

# S U C C E S S

# STORIES

## Wharton, New Jersey

### Active Community Participation Leads to the Development of Wharton School District's **SRTS** Travel Plan

In December of 2005, the Morris County Division of Transportation (MCDOT) selected Wharton Borough's MacKinnon Middle School and Duffy Elementary School, which occupy the same building, to be pilots for a **Morris County Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Program**. Wharton Borough was selected by MCDOT for the pilot project for a number of reasons. First, Wharton is a compact community where the students are not bused to school and safe alternatives to driving are needed. Second, school and municipal officials together enthusiastically supported community participation in International Walk to School Day (the first Wednesday in October). They had demonstrated that they were ready, willing and able to participate and were prepared to maintain SRTS momentum. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) provided federal funding for the pilot program.

The SRTS project team included Borough, County, School District, parent and student representatives. The MCDOT facilitated the program with help from a local and national consultant team, led by The RBA Group of Morristown. Together, the team worked to develop a SRTS program for the Wharton schools. School children were encouraged to actively work with the team leaders in the classroom and at special events. They sought to develop a program that would engage the entire community in improving the physical environment and encouraging a social climate to support children's ability to walk, bicycle, carpool or take transit safely to school - all while gaining added health, air quality, traffic safety, and quality of life benefits.

The goal of this SRTS pilot program is to ensure that the results (both the successes and challenges) of the Wharton experience were recorded and published in order to assist both the Wharton schools in advancing their SRTS Program and to serve as a resource to guide future projects in other communities in Morris County and New Jersey.

#### Key Facts

- Wharton was selected through a competitive process for funding as a SRTS pilot program.
- Wharton school district does not provide busing.
- Wharton has had on-going involvement in events like International Walk to School Day.

#### Innovative Ideas

- Utilize student participation through:
  - Walkability Audits
  - Walking Time Radius Map
  - Emission Calculations
  - Camera Exercises (The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly)
  - Cross section measurements
  - Art/Poetry Class Activities
- Solicit public input through:
  - Personal vision statements
  - Route planning
  - Voting on preferred treatments/programs
- Offer a variety of encouragement and education events that involve all community members, such as International Walk-to-School Day and a Bike Rodeo.

#### STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN PLAN DEVELOPMENT

In Mid-March, twenty-three seventh-grade algebra students from MacKinnon Middle School participated in a Student Field Exercise to solicit insight on the identified and potential routes to school from the students' perspective. Activities related to the student's algebra course. Teams of six to eight students each worked with a staff person to complete the following activities:



- *Walking Time-Radius Map*
- *Walkability Audits*
- *Cross Section Measurements*
- *Camera Exercise (The Good, Bad, and Ugly)*
- *How Much Pollution is that Car Producing?*

In addition, during Spring 2006, students were also able to participate in a Bicycle Rodeo. The event, entitled “Ready to Roll,” included six different stations addressing bicycle safety and one station addressing pedestrian safety. Students saw first hand how safe bicycling practices can be as simple as making sure your helmet fits correctly.



At the end of the Student Field Exercise, RBA and Morris County were able to assemble some of the key elements of a School Travel Plan. They developed a map of the school’s neighborhood with optimal walking routes to include in their SRTS Plan. They were able to identify what the neighborhoods look like and how they function, where people walk or not and why, and some key issues associated with implementing their Travel Plan.

Elementary school students also participated in SRTS-related activities. Fourth graders were asked either to write a poem or draw a poster depicting their journey to school. The winning artist and poet received a small award and had their entries displayed at the public visioning workshop.

All of these student activities aided in creation of the SRTS Travel Plan by identifying students’ concerns about the commute to and from school on foot or bicycle. Students were able to gain hands on experience as to what exactly SRTS

means before providing their own opinions on such issues as health, safety and the environment.

### PUBLIC VISIONING & PLAN INPUT

In April 2006, the SRTS project team hosted a public visioning workshop where community members had the opportunity to learn about the SRTS Program and share their ideas on what types of events, projects and activities were of most interest to the Wharton community. At this meeting, adults and children were led in various exercises fashioned to garner their perspectives on what they envision an effective SRTS Program to be.

**Visioning:** Those present were asked to describe their dreams for the future. Responses included long-term goals, such as fewer cars on the roads and improved environmental health, as well as specific improvements, such as clearly marked crosswalks. With their visions in mind, participants took part in subsequent activities geared to help develop their School Travel Plan.

**Route Planning:** Participants were asked to begin to bring their visions to reality through a route planning exercise. Using the same base map that had been used for the student field exercise, they identified where students currently walk or bike, where they could if conditions were improved, major obstacles to walking and biking, and prime destinations for pedestrian and cyclists.

**Voting on Preferred Treatments/ Programs:** Finally, solutions were categorized according to the “4 E” approach to implementing a SRTS Program: Encouragement, Education, and Enforcement Programs, and Engineering Treatments. Each person was asked to rank the actions that they thought would best help the Wharton Schools realize their SRTS goals. By using color-coded

stickers, participants indicated for each solution whether they “loved it”, “hated it” or “would consider it.” Walk to School Days, Assemblies/Guest Speakers, and *Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25* Campaigns were voted among the top programmatic solutions, while traffic calming and facility improvements ranked highest for preferred engineering treatments.

By engaging representatives from the school and community, the SRTS project team was able to refine their program goals, expand their understanding of optimal routes to school, brainstorm solutions, and further develop a preliminary School Travel Plan.

### IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Although Wharton Borough’s Safe Routes To School Plan continues to evolve, their success lies in the enthusiasm of the municipality, school and community for working together towards a common goal: to increase the number of children walking and bicycling to school. It is anticipated that their plan will be completed and many actions implemented by Spring 2007.



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### Wharton Borough, Morris County

Population (2000)	6,239
Area	.22 square miles
Density	2,836 people/sq. mile
Public School Participant:	
Marie V. Duffy Elementary School (grades PK-5)	approx. 580 students
Public School Participant:	
MacKinnon Middle School (grades 6-8)	approx. 270 students



NJ Department of Transportation

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