

**MATT HOBBS'S REPORT TO THE WALKBOSTON BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MEETING, APRIL 22, 2004**

At today's meeting I wish to draw your attention to the federal Safe Routes to School Bill (H.R. 2568) introduced by Senator Jim Oberstar, senior Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and long-time pedestrian and bicycle advocate.

As you are well aware, WalkBoston has been a regional leader in the Safe Routes to School movement. In addition to creating the first Safe Routes to School Program in New England, we co-sponsored the Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Bill (H. 1610) which is currently in Committee. The majority of our efforts as an organization have been focused on the State and local levels and I believe it is time that we extend our advocacy to the national level through our support of H.R. 2568.

The climate is becoming more favorable for pedestrian issues and I believe we are approaching a policy window that could place SRTS on the federal decision agenda. The recognition of the problem of increasing rates of obesity has brought the public health community into alliance with pedestrian advocates in promoting a physical environment that supports and encourages safe physical activity. The current administration's environmental record has recharged green activism, including trail advocacy groups, alternative transportation supporters and air pollution prevention activists that are all supportive of SRTS legislation. The acknowledgement of a trend toward more inaccessible school sitings and increased traffic congestion has brought School Boards, educators, parents and PTA's together as visible backers of SRTS programs across the country. With WHO's choice of Road Safety as the theme of the recent World Health Day 2004, events across the world were carried out that brought attention to the public health challenge and burden of road traffic injuries. The *World report on road traffic injury prevention* jointly issued by WHO and the World Bank underscored their concern that unsafe road traffic systems are seriously harming global public health and development. Finally, the recent passage of both the Senate and House Transportation Reauthorization Acts which include SRTS language demonstrate the legislature's knowledge and recognition of SRTS programs. The skillful use of this national and worldwide attention and publicity can bring the issues of safe, alternative routes of transportation to the attention of policy makers. As policy entrepreneurs, it is now time to join the problem, policy and political streams, take advantage of the emerging policy window and move SRTS from the government to the decision agenda. I believe the time is ripe for the passage of H.R. 2568.

H.R. 2568 Background and Relevance to walkBoston

H.R. 2568, The Pedestrian and Cyclist Equity Act (PACE), seeks to establish a national Safe Routes to School program. To fund the program, \$250 million is to be appropriated from the Highway Trust Fund for each of five consecutive fiscal years and would be available for infrastructure projects, and education, promotion and planning activities.

In H.R. 2568, funds will be apportioned among the States on the basis of total student enrollment in primary and middle schools. According to January 2004 enrollment figures from the 1,527 schools in Massachusetts, our state would be eligible for \$4,221,972 of SRTS program funds with the passage of H.R. 2568. A fully funded SRTS program in Massachusetts would be able to build at least 16 miles of sidewalks and 22 miles of bike lanes and install 54 walk signal systems each year, *and* fund a significant education and encouragement program (\$422,197). As a leader in Massachusetts SRTS programs,

WalkBoston is a plausible candidate for a significant percentage of the funds apportioned to our State. Additionally, as they are to be appropriated from the Highway Trust Fund, SRTS funds qualify as mandated funds and, as such, will help reduce some of the annual struggle of requesting funds from our State DOT which has historically assigned low funding priority to pedestrian projects.

H.R. 2568 is currently in the Highways, Transit and Pipelines subcommittee of the House Transportation Committee on which Capuano, one of our MA Representatives and bill co-sponsor's, sits.

Strategy Recommendations:

America Walks, the national coalition of local pedestrian advocacy groups, is organizing the 2004 National Congress of Pedestrian Advocates from May 6-8 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Workshop sessions are planned on Safe Routes to Schools and the President, our own Anne Hershfang, has chosen the theme of "Go Statewide" for this year's congress. There will be three full congressional sessions devoted to comprehensive discussion and training to encourage the formation of statewide pedestrian advocacy organizations. In acknowledgement and support of Anne's work I propose that we form a statewide coalition to advocate for H.R. 2568 through organized lobbying of our Massachusetts Representatives. The National Congress is an appropriate forum to encourage other states to use statewide coalitions to influence their representatives on H.R. 2568 as well.

Our statewide coalition should include local pedestrian advocacy groups, trail advocacy groups, existing SRTS programs, the public health community, School Boards, PTA's, transportation planners and smart growth advocates. This alliance will provide a State level testament that SRTS programs truly serve the public interest and are not merely representative of any narrow interest group. As the Massachusetts leader in SRTS, it is appropriate that the leadership for such a coalition come from WalkBoston.

While WalkBoston is viewed as a resource by our local and state governments as well as other agencies and organizations, a statewide coalition could establish itself as the pedestrian specialist and information resource for Massachusetts legislators in Washington.

Coalition efforts will be directed at empowering Massachusetts Representatives to confidently vote in favor of H.R. 2568. Of our ten Massachusetts representatives, two are already co-sponsors of the bill: Representative Capuano, who sits on the Highways, Transit and Pipelines subcommittee of the House Transportation Committee and Representative McGovern. Our statewide coalition needs to concentrate on contacting and educating Representatives Neal, Frank, Meehan, Tierney, Markey, Lynch, Delahunt and especially Representative Olver who sits on the House Appropriations committee, subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies. On the return trip from the National Congress, coalition leaders should take the opportunity to meet with these representatives in Washington.

Our strategy here in the state should include a letter writing and telephone campaign of which PTA and parental involvement will be crucial; inclusion of H.R. 2568 in the legislative section of WalkBoston's newsletter; promotion of the bill at public, community, School Board and PTA meetings; and communication of campaign progress through the coalition website and newsletter.

walkBoston

WalkBoston is a pedestrian advocacy organization formed in 1990 to raise public awareness about the benefits of walking for transportation, health, recreation and vital communities. In collaboration with citizens groups, government officials and private developers, WalkBoston has played a role in improving the design and use of streets, sidewalks and pathways in the greater Boston area.

WalkBoston advises cities and towns on how to redesign streets to reduce speed and to make walking safer. They sponsor forums, publish a newsletter and other advocacy materials, conduct informative guided walks throughout Boston and collaborate with other pedestrian advocacy organizations.

WalkBoston created the first Safe Routes to School Program in New England and recently developed a SRTS tool-kit that has assisted communities across the nation in successfully organizing local SRTS programs. They are co-sponsors of legislation for a statewide Safe Routes to Schools Program in Massachusetts (H. 1610) which was recently reported to the House favorably by the Transportation committee and was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee (03.23.2004). They have also advocated for the inclusion of SRTS programs in both the Senate and House Transportation Re-authorization acts that have both recently passed. WalkBoston continually submits comments on local and state projects hold membership on various state, regional and local advisory committees.

The leadership of WalkBoston has a history of involvement in pedestrian advocacy on a local, regional and national level. They are comprised of two paid staff including an executive director and operations manager. There are 17 additional leaders that make up the board of directors including a president, two vice presidents, secretary and treasurer. Responsibilities are further divided into committees that oversee advocacy, education/public relations, fundraising, legislative issues, media relations, membership, the newsletter, programs, suburban advocacy, walks, special projects and volunteers.

WalkBoston's activities have been recognized by many in the pedestrian advocacy field and the organization has received the following awards: Best Foot Forward Award from America Walks to exemplify contributions to the cause of pedestrian advocacy, 2003; Conservation Hero Awards from the National Park Service to Dorothea Hass and Don Eunson of the Safe Routes to School Program, 2002; Distinguished Friend Award from Boston By Foot, 2000; Design Achievement Award from Move Massachusetts, 2000; Environmental Protection Agency's Transportation Partners Award "for making smart moves for healthier transportation choices in Boston," 1998; Boston Society of Landscape Architects Award of Excellence, 1993.

WalkBoston's operations, events and publications are funded through grants, corporate solicitations, product sales and membership fees.