

Bend receives federal funds for safe school sidewalk project

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has awarded \$124,724 to the City of Bend's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) infrastructure project. The City's application was one of eight proposals approved to receive SRTS infrastructure funding in 2008-2011, and although the SRTS is 100% Federal funding with no match funding required, Bend has approved \$50,000 in its 07/08 budget as supplemental and matching funds for the SRTS project. The Oregon SRTS Program had \$2.1 million available for award in 2007 for projects at schools serving grades K-8. The program administers funds received from the 2005 SAFETEA-LU transportation bill for SRTS programs. The SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) was signed into law in 2005 to address the many challenges facing the nation's transportation system.

The funds are used to provide infrastructure to improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school. Benefits include the potential to: (1) reduce or avoid child injuries and fatalities; (2) create a more livable community by reducing the barriers and hazards to children walking or bicycling to schools; (3) create a safer walking and bicycling built environment within approximately two miles of a school.

The City project provides for the completion of the sidewalk along Bear Creek Road to the boundary of the walking zone for Bear Creek Elementary (Bear Creek from Alpenview to Cessna). Children in the walking zone from Bear Creek Elementary currently have to walk on the shoulders along Bear Creek Road, a roadway that was constructed to rural standards. When completed, the 790-foot sidewalk project will allow children to walk more safely along the minor arterial road. The time line for construction is dependent on an agreement between ODOT and the City; however, it is likely that the design should begin this year with construction happening in 2009.

Today, fewer than 15 percent of all school trips are made by walking or bicycling, one-quarter are made on a school bus, and over half of all children arrive at school in private automobiles. The decline in walking and bicycling has had an adverse effect on traffic congestion and air quality around schools, as well as pedestrian and bicycle safety. In addition, a growing body of evidence has shown that children who lead sedentary lifestyles are at risk for a variety of health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Safety issues are a big concern for parents, who consistently cite traffic danger as a reason why their children are unable to bicycle or walk to school. The purpose of the Federal SRTS Program is to address these issues head on. At its heart, the program empowers communities to make walking and bicycling to school a safe and routine activity once again. The program makes funding available for a wide variety of programs and projects, from building safer street crossings to establishing programs that encourage children and their parents to walk and bicycle safely to school.

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