Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Buses Boots & Bicycles

Exploring Collaboration between Safe Routes to School and School Busing Professionals to Get Children to School Safely and Healthily

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SCHOOL BUS FUNDING CONVENING ATTENDEES

Austin, Texas April 8 & 9, 2014

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Introduction

Today, most student transportation departments around the country focus primarily on getting students to school on yellow school buses. But student transportation isn't just about school buses. Students are also getting to school by foot, bicycle, car, and public transportation; decisions about how students travel to school affect their health and safety, as well as traffic congestion, air pollution, and the health and safety of the community at large.

Student transportation departments play a crucial role in our educational system. In the most basic sense, these departments provide access to education. They ensure that students have the ability to safely travel to and from school on a daily basis and support the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity that is needed in our schools for our children to thrive. In addition, they also provide a way to get to school for children who live far away, as well as those who are homeless or have disabilities. But when student transportation departments focus solely on busing, they miss a crucial opportunity to support students and communities.

In this report, we draw a picture of how student transportation currently works – how students are getting to school, how student transportation departments and policies are structured at different levels of government, which trends are emerging, and how Safe Routes to School plays a role. We then identify a vision of a multi-modal student transportation system that is good for student health and safety, academic achievement, community, and the environment. We explore specific policy areas affected by this vision: transportation funding formulas, student eligibility for transportation, hazard busing, school siting, use of public transportation for student transportation, and more. And we set out a number of recommendations for how to encourage collaboration and work toward this vision.

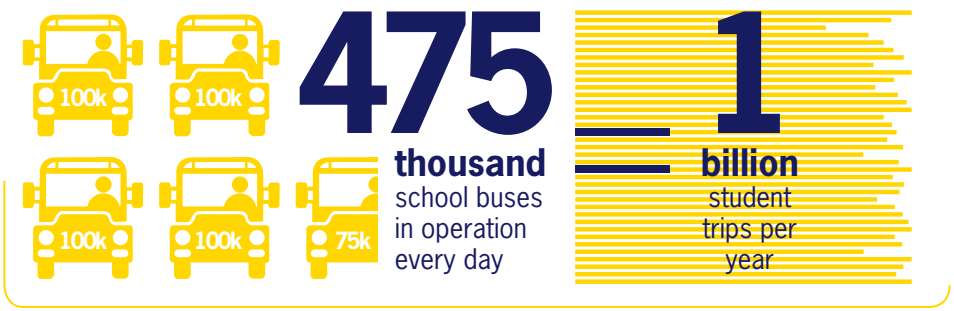
In the long run, student transportation departments have the potential to expand their mission by supporting Safe Routes to School, walking and bicycling, and community well-being. In light of major funding cuts to busing and concerns regarding growing childhood obesity rates, student transportation departments and Safe Routes to School proponents need to work together to help schools save money, decrease traffic, increase community safety, and improve the health of children.

Purpose of This Report

Safe Routes to School proponents and school transportation departments share the goal of getting children to school safely. These groups have the potential to be natural partners, but have not always worked together in the past. The purpose of this report is to give Safe Routes to School proponents a better understanding of how school transportation departments work, explain the work of Safe Routes to School to the student transportation industry, and discuss the benefits of these two groups working together towards common goals.

The report presents the complexities of school transportation policy and school bus funding formulas, and provides recommendations that will support new levels of collaboration and shared objectives for both groups moving forward.

To inform this report, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership engaged in a literature review, explored existing policies, and interviewed a series of key student transportation stakeholders in early 2014. In April 2014, the National Partnership held a convening with representatives from different areas within the school transportation field to discuss school bus funding formulas, trends within the field, and ways that Safe Routes to School professionals and transportation directors could collaborate more effectively to ensure that all children safely access their local schools. Participants represented different sectors: state student transportation directors, district transportation directors, national school bus industry associations, researchers, and Safe Routes to School experts. During the convening participants aired issues and concerns, identified shared goals, discussed trends and challenges, and set forth an agenda for future collaboration and change.

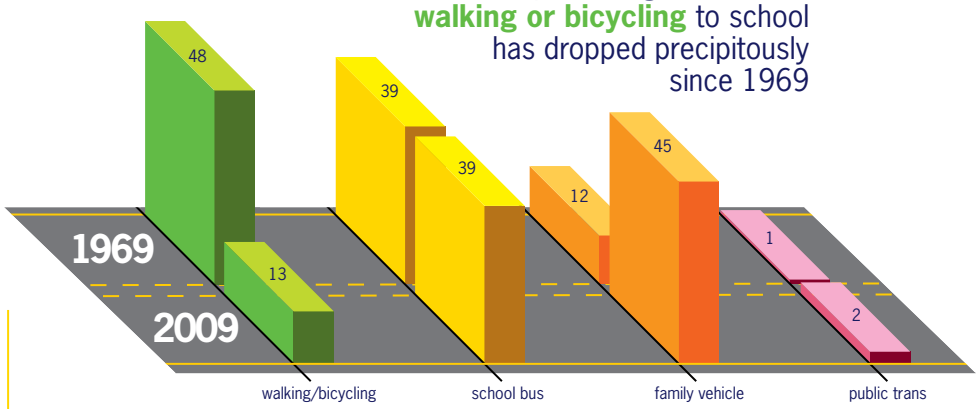


II How Does School Transportation Currently Work?

In investigating how school transportation works in the United States, a starting place involves the question of how students are actually getting to school today. In 2009, for students in elementary and middle schools, almost half (45%) got to school by family vehicle, 13 percent walked or bicycled, 39 percent took the school bus, and 2 percent rode public transit.[1] School bus transportation made up almost the same percentage of K-8 students' travel methods in 1969 as it did in 2009.[2] In contrast, travel in the family car increased from 12 percent in 1969 to 45 percent in 2009, while walking and bicycling showed the inverse relationship, dropping from 48 percent in 1969 to 13 percent in 2009.[3]

What part of this picture does school busing play? Looking at the entire K-12 student population, approximately 25.2 million public school students (55.3 percent of students) were transported to school on school buses at public expense in 2004.[4] Approximately 475,000 school buses are in operation each day, totaling more than a billion student trips per year, at a cost of around $17 billion.[5] To understand how student transportation currently works, we explore the student transportation industry, the Safe Routes to School movement, the student transportation policy environment, and emerging trends.

The percentage of children **walking or bicycling** to school has dropped precipitously since 1969



School Transportation: Structure & Roles

There are three primary levels of leadership within the school transportation world: state transportation directors, district transportation directors, and leaders affiliated with national industry associations.

STATE TRANSPORTATION DIRECTORS

Most states have some type o f school transportation director within the Department of Education. The role of the state director varies greatly depending on state rules and laws, as each state has varying levels of control. In some states, such as Indiana, the state director's main job is to oversee the training of bus drivers, work with local and state legislators to ensure that district policies comply with state requirements, and support beneficial policy directions for student transportation. Other state directors oversee budgeting, while others may play an advocacy role by educating legislators of the larger repercussions of revising funding regulations or other systems. All state directors have some interaction with district directors, but the way these interactions are structured is largely dependent on state law and practice. Some states have regional transportation coordinators who assist state directors. Twenty states have very active directors in significant leadership roles, another twenty have directors who are somewhat active with limited impact at the regional and local level, and ten states have no clear state transportation director.[6]

DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION DIRECTORS

The key responsibility of a district transportation director is to manage student bus transportation. The size and scope of student transportation departments vary widely. Departments may have one or two employees, may run dozens or even hundreds of buses, or may manage a contractor. The role of a district transportation director also varies depending on state and local laws and regulations.

District transportation directors have complicated and often very political jobs. In addition to coordinating bus routes, training drivers, managing mechanics, and overseeing costs, they also have to address safety concerns, parent complaints, and expectations of the school board and school administration. Meanwhile, they must also understand and comply with federal, state, regional, and local laws. They also are typically involved in coordinating transportation for students that attend athletic events, field trips, afterschool activities, and community engagement events.

The role that district directors play can range from simply managing school bus drivers to more comprehensively overseeing all modes of transportation that students use to get to and from school, such as parent drop-offs, walking and bicycling programs, or programs integrating student transportation with public transportation. Most district directors are responsible for making decisions concerning (but not limited to):

- Staffing and managing district positions related to transportation (bus drivers, mechanics, crossing guards, and safety patrols).
- Setting school bus routes and schedules.
- Determining locations of bus stops (unless this is regulated at the state level).
- Setting or implementing policies dictating eligibility for busing.
- The budgeting for and purchasing of new buses.

Additional roles may include:

- Working with local officials (e.g., police departments) to set up trainings for volunteers who assist in student safety patrol, such as youth who are trained to monitor safety on buses, at crosswalks, and sometimes at identified drop-off/pick-up areas.
- Providing supervision of loading and unloading areas at or near schools and ongoing evaluation of route pick-up and drop-off locations for safety, including developing a system to separate buses from students and others walking, bicycling, or being dropped off.

NATIONAL SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATIONS

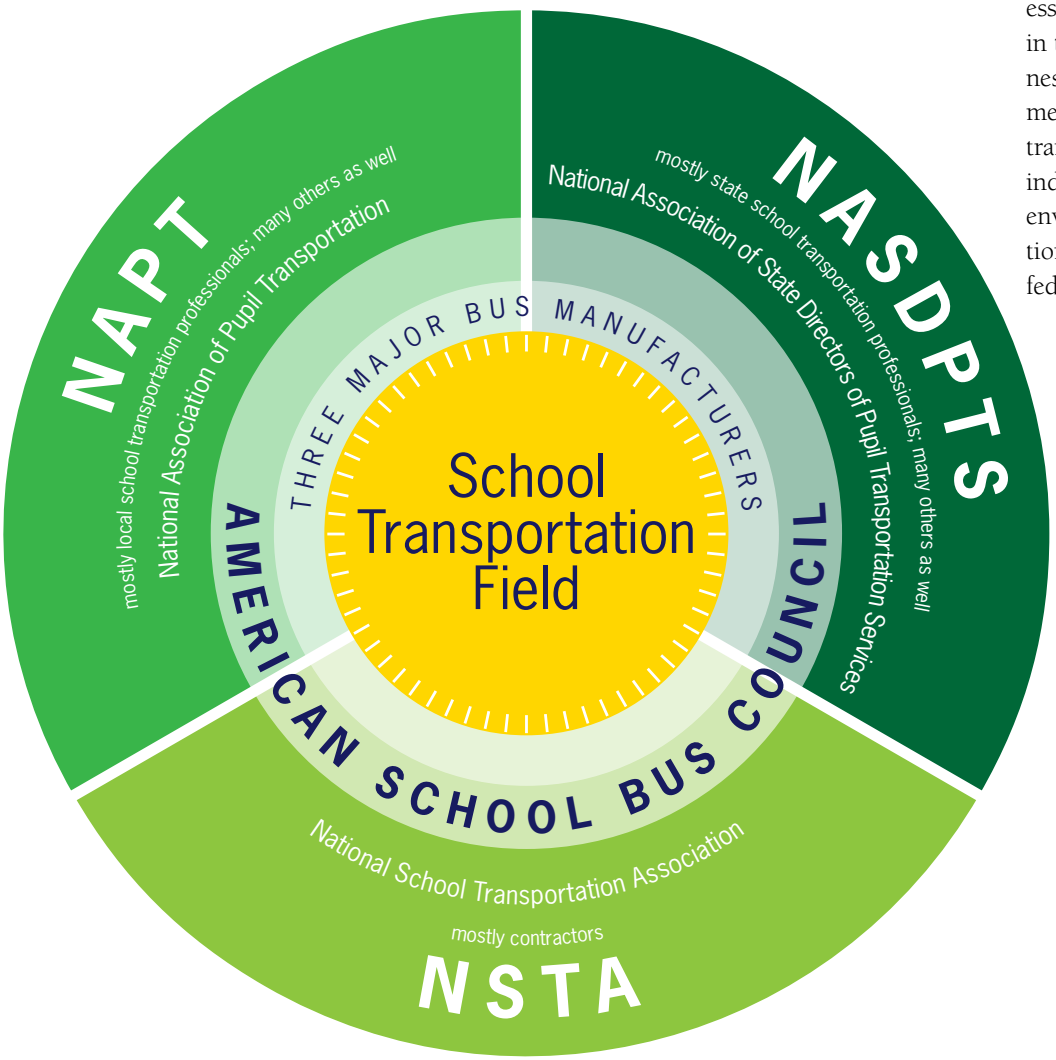
There are three main national groups that represent the school transportation profession: the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation, the National Association of Pupil Transportation, and the National School Transportation Association (NSTA). Each association has a slightly different role and membership.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) represents state student transportation directors and other student transportation leaders in every state. NASDPTS's mission is "to provide leadership, assistance, and motivation to the Nation's school transportation community with the goal of providing safe, secure, efficient, economical, and high-quality transportation to school children on their trips to and from school and school-related activities. NASDPTS membership is comprised of state and national leaders in school bus transportation, local school transportation administrators, and suppliers of products and services."[7]

The National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT) is an umbrella organization that includes anyone interested in school transportation. With almost 2,400 members, NAPT's mission is to "lead, support and develop professionals who provide safe and efficient pupil transportation for all children." More than half of America's state-level pupil transportation associations are affiliated with NAPT, as are more than 130 original equipment manufacturers and after-market product suppliers. NAPT provides a wide variety of resources to the industry, including a professional certification program for six different types of student transportation professionals.[8]

The National School Transportation Association (NSTA) represents private contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers. Its mission is to "provide school transportation professionals with the tools and resources they need to make school buses safe, secure, affordable, and efficient nationwide."[9]

The American School Bus Council (ASBC) is an advocacy coalition representing the three previously mentioned national organizations, as well as three major bus builders. Formed in 2006, its mission is "to educate parents, school officials, and lawmakers about the essential role the yellow school bus plays in the safety, health, security and readiness of America's schoolchildren. Council members advocate for increased school transportation funding and advance industry standards on safety, security, environment, energy and access to education that are above and beyond state and federal law."[10]



Safe Routes to School Movement

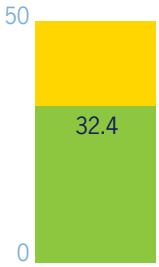
When it comes to student transportation, there's another strong interest group in addition to the school bus industry – Safe Routes to School professionals. The field of Safe Routes to School is comprised of public health, active transportation, education, and environmental stakeholders who see the decline in the number of students walking and bicycling to school as cause for concern.

As noted above, in 1969, almost half of all students walked or bicycled to school, and 87 percent of kids who lived within a mile of school walked or bicycled.[11] In contrast, fewer than one in six students walk or bicycle to school today. These changes have had a significant negative impact on traffic congestion near schools, as well as the health and safety of students. Safe Routes to School initiatives offer an alternative by getting more students to walk, bicycle, skate, skateboard, and scooter to school and in daily life. The 2005 federal transportation act, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), dedicated $1.1 billion to Safe Routes to School infrastructure and encouragement programs through state departments of transportation. While the 2012 transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), does not set aside funds for Safe Routes to School projects, it does have a substantial amount of funding for which Safe Routes to School projects are eligible.[12]

To date more than 13,000 schools and 5 million children nationally have benefited from Safe Routes to School projects and programs that work to provide an affordable, accessible, and simple alternative to driving. Communities implementing Safe Route to School have seen many improvements, including a 44 percent decrease in pedestrian crashes,[13] increases in walking and bicycling rates ranging from 20 percent to 200 percent,[14] and reduced traffic congestion.[15] Some studies show that students who walk or bicycle to school have higher levels of concentration in school than those who do not.[16]

While walking and bicycling support health and academic achievement for children and communities, Safe Routes to School practitioners understand that walking and bicycling to school is only a piece of the school transportation puzzle. Many of the barriers that keep children from walking to school are more nuanced than just infrastructure and programmatic concerns and cannot be completely solved by simply putting in more sidewalks or starting a program.

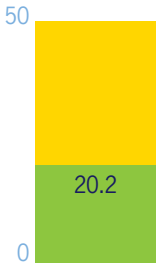
With declining federal transportation dollars dedicated to bicycling and walking, it is even more important to ensure that stable funding streams and supportive policies are pursued at the state, regional, and local levels. Partnerships must exist that encompass all interested partners, including but not limited to local government, planning departments, public health professionals, schools, and private sector stakeholders. Of all of these partners, school transportation departments are potentially the most natural ally, as both groups work directly to increase the safety and well-being of students traveling to and from school.



In schools participating in Safe Routes to School program

32.4%

of students walked or biked



In schools **NOT** participating in Safe Routes to School program

20.2%

of students walked or biked

Policies

One major recurring theme throughout the school transportation world is that every state manages school transportation differently. Some states require school districts to provide transportation to and from school, some do not. Some states regulate hazards, eligibility distances, approved costs, and bus driver trainings, while others leave all decisions up to the individual districts. Some states pay for school bus costs through local property tax, while others allocate funds at the state level.

There are very few federal laws regarding student transportation. Most laws and regulations are set at either the state or district levels. Only half of the states require districts to provide student transportation at all, though all states provide some level of transportation. Consequently, the levels of student transportation services around the country vary widely. Many school transportation professionals have voiced a desire to have more consistency on a national level, as consistent language and basic model policies would assist in standardizing the profession and achieving service goals.

FEDERAL LAWS

As noted above, there are very few national requirements regarding student transportation. Several federal laws impose requirements pertaining to specific populations of children, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires transportation for children with disabilities.[17] The transportation requirements in IDEA include transportation to and from school, between school buildings on the same campus, and between schools.[18] These requirements are intended to ensure that children with disabilities have the same opportunities to access education and extracurricular activities as their peers. The requirements do not require separate transportation for students with disabilities; rather, students should be integrated into general transportation to the extent feasible, but provided with separate or supportive transportation as necessary.[19] A student's individualized education program (IEP) team is responsible for determining whether transportation is required to assist a student with a disability, and how the transportation services should be provided. In practice, one consequence of this federal requirement is that transportation for students with disabilities is often reimbursed separately under state law, since it can be considerably more expensive to provide if specialized equipment or separate routes are necessary.

Federal law also requires the provision of transportation to school for children who are homeless.[20] Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act), districts and states must adopt policies and practices to ensure that transportation is provided to and from school for homeless students.[21] The reason for this requirement is that transportation is the number one barrier to attending school encountered by homeless children. Under the Act, districts must provide transportation for students who are homeless even if they do not provide general student transportation, and they may be required to provide transportation for students who have moved out of the district.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 is similar to the McKinney-Vento Act in that it encourages school districts, social workers, and foster families to work together to ensure children in foster care can attend their school of origin. The Act also increases federal funding that may be used to cover education-related transportation costs for children in foster care and expands the definition of "foster care maintenance payments" to include reasonable transportation to school.[22]

A different type of federal law affecting school transportation is the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA)'s Charter Service Rule, frequently referred to as the "Tripper Rule." The Tripper Rule protects private charter operators from competition from FTA grant recipients.[23] This rule works to restrict public transportation buses from providing transportation for the specific purpose of assisting students in getting to and from school. Any public transit buses that do provide school transportation must have publicly available schedules and clearly show that the general public is permitted to use the buses. The effect of this rule is to limit the ability of public transit and school transportation authorities to work together to provide service for schoolchildren, but a number of communities have worked within the rules to provide some degree of integration nonetheless.[24]

As noted above, the 2012 federal transportation law, MAP-21, does not specifically set aside funds for Safe Routes to School projects. However, these projects remain eligible for a pot of $1.6 billion set aside for the Transportation Alternatives Program, which includes Safe Routes to School and bicycling and walking projects. As a result, in every state, there are substantial funds available through state and regional transportation agencies to support Safe Routes to School programs in schools and Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements near schools.

NATIONAL GUIDELINES

Although there are few national laws regarding student transportation, national school transportation associations have created guidelines to assist in filling this gap. The National Congress on School Transportation meets every five years. During this meeting, delegates discuss and offer revisions to the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures.[25] The Specifications focus on topics such as school bus design, inspections, operations, activity busing, security and emergency preparedness, and busing of specific populations of students. While mentioning that students get to school via different modes, the Specifications recommend that "all school students be transported in a school bus."[26] Some states have adopted these guidelines as standards, while others simply use them as a reference point.

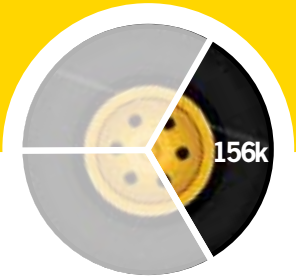
STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES

School bus transportation is primarily controlled by policies at the state and school district levels. State policies, both formal and informal, are controlling where they exist, but in many states, much of the decision making authority for the extent of busing and how it takes places is located with local districts.

As we will discuss below in detail in Chapter IV, states have different policies and formulas regarding payment for the costs of student transportation. In some states, busing is required for students; in others, it is not. In some states, the state provides districts with ample funding for busing; in others, it does not.

Eligibility for Busing

Policies that dictate how far a student must live from school to be eligible for busing exist at the state and district levels. Twenty-six states have some minimum busing distance policy at the state level, while the remainder may have various district level policies.[27] A common standard requires elementary and middle school students to live one or one and a half miles from school for busing, and high school students to live more than two miles away.



Private school bus contractors represent 1/3 of the nation's fleet

Trends

In addition to the general way that school transportation works, laid out above, there are also a number of trends influencing the direction of school transportation.

FUNDING CUTS

A dominant ongoing trend in the world of school bus transportation involves cuts to transportation funds and reductions in services. The reductions in transportation funding are a result of decades of cuts to education funding, made worse by challenges faced by state and local government in the recent recession.[28] The funding shortfalls are exacerbated by volatility in fuel prices as well as increasing costs of transporting students due to dispersed residential patterns, poor school siting decisions, and other trends.[29]

PRIVATIZATION

Another significant trend involves privatization of school bus transportation. Private school bus contractors represent one-third of the nation's fleet.[30] In some states, private school bus companies transport a significant percentage of students, and in other states, the percentage is quite low. For example, in Pennsylvania, 72 percent of transportation services were privately run in 2008.[31] In contrast, in Ohio, around 6 percent of school buses are run by contractors.[32] There is an ongoing debate regarding the financial and other implications for districts that decide to privatize student transportation.[33]

CHARTER SCHOOLS

A new challenge facing states and districts across the country is the increasing number of charter schools. These schools are typically further from students' homes than their normal public school, increasing transportation costs as well as the time that students spend on buses.

In some states, like Utah,[34] there is no requirement to bus students who attend charter schools, but other states, like Pennsylvania, require transportation of these students.[35] When charter students are not transported, overall safety is decreased because of the additional parent drivers on the roads. In some states, this also takes away from the amount of funds that could be allocated for eligible students that would be riding the bus to their local school. In contrast, when charter students are transported by school bus, routes become vastly more complex, and student transportation costs and logistical challenges increase.

DECLINE IN BUSING FOR DESEGREGATION

Another trend involves the termination of court-ordered busing for diversity in many states and districts.[36] Despite the fact that segregation is increasing in schools across the United States, school transportation systems are often moving away from (or even being prohibited from) busing students to create the diverse schools that support student success.[37]

REGIONALIZATION AND SHARED SERVICES

Many districts are considering revising policies to be focused more on regions than on individual districts. Through partnering with other regional school districts to address transportation, districts are hoping to decrease costs by sharing buses and bus routes.

GREEN SCHOOL BUSES

A trend that is growing in popularity is the use of more environmentally friendly buses. While traditional school buses are more environmentally friendly than parents driving children to school, with each bus of children eliminating approximately 36 cars from the road,[38] their diesel engines release harmful emissions. In an effort to reduce emissions, the Environmental Protection Agency created the Clean School Bus program, which works to get older buses off the road and reduce idling.[39] There are also ongoing efforts to phase out buses that use diesel fuel and replace them with buses that run on propane, natural gas, or electricity. The major concerns with replacing buses are the additional costs required to buy more environmentally friendly buses and the lack of availability of refueling/recharging stations, especially when buses are used for out-of-town school activities.

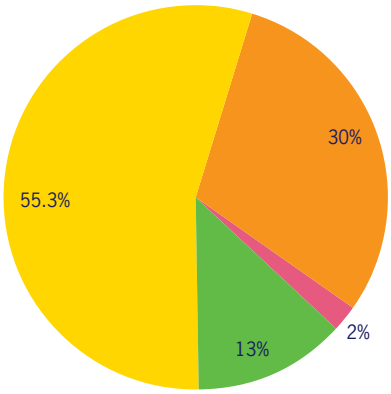
III The Vision: A Multimodal Student Transportation System

Although the school bus industry sometimes asserts that all children should get to school by yellow bus,[40] this is neither a practical nor an ideal situation. School buses certainly play a key role in getting students to and from school, but buses, like walking and bicycling, are only one piece of the school transportation puzzle. Yet, while the phrase "school transportation director" seems to suggest that this position oversees all transportation-related issues at a school or within a district/state, in practice, these positions tend to focus heavily, if not solely, on bus-related transportation.

What would a more ideal student transportation system look like? Ideally, the majority of students who live within a reasonable walking or bicycling distance from school would walk and bicycle to and from school. For younger students, walking distances would be shorter; for older students, they would be further. Safe Routes to School programs at schools would provide encouragement programs, including components such as walking school buses, walk and roll to school days, and safe transportation skills and education. Meanwhile, students would have safe streets and paths in the vicinity of schools, making it safe and easy to walk and bicycle to school, and these investments would be prioritized by local, regional, and state governments, and supported by private developers.

For students who live further from school, school buses would be available to help them easily access education. Buses would stop and pick up students at centralized locations in neighborhoods, allowing students a short walk to the bus stop, a system that is more efficient for busing and provides physical activity for students. Safe routes to bus stops would be required and funded, including features such as sidewalks and safe street crossings, to ensure that students could safely make these trips. Buses might also stop a short distance from schools to allow students who are bused to have a morning walk. For students who live within walking or bicycling distance, but are prevented from getting to school by hazards on the route, hazard busing would be available while the hazard remained, but schools and municipalities would coordinate to prioritize remediation of the hazard. In addition, busing might also take place to support school diversity.

Schools would also consider transportation issues, full lifecycle costs, and benefits of walking and bicycling when making decisions about where to locate new schools or which existing schools to close.



2004-05

25.2 million
K-12 public school students transported on buses at public expense

public trans
family vehicle
school bus
walking/bicycling

With prioritization of schools located centrally in communities and near residential areas where students are concentrated, ease of walking and bicycling and low transportation costs would be built into the system from the start.

With a comprehensive student transportation system that supports walking, bicycling, and yellow buses, the numbers of parents driving students to school would decrease. This would increase safety for the students being driven and bused, as well as for students walking and bicycling. Where public transit might provide a cost-efficient method for students, particularly older students, to get to school, student transportation departments would coordinate with public transit agencies to ensure that routes, scheduling, and cost for the district or students all supported students' use of public transit. Additional policy and programmatic elements would also support efforts to encourage parents not to drive.

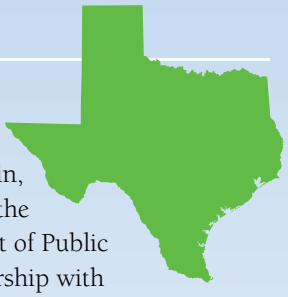
How would this change the role of student transportation departments? In a comprehensive multimodal student transportation system, school transportation directors would have the support and funding necessary to incorporate additional tasks into their existing responsibilities, including:

- Evaluating and planning walking and bicycling routes
- Evaluating and helping plan safe routes to bus stops
- Educating parents and encouraging walking school buses
- Participating in school siting and school closure decisions
- Providing busing for diversity where appropriate
- Working with local officials such as police departments to set up trainings for volunteers who assist in student safety patrol (e.g., youth who are trained to monitor safety on buses, at crosswalks, or drop-off/pick-up areas)
- Providing supervision of loading and unloading areas at or near schools and ongoing evaluation of route pick-up and drop-off locations for safety
- Devising systems at each school to separate buses from students walking, bicycling, and parent drop-off areas

Case Studies

Montgomery County, Maryland
Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland has a comprehensive student transportation policy that includes strong policies on bus transportation and walking. The policies set clear guidelines on the "no-transport" zone for school bus transportation and for exceptions due to hazardous walking conditions. They also makes the school district responsible for assessing safety of recommended walking zones and school bus stops and encourage school staff to work with parents and students to teach safe walking and bus-riding behaviors. [41]

Boulder, Colorado
The student transportation department in Boulder, Colorado, created the Trip Tracker program to encourage and reward students for walking, bicycling, skating, scooting, busing, or carpooling to school. Families record their alternative transportation trips and send them in via a monthly e-mailed survey. The program has saved more than 180,000 trips by motor vehicle.[42]



Austin, Texas
The Child Safety Program in Austin, Texas, is run by the city's Department of Public Works in partnership with seven local school districts. The program receives no general tax revenues, but instead is funded by fees from legislation passed by the Texas Legislature to create a school crossing guard program for cities and counties. The program uses these fees to provide:

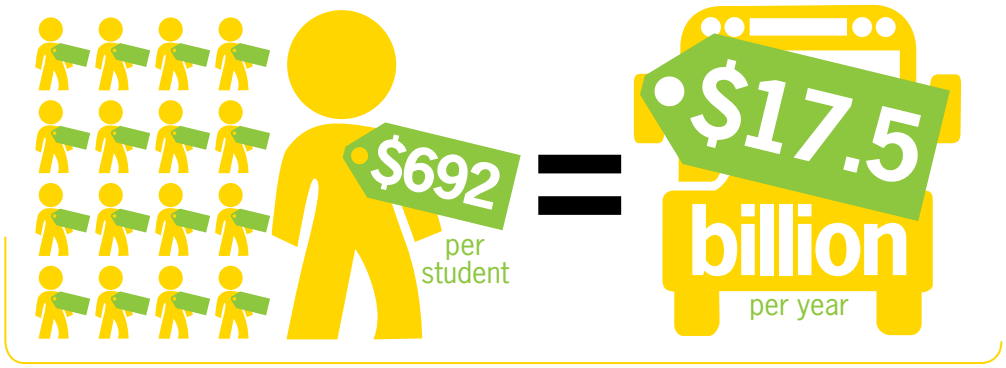
- Crossing Guards: Placing crossing guards at all warranted locations. This program is responsible for hiring and supervising more than 200 crossing guards near or in front of 88 schools.
- Education: Educating more than 45,000 students a year in safe walking, bicycling, bus riding, and skating procedures.
- Safety: Facilitating the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of Austin's schools.[43]

IV School Bus Funding Formulas

Having explored what a multimodal student transportation system would look like, the next question is: how do we get there? Sections IV and V investigate specific policy arenas that currently steer our system in one direction, but could move it in another direction.

The biggest challenges to making change often involve money. The annual cost of busing students in the United States is approximately $17 billion.[44] In order to understand how state transportation policy affects the potential support of Safe Routes to School by the student transportation industry, it is necessary to understand state school bus funding formulas.

Because of the structure of state transportation funding formulas, school districts in some states may suffer financially when students switch from busing to walking or biking. Because school districts' perennial financial woes are likely to affect decision-making, we looked closely at whether these formulas provide a disincentive for districts to support Safe Routes to School programs. As we discuss below, different states' approaches to funding student transportation have different implications for Safe Routes to School. But for the most part, even when there is some disincentive created for Safe Routes to School, the effect does not appear to be very significant and seems unlikely to be the controlling factor in decision-making. Additionally, the political cost of seeking to change funding formulas is likely to be significant. As a result, this arena may not be worthwhile for Safe Routes to School practitioners to pursue.



How Are School Transportation Expenses Funded?

All states pay some portion of the costs that school districts incur when they transport students to or from school by school bus. But the amount that states cover of these costs varies widely, as does the method that they use for determining how much to pay. Every state has its own formula for funding or reimbursing school bus expenses. These formulas determine how the state's payment for school district busing expenses will be calculated. Because the actual amount that states appropriate for school bus expenses often does not suffice to cover the amount laid out in the funding formula, the amount that the state pays in practice is frequently less than the theoretical amount, with the remainder covered by local education funds.

The approach taken by a state to the funding of student transportation is sometimes but not always aligned with a state's approach to requiring transportation. Thus, in some states, districts are required to transport students but are only partially reimbursed for the costs of doing so, whereas in other states, there is no required transportation of students at all (with the exception of federal requirements for students with disabilities and others), but the state does provide some degree of reimbursement should a district decide to transport students; states fall in various places on these continuums.

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature commissioned a report on school bus funding, which included an analysis of the funding formulas for every state.[45] Although the analysis concluded that every formula was different, the general approaches taken by the states were grouped into a number of broad categories, which are discussed further below. The categories include the following: no funding, block grants, the approved cost method, unit cost method, and efficiency formulas.[46]

1 bus route = $37,000 per year

based on average per-pupil expense and the average number of children per bus

Decreasing the number of students who ride the bus only saves money if an entire bus can be taken off the road

Goals in Designing Formulas

The variety of approaches to formulas may, in part, reflect historic developments and different policy goals in each state. However, the various approaches also reflect the fact that there is tension between some of the basic characteristics that are desirable in determining how to fund student transportation, and different states have favored different factors in resolving that tension. The goals or factors that tend to be listed as desirable characteristics in a formula include the following:

- Clarity: Easy to understand.
- Ease of implementation: Easy to administer; creates low administrative burden.
- Actual cost: Reflects actual costs.
- Equitable: Provides fairness and equity among different districts, in light of differing challenges, needs, physical characteristics (such as rural, urban, dense, sparse, mountainous, etc.), and financial resources of each district.
- Encourages efficiency: Provides incentives for efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- Predictable: Provide predictable and consistent levels of funding for districts from year to year, so that districts are able to plan, budget, hire, and implement with assurance.
- Local control: In many states, systems that support local decision-making are viewed as preferable to those where determinations are controlled at the state level.

Additional factors that could potentially be added to this list include:

- Supports health: Incentivizes Safe Routes to School by encouraging walking and bicycling from home to school where feasible; encourages walking to bus stops.
- Encourages right balance of busing versus driving: Encourages districts to provide adequate busing and minimize parents' driving, thereby increasing safety for students walking, bicycling, and on buses, and decreasing traffic congestion and air pollution.
- Values students' time: Incentivizes districts to keep students' trips shorter.

Summary of the Types of Formulas

We now describe each of the types of funding formulas, including no funding, block grants, the approved cost method, unit cost method, and efficiency formulas. For each method, we assess pros and cons to determine which goals are supported by the formula or not.

NO FUNDING

The simplest method employed by states is to provide no set-aside transportation funding at all. In states that do not provide any state transportation aid to local districts, districts are permitted to spend money transporting students, but there is no money expressly provided by the state to cover transportation funding. However, districts may use money from their general education grants for student transportation.

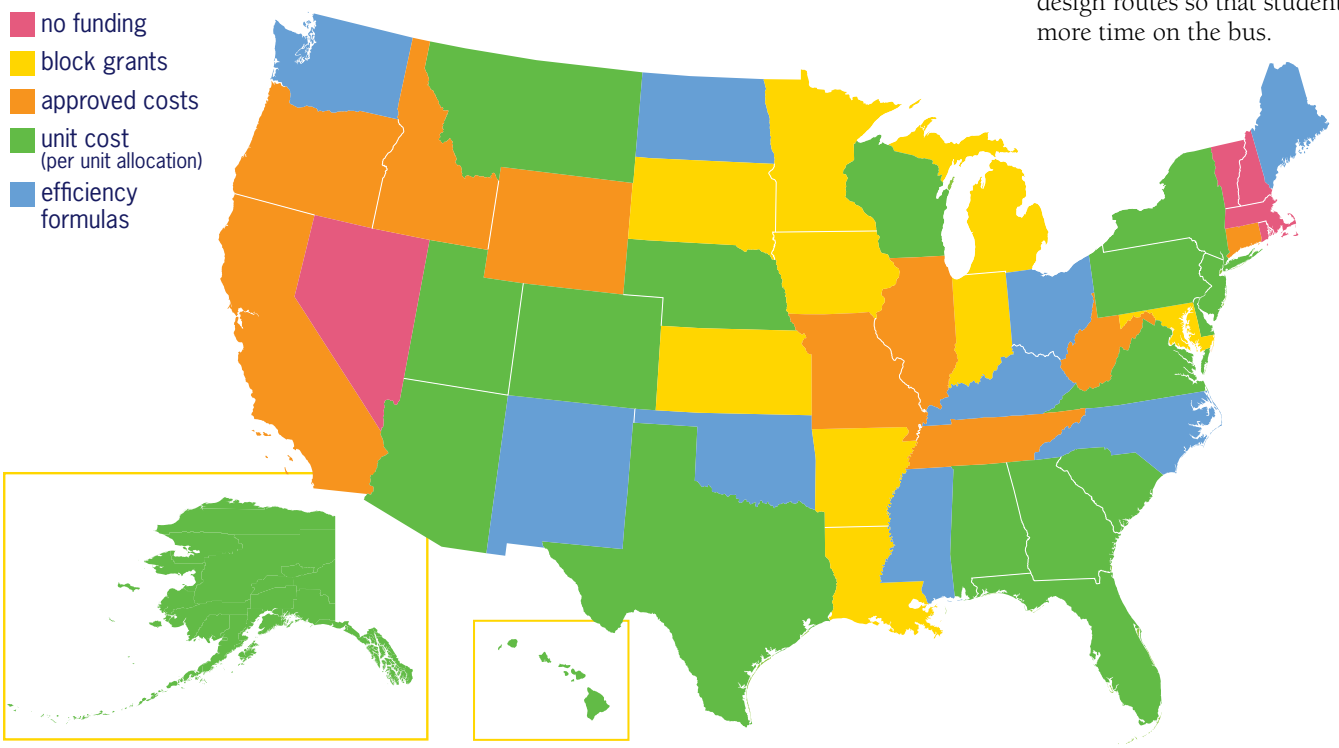
- Pros: Easy to understand; encourages efficiency; predictable; incentivizes Safe Routes to School; provides local control.
- Cons: Does not reflect actual costs; not equitable; does not encourage right balance of busing (encourages districts to have families drive instead of providing busing).

BLOCK GRANT METHOD

In states that provide districts with block grants to address student transportation, districts receive a set amount of money and have flexibility regarding how it is spent. Block grants are frequently based upon the number of students transported or the number of students in the district, and may or may not provide enough money to fully cover the costs of student transportation.

In some states, school transportation block grants are provided outside of the general education grants, and the money provided may only be spent on transportation-related matters. In other states, a lump sum of money for transportation is included within the general education grant to the district. In these states, this money can generally be used for other education expenses if it is not used for student transportation. As a practical matter, the effect of transportation block grants that are included within the general education grant is very similar to the effect of having no set-aside funding at all, since in both cases the district may use its general education funds to cover transportation costs and is able to use money not spent on transportation for other education needs.

- Pros: Easy to understand and administer; may encourage efficiency if the level of funding is less than actual costs; predictable; incentivizes Safe Routes to School; provides local control.
- Cons: Does not reflect actual costs; not equitable (no adjustments to funding based on wealth of district or on terrain/transportation challenges); does not encourage right balance of busing (discourages provision of busing); may provide incentives for districts to design routes so that students spend more time on the bus.



APPROVED COST METHOD

In states that use an approved cost reimbursement formula, the state sets out specific categories of costs that will be reimbursed. The reimbursement is then based upon the actual expenditures in these categories. The state may in theory pay all of the approved costs, but, more often, pays a percentage of the approved costs or an amount up to a cap. In a few states, the reimbursement is adjusted based upon the wealth of the district, so that districts with fewer resources receive more reimbursement for approved transportation costs. In practice, in states where reimbursement is less than 100%, the approved cost method may sometimes function fairly similarly to the block grant method, since under both methods there are limitations on the money available and particular costs that are allowed or excluded.

- Pros: Relatively easy to understand; reflects actual costs; fairly predictable; may encourage right balance of busing; more equitable since actual costs are reimbursed, especially in states that adjust reimbursement for wealth of district; no incentives to make students spend more time on the bus.
- Cons: Somewhat challenging to track and administer; does not encourage efficiency; does not encourage Safe Routes to School; local decisions are heavily influenced by the need to fit into state-approved funding categories.

UNIT COST METHOD

Under the unit cost approach, the district receives reimbursement based upon a set cost assigned by the state to a measurable unit. For example, the state will establish a given rate per mile driven or student transported, and will reimburse the district based on the actual number of miles driven or students transported. Half of the states that use the unit approach do not provide any adjustments based on the characteristics of a district, while the other half do provide some very basic adjustments based on site characteristics.

- Pros: Easy to understand and administer; encourages efficiency; fairly predictable; may encourage right balance of busing; no incentives to make students spend longer on the bus.
- Cons: Inequitable if district characteristics are not adjusted for (and inequity still somewhat likely where adjustments due to the very approximate nature of such adjustments); not closely related to actual costs; does not encourage Safe Routes to School.

EFFICIENCY METHODS

Another approach to structuring a transportation funding formula is to build a formula that encourages districts to be efficient in their transportation of students. Under these types of formulas, the state reimburses districts for the cost that the formula concludes ought to have been incurred by the district, if it were efficiently transporting a large number of students at a low cost. These formulas take mathematically complex approaches to calculate what an efficient district would spend. In addition, they require specific local information in order to accurately and fairly account for the differences in how efficient a district can be expected to be in light of local characteristics.

Expected Cost Method

One type of efficiency formula is known as the *expected cost method*. The expected cost method is designed to provide a way to fund student transportation that encourages districts to meet a determined level of efficiency. This method works by providing some basic funding for administrative expenses, using a unit cost approach to determine a starting place for the rest of the funding, and then adjusting the reimbursement up or down based upon how the district compares to others on a variety of factors. In a denser urban area, where students live close together and relatively near their school, the reimbursement would be adjusted downward by set factors, because it is easier to transport these students, whereas in a sparsely populated rural area with circuitous roads, the reimbursement would be adjusted upward. The district is then reimbursed based upon the expected cost for a district with its characteristics, creating incentives for a certain level of efficiency.

- Pros: Encourages efficiency; fairly equitable; related to actual costs; does not discourage Safe Routes to School (unless walk zone is not properly set).
- Cons: Difficult to understand and administer; difficult to predict; may provide incentives for districts to design routes so that students spend more time on the bus.

Frontier Method

Another type of efficiency method is the *frontier method* (also known as the efficiency method, minimum cost method, or target cost method). In this method, a target is created for each district based upon its site characteristics and the actual performance of the other districts in the state. As the districts become more efficient in order to receive fuller reimbursement, the target is revised since actual performance has improved. This approach encourages ever increasing efficiency and provides a strong incentive to reduce costs.

- Pros: Encourages the most efficiency possible; fairly equitable; related to actual costs; does not discourage Safe Routes to School (unless walk zone is not properly set); likely to reduce state costs.
- Cons: Difficult to understand and administer; particularly difficult to predict due to ever changing reimbursement rates; likely to encourage longer trips for students; may discourage right balance of busing.

TYPES OF FUNDING FORMULAS, DESCRIPTIONS, AND STATES

	How Does It Work?	Details	States Deemed to Use this Method[47]
No Funding	No funding provided by state to districts for public transportation.	Districts may use money from their general education grants.	**5 states** Massachusetts (some regional funding provided), Nevada, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
Block Grants	Set transportation grant (sometimes included in general education grant to district and sometimes separate).	Some restrictions may exist on what can be funded (e.g., Arkansas has specific regulations about what funds can cover).	**9 states** *Block grant included in educational grant:* Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, South Dakota *Block grant separate from educational grant:* Maryland (may not use extra funds for any other purpose), Michigan
Approved Costs	State pays all or some portion of expenditures on specific approved identified costs.		**9 states** *Set allocation:* California, Idaho, Illinois,[48] Missouri, Oregon, West Virginia (state pays a higher percentage of approved costs for less dense districts),[49] Wyoming *Amount paid is adjusted based on wealth of district:* Connecticut, Tennessee
Unit Cost (Per Unit Allocation)	Reimbursement rate is set based upon a selected unit of performance (miles driven, students transported, total student enrollment, etc.); reimbursement based on actual units expended by district.	Some states provide some adjustments based upon the density or other challenges of a given district.	**18 states** *No adjustment:* Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah *Adjustments for district characteristics:* Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin
Efficiency Formulas	State reimburses based upon its conclusions about what the costs ought to have been for an efficient district operating under the same conditions.	Expected cost approach encourages a predetermined level of efficiency; frontier method encourages ever increasing efficiency.	**9 states** *Expected cost method:* Kentucky,[50] Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma *Frontier Method:* New Mexico, North Carolina, Washington

(based primarily on data from 2006)

OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES

As illustrated above, states takes a wide variety of approaches to the challenge of allocating student transportation funding. Approximately 18 states take the unit cost approach, nine take the approved costs approach, another nine take an efficiency approach, and 14 either provide no set-aside funding or provide funding through block grants. Thus, there is no approach that is favored by the majority of the states. As revisions to the formulas slowly take place in state legislatures, there is some movement toward the efficiency approach, but there is also a significant drive to stay with the status quo in any given state. The biggest overall funding trend is not a revision to the formulas, but simply the reductions in the overall level of funding for student transportation.[51]

Interaction with Active Transportation

In describing the different funding formulas in the previous section, we noted whether the approach was likely to create an incentive for districts to support Safe Routes to School programs or a disincentive for them to do so. But why do funding formulas affect Safe Routes to School at all?

The basic reason has to do with the fact that transporting students who live within easy walking or bicycling distance of a school is cheaper and easier than busing other students, but has a cost nonetheless. As a result, if a funding formula reimburses for the costs of busing these nearby students, it will create some disincentive for the district to support Safe Routes to School. If the formula does not reimburse for those costs, it will provide a mild incentive for the district to support Safe Routes to School, since Safe Routes to School will assist in getting students to school while removing some busing expenses. Efficiency formulas can go either way: it is far more efficient to bus students who live near a school, creating an enormous incentive for busing these students and discouraging Safe Routes to School; however, most efficiency formulas exclude students within a given radius from consideration in the formula, creating a mild incentive for Safe Routes to School.

In discussing the effects on active transportation with the school transportation directors and professionals at our convening, one thing become clear: as a general rule, any effects on Safe Routes to School due to changes in the funding formulas are likely to be relatively small.

General Recommendations: Do Not Reimburse for Transporting Students within Minimum Busing Distances

As noted, by and large, the formulas did not create a strong disincentive for Safe Routes to School. But one important factor was how the state handled the walk zone (also known as the minimum busing distance or eligibility zone) for busing. In 26 states, the state only provides student transportation for students who live more than a certain distance from school.[52] In the remaining states, there is no such state law, though districts may have their own policies. Note that these minimum busing distances can work in several different ways: often, they apply only to reimbursement, so that students within the minimum distance may be bused, but the district will not be reimbursed for the cost of busing these students. Other times, the restriction means there is no requirement to bus students who live nearby, but districts may be reimbursed if they do bus students. Finally, but not commonly, the restriction may forbid the busing of these students.

Some states have established one minimum busing zone, such as Idaho, which provides busing for students who live more than one and a half miles from school.[53] Other states have different ranges for students of different ages, with elementary (and sometimes middle school) students eligible for busing if they are beyond a certain distance, and high school (and sometimes middle school) students eligible if they are beyond a longer distance.[54] For example, Delaware provides busing to elementary students who live more than a mile from school, and for middle and high school students who are more than two miles.

What type of range exists for these requirements? Of the 26 states that have such requirements, half of them require students to be one mile or two miles away.[55] For the other states, seven limit busing to students who are over two miles, with South Dakota (5 miles), Nebraska (4 miles), Missouri (3.5 miles), and Kansas (2.5 miles) having the furthest requirements.[56] Five states have limits less than or equal to one mile.

As noted above, state reimbursements for transporting students who live near school can discourage districts from supporting Safe Routes to School. For states that have no set-aside funding or that have block grant funding, there is no disincentive, and even for states that take an approved cost approach, the disincentive is quite small, since the additional cost for transporting these students is small. But for states that take a unit cost approach based on the number of students transported, or for states with efficiency formulas, the incentive

EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT FUNDING FORMULAS ON SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

	Effects on Safe Routes to School	Size of Effect on Safe Routes to School	Potential Improvements to Support Safe Routes to School
No Funding	Mild incentive for Safe Routes to School based on savings if enough children walk to eliminate a bus (could get more money into the classroom, but might be seen as a loss by the transportation director)	Minor effect. Formula fine for Safe Routes to School.	
Block Grants Set transportation grant provided	Mild incentive for Safe Routes to School based on savings if enough children walk to eliminate a bus (could get more money into the classroom, but might be seen as a loss by the transportation director)	Minor effect. Formula fine for Safe Routes to School.	
Approved Costs State pays approved costs, up to a cap or percentage	No major disincentive for Safe Routes to School in formula.	Minor effect but depends on how it is set up.	Get hazard mitigation efforts included as approved cost (net costs go down).
Unit Cost State provides set reimbursement per unit (mile driven, student transported, students enrolled)	Depends upon the unit selected. • If allocation is based upon students actually bused, big disincentive to switch students to walking and bicycling. • If based on student enrollment, then no disincentive. • If based on miles driven, small disincentive.	Potentially a larger effect, especially where the unit is student transported.	Ensure appropriate walk zones (minimum busing distances) at state level, especially where unit is student transported.
Efficiency Formulas	Generally, would not create a disincentive (assuming appropriate walk zone provided).	But if eligibility exclusion zone not properly set, large disincentive for Safe Routes to School.	Ensure appropriate walk zones (minimum busing distances) at state level.

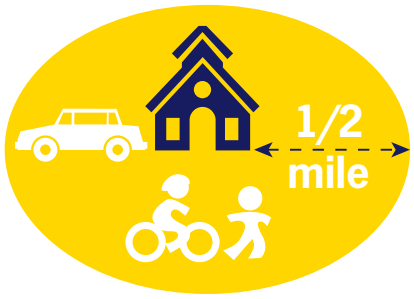
to transport those nearby, inexpensive students can be quite high. Establishing a proper minimum busing zone in states with these approaches is a high priority. What should that minimum be? The school transportation industry does not currently have a recommended standard for minimum busing distances, and as mentioned above, the range is wide. This is an area where Safe Routes to School proponents and the school transportation industry could partner, since Safe Routes to School can provide an evidence-based recommendation for a best practice for minimum busing distances.

How does this work in practice? It appears that, indeed, many students who live close to school are bused. The 2009 National Household Transportation Survey found that of K-8 students who lived less than a quarter mile from school, 12.5 percent were bused. For students one-fourth to one-half mile away, 21.1 percent were bused, and for kids one-half to one mile away, 26.9 percent were bused.[57] These numbers comprise a meaningful percentage of potential walkers and bikers, and suggest that remedying busing distance practices could be a fruitful area of focus.

Within this context, it is worth noting one potential challenge. In considering the busing of students who live close to schools, student transportation directors described what they termed an "aesthetic benefit": tax-paying community members and school administrators prefer the image of thriftiness conveyed by a full school bus pulling into a school. Picking up nearby students helps make school buses looked packed, efficient, and economical, without adding significantly to the cost or time of the route.

V Additional Policy Areas

A number of additional policy areas have the potential to have a significant impact on the ability to achieve both student busing and Safe Routes to School goals. Policies that take into consideration how hazards are addressed, where schools are located, and the role public transit may have on school busing can help create a comprehensive multimodal transportation system.



50%
of vehicle trips to school are at a distance easily covered on foot or bike

Hazard Busing

Ideally, all students who lived within a mile or two of their school would be able to get there by walking or bicycling. Unfortunately, a lack of safe infrastructure, crime, and other variables often pose a barrier for walking or biking for students who would otherwise be within walking distance. In these situations, school districts often provide busing for students who would otherwise be ineligible for bus transportation. The extent and requirements for this type of busing, referred to as "hazard busing," vary greatly depending on how each state or district qualifies a hazard and how that hazard is addressed once identified.

Some states allow the district to determine whether a hazard exists, while other states require specific criteria in order to define a hazard. Most states do not have policies in place that address fixing or eliminating the hazard, which can lead to substantial ongoing spending, with no end in sight. In many cases, by fixing a hazard, students can partake in physical activity to and from school, while the community as a whole benefits from the improvements.

The lack of consistency in the way hazards are addressed and categorized means that there is little definitive data regarding the scope of the problem on a national level. A state study in Florida showed that 1 percent of all Florida students used hazard busing, which accounted for 4 percent of all bused students.[58] In some counties in Florida, districts provided hazard busing for 6 percent or even 12 percent of their students, showing that there are huge inconsistencies across

communities and infrastructure.[59] Other analyses estimate that between 1 percent and 6 percent of all students nationwide (half a million to 2.5 million students) receive hazard busing.

In an effort to collect better data, as well as ensure that all states are on the same page when discussing hazard busing, it has been suggested that the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures guidelines, which were previously discussed, should include specific language defining what a hazard is and spelling out procedures for addressing hazards and hazard busing. This document will be updated in 2015, so it would be wise to begin conversations around this topic now.

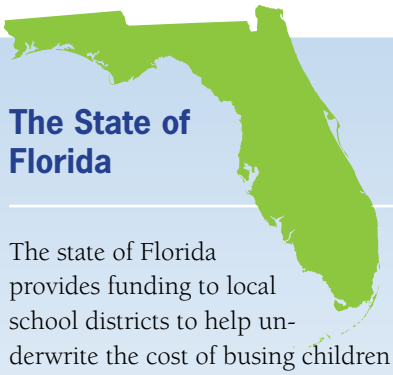
Because of the varied cost required to fix hazards, it can be difficult to determine if fixing a hazard is cost effective in the long run. A study in North Carolina identified how much money could be saved in the long run if hazards were fixed instead of students being bused. This study determined that hazard busing costs an estimated $200 per year for each student that was hazard bused (the average bused student costs between $600-$1,000). Using the $200 figure, hazard busing across the country is thought to cost between $100 million and $500 million per year.[60]

By having clear state standards for determining what qualifies as a hazard, the state can ensure consistency and take a comprehensive approach to addressing hazards. In contrast, when there is no role beyond funding at the state level, the district is left in a situation where its students are affected by the hazard, but it has no jurisdiction over the problem. The distinct roles and arenas of action of school districts and local government mean that this type of problem can simply fall between the cracks.

Moreover, costs for hazard busing come out of state or local education funds, while infrastructure improvements usually come out of public works or local/regional transportation department funds. Although Safe Routes to School proponents have raised the possibility of using school transportation dollars to remedy hazards, this is likely to be a bureaucratic impossibility – it is extremely difficult (and likely illegal in some states) to use education funds to fix an infrastructure hazard. Because of this, school transportation departments must partner with local municipalities to ensure that agencies are working together to address infrastructure and transportation concerns, regardless of the funding source.

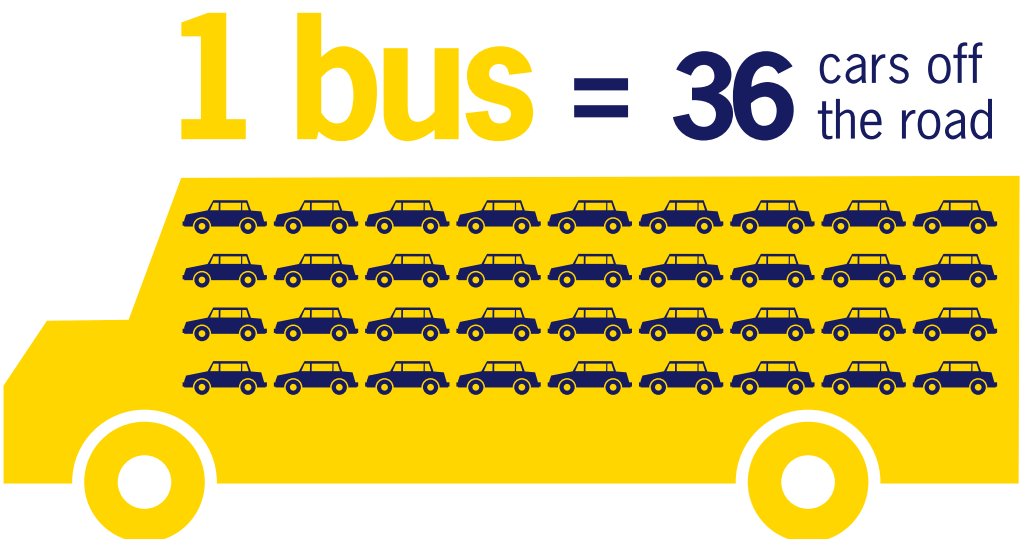
What do strong policies look like with regard to hazard busing? States should consider establishing criteria for designating a hazard, having mechanisms to review alleged hazards, and requiring municipalities to fix hazards within a given period after the hazard is designated by the state. Some states, such as Florida, have stipulations in place requiring districts to prove that they are working to remove the hazard within a certain time period in order to be reimbursed for hazard busing costs. Florida also has a review process for the hazard busing routes to ensure that all hazards received attention each year.[61]

It is also vital that communication is handled properly throughout the process of fixing the hazard, as parents can become upset if their bus is taken away without proper explanation or notice. The school transportation department and other involved parties need to ensure that parents and community members understand the positive impacts that are likely to come out of the improved infrastructure changes. If this is not handled correctly, parents may feel they are losing bus service rather than gaining safe walking and bicycling options.



The State of Florida

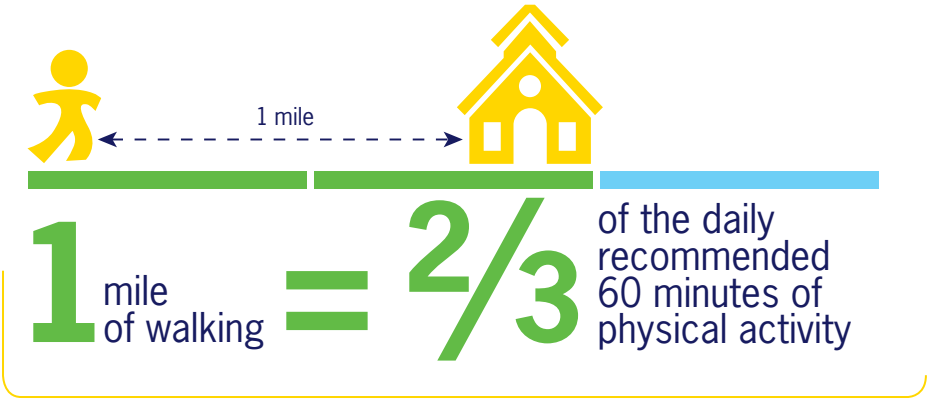
The state of Florida provides funding to local school districts to help underwrite the cost of busing children who live close to school but cannot walk or bicycle due to unsafe conditions. State law links the availability of this funding to a plan to fix the hazard. School boards that request hazard bus funding must work with the appropriate state or local governmental agencies to correct the hazard within a reasonable timeframe.



School Siting

Another key arena for school transportation directors and Safe Routes to School proponents is school siting (and the related topic of school design). School siting is key to the success of Safe Routes to School initiatives. In addition, school siting has enormous impacts on the efficiency, cost, and service provided by school busing.

How does school siting affect Safe Routes to School? As discussed above, in order for most students to walk or bike to school, they must attend a school located within a mile or two of their home. Parents report that the biggest factor that prevents their children from walking or bicycling to school is distance from school.[62] In recent years, there has been a trend toward locating schools on the outskirts of towns.[63] Reasons for this trend include a perceived need for large schools with sizeable playing fields, sprawling development approaches, and consideration of one-time land costs (rather than the many long-term costs of a school siting decision, including costs of new construction or renovation, maintenance, utility infrastructure, public support, and so on). Two-thirds of today's schools are located far from where children live.[64] By improving school siting practices, children's rates of walking and bicycling to school are likely to increase. In addition, well-sited schools can also support children's physical activity and community well-being after school hours by providing a convenient location for play, athletic activities, community meetings, and emergency centers.[65] Shared use agreements can be created to ensure the best possible use of these nearby amenities.



The trend towards locating schools on the outskirts of cities and towns has a significant effect on school transportation departments as well. The need to transport more students for longer distances make it more costly and less efficient to bus students. Schools located far from children's homes can lead to huge increases in busing costs, especially if small neighborhood schools are closed in favor of large schools on the outskirts of town, or when small schools in two smaller towns are replaced with a large school in between the two.

School transportation directors are rarely involved in conversations regarding the selection of which schools will be closed or new sites for schools. These decisions are often very controversial; therefore, even substantial costs related to transportation may not be a priority. But putting processes in place that require comparison of all the costs associated with a potential new site – not just the initial capital costs – can help build these considerations into the decision-making process.

Additionally, transportation directors are often not consulted when schools are designed, leading to an absence of logical transportation design both on school property and surrounding the school. It is easy to increase safety around schools during initial design through measures such as separating vehicles from students walking or bicycling as well as including and carefully locating walkways, bicycle entries and storage areas, school bus unloading zones, and car drop offs. However, it is much more difficult to retrofit this type of poor design once a school campus has been constructed.

Public Transit

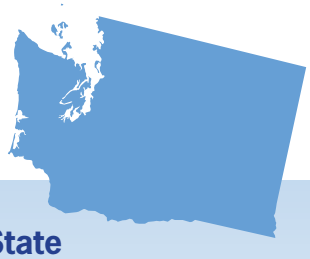
Traditionally, student transportation directors have preferred to see a separation between students and the general public. But in many communities, having separate public transit and student transportation systems is duplicative and wasteful. Public transit is often a safe, affordable, and convenient supplement to traditional school buses, especially for middle and high-school students.[66] However, taking full advantage of these possibilities is made tricky by the Tripper Rule, mentioned above, a federal law that limits the ability of public transportation to exclusively provide school transportation or directly compete with private school bus operators.

Need for More Data and Evidence

School transportation professionals are eager for better data to support their work, but the school transportation system is understudied, and many questions remain about what is taking place on the ground. In the absence of sufficient data, decision makers are forced to make decisions based on assumptions or logic rather than evidence. By collecting more complete data, school transportation departments can more easily make the case for sound policies, stabilized funding, and more involvement in all school-related conversations.

Additional research should address questions such as:

- What are common and uncommon practices in student transportation at the state and district level, and how many states espouse each particular practice?
- How many students are currently considered eligible for busing in each state?
- How would this number change based upon different possible minimum busing distance standards for eligibility?
- How many eligible students are not riding buses? Why not? How do these students get to school?
- How many students use hazard busing and what types of hazards are most common? How do these rates and hazards vary by state and by region?
- How many students are eligible for hazard busing?
- Under which circumstances and over what timeframe is it cost effective to fix hazards?
- What is the cost per district, state, and nationally of parents driving their children to school?



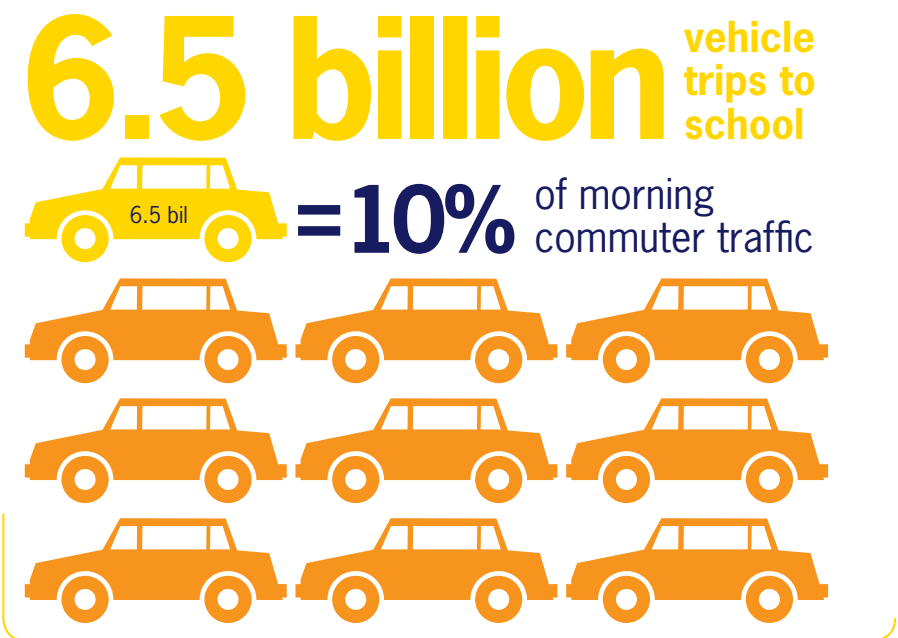
The State of Washington

Washington state law requires that each elementary school develop route plans recommending the safest routes for children walking and bicycling to and from schools.[67] The State Department of Transportation, Washington Traffic Safety Commission, and Superintendent of Public Instruction worked together to create a guidebook to help school administrators develop the school walk routes and work with public works officials to remedy deficiencies.[68]

VI Recommendations

By working together, Safe Routes to School proponents and transportation directors can save money and increase the overall health of all students. Joint goals include encouraging students who live close to school to walk or bicycle, and working to get the rest of the students out of family vehicles and onto the bus.

When we brought Safe Routes to School champions, researchers, school transportation directors, and consultants together in April 2014, a number of recommendations emerged, with one prominent concern being the importance of continuing the conversation between Safe Routes to School representatives and state and district school transportation directors. Additional recommendations focused on creating policies and procedures that promote and encourage students who live within a reasonable distance to walk and bicycle instead of being driven to school, and encourage students who live farther away to ride the bus instead of being driven to school. Specifics included:



1: MULTIMODAL SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

In order to address all student travel, district and state transportation departments should work toward a school transportation system that addresses all modes of travel that students use to get to and from school in a collaborative and comprehensive way. By accounting for all transportation modes, transportation directors create better outcomes for students while becoming more versatile and increasing job security in the face of budget cuts.

2: SAFE ROUTES TO BUS STOPS

A key way that the Safe Routes to School movement can reach out to school transportation departments is by working to address the need for safe routes to school bus stops. By ensuring that students can safely walk not only to schools, but also to school bus stops, districts can help increase physical activity levels among students who live near schools or school bus stops.

3: NATIONAL POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Safe Routes to School proponents can assist transportation directors with national policy approaches for school transportation. Safe Routes to School has received federal attention, designated funding, and Department of Transportation guidance for projects. Basic school transportation standards could have significant effects on school transportation directors' roles at the state and district levels.

Applying the Safe Routes to School 5 E's to Safe Routes to School Bus Stops:

- Evaluation - Transportation directors can participate in bus stop assessments to analyze the conditions of the routes leading to bus stops, including safety of the stop itself, street crossings, and travel along streets and paths. They can also assess concerns that parents may have with the routes. After making changes to support students walking to bus stops, evaluation is important to assess whether physical activity levels, safety, or other factors have improved.
- Engineering - Transportation directors can work with public works departments to ensure that infrastructure supports walking in areas where students are walking to bus stops. Transportation directors can also work with city planning staff and local developers to ensure that there are consolidated school bus stop areas in new developments. By eliminating bus stops in front of individual homes, consolidated stops save money and time while providing physical activity for children and increasing safety. Development agreements can require new developments to ensure students have a safe way to get to school as part of the development plan.
- Education - Transportation directors can work with parent and community volunteers to accompany students walking to bus stops (the traditional Safe Routes to School walking school bus approach) and coordinate with the school to incorporate pedestrian safety into the curriculum.
- Encouragement - Transportation directors can work with community groups, parent volunteers, and the school administration to encourage safe walking to and from bus stops by organizing events and activities that promote walking and bicycling. Programs that generate enthusiasm will result in a higher degree of involvement from students, parents, staff, and the surrounding community.
- Enforcement - Transportation directors can incorporate crossing guards into neighborhoods with large numbers of bus-riding students. They can also partner with local law enforcement to ensure that students are safe while at bus stops and that traffic violations are discouraged in areas where students are walking to bus stops.

4: MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL MESSAGING

When working together, both groups should consistently focus on their shared goals. To increase the likelihood that school transportation directors will be open to working with Safe Routes to School organizations, it is advisable to address goals that focus on economics and safety rather than solely health. Conversations should emphasize the fact that Safe Routes to School is not taking anything away from schools, parents, or school transportation directors, but is instead a beneficial addition to the school network. Messages emphasizing the fact that safe access and transportation to school are essential to academic success can bring both parties together.

5: STANDARDIZED WALK ZONES (Minimum Busing Distances)

Establishing standardized minimum busing distances based on age/grade in national guidance and then adopting these guidelines in state law will generate better outcomes for walking and bicycling and increase efficiency for busing on the ground.

6: NO REIMBURSEMENTS FOR TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITHIN WALK ZONES

Each state funding formula is unique, and each has different pros and cons. By ensuring that formulas do not reimburse districts for busing students who live within an appropriate walk zone, transportation departments will not experience financial penalties for supporting Safe Routes to School practices.

7: STANDARDIZED HAZARD QUALIFICATIONS

Determinations regarding what qualifies as a hazard should take place at the state level instead of at the district level, and should include standards, assessments, processes focused on fixing hazards, and a comprehensive approach to the problem of unsafe school zones.

8: CURRICULUM

School transportation directors can encourage schools to have curricula that address transportation skills and safety, including how to safely bicycle, walk, ride the school bus, and use public transit. Many schools already have programs where children that walk or bicycle to school qualify for physical education credits. The Safe Routes to School and school bus transportation fields could collaborate on curricula.

9: ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ADVOCATES

In addition, state and regional active transportation advocates need to be more proactive in reaching out to school transportation directors. Because transportation directors often do not think of themselves as part of the active transportation world, they are frequently left out of conversations that could be beneficial to both parties, and may need to be invited in and shown the benefits that could come of collaboration.

10: FUTURE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The school transportation and Safe Routes to School fields should identify opportunities to work together in the near future. One example includes presenting together at major conferences focusing on health, transportation, physical activity, planning, and safety, including state, regional, and national Safe Routes to School conferences and National Association of Pupil Transportation's annual conference. By cross-pollinating the two sectors, they will reach more interested parties and broader audiences than if they presented separately.

11: MAPPING SOFTWARE

School transportation departments use mapping software to identify and analyze the shortest and most cost-effective school bus routes. Districts should use this software to identify best routes for students walking and bicycling as well.

12: DIRECTOR CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION

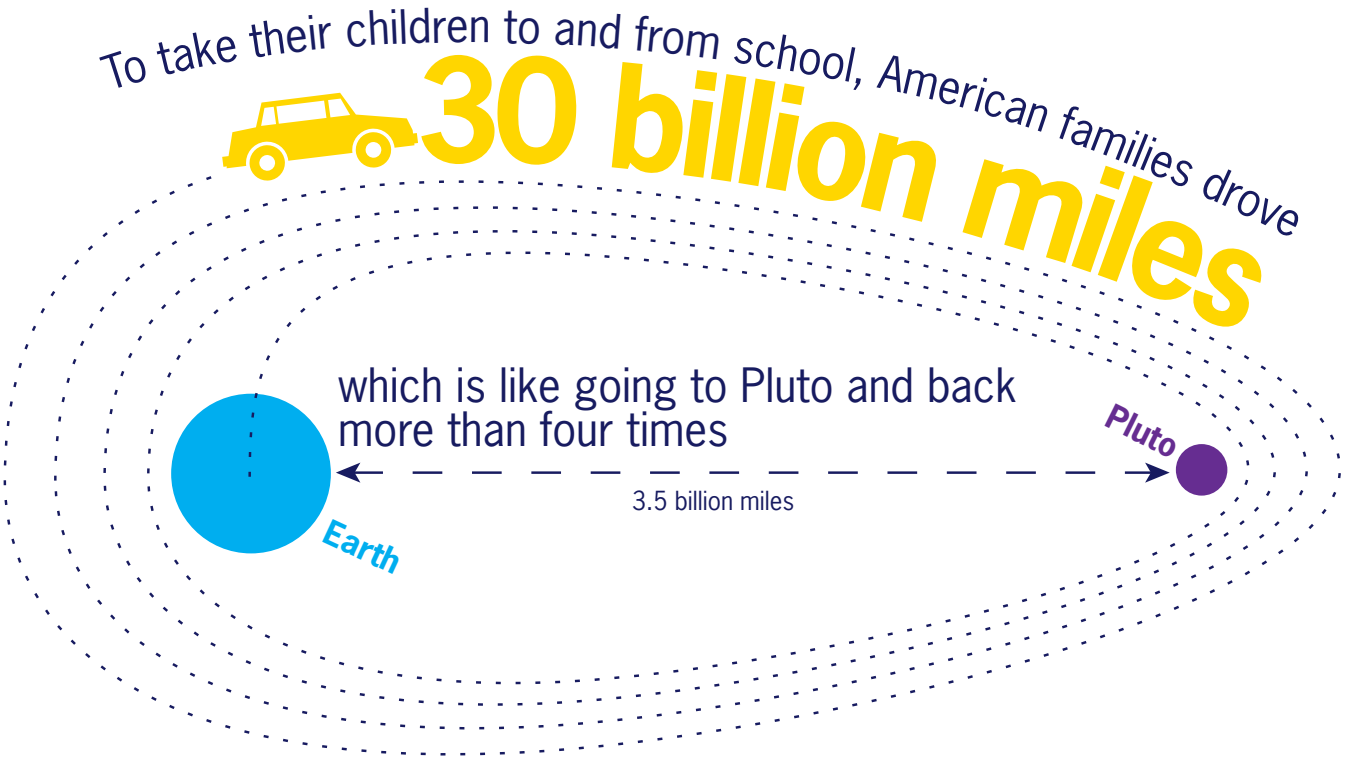
A concern with the shift from bus-focused transportation departments to a more comprehensive transportation role is the fact that many school transportation directors do not currently have the skillset to do true multimodal transportation planning, rather than simply traditional school bus planning. Training at the state level or through national organizations will provide directors with the skills to support multimodal student transportation. The National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT) oversees certification processes for transportation directors. Including Safe Routes to School in this certification process will increase the number of directors who understand the benefits of multimodal departments and know how to integrate active transportation into school transportation.

VII Conclusion

Today, there are many roadblocks that make it difficult for children to get to and from school safely and healthily – funding cuts for student transportation departments, hazardous road crossings, streets without sidewalks or bicycle lanes, and school vicinities choked with cars driven by rushed and harassed parents.

By working together, Safe Routes to School proponents and school bus professionals can clear these obstacles and create an alternative future where children's trips to school promote their health and academic success, with school buses, walking, and bicycling playing complementary roles. The integration of walking, bicycling, and busing is already occurring, as student transportation departments increasingly embrace a multimodal system of safe and healthy school transportation.

By continuing to explore partnership opportunities, carrying out the recommendations outlined in this report, and working together toward joint goals, the school bus industry and Safe Routes to School proponents will be more effective at creating a safer and healthier future for this generation of children and the next.



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