

BY JULIE DEMAURO/CITY OF REVERE SRTS

Getting back to basics: the Revere walk to school program

On a gray morning in May 2011, 175 students from the A.C. Whelan Elementary School in Revere did something they had never done before: with their parents they walked to school and liked it. Walking to school is new to these families. Of 776 students enrolled at the school only 9% of the students walk to school daily, even though the majority of the students live less than a half-mile away. The program that spurred this movement is called A.C. Whelan's Walking Wednesdays. As the program has grown, walking to school has increased 51% and the early morning traffic congestion around the school has decreased by 17%. An added benefit, mostly anecdotal, is that the kids have become

more independent. They are making the effort to get ready for school earlier to allow for the extra time it will take them to walk. The program has received recognition from the National Center for Safe Routes to School. www.saferoutesinfo.org/about-us/newsroom/our-newsletter/article/spotlight-ac-whelan-elementary

This initiative is an example of the kind of work I have been doing as the City of Revere Safe Routes to School Coordinator. In April 2012, with the support of WalkBoston, the Barr Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital, I was hired to work with the six elementary schools in the City of Revere to develop walking programs based on the schools' current walking behaviors. [continued]

BY WENDY LANDMAN/WALKBOSTON & TIM REARDON/METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

New framework targets schools with walking potential



SRTS students and parents en route to Boston's Hurley School

Many of us remember a time when walking and bicycling to school was a part of everyday life. In 1969, about half of all students walked or bicycled to school. Today the story is very different. Fewer than 15% of all school trips are made by walking or bicycling, one-quarter are made on a school bus, and over half of all children arrive at school in private automobiles.

The response to this has been thousands of schools across the country creating initiatives that encourage students and their parents to choose walking and biking for commutes to and from school. Commonly falling under the rubric of Safe Routes to School [SRTS], these programs generally seek to achieve a variety of objectives: health benefits for students, air quality improvements, and reduced congestion. Because research suggests that auto school commutes account for 10% to 14% of all vehicles on the road during morning peak periods, another potential benefit of SRTS is to reduce auto vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions [GHGs].

In order to get the greatest benefit from the SRTS programs designed to shift kids from cars to feet, it is important to have the information needed to identify those places right here in Massachusetts where investments in walk-to-school programs might yield the greatest reduction in auto commutes. WalkBoston and MAPC [Metropolitan Area Planning Council] developed a new framework for analysis that has been tested and is now ready to use by Metro Boston Communities.

Previous walk-to-school research has demonstrated that travel distance has the single greatest effect on student travel mode. Travel distance is a function of two variables: the geographic distribution of students and schools, and the availability of safe pedestrian infrastructure connecting the two. In other words, only students with a reasonably short and safe route to school have commutes that may be amenable to SRTS interventions. These are clear and definitive findings,

but few SRTS studies use detailed mapping to estimate the potential impact of walk-to-school programs. Parent surveys commonly ask parents to report a nearby intersection and to estimate the distance to school, yet the location information is rarely geo-coded [mapped in a manner that can be interpreted]; self-reported distances are notoriously unreliable; and the responses are rarely correlated with sidewalk availability data. A new analytic approach that overcomes these deficiencies can help pinpoint the "target audience" for walk to school programs: those students who could walk or bike to school but who are currently being driven.

Funded by the Barr Foundation, WalkBoston and MAPC developed tools to answer the following questions: How many students in the region live within a safe walking distance of their school? How many students within walking distance of a given school are currently being driven? What would be the GHG impacts of shifting these auto commutes to walking or biking? To answer these questions, WalkBoston and MAPC conducted the following analyses:

- applied a new method of spatial analysis to over 800 schools in Eastern Massachusetts and defined "walksheds" [the areas that can be conveniently reached on foot] of various distances based on mapped sidewalk infrastructure;
- evaluated land use and demographics to assess the rough number of students living within each school walkshed;
- surveyed over 4,500 students in 23 schools to better understand existing travel patterns;
- identified six schools with the greatest potential for shifting trips from autos to walking; and
- developed new methods and tools for replicating this analysis across Massachusetts and the U.S.

The new methods and tools can be used to prioritize, tailor, and measure the effectiveness of SRTS investments. Our analysis also provides new insights into vehicle availability, spatial factors, and "trip chaining" [combining multiple errands into one trip], all considerations that influence student travel patterns.

The tools and analysis developed from this research will be available to all partners who work with WalkBoston and MAPC on SRTS programs. The online survey tool that was developed in seven languages can be seen at www.myschoolcommute.org.

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Walk The Walk - it pays off

Mon, Sept. 27th @ 6pm

American Meteorological Society Corporate Members Event

Learn how dollar for dollar, the returns of a walkable neighborhood are impressive.

WalktoberFest

Thurs, Oct. 6th, 3-6 pm

Meet: TBA

Grab a stein and join us for our 2nd annual toast to centuries of walking and brewing in Massachusetts.

Rails-to-Trails

November TBA

Railroad tracks are being transformed into trails for exercise & recreation or nature & public art. Hear firsthand how it is done.

facts on kids

1) WalkBoston has worked with more than 7,000 students at 67 schools in 40 communities across the Commonwealth.

2) 87% of children live within one mile of school yet today fewer than 15% of children walk or bike to school.

3) Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled; nearly 40% of children are overweight or obese.

4) Children who walk to school are more likely to get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity a day.

2nd grade safety education

For the last five years, WalkBoston has been teaming up with MassRides to provide pedestrian safety education for Massachusetts second graders.

WalkBoston has provided 95 pedestrian safety education sessions to over 7,000 second-grade students at 63 different schools in 39 cities and towns across the Commonwealth. Recent safety trainings have taken place in Arlington, Canton, Framingham, Leominster, Needham, Northborough, Peabody and Worcester.

The safety education program is an on-the-street training with adults and children. WalkBoston trains volunteers to ask the students: What rules do they already know? Do they walk to school? Where do they walk? Who do they walk with? By the time they reach second grade, most children have already become familiar with some of the basic rules of the road, such as “look both ways before you cross the street.”

The safety program goes further. WalkBoston teaches students to look all ways because of complicated intersections and turning traffic. The training also includes safe walking in parking lots.

One mnemonic device has become a staple “It’s a sideWALK or a crossWALK, not a sideRUN or a crossRUN.”

thank you!

RACEWALKER

Massachusetts Convention
Center Authority
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Medical Center
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HNTB

Massachusetts General
Hospital
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New Balance
NStar
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TEC Engineering
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Tufts Medical Center
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AMBLERS

A Better City
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Toole Design Group
Zipcar

[continued] back to basics

This has involved observing morning drop-off procedures at each of the schools and speaking with parents to learn what factors influence how their children get to and from school.

Full support from the superintendent’s office, school principals, parent groups and the Revere Police Department has been critical. For example, one school in the district has a large population of students who could walk but are driven. The school’s Parent Teacher Association worked with me to identify the reasons that deter students from walking. We held a “walk audit” with the police chief, the school principal and parents to look at the current drop-off system and identify key factors. The result of this collaboration is a redesign of the drop-off plan.

School principals have been very enthusiastic about identifying walking routes for their students, and providing pedestrian safety training. Starting in September 2012, all of the schools will have information to send home to parents about the walking program and why walking is beneficial for student health. Two goals I hope to achieve this fall are to create more walking trains among neighborhood families that will allow students to walk to school as part of adult-supervised walking groups, and to have all of the schools registered for and active participants in International Walk to School Day on October 3rd, 2012.

8.12 SRTS

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

mission

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