since churches in Mississippi do not enjoy the liability protection under the state's shared use law, they need a way to protect their leaders and facilities. The National Partnership helped develop waivers that provided the necessary legal protection.

Mt. Bethel Missionary Baptist Church was one of the first churches in the state to open its doors to the wider community. Thompson was able to go beyond a basic shared use agreement at Mt. Bethel by helping church leaders secure a grant from Alcorn State University to teach aerobics classes and provide space for a community garden. Two in-house aerobics instructors have been certified with the grant and

classes have grown from one day to three days a week. The community garden is a source of fresh food in an area where many residents live five to 10 miles from the nearest grocery store.

Progressive Morningstar Baptist Church has also implemented shared use programs with assistance from Thompson and the National Partnership. Pastor Willie Tobias says his church is "in an area of great need that can benefit from all kinds of programs at the church when there is an opportunity for us to reach out. It's not just sermons. We want to support people in any way we can." Morningstar started offering aerobics classes in 2012, which are still going strong. "They take place two nights a week with a certified athletic trainer," says Tobias. "Church members and nonmembers attend."

"It's a well-rounded, four-course meal that they can count on Monday through Friday," says Tobias. "We're open from 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., so the children can play basketball, recreate and socialize in the gym in addition to getting a meal."

Progressive Morningstar reviewed its liability insurance policy before taking on the shared use programs to make sure they had proper coverage. "With supervision and within reason, we are able to open our facilities to the community with no problems," says Pastor Tobias. "I'm happy to say that these programs have increased our attendance at church, but also that they demonstrate that we want to help people of all backgrounds and walks of life."

In Mississippi, where obesity rates are among the highest in the country and opportunities for physical activity are often lacking, churches play an especially important role in addressing health and physical activity needs in the community.

With state funding, for seven weeks in the summer, Progressive Morningstar also offers free lunch and gym access to area school children. Most of the 75 to 100 children who participate each week are at risk of going without enough food when school is not in session.

OPENING THE GATES IN MISSISSIPPI IN THE COMMUNITIES THAT NEED IT MOST

Few school districts in the country face challenges on the magnitude of Jackson Public Schools (JPS). In this district, 87 percent of children receive free or reduced school lunch, which is a level of poverty rarely seen across an entire school system. In some JPS schools, the entire student body is eligible for free school lunches. The district is overwhelmingly a community of color, with 85 percent of the students from minority populations, the vast majority of whom are African-American. Students also lack safe and appropriate places to play.

As the largest school district in the state, Jackson operates 64 schools, which are strategically distributed throughout the city, with the potential to provide many locations for physical activity if only a shared use policy was in place. Jay Thompson, Mississippi advocacy organizer, approached Superintendent Dr. Cedrick Gray about the possibility of adopting a shared use policy.

Dr. Gray was interested in the concept, but had concerns about liability, buy-in from city officials and equipment maintenance costs. Thompson explained that Mississippi's recently passed shared use law includes liability protections for school districts, and he also secured support of the broader city leadership. Finally, Thompson leveraged his relationships with KaBOOM!, a national non-profit that makes financial grants to create safe play spaces for children, to help guide JPS through KaBOOM!'s grant application process. KaBOOM! awarded JPS \$15,000 per school, providing funding to revitalize playgrounds, support maintenance expenses and underwrite costs to keep all school playgrounds and athletic fields open for use during non-school hours, per the newly approved shared use policy. This city, among the most in need nationwide, now has a policy that ensures all children in Jackson have access to safe places for play.



Sharing Our Voice for Shared Use in Florida



In 2013, the National Partnership joined Florida's Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC) to create more opportunities for children to lead active, healthy lives. PHC members also include the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, Florida YMCAs, Florida Department of Children and Families and many others.

Research from the American Heart Association shows that lack of access to outdoor recreation contributes to the high number of obese children nationwide. In Florida, 12 percent of young people in grades 9–12 are overweight or obese, according to a 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.⁵ School playgrounds and sports fields are an ideal resource for reducing these distressing numbers, yet many school districts don't currently allow access during non-school hours because of concerns over cost, vandalism, security and liability.

A proposed state law could change that, reducing liability concerns for schools and putting parents in charge of supervising their children. A Florida House bill to this

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effect passed, but the Senate bill failed to be passed before the end of the session.

In order to educate lawmakers about how important shared use can be for creating safe places for children to play, the coalition needed to win the support of more Floridians. The PHC hopes to accomplish this with a public service announcement funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It is a powerful tool for promoting the ins and outs of shared use. This video is targeted at decision makers from school districts, municipalities and state officials, and explains how shared use agreements can help address childhood obesity.

Heather Murphy, the Florida advocacy organizer, was a key member of the team that produced the video. She helped develop the content and was one of the featured speakers. Murphy and fellow coalition members at the PHC are working on a shared use education distribution plan. They are reaching out to key contacts at state agencies to help get the message out and are putting together a webinar on shared use. Helping the public, state agency staff and decision makers understand the value of shared use policies will help policymakers in Florida see the value of removing barriers to playgrounds.

LOCAL LEADERS INSTRUMENTAL TO NETWORK SUCCESS: TIM PEHLKE

Tim Pehlke created and leads the University of Central Florida (UCF) Walking School Bus program. The program partners with local communities to organize safe walking routes for school children led by trained adult mentors. Through involvement with the Walking School Bus, youth ages 5–14 learn pedestrian safety, develop healthy habits and form new friendships.

In the 2012–2013 school year, the UCF Walking School Bus served 100 youth with 38 volunteers, four routes and three

schools. In the 2013–2014 school year, the program served 230 youth with 64 volunteers, seven routes and five schools. The program has since expanded to include more than 350 youth at seven schools across three counties. Pehlke worked with his staff to develop a web page with resources and information on the UCF Walking School Bus program as well as social media pages to promote the Walking School Bus and recruit new families into the program. The program website is www.walk2schoolcf.org.

Ohio: Three Policy Victories for the Price of One

Obesity and other preventable chronic diseases are a tremendous drag on Ohio's coffers and the broader economy, totaling an estimated \$60 billion annually in health care costs and lost productivity.⁶ To improve residents' health, stakeholders from across the state formed the State Health Improvement Plan Chronic Disease Workgroup to create Ohio's Plan to Prevent and Reduce Chronic Disease: 2014–2018 (Chronic Disease Plan). Development of this five-year plan was facilitated by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), and is now being implemented by the Ohio Chronic Disease Collaborative (OCDC).

Kate Moening, Ohio advocacy organizer, was asked to join the Ohio Department of Health's Creating Healthy Communities collaborative to help ensure that the development of the Chronic Disease Plan included goals for improving physical activity. The plan is designed to achieve reductions in chronic disease prevalence, such as obesity, through a multifaceted approach. The tools included in the plan will be promoted by ODH and the OCDC leadership team throughout the state.

Moening saw the opportunity to secure inclusion of all three of the state network's policy priorities (Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets and shared use agreements) into the plan. By educating collaborative members about the benefits of each of our policy areas, she and other members of the Ohio state network were successful. The plan now includes a number of goals:

- Complete and implement comprehensive school travel plans to promote walking and bicycling to school in a safe way

- Work with partners and local government to adopt policies that promote active transportation
- Work with schools and other community organizations to adopt shared use policies and agreements to increase availability of safe places to be physically active

This is an important and well-timed accomplishment. The plan will guide the work of the OCDC for the next five years. By helping to promote and gain inclusion of these policy levers, the National Partnership has helped institutionalize support for these policies in Ohio from state agencies and advocates for years to come.





Lessons Learned

Since 2007, the state network project has been reevaluated and refined periodically to maximize its effectiveness in the targeted states. This has required the organization to regularly assess the project's structure, goals, successes and challenges. Based on seven years of work in this area, we have identified a number of factors that helped—or hindered—the progress of the state network project.

Concentrate our efforts on specific policy areas: In earlier iterations of the network project, each state was allowed

to focus on a wide range of possible outcomes, depending on the opportunities in the state. While it did lead to successes in a variety of policy areas, it impeded the ability of network staff to learn from each other and build momentum in the most critical areas. In the current network project, staff focus their efforts on three core areas: award and obligation of Safe Routes to School funds, street scale improvements and shared use. This targeted focus has been helpful but still can present challenges as the policy levers, audiences and agencies are often different

when working in each policy area. Safe Routes to School involves working with the state department of transportation or MPOs, while shared use may require collaboration with the department of education or health or school district staff. It has required staff to have expertise and relationships in a broad set of areas, reducing their ability to specialize and excel in an individual policy area. Even so, the benefit to focusing on three policy areas is the opportunity to engage partners in multiple areas and unite diverse stakeholders towards common goals.

Take advantage of regional

distinctiveness: With staff currently located in several southern states, it has become apparent that there are good opportunities for collaboration in distinct regions of the country. We have found that, often due to cultural and regional characteristics, the challenges in one state are shared by many states in the same region. Policymakers are more likely to see how a policy can fit their state if it comes from a similar state. For example, in many southern states, population growth is more likely to be low-density sprawl, which requires dramatically more infrastructure to service fewer people than in dense urban cores. However, in areas of the Midwest and Northeast, maintenance requirements for existing infrastructure has stayed constant while populations have shrunk, reducing the tax base and budgets for maintenance. Understanding the unique characteristics of a specific region allows the National Partnership to tailor its tactics and practices to match the regional characteristics, while maximizing the utility of the tools we develop, as they will be useful to other states in the same region.

Engage opinion leaders to influence transportation spending:

Based on our experience in transportation decision-making at the federal, state and regional levels, it has become apparent that mayors—particularly those in small towns—are critical to our success. They have the power to change local practices and apply for funding and are influential with state transportation officials. In several states that sought to transfer funds from the federal Transportation Alternatives Program into road spending, mayors were critical in speaking on behalf of the need for bicycle and pedestrian funding and asking the state to reconsider. Mayors also make great spokespeople when engaging the media about policy successes and funding challenges.

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Capitalize on what already exists:

In all of our network projects, we prioritize the creation of a state Safe Routes to School coalition that meets regularly. In some states, similar coalitions already exist, which can lead to “meeting overload” and concerns about duplication. We have adapted our approach to ensure that we complement rather than compete with existing coalitions. In some states, the best approach has been to join an existing coalition or group with a related area, such as an obesity coalition, and educate its members about how transportation relates to their cause. In other states, it made more sense to create a new coalition. States are best served when we build flexibility into the design of our approach, allowing our team members to adapt to any situation.

Leverage our regional expertise:

Through another funder, Kaiser Permanente, we have staff working at the MPO level in five locations around the country. Those staff have learned a great deal about transportation planning and spending at the MPO level and how more urbanized areas can set policy and generate funding to support active transportation. With Transportation Alternatives Program funds flowing through large MPOs under MAP-21, it is

critical that we focus some of our staff time and resources on influencing these MPOs. Their application forms, review and ranking systems and engagement of local advocates will have a strong impact on whether active transportation projects—including those in communities most in need—will be funded. Our experience at the MPO level will prove beneficial as we seek to engage MPOs in targeted states.

Make better use of the media and success stories to build support:

Up to this point, our communications resources have been limited. At the mid-course review, it became apparent that we could better utilize the media as an influencer of transportation spending and policy, particularly by sharing more success stories. Once we decided to increase our media outreach in places like Chattanooga, we saw success almost immediately.

Agility is crucial: When the state network project was entering its third phase, there was no indication that the federal Safe Routes to School program was less than a year away from being consolidated into the new Transportation Alternatives Program that would have no dedicated funds for Safe Routes to Schools. By being agile and adapting to the new paradigm of MAP-21, our team was able to continue



working successfully with departments of transportation as the standalone Safe Routes to School program was winding down and the Transportation Alternatives Program was gearing up.

Tailor and prioritize policies: This version of the state network project had three main policy goals. In an ideal world, we hoped to be able to advance each of our issue areas in each of our network states. However, not all states are ready for every policy intervention.

Shared use was the most challenging issue. Despite experiencing success in some states, many states do not have the legal framework in place to protect schools

and districts from liability claims related to shared use of their facilities. This made shared use agreements a hard sell for school district staff in some states.

The Safe Routes to School program also demonstrated how states may be in much different circumstances and require much different levels of advocacy. The Florida Department of Transportation has been incredibly efficient in awarding and obligating SAFETEA-LU funds, for example, while North Carolina—which is not always supportive of walking and bicycling programs—has been very slow to award and obligate funds. As a result, our resources in Florida may be better focused on Complete Streets, while we must

continue to make the case for Safe Routes to School funding in North Carolina.

To ensure the most efficient use of staff time and resources, we have had to assess each policy in each state, focus on certain areas over others depending on the individual circumstances and prioritize the goals most likely to bear fruit.



Vision for the Future

Our vision for the future is simple: ensure that every person in every neighborhood in every state has the same ability and right to safely walk and bicycle, both for recreation and transportation, each and every day. This future would mean we have created a culture of health in which all children and families are able to safely walk and bicycle to and from school, playgrounds and neighborhoods, without disparities between wealthy or poor neighborhoods. Clearly, we have a lot to do to make this a reality. There are several areas in which the National Partnership sees a need for significant progress to achieve our vision.

Reaching across the regions

Over the past three years, we have learned important lessons about the regional nature of challenges for promoting active transportation and physical activity. The clearest example of this has come from our increasing focus on the South, where issues related to poverty, race relations, climate, low population density and political

culture all have very unique impacts on active transportation policy. Yet even with issues that overlap between regions, there are often nuances that may require a different approach.

Each region of the country has unique challenges. Youngstown, Ohio has been called America's fastest shrinking town and has been ravaged by de-industrialization. Youngstown has seen the city's population shrink by as much as 1 percent per year, with affluent citizens most likely to move, leaving Youngstown with the highest concentration of citizens living in poverty in the nation.⁷ When the population of a city shrinks, so does the tax base, but the size and scope of the city's infrastructure obligations does not. These are challenges unique to the Rust Belt and they require creative strategies to promote active transportation and physical activity that accommodate larger distances and less dense population.

We envision a future for the National Partnership where collaborative regional teams work together across all the states in the region. Each state or pair of states would have an advocacy organizer who promotes policy solutions that take into account the unique challenges and nuances of that region. We have already started this process in the South, holding a series of focus groups to develop a better understanding of the regional challenges. We have carried these focus groups forward, forming a Southern forum for advocates who will work to address these problems through shared best practices. As this forum continues to develop we will increase the reach of the National Partnership in the region, developing contacts and champions in each state. As the National Partnership finds the resources to add more state or regional advocacy organizers to our network, we will have the ability to more rapidly ramp up our advocacy efforts.

Prioritizing underserved communities

Low-income communities do not enjoy the same level of safety measures as their more affluent counterparts. Higher-income communities are 50 percent more likely to have streetlights, twice as likely to have sidewalks, almost three times as likely to have traffic calming measures and twice as likely to have crosswalks⁸ as lower-income communities. Being able to safely walk around one's neighborhood should not have any correlation to socioeconomic status. Every child should have access to safe opportunities for physical activity.

However, residents in these communities often face many disparities and equitable transportation is often not prioritized. These communities need organizations like the National Partnership to fight for safe transportation options. As the success story in California shows, when the state prioritizes funding for underserved communities and those communities receive support in applying for funds, significant shares of dollars can help reverse disparities in active transportation.

We continue to see equity as a major focal point for our work in the years to come, ensuring that disadvantaged communities have comparable access to state and federal programs and funding to improve safety in their communities.

Keeping the pressure on the Transportation Alternatives Program

The federal Safe Routes to School program is still in a period of delicate transition. Many states still have unspent Safe Routes to School funds and it is important that those funds be put to use to create opportunities for children to safely walk and ride bicycles. More proactive states have already spent their SAFETEA-LU funds and are charting a course for Safe Routes to School under MAP-21 and the new Transportation Alternatives Program.

Under MAP-21, new policies and procedures are being put into place that will affect the Safe Routes to School program and we must ensure that strong advocates fight for policies that prioritize the program. Some states have made a

commitment to keep Safe Routes to School as a stand-alone program and we would like to see that replicated by others. States now have the ability to transfer a portion of their Transportation Alternatives Program dollars to instead fund conventional road projects, which we must work to discourage. Additionally, up to half of available funds for the new Transportation Alternatives Program are now newly administered by MPOs.

Underserved communities are most at risk of losing out during this transition because under the stand-alone Safe Routes to School program, 100 percent of funds were provided by the federal government, whereas now grantees are required to provide a match of 20 percent of the project costs. Some states have made the decision to make up that difference using state resources, but not enough. Strategic advocacy for Safe Routes to School is absolutely necessary to ensure that both states and MPOs implement the Transportation Alternatives Program in a way that is supportive of, and not



detrimental to, Safe Routes to School projects and that is inclusive of underserved communities.

Linking Safe Routes to School and street scale improvements

The National Partnership is not the only national organization focused on street scale improvements and Complete Streets policies, but we are one of the few with the capacity to work on it both at the state and local level. These policies require diverse coalitions that bring together advocates from the education, health, business and equity communities. There is a natural synergy between the Safe Routes to School program and implementing street scale improvement policies. The networks built by the National Partnership to advocate for Safe Routes to School are perfectly situated to carry the torch for street scale improvement policies in our states and we plan to continue working in this policy area.

incredible value as a technical assistance resource to those organizations and facilities that have decided to implement shared use agreements and policies. We envision a future where our advocacy organizers convince an organization like the Mississippi Baptist Convention to endorse shared use for its members and the National Partnership provides technical assistance to create strong policies.

Addressing distance through land use development policy

Even with the best walking and bicycling infrastructure in place, residents are not likely to use it in their daily life if the distances are too great between their homes and destinations like schools, workplaces and shops. As a result, the issue of land use development policy has come to the forefront over the past several years as an area in need of more attention from active transportation advocates.

costly retrofits out of limited local budgets. This issue has tremendous synergies with our existing Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets work, leveraging the networks and expertise of our organization. We hope to be able to add this policy issue as an area of focus in our future work at the state and local levels.

Conclusion

The state network project has had a tremendous impact in the states and communities where the National Partnership has established an in-depth presence. Our organization fills an important and unique role, covering transportation, health, education and equity. The policies we work on have gained support among diverse stakeholders who have added them to their own list of priorities.

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However, no other organization has made Safe Routes to School—both funding and related policy—its central focus. It is a huge victory for the Safe Routes to School movement to have organizations like AARP, the American Heart Association and the National PTA as partners that care about the program, but their much broader policy portfolio means that they cannot devote as much time and attention to the program as we can at the federal, state and local levels. Safe Routes to School initiatives touch on transportation policy, land use development, environmental protection, community health, personal safety, economic development, education policy and numerous others.

Continuing to spread shared use

Working on shared use policies has been one of the biggest challenges for the state network project. There is no central organization that tracks shared use agreements and often schools will already have informal agreements in place. The most effective way we can impact the issue is by working towards systemic changes and providing technical assistance. As we demonstrated in Ohio, it is possible to raise the profile of shared use through statewide policy tools like *Ohio's Plan to Reduce Chronic Disease*. We can also provide

Intelligent planning that includes active transportation would negate the need for costly retrofitting of transportation corridors. Locating schools in areas with active transportation infrastructure already in place would address the problems created when schools are placed on the outskirts of communities wherever the cheapest land can be found. Working with developers to build sidewalks or wider shoulders into their construction plans would make communities more walkable and bicycle friendly and avoid the need to seek easements later on and finance

A program that is this specialized and dynamic requires a similarly specialized and dynamic organization to fight for it. As long as we have the means, the National Partnership will continue to lead the fight for this program to remain successful.

End Notes

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