



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

Transportation Advisory Commission

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January 21, 2022

The Honorable Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 530
Fairfax, Virginia 22035

Dear Chairman McKay,

On behalf of the Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC), I write to raise a concern about the potential ending of funding for the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) non-infrastructure program in Fairfax County. FCPS did not apply for funding from the federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) non-infrastructure program in the most recent application cycle. As a result, federal matching funds for the program will cease at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, impacting FCPS programs that have been in place since 2013.

The TAC discussed the program during our December meeting and further discussed the program with county and FCPS staff at our January meeting. As the Board of Supervisors reviews the FY 2022 budget, the TAC wanted to make the Board aware of potential changes to the SRTS program and encourage the Board to consider opportunities to build on its successes, which have been achieved with modest county investments. Safe and active transportation to County schools on foot and by bike is critical to the health and safety of students and residents and is necessary to ensure the resilience of Fairfax communities.

According to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) 2020 SRTS Success Book¹:

“With 141 elementary schools and 23 middle schools, Fairfax County Public Schools is the largest school division in the state and the 10th largest school division in the country. Many Fairfax County schools participate in annual Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day events, which is a key reason why Virginia consistently ranks near the top

¹ Work Cited: Virginia Department of Transportation. *SRTS funded Non-Infrastructure Project List through 2019*. 2019. VDOT, https://www.virginiadot.org/programs/resources/safe_routes/2016-2017/Main_Page/SRTS_funded_Non-Infrastructure_Project_List_through_2019.pdf.

of all states for schools participating in Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day events, routinely outperforming more populous states like Texas and New York.

Fairfax County Public Schools also has one of Virginia's most well-developed bicycle safety education programs. The program was spearheaded by the Division's long-time VDOT-funded SRTS coordinator, who has delivered bicycle safety education to schools throughout the County, including schools with at-risk or special needs students. In support of the program, the coordinator has helped build, maintain, and coordinate FCPS's bicycle fleet and conducts annual training for PE teachers to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to teach bicycle safety education to students, including bicycle maintenance skills.

In addition, the Fairfax coordinator has championed the implementation of traffic safety gardens, which are simulated street environments where students can learn pedestrian and bicycle safety skills. She helped coordinate construction of FCPS's first traffic safety garden at Hollin Meadows Elementary in 2019, including assisting with an application for a QuickStart Mini-grant, and hopes to institutionalize traffic safety gardens throughout FCPS, so that whenever a school blacktop is repaved, a traffic garden is considered for implementation."

In addition to the benefits outlined in the state report, the TAC learned that the SRTS coordinator and programming have:

- Helped students be physically active and arrive at school energized and ready to learn;
- Reduced car congestion and improved air quality at and near schools;
- Educated students on pedestrian and bicycle safety;
- Delivered permanent sets of bikes to schools;
- Hosted successful bike and walk to school campaign events each year; and,
- Increased the number of students walking and biking to school regularly.

As the county continues to advance the ActiveFairfax Transportation Program and Safe Streets for All, the TAC believes it is important to consider the impact the SRTS program has had in encouraging more healthful behavior, especially among our most vulnerable populations. In addition, the Board's adopted Transportation Project Priorities for FY 2015 – FY 2025 provides additional funding for 23 school-walking-route sidewalk projects totaling over \$40 million. With this level of investment, it would seem prudent to ensure that the SRTS program is maintained, and perhaps even expanded, to ensure these funds are spent wisely and where they can have the most benefit. Consequently, the TAC urges the Board of Supervisors to please consider working with FCPS to continue supporting the SRTS program and coordinator position in FCPS.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our request. Please let me know if you have any questions. Because of the importance of this issue, the TAC plans to continue monitoring the status of the SRTS program as part of our 2022 Work Plan.

Sincerely yours,



Michael D. Champness
Dranesville District Representative and Chair
Fairfax County Transportation Advisory Commission
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/tac>

cc: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Fairfax County School Board
Tom Biesiadny, Director, Fairfax County DOT
TAC Members