

# SRTS CASE STUDY: Auburn, Washington

## Collaboration Creates Success

**SafeRoutes**  
National Center for Safe Routes to School



CASE STUDY

In 1995, the Auburn School District linked concerns about the high cost of transportation and increased childhood obesity to create cooperation that has led to 20 percent of its district's students walking to school.

“The key to our program is the partnership,” said Jim Denton, Director of Transportation for the Auburn School District in Auburn, WA, for 12 years.

The District has 14,500 students in 22 schools. There are three towns, Auburn, Algona and Pacific, and four county schools. Many people in the community had indicated that they would walk, but they wanted safe routes.

“We are just blessed to have a community that's so supportive and is committed to making the program work,” Denton said.

In 1995, a citizens ad hoc committee made recommendations to the school board to curb the rising costs of transportation.

Early discussions began to link the goals of addressing transportation planning and childhood inactivity, Denton said. Participants included the school district and community residents, as well as professionals in cities and municipalities who all wanted to increase the rate of walking and bicycling to school. These planning participants spent several years working together to develop a district-wide plan of safe pedestrian routes.

Together, committee members sought ways to develop safe routes, but they had no money for sidewalks. A state-funded pilot project through Washington DOT awarded \$121,770 to the City of Auburn and the Auburn School District to build sidewalks and bike lanes. They added curbs and built four-way stops at crosswalks. They constructed walking paths and provided signage to clearly mark the pedestrian-friendly routes. The school district hired a bicycle safety officer who monitors children on routes in the morning and after school. Parent volunteers walk with children as young as kindergarteners, who are walking up to a mile, Denton said, and “that takes a little bit of effort.”

In 2007, the Auburn School District received an \$185,000

Federal SRTS infrastructure grant for Olympic Middle School to remedy concerns along a heavily traveled road where children walk. The project, which is nearing completion, includes a shared use path, crosswalks, signs, safety education, media outreach, encouragement events and increased patrols.

Each of the grants included an educational component, Denton said. For example, elementary schools conduct walking field trips to teach pedestrian safety, such as how to cross safely and where to cross. Schools hold bicycle rodeos, and children who complete the training receive a free helmet from Washington Traffic Safety Commission.

Auburn School District Transportation Department's “Partnership Approach to Safe Routes to School” program was declared a Top 50 Program in the 2008 Innovations in America Government Awards competition, administered by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School.



Pedestrian Crossing at Washington Elementary School

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One of the school board's goals was to increase physical activity, and it sought ways for transportation to contribute to that goal as well. Many of the elementary schools have built into their physical education curriculum a walking program where students receive bonus point incentives for walking to school. At Pioneer Elementary School, students who walk to school receive fresh fruit when they arrive there.

Every school in the district has a Safe Walking Committee, comprised of the principal, teachers and parents in the school. Each year those committees evaluate neighborhoods to identify which are safe and to make recommendations for improvements to the District.

"Every year we write another grant," Denton said.

As a result of SRTS efforts, 20 percent of the children in the Auburn School District are walking or bicycling to school. At Pioneer Elementary School, bus use has decreased from six buses to one, and 85 percent of the children walk or bicycle to school. A new school in an upper class neighborhood was designed to provide the opportunity for 95 percent of the children to walk or bicycle to school. The developer built sidewalks and worked with the City of Auburn and the school district to form a cooperative agreement to build a "walking school." The City of Auburn requires installation of sidewalks by new developers and charges impact fees.

Only one school in the 22-school system has been identified as unsafe for students to walk or bicycle to school.

Another benefit, credited in part to the program, has been better test scores at Pioneer Elementary, which is a low income school. Pioneer Elementary students recently have achieved the highest scores in the district, and Principal Debra Gary attributes part of that gain to walking and bicycling to school, Denton said.

"It's a real success story," he said. "We're saving \$220,000 in transportation costs every year because of these kids. Not only is it working, this program is standing the test of time. Each school is finding more and more ways to participate."

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*Jim Denton, Director of Transportation for Auburn School District, Wash."*

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