

Safe Routes to School Reauthorization

Background

On October 2, 2001, Governor Davis signed SB 10 (Soto) extending the Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) program for three more years. The program sunsets on January 1, 2005, unless a later enacted statute deletes or extends that date. During this time period the state has funded 273 programs throughout the state.

The program dedicates \$20-25 million a year for six categories of projects: sidewalk improvements; traffic calming and speed reduction; pedestrian/bicycle crossing improvements; on-street bicycle facilities; and, traffic diversion improvements.

The program is administered by the CALTRANS Local Assistance Program. This program provides vital funding to local governments to construct projects in the vicinity of schools statewide to make it safer for children to walk and bike.

Success

The SR2S program has been implemented successfully in many different jurisdictions around the state and in other parts of the country and even overseas. In CA one of the more successful programs had occurred in Marin County and has led to increased biking and walking to school by students and reduced traffic at schools due to parent drop offs and pick ups.

Because of the success of the CA program, the State of New Mexico has enacted a program this year and federal reauthorization efforts have taken the lead from the SR2S to possibly include a Safe Routes to School type program.

Why Need for Reauthorization?

The program has been highly competitive with an average of 500 applications per round and over 2,000 total applications submitted since its inception. However, this is not indicative of real statewide demand especially in areas that may not be aware of this funding option or organized to take advantage of it. Funding for projects in low-income and communities of color need to increase, as these communities are more likely to have children that have to walk or bike to school.

A recent report released by the Surface Transportation Policy Project and Latino Issues forum has outlined the enormous dependency that children have on travel via cars to school because of several factors, including unsafe walking and biking routes to school. The report outlines the alarming child obesity and asthma rates as result of children riding in cars, not biking or walking to school and not participating in recreational activities.

Program Improvement

Additional funding could be provided to SR2S or integrated from other programs to help reduce risk of exposure to crime along routes in low-income and high crime communities. In particular, community policing, security guards and crossing guards could be eligible activities for SR2S projects.

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