

# TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Testimony for Assembly Transportation and Public Works Committee  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment today. My name is Janna Chernetz, and I am the New Jersey Advocate for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit transportation policy watchdog organization working in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign supports A4064 which requires a percentage of motor vehicle fines to be used to support a "State Safe Routes to School Fund" (SRTS). The goal of the SRTS Program is simple: to ensure that walking and biking are viable and safe options for children to get to school. This includes both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. Infrastructure projects include the planning, design and construction or installation of sidewalks, crosswalks, signals, traffic-calming and bicycle facilities. Non-infrastructure project include activities such as public awareness campaigns, walk and bike to school events and training, traffic education and enforcement and student lessons on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health and the environment. In order to be eligible for SRTS funding, projects must be located within two miles of any school that serves students in grades K-8. It is currently a 100% federally funded program.

This bill before you today provides a much needed boost to this program and is important for three primary reasons:

- (1) The bill diversifies funding source for vital pedestrian and cycling safety projects and protects the vitality of the program in the face of federal funding cuts. The Federal SAFETEA-LU bill included dedicated funding for SRTS, however, MAP-21 does not include such dedication. While money for the program does exist under "Transportation Alternatives" MAP-21 does not guarantee the continuation of a SRTS program on a state level.
- (2) It targets resources to high priority roads that have seen high pedestrian fatalities in recent years; and
- (3) It demonstrates the state's dedication to keeping our children safe on our roads.

This program benefits all the diverse municipalities in New Jersey including urban, suburban and rural. Children in urban communities encounter many challenges when walking or biking to school. High volume traffic, high motorist speeds and the lack of adequate pedestrian and safe cycling infrastructure in key locations, in some cases, prohibit walking and biking from being viable transportation choices for families. Many NJ municipalities do not have sidewalks, high visibility crosswalks, or protected bicycle lanes, forcing kids to navigate dangerous streets with little room for error.

The lack of investment in these types of transportation infrastructure has led to decreased levels of walking and biking to school over the past few decades. National trends show that fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago<sup>1</sup>:

- In 1969, 48 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.
- In 2009, 13 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.
- In 1969, 89 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school.
- In 2009, only 35 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school even once a week.

According to sources at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Public Planning at Rutgers, the 2009 National Household Travel Survey shows that NJ matches this national data.

The CDC is reporting that childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years.<sup>2</sup> New Jersey has one of the three highest obesity rates in the nation among low-income children, ages 2-5 (16.5%). Nearly one out of three (31%) children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese in New Jersey.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to improving the health and mobility of children, research suggests that children who walk to school show improvements in academics<sup>4</sup> and safer routes for walking and biking for children also mean safer streets for seniors and all users of the road, leading to the community at large also reaping safety and health benefits.

Since the first round of funding awards in 2005, the SRTS program has awarded \$31,294,169 in grants. However, with 565 municipalities and 603 school districts, existing funding is simply not enough.

Tri-State urges this committee to vote favorably in support of A4064.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/srts-talking-points-2013.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/obesity/obesity-youth.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/shapingnj/work/publications/NPAO%20Data%20Sheet\\_11.20.12.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/shapingnj/work/publications/NPAO%20Data%20Sheet_11.20.12.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> California Department of Education. A study of the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement in California using 2004 test results. Accessed 9/16/05 at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/documents/2004pftresults.doc>.