Case Study

Walkable Washington

The Walkable Washington program grew out of the Feet First Cities Program. It showcases exceptional pedestrian-oriented improvements, community groups and outreach programs; maintains a statewide network for key contacts and stakeholders including an annual symposium; and provides assistance with Safe Routes to School, walking audits and other educational activities and programs.

Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a growing movement to encourage and support active commuting by school children and families. At the intersection of public health, public safety, education, and transportation, SRTS helps communities make it safer, easier, and more common for children to walk or bike to school. Safe Routes to School solutions are multi-faceted and can be categorized into the “5 E’s”: Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, and Evaluation.

Hawthorne Elementary School Safe Routes to School Program
Seattle, WA

Description and purpose

Hawthorne Elementary is located in an economic and ethnically diverse Southeast Seattle neighborhood. The school currently serves 321 K-5 students, with seventy-six percent eligible for free or reduced lunch.

One of the goals of Safe Routes to School program at Hawthorne was to improve pedestrian safety and to increase the amount of students who walked to school. This program began at Hawthorne shortly after the Seattle Public Schools shifted the school assignment policy to favor neighborhood schools. The policy change resulted in having fewer students bused to Hawthorne, and more students potentially arriving on foot or by car. At the start of the project, only five percent of students walked to school. Parents identified the steep hill as a powerful disincentive to walking. SRTS program planners approached the hill as an asset by challenging students to “Hike and Bike Hawthorne Hill.”
Beyond the physical challenge, families also voiced concerns about traffic speeds on nearby arterials, and visibility issues caused by the steep hill. SRTS planners knew early on that traffic safety education would be central to this project.

Costs and funding
Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) improved crosswalks and sidewalks and installed wheel stops and curb burbs to provide a safer street environment for Hawthorne’s families. The low-cost wheel stops effectively increased visibility at Hawthorne and made the area more walkable for people arriving from the west. The construction cost of the Hawthorne Elementary SRTS project was $132,000.

Implementation time-frame
In 2010, neighbors pushed to secure funding to begin a Safe Routes to School program at Hawthorne. The Seattle Department of Transportation applied for a grant from the Washington State Department of Transportation, which was awarded in 2011. The project was completed in 2014.

Community involvement
One of the primary concerns in the Hawthorne community is road safety. Fast speeds on South Genesee Street and along 38th Avenue South, visibility issues caused by the steep road grade, and chaotic arrival and departure procedures were all significant barriers to walking.

Based on an initial observation of the arrival and departure procedures in April 2012, Feet First created a communications plan for parent and guardian education, working with the school safety committee and engineers. Parent-led “Walking School Buses” were organized on Fridays for the “Hike and Bike the Hill” encouragement campaign. Hawthorne also hosted a “Park & Walk” campaign to encourage families who drove to park away from school and walk the remaining distance. To further pique students’ interest in walk-to-school activities, Feet First distributed punch card key chains and “Toe Tokens” as an incentive for students to walk to school on Friday mornings.

In order to address pedestrian safety concerns immediately, Feet First worked with school families to build and install Pedestrian Safety Flag Buckets at three locations: Cascadia Avenue South and South Genesee Street, 38th Avenue South and South Dakota Street, and 38th Avenue South and South Genesee Street. The pedestrian safety flags were decorated by Hawthorne students at the Community Day School on campus. Three school families agreed to adopt responsibility for maintenance, and hosted a safety party to prepare the intersections and practice safety skills with their children.

The school also strengthened its bicycle safety education by providing PE curriculum with Cascade Bicycle Club’s “Group Health Basics of Bicycling” and “Artistic Cycling” programs.

1. Pedestrian safety flags are used to increase visibility when crossing the road. Installing buckets at legal intersections is an opportunity for safety training and community engagement.

Motor-powered vs. Foot-powered Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Travel Tally Report</th>
<th>Pre- and Post-program Travel Mode to School Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driven to School</td>
<td>Walk/Bike to School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.6% Baseline (April 2010)</td>
<td>81% Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81% Morning (June 2014)</td>
<td>77% Afternoon (June 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% Morning</td>
<td>18% Afternoon (June 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Motor-powered travel includes school bus and family vehicle.
Benefits and results
Over the course of the SRTS grant, Hawthorne Elementary saw a measurable increase in active school commuting. The number of students walking and biking to or from school increased from five percent to sixteen percent. The number of students driven to school by bus or car was reduced by approximately fifteen percent.

Project Contacts
Brian Dougherty
SRTS Coordinator, Seattle Department of Transportation
brian.dougherty@seattle.gov
206.684.5124

Ashley Harris
Associate Transportation Planner,
Seattle Department of Transportation
ashley.harris@seattle.gov
206.652.2310

Jen Cole
Safe Routes to School Program Director, Feet First
jen@feetfirst.org
206.652.2310

Resources
SRTS Walking Audits, Hawthorne Elementary, Feet First
Seattle Public School, Hawthorne Elementary

Date: September 12, 2014