



## City Safe Routes to School

North Shore Elementary School  
200 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
St. Petersburg, Florida

October 19-20, 2008

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[www.activelivingresources.org](http://www.activelivingresources.org)

The Active Living Resource Center's City Safe Routes to School pilot program began its third year in St. Petersburg, Florida. Working with the City of St. Petersburg, and Florida's Safe Routes to School coordinator, the Active Living Resource Center (ALRC) conducted a three day City Safe Routes to School program in conjunction with the 2008 Pro Bike/Pro Walk Florida conference.

The St. Petersburg City Safe Routes to School workshops were developed to meet three distinct requests for technical assistance:

1. North Shore Elementary School received planning assistance in developing a Safe Routes to School program;<sup>1</sup>
2. Pinellas County School District, recently transitioned from a School Choice program to a new neighborhood school assignment plan, was interested in using North Shore as a template for others schools in the District; and
3. Florida DOT, host to the local Pro Bike/Pro Walk conference, invited district and local Safe Routes to School contacts to receive training on developing SRTS programs suitable for urban schools.

The St. Petersburg SRTS activities were spread over three days, with Days 1 & 3 spent working with SRTS practitioners on how they can they can more effective work with schools; Day 2 was spent on site at North Shore Elementary School.

<b>Day 1</b>	
1 pm	ALRC personnel visit North Shore to conduct a walking audit of the school's neighborhood. Digital photographs are taken for inclusion in the Day 2 workshop.
3:30 pm	ALRC personnel meet with the local coordinator (Cheryl Stacks, P.E., City of St. Petersburg, Bicycle/Pedestrian coordinator) and several SRTS practitioners to review an aerial map of the neighborhood, and discuss the school's issues. The group travels to the school to conduct a walking audit of the infrastructure surrounding the school.
7:00 pm	ALRC personnel host a two hour briefing on the City SRTS program. Topics covered include: a typical workshop presentation; information sharing on how the City SRTS program was developed and our findings on working with urban schools; suggestions on how to engage youth and community members; and a question and answer session with SRTS practitioners from across the state. Goals and expectations are set for the Day 2 visit to North Shore ES.
<b>Day 2</b>	
7:30 am	Observation of student arrival at North Shore ES and interviews of crossing guards and school personnel.
8:40 am	School begins.
9:00 am	The workshop begins
Noon	Workshop concludes; lunch and debriefing with workshop participants.

<sup>1</sup> The ALRC had planned to work with a second school in the St. Petersburg area, but due to a last minute conflict, the school declined to host the Safe Routes to School workshop. A typical City SRTS program works with two schools in a chosen city.

2:15 pm	Observation of student dismissal at North Shore ES. Additional activities include: interviews with 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> grade safety patrols, interviews with bus drivers, and interviews with parents.
<b>Day 3</b>	
3:30 pm	A panel presentation at the Pro Bike/Pro Walk Florida conference on the ALRC's City SRTS program and an overview of the activities conducted at North Shore ES.

### **Organizations Represented**

North Shore Elementary School Secretary and Principal  
 All Children's Hospital & Safe Kids Florida Suncoast  
 City of St. Petersburg  
 Center for Urban Transportation Research (University of South Florida)  
 Florida DOT SRTS Coordinator, based in the Central Office in Tallahassee  
 Florida DOT District 7 –Tampa area  
 Florida DOT District 6 – Miami area  
 Florida DOT District 1 – Bartow area  
 St. Petersburg Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee  
 Brevard MPO  
 St. Petersburg Police Department  
 St. Joseph's Children's Hospital  
 Sprinkle Consulting  
 Hillsborough County Public Works

## **Local Conditions**

### **Findings of the Walking Audit and Observations of Arrival/Dismissal**

North Shore Elementary School is located in a residential neighborhood in northeast St. Petersburg. The neighborhood streets follow a grid pattern. The school's 500+ students either come from the immediate neighborhood, or they are participating in the District's school choice program (now being phased out). Our workshop occurred on a sunny day in mid October with temperatures in the 70-80 degree range. Despite the favorable conditions, a seemingly bucolic residential neighborhood, and the presence of three crossing guards along walking routes, only a handful of students—fewer than 10—were observed walking or bicycling to school.

On October 20, 2008, students were transported to and from school primarily by motor vehicle and, to a lesser extent, by school district buses. The low number of walkers could be attributed to obstacles in the infrastructure adjacent to the school and in the immediate neighborhood. For example, the school is bordered on two sides by 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue, NE, and 1<sup>st</sup> Street N: the former is a long, straight, smooth stretch of two lane road that is in need of traffic calming (or at least a speed study); the latter is a wide, four lane collector street with a speed limit of 35 mph, that is difficult for pedestrians to cross unless one is at a signalized intersection. A third infrastructure obstacle is 4<sup>th</sup> Street North—otherwise designated as State Route 92. This is a 6 lane arterial, carrying a heavy volume of traffic. (A crossing guard is posted at this location, but when she was interviewed, she noted a declining number of students walking and bicycling. The crossing guard also noted the general lack of empathy of drivers towards pedestrians.)

### Additional observations

**Incomplete sidewalk network.** Most neighborhood streets feature a sidewalk on only one side. The sidewalks tend to be old and narrowed by encroaching vegetation. At intersections, few crosswalks are marked. The pedestrian facilities at each corner of the school's property are inadequate:

35<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Oak Street: This is a two way stop. One of the crosswalks terminates in a lawn and utility pole. The crosswalks have only the minimum markings.

35<sup>th</sup> Avenue & 1<sup>st</sup> Street N: There is no marked crosswalk at this location. Drivers entering 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 1<sup>st</sup> Street may not be aware they are in a school zone.

34<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Oak Street: This is an exceptionally hazardous location for pedestrians. There are no marked crosswalks at this location. This intersection is a two way stop, and each STOP sign is set far back from the intersection. Due to restricted sightlines, drivers do not always stop at the proper location, preferring to stop where they can see oncoming traffic. While this may be safer for the driver, the driver's vehicle is in a position to block the pedestrian's path. Without a marked crosswalk, there is nothing to remind drivers to expect pedestrians.

34<sup>th</sup> Avenue & 1<sup>st</sup> Street N: This is a signalized intersection with a crossing guard posted at this location. While it is commendable that there are pedestrian countdown signals at this location, the intersection remains challenging due to the extreme narrowness of the sidewalk. Note: It is likely this deficiency will be corrected when a planned multiuse trail is constructed through this location.

**School zone markings.** The school zone for North Shore is marked inconsistently. At the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Oak Street the END SCHOOL ZONE sign for eastbound traffic (on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue) is posted before the intersection and pedestrian crossing. The school zone on 1<sup>st</sup> Street N for northbound traffic ends approximately half way into the block. Other deficiencies: there are no overhead signs, no beacons, and no pavement markings on 1<sup>st</sup> Street N to indicate to drivers that they are entering a school zone. Because of a recent ruling in Manatee County against FDOT, it is unlikely any traffic citation issued in the North Shore school zone would hold up under scrutiny in court. (Read more about the decision <http://www.bradenton.com/188/story/912072.html>)

**Traffic congestion in front of the school.** Student drop off and pick up occurs at the front of the school. The procedure for discharging students and picking them up is orderly, and well-thought out: there are designed locations for each grade level; Kindergarten pick up has been separated from the other grades; school buses are at a different parking lot; drivers are only allowed to exit the driveway in one direction; students from the Safety Patrol open car doors in the morning and afternoon; and there is adult supervision—sometimes including the school resource officer—of the process. While the process is orderly and users are separated and supervised, a simple problem remains: too many vehicles and people converge on the school at once. Parents begin lining up for dismissal 30 minutes prior to the school's dismissal bell. Many of the buses and cars are left idling. During the dismissal the street is clogged with cars, buses do not have enough space to pass, and pedestrians cross the street at their own risk, often doing so mid-block.

**Signage.** There is a tremendous amount of signage around the school. An explanation proffered at the workshop was that prohibitive signs were added as new problem behaviors—by drivers—cropped up. As the years have progressed, the number of signs has added up. We observed the following signs: NO PARKING, NO U TURN, SCHOOL ZONE, END SCHOOL ZONE, the speed limit signs, NO DOGS ALLOWED ON SCHOOL BOARD PROPERTY, etc. The really important warnings can be missed amidst the sign clutter.

**Other factors.** While deficiencies and barriers in the infrastructure around North Shore were obvious, we were unable to assess those non infrastructure barriers to SRTS that are (often) equally challenging. For example, we were unable to accurately assess: the school administration's attitude towards Safe Routes to School, faculty support for SRTS, parental support for SRTS, whether there are concerns for the personal safety of students, and the host of other unique factors that are influenced by culture or geography that we have uncovered in previous City SRTS workshops. The school's parent liaison was present for the workshop, as was a parent, but we cannot assume that they speak for or represent the prevailing attitude towards Safe Routes to School at North Shore ES.

## The Workshop

The Safe Routes to School workshop was held in the media center from 9 am to Noon. Participants were invited to show up early to observe student arrival. Those unable to observe, were briefed by a slide show of photographs taken that morning, and by the observations of workshop attendees who had been there. (A listing of organizations represented at the workshop can be found elsewhere in this report.)

The workshop was divided into five parts:

1. Audience introductions and goal-setting for the workshop;
2. An hour long, interactive presentation on Safe Routes to School, covering common barriers, and field-tested countermeasures;
3. A facilitated discussion of conditions around the school and other barriers;
4. Mapping out available resources and community assets for addressing identified barriers; and
5. Developing a prioritized list of next steps for a North Shore Safe Routes to School program.

In addition to the already mentioned obstacles and barriers, workshop participants added:

- Bus/car conflicts on 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE: Cars parking on the street makes it difficult for buses to exit the parking lot. Last year a bus struck a car.
- Parents speed through the drop off area.
- The crossing guard at 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE & 1<sup>st</sup> Street N is using improper procedures.
- On 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE: cars speed through the school zone, the sheer number of speed limit signs confuse drivers, the school zone is not well-marked, and curb ramps are deficient.
- Better crosswalk marking are needed (everywhere).
- Drivers do not obey the stop bar at signalized intersections.
- Drivers make prohibited U Turns on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE after dropping off or picking up their children, endangering other children and adults.
- After the school bell (in the morning), cars speed up. The school has a strict three tardy policy.
- The intersection geometry at 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE & Oak Street creates poor sightlines for drivers which, in turn, impacts pedestrian safety.

The ALRC does not consider this a complete listing of all the barriers facing a SRTS program at North Shore. The City SRTS program, the accuracy of the workshop report, and the legitimacy of its recommendations is predicated on having strong community involvement, and strong school involvement in the workshop. These crucial elements were missing from the North Shore workshops. This report, however, can be used as a backdrop to school, parent and community discussions on travel to school conditions and attitudes.

A complete Safe Routes to School program at North Shore ES can draw on the following Assets and Resources:

### Assets

- The Florida DOT's *Safe Ways to School Toolkit* is an excellent resource for planning a SRTS program.
- North Shore regularly communicates with parents about transportation (among other issues) through the student handbook, its newsletter, and Back to School night. There are channels to communicate with parents about school zone safety, and pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- The school safety patrol opens car doors. How could they be used to assist healthy, active transportation? Currently, they are exposed to car exhaust for 30 minutes every morning while on duty.
- The school already has secured bicycle parking. (The racks need upgrading.)
- The school will soon be connected to a multiuse trail. The construction of the trail will be an opportunity to address deficiencies along 1<sup>st</sup> Street N.

- The City has intersections with prohibited Right-Turn-on-Red. While Florida law does not (currently) allow red light cameras., the City can install *red light confirmation lights* that can aid enforcement at intersections.
- The North Shore PTA has a de facto Safety Committee that could take up the SRTS program. Some of those in attendance pledged to take the issues discussed at the workshop to the PTA for further action.

## Resources

### Transportation

- Many transportation planning departments/agencies in the area are supportive of pedestrians. That includes the City of St. Petersburg, led by the Mayor of St. Petersburg, the County and the Pinellas County MPO.
- St. Petersburg DOT can do a sign audit of the school.
- Cheryl Stacks has a good track record of working with crossing guards and others to find and fit bicycle helmets for children lacking them.

### Public Safety

- Community Resource Officers are on bikes and Segways. The Traffic Safety Officer assigned to North Shore Elementary School is very supportive of safety initiatives and events at the school.
- The Fire Department promotes school zone safety at the start of the school year.

### Safe Kids Coalition

- Fifty (plus) schools in the Suncoast Safe Kids area (Polk, Pasco and Pinellas Counties) participated in the recent Walk to School Day. Safe Kids did a speed estimation exercise at a local school for students.

### Florida DOT

- State SRTS Coordinator Pat Pieratte periodically orders pedestrian and bicycle videos, CD ROMS and print educational materials for the Districts to use with their local SRTS programs.
- Most FDOT districts periodically order additional pedestrian and bicycle educational and promotional items for the SRTS programs in their Districts.
- The State's Bike/Ped resource center will soon reopen in a new location, the University of Florida Technology Transfer Center. It will include pedestrian and bicycle educational and promotional items for all ages, including new drivers.
- The call for applications for infrastructure projects is open Fall 2008 to Spring 2009. Non infrastructure programs can apply at any time, until the District's funding is committed. For more information on Florida's SRTS program, see [www.srtsfl.org](http://www.srtsfl.org)

### Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR)

- CUTR is working with 5 schools in Tampa on Walking School Buses and Bike Trains. North Shore can call and request a visit.

### Step Up, Florida

- The Florida Department of Health has many resources on how schools can promote physical activity and reduce childhood obesity.  
[http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/chronicdisease/walk\\_index.html](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/chronicdisease/walk_index.html)

### National Organizations

- [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Safe Routes to School](#) National Partnership
- [Active Living Resource Center](#)
- [National Center for Bicycling & Walking](#)
- [Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals](#)

### **Student Interviews**

Prior to dismissal, workshop participants interviewed thirteen North Shore students about their school travel experiences. Of the thirteen, only one student reported regularly walking or bicycling to school. (He does both.)

#### **Question: What do you like about walking?**

Trees & flowers.

Being alone.

Exercise (that's fun!)

"Not having parents telling me what to do."

Time to think about stuff.

#### **Question: How could you make your walk better or safer?**

More crossing guards.

Slow down the cars (they go too fast).

4 Way STOP at the crosswalks/intersections.

#### **Question: How long does it take you to get to school in the car?**

More than 10 minutes: 1

Less than 5 minutes: 8

#### **Question: Why don't you walk (or ride) to school?**

I am tired.

My parents won't let me because it's too far.

Sometimes it rains.

The car has air conditioning.

I could get hurt (e.g. hit by a car, or grabbed).

#### **Question: How many of you have bikes?**

12

#### **Question: If only one of you bicycles to school, and almost all of you have bicycles, where do you ride?**

Around the neighborhood.

With friends.

#### **Question: How many of you participated in Walk to School Day?**

In 2008: 3

In 2007: 7

#### **Question: Should we have more Walk to School Days?**

Yes! (12)

## Recommendations

1. North Shore ES must take steps to build a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program. There are many reasons for the school to undertake a SRTS program (student health, the environment, traffic congestion, students' safety), but not the least of which is the District's transition to a neighborhood school plan which will include a reduction in student busing. The school is already overwhelmed by the traffic at arrival and dismissal. Once the transition from school choice is complete, the situation will undoubtedly worsen. Doing nothing is simply not an option. Fortunately, the school is situated in a neighborhood well-suited for walking and there are already ample assets and resources in the community to make every day a Walk to School Day.
2. School administration and the PTA should evaluate what impact the school's strict tardiness standard is having on traffic safety. Parents racing in their cars to avoid a third tardy for their kids, has created a safety hazard.
3. The City of St. Petersburg should evaluate the infrastructure and streets around North Shore ES for opportunities for traffic calming, crosswalks and intersection upgrades to enhance pedestrian safety, eliminate violations of the ADA, and eliminate improper signage.
4. The school, with the assistance of the City of St. Petersburg, should develop a School Travel Plan. This will help to order needs and priorities and establish an action plan and framework for funding.
5. The Pinellas County School District should develop a District wide Safe Routes to School program to accompany its return to a neighborhood schools.

### Specific Recommendations

1. The intersection of 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Oak Street should be converted into a four way stop. The crosswalks should be upgraded.
2. Traffic calming measures should be employed on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Oak Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Street N. The current street configuration is incompatible with the adjacent land use (a school zone!). The ALRC recommends a visual narrowing of the road by stripping for bike lanes, a painted median, or both. The (relatively) high number of bicyclists we observed using the street, and the presence of a bike lane on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue between 1<sup>st</sup> Street N and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, suggests a bike lane would be an appropriate facility for this road.
3. The City of St. Petersburg should conduct a sign audit of the North Shore Elementary school zone as soon as possible. The school zone is improperly and inconsistently marked. Existing school zone signs should be replaced by signs that advise "Speeding Fines Doubled."
4. North Shore should host another SRTS workshop in cooperation with the school's PTA. There is sufficient expertise on SRTS within the Tampa/St. Petersburg area to facilitate a SRTS workshop, and to assist the school with developing a school travel plan.
5. A No Idle Zone should be created in front of the school. Air quality around the school suffers when numerous vehicles are idling for 30 minutes or more waiting for the dismissal bell. (The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency/Air Watch Northwest has an extensive listing of resources on its website on how to establish a No Idle Zone. See [http://www.airwatchnorthwest.org/wa/NO\\_IDLE/index.asp](http://www.airwatchnorthwest.org/wa/NO_IDLE/index.asp))
6. Establish remote drop off/pick up locations for private vehicles. There are several large parking lots in the vicinity of the school that could be used for this purpose.

2008 State Statute, Title XXIII

### **316.1895 Establishment of school speed zones, enforcement; designation.--**

(6) Permanent signs designating school zones and school zone speed limits shall be uniform in size and color, and shall have the times during which the restrictive speed limit is enforced clearly designated thereon. Flashing beacons activated by a time clock, or other automatic device, or manually activated may be used as an alternative to posting the times during which the restrictive school speed limit is enforced. Beginning July 1, 2008, for any newly established school zone or any school zone in which the signing has been replaced, a sign stating "Speeding Fines Doubled" shall be installed within the school zone. The Department of Transportation shall establish adequate standards for the signs and flashing beacons.