



Esko Safe Routes to School *Scope of Work*



Background & Purpose

The purpose of the Esko Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan is to identify barriers and unsafe conditions for children walking and biking to school in Esko. The SRTS program is designed to work with school staff, students, and parents to evaluate the school's surrounding, educate on the SRTS concept, enforce safety-related policies, and encourage participation. These key areas of evaluation, education, enforcement and encouragement help create a community where students can travel to school on their own and parents and school staff feel comfortable about their safety.

Evaluation provides the core element of the SRTS program by evaluating existing conditions around the schools in Esko, and determining design elements necessary to remedy the problems the evaluation uncovers. The education component includes identifying safe routes, teaching students to look both ways at intersections, and how to handle potentially dangerous situations. Enforcement includes policies that address pedestrian safety issues such as speeding or illegal turning. Encouragement is the final element of the SRTS program. It combines the results of the other areas to improve knowledge, facilities and enforcement to encourage more students to walk or ride safely to school.

In the 1960s, more than sixty-five percent of children walked or rode their bikes to school. Today, that figure is closer to ten percent. The impacts of this change are quite dramatic:

- Almost half of young people are not vigorously active on a regular basis; one in eight is overweight or obese.
- More than ten percent of all trips are "escort" trips, children being driven around by adults; this rises to almost one-third of trips in the morning rush hours.
- Children today have much less independence, freedom to move around, and opportunities to "discover" their world than any previous generation.
- Motor vehicles are the leading cause of death for children 4-14 years old (2,197 fatalities and 267,000 injuries in 2001).
- Children in the US spend an average of more than one hour in a car every day and between three and four hours a day watching television.



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Enabling and encouraging children to walk and bicycle to school clearly has many benefits. These benefits include improving their safety, providing them with fresh air and exercise, reducing traffic around schools, reducing fuel consumption and pollution, increasing community involvement, and encouraging healthy, active lifestyles at an early age.

Safe Routes to School programs generally include:

- ❑ Sidewalk improvements
- ❑ Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements
- ❑ On-street facilities
- ❑ Traffic diversion improvements
- ❑ Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- ❑ Traffic calming measures for off-system roads

School administrators in Northeast Minnesota currently have neither the resources nor the concise reference for preparing walk route plans for their students. The process used to develop walk routes varies from district to district and school to school. Walk routes are usually developed by the transportation supervisor and/or some combination of the school principal, school bus drivers and sometimes a few parents. In some districts, there are no identified walk routes because the district has decided to provide bus transportation for all students.

Participants

ARDC will work with a group of local officials to complete the Esko Safe Routes to School plan. Input from the following people and agencies will be valuable.

- Thompson Township residents/students
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Carlton County
- Esko Public Schools
- Police Department



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Planning Process

The steps for the Esko Safe Routes to School planning process are as follows:

Step 1:

ARDC would inventory existing walking and bicycling conditions within a two-mile radius of Winterquist Elementary and Lincoln Schools through a field inventory. The inventory would include the following:

- ❑ Sidewalk location/condition
- ❑ Marked crosswalks
- ❑ School and pedestrian signage
- ❑ On-site circulation at school
- ❑ Bicycle racks
- ❑ Location of signalized and stop controlled intersections
- ❑ Location and timing of pedestrian actuated signals
- ❑ Roadway characteristics including lane striping, curb returns, pavement widths, shoulder width
- ❑ Existing traffic calming elements
- ❑ General observations regarding driver and pedestrian behavior

Step 2:

Step two will rely on input from students and parents. In each of the schools Geography classes an ARDC staff person would ask the students to create a map of their route to school and indicate how they travel to school. ARDC would provide a local area map for this activity.

Ask students to trace their route to school.

- ❑ Ask the class to share some of the reasons they can't walk or ride to school and brainstorm possible solutions.
- ❑ Discuss some of the problems they experience along the way-speeding cars, no sidewalks, dangerous spots, etc.
- ❑ Area maps and questionnaires will also be sent home and filled out by parents.

Step 3:

Step three will design walking and cycling routes in the community. These routes will be chosen by applying the following:

- ❑ Routes that cross the fewest number of streets to reduce vehicle pedestrian exposure;
- ❑ Walk on sidewalks or paths where available;



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- ❑ Walk the shortest possible distance on streets without sidewalks or wide shoulders;
- ❑ Walk on the left side of the road facing traffic on streets where practicable;
- ❑ Avoid high speed, high volume roads and roads with high truck volumes;
- ❑ Make maximum use of protective techniques, (crossing guards, school patrols, traffic control devices); and
- ❑ Use easements with walkways through parks or other available areas where student safety is maximized.

Step 4:

Step four includes writing the plan and creating maps. The plan will include recommendations for addressing safety issues within the community. The final plan will also include possible funding sources for implementation of the recommendations.

Public Participation

The planning process will offer an opportunity for citizens to provide input by holding a comment period during *Step 2*. During this phase the public can e-mail or call project staff with their comments. ARDC will also maintain an up-to-date web page at www.arrowheadplanning.org that will monitor project progress and contain contact information. ARDC will make available a draft comment at the end of the planning.

Timeline

The planning process is designed to be completed within six months. The beginning date is estimated April 1, 2008.

Plan Budget and Funding Sources

The cost of this planning process is \$12,000. ARDC will submit a Safe Routes to School grant application to cover 100% of the cost associated with this plan. The grant application will be submitted in the Fall of 2007 if this scope of work is acceptable to the Esko School District.