





Identifying Barriers and Developing Solutions to Provide a Safer Route to School

There are four basic steps involved in identifying barriers that limit children from walking and bicycling to school and in determining solutions to provide a safe route to school.

Step 1: Bring Together the Right People and Plan a School Site Audit

The first task is to bring the key stakeholders together to plan a school site audit. It is critical that the school principal, teachers, and interested parents and students are involved. It is also important that representatives from San Francisco's Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), Police Department (SFPD), and Department of Public Health (DPH) attend. Community members and pedestrian, bicycle, safety and disability advocates should also be present at the audit.

The school should determine how many children currently walk or bicycle to school. Parent surveys can be used to understand parents' attitudes towards walking or bicycling to school and identify barriers to walking and bicycling that need to be addressed. The SFMTA can prepare maps to illustrate where children live in proximity to school. The SFMTA and Safe Routes to School coalition members can assist with collecting technical information such as traffic counts, vehicle speeds, reported collisions, and can help with identifying driver-related safety issues.

School and/or parent representatives should create a map identifying key issue locations and a showing a route for the school site audit.

Step 2: Conduct a School Site Audit

Walking around the school as a group to observe arrival and/or dismissal time can be one of the best ways to reach a collective understanding of the issues. There are many things to consider during a site audit, including:

- Are sidewalks or pathways continuous along the routes?
- Are sidewalks or pathways in good condition?
- Are there crosswalks and pedestrian signals to help people cross busy streets and intersections?
- Are curb ramps present at intersection crosswalks?
- Are there obstacles blocking the sidewalk?
- Are the sidewalks, pathways, and curb ramps ADA-compliant?
- Is secure and convenient bicycle parking available at school?
- Is there sufficient operating width for bicycles along the route?
- Is the roadway surface in good condition?
- Are curb radii too large, thus encouraging fast vehicle speeds?
- Do motorists behave appropriately?
- Do student pedestrians and bicyclists behave appropriately?
- Are sufficient sight distances and visibility provided, especially for pedestrians less than five feet tall?
- Are there adequate and visible signing and pavement markings?
- Is there enough lighting?
- Are crossing guards present?

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Step 3: Prioritize Issues and Develop Solutions

It is likely that a school site audit will generate a list of potential issues. The next step is for school and parent representatives to prioritize the issues. Are some issues more critical to address than others? Are there "quick wins" that the group can identify that would help to generate additional enthusiasm for children to walk or bicycle to school?

Solutions to issues often include a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies. Safety is the first consideration. If it is not safe for children to walk and/or bicycle to school, then they should only be encouraged after problems are evaluated and addressed. Some problems will require engineering solutions; others may require education, encouragement, enforcement or a combination of strategies. The Safe Routes to School coalition has representatives from all relevant agencies that can provide necessary technical assistance.

For example, SFMTA staff will review the prioritized issues and suggest enforcement or engineering solutions, if appropriate. These recommendations will be shared with the key school stakeholders for input.

Step 4: Fund and Implement Infrastructure Solutions

There are many low-cost engineering solutions that can often be put in place in a relatively short amount of time such as new signs or refreshing marked crosswalks. On the other hand some changes, such as new sidewalk construction, may need large amounts of capital and may take awhile to get funded and ultimately constructed.

The SFMTA will identify feasible engineering solutions that meet applicable standards and will assist in seeking funding for implementation. Most moderate to higher cost engineering solutions will likely require outside funding from regional, state or federal sources. It should be noted that obtaining funding can be challenging and take years. Once funding is secured, it often takes another year or two to obtain environmental clearance, design and construct major infrastructure improvements.

The SFMTA is committed to expediting all school area safety projects.

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