



# Illinois Department of Transportation

2300 South Dirksen Parkway / Springfield, Illinois / 62764

June 6, 2007

## **CIRCULAR LETTER 2007-08**

### **SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM**

COUNTY ENGINEERS/SUPERINTENDENT OF HIGHWAYS  
MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS/DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS/METROPOLITAN PLANNING  
ORGANIZATIONS - DIRECTORS

The Illinois Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) is a federal program administered by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). The SRTS supports projects and programs that enable and encourage walking and bicycling to and from school. The program applies to schools serving grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. A School Travel Plan must first be approved before applying for SRTS funds. The deadline for submitting School Travel Plans was May 31, 2007, and the deadline for submitting SRTS Applications is June 30, 2007. School Travel Plans and funding applications are accepted only through an online process. The SRTS is anticipated to continue as an annual program. Details on submitting School Travel Plans and Applications for funds can be found on the IDOT website at <http://www.dot.il.gov/saferoutes/saferouteshome.aspx>.

### **Program Overview**

The Safe Routes to School Program uses a multi-disciplinary approach to improve conditions for students who walk or bike to school. The program has three main goals:

1. To enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
2. To make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
3. To facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity (within two miles) of both public and private primary and middle schools (grades K-8).

The program funds both infrastructure improvements to the physical environment, as well as non-infrastructure projects. Eligible project

sponsors include schools and school districts, governmental entities and non-profit organizations. Projects may be organized on a variety of jurisdictional levels; however, infrastructure projects must have a local government sponsor.

Key features of the Illinois SRTS Program include:

- Projects are funded at 100%, up to the approved federal amount, with no local match required.
- Between 70% and 90% of funds will support infrastructure projects. Ten percent (10%) to 30% of funds will support non-infrastructure programs.
- All applications require an approved Illinois School Travel Plan.
- Only those projects and programs included in the corresponding School Travel Plan are eligible for funding.
- Multiple projects may be applied for by a single Sponsoring Agency, using a single application.
- School Travel Plans and funding applications are accepted only through an online process.

The Safe Routes to School program utilizes the five "E's" in seeking to improve the school walking and cycling environment: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement and Evaluation. It funds the following types of activities:

1. **Engineering:** A broad term that describes physical changes to the walking and bicycling infrastructure within two miles of schools. Engineering solutions include planning, design, and construction of changes to the infrastructure.
2. **Education:** Education activities include teaching pedestrian, bicyclist and traffic safety and creating awareness of the benefits and goals of SRTS.
3. **Encouragement:** Encouragement strategies are about having fun. They generate excitement and interest in walking and bicycling. Special events, mileage clubs, contests and ongoing activities all provide ways for parents and children to discover, or rediscover, that walking and bicycling are doable and a lot of fun.
4. **Evaluation:** Evaluation will help you measure the impact of your efforts. The two main categories for measurement are changes in travel mode (increases in walking/bicycling) and safety (decreased crashes,

improved safety behaviors and knowledge). Evaluation also helps keep track of progress made toward goals and reports any changes or updates to the School Travel Plan.

5. Enforcement: Enforcement strategies act to deter unsafe behaviors of drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists; to encourage all road users to obey traffic laws; and to share the road safely.

### **Funding Procedures**

Once a project is selected, IDOT will notify the applicant to schedule a kick-off meeting and begin the process of formalizing a funding agreement. Infrastructure projects will be coordinated by the District Bureau of Local Roads and Streets. Typical infrastructure projects will involve sidewalks, bike paths, traffic signals, pavement marking, installation of bike racks, and permanent signs. Non-infrastructure projects will be coordinated directly with the State Safe Routes to School Coordinator.

It is important to remember that all funds are provided on a reimbursement basis, so the sponsor must first complete the activity or project and then send an invoice to IDOT to receive reimbursement funds. **Local sponsors are responsible for paying all initial costs, then seeking reimbursement based on proof of payment.**

An exception to this will be construction of infrastructure projects that utilize the scheduled IDOT state lettings. Projects on the IDOT state letting will be administered through IDOT procedures where the state pays the contractor directly, receives federal reimbursement for SRTS approved funds, and then bills the SRTS sponsoring agency for their responsible portion. As long as the project cost does not exceed the approved SRTS funds or activities, the local sponsor should not receive billing for any funds for construction projects on the state letting. However, cost overruns and unapproved items will be the responsibility of the sponsor.

Use of in-house engineering or day labor construction should be closely coordinated with the District Bureau of Local Roads and Streets to ensure reimbursement for work effort. In-house engineering and construction performed by qualified personnel for infrastructure projects selected through the SRTS program are eligible for reimbursement only for work performed after the formal notice to proceed has been given. There will be no retroactive funding for costs incurred prior to the notice to proceed. **A notice to proceed is a separate document from the project selection notification.**

Scoping the project to match the available funds is a critical step for the local sponsor, recognizing that federal procedures must be followed. Use of professional engineering services in determining cost estimates and project scopes is strongly recommended.

## **Regulatory Requirements**

Safe Routes to School funds are federal funds originating from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The FHWA is required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) to consider environmental factors through a systematic, interdisciplinary approach before committing to a course of action. The Federal Highway Administration must also follow requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). NEPA Section 4f relates to public parks and recreational areas and must be considered for projects that extend outside of existing right of way limits. NEPA Section 106 relates to cultural and historic areas and must be considered for all construction projects. The Americans with Disabilities Act design criteria must be followed on all infrastructure projects. Infrastructure improvements that are significant in scope or entail work outside of existing public right of way could require substantial cost in order to comply with these regulations. The department expects that most projects will not impact lands outside of existing right of way; and therefore, should qualify for categorical exclusions and have minimum environmental considerations.

Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects must go through three phases before a project is completed and comply with NEPA and ADA in all phases. These phases are: Phase I (Planning), Phase II (Design), and Phase III (Construction).

- In Phase I, the purpose and need for the project is defined; the level of environmental documentation is determined; public involvement activities occur; and preliminary plans are developed. It is in Phase I that detailed review of the project's environment is completed. The main reviews, which take the most time, are: Cultural, Biological, and Wetlands. These review areas are very dependent on weather, seasons, and availability of personnel. As such, a project's development of preliminary plans may not take much time in Phase I, but receiving the necessary environmental sign-offs can be lengthy. Sign-offs are generally required through several agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Historic Preservation Agency, Federal Highway Administration and the Department of Natural Resources.
- Phase II, while requiring some time, will generally proceed much quicker than the Phase I process. Phase II does not depend on reviews and comments by agencies external to IDOT to the extent required for Phase I. Phase II refines the plans developed in Phase I and finalizes those plans by adding the necessary detail drawings and information. Quantities are calculated, contract documents are prepared, and any permits are obtained. Land acquisition related to the project may occur during Phase II and must follow federal procedures for obtaining right of way to include certified appraisals and paying fair market value. All SRTS infrastructure projects must be accessible to the public through at least a 20-year

recorded public easement to the facilities. A review of these Phase II documents is done by the IDOT district and central offices. After the documents are satisfactory, the project is ready for letting. The letting process allows the project to enter Phase III.

- Phase III construction will be accomplished in accordance with the approved plans and specifications that reference applicable federal and state regulations. The local sponsor is responsible for ensuring compliance with the contract documents during construction and keeping accurate records. Reimbursement of SRTS funds is contingent upon the project being completed in accordance with all federal requirements and regulations governing the improvement.

### **Who to Contact**

Questions related to this program may be directed to your District Local Roads and Streets Engineer, or the state Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Megan Holt, at (217) 785-2932 or [megan.holt@illinois.gov](mailto:megan.holt@illinois.gov).

Sincerely,



Charles J. Ingersoll, P.E.  
Engineer of Local Roads and Streets

cc: Greg Piland, FHWA  
District Local Roads Engineers  
Todd Hill  
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