

2013

Promoting Trip Reduction at Schools



Report on U.S. Department of Energy – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant

mccormk

Thurston Regional Planning Council

7/31/2013

THURSTON REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL (TRPC) is a 22-member intergovernmental board made up of local governmental jurisdictions within Thurston County, plus the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and the Nisqually Indian Tribe. The Council was established in 1967 under RCW 36.70.060, which authorized creation of regional planning councils.

TRPC's mission is to **“Provide Visionary Leadership on Regional Plans, Policies, and Issues.”**

To Support this Mission:

- A. Support **regional transportation** planning consistent with state and federal funding requirements.
- B. Address **growth management, environmental quality**, and other topics determined by the Council.
- C. **Assemble** and **analyze data** that support local and regional decision making
- D. Act as a **“convener”**, build regional **consensus** on issues through information and citizen involvement.
- E. Build **intergovernmental consensus** on regional plans, policies, and issues, and advocate local implementation.

This report was prepared as part of the Thurston Regional Planning Council's 2013 regional work program.

**2013 MEMBERSHIP
THURSTON REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL**

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City of Olympia	Nathaniel Jones , Councilmember
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City of Tenino	Bret Brodersen , Councilmember
City of Tumwater	Tom Oliva , Councilmember
City of Yelm	Robert Isom , Councilmember
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Introduction

Only one generation ago, about half of all U.S. students walked or bicycled to school. Today, fewer than 15 percent of school trips are made by students who walk or bike and over half of students arrive at school in family vehicles. Several years ago leaders in the Thurston region asked “Why can’t kids walk and bike to school?” That question led to an analysis of the issues, challenges and opportunities that resulted in the Healthy Kids – Safe Streets Action Plan. The Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) has had a keen interest in trip reduction to and around schools in order to meet its Regional Transportation Plan goals to reduce trips and serve all modes of travel safely and efficiently. The Healthy Kids – Safe Streets Action Plan includes essential actions necessary to achieve its goal to “Build a generation of safe and healthy walkers, bicycle and bus riders” in order to 1) reduce the numbers of students driven to school, 2) relieve traffic around schools, and 3) promote safety and health. Over several years TRPC partnered with Intercity Transit, Safe Kids Thurston County, and two school districts to do demonstration projects at several schools. These in-school Walk & Roll programs include elements of education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering, and evaluation. This report identifies the experience of taking the program to additional and more rural school districts.

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About the U.S. Department of Energy Sponsored Grant

In 2010, TRPC was awarded a U.S. Department of Energy sponsored Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG), funded through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, to reduce transportation-related fossil fuel consumption and its associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the Town of Bucoda and the cities of Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, and Yelm in Thurston County. From October 2010 through July 2013, TRPC coordinated a package of marketing, implementation, and monitoring strategies to increase the public's awareness about the benefits of sustainable travel choices and encouraged reductions in trips among small businesses, residents, employees, and students in the cities and towns. This report describes one of the six coordinated tasks that worked to demonstrate and analyze short and long term opportunities to address trip reduction. The six tasks include:

- 1. Promote Trip Reduction at More Schools**
2. Expand Existing CTR Programs to Smaller Worksites and Residential Neighborhoods
3. Increase the use of Telework and Compressed Work Weeks
4. Remove Barriers to Infill and Redevelopment
5. Create Community Tools
6. Monitor and Measure

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Promoting Trip Reduction in Schools – Advancing the Healthy Kids – Safe Streets Action Plan

What's the Problem?

Understanding the problem is the first step toward addressing the issues and taking action. Problems include:

- Too few students walk, bike or take the bus to school. Local surveys show that even 50% of students living within a half mile of school are driven to school. Obesity rates among school age children are increasing and are leading to an increase in diabetes and heart disease, health care costs to families and community health systems.
- Too many parents drive students to school resulting in peak hour traffic jams, decreased safety for all travelers to school, decreased air quality around schools, fewer opportunities for students to be healthy, practice safe travel and navigation skills, and through exercise increase readiness to learn.
- Larger schools, sited on the fringes of urban areas where land is cheaper, and built in the suburban one story form, separate schools from neighborhoods and erode the ability of large numbers of students to walk and bike to school. The large sites and distance to neighborhoods increases the cost of building safe and connected sidewalks and bike paths as part of school and neighborhood development.

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Expanding the Healthy Kids – Safe Streets Action Plan to Rural School Districts

The Program

TRPC used the U.S. Department of Energy Grant to expand the Walk & Roll program to two schools in Tumwater School District (Peter G. Schmidt and Michael T. Simmons Elementary Schools) and two schools in Yelm Community Schools (Fort Stevens and Mill Pond Elementary Schools). The Walk & Roll program includes elements of education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering and evaluation. The Rainier and Tenino school district did not participate in Walk and Roll activities, but benefited from the development of walk route maps and safety education for use at their elementary, middle and high schools. The Tumwater and Yelm schools Walk & Roll programs included the full program plus expansion of the types of education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation programs that have been available during past demonstration projects.

Tumwater Schools

Peter G. Schmidt and Michael T. Simmons are both Kindergarten through sixth grade elementary schools. They are the two largest elementary schools, by enrollment, in the Tumwater School District. Many of the students are transported by school bus to both schools.

Peter G. Schmidt is located in Tumwater city limits at the intersection of Capitol Boulevard and Dennis Street in a commercial neighborhood surrounded by state government agency offices, retail stores, medical clinics, and fast food restaurants. The morning commuter traffic to large worksites is heavy around Peter G. Elementary. Two residential neighborhoods are within walking distance: the Elm Street neighborhood to the northeast and a neighborhood west of Capitol Boulevard in the vicinity of Tumwater High School. The sidewalks along Elm Street are discontinuous and of variable width. Parent drop-off and other through traffic on Dennis Street pose challenges to students crossing to and from the school property on the north side of campus; however a crossing guard patrol is located mid-block on Dennis Street. While the sidewalk connectivity on the west side of Capitol Boulevard is adequately connected, the traffic along Capitol Boulevard poses a challenge to walking students. However a traffic signal and a regular crossing guard do facilitate student crossing the intersection at Capitol and Dennis.

Michael T. Simmons is located west of Capitol Boulevard between Linwood Avenue and 2nd Avenue. Its campus is south of and adjacent to the Tumwater School District administrative offices. Linwood

Avenue and 2nd Avenue are major collectors. A crossing guard is stationed north of the school at Linwood and 7th Avenue. The majority of the students who walk to school come from the neighborhoods north of the school's campus. Sidewalks within these neighborhoods are discontinuous, of variable width, and surface conditions range from good to poor. Significant segments along Linwood Avenue and Lake Park Drive are missing sidewalks, restricting students from walking from several neighborhoods within walking distance to the school.

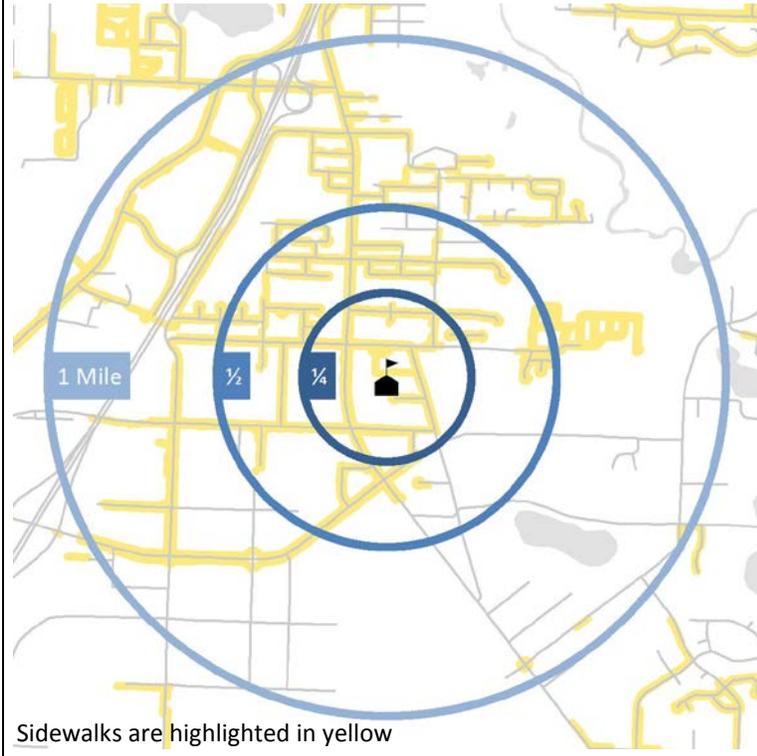
Yelm Schools

Fort Stevens and Mill Pond are both Kindergarten through sixth grade elementary schools. They are located on the edges of Yelm city limits around relatively new housing subdivisions. Many of the students are transported by school bus to both schools.

Fort Stevens Elementary School is located on the southeast edge of Yelm city limits south of 100th Way SE. Two neighborhoods northwest of the school on both sides of Middle Road have relatively low traffic and are fairly well connected by sidewalks. Middle Road has sidewalks, but they end at the edge of the school property. Students can enter the northeast edge of the school property from a gravel path that connects to the sidewalk edge. There are no permanent crossing guards serving Fort Stevens.

Mill Pond Elementary School is adjacent to Ridgeline Middle School. It is located in the center of residential neighborhoods in the south end of the City off of Mill Road. The neighborhoods immediately around Mill Pond and Ridgeline Middle Schools have sidewalks and paths and students can access Mill Pond school property by foot. The neighborhood around Brighton Street north of State Route 507 is connected with sidewalks and is served with a pedestrian activated flashing traffic beacon. Traffic on State Route 507 is a barrier for many students. Without a permanent crossing guard at the intersection of State Route 507 and Brighton Road/Carter Street, many families will be hesitant to allow their children to cross the highway to walk to and from school. There are no sidewalks and no wide shoulder along Mill Road creating a barrier for students who live in neighborhoods east of the school property. Yelm Fire District has given permission to parents to temporarily use fire station during the bell schedule to park and walk with their child the remaining distance to and from school.

Peter G. Schmidt Elementary



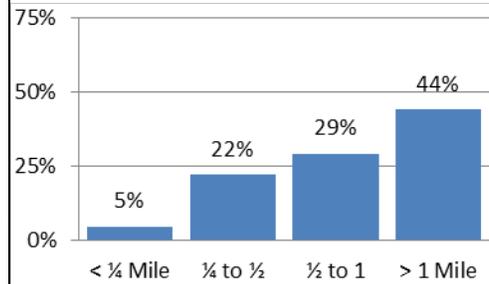
Grades K-6

2011-2012 Enrollment: 600

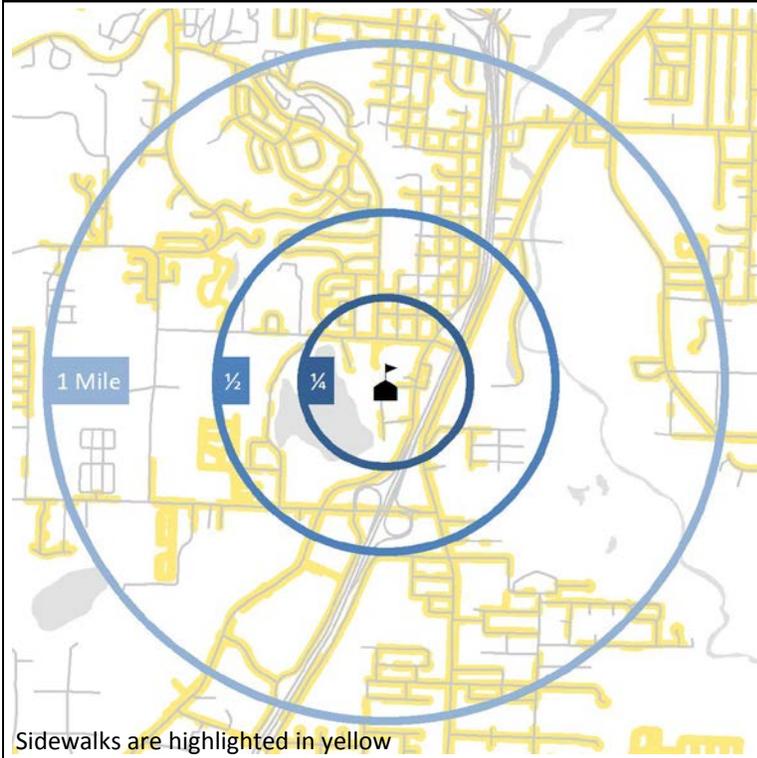
Means of Transportation to School:

- Walk 22%
- Bike 1%
- School Bus 79%
- Family Car 64%

Percent of Students by Distance from School:



Michael T. Simmons Elementary



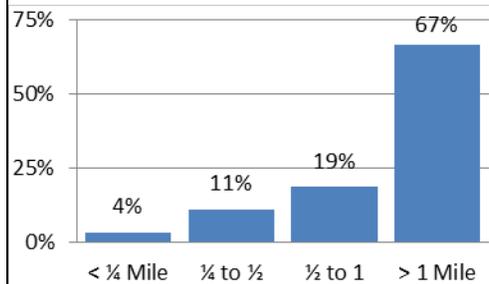
Grades K-6

2011-2012 Enrollment: 720

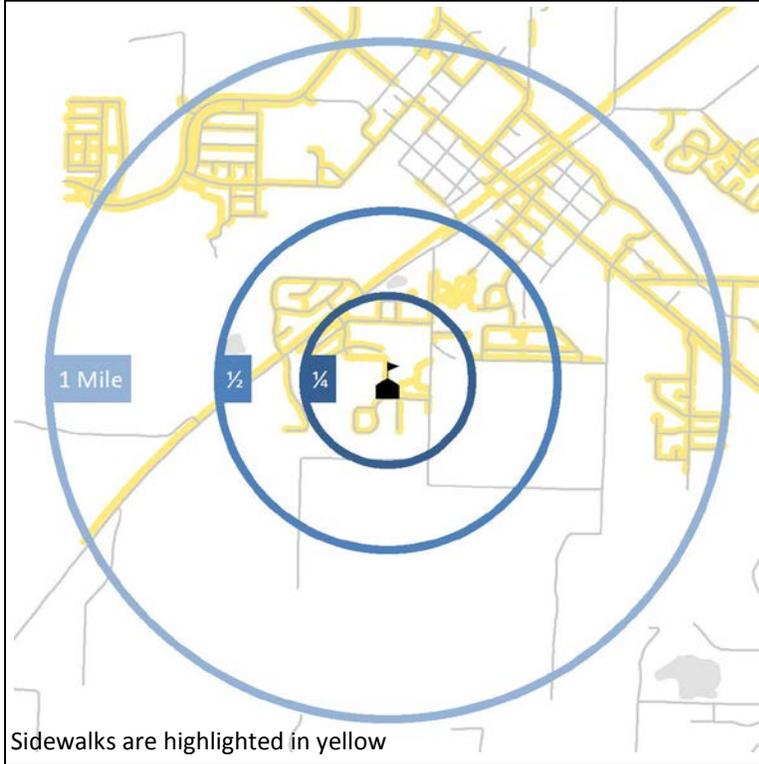
Means of Transportation to School:

- Walk 18%
- Bike 2%
- School Bus 47%
- Family Car 33%

Percent of Students by Distance from School:



Mill Pond Elementary



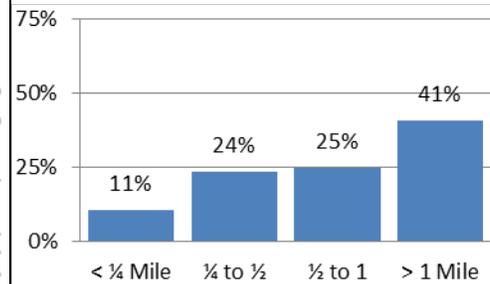
Grades PK-6

2011-2012 Enrollment: 490

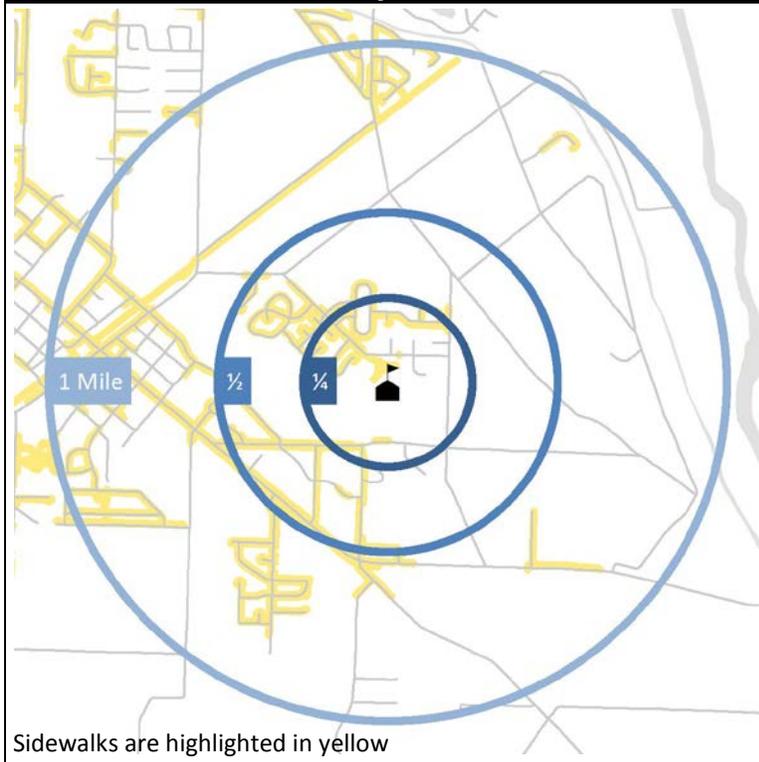
Means of Transportation to School:

- Walk 15%
- Bike 5%
- School Bus 63%
- Family Car 18%

Percent of Students by Distance from School:



Fort Stevens Elementary



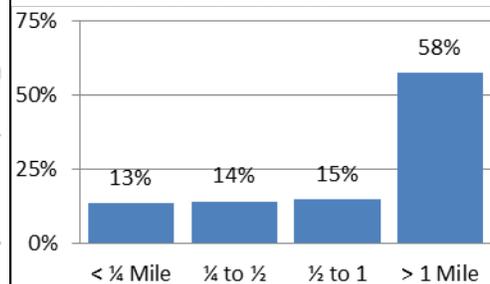
Grades PK-6

2011-2012 Enrollment: 530

Means of Transportation to School:

- Walk 5%
- Bike 3%
- School Bus 73%
- Family Car 19%

Percent of Students by Distance from School:



Ten Walk & Roll Program Elements

1) Walk Route Maps including Safety Tips for Students Traveling to School. These maps were developed in partnership with schools, parents, and jurisdiction planners and public works staff. They not only identify the best routes to school but include safe travel tips for students and safe driving tips and anti-idling education and encouragement for parents. Where possible, the maps identify park and walk locations near the school so that parents who must drive their children to school can at least park and walk some portion of their journey with their children.

2) Outreach and education flyers. These monthly flyers offer encouragement to participate in events, in-school competitions, and “Did you know...” factoids about the benefits of choosing walk, bike and bus travel to school.

The image displays five 'Walk & Roll' program flyers, each featuring a vertical banner on the left that reads 'WALK & ROLL' with a bicycle icon. The flyers are:

- Peter G. Schmidt Eagles Walk & Roll:** Promotes a Winter Challenge in March and a March walk event on Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at the intersection of Dennis / Linderson. It includes a map of the area and safety tips for students and parents.
- Mill Pond Wolves Walk & Roll:** Announces a Spring Challenge from May to June and a 'Spring is Here!' event on May 10th. It features a 'Spring is Here!' logo and information about the Thurston County Healthy Child Weight Coalition.
- Michael T. Simmons Wolves Walk & Roll:** Calls for a 'Walk-Bike-Ride the bus to school' event on June 5th. It includes a photo of a group of children and safety tips for parents.
- Fort Stevens Eagles Walk & Roll:** Promotes a 'Walk-Bike-Ride the bus to school' event and a 'Win The Fort Stevens Grade Challenge!' on June 6th. It features a 'SEE INFO' button and safety tips for parents.
- The 26th Thurston County Bicycle Commuter Contest:** A contest for students to win prizes for riding a bicycle to school, work, or errands during the month of May.

Each flyer includes a 'WALK & ROLL GOALS' section with bullet points such as 'Reinforce students' good traffic safety skills' and 'Promote regular physical activity - to stay strong and healthy and be ready to learn'. They also feature 'WHAT IF...' and 'DID YOU KNOW...' sections with additional safety information and icons for a school bus, a bicycle, and a speed limit sign.

3) Quarterly grade and class challenges. Each school had students keep track of the trips taken, with the winning grade or class having an opportunity to win prizes and receive certificates and recognition at assemblies. Prizes and incentives consisted of bicycle helmets, bike lights, pedestrian lights, bike locks, bells, bike locks, and reflective slap-bands.

4) Special Walking & Wheeling Wednesday events including “Walk with the Principal” events and law enforcement participation. Some schools held special monthly walk events, meeting the principal at a designated spot and picking up students along the half mile route to school. Parents, students, teachers, city council members, and a police escort accompanied the principal leading the walk to school. These walks were successful even in inclement weather. With enthusiastic support from the principal, some walks attracted over 100 students.



5) School and classroom education programs including safety and encouragement assemblies, and the Science of Transportation program. Intercity Transit Youth Program coordinators were invited to several assemblies to promote safe travel and encourage Walk & Roll program participation. In addition two Science of Transportation education programs gave 120 students an opportunity to



learn about and think about transportation blending lessons in math, physics, science, and engineering. Students learned about motion, where the materials cars are made of come from and where they go when they “die”. They also made meaningful connections with the impacts of transportation choices and how the way neighborhoods and whole cities are built influences travel choices and affects the

environment. Students considered school, neighborhood and city designs they would like to live in and created digital stories to share their ideas.

6) Build a Bike Program. Another Walk & Roll program was the volunteer-led Bike Partners program

that teaches bike maintenance and safety skills. The program offers refurbished bikes to students who need them. Sixty five students completed the workshops and



received a free refurbished bicycle along with a new bicycle helmet, a set of bike lights, bike tools, and a bike lock. Bike Partners also teams up with its

Intercity Transit partner to perform bicycle maintenance and help teach safety skills at bicycle rodeos throughout the year for students who already own bikes. At bike rodeos students and sometimes parents can have a safety check on their bikes and equipment, participate in a bike safety course and practice good bike safety skills.

7) Crossing guard program. Students who live in less developed and more rural communities generally have fewer connected sidewalks, marked crosswalks, or traffic signals, making it difficult for them to walk or ride their bikes to school. Two grant funded school assistants served as crossing guards at State Route 507 and Brighton Road/Carter Street near Mill Pond Elementary School in Yelm. This made it safe and acceptable for students living across from school to walk rather than be driven by parents to school. A Washington State Traffic Safety Commission grant provided high visibility rainwear, vests, and crossing guard equipment. The program was well received by the Mill Pond community and the program was



staffed through the entire 2012-2013 school year.

This pilot project demonstrates that the presence of an adult crossing guard enhances people’s sense of safety and promotes active transportation. It will be incumbent on the Yelm Community School District to prioritize funding crossing guard positions throughout the district where dependence on school buses can be reduced by fostering safe walking

environments.

8) Special parent encouragement through the “Pace Car” program and parent education. This parent driver pledge asks parents and other community members to promise to drive within the speed limit and turn off their engines if they are idling more than 30 seconds in order to increase safety for all travelers and maintain clean air around schools and in the community. Bumper stickers are distributed to remind other drivers to “Slow the Pace to Keep Kids Safe”.

Yelm Community Schools also invited local parent educator, Candyce Bollinger, to present “Safety without Fear.” This evening class offered parents information about how to educate their children about how to respond in a safe manner to various situations.



9) Special student participation through the “Un-drivers license” program. At special events students and parents have an opportunity to identify ways to leave the car at home and think of walk, bike and bus trips that could be taken instead. They get their picture taken and get a laminated “license” that looks like a drivers’ license but instead lists the student or parent commitment to walk, bike, take transit etc.



10) Evaluations through parent surveys and in-school “hands up surveys”. In June 2013, the parents at the four participating elementary schools in Tumwater and Yelm were invited to take part in a survey that asked questions about their attitudes and familiarity toward the efforts of the Walk and Roll Program. Some common themes emerged from parents at all of the schools:

- Most parents report that they are familiar with the Walk and Roll Program. Over 90 percent of parents at Peter G. are familiar with the program or have at least heard of it, followed by 86 percent at Michael T., 81 percent at Fort Stevens, and 73 percent at Mill Pond.
- Over half of students at all schools travel to school by a district school bus most days. Nearly 64 percent of Fort Steven’s parents report their child rides the bus followed by Michael T. and Peter G. at 59 percent, and Mill Pond at 50 percent.
- The family vehicle (21 to 31 percent) is the second most common means of traveling to school, followed by walking (7 to 13 percent).
- The volume of vehicle traffic along school routes was reported by parents as the greatest factor affecting their decision to not allow their child to walk to school, followed by lack of sidewalks, lack of crossing guards, distance, and traffic speed.
- The majority of the parents report they read the Walk and Roll Newsletter.
- Parents rated the exercise and health tips as the most useful information in their school’s Walk and Roll Newsletter, followed by the schedule of events and promotions, and safety tips.
- Parents cited increasing the physical activity opportunities and health awareness of their child and family as the most important benefit of the program, followed by increasing the number of

students who walk, bike, or ride the bus safely to school, and increasing their child's readiness to learn by promoting active transportation before school.

- Over two-thirds of parents from all schools reported that it is important or very important for their school to maintain some type of Walk and Roll Program and promote safe routes to school activities.

11) Policy maker discussion integrating schools and transportation goals and actions into local and regional plans. Enhanced communication between school district and jurisdiction planners regarding school siting and infrastructure improvement around schools is essential if more students are going to have the opportunity for safe walk, bike and bus trips to school. A major impediment to the opportunity for safe walk and bike trips to school is the siting of schools in fringe areas, the lack of connections between schools and neighborhoods, and incomplete sidewalk and bike lanes especially within one half mile of schools. The Healthy Kids – Safe Streets Action Plan as well as the *Draft Sustainable Thurston Plan* identifies early and ongoing communication and collaboration as key to overcoming the challenges and achieving the goal to build a generation of healthy and safe walkers, bicycle and bus riders.

What We Learned About How to Reduce Trips around Schools and Build Partnerships

The following chronicles what the Walk and Roll partners learned about essential start-up steps in school based programs:

1. **Be Clear About Goals: Articulate these in a simple, easily understood way.** Prepare brief information that articulates the goals and benefits to participants and partners.
2. **Become Familiar with national, state or local support programs and information.** Many of these have excellent websites and support for programs. The following are key connections to programs, support materials, and ideas from organizations and places throughout the country.
 - **America Walks and the National Center for Safe Routes to School.** These organizations sponsor webinars on school programs and have ready-made information for school programs both start-up and established, as well as bicycle and pedestrian safety training.
 - **Federal Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Center for Disease Control.** Their publications include Kidswalk-to-School – A Guide to Promote Walking to School.
 - **Safe Kids Worldwide** – a privately funded organization whose mission is to keep children alive, and who have large private sponsors.
 - **Washington State Department of Transportation** – Highways and Local Programs – bicycle and pedestrian program advocates and supporters of safe routes to school program through their grant programs.
 - **Washington Traffic Safety Commission** – has guides to school walk routes and student pedestrian safety including a traffic safety guard training manual and video.
 - **Other area organizations.** Local government public works, planning, and law enforcement staff; non-profit or advocacy organizations such as Feet First, Safe Kids, and Intercity Transit’s Youth Program which has a full range of programs including in class programs and the Bike Partners program.
3. **Identify and Contact Essential Partners.** Without the support of these people or organizations the program or goal cannot proceed. This includes the school district administration (find a

person within the administration who will be a champion and help identify schools that are good candidates for programs); the school principal, teachers or other identified school staff person identified by the principal as the primary contact (the principals in most schools have designated themselves as the lead). If possible, find interested parents that are willing to be Walk & Roll program advisors or leaders (principals can be helpful in identifying possible parent leaders or partners).

4. **Listen** – Every school is different. Understand and respect the roles of school district personnel, principals, teachers, and parents. Ask for their ideas about issues, barriers, benefits and opportunities related to the identified goal. Seek their insight and advice about processes, projects or programs that could help reach identified goals. Identify barriers to using walk, bike, bus modes of travel, ways to overcome barriers, ideas for the program, and how parents may be interested in helping with the program.
5. **Articulate Draft Start up Program Ideas and Benefits to Students** – Review these with Essential Partners (school district staff, principal, teachers – as identified by the principal, and other school personnel). Listen and adjust program using school partner ideas. Enlist their help in resolving issues such as how – and when to get baseline trip-to-school information and, 2) integrate program elements such as pedestrian and bike safety skill education, without adding undue complexity to their operations. Project start up and program elements must respond to – and respect – the school district and school identified issues and ideas.
6. **Form a Project and Plan Partnership** – Write a Program Plan for each school – work through the principal or designee. Review plans and start up materials such as a baseline survey of how students get to school before a newsletter is sent to all families in the school. A parent survey will also give valuable information and the value of different plan elements can be assessed with a follow up survey at the end of the school year. Determine schedule of activities for the year with detailed plans for the first quarter.
7. **Complete Start Up Activity, Implement Plan and Perform an Analysis.** A midyear check in on the program will help assess the startup activities and make adjustments to the general plan outlining activities for the remainder of the year. An end of the school year assessment and debrief allows adjustment to plans and ideas for continuation of the program. Throughout the year seek additional support, leadership, ideas, and funding sources to make programs sustainable.