



Spring 2019



Coordinator's Corner

As Spring returns to the Commonwealth, it's an exciting time for Safe Routes to School! Students are back outside walking and biking. Communities are getting applications ready for Non-Infrastructure Grants. And everyone's preparing for Bike to School Day, which will be here before we know it!



You'll find lots of useful information on all of these things in this newsletter, as well as some helpful skills for improving your SRTS program, and advice from a bicycling advocate on how to make our communities safer and more joyful places to ride.

If you have questions or would like more information on any of the topics included here, please call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send an email to info@virginiasrts.org.

Regards,

Rob Williams
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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CALENDAR

MARCH

22: Non-Infrastructure Grant applications due

APRIL

4: National Walking Day

4: QuickStart Mini-grants due

22: Earth Day

MAY

1-31: National Bike Month

8: Bike to School Day

17: Bike to Work Day

Friends and Faces: Interview with Andy Clarke

Andy Clarke is Director of Strategy at Toole Design Group, a transportation planning firm in Silver Spring, Maryland that specializes in active transportation, like walking and bicycling. We asked Andy a few questions about what transportation planners do and why Safe Routes to School benefits people of all ages.



Andy Clarke (Photo Credit: Toole Design)

How would you describe what you do?

Along with my planning, engineering, and design colleagues, I work on projects around the country that involve schools or school zones, whether or not that's part of a SRTS program. All of our work is about creating an environment that's safe enough for students who want to walk or bike.

How did you get into bike planning?

Through a Safe Routes to School project! I left university with a law degree I didn't want to use and went back to my parents in Cheltenham, England. I volunteered for a local cycling group and they were just starting a SRTS program.

There were examples all over Cheltenham of fencing and barriers designed to physically stop kids from going where they wanted to go, and they would always go anyway – just climb over the fence! Safe Routes to School in its day was somewhat revolutionary, because it asked kids what routes they took and said, "How can we make that route safe?"

I looked at the routes that kids were taking to and from school in that community and started to figure out how to make those routes safe. Then, we presented our findings to the Cheltenham city council.

You worked at the League of American Bicyclists for many years. How did that organization help create Safe Routes to School in the US?

The League is an organization of individual bicyclists and bicycle clubs and was one of the early champions for the federal Safe Routes to School program in the early 2000s. In general, the things that make streets safer for cyclists make it safer for all users. Safe Routes to School programs are critical to getting kids riding at an early age; if they never ride when they're kids, they typically never ride as adults.

Did you bike to school?

Ironically no, because I went to a boarding school, where we only had to walk from one side of the quad to another! In university I got back into cycling. I rediscovered the practicality and the fun of cycling.

You live in Richmond now. What do they well from a bicycling perspective, and what could they do better?

As a pretty confident cyclist, I find Richmond is a great place to ride. It's not too busy, the streets are generous. But it has also made me realize what is comfortable for me is still well beyond the pale for many people who don't want to bike in traffic. Richmond is still a challenging place to ride because there's very little dedicated infrastructure. It's starting to change. The city's got great bones, it's got a great setup, it's got a good feel for cycling that I think could be captured in the future.

You recently spoke to Virginia SRTS coordinators about the current state of the transportation planning field. Could you give us a recap of your presentation?

In the field, I think there's a realization that the traditional models for engineering and planning aren't always making streets safer. We have rules and standards that prioritize moving cars, which result in streets that get people hit and killed in traffic crashes. We need to change that conversation. It's wrong to be hitting kids and creating situations where we know that's going to happen because of how that street's been designed.

We also need to think more holistically and in a more multidisciplinary fashion about the issues that challenge our transportation system, including equity. There is a massive inequity in the relative safety of streets, in the provision of sidewalks and crosswalks and bike infrastructure based on a community's demographics. And we have decades of inequitable investment and engagement with communities of color or communities with poverty. Part of the way we fix that is by properly engaging

with those communities and having a conversation where we find out what the issues are.

The national Safe Routes to School conference is coming up this fall in Tampa, Florida. Why should SRTS coordinators or people interested in SRTS attend?

There are a couple of reasons. Number one, it's a chance to learn from your peers, to network and learn what other programs are doing to address the same questions that Virginia communities face every single day. You might even get a head start on questions that haven't even come up. It's a great opportunity to stay on top of the best practices in the field.

The second reason is it'll be one week of the year where you don't have to explain to anyone what you do. There's tremendous kinship that you can gain from just being around others who are in the same boat. That's quite inspiring and helpful to go through that!



The Community Benefits of Walking and Biking



When we talk about Safe Routes to School and the program's benefits, the conversation often stops not far from the schoolhouse door. But in much of the Commonwealth, SRTS is on the front lines of promoting walking and bicycling. The work we do is visible, and as a result, there's a crucial opportunity to talk about the broader community benefits of physical activity. Here are some reasons why SRTS and promoting walking and bicycling makes a difference outside of school that you can share with community members:

Walking + biking are for all ages.

On average, 80% of Americans across all age groups [say they like walking](#), including older adults. A recent study found that 80% of seniors looking for independent living, and 2/3 of seniors seeking assisted living, [wanted to live in a walkable neighborhood](#).

Making it easier to walk to school makes it easier for everyone else to walk.

Pedestrian or bicycle improvements near a school, like a crosswalk or path, can also improve connections to other amenities, like shopping, community centers, or public transportation.

Walking saves money.

Encouraging more students to walk and bike can save school divisions money on buses, parking, and pick-up/drop-off areas. The school district in Lakewood, Ohio, where all students walk or bike to school, [saves \\$1 million per year](#) on buses, while the Austin, Texas school district [saved \\$130,000 per year by building a pedestrian bridge](#) between a school and a nearby apartment complex where students lived.

There's a shortage of walkable and bikeable places.

Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods [often make up a small minority of most communities](#). A study of housing preferences found that [67% of families with kids](#) would pay more to live in a neighborhood where they could walk to parks, shops, and restaurants, which is a big advantage for schools in walkable areas.

Walking is big business.

Companies increasingly [seek out walkable and bikeable communities](#) for their employees, like Amazon, which chose to locate their new headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Or the Walton Family Foundation, the nonprofit arm of Walmart, [which spent \\$74 million on trails](#) in Bentonville, Arkansas to benefit the company's employees and local residents.

Working with Partners

School administrators and parents are a big part of a Safe Routes to School program, but there are lots of other partners in the community that coordinators can reach out to as they seek to expand. These potential local partners may provide funding for SRTS because the results are mutually beneficial.

Looking to expand your SRTS Program? The first step is to inventory your partners and see where you can move beyond the traditional SRTS partner group. Make a list of those groups in your community who are enjoying the benefits of a safe, walkable community (see below for some ideas), and reach out to them to see if there partnership opportunities that you both can enjoy.

It's not just about childhood health or active transportation and environmental benefits anymore. Partners such as retirement homes or senior citizen centers understand that SRTS programs help seniors feel safe when walking, and help them get their critical daily exercise requirements. Getting out of the house more, means seniors are less isolated, and happier. A recent study sponsored by a retirement community in Washington DC found that their seniors timed their daily errands to coincide with crossing guards on duty. Seniors could rely on them to be at their stations in the morning and afternoon to help stop traffic and give them time to cross.

For real estate professionals or economic development agencies, SRTS can be highlighted as improving the desirability of a home thanks to its easy walkability to destinations, or by making it easier for visitors to reach the same destinations without having to drive.

Partners within the Community

- Senior Center Directors
- Real Estate Agent/Developers
- Local Health Clinic Directors
- Social Services Directors
- Municipal Economic Development Coordinator
- Main Street Directors
- Local Bike Advocacy Organization
- Bike Shops
- Police Department
- Sporting Goods Stores

Logos: MAIN STREET AMERICA, LOUDOUN VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MAIN STREET ORGANIZATION OF LOUDOUN

*These are just some of the partners
SRTS coordinators can work with!*

Don't overlook those larger foundations who often have a local presence. Foundations such as AAA or AARP or the Vision Zero Foundation like to support local efforts that improve conditions for their members too.

Before you approach a new potential partner, it's key to think in advance about how you will:

1. Complement each other
2. Build respect and trust
3. Communicate
4. Derive those benefits that are mutually beneficial

Embrace the very real benefits you offer potential partners. Be proud of your program! You can increase a partner's profile in your community by introducing them to lots of kids and parents and good publicity while helping them build community goodwill.

Bike to School Day Registration Now Open!

Each year, tens of thousands of children, parents, school officials and community leaders nationwide participate in National Bike to School Day (BTSD). Last year, 286 Virginia schools participated in BTSD, second only to California for the best turnout nationwide!



BTSD returns May 8, 2019! Whether you are a seasoned Bike to School Day champion or will be planning an event for the first time, be sure to check out the resources on the program website, including [How to Plan a Walk or Bike to School Day Event](#) in 7 Days and our Learn it, Do it, Live Event Ideas tip sheet.

Remember, you can still apply for a [QuickStart Mini-grant](#) to help support your Bike to School Day activities. The final due date for the spring is April 4.

To register your Bike to School Day event and find event ideas, visit the [Walk and Bike to School Day website](#). The Virginia SRTS Program uses this database to track growth from year to year and send decals to participating schools.

Perfecting Your SRTS Pitch

As a SRTS champion, you do many different things and talk with dozens of people serving a variety of roles in the community. How many of the people that you talk to truly understand what it is you do? How many of them know how they can contribute to your mission?

It's been said that you never get a second chance at a first impression, which is why having a few versions of an elevator pitch at the ready can help you garner support for your program. Read on for tips on how to craft your own.

What is an elevator pitch?

An elevator pitch is what you can say in response to the oft asked, "What do you do?" It can also be what you would tell someone about SRTS in the time it takes to ride an elevator, wait in line at a coffee shop, when someone stops by a table at a health fair, or when you finally get 5 minutes of a busy principal's time.

The elevator speech is:

- Absolutely no longer than 30-60 seconds
- Or, approximately 80-90 words
- Or, 8 to 10 sentences

You want your pitch to be personable, relatable, and most importantly, memorable. You can do this by including a story, an anecdote, or a couple of compelling highlights. The next section includes a few different templates for inspiration

Crafting Your Pitch

One approach to crafting an elevator pitch is to make it “all about you.” The pitch should answer basic questions such as: Who are you? What makes you unique? and What are your goals?

Examples:

1. My name is Jane and I am concerned about the traffic around our schools. If you want to help reduce the number of cars in our neighborhood, please volunteer to lead one of our walking school buses.
2. I am the SRTS Coordinator for the school division and I’m planning for Bike to School Day in May. Would you be interested in getting the name of your business out in front of 300 parents at Lincoln Elementary School?

A second approach flips the first one on its head and focuses on the people you serve. Instead of talking about your role and goals, this type of elevator speech addresses who you help, how you help them, and why it matters:

Examples:

1. I help busy PE teachers by sharing lesson plans and resources so that they can more easily incorporate safe walking and bicycling skills into their lessons.
2. My name is Bob, and I help students learn how to ride bicycles so that they gain a lifelong skill that helps them be more independent and physically active.



The last approach covered here can help foster a conversation when someone asks you, “What do you do?” This approach is personal and memorable because it relates your work directly to others’ experiences.

Example:

Them: What do you do?

You: Do you ever get stuck in the traffic around the neighborhood school in the morning?

Them: Yes, if I don’t leave early enough I’ll sit for several minutes in that line of cars!

You: I’m working with schools across the division to make it safer for students to walk and bike to school, reducing congestion during drop-off. Last week, 40 families participated in our Park-and-Walk event.

Them: Oh wow! Do you need any volunteers?

You may want to draft a pitch following each of the approaches above so you’ll be covered in any situation. Once you have it down on paper, it’s a good idea to practice with family or colleagues to ensure a smooth delivery when the time comes.

Focus on Funding

Welcome to the inaugural edition of "Focus on Funding," a new feature of the Virginia SRTS newsletter that will alert you to upcoming SRTS funding opportunities, apprise you of new funding resources, and offer advice on how to win at the SRTS funding game.

In this edition, we are pleased to announce an exciting new installment in our Learn It. Do it. Live it! series—a new resource called [Funding SRTS Projects](#). This resource provides time-tested tips for funding SRTS implementation, a menu of common funding sources, and links to other valuable funding resources.

Here's a list of upcoming grant opportunities at the state and national levels. Opportunities marked **[Plan Ahead]** typically require advance planning and coordination to achieve a successful outcome.

[Virginia SRTS Program, QuickStart Mini-grants](#)
\$1,000

- Applications due April 4, August 8, and September 12
- USE FOR: Small-scale SRTS activities



[Virginia SRTS Program, SRTS Non-Infrastructure Grant](#)

\$5,000 to \$100,000 **[Plan Ahead]**

- Applications due March 22
- USE FOR: Large-scale SRTS non-infrastructure programs

[Safe Kids Worldwide, Walk this Way Grant](#)

\$500 to \$1,000

- Applications due in July (anticipated)
- USE FOR: Walk to School Day events

[Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, Healthy Community Action Teams \(HCAT\) Grant](#)

\$30,000 **[Plan Ahead]**

- Request for proposals in August (anticipated)
- USE FOR: SRTS planning

[VDOT, Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program](#)

\$50,000 to \$1.5 million **[Plan Ahead]**

- Large-scale SRTS infrastructure projects
- Applications due October 1, 2019

As always, keep an eye out for opportunities at the local level. Common sources include PTAs and PTOs, local governments, hospitals and health systems, businesses, foundations, advocacy groups, and others.