

OREGON SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

RURAL PRACTITIONERS' TOOLKIT

JULY 2022



Oregon Department of Transportation
Safe Routes to School



ALTA · COMMUTE OPTIONS · THE STREET TRUST

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Promoting Safe Routes to School in Rural Oregon

Why SRTS in Rural Communities?

Oregon Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a statewide program that encourages students to walk and roll to school, by hosting Walk+Roll events, bicycle and pedestrian safety education, and campaigns to create safer streets for all.

Oregon SRTS is a constantly evolving program. From its conception, SRTS staff have brought bicycle and pedestrian education, Walk+Roll encouragement events, and resources to schools throughout Oregon. Many of the resources available focus on the more densely populated, urban areas of Oregon such as Portland, Salem, and Eugene. Some rural areas do not have complete or safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and SRTS programs help students learn to use the existing infrastructure safely, and can help improve biking and walking environments in ways that benefit the entire community.

- Students may travel further to school, and thus may not be reasonably able to walk or bike.
- Walking and biking infrastructure may not be provided around the school.
- High vehicle speeds may decrease comfort for students walking and biking.

About This Toolkit

SRTS provides a lot of value to rural areas. Some rural areas do not have complete or safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and SRTS programs help students learn to use the existing infrastructure safely while improving biking and walking environments in ways that benefit the entire community. Students are likely to walk to other destinations or walk pets around their homes, and thus benefit from bicycle and pedestrian safety education and encouragement. Students can learn more about their travel options and make transportation choices for themselves as they grow up. SRTS encourages students to be physically active, helping them arrive at school ready to learn.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide tailored and specific resources for SRTS advocates throughout rural areas of our state. Use the provided guides and ideas to inform your SRTS programming, or use them as templates to create your own.

If you have questions regarding any of these resources, or would like to contribute your own, please contact info@oregonsaferoutes.org.

Contents

Forming Partnerships in Your Community	1
.....	
Getting Students Walking+Rolling	3
.....	
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education	11
.....	
Planning Walk+Roll Encouragement Events	13
.....	
Continuous Engagement for Rural Communities	15
.....	
Funding Opportunities	17
.....	
Additional Resources	17

Forming Partnerships in Your Community



Rural communities throughout Oregon have created strong SRTS programs by forming partnerships. Read below for ideas and tips for beginning outreach in your community.



SCHOOLS DISTRICTS

School districts and individual schools are a great starting point for building your programs. Reach out to superintendents, principals, facilities staff, and curriculum creators with your program ideas, and ask for clear, practical support. Review the email template provided on page 18 in the Additional Resources section for guidance on reaching out to school districts.

PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

Many parents and caregivers are supportive of getting students walking and rolling to school. Contact your local parent-teacher associations (PTAs) with your ideas for safe routes, and ask to present at their meetings.

TEACHERS

To increase the number of students impacted by your safe routes, it is often important to bring in PE teachers or other educators to assist with bicycle and pedestrian education during the school day. Read more in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education section.

LOCAL TRANSIT AUTHORITIES

Local transit authorities are committed to creating safer community infrastructure, and may have access to additional resources necessary to make a strong Safe Routes program.

COUNTY AGENCIES

County agencies, like transit authorities, may have access to additional resources necessary to make strong Safe Routes programs. Many rural roads are planned, built, and maintained by County agencies, so having their support for your SRTS program can go a long way.

CITY/TOWN GOVERNMENTS/ MUNICIPALITIES

If you can, attend your City or Town government council meetings, and consider offering public comment about your Safe Routes program. This helps City or Town officials become more familiar with you and what you do so they can better support your endeavors. Municipalities own and maintain roadways, and are responsible for planning and building improvements. If your municipality has a parks and recreation departments or library network, they are often also happy to provide support to SRTS programming.

HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

Health departments make great partners! The missions of SRTS and health departments are aligned—walking and rolling to school improves health in youth, and distributing helmets and teaching bike safety helps prevent accidents.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Education that creates safer pedestrians and cyclists is very much in the interest of law enforcement groups. Reach out to your local law enforcement agencies to find ways you can collaborate on programming. Note: due to historical violent policing methods used in some communities, some students and families may feel uncomfortable around law enforcement. If partnering with law enforcement, request that they come to events and schools campuses unarmed whenever possible.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Local bike groups can be great partners for bicycle education and events. Some bike groups are even willing to provide basic maintenance for students who participate in Safe Routes programs. After-school programs, youth centers, religious groups, eldercare groups, and many other community programs and organizations are also often willing to provide support and resources for SRTS programming. When in doubt, ask a potential community partner for a meeting to discuss your program to determine if they have capacity to help you grow.

Rural Coordinator Highlight:

Bike Swap Event with the La Grande Police Department

In 2021, La Grande SRTS Coordinator Jessie Wilson teamed up with the La Grande Police Department to distribute bicycles to students. When bicycles are abandoned in public, they are picked up and stored by local police departments. If the owner does not claim the bike after a certain period, they fall under the ownership of the police department—and can take up a lot of space! Wilson approached the La Grande Police Department and asked if they would be willing to donate bikes in their possession to the SRTS program at a fun, educational event. Families were invited to a Bike Night, where students were fitted for helmets, took some bike safety courses, chose a bike to take home, and had it tuned up by a local bike group.



Families in La Grande enjoy a Bike Night with a Bike Swap.

Getting Students Walking+Rolling

Getting students walking and rolling (riding bikes, scooters, and so on) to school is a key part of every SRTS program. In rural communities, where populations are less dense and distances to school are longer, SRTS offers a variety of strategies for creating opportunities to walk and roll.



Walking School Bus

A Walking School Bus (WSB) functions very much like a traditional school bus. Students are picked up and dropped off at predetermined points (or meet in one spot for pick up and drop off) and walk together with an adult supervisor to school.

BENEFITS

- Reduces vehicle traffic around schools during drop off and pick up.
- Energizes students so they are ready for school.
- Creates healthy habits.
- Gives students opportunities to create safe pedestrian habits.
- Builds community and strong relationships between school families, by giving them time before and after school to socialize.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Do a walk around the schools in your area, and identify safe places for students to walk.
- Create maps from nearby neighborhoods to schools, and identify the routes students might take to get to school. You can use these to formalize your WSB routes.
- Reach out to community partners and ask if they would be interested in volunteering as adult supervisors. PTAs are great groups to start with, as guardians may be interested in supervising WSBs.
- Once you have volunteers and a route, start advertising your WSB. Ask schools to advertise them in their newsletter.



FURTHER TIPS

- Rely on volunteers when you can. Ask guardians and community members to help lead your route.
- Start small! Try out the WSB just a few days a week at first, and grow as you get more volunteers and interest.
- Provide incentives. When possible, provide warm drinks (coffee, cocoa) or giveaways (reflective gear, pencils) to encourage students and volunteers to join.
- Check out this [Walking School Bus guide](#) from Commute Options for additional help.
- [Order incentives for your WSB here.](#)

Park & Walk

Sometimes, due to longer distances between neighborhoods and schools, it is not reasonable for students to bike or walk to school. Park & Walks provide a great alternative, encouraging students to still walk part of the way to school. School families park at a predetermined location close to the school, and walk as a group.

BENEFITS

- Reduces vehicle traffic around schools during drop-off times.
- Energizes students so they are ready for school.
- Is accessible to students who live long distances from schools.
- Encourages healthy habits.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Do a walk around the schools in your area, and identify a safe area for school families to park and walk to school together. Churches, municipal parks, and community centers may have parking lots that are mostly empty during school hours.
- Choose a date for your first Park & Walk, and make it a big event! This will help garner interest in regularly scheduled Park & Walks.
- Begin advertising to your school(s). Use social media, hang physical posters at the school(s), and reach out to relevant groups, like PTAs.
- Recruit and train volunteers, using social media, physical posters and outreach to groups like PTAs.



FURTHER TIPS

- Reach out to local businesses and ask for donations (hot beverages, incentives) for your initial Park & Walk to encourage families to join.
- Make it fun! Play music or ask students to point out what they see on their walk to school.
- Use stencils to create directional signage from the parking area along the walk. Encourage students to help design the signage.
- Order incentives for your Park & Walk [here](#).
- Encourage families to carpool to the Park & Walk, to help further reduce traffic and avoid absenteeism. You can help families set up carpools with the [School Pool tool](#).

Bike Trains

For students that live closer to their school, bike trains can be a great option for getting to school. Bike trains function similarly to a WSB, where students are picked up by an adult leader on a predetermined route and bike to school in a group. Bike trains are a great active transportation option for students, and help teach safe biking habits. Bike trains are often more challenging for rural communities than a WSB or Park and Walk, as safe bicycle infrastructure isn't always present, and routes may pass through high traffic areas. Evaluate the infrastructure of your community and surrounding school areas before implementing.

BENEFITS

- Reduces vehicle traffic around schools during drop-off times.
- Energizes students so they are ready for school.
- Gives students opportunities to become able, proficient bikers.
- Encourages healthy habits.
- Lead by an adult to ensure safety and supervision.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Do a walk around the schools in your area, and identify safe places for students to bike.
- Create maps from nearby neighborhoods to schools, and identify the routes students might take to get to school. You can use these to formalize your bike train routes.



- Reach out to community partners and ask if they would be interested in volunteering. PTAs are great groups to start with, as guardians may be interested in supervising bike trains.
- Once you have volunteers and a route, start advertising your bike trains. Ask schools to advertise them in school newsletters.

FURTHER TIPS

- Start small! Test your bike train with a few interested students first, and scale from there.
- Host bicycle education workshops and courses at your program schools to get interest for the bike train and to teach students bike safety.
- Be sure there is ample bike parking on the school campus for students to safely leave their bikes for the day.
- Reach out to local bike shops and ask if they would donate gift cards to raffle off to bike train participants.



Bike Field Trips

Not all students live within a safe distance from schools to walk or roll regularly. Bike Field Trips from school campuses are a way to include all students and promote walking and rolling.

BENEFITS

- Inclusive of students who can't walk or roll to school safely from their homes.
- Encourages and teaches biking safety.
- Gets students out and allows them to be active at school.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Connect with your program schools and teachers, and determine a time and date for you to come and lead a bike field trip.
- Plan your route. Choose a short route near the school for students to use.

- **If you do not already have a bike fleet and bike trailer**, connect with local bike groups and inquire about rentals, or donations for the day.
- Ask for student guardians to volunteer as chaperones for the trip.
- On the day, have volunteers fit students for helmets, and give a bike safety lesson before heading out.
- Give students snacks and safety goodies (e.g., bike lights) after the trip.

FURTHER TIPS

- Ask local bike groups for donations for small giveaways like bike lights, reflective gear, and so on.
- Have adaptive bikes available so that all students can be included.

Walking Around School Campuses

Walks around school campuses, often known as walk-a-thons, are a way to encourage all students to walk and roll regularly, even if they cannot walk and roll to school daily. When students arrive at school, have them do a quick lap around the school campus to get their energy up for a day of learning. Walking around school campuses is great for all encouragement events. This includes students who cannot walk or roll to school during encouragement events an opportunity to participate, while providing students who are able to walk or roll to school extra opportunities to walk and roll.

BENEFITS

- Inclusive of all students, especially those who ride the bus or are dropped off by an adult.
- Can be done at whatever frequency you want, with relatively low preparation.
- Gets the entire school involved.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Talk with your schools and get the necessary approval to use the campus for a walking event.
- Talk with teachers and staff about supervising students as they walk around campus.
- Choose the frequency of the event—would you like to do this daily, weekly, monthly?
- Start promoting the event. Ask schools to include the dates for the events on their school calendar, social media platforms, and newsletters.



FURTHER TIPS

- If you're hosting the event multiple times, give students punch cards to mark off each time they participate and offer a prize for finishing the card.
- Make it fun! Play music, pass out incentives, and get students excited about being active.
- Speak with teachers about adding these events into their curriculum. Walking around the school could easily fit into a PE curriculum, a math curriculum (by counting steps, measuring parts of the sidewalk), or an art class where students are asked to draw what they see on their walk. This activity can be interdisciplinary while teaching students how to be safe pedestrians.



Safe Routes to the Bus

Many students in rural areas ride the bus. Including them in your Walk+Roll encouragement is incredibly important, so that they can learn to safely navigate their way to and from bus routes.

BENEFITS

- Inclusive of students who bus to school.
- After some preparation, can be managed by families and volunteers.
- Builds pedestrian safety skills in young students.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

- Create walking maps to bus routes for neighborhoods in your community. Find where the bus picks up students, and identify safe routes for students to take walking from their home.
- Ask families and volunteers to get involved! Encourage them to walk with students to the bus stops.

- At schools, teach students pedestrian safety skills so they are comfortable walking to the bus on their own.

FURTHER TIPS

- At school, encourage students who take the bus to do a lap around the school. See the Walk Around School Campuses section above for more details.
- Engage with families and volunteers early. Make sure they have the resources they need to help students get safely to and from their bus stops.



Carpool

As many students live far from school in rural areas, encouraging carpooling is a great way to reduce pressure on the school bus system, and promote school attendance. Students can still walk or roll to another family's house to meet up for their carpool, so they still can participate in walk and roll encouragement events.

BENEFITS:

- Reduces pressure on bus systems.
- Reduces traffic around schools.
- Reduces absenteeism.

RECOMMENDED STEPS:

- Meet with your school's PTA/PTO and discuss formalizing carpools between families.
- Encourage families to have their students walk or roll to their carpool meeting spot when possible.
- Use the [School Pool](#) tool to coordinate carpools.

FURTHER TIPS:

- Order incentives for students who join carpools.
- During Walk+Roll events, encourage students who carpool to walk a lap around the school.
- If you are planning a Park & Walk event, invite carpool drivers to drop students off at the Park & Walk meeting spot.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education

Bicycle and pedestrian safety education is important to give students and their families the skills they need to travel by walking and rolling. Use this section for tips on how to implement education in your rural community, and where to find resources.

Educational Materials

The Oregon SRTS website has many free resources you can access for your educational programming. You can download [lesson plans](#), [educational materials](#), and [guides](#).

ODOT SRTS also offers free educational incentives for students. You can order the Strider & Viv comic series [here](#). Strider & Viv are the ODOT SRTS mascots, who help students learn bicycle and pedestrian safety.



Education in Schools

Schools are an obvious choice for SRTS educational programming, but getting SRTS curriculum in schools takes time and relationship development.

Key staff members to build relationships with are PE teachers. Talk with PE teachers at your program schools and ask about teaching bicycle and pedestrian safety lessons. [Neighborhood Navigators 2.0](#) is a great place to start for lesson planning.

Adding elements of city or urban planning can also be a great way to engage rural students in thinking about what infrastructure is needed to make it safer to walk and roll. Have students design their “dream community” that allows them to walk or roll wherever they need to go, and invite them to discuss what is needed to make that dream a reality. East Central Wisconsin SRTS has an [in depth lesson plan](#) for educators to add community and urban planning in their work.

For bicycle safety education, it is helpful to have a fleet of bikes to bring to schools for training. However, this isn't a resource that is universally available. If you do not have a bike fleet at your disposal, consider reaching out to local bike groups or, parks and recreation departments, or contacting ODOT SRTS to get bikes for your educational programming.

Educational Events

Education doesn't have to end at the ring of the last school bell! Bike Nights and other educational events are a great way not only to continue bicycle and pedestrian education with students, but to engage the whole family.

Speak with your program schools or school contacts about hosting a booth at family nights and open houses. Here, you can have helmet-fitting tutorials, demonstrate basic bicycle and pedestrian safety, and let students and their families practice safe bicycling and walking.

These events can be hosted outside the school, or without school support as well. Talk with local bicycle and pedestrian groups, and partner with them to host events. Here, you can do all the activities mentioned above, and local groups can showcase and promote their work.



Planning Walk+Roll Encouragement Events

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There are many Walk+Roll to School events that you can host in your community. All events have specialized toolkits with editable posters, social media posts, and activities for you to choose from; these resources can be found at [the Oregon SRTS website](#). These are available to help ease your Walk+Roll Event planning, so you can focus on building relationships with your school communities. Below are some tips for planning your Walk+Roll events.

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Tips for Planning Walk+Roll to School Day Events:

START SMALL—BUT MIGHTY!

If you are a new rural coordinator, don't feel like you need to do every event at every school your first year! Choose some events that feel relevant to your community, and start planning with one or two schools in your area.

MODIFY THE EVENTS

At rural schools, where students are traveling long distances, walking or rolling to school is not always reasonable or safe. Consider modifying your events, and hosting something like a Park & Walk or walk around the school campus.

CONNECT WITH SCHOOLS AND PRINCIPALS

Ask your schools (teachers, PTAs, principals) to promote your events in their newsletters, on social media, and with flyers at the school.

USE INCENTIVES

Rewarding students with fun incentives is a great way to increase participation. You can visit the [Street Trust's website](#) to see what incentives are available for your events.

Rural Coordinator Highlight:

Douglas County Walk Anywhere Days

Douglas County has many beautiful trails and parks that families and students can use to get to and from the places they need to go, or use for leisure. Routes to schools, however, are often along busy, high speed highways, making every day biking and walking difficult for students.

Coordinator Janelle Newton, opened up Walk+Roll encouragement days to include walking and rolling anywhere in the community. On walks in local parks or along popular trails, families could scan a QR code to log their trip and be entered into a contest to win great prizes.



The poster is for "Walk 'n Roll to School Anywhere Week!" held from October 4th to 8th, 2021. It features a blue background with white and yellow text. At the top right, there is a circular icon with a QR code. Below the title, there are four illustrations of children: a girl walking, a boy on a bicycle, a girl in a wheelchair, and a boy on a skateboard. The text "Move naturally and win a prize!" is written below the illustrations. The poster lists three rules: 1. Walk or Roll for 20 min. to any safe location the week of Oct. 4th - 8th. 2. Enter your name at <https://bit.ly/VirtualWalkRoll> or scan the QR Code. 3. Grand prize winners will be announced on Monday, Oct. 11. A QR code is provided for scanning. The poster also lists sponsors: Douglas County, Thrive Unipqua, and Douglas Education Learning District. Grand prizes for kids are listed as a new bike or athletic shoes, and for parents as gift cards to local restaurants. The poster is decorated with clouds and a rainbow.

presents...

Walk 'n Roll to School Anywhere Week!

Oct. 4 - 8, 2021

Move naturally and win a prize!

- Walk or Roll for 20 min. to any safe location the week of Oct. 4th - 8th
- Enter your name at <https://bit.ly/VirtualWalkRoll> or scan the QR Code
- Grand prize winners will be announced on Monday, Oct. 11

Sponsored by

Douglas County
Safe Routes to School

WALK+ROLL

Thrive Unipqua
A New Towns Unified Community

DOUGLAS
EDUCATION LEARNING DISTRICT
LEARN • LEAD • LIVE

Grand prizes for kids: new bike or athletic shoes

Grand prizes for parents: gift cards to local restaurants

Continuous Engagement for Rural Communities

Beyond Walk+Roll To School Days and education, there are many ways to continuously engage your community with SRTS. Below are ideas to get students thinking about walking and rolling every day.

Poster and Art Contests

Poster and Art Contests can be done in conjunction with a Walk+Roll encouragement event like the May Walk+Roll Challenge, but are also a great tool for everyday encouragement. Have students create posters around a specific theme (e.g., “I Walk+Roll to school because...”). You can award a winner with a special prize, or give each student who submits a piece a treat. For voting, consider opening it up to the larger community, sharing posters or artwork on social media and asking for votes. See previous winners of state-wide contests [here](#).

Crossing Guard and Bus Driver Appreciation Day

Crossing guards and bus drivers are important at all schools, but especially so in rural areas where road speeds near schools may be higher, or students may need to travel longer distances to schools. Have students write thank you cards to their schools’ crossing guards or bus drivers to thank them for their work, and get the students thinking about these individuals’ roles in getting them to school safely.

Traffic Gardens

Traffic gardens are a low-impact, easy way to encourage and educate students to walk and roll outside of the classroom. Traffic gardens can be installed cheaply using materials like chalk paint, and placed in more public areas like library parking lots, local parks, and of course, school grounds. Students can come with their families and practice traffic safety while getting exercise. You can learn more about traffic gardens and download educational guides [here](#).

Helmet Fittings and Donations

Safety is key in safe routes. Attending events, such as family nights at schools and other community events, and offering helmet fittings is a great way to ensure students are set up to roll to school safely, while also having an opportunity to further engage with your community. Reach out to local agencies and ask for helmet donations, or consider applying for funds from different organizations to purchase helmets.

Golden Sneaker Challenge

The Golden Sneaker Challenge is a fun way to continuously inspire students to walk and roll. In this challenge, which can take place any time for any length, classrooms or schools compete to see who can walk and roll the most. At the end of the challenge, the winner receives the Golden Sneaker. You can learn more about the Golden Sneaker Challenge, and download materials [here](#).



Rural Coordinator Highlight:

Traffic Gardens by Commute Options

Many rural coordinators work in large service areas, thus making continuous engagement of all students in the community difficult. Commute Options Coordinator Whitney Bennett (who serves Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook Counties), decided to continuously encourage students in Madras to walk and roll and practice traffic safety

by installing traffic gardens. Using only chalk paint and some stencils, Bennett installed two traffic gardens for students in public areas near a popular Madras park. Students could come to the traffic gardens at their leisure, read traffic safety instructions, and have fun practicing walking and rolling.



A traffic garden, completed with spray-on chalk, in Madras, Oregon.

Funding Opportunities

There are many funding sources available to support your SRTS program. We recommend you visit [our website](#), where new funding opportunities and grants are posted frequently.

Additional Resources

- [Oregon SRTS](#)

Oregon SRTS provides resources to coordinators throughout Oregon to help with their regionally specific programming.

- [Rural Organizing Project](#)

The Rural Organizing Project works with rural communities on multiple issues to empower grassroots activism and change.

- [East Central Wisconsin SRTS](#)

East Central Wisconsin SRTS has many resources for programming in rural schools, including premade lesson plans, activities, and more.

- [Rural Health Information Club](#)

Further resources to help promote active transportation in your community.

- [Safe Routes to School National Partnership Rural Toolkit](#)

An additional toolkit with recommended best practices and approaches for safe routes programming in rural communities.

- [ODOT Materials](#)

Free, educational materials you can order from ODOT for your SRTS programming.



Email Template to Schools

Dear _____ ,

My name is _____ , and I am a Safe Routes to School practitioner with _____ (name of school, district, group). Oregon SRTS promotes students' health and well-being by teaching safe bicycle and pedestrian skills, and encouraging students to walk and roll to school through events like International Walk+Roll to School Day and the Walk+Roll May Challenge month.

As a SRTS practitioner, I am excited to get students in our community walking and rolling. However, I will need the support of school administrators and families to make this a reality. I would thus like to set up an introductory meeting with you to discuss SRTS in more depth, and find ways we can support one another to reach the goal of getting students walking and rolling safely.

Sincerely,



Oregon Department of Transportation
Safe Routes to School



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