

Safe Routes

Safe Routes to School: Dollars and Sense

AFTER FOUR YEARS OF STUDIES, THE TIME IS OVERDUE FOR THE NYC DEPARTMENT of Transportation's Safe Routes to School program to install promised safety improvements.

February 2007 will mark the third anniversary of the DOT's public launch of Safe Routes to School, and the time has come for the agency to start implementing its recommendations. The DOT originally identified 135 "priority schools," out of 1,471 schools citywide, for Safe Routes to Schools improvements. Studies of existing conditions and traffic safety recommendations have been

completed for two-thirds of these schools and posted on the DOT's website. The reports include recommendations ranging from signage, striping, assigning more crossing guards, changing signal timing and/or reduction of parking spaces near intersections, to more structural changes such as installation of curb extensions or relocation of utility poles.

A snapshot of the 135 NYC DOT Safe Routes to Schools "priority schools" from the 84 completed reports (to date)

	Bronx	Brooklyn	Queens	Manhattan	Staten Island
Number of reports completed:	21	26	15	17	5
Average percentage of students that currently walk to school:	62%	66%	53%	54%	25%
Average enrollment of students at each priority school:	810	770	1,022	715	891
Average number of total crashes (can be any kind) per year, per school zone (about 5 blocks around each school):	66	63	47	68	44
Average number of pedestrian injuries per year, per school zone (about 5 blocks around each school):	9	7	4	8	3
Average number of school-related* crashes per year, per school zone:	1.4	1	.6	1	.4

*School-related crashes are reported as crashes involving school age pedestrians (0-14) that occurred on weekdays during the school year.

Grand Totals: When we look at the grand total of crashes and fatalities for the period of 1998-2004 for all of the schools in each borough for which there are reports filed (Bronx, 21; Brooklyn, 26; Queens, 15; Manhattan, 17; and Staten Island, 5) the magnitude of the severity of the need to make areas around schools, and all streets for that matter, safer is clear.

	Bronx	Brooklyn	Queens	Manhattan	Staten Island
Total crashes for 1998-2004 in school zones:	9,699	11,413	4,954	8,120	1,533
Total pedestrian injuries for 1998-2004 in school zones:	1,278	1,208	390	930	95
Total pedestrian fatalities by for 1998-2004 in school zones:	17	10	3	17	4
Total school-related crashes for 1998-2004 in school zones:	210	189	61	120	15

The most recent federal transportation funding bill (SAFETEA-LU, which was signed into law in August 2005) passed millions of dollars to every state specifically for Safe Routes to School capital construction. New York State received \$32 million in federal funding for safe routes to school for 2005-2009, with \$13.1 million currently sitting in the bank for 2005-2006. Representatives at the State Department of Transportation expect the application process for distributing this first \$13.1 million to be finished by January 2007. The monies will then be divided within the eleven State DOT Regions in part based on the school aged population in each region. It is expected that Region 11, which encompasses all of New York City, will receive a large portion of the State funds. The monies received by each region will be divided so that 30% will go toward education and 70% will go toward physical street safety improvements. In addition to the federal transportation funding, the New York City congressional delegation has set aside more than \$2 million for safe routes improvements.

With plans sitting on the shelf and money in the bank, Mayor Bloomberg and the City DOT should not waste time breaking ground on changes that will make it safer for school-aged New Yorkers to walk and bicycle to school and make active transportation a healthy habit of the newest generation of New Yorkers.

The DOT reports that it has installed speed humps in front of 24% of the 1,471 total schools throughout the city as part of the Safe Routes to

School program, and placed signs and markings at most schools. It remains unclear how well these modest measures prevent the epidemic of injuries and fatalities to children age 0-14 from conflicts with automobiles. Some of the school safety reports describing the walking conditions and crash history on the streets around the 135 priority schools clearly show that more robust street improvements are needed to prevent any more injuries and fatalities. □

TakeAction!

WRITE to Mayor Bloomberg and urge him to accelerate the installation of DOT recommended safety improvements around NYC schools.

Mayor Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007