



Highlights of [GAO-08-789](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In August 2005, Congress established the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program primarily to encourage children to walk and bicycle to school. GAO was asked to determine (1) the steps the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and states have taken to implement the program, (2) the extent to which FHWA and states have evaluated the results of the program, and (3) how the program is related to other surface transportation programs and some considerations for future reauthorization. GAO reviewed statutes, regulations, and guidance; analyzed program obligation data and funds awarded by states; and interviewed officials with FHWA, state departments of transportation, and local grant recipients.

What GAO Recommends

To enhance its oversight of the SRTS program, GAO is recommending that DOT (1) develop a comprehensive plan to monitor and evaluate the program and (2) formalize its efforts to work jointly with CDC and EPA in developing health and environmental outcome measures. To improve the effectiveness of the federal investment in the program, Congress should consider requiring a state or local match that will help encourage additional state and local investment in SRTS activities. DOT officials generally agreed with GAO's findings and said they are considering the recommendations, and they provided technical clarifications, which are incorporated as appropriate.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-789](#). For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Progress in Implementing the Program, but a Comprehensive Plan to Evaluate Program Outcomes Is Needed

What GAO Found

FHWA and the states have implemented key aspects of the SRTS program. FHWA established a clearinghouse to provide technical assistance for SRTS programs and a national task force to study and develop a strategy for advancing SRTS programs nationwide. It also provided an interim report to Congress on its progress and developed program guidance that provides states with flexibility in implementing their SRTS programs. Although state-level implementation varies, states have made progress in implementing the program. Approximately 2,700 schools nationwide are participating in the program. As of March 31, 2008, states obligated almost \$75 million in SRTS funding or approximately 18 percent of the total amount apportioned by FHWA since September 2005.

FHWA, in collaboration with the clearinghouse and the national task force, has taken significant steps to develop a framework for evaluating SRTS program outcomes, including developing standardized data collection forms. However, FHWA lacks a comprehensive plan to monitor and evaluate the full range of SRTS program outcomes. FHWA requests, but does not require states to develop and report information on program results. The Department of Transportation (DOT) could require states to develop and report such information by including language in its grant agreements. The Government Performance and Results Act requires agencies to measure performance toward the achievement of program goals and objectives. The clearinghouse has made an initial effort to talk with key stakeholders, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), about appropriate measures for health and environmental outcomes, but additional work is needed to determine the feasibility of developing these outcome measures.

The SRTS program broadens the federal transportation role in that it addresses concerns about bicycle and pedestrian safety of students, childhood obesity and inactivity, and traffic and environmental problems in the vicinity of schools, rather than primarily addressing broader concerns about the condition of surface transportation infrastructure or highway safety. Also, we note that while most federal funds for federal highway projects require a 20 percent match from state and local governments, a 100 percent federal share is established for SRTS projects or activities. GAO has previously reported that grants with federal matching requirements may promote relatively more state and local spending than nonmatching grants. Finally, the SRTS program incorporates some of GAO's principles for re-examining federal programs—such as sharing best practices—but the program has had more limited success in implementing performance accountability.