



POLICY 2016-7

SAFE SCHOOLS EMPHASIS PROGRAM POLICY

1. POLICY OBJECTIVE

The program will be used to assist the counties and municipalities identify and prioritize the most urgent needs within the two-mile radius, "parent responsibility zone," for each school in the Lake~Sumter MPO planning area. The Safe Schools Emphasis Program Policy will be incorporated into Transportation 2040 after Governing Board adoption. This objective is consistent with the multimodal transportation goals and visions set forth in TRANSPORTATION 2040, the MPOs long range transportation plan.

2. BACKGROUND

Today more than ever, there is a need to provide options that allow all children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school safely. Many communities struggle with traffic congestion around schools and motor vehicle emissions polluting the environment. At the same time, children in general engage in less physical activity, which contributes to the prevalence of childhood obesity. At first glance, these problems may seem to be separate issues, but the Safe Schools Emphasis program can address some of these challenges through coordinated school transportation planning.

Recent studies have found that walking to school is associated with higher overall physical activity throughout the day. There are many potential benefits of physical activity for youth including:

- Weight and blood pressure control
- Bone, muscle, and joint health and maintenance
- Reduction in the risk of diabetes
- Improved psychological welfare
- Better academic performance

3. Safe Schools Emphasis Program: The MPO received funding from FDOT for the Safe School Access Transportation Study (SSATS) to assess the transportation conditions of each school located within both Lake and Sumter counties. The primary goal of the SSATS was to develop transportation master plans for each school in the study area, focusing on a 10-year planning horizon. The plans were based on data

collected and analyzed for each school in the study area, as well as recommendations for improvement for all modes of travel to and from the individual school sites. The study area is a two-mile buffer around each school site encompassing any statutorily defined student walk zones and any locally defined parent responsibility zones for long range transportation planning purposes. Each school starts from a unique situation with different circumstances. Some schools have great places for walking and bicycling, but few students taking advantage of it. Other communities have children walking and bicycling to school in unsafe conditions or along poorly maintained routes. The SSATS addressed each school site and its unique conditions and issues and developed recommendations to provide more safe options for walking and biking to and from school. To implement the recommendations made in the SSATS, the MPO is establishing a Safe Schools Emphasis Program.

The benefits of walking and biking , such as improving public health, fostering connected communities, decreasing automobile dependence, and reducing air pollution are all highlighted in the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (TRANSPORTATION 2040). There is an increasing need and responsibility to give people the opportunity to walk and bike for transportation. TRANSPORTATION 2040 addresses the importance of walking and biking and what can be done to facilitate and promote it as a viable mode of transportation.

4. DEFINITION

Safe Schools Emphasis Area: For the purposes of this program the Safe School Emphasis area is defined as a 2 mile circular buffer around all school sites. This is a standard school transportation planning boundary established in July 2005, when Congress passed federal legislation that established a national Safe Routes to School program and defined this 2 mile buffer around schools. Specifically, this program addresses the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school, on any public road or any bicycle or pedestrian pathway or trail within approximately two miles of a school. Educational and encouragement projects and programs are eligible for areas with walking and biking infrastructure in place.

5. GOALS

- a. The primary goal of the Safe Schools Emphasis Program is to help municipalities and counties within the Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization planning area to provide a transportation system where students can safely and conveniently walk and bike to school.
- b. The Safe Schools Emphasis Program serves as framework for identifying and selecting school transportation projects for implementation.

- c. To establish a comprehensive vision and strategies for school transportation accommodations that enhance mobility through connectivity & accessibility, improved safety & quality of life.
- d. To maximize the multimodal capacity of existing roadways around our schools.
- e. To reduce the number of crashes involving motorists and pedestrians and bicyclists around our schools.
- f. Promote community policies, plans, subdivision regulations, and right-of-way requirements to make sure that school transportation provisions are included in new construction and rehabilitation projects both at a regional and local level.
- g. Safe Schools Emphasis Program aims to create safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for children to bicycle and walk to and from schools.
- h. Reverse the decline in children walking and bicycling to schools, increase kids' safety and reverse the alarming nationwide trend toward childhood obesity and inactivity.

6. POLICY

The MPO will promote the planning and implementation of the Safe Schools Emphasis Program throughout the MPO planning area and recommends that all member governments adopt Safe Schools Emphasis policies, consistent with this program. The MPO will seek incorporation of the Safe Schools Emphasis Program into the development of transportation projects and plans where applicable. The concepts listed provide a broader perspective for both regional and local decision making concerning Safe School Emphasis Program implementation:

- a. Create Complete Streets around our schools
- b. Close gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network
- c. Improve the pedestrian and bicycling environment around our schools
- d. Encourage appropriate school siting

7. CRITERIA

Safe Schools Emphasis projects can have different types of benefits, depending on the type of project. It can increase the number of children walking or bicycling to school, it can improve safety, and it can even reduce busing costs. The Lake~Sumter MPO defines Safe Schools Emphasis Program as one of their priorities: "projects that provide safe and convenient access to school locations within the MPO region; projects that complement education, outreach, and planning efforts at school sites The Lake~Sumter MPO will prioritize Safe Schools Emphasis projects in their Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) application process based on any of the following criteria:

- a. The proposed project been identified as a priority in the SSATS or other Plan or is a missing link in a pedestrian or bicycle system within the defined Safe School Emphasis Area.
- b. The project resolves a documented hazardous walking condition as defined in Florida Statute and eliminates the resultant school busing requirement.
- c. The project meets the objectives and/or guidelines described in the Safe Routes to School Program and is within the defined Safe School Emphasis Area.

8. REQUIREMENTS

- a. Safe Schools Emphasis project sponsors must complete and submit a MPO Project Information Application and Maintenance Agreement covering the long term operation and maintenance of the Safe Schools Emphasis facility
- b. Each project should use the most appropriate design standards and procedures. For projects using MPO attributable federal funding, it is important to meet or exceed standards and procedures acceptable to the Florida and U.S. Departments of Transportation, i.e., Florida Greenbook, Plans Preparation Manual. All waivers of design criteria as described in the Florida Greenbook and the Plans Preparation Manual are supported in this policy document.
- c. Designs should include accommodation of all users and be sensitive to the context of the roadway and adjacent land use for the corridor.
- d. The project sponsor should provide the local transit agency the opportunity to participate throughout the process and encourage the involvement of the local transit agency in the design process to ensure that sufficient accommodation of transit users and access to transit facilities is provided.

9. APPEALS

When a member government is not in agreement with the MPO's decision regarding Safe Schools Emphasis projects subject to the Transportation Improvement Program Selection Process, the jurisdiction may introduce a formal appeal by means of a resolution adopted by their local governing body. The resolution must be submitted to the MPO and proceed through the established transportation planning process. As such, the resolution will be subject to review and comment by the Technical Advisory Committee, Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The MPO Governing Board, after considering comments from the other three committees, will make the final decision on the appeal.

10. IMPLEMENTATION

Upon approval and adoption of this Safe Schools Emphasis Program, it will become part of the MPO's planning process and project selection for state and federal funding. The principles of this Program will also guide MPO staff in preparation of MPO planning documents and regional transportation planning efforts to which it contributes. TRANSPORTATION 2040 will be amended to incorporate this Program in accordance with the requirements of the plan at adoption. Also, the List of Priority Projects will be amended as necessary in order to seek funding for projects as the result of the completion and resolution of support of a Safe School Emphasis Project Information Application.

11. EVALUATION

The MPO, through its committee review process, will evaluate this Policy and the documents associated with it on an annual basis. This evaluation may include recommendations for amendments to the Safe Schools Emphasis Program, including the development of prioritization criteria, design guidance, and subsequently be considered for adoption by the MPO Governing Board.

Lake~Sumter MPO Safe Schools Emphasis Program Policy

Policy Approved on: September 28, 2014

Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization



Leslie Campione, Chairman

Approved as to form and legality:



Melanie Marsh, MPO Attorney