



# WalkBoston

## Community Safe Routes to School 2008–2009 Summary Report

July 2009

### Introduction

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This report summarizes the accomplishments of the first year of an intensive pilot Community Safe Routes to School Program (CSRTS) in four municipalities over the 2008-2009 school year. The goal of the pilot was to see if a part-time, paid, community-based coordinator (assisted by WalkBoston staff) working with municipal and school system staff and volunteers could achieve an increase in the number of children walking to school and begin to change community culture around walking.

Brockton, Newton, Stoneham and Watertown were selected because they have a good walking infrastructure and exhibited strong community support for SRTS programs. In each community the local coordinator (3 of the four are local residents), spent 8 to 10 hours per week working with the schools, initiating walking programs such as Walk on Wednesdays, pedometer challenges and art/poster contests. In addition, coordinators sought to improve the walking environment of the schools by addressing snow removal and improving safety of students in the drop off/pick up area of the schools. Finally, the coordinators developed links with community residents, advocacy groups and businesses to strengthen and sustain the program and to extend the conversations about walking beyond the school community.

This report describes the programs and activities developed to encourage children to walk to school and the efforts to improve the walking environment. In addition, since the long-term goal of the program is for it to continue in the future without outside funding, the report also looks at the sustainability of the program and at the factors that influence the parents' and students' decision to walk to school.

Funding for the pilot program came from matching private and government sources. WalkBoston's work was underwritten by a grant from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation. The funding for the local coordinators and local direct expenses came from MassRIDes, an office of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The staff of all three funders provided valuable insight and assistance in the development of the programs' goals and methods. The SRTS staff of MassRIDes worked closely with each of the local coordinators and WalkBoston staff and provided terrific assistance and advice.

Peer leader walking to school with younger sibling at Brockton's Downey School – holding traveler pass to be stamped.



## Findings

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### What can change in a year?

Not surprisingly, one year of programs and community organizing has led to only modest change in the behavior school children and parents. Based on the less-than-rigorous survey results that are available, walk-to-schools rates seemed to rise 4 – 7% in Stoneham and Watertown, and fall 2 – 5% in Newton and Brockton (although the end of year surveys were carried out during Massachusetts' rainiest June on record.)

The full school year of steady and enthusiastic emphasis on walking's health and environmental benefits does seem to have led to a wider recognition of walking as a quality of life concern in all four communities. The community coordinators and volunteers have forged links with local businesses and activists to give walking related issues more prominence within municipal agencies, within school departments and, most importantly, within the communities at large.

### What is starting to change in a year? [Note: the communities vary widely, as do the changes.]

- The positive CSRTS experience in Brockton has prompted the City to expand the SRTS program to three additional schools in the 2009-10 school year, and to develop plans to have SRTS programs in all of the City's 14 elementary schools over the next two to three years.
- Across the communities, aldermen, selectmen, town managers, and school superintendents are talking about walking issues.
- Walking is being incorporated into community life through Green Streets Programs, EcoAwareness Days and walking events.
- Convincing parents to change how they get their children to school is beginning to be an acceptable topic for discussion—a very touchy issue in many places.
- Local municipal staff—police, school departments, health departments, public works—are beginning to get behind efforts to promote walk-to-school initiatives.

### What have we seen about changing behavior?

- Bracelets, pedometers and Walk on Wednesdays are a good start, but aren't sufficient to institutionalize walking to school and create good exercise habits in children. Survey results indicate that barriers to walking include systemic infrastructure and operations issues such as poor winter snow management and excessive traffic congestion and speeding in school zones.
  - Newton's CSRTS coordinator and Task Force have taken part in efforts to update and improve the city's snow removal efforts and policies in order to keep sidewalks safe and walking routes open.
- So many parents currently drive their children to school that it has become unsafe for all children in front of schools.
  - Parents routinely double and triple park forcing children to thread their way through an obstacle course of vehicles trying to pull in and out of the drop-off zone. At the suggestion of CSRTS, in spring 2009 Newton police began occasionally enforcing traffic and drop-off regulations around the schools. During 2009-2010 the Newton CSRTS coordinator will be working with the Police Department to expand this school zone enforcement.

- Similar concerns have been raised in the other CSRTS communities. Future plans may include preventing parents from dropping off students at the school entrance in order to prevent dangerous traffic congestion. Parents would then be required to park further away and walk with their children to the schools.
- The culture of walking needs to change.
  - Often students don't walk to school, even when it is safe and easy to do so, because "everyone" drives. Schools and the community at large need to focus on the having children walk to school on their own without constant parental supervision.
  - Stoneham will be developing an "independent walking" pilot program in the coming school year in which students will be encouraged to walk with older friends and siblings.
  - The schools and municipalities need to look at institutionalizing a walking-centered environment in which walking is safe and pleasant with appropriate street facilities, maintenance and signage. When parents and students decide whether to walk or ride to school, the right choice needs to be the easy choice.



Co-Principal Bill McCarthy and his Troop on Mt Auburn Street, Watertown on Massachusetts Walk to School Day, May 6, 2009

#### **Further lessons from the first year**

- The variety of approaches to achieving higher walking rates was successful. As described below, both the approach of intensive school-based walking programs—as exemplified by Watertown's Pedometer Program, Pennies for Pedestrians and Walking School Buses—and Stoneham's community wide walking and environmental events, coupled with school walking activities, resulted in an increase in walking: 7% in Watertown and 4% in Stoneham.
- Trying to cover too many schools, 15 as was the case of Newton, made it difficult to show a positive change in the short-term. The Newton Coordinator's approach of creating policy change in both snow removal and parental driving behaviors in drop off-pick up zones may in

the long-term have very positive impacts on the number of students walking to school. However, it was frustrating for the Coordinator to spread herself thin over so many schools.

- Unexpected opportunities for CSRTS such as Brockton’s decision to substantially reduce busing can only be realized if CSRTS programs are already in place and viewed as effective by decision-makers.
- Walk-to-school surveys are difficult to administer and collect, and we do not feel that they give a very accurate picture of the program effects. This is a problem throughout the country, and is one of the issues that the national Clearinghouse is working on as SRTS matures as a program.

### **What have we learned about sustaining the program?**

- The high cost of busing presents a fiscal incentive for school systems to encourage walking to school.
  - Brockton bused a significant number of students to and from school in the 2008–2009 school year, with over 40 percent of students riding buses to the participating schools. Responding to budgetary pressure, Brockton will be expanding the CSRTS program to three additional schools in the 2009–2010 school year.
  - Brockton’s approach to reducing busing may be able to serve as a model to help other communities shift their transportation programs away from buses and toward increased walking and bicycling.
- SRTS has not yet tapped into the widely recognized need to find cost effective ways to increase physical activity for students.
  - Physical education educators and school nurses, while supportive of the programs, have not yet begun to support them as a core part of increasing physical activity worthy of program support from within existing school budgets. This is an issue that should become part of the sustainability conversation over the coming year.
  - Local coordinators and stakeholders need aid in identifying and securing new funding sources.

### **What will still need to come from outside the community?**

- Technical assistance
- Encouragement
- Building bridges to other communities
- Financial resources to cover at least an additional year of local coordinator time

### **Major Accomplishments**

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#### **1. Established and expanded the Safe Routes to School Program**

All four communities established very strong Walk to School programs. As one teacher said “there is a lot of buzz around the SRTS program.” Schools and communities embraced the SRTS program with both school based activities and community wide events.

#### **2. Walking increased in two communities over the course of the year**

The survey data on school travel is not very robust. Some communities have good survey participation rates, while others do not collect much data.

**Table 1**  
**Communities and Schools Participating in Community Safe Routes to School**

	<b>Brockton</b>	<b>Newton</b>	<b>Stoneham</b>	<b>Watertown</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Schools	2	15	4	3	24
Students	1,240	5,400	1,300	1,155	9,095
% Walking – Sept 2008	19%*	35%	21%	23%	
% Walking – Nov 2008	15%	31%	22%	29%	
% Walking – June 2009	14%	33%**	25%***	30%	

\*40% of Brockton's students are bused to school.

\*\*Only five of the 15 schools completed surveys in June.

\*\*\*Three of the four schools completed surveys in June.

### **3. SRTS program expansion in Brockton from two to five schools**

The difficult financial times encountered by Brockton created an opportunity for the SRTS program where free busing for children to attend an elementary school in one of the City's two existing school choice zones is being substantially reduced in the coming school year. The City will go to a four-zone system thereby reducing the size of zones, and reducing the number of students who need to travel long distances to school. Children living within 1.5 miles of a neighborhood school will NOT be bused. To help with this transition, the Superintendent's office decided to expand the CSRTS program from two to five schools. Over a two to three year period Brockton plans to extend the SRTS program to all 14 of the City's elementary schools.

To accomplish this expansion the City will cover the costs for SRTS efforts by paying for a few hours each week of the part-time paid parent liaisons that work in each school. The Brockton CSRTS coordinator will manage the parent liaisons. The positive impacts of the pilot program set the stage for community adoption and expansion. **This expansion of the program under the auspices of the school department is precisely the kind of community adoption that is the goal of the pilot – WalkBoston views this as a significant program success.**

### **4. Stoneham completed an Historic Walk with sidewalk medallions and brochure: a shared resource for schools, community and visitors**

To encourage community walking the Stoneham Coordinator was a catalyst in developing a Historical Stoneham Walk laid out with sidewalk medallions of historical illustrations. The Walk was a collaborative effort of the town's historical groups and agencies with artists and craftspeople donating their services. The Walk's completion was celebrated in June at a town wide event.

## **Program Character in the Four Communities**

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### **Brockton: School-based programs**

The Superintendent's office wrote the initial grant application and provided very strong support. The coordinator is a special education staffer at one of the participating schools and the program promoted in-school activities such as a large walking map and decorated paper sneakers in the front hall. One of the pilot's key successes was its engagement with the peer leader program, an after school program for 4th through 6th graders in the Walk on Wednesdays and other programs. The program thereby generated support and enthusiasm among a wide age range of students AND was linked to a positive student leadership program that is well liked by students, parents and school staff.

Peer Leaders greet walkers on Wednesday and stamp their traveler passes at the Downey School in Brockton



### **Newton: Citywide Policies to Encourage Walking to School**

As a former staffer in the City's Planning Department, the school coordinator took a policy approach to encouraging students to walk to school. With 15 schools and over 5,000 students participating the coordinator could not provide individualized assistance to each school. As a means to ascertain the most effective approaches, the coordinator developed and distributed an email survey that elicited responses from more than 900 parents.

The survey revealed that snow removal problems discourage students from walking to school and prompted the coordinator and Newton's SRTS Task Force to urge the City to begin studying a new, stronger snow shoveling policy. Other SRTS initiatives included working with the Police Department to begin a traffic enforcement program near the schools. The coordinator also helped to launch a Green Streets Program that is designed to help create a healthier, more attractive walking environment.

### **Stoneham: Town-wide Environmental/Walking Programs**

The Stoneham Coordinator focused on town-wide programs with school initiatives as one component. The programs included development of a website, town-wide walks, including a Stoneham Historical Walk and a cleanup of a bicycle/walking route. Throughout the school year, the schools celebrated Walk to School days, participated in Walk on Wednesdays and received safety training. Stoneham also participated in Green Streets activities. Fun activities included a hunt for decorated ballet slippers throughout the town.

### **Watertown: Walking Activities for Students**

In Watertown, the Coordinator focused on incorporating walking themes and activities into classrooms. A very popular activity was the Pedometer Challenge undertaken in the fall by



480 students as well as a “Pennies for Pedestrians” Program that ran for 8 weeks in the spring and drew 173 participants. The Watertown Bank provided funds to purchase books for the elementary school libraries as a reward for the distances students walked.

Watertown students also received pedestrian (125 students) and bicycle safety training (331 students) through the services of MassRides. Finally, Watertown had a very successful Walking School Bus Program that grew from 9 in the fall to 30 in the spring of 2009.



Gathering Place: Walking Bus Route #10 – Hosmer School, Watertown

**Table 2  
School Programs**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Brockton</b>	<b>Newton</b>	<b>Stoneham</b>	<b>Watertown</b>	<b>Total</b>
Walk on Wednesdays	200	200	400	200	1,000 students -
Walking School Buses		29 Buses@ 6 students ~ 164 students		30 Buses@ 6 students ~180 students	59 Buses ~344 students
MA Walk to School Day	250	1,000	300	825	2375 participants
Community Walks			80 Stoneham Historical Markers Walk 30 Holiday Hike		110

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Brockton</b>	<b>Newton</b>	<b>Stoneham</b>	<b>Watertown</b>	<b>Total</b>
School Walking Projects	20 Peer leaders		75 Hall of Fame	173 Pennies for Pedestrians 480 Pedometer Program	748 students
Safety Training	900 (in-school program)	80	240	125 pedestrian safety 339 bicycle safety training	1,684 students
Classroom/Art/Essay Projects	1,200	65	155	165	1,585 students
Community Events, e.g. Stoneham's EcoAwareness Day, Newton Green Streets		300	100 Eco-Awareness Day & 100 in Green Streets		500 participants
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,570</b>	<b>1,809</b>	<b>1,480</b>	<b>2,487</b>	<b>8,346</b>

### **Building strong bases of community support**

While initiating programs within the schools occupied a substantial portion of program energy during this first year, each of the coordinators reached out to the broader community to build support, and to begin the process of changing behaviors (or to start, changing attitudes) in the community as a whole. Examples of the efforts and their impact include:

- Tying SRTS into the Green movement
  - Green Streets in Stoneham and Newton
  - EcoAwareness Day in Stoneham
- Police support
  - In Brockton police officers have monitored traffic speeds around the schools on special walking days.
  - In Newton the police have committed to a traffic safety pilot project that was developed in the Spring of 2009 and will be implemented in the fall. Also, Burr School did a one-week safety program this spring as a model for the planned enforcement project in the fall of 2009.



- Health Departments
  - Newton Green Streets Program
  - Brockton Peer Leadership Program

Downey Peer Leaders hand out healthy snacks on MA Walk to School Day along with the program coordinator, DPH and the school principal in Brockton



- Financial Support
  - Watertown has raised \$4,750 for CSRTS program activities in the coming school year and the Watertown Savings Bank provided Pennies for Pedestrians funding.
- Communitywide Programs
  - Stoneham Historical Walk

The table below highlights the key programs carried out to encourage walking to school.

**Table 3  
Community Involvement and Support**

	<b>Brockton</b>	<b>Newton</b>	<b>Stoneham</b>	<b>Watertown</b>
Enforcement	Police presence in Brockton on MA Walk to School Day and selected other days	Police participated in Walk to School days at invitation of individual schools. Police are working with task force to create model enforcement program.		
Community Programs	The Brockton Rox, a minor league baseball team, attended the International Walk to School Day and the first Walk on Wednesdays as well as donating prizes. The Rox	Green Streets Program was organized by Health Department as part of the Activate Newton program.	Received support for walking events from ZooNewEngland, the Chamber of Commerce, Stoneham Bank and Stoneham Savings Bank, The Stoneham Theatre, and	

	<b>Brockton</b>	<b>Newton</b>	<b>Stoneham</b>	<b>Watertown</b>
	are very popular with school children.		other local charities	
Financial Support		In-kind services from Planning Dept, GIS Dept, school Dept, police Dept.		2008-09 School year \$700 bicycle raffle and \$1,700 from Watertown Educational Foundation. Also funding from the Watertown Savings Bank. 2009-10 Watertown Community Foundation (\$2,250) and O'Neill Grant (\$2,500), and Tufts Health Plan (for a Watertown walking map)
Community Support to Walking in General		Task force is working with League of Women Voters on improving snow clearance procedures		Planning is underway for the City to clear walking school bus routes of snow

### **Planning for coming school year**

#### **Brockton**

Since the CSRTS program will substantially change with the addition of three new schools, the Brockton Coordinator and WalkBoston will develop a plan over the summer that specifies SRTS tasks for the five parent liaisons who will be working two to three hours a week in the five SRTS schools. The Coordinator will be managing the liaisons and WalkBoston will work with her to develop maps and walking routes for the five schools.

Other plans call for the Physical Education Department to provide pedestrian safety training and the Health Department to continue the successful Peer Leadership Program.

## Newton

A new Coordinator has been hired to lead Newton's CSRTS program. In addition to undertaking the enforcement pilot in the fall, the Coordinator will continue to pursue a snow shoveling policy. Finally, although the enforcement pilot and snow shoveling policies will be applicable to all 15 schools, the coordinator will focus on fewer schools. At the start of school parents will be encouraged to have their children walk to school with the flyer shown below.

# How SHOULD MY CHILD GET TO & FROM SCHOOL?



## WALK.

**WHY?** Because it promotes physical activity and it reduces traffic congestions around schools.

- Children who walk to school are alert and ready to learn.
- Walking with parents helps kids learn valuable pedestrian safety lessons.
- Too many cars lead to traffic congestion and hazards to our kids.

Take advantage of your school's Walking School Bus Program or ask your Safe Routes To School representative for help creating one. Walking play-dates can help working parents share the job of getting kids to school.

Your kids will love it!

## TAKE THE SCHOOL BUS.

**WHY?** Because it helps reduce congestion around schools and saves you time.

School buses are safer than cars; all our buses have seat belts.

Bus fees are waived for most elementary students.

- Except for Horace Mann and Lincoln-Eliot, all our schools have bus service.

Visit <http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/transportation/index.html> to view a bus route map and schedule for your school. Or call 617-559-9052 to reach the Transportation Department.

## DRIVE, BUT ONLY IF YOU MUST.

**WHY?** Because traffic congestion around our neighborhood schools is dangerous for students.

- Competition for parking creates an unsafe situation, especially in the winter.
- Emergency vehicles must have access to our schools.

- Your child receives no physical exercise sitting in the back of the car.

If you must drive consider picking a location a few blocks from school to pick-up and drop-off. Even a five-minute walk will be good for your child and your school.



Draft document from Newton Schools

Safe Routes Task Force, June 1, 2009.

**Stoneham**

The Stoneham program will become more focused on school based programs. In addition to a pedometer challenge the Coordinator will undertake a pilot “independent walking” program that will address the questions of why parents drive older children to school rather than encourage them to walk with older friends and/or siblings.

**Watertown**

The Coordinator will continue her intensive school based programs while trying to address ways of making CSRTS sustainable through increased funding and more closely tying the program to the school department. Specific programs for the Fall are:

- Math/Science Night for families on “Reducing Your Carbon Footprint”
- Another Pedometer Challenge – this was very successful this year
- An author-naturalist DB Johnson will give presentations at the three elementary schools and participate in a storywalk on “Henry Hikes to Fitchburg”
- Addressing the concerns of crossing guards who are ignored by some drivers near the schools
- Dealing with the school drop off/pick up areas that create safety problems for walking students