

February 20, 2004

Re: H.R. 2568—Pedestrian and Cyclist Equality Act (PACE)

Dear Representative Lipinski:

House bill 2568 serves to amend Title 23 of the US Code to establish a transportation and active living program, a safe routes to school program and a non-motorized transportation pilot program. In this memo I wish to focus your attention on Sec. 3. The Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS).

To fund the program, \$250 million is to be appropriated from the Highway Trust Fund for each of the fiscal years 2004 through 2009. Funds will be apportioned among the States on the basis of total student enrollment in primary and middle schools. Amounts apportioned to the State shall be used to provide financial assistance to State, local and regional agencies, including nonprofit organizations for infrastructure related activities, non-infrastructure related activities and a full time SRTS coordinator for each State receiving funds. Additional administrative expenses will be provided for the operation of a national SRTS clearinghouse and taskforce.

### **History and Background:**

The SRTS movement began in Denmark in the 1970's to address some of the highest child pedestrian accident rates in Europe. Its success encouraged other nations, including the U.K., Canada and the U.S., to adopt measures to improve the safety of youth as they travel to school. Numerous states and localities are already involved in SRTS programs. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has funded two successful pilot projects, one in California and the other in Massachusetts. Other programs have been able to utilize federal funds through TEA-21.

In S.1072 (SAFTEA-the Senate TEA-21 reauthorization bill), recently passed on 02/12/2004, SRTS is only funded at \$70 million a year, versus the \$250 million in the PACE bill. The Senate language also includes some steps back from PACE as it funds projects only on federal roads and only for grade schools (K-6). There is concern that the funding for SRTS in H.R. 3550 (TEA LU-the House reauthorization bill) may therefore be reduced from its current \$250 million.

### **Benefits of HR 2568 and Safe Routes to Schools Programs:**

House bill 2568 is an unusual approach to managing transportation. First, it has support from multiple constituencies (transportation, smart growth, public health and safety advocates, parents, teachers and children). Second, where most other transportation strategies focus primarily on marketing and promotion, HR 2568 has an equal emphasis on infrastructure improvements for walking and biking.

Successful SRTS programs integrate health, fitness, traffic relief, environmental awareness and safety under one program. Cities with existing programs have experienced reduced traffic congestion, reduced collision in and around schools, and decreased speed in residential neighborhoods. Children learn traffic safety skills and responsibility and more people of all ages are able to walk and bike in the neighborhood as a result of improved access.

## **Groups Supporting:**

- America Bikes
- Active Living Network
- Bikes Belong
- California Dept of Health Services
- Centers for Disease Control
- Coalition for Community Schools
- League of American Bicyclists
- National Park Service – Rivers and Trails Program
- National Center for Biking and Walking
- National SAFE KIDS Campaign
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Info Center
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- Thunderhead Alliance

## **Potential Resistance:**

While no one is voicing opposition to improving the safety of youth as they travel to school, there is potential for resistance to SRTS from the following two sources:

- The school bus industry which has strong ties to road builders as well as an interest in the construction of schools on the margins of towns where the feasibility of children walking to school is minimal.
- Fiscal conservatives who view SRTS as an additional federal mandate on State transportation spending and who may believe that these funds are needed for highway construction.

## **Bill Considerations:**

SRTS programs are usually community wide efforts to look at engineering, educational, training, and enforcement efforts needed to allow children to walk and bicycle to school. Technical assistance is needed by communities wishing to set up effective SRTS programs. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center has received funding from the Federal Highway Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a National Safe Routes to School Course and to establish a national marketing and delivery strategy. This collaboration sends a clear message to professionals and communities about the value of this initiative and facilitates its broad acceptance.

## **Recommendations:**

In light of the reduced funding provided in S. 1072, at this time it is important to strengthen the coalitions of bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups, trail advocacy groups, local and State SRTS programs, the health community, various state and local governmental officials, School Boards, PTA's and parents that have already shown support of HR 2658.

On March 3-5, 2004, the National Bike Summit will be held here in Washington. There will be a rally on Capitol Hill, meetings with legislators and a breakout session on Safe Routes to Schools. As awareness will be high following this summit, a hearing should be scheduled shortly thereafter in order to take advantage of a potential policy window. Such a hearing should include spokespersons from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the League of American Bicyclists, and the CDC's Kids-Walk-to-School Program.