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### **Safe Routes to School Programs—a partnership of transportation, safety and health**

**Abstract:**

In recent years, the US Department of Transportation (US DOT), through FHWA and NHTSA, has partnered with other federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to establish initiatives to encourage more children to safely walk and bicycle to school. These initiatives include support for International Walk to School events and Safe Routes to School (SR2S) Programs. These programs can play a key role in creating opportunities for children to increase their amounts of routine physical activity.

Walk to School Day has grown from 2 schools in 2 US cities in 1997 to over 3,000 schools representing every state joined by walkers in 36 countries in 2004. A survey of 2004 Walk to School coordinators revealed that approximately half (51%) of events are part of ongoing school programs to promote walking and bicycling.

SR2S programs work to make walking and bicycling safe and appealing ways for children to get to school. In response to the growing interest in SR2S programs, US DOT partnered with CDC and EPA to develop a national course to train health, transportation and safety professionals along with parents, school personnel and community leaders to initiate community- and state-level action. During the one-day course, participants gain knowledge about the built environment (engineering and planning); health and safety issues; encouragement, education and enforcement programs; as well as skills regarding how communities create change. An observation of a school is followed by participants generating a plan of action and identifying their respective roles in the plan.

These two initiatives can play an important role in 1) creating awareness for the need for increased walking and bicycling as a means of transportation and physical activity and 2) preparing states and communities to initiate programs based on community conditions, best practices and responsible use of resources.