

Champaign-Urbana Safe Routes to School Project



Annual Report
2021-2022

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Acknowledgments



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We also would like to acknowledge all the members of the C-U SRTS Steering Committee, supporting staff from MTD, students, educators, parents, and other community partners



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Executive Summary

The Champaign-Urbana Safe Routes to School Project (C-U SRTS) is an organization that is dedicated to increasing education and awareness of the benefits of walking and cycling to students K-12 in the Champaign-Urbana area, while also advocating for improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure for the community. The project has been funded primarily by the Illinois Safe Routes to Program through non-infrastructure grants provided through the Illinois Department of Transportation. Securing grants, and the overall operation of the program, is supported by the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD) as the grant fiscal agent and primary program sponsor.

For the year 2021-2022, the program continued to face challenges resulting from the fallout of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and other related issues such as staffing shortages at partner organizations, the shutdown of the National Safe Routes to School Data System, and no new opportunities for grant funding from the Illinois Department of Transportation. Nonetheless, the C-U SRTS team continued to be resilient and organized successful events and programs that met and exceeded the project's goals. The programs include Earn-a-Bike, C-U Bike Month 2021, Walk n' Roll to School Day, Snow Removal, Bike and Roll to School Day, reactivation of Active4me, and Vision Zero.

These programs and events are all integral in supporting the goals of the C-U SRTS Project which are:

- Encourage and increase walking and/or bicycling trips to school
- Improve safety for students walking/bicycling to school
- Reduce congestion at schools during arrival/dismissal
- Raise community awareness of and compliance with school zones/roadway safety
- Expand and sustain SRTS programs for the school districts into the future

In addition to MTD support, such as paying for staff time to operate the project as well as providing office space and administrative support, the C-U SRTS Project also works with both Champaign and Urbana School Districts, the Cities of Urbana and Champaign, local law enforcement, local bike organizations such as Champaign County Bikes, and the University of Illinois to help promote and educate the community on bicycle and pedestrian safety. More information, as well as a copy of this report, can be found online at www.c-usrtsproject.com.



Safe Routes to School Benefits

Economic

Owning and maintaining a personal vehicle is costly, ranging up to \$9,282 annually, according to the American Auto Association (AAA). Trips to drop off and pick up students from school for daily attendance and extracurriculars activities contributes to this cost. The cost will also continue to increase as a result of higher fossil fuel prices and inflation. Additionally, school districts spend up to \$500 million annually in busing costs.

A key method to reduce these costs for parents and school districts is through the implementation of Safe Routes to School programs. These programs aim to improve walking and cycling infrastructure and educate students about safety. Transitioning students to these modes of transportation would reduce the need for driving and busing students to school, resulting in dramatic cost savings as a result in reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

Environmental

The large amount of idling automobiles during peak drop off and pick up periods at schools contributes to air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory diseases. Around one-third of schools are located in air pollution danger zones. High automobile congestion and usage cause school districts to invest in parking lot expansions and travel lane additions.

Cycling and walking create no emissions, require significantly less space for infrastructure support, and do not create the congestion and safety issues that large numbers of vehicles do. Transitioning students to these modes of travel will help reduce pollution around school and reduce the risk of exposure to diseases such as asthma.

Health

Obesity is a growing problem in the United States with 40% of adults and 18.5% of youth reported to be obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Obesity among youth lays the groundwork for health issues in adult life such as respiratory problems, psychological problems, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes.

Daily physical activity is a key solution to preventing and mitigating these health issues. The CDC reports that “participating in physical activity was positively related to outcomes including academic achievement, academic behaviors, and indicators of cognitive skills and attitudes, such as concentration, memory, self-esteem, and verbal skills.” Walking and biking to and from school helps fulfill the daily physical activity needed to achieve these benefits and it exhibits how these modes are healthier alternatives to driving.



Safe Routes to School Benefits

Safety

School campuses and neighborhoods that have auto-centric infrastructure create unsafe environments for children arriving and departing school. Many of these environments lack the necessary active transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, protected bike lanes and paths, signage, traffic signals, and other multimodal street design features. The lack of multimodal safety education for motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians is also another factor that hinders the walking and cycling environment for children.

Walking and cycling safety are a key part of the C-U SRTS Project's mission. Bike rodeos, cycling classes, the Snow Removal Program, the Earn-a-Bike Program, and the promotion of the Illinois Bike Safety Quiz all serve as tools to promote active transportation safety education in the community. The project is also a supporter of the Vision Zero initiative, which has a goal of achieving zero traffic-related fatalities and injuries nationwide.



Project Background

C-U SRTS Project was founded in 2004 by Cynthia Hoyle and Rose Hudson through a partnership between MTD and SafeKids Champaign County to promote International Walk to School Day. The 2004 event saw the distribution of walkability checklists and the participation of two elementary schools each from the Urbana and Champaign school districts. Walk and Roll to School Day events have been a staple of the C-U SRTS Project ever since.

The C-U SRTS Project has been awarded several grants through the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program. All these grants have been awarded for non-infrastructure purposes. Unfortunately, IDOT did not offer new non-infrastructure grants for their 2021 grant distribution cycle. The current SRTS grant was extended through December 2021 due to issues resulting from the pandemic.

- 2008: \$25,500
- 2009: \$62,000
- 2012: \$76,000
- 2014: \$15,840
- 2019: \$48,587 (extended through December 2021)



Partnerships

Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD)

MTD has been essential in enabling the C-U SRTS Project through their provision of staff time, office space, funding, and administrative assistance.

C-U SRTS Steering Committee

The purpose of the steering committee was to establish communications with community stakeholders and gain insight on making key decisions. Furthermore, the members of the steering committee help provide recommendations and support with various projects. Meetings are generally held the second Tuesday of each month with an agenda produced by the Project Chair and minutes produced by the Project Intern.

The agencies that comprise of the steering committee include:

- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD)
- City of Champaign
- City of Urbana
- Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC)
- Champaign County Bikes (CCB)
- Urbana School District 116
- Champaign Unit 4 School District
- Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD)

The active members of the steering committee include:

- Cynthia Hoyle, FAICP, LCI
- Thomas Valencia
- Evan Alvarez
- Daniel Saphiere
- Lily Wilcock, AICP
- Bridget Broihahn
- Gabriel Lewis, AICP
- Charlie Smyth
- Jeff Yockey
- Judy Weber-Jones



Partnerships

Educators

Educators are crucial partners to C-U SRTS Project. Teachers, administrators, and staff have provided assistance with the distribution of materials and checklists, major safety events, and promoting educational resources such as the Illinois Bike Safety Quiz. This year, we had the opportunity to partner with Urbana High School Driver's Education Instructor Judy Weber-Jones and the Project Ignition Club in hosting a bike station for Bike and Roll to School Day.

Law Enforcement

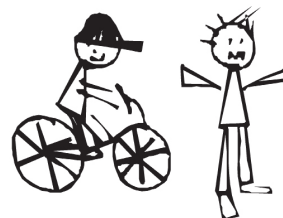
Law Enforcement has historically been an important partner to the C-U SRTS Project. They have served as volunteers for major safety events that improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists in the community. This year, however, challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing shortages have limited participation from law enforcement. We hope to rejuvenate our partnership soon.

Elected Officials

Elected officials provide crucial support to C-U SRTS Project through their community influence, developing bicycle and pedestrian friendly legislation and resolutions, and as volunteers. Urbana Mayor Diane Marlin participated in Walk n' Roll to School Day and Bike and Roll to School Day this last academic year. She read proclamations for both events and the WRTSD event was featured in a WCIA 3 news story.



Project Accomplishments



C-U Safe Routes to School Project
(C-U SRTS Project)

Earn-a-Bike Program 2021



The C-U SRTS Project partnered with Champaign County Bikes (CCB) and Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club (DMBGC) to host the four-day 2021 Earn-a-Bike Program during the week of August 2. The program's goals are to teach student participants basic bike maintenance and repair, safe bike handling skills, and provide them with a bike. Four students participated in this year's program. The program was led by three League Cycling Instructors (LCI): Cynthia Hoyle, Charlie Smyth, and Jeff Yockey. We also had five volunteers that assisted us: Evan Alvarez, Daniel Saphiere, Gabriel Lewis, Rose Kaczmarowski, and Sarah Havens. The program was held at the Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club and Crystal Lake Park in Urbana.

DMBGC students were asked to complete an application to confirm their participation in the program which included a parental permission form. Up to six students were allowed to participate. Students were also asked to complete the online Illinois Bike Safety Quiz. The quiz teaches students about bike safety and how to ride safely while on the road. Each student who completed the course and passed the bicycle safety quiz received a new bike, a bike lock, bike lights, and a helmet.

The COVID-19 safety guidelines for our program allowed instructors, participants, and students to safely participate in the program. Mask wearing and three feet social distancing was recommended when conducting close contact activities with students such as working on bikes, fitting helmets, etc. Masks were not required while riding bikes.



C-U Bike Month 2021

The Champaign-Urbana community traditionally celebrates National Bike Month in May. However, the University of Illinois and local school districts operated under remote learning during May 2021, so organizers of C-U Bike Month pushed back event celebrations to September 2021.

The C-U SRTS team and many Steering Committee members are part of the C-U Bike Month organizing group. Given that the shift of celebrations to September was a community decision, many events incorporated “C-U” in their titles to distinguish from national events traditionally held in May. The C-U Bike Month team helped with the t-shirt design, flyer creation, materials set-up and distribution, and community outreach.

The signature C-U Bike to Work Day and Light the Night events were both held on Tuesday, September 14th, 2021. C-U Bike to Work Day was hosted in the morning from 7:00 AM to 10:00 AM. 16 welcome stations were located across Champaign County and bike commuters were greeted with snacks, drinks, and important cycling information. Light the Night was held in the evening from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM at three locations on the University of Illinois campus. Over 750 free bike lights were installed for those who brought their bicycle.



CU BIKE MONTH 2021



Walk n' Roll to School Day 2021



The C-U SRTS Project celebrated International Walk n' Roll to School Day (WRSTD) on Wednesday, October 6th, 2021, in partnership with Urbana School District 116 and Champaign Unit 4 School District. Additionally, University of Illinois student athletes, local volunteers from community organizations, and staff from local government entities joined the event. Students were also welcomed by celebrities Urbana Mayor Diane Marlin and Urbana City Council Members Jaya Kolisetty and Chaundra Bishop at their events. Mayor Marlin read a proclamation declaring International Walk n' Roll to School Day in the City of Urbana at Dr. Williams Elementary. A total of eight schools participated in the event: six from Urbana and two from Champaign.

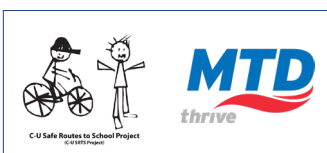


School events were held in the morning between 7:30am to 9:00am. Each individual school had their own programming, but generally volunteers, along with school officials, joined students at their bus drop locations and walked with them to their school. Schools were given backpack reflectors to distribute to students and were provided with educational materials and school announcements to educate students about pedestrian safety. Elementary schools in Urbana were provided packets that included walkability checklists to send home with every student in Friday folders the week before

the event. The packets also included safe walking route maps for each school, safety tip sheets, and a questionnaire. This year an online survey and map were provided. Schools were provided with electronic parent surveys to send out to families. The parent survey is provided through the National Center for Safe Routes to School Data Collection system.

This year's volunteers included Evan Alvarez, Will Finkelstein, Cynthia Hoyle, Kyoungjae Kim, Gabe Lewis, Dan Saphiere, Charlie Smyth, Thomas Valencia, Lily Wilcock, and Jeff Yockey.

Project Intern Thomas Valencia delivered a presentation to the Urbana Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) at their February 2022 meeting about WRTSD and discussed event highlights and community survey results with members.



Snow Removal Program 2021-2022

The Snow Removal Program plays a crucial role in ensuring that students and community members can walk and bike safely, regardless of weather conditions. With assistance from MTD Facilities Director Kirk Kirkland, we distributed several snow removal yard signs throughout the community. For the 2021-2022 school year, we had a total of three volunteers: Ben Orwig, Jenna Quintana, and Dan Saphiere. C-U SRTS supplied the volunteers with gloves, hats, and shovels that were made possible by the SRTS grant.



The team also recognized Dan Saphiere as a Snow Angel, which is a recognition given to a community member who exhibits exceptional snow removal participation and commitment. Dan volunteered to shovel three blocks of Springfield Avenue from Race Street to McCullough Street in Urbana. He also assisted with helping MTD buses that got stuck in the snow. As part of his recognition, the team awarded Dan an official certificate signed by Project Chair Cynthia Hoyle and MTD Managing Director Karl Gnad.

Additionally, we had a community member report a concern regarding the inequity of sign distribution that favored the West Urbana neighborhood. As a result, 2022 MTD Planning Intern Temka Erdenebayar worked with MTD Analyst Planner Dan Saphiere to create maps of bus stops near schools in ArcGIS to develop new locations for sign distribution for the following year.



Bike and Roll to School Day 2022



The C-U SRTS Project celebrated Bike and Roll to School Day on Wednesday, May 4th, 2022 as part of National Bike Month. We partnered with the City of Urbana, Urbana School District 116, Champaign Unit 4 School District, and Champaign County Bikes. We also had a first time, special partnership with Urbana High School's Project Ignition Club. We had volunteers from community organizations, staff from local government entities, and students from the University of Illinois. The day's flagship event was held at Urbana Middle and High Schools in partnership with the Project Ignition Club. Mayor Diane Marlin joined Project Ignition students in reading a proclamation declaring Bike and Roll to School Day in the City of Urbana. We also had volunteers attend events at five schools: three in Urbana and two in Champaign.



School events were held in the morning roughly between 7:15am to 9:00am. The bike station at Urbana Middle and High School received the most comprehensive planning and coordination, mainly between C-U SRTS team and the Project Ignition Club. The remaining schools did not have formal events, but volunteers meet with students at the bike racks of each school and distributed to them their t-shirt and bike materials. No checklists or surveys were given to schools to distribute to students, especially since the National Center for Safe Routes to School Data Center was shut down in March 2022.

This year's volunteers included Evan Alvarez, Briana Barr, Kara Dudek-Mizel, Cynthia Hoyle, Audrey Ishii, Rose Kaczmarowski, Gabe Lewis, Jenna Quintana, Dan Saphiere, Charlie Smyth, Thomas Valencia, and Lily Wilcock.



Active4Me Program

The Active4Me program is a walking and cycling initiative that aims to track the cycling and walking rate of elementary and middle school students commuting to school. The program comprises of the ZAP, a solar powered computer mounted on a pole at a school and it keeps track of how many trips a registered student makes via walking and biking to school. The program has a website that also provides information on things such as calories burned, pounds of greenhouse gas emissions saved, and estimates one's mileage based upon the distance students walked or biked to school.

The program has been dormant as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we hope to restart the program for the 2022-2023 academic year. We learned from the program vendors that we need to pay additional money to restart the program. With the absence of new SRTS grant funding, the team is exploring other funding options

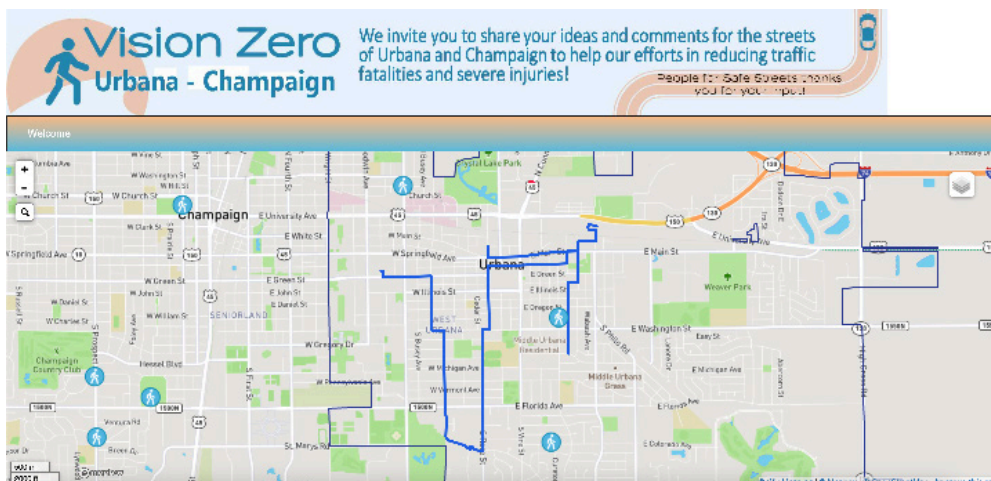


Vision Zero Initiative

The C-U SRTS Project has assisted in the implementation of a Vision Zero strategy in the Urbana-Champaign community. Vision Zero is an initiative that aims to eliminate all roadway fatalities and severe injuries. The City of Urbana adopted a Vision Zero resolution in 2020, providing municipal endorsement of the initiative.

C-U SRTS has assisted with running the People for Safe Streets website and the Urbana-Champaign Vision Zero WikiMap tool. This year, we changed the title from “Urbana Vision Zero” to “Urbana-Champaign Vision Zero” to include the entire community. A new Vision Zero flyer was created by Project Intern Thomas Valencia and it was submitted to the Urbana Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission for use.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH	VS	VISION ZERO
Traffic deaths are INEVITABLE		Traffic deaths are PREVENTABLE
PERFECT human behavior		Integrate HUMAN FAILING in approach
Prevent COLLISIONS		Prevent FATAL AND SEVERE CRASHES
INDIVIDUAL responsibility		SYSTEMS approach
Saving lives is EXPENSIVE		Saving lives is NOT EXPENSIVE



Websites and Social Media

C-U SRTS Website

C-U SRTS hosts a website that provides the latest information about upcoming events, highlights of past events, walking and cycling resources, the project's background, and reports. The team has worked throughout the year to update and revamp the website to make it more user-friendly and get rid of outdated information and logos.

C-U Bike Month Website

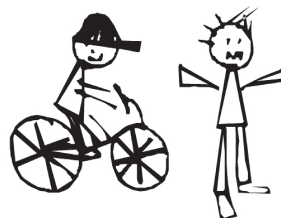
C-U SRTS is one of the many organizers of C-U Bike Month and it also updates and maintains the C-U Bike Month website. The team helps update the calendar with bike rides, bicycle classes, and other major bike events. The website also hosts pictures and important cycling resources.

Social Media

C-U SRTS runs social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Facebook continues to be the account with the most interactions and the team uses it often for event information, articles, event highlights, and community outreach. The Instagram and Twitter accounts are utilized more for event reminders and highlights.



Challenges and Conclusions



C-U Safe Routes to School Project
(C-U SRTS Project)



Challenges

No New IDOT SRTS Funding

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announced that for the 2021 Safe Routes to School Funding Cycle, only infrastructure projects will be funded. This was disappointing news for the C-U SRTS team. Funding beyond this point remains uncertain. The team is still able to host many of its major events and initiatives with the equipment purchased with previous grants, but purchasing any new equipment or starting/expanding a program will be difficult. The team continues to identify other sources of funding to run our programs.

Data Collection Issues + Shutdown of National SRTS Data System

The National Center for Safe Routes to School data collection system ended its regular level of service in early 2022. This data collection system was used in the 2021 WRTSD event and in previous events to distribute online surveys about neighborhood walking and cycling conditions and travel choices. The C-U SRTS team was given until June 30, 2022 to download its archival data. With the system no longer running, the team was not able to distribute online surveys for the 2022 BRTSD event. For future events, the team will look at creating its own online surveys through Google Forms. Additionally, we were not able to do in-person classroom tallies at Urbana schools due to coordination issues with USD #116 officials.

Continued Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

For the 2021-2022 academic year, we were able to host many of our in-person events and programs thanks to reduced restrictions. Many events before April 2022 required the use of masks or facial coverings to be in line with local and state regulations, especially for events that involved interactions with children. The 2022 BRTSD event, held in May, was the only event where masks were optional after Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker lifted the statewide mask mandate. Steering Committee meetings were held virtually with the May meeting being the first in-person meeting in two years. We still faced several challenges in regard to the pandemic. Student, parent, and organizational participation remained lower than desired for many events and many past events and initiatives became dormant or defunct because of financial challenges, virus mitigations, and staffing shortages.

Staffing Shortages at Partner Organizations

The largest continuing effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is staffing shortages across all partner organizations, including MTD. Law enforcement was unable to deliver the level of participation that they have in the past due to increased community safety challenges. The City of Champaign and Champaign Unit 4 School District both had major staff changes that saw the departure of previous steering committee members. Both organizations have been unable to send replacements. The Champaign-Urbana Public Health District has not provided any participation throughout the year due to being heavily occupied with the community response to the pandemic. MTD is facing an ongoing bus operator shortage which sometimes limits the participation of staff in assisting C-U SRTS Project.



Conclusions

Being resilient and persistent has been the main lesson developed throughout the course of the academic year. The pandemic-induced challenges across all factors pertaining to the C-U SRTS project have made it challenging to continue with our initiatives and programs, but we still look for other ways to continue with them. The return of in-person learning allowed us to restart our past signature programs: Walk and Bike to School Days. Our new partnership with the Project Ignition Club helped increase participation for Bike and Roll to School Day and helped with having many students take the Illinois Bike Safety Quiz. We also are exploring new funding opportunities. C-U SRTS Project will continue to use this resilience to push for more participation and funding to implement our programs to ensure children and community members have a safe environment to walk and cycle.



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Thank You!



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