



**APRIL 2012**

**Coordinator's Corner**

This issue of our Virginia SRTS Program Newsletter looks forward to some very exciting activities and events. You'll learn more about our recently-completed SRTS Strategic Plan ([http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1104107397403-140/VDOT\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_120418.pdf](http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1104107397403-140/VDOT_Strategic_Plan_120418.pdf)) and how some changes to the program will benefit you. You'll also learn about our new SRTS Hotline and our anticipated call for SRTS grants.



These next few months will provide many opportunities for you to participate in SRTS activities. For example, the first ever National Bike to School Day on May 9 is a great way to welcome spring. I encourage all of you to participate, joining in the celebration in all 50 states. Register your event at [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org) and browse the new website for some great resources to help plan your event. You can also use some of the customizable materials on the Virginia SRTS website ([http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm\\_marketing\\_toolkit.asp](http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_marketing_toolkit.asp)). Start planning now so that we have a great representation.

-Rob Williams  
VDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator

**Friends and Faces: Stephanie Weber**

*Stephanie Weber is the regional network manager for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. She guides the work of the regional policy managers working in four regions - Atlanta, GA, District of Columbia, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles, CA.*



**Q: How did you get involved in SRTS?**

**A:** I was working part-time for BikeWalk Virginia when Safe Routes to School (SRTS) was included as a part of the 2005 transportation bill (SAFETEA-LU), along with other bicycle and pedestrian transportation programs. BikeWalk Virginia's coalition of advocates and state agency partners supported this new program. As a parent of a preschooler at the time (she's now 10!), I loved the mission and goals of this program and volunteered to staff efforts to support it in the state. It grew from there.

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**CALENDAR**

*Dates specific to VDOT SRTS Program are indicated with \**

**APRIL 2012**

22: Eath Day! Think about celebrating Earth Day by hosting a parade at or around your school.

24: National SRTS Course at Sugarland Elementary School (Sterling).

26: National SRTS Courses at Rolling Ridge Elementary School (Sterling) and Herndon Middle School (Herndon Municipal Building).

**MAY 2012**

9: First Ever Bike To Scool Day ([www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org))

Let us know about SRTS events in your community!

Click here to send your information so we can include it in our calendar.

**Q: You now work for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. What is the role in SRTS?**

**A:** The National Partnership is an advocacy organization, with funding coming primarily from foundations. We work to promote the federal SRTS program, and we also work in specific states and a handful of large metropolitan regions to institutionalize SRTS and leverage funding. We often run into folks confused between the role of the National Partnership and the National Center for SRTS. (See "Who does what? The National Center for SRTS and the National SRTS Partnership" to the right.)

We work together with the National Center for SRTS (<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>) on many issues such as the national SRTS conference.

**Q: Does the National Partnership work directly with schools?**

**A:** We work at the local level through technical assistance to communities, and through a new parent-engagement program called "Fire up Your Feet." But, at this point, we don't work directly with individual schools and setting up their programs

**What is your vision for SRTS over the next five years, both nationally and in Virginia?**

**A:** I am a firm believer in the overall mission of this program and I want to see it continue to grow. It is difficult to really know what the funding picture will look like at the federal level. There is strong, bi-partisan support for Safe Routes though, and those of us who have been in the pedestrian and bicycle world for a while know that the demand for livable communities has grown. There have been some examples of really creative ways in which metropolitan planning organizations allocate their transportation dollars that give me hope that, even in the absence of a dedicated federal program, the efforts to improve multi-modal infrastructures around schools and throughout communities will expand.

Over the next couple of years, the National Partnership will continue to lead a network in the Washington, DC metropolitan region working to leverage funding and to support policies that are favorable for bicycling and walking.



We will also continue to grow and sustain SRTS in the region. My hope is that the work of the regional network will have a reverberating effect throughout Virginia

**When you are meeting new people, especially those unfamiliar with the SRTS Program, what are the core messages for supporting SRTS?**

**A:** The answer to this question depends on your audience. I work primarily with policymakers and will use that framework for my answer. In this current political climate, I think the most compelling arguments we can make when dealing with policymakers and community leaders are on the economic benefits and the issue of choice in transportation modes. These benefits complement others such as creating safe places for children to walk and bike to school, building a sense of community, reducing traffic congestion, and improving air quality.

**When explaining the benefits of the program, what would you suggest for parents say to other parents?**

**A:** There are several things I would say: First, walking to school creates an opportunity for regular physical activity for your child and for you that is part of your overall exercise plan. Second, getting outside (and out of your motor vehicle) allows you to experience your community at a really tangible level. You learn about the community and have interactions in ways that you couldn't have in the car, such as meeting neighbors walking along the sidewalk, too. Finally, from a community level, SRTS taps into something that we've lost across the country --

bringing the “people-level” back to our daily experiences. These are the things my 10 year old daughter enjoys about commuting to and from school.

**What should kids say to their parents if they want to start walking to school?**

**A:** It’s healthy for kids. Walking is also good for the environment. Kids could even say that, “All the other kids are walking; I want to walk, too!”

**With all of that in mind, what’s the best way to get the word out about SRTS?**

**A:** I don’t know if it’s the best way, but clearly, use of both traditional and social media is critical. It was great to see the amount of press that the recent VDOT funding awards received. Local stories make such an impact as well. Sharing your experiences about SRTS with others is a great way, too.

**What advice do you have to those involved in SRTS at the local level to make their needs known and connect with complementary programs and projects?**

**A:** Tell your story! By sharing the successes and the challenges of your particular program, you will find ways to help your program succeed in ways you never imagined. Building personal connections can help build the infrastructure connections.

Your audience is a broad range of people. Talk to your neighbor and the parents of other kids. Promote your story amongst local media. Reach out to fraternal organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary Club, elected officials). Talking about what we’re trying to do often opens opportunities that we may never expect, especially if they are in a position to make policy or infrastructure a reality.

**Overview: Virginia Safe Routes to School Five-Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017**

The SRTS program in Virginia has worked for over six years to start and sustain SRTS programs throughout the Commonwealth. Since FY 2005, Virginia’s SRTS program has awarded nearly \$17 million of its \$24.4 million apportionment for 19 travel plans development, 39 non-

infrastructure projects, and 65 infrastructure projects. The non-infrastructure grants have helped schools create SRTS Travel Plans that work to create sustainable SRTS programs, evidenced by the great participation we have for Walk to School Day each October.

At its five-year anniversary, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) recognized that the program can still improve. The new Strategic Plan identifies activities and actions that will strengthen and adapt the program to current and future needs, based on the following three plan goals:

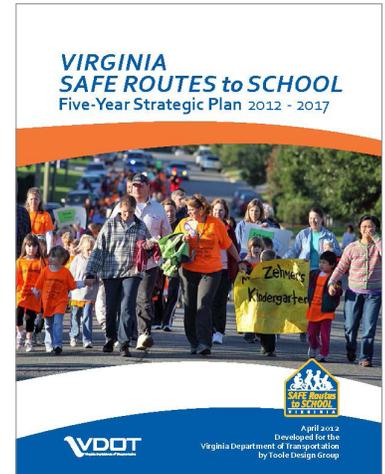
**Goal 1:** Create a greater awareness of SRTS throughout the Commonwealth.

**Goal 2:** Provide technical support or assistance to schools that wish to participate in SRTS, with priority for underserved populations.

**Goal 3:** Progressively increase the percentage of children walking and bicycling to school by producing physical and programmatic changes that make it feasible, attractive and sustainable.

Several of the changes that you will see and use for your local SRTS program are described briefly below.

- **Student Travel Tally Week.** Virginia will be encouraging all SRTS programs to participate in Student Tally Week, a new annual event that will encourage schools to track how their students travel to and from school. More on this topic is covered in “Student Tally Week” article below.
- **A new approach for a statewide non-infrastructure program.** We are also reinstating



the non-infrastructure program, adding flexibility for programs that can be funded. More on the program will be available in the coming months.

- **Creation of Safe Routes to School Starter Kit.** The SRTS Starter Kit will collect the best materials from existing local SRTS programs in Virginia so that programs that are just getting started will have access to great resources. We'll tell you more about the SRTS Starter Kit as it develops.
- **Changes to the School Travel Plan development process.** The key change here is to create a suite of travel plan options aimed at making a travel plan easier to complete, suited to local needs, and easier for VDOT to review. The new school travel plan format will be customizable for different sized school communities (from an individual school to a large school district) and offer a slightly different format to support an infrastructure project or a non-infrastructure program. Finally, we expect that the format will allow for elements of the templates that can be completed over time and in response to the growth of the program.
- **A new process for project close-out that is more reliable and predictable for both the SRTS Coordinator and the grantees.** SRTS is a reimbursement program that awards funds once projects are completed and properly documented. Communication regarding standards for completed projects and the required documentation has not always been clear in the past. The new Strategic Plan calls for end-of-project milestones or requirements. Requirements can include student tally documentation, final close-out report, or a last invoice. Regardless of the requirement, the standards and needs will be clear and accessible from the start of the project.

If you have any questions about these new changes, contact Rob Williams at robertj.williams@vdot.virginia.gov or 804-371-4868.

To view or download the Strategic Plan go to [http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1104107397403-140/VDOT\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_120418.pdf](http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1104107397403-140/VDOT_Strategic_Plan_120418.pdf). Please note that the download may take a few minutes to complete.

### Student Tally Week

As part of the strategic plan, VDOT will be expanding data collection and evaluation efforts. To help schools comply, the Virginia SRTS program will designate one week each fall for a statewide count of Student\_Tallyhow students travel to school. In the past, Virginia SRTS programs collect data as part of developing a Travel Plan. However, the time of year and regularity with which student travel-to-school modes is collected varies by community, making it difficult to compare travel modes both locally and across the state. "Student Tally Week" will establish a reliable way to measure changes in student travel-to-school mode. All schools grades K - 8 are encouraged to participate. We'll provide more information on Student Tally Week during the coming months.

### Social Media, SRTS and You

We want to hear from you about social media and SRTS!

Go to <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/890892/137e8b736838> to take a short survey that will help us incorporate social media into SRTS programs in



Virginia to benefit outreach and education, and help build local programs. Tell us which tools you use most often, how you would use them, and who else you think would use them.

Social media as a marketing tool has been embraced by both public and private entities as a means to reach targeted audiences for message delivery and interaction. Currently the largest channels in social media are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Each of these social media channels has been used successfully to promote the SRTS program.

### **Another Round of SRTS Grant Applications**

Look for another call for SRTS grant applications in the summer 2012. This round will include both non-infrastructure and infrastructure applications. We recognize the importance of maintaining momentum for existing SRTS programs while we spend time to revise the non-infrastructure grant program. We expect subsequent rounds of non-infrastructure grants will be based on the revised program. Look for a formal announcement in the next few months.

### **We Now Have a Hotline!**

You can now get information about Virginia's SRTS program through our new Hotline: 1-855-601-7787 (SRTS). Given the growth of SRTS programs in Virginia, we wanted to increase our outreach to you. So, give us a call if with questions about SRTS. Call us to get a few ideas for your National Bike to School Day event or to answer a basic question.

### **What does what? The National Center for SRTS and the National SRTS Partnership**

VDOT's SRTS program relies on resources from the National Center for Safe Routes to School, which is funded through the federal transportation bill to oversee SRTS programs in all states.

Local programs may find additional resources from the National Safe Routes to School Partnership ([www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)), which is separate organization from the National Center for Safe Routes to School. The National Partnership's primary role is to advocate for SRTS programs nationally, and to help local programs advocate locally. This is an important role, especially since the federal transportation bill has not been re-established for another five-year period.



**SafeRoutes**  
National Center for Safe Routes to School



### **Sustainability SRTS Stories**

The Coordinator's Corner in the January 2012 Virginia SRTS Newsletter ([www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/resources/srts\\_assets/VDOT\\_SRTS\\_Newsletter\\_Jan\\_2012.pdf](http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/resources/srts_assets/VDOT_SRTS_Newsletter_Jan_2012.pdf)) talked about three ways to create SRTS program sustainability: Identify and support local champions; create and encourage partnerships; and promote your program. We believe that you are each other's best resources and want to create a place for you to share your experience and activities in these areas.

Send Rob ([robertj.williams@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:robertj.williams@vdot.virginia.gov)) a brief summary and a photo or two to help us get started. Or, give us a call at on the Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 (SRTS).

Remember -- adding a sustainability focus will help to ensure that there is adequate support and resources available to continue encouraging children to walk and bike to school in the future.