There was a time when the sight of children walking and bicycling to school was a familiar scene in communities across California. In fact, in 1969 approximately 50 percent of children walked or bicycled to school. Today, fewer than 15 percent of children do and rates of childhood obesity and overweight are overwhelming.¹²

Concerns about traffic safety are often cited as one of the main reasons children do not walk or bicycle to school.³ And for good reason, as in 2010 alone, over 21,000 California school children were sent to an emergency department and over 1,500 were hospitalized due to pedestrian or bicycle injuries.⁴

Creating safe opportunities for walking and bicycling is critical to improving the safety of young pedestrians and bicyclists and to reducing overweight and obesity among California’s youth. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs are key to reversing these trends. SRTS programs increase the number of children who safely walk and bicycle to school through education and encouragement programs, enhanced enforcement, engineering improvements, and strong program evaluation.

**PROGRAM SUMMARY**

The City of Riverside received a SRTS state Cycle 7 Infrastructure award for $150,000 to upgrade pedestrian signals with visual and vocal count down timers at 213 intersections located within a ½ mile of 48 school sites.

Traffic engineers targeted these signals for retrofitting because their proximity to schools increased the likelihood of pedestrian use by students, teachers, and parents. Choosing these locations also provided the greatest investment in pedestrian safety.

This project was turned around quickly. By summer 2010, all 1,500 pedestrian signals at the 213 intersections near schools were upgraded.
IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

City of Riverside,
Traffic Engineering Department

LOCATION

Riverside, Riverside County
Caltrans District 8
CA Assembly District 63
CA Senate District 31

FUNDING

State SRTS Infrastructure – Cycle 7

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

48 schools in the City of Riverside

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PROGRAM SUCCESSES

• Decrease in Pedestrian Collisions: Between 2009 and 2010, pedestrian collisions decreased by 33 percent.

• Positive Feedback From the Community: City staff continue to get positive feedback from parents, teachers, residents, and elected officials, who say walking and bicycling to school (and other destinations) is safer and more accessible as a result of the new pedestrian signals.

• Makes it Easier for Crossing Guards to Keep Children Safe: Crossing guards are especially pleased with the change because the signal now communicates the time available to cross the street with the children.

• High Return on Investment: The City Traffic Engineer said this project was “one of the best $150,000 we spent in the City. Retrofitting the pedestrian signals provided a high benefit at a relatively low cost.”

• Encouraged Additional Pedestrian Crossing Signal Upgrades: As a result of the positive feedback from the community, the City decided to retrofit the remaining 147 intersections with upgraded pedestrian crossing signals. As of July 2012, all 360 pedestrian crossing signals were upgraded with a pedestrian count down.


The California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center is a program of California Active Communities, a joint Unit of the University of California San Francisco and the California Department of Public Health, and is funded through a statewide non-infrastructure SRTS award from the California Department of Transportation.