

powered by feet first



feet first policy

taking a stance to advance walkability

Contact us for information about
Feet First policies

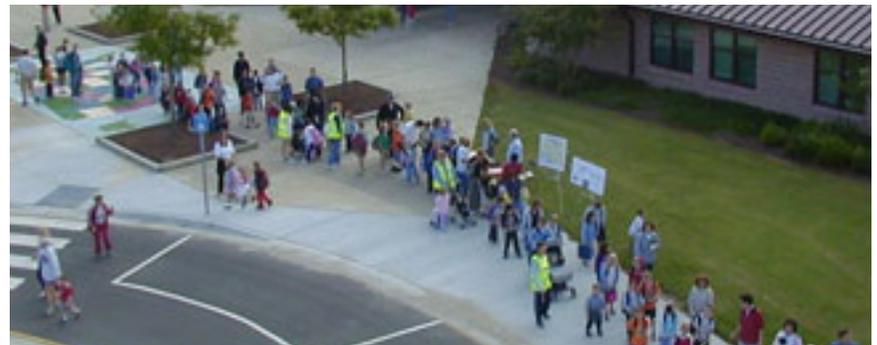
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School Transportation

Policy

where we stand

Advocacy is a major component of the work Feet First does. These policy papers, prepared by our Policy Committee, convey Feet First's position on key issues of interest to increase safe and easy ways for people to choose to go by foot.



background

Many school districts around the country are choosing to restructure school bus ("yellow bus") policies, often significantly reducing service from previous levels. Rising diesel prices are a key contributor to this, and significant annual cost savings (\$37,000 per bus) are tempting for school districts dealing with funding shortfalls. This savings amount, incidentally, is roughly equivalent to the cost of a new classroom teacher for one year. Reductions in bus service typically eliminate the shortest bus rides by expanding walk boundaries; theoretically this could lead to an increase in children walking to school..

Mission

who we are - what we do

Feet First promotes walkable communities and envisions people walking every day for their health, transportation, environment, community, and pleasure.

why it matters to walking

Since 2004, Feet First has worked on Safe Routes to School projects, starting in Seattle and expanding to the regional and state level. We have done this work because of the environmental, health, and neighborhood benefits that result when more children walk to school. It is estimated that 10-14 percent of morning traffic congestion is attributable to students being driven to school. Our work also supports studies that



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show children who walk to school are more ready to learn. Teaching children the value of walking as transportation has lifelong benefits such as improved mental health and mood, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, and controlled weight.

The current situation at the national level is grim. The Centers for Disease Control indicate childhood obesity has more than tripled in the last 40 years. From 1969 to 2007, the number of children walking or bicycling to school decreased from 48 percent to 13 percent. Cutting bus routes could potentially help to increase walking and biking, but it is equally likely that parents will replace the bus ride with a drive instead. As the Safe Routes to School National partnership notes, "cutting bus routes without a simultaneous and planned effort to address student safety concerns will likely lead to greater traffic congestion, poorer air quality, and higher parent transportation costs due to a sharp increase in parents driving children to school."

feet first position

When a school district has scarce resources and must choose between yellow bus service or educational resources, Feet First asserts that school districts must collaborate with parents and city officials to make it safer for children to walk and bicycle, and to educate and encourage families to walk instead of drive. Feet First has a key role in helping school districts make sure that solid, effective, safe routes policies are in place before cutting school bus service.

Feet First is aware of many concerns related to kids walking to school including fear of crime, lack of sidewalks and safe paths to schools, and parental challenges getting kids to school and themselves to work without using a car.

Feet First advocacy has centered on walking audits of school zones, focusing engineering work on safe routes to school, working with school administrations to improve safety in school zones, and coordinating walking school bus projects which encourage groups of children walking to school with one or more adults.

Feet First has had great success with programs related to Safe Routes to School. In 2013, the Washington State Legislature enacted a proposal for 20-MPH speed limits near schools without professional engineering studies. However, we need more focus on local and state policies like Complete Streets, and a state-level commitment to stable funding for safe routes to school projects. We also need statewide funding for crossing guard programs, policies connecting school siting with residential density and pedestrian access, and encouragement for non-motorized and/or pedestrian plans in cities around the state.

For more information regarding the Safe Routes to School program, please contact:

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resources

The benefits of physical activity. Centers for Disease Control:

<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/>

Physical activity in early childhood: setting the stage for lifelong healthy habits:

http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca/documents/parenting_2011-04.pdf

The walking school bus. Combining safety, fun, and the walk to school. Safe routes to school guide:

http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/

Cover photo courtesy of :

The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun and the Walk to School

National Center for Safe Routes to School



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