



Safe Routes to School in Action

Ronan, Montana

Background

In the northwestern corner of Montana, less than 100 miles from Glacier National Park, Ronan is located on the Flathead Indian Reservation, snuggled up to the base of the Mission Mountain range. Ronan is an agriculturally-based town with a population just over 2000. Ronan's school district serves nearly 1,200 students with one elementary school, one middle school and one high school; the middle school and high school are connected. The elementary school is located only one block away and is connected by a multi-use path.

District policy is to bus students that live further than 3 miles from school, which is approximately half of the student population. Recognizing that 58% of the student population is Native American and has a high incidence of childhood obesity, Ronan wanted to promote physical activity and provide students with safe options to get to and from school.

Details

A 15 acre park centrally located in Ronan offers green space for children and families to recreate, but city officials wanted to increase practical use of the park by creating paths that cut through the park for kids to bike and walk to school.

Ronan received an initial SRTS grant of \$19,054 in 2007 to provide lighting and signage along a bike path and crosswalks through the park. Additionally the city was able to change the speed limit to 15 mph at a crossing where the bike path crosses two main town corridors (Buchanan St. and Eisenhower St.).

A second round of SRTS grant funding of \$20,000 in 2008 is currently being used for encouragement and enforcement. The Ronan SRTS program recognized that it needed to increase safety around school. Although they tried to change the speed limit near crosswalks on the state highway that cuts through Ronan, they were unsuccessful. \$15,000 has since been used for enforcement. SRTS provides 3-5 paid officers during high traffic times to enforce the speed limit on the state highway near the crosswalks. Police presence has made a difference and highway traffic has slowed without officially reducing the speed limit.

The remaining \$5,000 has been used for encouragement. Ronan is littered with SRTS items including water bottles, Frisbees, hackey sacks, reflectors to stick on bikes helmets and more.



Students take a moment to show off their walk to school rewards and spirit.

Lastly, to create awareness of the improvements that have been made along the bike path, Ronan hosted Bike Path Appreciation Day on April 25th, 2009. This event brought attention to the bike path connecting Polson to Ronan (nearly 15 miles) and the infrastructure improvements that had been completed with SRTS funding in 2007.



Over 350 people attended the celebration where bike helmets were fitted and given away.

What's Next

The Ronan SRTS program has been granted \$45,000 in 2009 for additional infrastructure projects. The project will add 400 new feet of path in the park that will connect the state path to bicycle path in town. Additionally, Ronan will be purchasing bicycle racks for schools in school colors after noticing an increase in bikes locked up outside during the 2008-2009 school year.

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