

## **VI. REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL**

Safe Routes to School and school siting sit at the intersection of many different entities and roles that must work together effectively to best serve their communities and schools. Rapid growth in previously rural areas offers a challenge to smaller cities and unincorporated areas to “get it right” the first time, as it is much more difficult to retrofit a design that is not compatible with safe pedestrian and bicyclist access once it has been built. As development comes in, it may be difficult to keep up with demand, especially in smaller cities with fewer staff. It is vital for municipalities and ISDs to work together to get ahead of growth when selecting future school sites. With population projections, demographic data, and city knowledge of planned development, ISDs can plan and build new schools that are safe and accessible for students in advance of large population booms.

The recommendations below and next steps were developed to better enable municipalities to advance Safe Routes to School and sustainable school siting in the region.

### **1. Joint Coordination Among Local Agencies**

Stakeholders in Safe Routes to School and school siting include regional planning organizations such as NCTCOG, local governments (counties, cities, towns, etc.), ISDs, schools, and other transportation organizations such as TxDOT and local public transportation agencies. These groups must coordinate and communicate to eliminate redundancies, keep each other informed on relevant projects and initiatives, and share data and plans. The data and information each entity may have, such as demographic projections, traffic counts, knowledge of new developments and more, is necessary for effective planning ahead of growth, particularly in fast-growing areas.

Collaboration efforts among different local cities and ISDs to increase walking and biking have occurred in the region. For example, the City of Frisco has established School Zone Safety initiatives in a partnership between the City of Frisco Transportation Engineering Division, Frisco Police Department, Frisco Fire Department, and the Frisco Independent School District. This interdisciplinary partnership celebrates Bike to School Day, Walk to School Day, and has prioritized traffic



safety improvements in school zones. The [Frisco School Zone Safety web page](https://www.friscotexas.gov/568/School-Zone-Safety)<sup>27</sup> also has many resources in their Pedestrian Safety Toolkit, including education materials and videos for students and their families to explore.

NCTCOG will also increase outreach and education efforts to cities and ISDs to effectively encourage and facilitate SRTS and school siting coordination throughout the region.

## **2. Technical Assistance**

NCTCOG's Land Use and Mobility Options program will provide the following activities and resources to assist ISDs and municipalities in their SRTS and school siting activities.

### **Data Collection and Evaluation**

NCTCOG staff have assisted with data collection and evaluation for local municipalities and ISDs to identify SRTS needs and analyze school travel behaviors. This data helps to evaluate progress in Safe Routes to School activities, prioritize infrastructure needs, and support SRTS investment.

NCTCOG staff will continue to monitor and evaluate data related to SRTS trends in the region to identify and explore additional SRTS needs.

### **Safe Routes to School Coordination**

Since early and continual coordination between multiple organizations is essential to successful school siting and SRTS efforts, NCTCOG can assist with identifying and gathering essential stakeholders as determined by a project's needs and facilitating project discussions. Example organizations that should be engaged in these coordination efforts include local governments, ISDs, developers, transit agencies, and any other context-specific relevant agencies and/or groups.



### **Crossing Guards Implementation and Management**

NCTCOG staff are initiating an effort to investigate issues associated with the implementation and management of school crossing guards in the region. An information gathering effort identified a need for best practices and tools to better facilitate crossing guard establishment. NCTCOG applied for and was awarded in 2024, \$5

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.friscotexas.gov/568/School-Zone-Safety>

million from the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grant program for the project Crossing Students Safely in the Dallas-Fort Worth region (CroSS-DFW). This project will explore crossing guard and school zone safety issues in the region, develop crossing guard and other safety recommendations, and develop a regional crossing guard implementation process that cities and ISDs may use to facilitate crossing guard decision making. Grant activities are anticipated to commence in late 2025.

### **Charter School and Traditional School Closures**

Charter school and traditional school closures have emerged in recent years as areas of concern for cities throughout DFW. NCTCOG has initiated activities to better understand the possible implications of these topics for both SRTS and school siting issues in the region, incorporate the results into current efforts, and develop a plan for next steps.

### **3. SRTS Planning Assistance**

SRTS planning is vital to identify problems and solutions, bring together collaborators, and prioritize projects and locations in need of improvement. In addition, funding opportunities often place emphasis on SRTS analysis or plans being in place. NCTCOG is available to assist local governments and ISDs to create these SRTS plans.



#### **Ongoing Assistance**

Staff can provide technical assistance to local governments and ISDs to analyze local roadway conditions to prioritize SRTS needs on an as-needed basis. NCTCOG can also help local governments and ISDs develop implementation tools and funding strategies to bring their SRTS efforts to fruition.

In addition, NCTCOG staff can assist cities and ISDs with prioritizing schools throughout their areas to identify schools most in need of SRTS assistance, similar to the analysis conducted in Regional Strategy for Safe Routes to School (page VI-1), but scaled locally.

### **Safe Streets and Roads for All SRTS Planning**

NCTCOG applied for and was awarded in 2023, \$5 million from the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All grant program for the project “Advancing Regional Safety in the Dallas-Fort Worth Region”. Grant activities include conducting roadway safety audits and developing SRTS plans at select schools within one-quarter mile of high-risk corridors

identified in the NCTCOG Pedestrian Safety Action Plan and Roadway Safety Plan. Grant activities began in 2024 and development of a SRTS plan is anticipated to begin in fall 2025.

### **Transportation Alternatives Program SRTS Planning**

As discussed in the Funding: Transportation Alternatives (TA) section on page I-10, the Transportation Alternatives program is a federally-funded, competitive call for projects that funds projects that include on- and off-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities and safety countermeasures, including SRTS projects. The most recent call for projects opened in 2024 and, for the first time, included a category for funding SRTS planning projects in addition to SRTS infrastructure projects. SRTS planning projects may also be eligible in future TA calls for projects. TA calls for projects occur approximately once every two to three years. For more information and updates, visit [www.nctcog.org/TAP](http://www.nctcog.org/TAP).

### **4. Education and Training**

NCTCOG provides training for local government and ISD staff addressing issues related to planning and designing for SRTS, project implementation, SRTS-supportive policies, and school siting. NCTCOG also has educational tools available for ISDs and local governments to engage and educate community members on SRTS topics, including school-specific Look Out Texans materials.



### **5. Encouragement Activities**

NCTCOG will continue to encourage participation in Bike & Roll to School Day and Walk & Roll to School Day as well as other encouragement activities and events.

To enhance NCTCOG's promotion of encouragement activities and provide further education, NCTCOG will develop an outreach campaign to local schools and ISDs in targeted areas with the goal of building awareness of the issues and resources available and to build cross-collaboration for future efforts. A goal of this effort will be to raise awareness of NCTCOG's work and increase participation in encouragement efforts.

### **6. Outreach and Promotion**

NCTCOG will continue to reach out to ISDs and local governments to provide SRTS-related presentations to school boards, Parent/Teacher Organizations, and other related

organizations on SRTS topics. These presentations and engagement opportunities are available upon request.

NCTCOG will also continue to promote existing and upcoming SRTS resources and tools available to ISDs and local governments throughout the region to facilitate SRTS activities.

As discussed previously, NCTCOG will develop an outreach campaign to local schools and ISDs in targeted areas with the goal of building awareness of the issues and resources available and to build cross-collaboration for future efforts.