



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

Supporting Safe Routes to School Through Data: Tips for Government



Safe Routes to School by the Numbers: Using Data to Foster Walking and Biking to School

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership has developed a report that explores the current and potential uses of data in walking and bicycling to school programs and initiatives. The report, [Safe Routes to School by the Numbers: Using Data to Foster Walking and Biking to School](#), discusses why accessible and usable data is important to Safe Routes to School, which types of data must be gathered or accessed, strategies for using data, the roles of various groups in making data accessible, and ways to address challenges that may arise.

Data – about students, streets, and walking and bicycling – is essential for planning, funding, and implementing successful Safe Routes to School projects. Government agencies play a key role in making data more accessible and understandable for the public.

Local government agencies can support Safe Routes to School initiatives by working with practitioners to make data about transportation, safety, education, and healthy behaviors accessible and useable. In return, partnering with local Safe Routes to School programs can have great benefits, leading to a more positive public view of government, citizen development of tools that aid agencies, public involvement in governmental data collection, better health and community outcomes, and increased citizen engagement by community members, families, and students.

This fact sheet is aimed at helping government agencies understand how they can support local Safe Routes to School initiatives by increasing data accessibility and usability. It describes key data for local Safe Routes to School initiatives that government can provide, discusses how government agencies can increase usability of data, and sets out ideas for how a local or regional government agency can support Safe Routes to School through data.

Useful Information for Safe Routes to School Decision Making

What types of information and data can government agencies provide to local Safe Routes to School programs and practitioners? Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs in schools, school districts, cities, and counties with children, families, and schools, pushing for strong municipal and district policies to support safe walking and bicycling. Practitioners work to support bike lanes, sidewalks, and other changes that make streets safer for children to bike and walk.



WHAT IS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL?

Safe Routes to School initiatives aim to make it safe, convenient, and fun for children and youth to regularly bicycle and walk to and from school. They can include a wide variety of programs and projects, from building safer street crossings to education programs that teach students how to walk and bicycle safely to school.

The following sets of data, often collected and maintained by local transportation and planning departments and other government agencies, can be crucial for Safe Routes to School decision making and program development. *Note: Projects and programs to support safe walking and bicycling for students typically focus on areas within ½ to 1 mile radius around the schools, but community-wide data can also be helpful for understanding broader health, safety, and transportation issues for children and youth.*

- **Infrastructure inventories.** Safe Routes to School programs are particularly concerned with infrastructure for walking and bicycling, such as sidewalks, off-street paths and trails, bike lanes and bike routes, and street crossings. Knowing the condition and location of infrastructure assists in planning routes and prioritizing improvements. Also noteworthy are features that make it safer and more hospitable for children and adults walking and bicycling: bike parking, shade trees, lighting, signage, and landscaping and other buffers between cars and the sidewalk or bike lane. At intersections and street crossings, the presence of traffic signals, stop signs, marked crosswalks, and medians are important.
- **Neighborhood land use and environment.** Safe Routes to School programs must understand the land uses around schools, including the location of parks, libraries, community centers, and other destinations for youth. Steep hills and other topography can influence program decisions. In addition, some

programs are interested in the locations of unhealthy neighborhood businesses, such as tobacco retailers and fast food outlets.

- **Other transportation data.** Speed limits, actual vehicle speeds, street widths, and public transit routes and stops assist with understanding the local transportation network.
- **Crash data.** Data for motor vehicle collisions with people walking or bicycling can assist in identifying areas for prioritized attention.
- **School facilities and environment.** School locations, attendance boundaries, pick up/drop off locations, and school bus routes and stops are all relevant to Safe Routes to School programs. Of particular importance are student residence locations, which assist with developing effective approaches to supporting safe walking and biking.
- **Behaviors.** Local bicycle and pedestrian counts, student attendance data, and neighborhood crime data are all useful.
- **Demographics and community characteristics.** Data on students and the community can assist with identifying Safe Routes to School needs as well as prioritizing geographic areas based on local goals. Data includes household income, poverty level, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, car ownership, and health disparities data, at the neighborhood level, if possible.

How to Support Safe Routes to School Through Data

For government agencies looking to connect with and support local Safe Routes to School initiatives, here are some ideas on where to start.

- Identify partners and understand data needs. Local Safe Routes to School programs and initiatives can be led by many different groups. Some have a dedicated coordinator who is housed within the school district, municipal government, local health department, or a non-profit or community organization. Other programs are organized by parents, teachers, or other volunteers, or led by a committee. Contact schools, public health departments or municipal governments to find out who is heading up local Safe Routes to School work. Work with Safe Routes to School leaders to understand how data is currently being accessed and what the needs are.
- Provide access to data. Whether it is through an online portal or other means, providing access to data is a key initial step. For some Safe Routes to School programs with resources to conduct their own analysis, the opportunity to obtain data may be all that is needed.
- Assist with data processing and analysis. Most Safe Routes to School programs do not have the resources or capacity to do their own analyses. For these groups, providing GIS mapping, online mapping tools, analysis, and report development is key to being able to use the data.

- Converting geography-based data into maps. For many community members, maps allow a better understanding of data than charts or lists. Maps can make a compelling visual case for where a project or program should take place, or where improvements should be prioritized.
- Provide apps (mobile applications) that help community members contribute to, access, and use data. Apps simplify how information is collected and disseminated, and have increased the ability of community members to collect and provide data without special knowledge, through interfaces that are appealing, easy to understand, and intuitive to navigate.
- Include Safe Routes to School partners in decisions about future data collection. When developing plans for future data collection, include Safe Routes to School practitioners in the conversation so that data is more likely to be useful to programs. Safe Routes to School programs may also be able to assist with data collection – parents, students, and community members can be mobilized to help their local government agencies.

Conclusion

Local and regional government agencies often have key data that is needed to make Safe Routes to School programs successful. By making this data available and usable, government agencies can facilitate better policies, programs, and plans that address community needs. Connecting and collaborating with local Safe Routes to School programs to address data needs can support many objectives, from improved transportation to better health outcomes.

This publication was made possible through a contract between the American Public Health Association and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, funded through cooperative agreement 1U380T000131 between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Public Health Association. The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the American Public Health Association.



Photo courtesy Bri Weldon on Flickr

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL RADIUS MAPS IN OHIO

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) facilitates local understanding of Safe Routes to School needs by providing Safe Routes to School radius maps. Local schools or school districts provide student address information in a spreadsheet and ODOT plots them on maps that show 1/4, 1/2, 1 and 2 mile radii from the school. School radius maps are used to identify groups of students who are close enough to walk or bike to school, and assist in planning improvements in relation to schools and their student populations.

