



TIPSHEET WALK AUDIT



WHAT IS A SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (SRTS)

WALK AUDIT? *A Safe Routes to School walk audit is a field visit to a school neighborhood to observe travel behavior (how drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists interact with each other and the built environment), to document existing infrastructure, and to identify safety conditions that need improvement.*



Why are SRTS walk audits important?

By assessing the physical environment for walking and bicycling, and by observing the behaviors of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists, SRTS walk audits can help identify areas where physical and environmental changes could make a big difference in improving opportunities for students to walk or bike to school. They can also assist in identifying education or encouragement programs to address student or parent behaviors.

The [MnDOT SRTS Neighborhood Assessment tool](#) also asks for walk audit findings. Submit your walk audit findings as answers for question seven. The Neighborhood Assessment is required for all SRTS Plans funded by MnDOT.

When should I plan and schedule a SRTS walk audit?

The best way to understand walking and bicycling safety issues at a school is by observing students arriving or departing during a normal school day. Each new school year brings a new set of students and families with new behaviors, and sometimes brings changes in the environment. Therefore, a walk audit should be scheduled early in each new school year after families have settled in to the school routine.

It can be difficult to get stakeholders to attend BOTH a morning and an afternoon assessment, so pick the time that will better represent challenges at the school. Do more students walk to school or walk home from school? Is traffic congestion more dangerous in the morning? For planning purposes, it will be important to observe BOTH arrival and dismissal, but a large group may only assemble for one of these audits.

A sample agenda for a group walk audit may look like this:

Morning Audit	Afternoon Audit
<p>7-8am: Group arrives 15 minutes prior to the time students begin arriving on campus and observes the arrival process until the bell rings</p> <p>8-8:30am: Group meets in a conference room to give introductions and discuss the purpose of the walk audit and discuss primary concerns already identified by the school</p> <p>8:30-9:30am: Group walks along the neighborhood routes walkers and bicyclists use to access the school</p> <p>9:30-10am: Group returns to conference room to debrief and discuss the major findings</p>	<p>1-1:30pm: Group meets in a conference room to give introductions and discuss the purpose of the walk audit and discuss primary concerns already identified by the school</p> <p>1:30-2:30pm: Group walks along the neighborhood routes walkers and bicyclists use to access the school</p> <p>2:30-3pm: Group returns to campus to observe the dismissal process</p> <p>3-3:30pm: Group returns to conference room to debrief and discuss the major findings</p>

How do I prepare for a SRTS walk audit?

Key information should be collected ahead of time that will better inform walk audit participants about the school's situation.

- **SRTS Student Travel Tallies and SRTS Parent Surveys** should be conducted before a walk audit, to provide an accurate snapshot of the number of students who currently walk and bicycle to school, as well as document parent concerns regarding pedestrian and bike safety.
- **Student addresses** plotted on a map can provide a visual guide to walk audit participants regarding the areas around the school that have the highest density of potential walkers and bike riders. Your school district or your town's planning or GIS department may be able to assist in developing the map. Ensure you have the school district's and the school administrator's permission for access to the addresses.
- **Current walking and biking routes** used by students should be identified, in addition to documenting general directions students are coming from in the morning, and where they are going in the afternoon.
- **School policies and procedures** regarding walking, biking, busing, and student loading should be compiled and reviewed.

Who should be invited to the Audit?

Key Decision Makers	Key Influencers
<p>The most important element of a successful walk audit is strong participation from key decision makers. If the group is identifying improvements that need to be made, who has the authority to implement these changes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● School administrators● School district and school board representatives● School district transportation directors● City, county, or state traffic engineering, planning, or public works departments● Law enforcement agencies	<p>It's also important to invite key influencers. These are individuals who can speak on behalf of the community and help to advocate for these changes. Examples may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Students and parents● School staff● Elected officials● Public health departments● Active transportation advocacy organizations● Local hospitals and injury prevention agencies

What should you bring to the audit?

- Large-scale aerial map of the school area
- Smaller maps for the team members
- Map of plotted student addresses
- List of previously identified issues
- Sign-in sheet
- Clipboards, paper, and pens
- At least one camera
- Reflective safety vests



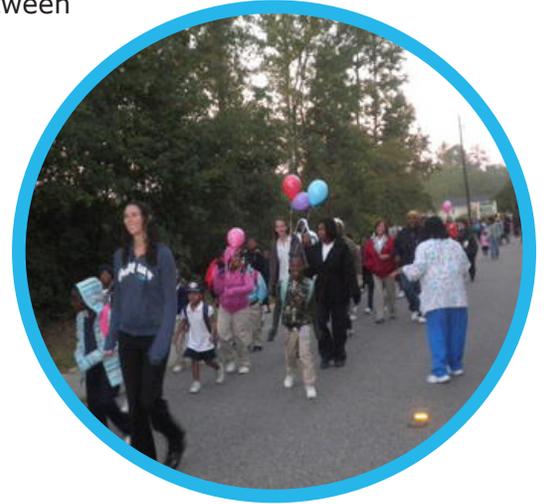
What should you do before beginning the audit?

Once all attendees have signed-in, have all team members introduce themselves. Discuss existing data, the purpose of the walk audit, previously identified concerns, and the day's agenda and walking routes. If there is a lot of physical ground to cover, you may want to split the team into separate groups and assign specific routes. Also, assign roles within the multiple groups – such as dialogue facilitator, note taker, and photographer (provide the photographers with school policies regarding taking photos of students).

What should you look for while conducting the audit?

On the school campus

- Are there convenient and continuous sidewalks or paths between school entrances and adjacent streets?
- Is there anything about the sidewalks or paths that would make them challenging for a person with a disability to use (e.g., uneven surface, too narrow, steep grade)?
- Are the pathways separated from the roadway by a curb, landscaped buffer, or parking lane?
- Are the pathways wide enough?
- Are the pathways well lighted?
- Are the pathways well maintained (i.e., free of debris, cracks, and holes)?
- Are there crosswalks and curb ramps with tactile warning strips where the pathways cross on-campus drives and parking lots?
- Are there bicycle racks? Are they in good repair? Do they have enough space? Are they in a secure location? Are they covered? Are they being used?



In the School Zone

- Are the edges of the school zone marked by school advanced warning signs, school pavement markings, or flashing beacons?
- Is there a school zone speed limit? Is the speed limit appropriate for a school zone?
- Are there school crossing signs at key student crossing locations?
- Are traffic calming measures, such as curb extensions, speed humps, chicanes, and narrower general purpose travel lanes, used to slow motor vehicle speeds?
- Are the existing school zone signs discolored, faded, damaged, or outdated (e.g., not the fluorescent yellow-green specified by the current MN Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices)?

Along Student Walking and Bicycling Routes

- Are there convenient and continuous sidewalks or paths?
- Is there anything about the sidewalks or paths that would make them challenging for a person with a disability to use, e.g., uneven surface, too narrow, steep grade?
- Are the sidewalks separated from the roadway by a curb, landscaped buffer, bicycle lane, and/or parking lane?
- Are the sidewalks and pathways wide enough?
- Are bicycle lanes or shared lane markings present?
- Are the sidewalks, paths, and/or bicycle lanes well lighted?
- Are the sidewalks, paths, and/or bicycle lanes well maintained and free of obstructions?
- Are there personal security concerns, e.g., abandoned buildings, areas of known (or suspected) crime, loose dogs, or places that feel unsafe?

Intersections

- Are there crosswalks and curb ramps with tactile warning strips at each intersection crossing location?
- Are movements at the intersection controlled by stop signs or traffic signals?
- If there is a traffic signal, are there also pedestrian countdown signals for all pedestrian crossings?

- How long is the crossing? Do pedestrians have enough time to cross? If the road has more than one travel lane in each direction, is there a median refuge island to facilitate two stage crossings?
- Do turning motor vehicles conflict with crossing pedestrians (e.g., because of right turn on red)?
- Are there good sight lines between pedestrians and motor vehicle drivers (i.e., sight lines between pedestrians and motor vehicles are not obstructed by parked vehicles, vegetation, fences, walls, signs, or other obstacles)?

Motorists Behaviors

- Do drivers yield to pedestrians?
- Are drivers obeying speed limits?
- Are drivers distracted (e.g., by using a cell phone while driving)?
- Do they follow arrival and dismissal procedures?
- Are vehicles parked blocking sidewalks?
- Are vehicles parked legally?

Pedestrian and Bicyclist Behaviors

- How many kids are walking and bicycling? Are they walking and bicycling with adults? With older siblings?
- Are kids crossing the street safely (e.g., do they look left-right-left, use marked crosswalks when they're available, obey traffic signals and crossing guards)?
- Are there places where kids must walk in the road? If so, do they walk facing traffic?
- Do bicyclists wear helmets? Do they follow the rules of the road?

Crossing Guards

- Do they have safety equipment?
- Are they in the needed locations?
- Are they helping students cross safely?
- Are there additional locations where crossing guards would be helpful?

How should you conclude the audit?

After the observation and walk audit is over, participants should gather to discuss the issues that were identified. The group should brainstorm potential safety improvements. Consensus should be reached regarding the top priority issues. The group should also discuss the next steps, which may include meeting again in the future to review the walk audit findings.

What's next?

After the audit, the leaders and walk audit facilitators should work with local authorities to develop a written report documenting the audit findings and identifying possible solutions, including education, encouragement, and enforcement strategies, as well as proposed infrastructure (engineering) projects. Non-infrastructure examples may include creating walking school buses, forming walking buddy teams, additional police presence or community enforcement, changing student loading policies, and increasing student education on proper walking and bicycling behavior. This list of action items or an action plan should then be reported back to audit participants and other stakeholders. Also, don't forget to log your walk audit findings using the [MnDOT SRTS Neighborhood Assessment tool](#).

Resources:

http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Lib_of_Res/SRTS_Program_Walking_ITE_2012.pdf
http://www.saferoutesga.org/sites/default/files/u14/WAY_TO_Walk_Audit.pdf