

DATE: November 13, 2019
RE: Existing Conditions Safe Routes to School Memo

Background

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is an effort by parents, schools, community leaders and government to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to safely walk and bicycle to school. SRTS programs examine conditions around schools, conduct projects and activities that work to improve safety and accessibility, and reduce traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. The Lawrence SRTS initiative began in 2014 as collaborative effort between the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, Lawrence Public Schools, the City of Lawrence, and the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). This partnership provided the framework for developing the holistic SRTS program, which includes bicycling and walking encouragement, education, equity, enforcement, evaluation, and engineering. This memo details the SRTS planning and infrastructure implementation progress made in the last five years.

Encouragement, Education, Equity, and Enforcement

In addition to safe walking and bicycling routes, the SRTS initiative involves education, encouragement, equity, and enforcement surrounding safe walking and bicycling behavior. Students participate in classroom education which covers pedestrian safety at intersections, crosswalks, and along the sidewalk.

Approximately 1,650 fourth and fifth graders annually participate in the Lawrence Bicycle Education Safety Training (LBEST) program as part of their physical education classes. In four classes, students learn about proper helmet fit, rules of the road, bicycle safety checks, road hazards and how to safely navigate through an intersection. Some students learn how to ride a bike, while all learn safe riding skills. On bike practice is taught using the school district's bicycle fleet.

Students are encouraged to participate in Walk to School Day in October and Bike to School Day in May. In 2018, approximately 400 students participated in Bike to School. Approximately 900 students participated in the 2017 Walk to School event.

The Lawrence Police Department (LPD) is committed to providing a safe environment for all Lawrence students and families. As part of that focus, LPD dedicates patrol resources to the enforcement of traffic laws in school zones and neighborhoods, with particular focus on speed limits and yield laws. The Lawrence Police Department encourages communication from parents, children, teachers, neighbors, and all residents to report any suspicious activity, or concerns, especially regarding areas frequented by families and children.

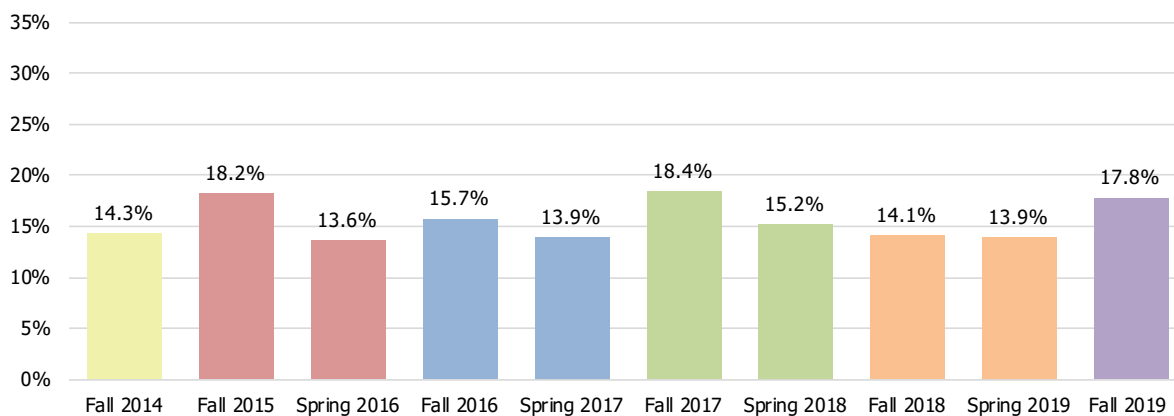


Evaluation

The University of Kansas (KU) and the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department (LDCHD) formed an Academic Health Department in 2013. Part of this venture included KU evaluating the Partnerships in Community Health (PICH) grant which included the SRTS program. The evaluation looked at the intensity of SRTS activities implemented and their impact to walking and biking rates. The analysis used student travel tallies (fall and spring surveys asking students how they arrived at school), parent surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015, and field observation of driver yielding rates.

Travel tallies have been conducted during every fall and spring since the fall of 2014. These tallies are self-reported in the classroom. An instructor asks students how they arrived at school that day and how they intent to go home. Students are asked if they are going to travel by foot, bike, school bus, vehicle, carpool, city transit vehicle, or other. The percentage of total Lawrence Public Elementary and Middle school students who travel by active travel (walking and biking) has stayed above 13% since the beginning of data collection. Historically there has been a higher percentage of students walking or biking in the fall, which makes sense when considering the weather. The weather is generally more conducive to walking and biking in August (during the fall counts) rather than April (during the spring counts) and students are used to being outside after having the summer break.

Figure 1: Per Semester Active Student Travel for All Lawrence Public Elementary and Middle Schools



Source: Semi-Annual Travel Tally - AM Tuesday/Thursday Counts

Engineering and Routes

Routes were developed during the SRTS planning process in 2015 by reviewing student addresses, school boundaries, and possible 2.5 mile walking routes (the demarcation for bussing) from each school based on the pedestrian network. This data allowed the SRTS staff team to propose primary routes which collect students who would be walking and/or bicycling from their residential streets. Input on these initial routes was gathered through multiple means. A community meeting was held on January 14, 2015. It was attended by approximately 75 representatives of Lawrence elementary and middle schools. Additionally, numerous other smaller meetings with parents, school officials, and other interested parties were held. Routes were finalized by the SRTS partnership, taking into account all of the input and feedback provided

through this process. Route maps were published for every public K-8 school on the Lawrence SRTS website: www.beactivesaferoutes.com. An overall route map can be found online at: www.lawrenceks.org/assets/mpo/SRTS/RouteMap.pdf. These routes were incorporated into the Regional Pedestrian Plan and are part of the priority pedestrian network.

The City has worked on SRTS route improvements utilizing several funding sources including: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Transportation Alternatives (TA) grants, incorporation into larger Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects or private development projects, and dedicated bicycle and pedestrian funding. The City of Lawrence has successfully received TA grants administered through KDOT. In 2016, \$189,000 was awarded to install SRTS sidewalks in various locations and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs, shown in the picture) in locations at existing school crossings which do not currently have a crossing guard. In 2017, the city was awarded \$394,000 to install SRTS sidewalks. The City submitted another SRTS TA application in 2018 for additional funding; however, the FY2020 SRTS TA application was not funded. The City submitted for more SRTS TA funding in November 2019; awards have not been announced.



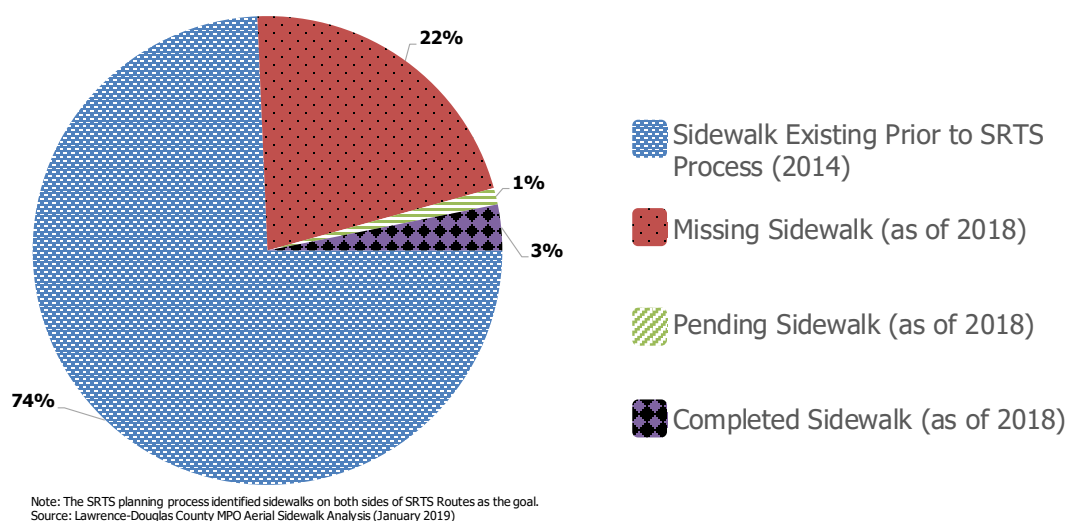
Prior to 2016 bicycle and pedestrian projects, including sidewalks, were only included in larger CIP projects or funded through grant programs. In 2016, the first set aside funding for standalone bicycle and pedestrian projects in Lawrence was established. Furthermore, a sales tax referendum passed in November 2017 allocating a portion of the funding towards non-motorized projects for the 10-year life of the sales tax (sunsetting in April 2029).

To determine which projects the dedicated bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure funding will prioritize the Multimodal Transportation Commission established a Non-Motorized Projects Prioritization Program.¹ The Program assigns points to projects based on priority networks, pedestrian access to priority destinations, safety, adopted plan priorities, and bicycle demand model. Safe Routes to School routes receive points based on the type of road and sidewalk presence (none on either side or only on one side). The City is also implementing the Sidewalk Improvement Program to inspect, repair, and eliminate sidewalk trip hazards. This program has an additional benefit of improving sidewalk conditions along School Routes.

Figure 2 shows the progress Lawrence has made in creating SRTS routes with sidewalk on both sides of streets. (The SRTS planning process identified sidewalks on both sides of the SRTS Routes as the goal.) The blue dotted portion of the pie chart shows the sidewalk which existed at the beginning of the SRTS sidewalk initiative. Since the SRTS sidewalk initiative began in 2014, an additional 3% of the network has been completed (shown in purple diamonds).

¹ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/boards/transportation-commission/NonMotorizedPolicy.pdf>

Figure 2: SRTS Routes Sidewalk Network – Both Sides of the Street



Citywide Lawrence Safe Routes to School Planning Process

In 2019, the SRTS partnership, led by the MPO, is conducting a planning process to develop a citywide SRTS plan. The process includes new and old partners: the Health Department, City, MPO, Lawrence Public Schools, the University of Kansas (as part of the Academic Health Department), and the Lawrence-Douglas County Sustainability Office.

The SRTS partnership kicked off the 2019-2020 planning process by collecting data in two ways: school crossing guard counts and conducting a parent survey. There were twenty-three existing school crossing guard locations. These locations had never been evaluated after they were established. Staff and volunteers followed the engineering standards used to establish the locations which entailed counting each location three times in the morning and three times in the afternoon. Five additional locations, which have been identified as potential school crossing guard locations, were also evaluated.

A parent survey was conducted from September 13th to October 25th, 2019; 216 surveys were received. This was the first time the survey was conducted since 2015. The survey asked parents to share their thoughts about travel to and from school for children in grades K-8. Summaries for each school will be provided at www.beactivesaferoutes.com in early 2020.

Staff mapped anonymized student addresses by school. This data was then summarized into heat maps for each school to indicate where clusters of students lived in relation to their school. The SRTS partnership reviewed the data and the current routes to propose revised routes. These revised routes are being shared at the open house to collect feedback.

The SRTS partnership hosted an open house on November 14th from 6 – 8 pm at the Flory Building of the Douglas County Fairgrounds. At the open house, parents and interested community members had the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed routes, crossing priorities, and preferences for comprehensive Safe Routes to School strategies.