

## **Narrative: Targeted Safe Routes to School (SRTS) interventions to increase safety and mobility of students**

This pilot project proposal would implement and assess a suite of SRTS interventions to support the safe movement of children to and from school with a focus on one high school cluster. The findings from this pilot will be carried forward to our recently established regional walking school bus & bike bus working group, to our regional Safe Routes to School (SRTS) practitioner's network to apply lessons learned regionwide, and to support broader implementation of the most successful initiatives.

Metro's Regional Safety Strategy identifies the implementation of SRTS programs - prioritizing schools in areas with a higher concentration of populations of people with lower incomes, people of color, and people with low English proficiency - as a recommended action to meet Strategy 1: Protect vulnerable users. By implementing and assessing the entire suite of interventions at schools with these characteristics, we can inform the SRTS action(s) to be more specific about effective and impactful SRTS activities to prioritize implementing region-wide. As part of our 2023 Regional Transportation Plan update, we conducted a safety needs assessment which confirmed a continued focus on vulnerable roadway users: pedestrians were involved in only 2% of crashes in the region but made up 38% of roadway deaths.

To deliver this project we will be investing in dedicated staff time embedded in the school cluster community, working closely with each school, and all project partners, to implement the activities listed above. Oregon Walks & Community Cycling Center are community-based partners with committed programs supporting kids & families to walk & roll. Community Cycling Center has been working for over 10 years in the project area and Oregon Walks is developing a city-wide Walking School Bus program. Portland Bureau of Transportation is currently assessing a temporary Walking School Bus & Bike Bus wayfinding system and provides Safe Routes to School programming citywide, and will focus activities in the project area. Portland Public Schools has a dedicated district-wide Safe Routes to School coordinator who will support the implementation of these activities through direct coordination with school staff and administration. Portland State University's Transportation Research & Education Center will support the project by conducting the evaluation in coordination with all partners.

### **Project Location**

The pilot activities will take place in the Roosevelt High School cluster in North Portland with programming at five elementary schools (Astor, James John, Sitton, Rosa Parks, César Chávez), one middle school (George), and one high school (Roosevelt). This cluster of schools has high populations of students of color (averaging 67.9% of the cluster's total population), students experiencing high rates of absenteeism (45.1%), families of low income (43.4%), and students who are Ever English Learners (30.3%). James John, George & Roosevelt schools rank in the 4th highest quintile for crashes within their [school walkshed](#) for the entire Metro region. The 2018-2022 5-year fatal and serious injury crash rate for the project area is 2.07 per 1,000 residents – much higher than the region at-large, with a 5-year rate of .28 per 1000

residents. Gun violence has also been a particular concern in this community, leading many families to be hesitant to walk or roll to school without additional support. At the same time, this neighborhood has a strong social fabric, connected by the schools in particular. Parent-led bike buses, street paintings and kid-focused community gatherings are recent activities, and the close-knit geography of the St. John's peninsula means that many trips are within walking/biking distance. The combination of school demographic needs, crash data, and strong community infrastructure are why this pilot project area was chosen.

## Scope of Work & Schedule

The activities in our scope of work will take place over the course of three years, starting in July 2025. The activities will occur annually, and Year 1 activities will focus on three elementary schools: James John, Cesar Chavez, and Rosa Parks due to their existing relationship with project partners; along with George Middle School and Roosevelt High School. By year 2 all schools will be participating in programming.

### Activities:

- Activity #1: Adult-led support for kids walking & rolling to school
  - Walking School Buses with paid adult leaders established weekly at all five elementary schools
  - Bike Bus events supported at three elementary schools in Year 1, expand to all five elementary schools by Year 2
  - Monthly Walk & Roll encouragement events held at all five elementary schools and coordinated with walking school buses/bike buses to engage the entire school community and provide sustained engagement with school staff
- Activity #2: Ensuring all kids have the tools and skills to walk & roll to school
  - Comprehensive K-12 in-classroom education to ensure all students know how to ride a bike, know the rules of the road, and can choose multi-modal options at all ages:
    - K-1st grade learn-to-ride education at two elementary schools
    - Bike and pedestrian safety education training for teachers at each elementary and/or middle school
    - 9th grade transit training through classroom & field trips
    - BIKETOWN training for high school students to use Portland's bikeshare system and learn safety skills on e-bikes
    - Annual SRTS education-focused instructor summit
  - Annual school-based or cluster-based adopt-a-bike event(s) & lock/helmet distribution to ensure all students have access to a bicycle
    - Up to 150 bikes/helmets/safety gear provided at each event
    - Repair services/workshops offered at each event to ensure existing bikes are ready to ride
  - Pop-up bike parking for event days - often on bike bus or monthly SRTS events there is not enough secure bike parking for all students who participate.

- Social media training: Support school leaders create walk/bike/roll-specific accounts that build awareness, have engaging posts, and are managed effectively
- Activity #3: Demonstration projects to provide safer environments for walking and rolling
  - Temporary wayfinding for walking school buses/bike bus routes that are established at each elementary school
  - Temporary 'traffic playgrounds' installed on campus at each elementary school for in-classroom education, so students can learn the rules of the road in a safe environment before moving to on-street walking/rolling.
  - Temporary or pop-up circulation improvements to guide traffic during pick-up/drop-off times, incorporating walking school bus/bike bus routes into planning for a safer street environment for all users.

## Evaluation

We will be partnering with Portland State University's Transportation Research and Education Center to measure the impact through assessing school trip behavior as well as perceived safety (how students feel walking/rolling and parent/staff perception of safety on streets near the school). The evaluation would utilize several approaches to understand the impact of the interventions, including:

- Schoolwide journey to school audits for elementary schools at multiple points over the course of the grant period, including several times per school year.
- Schoolwide student travel surveys to understand motivators and barriers to walking and bicycling to school, and to gauge impact of interventions. Surveys would include perceived safety, self-reported neighborhood and traffic safety measures, measures of potential social benefits of participating in SRTS activities, and more.
- Use of student mental map drawing exercises as proxy gauges of student knowledge of navigating their neighborhood.

We will also look for opportunities to include schools outside the project area cluster (and not receiving the targeted interventions) to further understand the effects of the interventions. This approach will allow us to compare results based on individual student participation in programming, explore changes over the three years of the programming, and to compare results to other school communities not participating in the program.

In addition, we will develop a set of tools for schools/project partners to carry out quick hit data collection efforts and evaluation activities, potentially including:

- Data collection on an event-by-event basis - collecting data on number and types of activities, the number of participants, challenges encountered, achievements, etc.
- Walking School Bus/Bike Bus report template encompassing route, participation, notable achievements, or events, etc.
- School drop-off zone measures, such as the number of private vehicle drop-offs, area congestion in surrounding blocks – before and after demonstration project installation