



APRIL 2011

Coordinator's Corner

Welcome to the April issue of the VDOT SRTS Newsletter. As Virginia's SRTS Coordinator, I am pleased to offer this Newsletter as a way to keep you informed about SRTS programs and projects in the Commonwealth. In our inaugural March issue, we described some changes underway for our SRTS program, beginning with a new logo and work on a Strategic Plan. We invited you to complete a brief online survey to help with the Strategic Plan, so far we've received over 150 responses – thanks to those who have given us your time. We also gave you a heads up about an expanded SRTS website, promising more information soon.



Our April Newsletter includes more details on VDOT's updated SRTS website, such as expanded information and more resources to use to prepare a SRTS Travel Plan or apply for an Infrastructure Grant.

With the May call for VDOT SRTS Infrastructure Grant applications close at hand, you'll want to read the article on Fondant, our new online grant application system that will make applying for and tracking a grant easier.

We're also introducing a new feature – Friends and Faces – where you'll meet folks from around the Commonwealth who have a positive impact on SRTS. This month, meet Marge White who started the mini-grant program at Prevention Connections.

Finally, as the weather gets warmer, consider hosting a walk or bike to school event. You'll find the seven steps for an event and other great information about walking and biking events in this issue.

One reminder: we want to make this Newsletter a place to share your SRTS successes. Send us a photo and short write-up by using the *Contact us* feature on our updated website.

Thanks for reading!

-Rob Williams

VDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator

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CALENDAR

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

MARCH

31: On-line survey for Strategic Plan closes*

APRIL

22: Free webinar: Lessons from Florida's Crossing Guard Program Sponsored by the National Center for Safe Routes to School and America Walks <http://americawalks.org/programs/srts/>
22: Earth Day Sponsored by the Earth Day Network Great Day for a Walk-to-School-Event!

<http://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2011>
29: Final School Travel Plans due to VDOT*
29: Prevention Connections SRTS Mini Grant applications due

MAY

2 to 6: Teacher Appreciation Week
5: Crossing Guard Appreciation Day
National Bike Month Sponsored by the League of American Bicyclists <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/>

JUNE

3: SRTS infrastructure grant applications due to VDOT*



Friends and Faces

Small sums of money can often result in big changes when an active and engaged community begins a Safe Routes to School program. As the Deputy Director of the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, Marge White oversees a SRTS mini-grant program (through Prevention Connections) that provides up to \$2,000 per school to plan and implement walking and biking activities. The program targets low-income areas, where studies have shown that young pedestrians are at a higher risk of being injured or killed in traffic, and where higher rates of obesity are often prevalent.

Marge sees SRTS as a key tactic for improving students' physical fitness. When the opportunity came along to create the mini-grant program, Marge went into action. She started by getting buy-in from school superintendents and principals, hiring a program manager to support grant recipients, and working directly with physical education and health teachers. "Mini-grants are a great way to launch a SRTS program. In general, schools get less funding for activities outside of the classroom. These grants support walking/biking events and safety trainings, as well other activities that directly relate to the school day." When asked about her vision for success, she says she hopes participation in Walk-to-School Day dramatically increases in 2011, and that many more elementary and middle schools become engaged (register your event at www.walktoschool.org).

The next round of mini-grant applications is due April 29, 2011. As of now, the program will end in February 2012. Looking ahead, Marge sees an even greater need for collaboration with VDOT and others, such as the Virginia PTA. She would like to get permanent funding for the program, and continue to provide small sums of money to spur additional interest in SRTS activities throughout the Commonwealth.

For more information about Prevention Connections' grant opportunities, contact Ashley Johnson at: www.PreventionConnections.org

Friends and Faces is a new feature aimed at helping you get to know folks around the Commonwealth involved in Safe Routes to School. Let us know if there is someone you feel should be featured in an upcoming newsletter.

Have You Planned Your Walk to School Day Event?

Spring is a great time to renew your school's commitment to walking and biking. Many SRTS programs choose to host a walking and biking event on Earth Day, Friday, April 22. This year's theme, "A Billion Acts of Green," includes a Green Schools program (<http://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2011>).



Planning a walking and biking event at your school can be done in seven easy steps:

Step 1: Pick a date and ask your school's principal to approve a Walk to School Day event. Get your PTA on board, too.

Step 2: Let us know about your event. Go to www.surveymonkey.com//s/SpringWalk_BikeEvent to complete a brief form with the details of your event.

Step 3: Identify a theme for the event and ask students to create posters to promote it. Write scripts for morning messages, flyers and other communications with school families. Check with local businesses to see if they can provide safety-related incentive items for students.

Step 4: Invite students and parents to participate in your Spring Walk to School Day event. Use your school's



e-newsletter or listserv to announce it. Make a special effort to ensure that kids with disabilities are included in your event – talk to the special education team leader or your principal to get ideas.

Step 5: Create Walk to School Day posters or a banner that will greet students when they arrive at school the day of the event. Potential phrases include “Thanks for walking” “It’s Walk to School Day” or “It’s cool to walk to school!”

Step 6: The day before your event, make a Walk to School Day reminder announcement on the school’s intercom system, encouraging students to walk or bicycle to school the next day. Download safety tips and distribute them to teachers and students: http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/resources/education_tip-sheets.cfm

Step 7: **Hold your Event!** Afterwards, get feedback from students, parents and teachers so that you can improve on it the next time.

Lose the Training Wheels

Looking for resources to help you include students of all abilities in your SRTS program? Lose the Training Wheels is a program that teaches kids with a wide variety of disabilities to ride a bike in one week. Programs are offered at several Northern Virginia schools, and the organization is taking registrations from other communities that are interested. See the list of schools and dates at <http://www.losethetrainingwheels.org/schedules.html>



Fairfax County is hosting a Spring Break camp the week of April 18 at the Lee District RECenter. Find out more at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/ada/lose-the-wheels.htm>

Finding ways to plan and design SRTS programs that take into account the abilities of all children should be part of

all SRTS programs. Tips and other resources are available in the National Center for Safe Routes to School resource, [Involving Students with Disabilities in SRTS](#). This resource discusses practical strategies for involving students with disabilities in SRTS, and provides success stories. Download the resource from the National Center’s website at: http://katana.hsrrc.unc.edu/cms/downloads/Involving_students_with_disabilities.pdf



Walk This Way

Make your spring walking event – and every walk to school – a safe one. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) just released a new pedestrian safety curriculum for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The guide is organized into five lessons. Topics include walking near traffic, crossing streets, crossing intersections, parking lot safety, and school bus stop and school bus safety. Each successive lesson builds on the previous one and emphasizes skills practice to help students develop safe pedestrian habits. Download the Lesson Plans,



Assessment Guide, and Student Report Form Guide, along with the Teachers Guide at <http://www.nhtsa.gov/ChildPedestrianSafetyCurriculum>.



Manage Your SRTS Grant Electronically

Many schools throughout who Virginia applied for SRTS mini-grant funding through Prevention Connections in the fall 2011 noticed how user-friendly the application process was. For them and everyone else interested in applying for VDOT Safe Routes to School Grants this spring, we have great news: VDOT will be using the same system for our own application process!

Foundant Technology's Online Grant Management Software will streamline the application process, for applicants and administrators, saving time and resources needed to grow our SRTS programs. For instance, applicants will no longer be asked to print and submit multiple copies of their applications. Instead, they will receive a link via email and will be asked to log-in and complete the application online. The interface is convenient and user-friendly; information that is entered in one area will be "remembered" in subsequent sections, and you will have the opportunity to save the application at any point, to return and complete it later. Because all of the information will be available online, the review process will also be significantly quicker, allowing us to notify applicants sooner.

Foundant's usefulness doesn't end once the awards are made. We will continue to use the system during the tracking phase as well, transferring documents among

localities and VDOT districts, and requesting reports. Other useful features include:

- The ability to upload School Travel Plans, maps, letters of support and other documentation.
- A fax-to-file function that allows applicants to fax documents directly to their application file.
- Automatic reports and reminders with templates for quarterly reports and reimbursement requests.

Beginning in May 2011, VDOT will be ready to accept applications through the new system for the next round of infrastructure funding. Application instructions and log-in information will be made available at that time.

Hey Look us Over! New VDOT SRTS Website

The Virginia SRTS Program's updated website is live! New landing pages at www.virginiadot.org/saferoutes allow you to:

- Stay on top of *News and Events* (http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_news_and_events.asp) with our SRTS Program Newsletter and calendar. You can also sign up for International Walk to School Day on this page.
- Get to the resources you need to prepare *School Travel Plans and Grants* (http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_school_travel_plans_and_grants.asp).
- See how other organizations in Virginia and across the nation support or complement SRTS on the *Links* page (http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_links.asp).
- *Join our email list* to receive the VDOT SRTS Program Newsletter and special announcements (http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_join_our_email_list.asp).
- Send us a question or comment, or share your school's SRTS success through our new *Contact us* option (http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_contact_us.asp).

Local SRTS Program News

We want to hear about the SRTS program at your school! Use the Contact us feature on our updated website to send us your SRTS success story and pictures to illustrate it.