

ODOT Launches Safe Routes to School Program; Sponsors International Walk to School Day

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 10, 2007

PR# 07-045

Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Information Release



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With recent reports stating childhood obesity has tripled since 1980, people across the nation have been looking for ways to reverse this trend and initiate programs to make the nation's children more active and healthy. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation is pleased to announce the launch of its Safe Routes to School Program and sponsorship of International Walk to School Day on October 3, 2007.

Studies have shown less than 15 percent of today's elementary and middle school children currently walk or bike to school and as much as 25 percent of morning rush hour traffic comes from driving children to school.

The \$612 million federal SRTS Program, which was approved by Congress in 2005, provides all the states and the District of Columbia funding to support education and enforcement programs and help communities improve infrastructure such as building sidewalks and bike paths. Oklahoma's SRTS funding is \$7 million through 2009, apportioned annually.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation's SRTS Program grant application period will officially begin October 1, 2007.

The purpose of the SRTS Program is to enable and encourage children to walk and bike to school and to make biking and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age. Another reason for the SRTS Program is to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety, reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity of primary and middle schools.

Ernestine Mbroh, ODOT's SRTS Program director, is charged with the task of working with local governments and organizations to gather public input, identify needs, analyze projects, develop proposals and shepherd applications through the process.

Individual grants can be distributed to state, local and regional agencies, including nonprofits that meet requirements. Projects can be for single, multiple or regional schools. Based on the federal guidelines, each state administers its own program and solicits and selects its own projects for funding.

The SRTS Program makes funding available for a wide variety of individual programs and projects, from building safer street crossings to establishing programs that encourage children and their parents to walk and bicycle safely to school.

To build public awareness and understanding of the SRTS Program and the benefits of walking and biking to school, ODOT is sponsoring International Walk to School Day in Oklahoma on October 3, 2007. Thousands of communities around the U.S. and nearly 40 countries across the globe participate in this annual celebration.

For more information on the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and International Walk to School Day contact SRTS Program Director Ernestine Mbroh at embroh@odot.org or 405-522-3570 or visit www.saferoutespartnership.org and www.walktoschool.org.

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(Editors and News Directors: For media inquiries, contact the ODOT Public Affairs Division at 405-521-6000.)