

Study Number: TPF-5(172)
Status: Cleared by FHWA
Title: An Analytical Review of Child Mobility Assessments for School Site Programs

Contract/Other Number:

Sponsoring Agency: Washington State Department of Transportation

Lead Agency: Washington State Department of Transportation

Lead Agency Contact: Charlotte Claybrooke (claybrc@wsdot.wa.gov)

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Study Partners: FL, MS, TX, WA

Contract Amount: \$60,000

Commitments Received: \$80,000

100% SP&R Approval: Approved

Background: Thirty years ago, nearly 90% of children who lived within a mile of school used active transportation (i.e., walking or bicycling) as their primary mode of travel (USDOT, 1972). In recent years, the rate of active transport to schools has declined dramatically. Traffic volumes and speed associated with school environments have worsened over the past decades. Increasing numbers of children being driven to schools by their caretakers has contributed to worsening traffic congestion and increases in obesity and respiratory diseases related to poor air quality.

Consensus is developing across the nation to reverse these trends by allowing children to walk and bike to and from school. This project would serve the development of programs to help prioritize and select safety enhancement projects around schools.

Objectives:

- 1) Assess different mechanisms for determining the number of children walking and biking to school on a statewide basis.
- 2) Establish the most efficient and effective methods to obtain statewide benchmarks of the number of children walking and biking to school.
- 3) Evaluate the similarities in the results to determine how community characteristics impact walking and biking to school.
- 4) Create guidance to make better funding decisions for the Safe Routes to School Program.

Scope of Work: Since this work has never been done before on this scale, the project involves an investigation to establish what needs to be done and exactly how to do it. At a minimum it will include a study, using a representative sample, to assess the number of children walking and biking to school in at least one state. Other methods to assess the number of children walking and biking to school may include the use of questions on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the National Household Travel Survey and other tools prioritized by participating states. The methodologies and results of the work will be shared and the different mechanisms for determining the

number of children walking and biking to school will be compared. Specific methods analyzed and the size of the study depends on the number of participating states and the annual funding available. The work will be conducted in two phases which include:

Phase I will cost \$60,000 and will include research to identify the academic evidence and best practices in the participating states. The initial investigation will provide for a literature review and a learning phase where the key stakeholders will share information about their past/planned assessment methods and results. It will include an assessment, in at least one state, of the numbers of children walking and biking to school using a representative sample. Status: Expected to be completed in 2008

Phase II funding is not included in this solicitation, but will involve an integrated study of processes. It will compare the different techniques to assess the number of children walking and biking to school to determine the best most efficient mechanism to conduct a statewide assessment. A trend analysis will be conducted to identify similarities in the findings. In a limited number of cases an assessment will be used to identify patterns that will provide guidance for Safe Routes to School funding decisions. Those case studies will be analyzed for variables such as the jurisdictions involved; the geographic location (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural areas); (cities and school districts); collision history; transportation facilities; classification of existing remediation measures (e.g., enforcement, safety education programs, etc.); and corresponding student population (e.g., elementary, middle and high school) by age and by total number. Status: Will be starting in 2008, based on available funding.

Model results will serve to develop a guide for the future selection of SRTS programs based on the similarity of the findings between the participating states. This research will enhance future SRTS programs at the local, state and national levels.

Comments:

Washington, Texas and Florida have committed to two years in the pooled fund and are contributing financially, as well as providing technical assistance. California is planning on joining this fiscal year. The addition of four more states will fully fund all phases of this project. Other states have expressed interest.

The minimum target amount of funding requested by the participating states should be \$10,000 per year for two years.