



WalkBoston

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Testimony to the Joint Committee on Transportation in support of H 3539 An Act to Establish a Safe Routes to Schools Program

Good morning, my name is Wendy Landman and I am the Executive Director of WalkBoston, a pedestrian advocacy organization that promotes walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. We are very pleased to come to you today in the company of many advocates for Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS), and hope that our collective testimony will help to build your support for H3539.

Massachusetts' children and communities deserve safe walking and biking routes to school. Such programs provide benefits for health, safety, transportation, education, community livability, and the environment. Across the country, states are undertaking the programs and capital projects required to increase the number of children walking and biking to school. Excellent results are being achieved in communities ranging from Arlington, MA to Marin County, CA.

In the 1960s, more than 60% of American children walked or biked to school. Today, the figure is approximately 10%. This change has profound impacts:

- There are more than three times as many overweight children today as there were 25 years ago.¹
- As much as 20% or more of morning rush hour traffic is school related.²
- Children in the U.S. average more than an hour a day as passengers in cars and have lost the opportunity to discover their communities and build a sense of independence and responsibility.

The basic goals of SRTS programs are to:

- Increase the number of Massachusetts' children walking and bicycling to school, and walking or bicycling for other trips that they make;
- Make the journey to and from school safer; and
- Reduce traffic congestion associated with the journey to school

Important corollary benefits include:

- Increasing children's physical activity (and thus reducing the incidence of chronic disease over the long term);
- Improving children's sense of independence and mastery of their environment;
- Enhancing the sense of community for Massachusetts cities and towns;
- Reducing expenditures for busing; and
- Reducing auto emissions.

Effective Safe Routes to Schools programs include both infrastructure improvements and education and promotional programs.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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- Capital funds are needed to fix hazards and disconnections, and pay for improved bike and pedestrian facilities such as crosswalks, bike lanes, off-road trails, sidewalks, and traffic calming around schools; and
- Program funds are needed to pay for activities such as biking and walking safety education, organizing “walking school buses”, training for enforcement personnel, and public information campaigns for students and parents

Under the current Massachusetts Safe Routes to Schools program that is funded through earmarked federal SRTS dollars, a budget of approximately \$1.4 million per year is available statewide. With the funding that would become available under H3539, the legislation that you are considering, Massachusetts could launch a more comprehensive program to encourage walking and biking to school.

We believe that a budget of approximately \$5 million per year would provide the level of investment needed to create substantial benefits for Massachusetts’ children and communities. This money would come from the Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (23 U.S.C. Section 148), and represents approximately 30% of the Massachusetts highway safety allocation. By way of background, from 1998-2002 **none** of Massachusetts’ federal safety set-aside dollars were spent on bicycle or pedestrian safety³. This, notwithstanding the fact that more than 16% of Massachusetts traffic fatalities were pedestrians or bicyclists.⁴

We are pleased to come before you today to support H3539 and ask you to help get our children walking and biking to school. An investment in Safe Routes to School is a good investment in our children and in our communities, and at the same time is an effective and cost-efficient way to reduce traffic congestion.

We hope that you will support H3539 and help our children and communities become healthier and safer.

³ Fiscal Management Information System, analysis by the Surface Transportation Policy Project.

⁴ Fatality Analysis Reporting System, <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/>; analysis by the Surface Transportation Policy Project.