

I. INTRODUCTION

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Regional Action Plan (RAP) is intended as a resource for local governments, independent school districts (ISDs), and the public to support existing and future safe routes to school and school siting planning and implementation activities. The RAP was conceived as a response to the challenges faced by local governments and ISDs with providing safe and accessible schools to students in the face of rapid growth and a complicated jurisdictional landscape. This jurisdictional complexity requires early and intentional cooperation to effectively plan school siting and travel. Coordination is also vital for ISDs and cities to plan effectively and compete for limited SRTS and other funding opportunities.

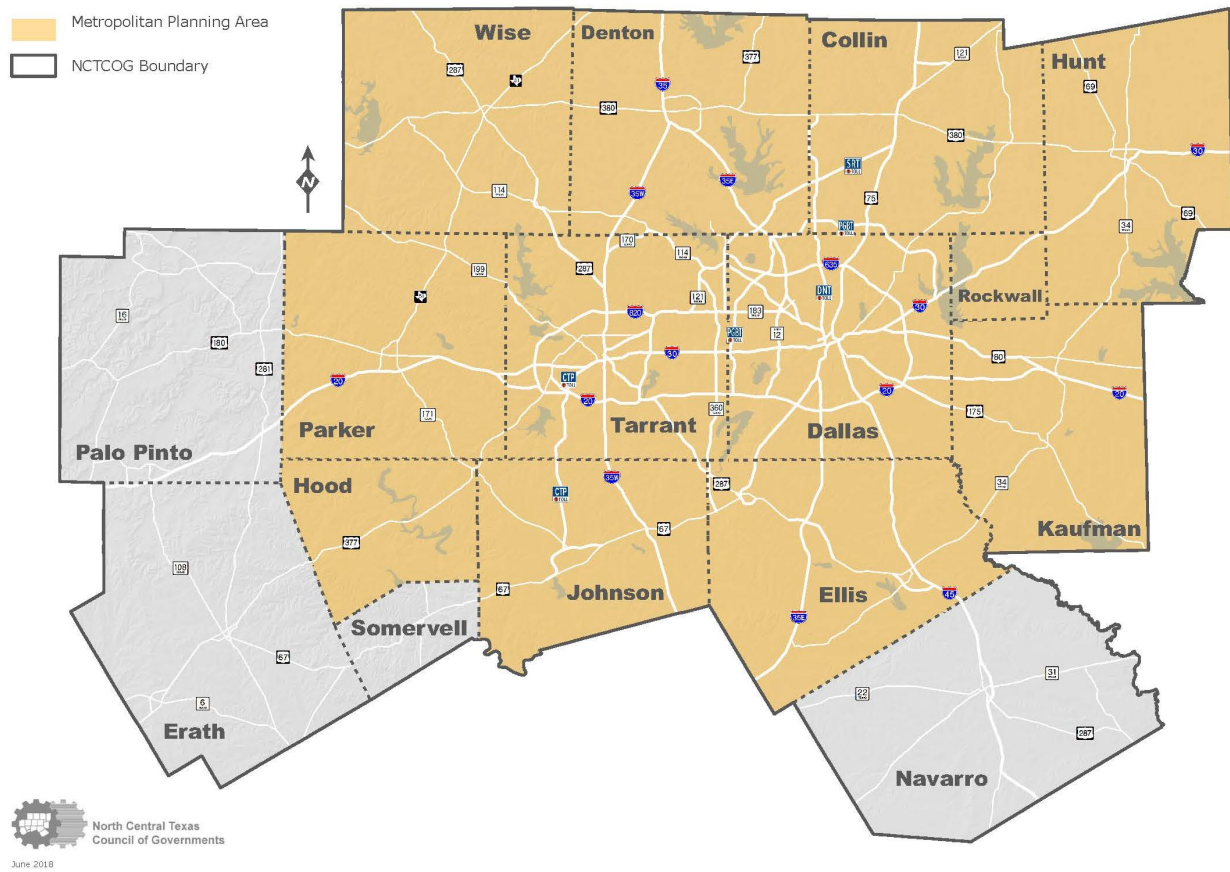
Rapid growth in the region has made the development of schools and their placement a crucial issue to achieve safe and accessible schools for students. The estimated population for the 12-county Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) has grown from 7.5 million in 2019 to 8.2 million in 2023. The MPA is forecasted to grow to 11.4 million residents by 2050 – an estimated 63.7 percent growth increase between 2019 and 2050. School planning will continue to take prime importance as the region’s school districts will need to absorb an estimated 500,000 additional students by 2045.¹

School-related planning in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) region, including school siting and SRTS, is very complex and involves many different entities and convoluted jurisdictional boundaries. The MPA includes 143 ISDs and 233 cities. Some cities in the MPA contain multiple ISDs, while some ISDs span multiple cities. This jurisdictional complexity requires early and intentional cooperation to effectively plan school siting and travel. Coordination is also required for ISDs and cities to plan effectively and compete for limited SRTS and other funding opportunities.

The SRTS RAP was developed by the Community Schools and Transportation Program, which is part of the Land Use and Mobility Options team at the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG). The Land Use and Mobility Options team is housed within NCTCOG’s Transportation Department. Since NCTCOG has jurisdictional authority over only the 12-county MPA (see Figure 1), the guidance provided in the SRTS RAP will be focused on this area. However, this report includes relevant information to jurisdictions both inside and outside the MPA.

¹ NCTCOG Draft 2050 Demographic Forecast

Figure 1: North Central Texas Council of Governments Region



Safe Routes to School and the “E’s”

SRTS programs encourage school children to walk or bike to school and strive to make these alternative modes of travel both safer and more appealing for pedestrians. SRTS programs achieve their goal through planning and implementation of infrastructure and activities that improve traffic safety, reduce traffic, and reduce air pollution in school areas. NCTCOG SRTS programs and activities are guided by the “E’s” of SRTS: Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engagement, Equity, and Evaluation (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Es of Safe Routes to School

SRTS “E”	Definition
Engineering	Design, construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure that improves the safety and comfort of students walking and bicycling to school. Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient.
Education	Educational programs, events, and/or curricula that teach students bicycle, pedestrian, and traffic safety skills, and teach drivers how to drive safely in school zones and share the road.
Encouragement	Special events, clubs, contests, and ongoing activities that encourage more walking, bicycling or carpooling through fun activities and incentives to generate excitement and participation.
Enforcement	Strategies to deter the unsafe behavior of drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians, and encourage all road users to obey traffic laws and share the road. Deterrents to unsafe behavior may include education on the unsafe behavior, developing a community-based enforcement program, increasing police presence, or installing warning signage and striping.
Engagement	Engaging community members, students, families, school staff, and others to create plans and activities that reflect community needs and desires.
Equity	Ensuring consideration of all who may be impacted by the SRTS plans or activities, including individuals of all ages, abilities, genders, ethnicities, and incomes.
Evaluation	Activities to understand the effectiveness of the SRTS activity, identify improvements that are needed, and ensure the activities can continue in the long term.

Historic SRTS Activities and Funding in the Dallas-Fort Worth Region

Early SRTS Efforts, Coordination, and Trends (2011-2014)

NCTCOG’s early efforts in SRTS began with facilitating city-ISD coordination on SRTS and school siting topics, including a workshop on Effective School Siting and Facilities

Planning in 2011 for the City of McKinney and a subsequent report in 2012 titled “[School Siting in North Central Texas: Strategies for Effective School Facilities Planning in McKinney, Texas.](https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/d7bd00fe-dab7-41f7-b5cf-938a36f179c5/McKinneySchoolSiting_2012.pdf)”²

In 2012, NCTCOG staff additionally facilitated a Joint Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Denton Independent School District and the City of Denton City Council. NCTCOG staff delivered a presentation on school siting and transportation coordination. This effort resulted in the City of Denton and Denton ISD working with NCTCOG to identify engineering projects near school sites to improve safety and access between neighborhoods and schools, assemble bicycle and pedestrian safety and outreach materials for students, map upcoming roadway construction projects within the ISD’s jurisdiction, and coordinate SRTS application materials. The City and Denton ISD subsequently submitted a request for funding to the RTC which resulted in sidewalks being constructed near two school sites.

In 2013, NCTCOG adopted a policy to promote coordination among municipalities and school districts located inside the MPA with a variety of initiatives (Figure 3).

Figure 3: RTC Policy Supporting School Districts

Active Transportation:

Advocate for:

- Safe Routes to School Program
- Precious Cargo Program
- Transportation Alternatives Program

Outreach & Engagement:

- Engage students to design the cover of Progress North Texas
- Advocate for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields



School Siting:

- Pilot school siting Programs
- School bus stop coordination
- Technical assistance for school districts

Air Quality:

- RTC Clean Fleet Vehicle Policy
- Clean school bus Programs
- Energy audit Programs
- Vehicle idling-reduction Programs
- Air quality-friendly contracting initiatives

² https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/d7bd00fe-dab7-41f7-b5cf-938a36f179c5/McKinneySchoolSiting_2012.pdf

Safe Routes to School Efforts 2014-2020

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Grant

NCTCOG received a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant in 2014 for \$300,000 to support SRTS and school siting programs with four goals: 1) encourage interagency cooperation; 2) address land use transportation problems and school siting; 3) plan for transportation safety in school locations, and; 4) plan for transportation options and safety. The tasks completed as part of this effort are discussed below. More information about each of these tasks and links to task deliverables can be found in Figure 4.



Task 1: Encourage Interagency Cooperation

NCTCOG formed a Regional School Coordination Task Force to promote collaboration between ISDs, local governments, and transportation agencies. The Task Force, which met in 2015 and 2016, covered topics including coordination of ISD facility planning, city comprehensive plans, and capital improvement programs. This enhanced coordination worked to encourage the removal of policy barriers to sustainable school siting. Information from these meetings, including presentations, can be found on the [NCTCOG School Siting web page](#).³

Task 2: Address Land Use Transportation Problems and School Siting

Staff developed a review of State legislation and policies surrounding school siting and land banking to create a framework for planning, establishing, and maintaining acquisition funds and/or land banking for schools. Recommendations for a greater level of coordination for future housing and school demand projections were also developed.



³ www.nctcog.org/saferoutestoschool

Task 3: Plan for Transportation Safety in School Locations

The transportation safety task consisted of a pilot SRTS planning program which developed SRTS plans for three schools – Ignacio Zaragoza Elementary School in Dallas, American Learning Academy/International Newcomer Academy in Fort Worth, and Delaney Elementary School/Arthur Intermediate School in Kennedale.

Task 4. Plan for Transportation Options and Safety

Staff investigated transportation connections between housing and schools in inner cities (with a focus on lower-income schools), suburban areas, and rural areas. Staff also completed an analysis of congestion, traffic flow, and safety around school areas, and researched school and public transportation busing partnerships to improve bus access to schools.

Figure 4: NCTCOG TIGER Grant Deliverables

Deliverable	Description	Website
Planning for Community-Oriented Schools: A Guide to School Siting in North Texas (2017)	Best practices for local governments to better align planning activities, build community-oriented schools, and achieve community goals.	https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/65dfee6f-d689-4955-a614-193b49b2bc3a/SchoolSitingGuide_NCTCOG_2017.pdf
Coordinating Demographic Projections (2016)	Review of best practices for coordinating school district, local government, and regional demographic projections.	https://www.nctcog.org/nctcg/media/Transportation/DocsMaps/Plan/Landuse/Memo_DemogProjections_2016.pdf
Review of State Legislation and Policies Related to School Siting Requirements (2016)	Review of state legislation and policies related to school siting and noteworthy policies from other states.	https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/c437e3c2-1e45-4c30-8080-0d2ff0300e68/Memo_ReviewStateLeg_2016.pdf
Land Banking Programs and Best Practices Research (2016)	Review of land banking programs for future school facilities, best practices, and case studies.	https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/aeb88ef5-7845-444e-94d8-4ad29fda4a3a/Memo_LandbankingPrograms_2016.pdf
Ignacio Zaragoza Elementary Safe Routes to School Plan (2017)	Safe Routes to School plan: including existing conditions, evaluation issues, recommendations, and next steps.	https://www.nctcog.org/nctcg/media/Transportation/DocsMaps/Plan/Bike/SRTS_Zgoza_Dallas.pdf
Applied Learning Academy and International Newcomer Academy Safe Routes to School Plan (2017)		https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/12659836-fdf3-42a4-82f8-82ee523c0710/SRTS_ALA_INA.pdf

Deliverable	Description	Website
Delaney Elementary School and Arthur Elementary School Safe Routes to School Plan (2018)		https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/24e8c4d0-b0d9-4087-abcb-92da9bbf8b51/SRTS_Del_Kdale.pdf
School District-Transit Coordination in the Dallas-Fort Worth Region (2020)	Information and tools to facilitate coordination and build partnerships between school districts and public transit agencies.	https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/701bbc0b-8915-4ada-9911-c6a419b1e46d/SchoolDistrict_PublicTransit_FINAL.pdf.aspx

Fort Worth Blue Zones Project Technical Assistance (2015-2016)

NCTCOG provided technical assistance to the City of Fort Worth and Fort Worth ISD in support of the Blue Zones Project Resolution that was adopted by Fort Worth ISD in 2014. Blue Zones is an initiative designed to help communities make healthy choices through changes to the built environment, policies, and social networks.⁴ The intent of Fort Worth's Blue Zones resolution was to support the City's efforts to create a healthy school population and reach 25 percent of schools achieving Blue Zone School status by 2017. NCTCOG participated in the Blue Zones SRTS Master Plan Work Group, providing technical assistance on data and mapping, and assisting with developing the pilot project.



Look Out Texans School Educational Materials (2015-Present)

NCTCOG created school kits and launched a school-focused safety effort as a part of Look Out Texans, an educational campaign aimed at increasing safety for all road users in North Texas. To create the school materials, NCTCOG recruited schoolteachers and



⁴ Texas Health Resources Blue Zones Project <https://info.bluezonesproject.com/live-long-fort-worth>

stakeholders to participate in a focus group to inform the creation of two separate school kits. One kit was created for children in third to fifth grades, and another for students in sixth to eighth grades. Both school kits include an introductory letter for school administrators to better understand the effort and the benefits to their students. The two kits contain varied age-appropriate materials including a Promise to Street Safety pledge, safety tips, quizzes, lesson plans, activities, and flashcards. Parent/caregiver communication materials provided in the school kits are offered in English and Spanish. For more information about Look Out Texans or to access the school kits, please visit the [Look Out Texans website](https://www.lookouttexans.org/).⁵

State Farm Good Neighbor Grant (2018-2020)

In 2018, NCTCOG received a State Farm Good Neighbor Grant to develop three SRTS plans for elementary or middle schools in low-income areas in North Texas. Plans were completed for Speer Elementary and Webb Elementary schools in Arlington, as well as a joint plan for Arturo Salazar Elementary, Leila P. Cowart Elementary, and L.V. Stockard Middle schools in Dallas. Completed plans are available on the [Safe Routes to School web page](https://www.nctcog.org/saferoutestoschool).⁶

Funding: Transportation Alternatives

Safe Routes to School programs in the DFW region are funded by several funding sources on local, State, and federal levels. One of the main sources of funds for SRTS available to NCTCOG is the federal Transportation Alternatives (TA) funds, which are distributed through a competitive call for projects. Eligible projects include on and off-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities and safety countermeasures.



TA calls for projects may also fund SRTS-specific projects, including bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and/or planning, which are anticipated to significantly improve safety and the ability of students to walk and bike to school. SRTS projects must be located in the MPA within two miles of a K-8 school, and within the school's attendance zone. SRTS TA project applications are scored on a variety of categories, including the potential to increase walking and biking; whether SRTS planning work has been completed; equity; and community support.

⁵ <https://www.lookouttexans.org/>

⁶ www.nctcog.org/saferoutestoschool

The TA program changed to its current form during 2012 with the passing of *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act* (MAP-21),⁷ which sub-allocated federal funding to each MPO from their state’s department of transportation. This suballocation allowed MPOs to create their own application processes and priorities in coordination with their state’s department of transportation. With the passing of MAP-21 in Fiscal Year 2013, NCTCOG limited the allowable application categories to bicycle- and pedestrian-focused projects and SRTS-focused projects, developed a guide and applications, and issued one of the first MPO-led call for projects in the country. A total of \$5.7 million was awarded for SRTS projects in the 2014 call.

Calls for projects now occur approximately every two to three years, depending on federal funding levels and allocations to MPOs. A breakdown of TA SRTS funding and projects funded by call year is summarized in Figure 5. A total of \$42.8 million for 47 SRTS projects has been programmed through NCTCOG’s TA SRTS funding. These improvements will provide better access to elementary and middle schools across the region.

Figure 5: NCTCOG Awarded TA SRTS Funding by Year

Year	Funding Amount in Millions	SRTS Project Total
2014	\$5.7M	13
2017	\$16.4M	22
2020	\$7M	6
2022	\$3.9M	3
2024	\$9.8M	3
TOTAL	\$42.8M	47

The most recent TA call for projects opened in late 2024, and the RTC approved the recommended funding awards in June 2025. For the first time, this call for projects included a category for funding SRTS planning projects, in addition to SRTS infrastructure projects.

Application Trends

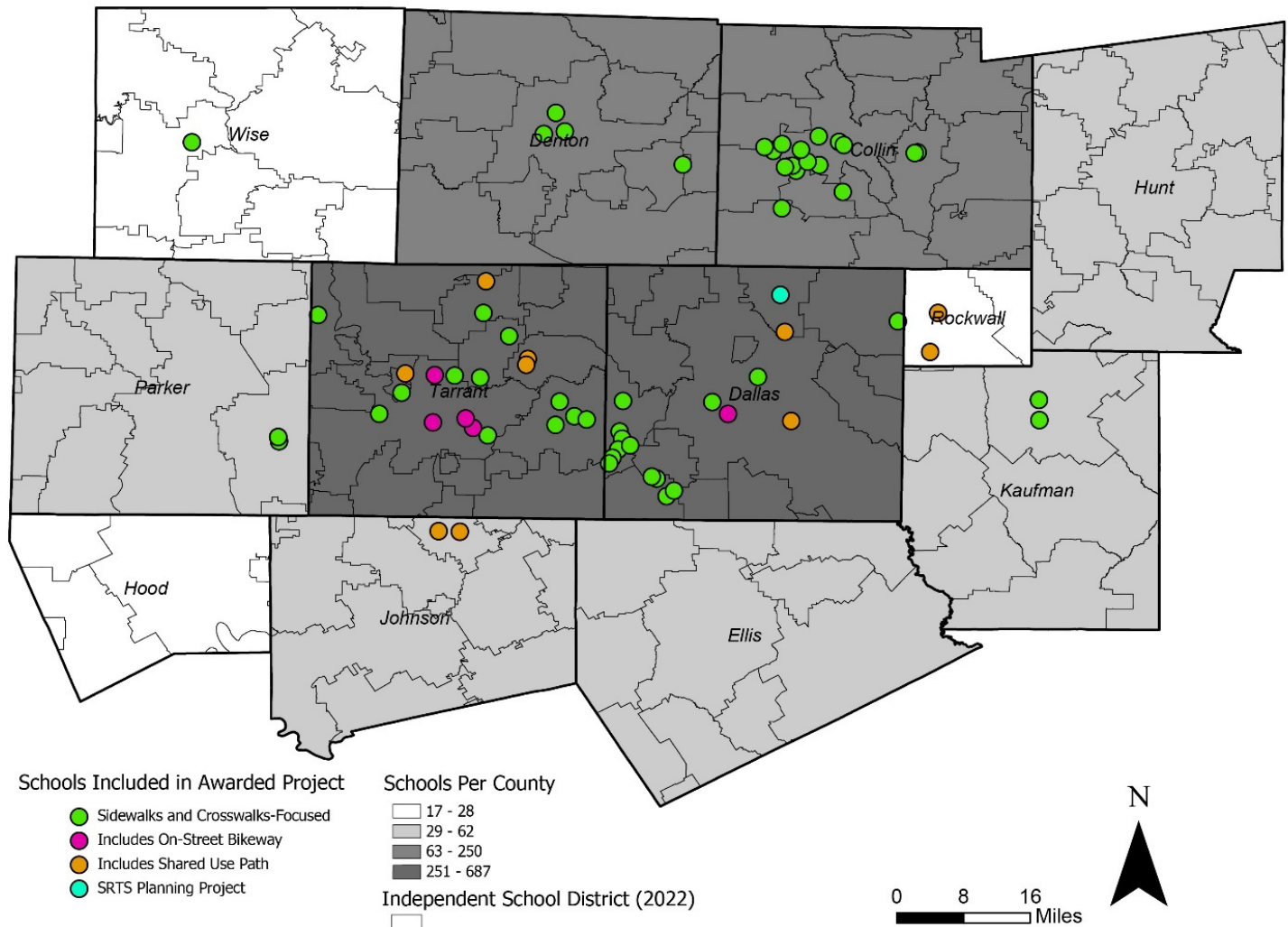
NCTCOG’s TA calls for projects have programmed \$42.8 million in funding for 47 SRTS projects in 21 cities and 23 ISDs in the MPA over five calls for projects since 2014. TA projects must be principally for transportation rather than purely recreational, have logical termini, and benefit the general public. Eligible projects for the SRTS category must be located within the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Denton-Lewisville, and/or McKinney

⁷ For more information on MAP-21, please visit <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/>.

Urbanized Area (see Figure 8, page II-2) and be within two miles of a K-8 grade school inside the school's attendance zone.

A breakout of projects awarded by type for all years in the region is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Awarded TA SRTS Projects by Type (2014-2025)



Submitting a Successful Application

Projects with previous planning work and/or coordination with other local plans score higher and are more likely to be funded.

Projects that scored well in the Safe Routes to School category demonstrated the following characteristics:

1. Proposed infrastructure improvements were identified as high priority in an existing SRTS plan or other local planning effort
2. Addressed a significant and documented problem
3. Likely to increase the number of students walking or bicycling to school
4. Likely to improve school access and safety for disadvantaged populations and underserved communities
5. Public engagement and community support
6. Other factors demonstrating project readiness

Municipalities and ISDs that are looking to benefit from TA funding should consider completing planning activities for their proposed projects prior to applying for TA funding. One method to do this is to create SRTS plans on a city level or to develop a prioritization process to identify schools in the greatest need of infrastructure improvements. Plans can also be developed to address the SRTS needs at specific schools known to have high need. TA applications with planning efforts that include existing conditions analyses and recommendations tend to score higher than applications submitted without any previous planning support. Creating a SRTS plan is a great opportunity for collaboration among local municipalities, ISDs, and staff at individual school campuses. Section III, Safe Routes to School Plans for Existing Schools, further explores creating SRTS plans for existing schools.