

Community-Based Transportation Planning Grants

Schools by Design

- **Grant Amount:** \$249,946
- **Grant Recipient:** Coachella Valley Association of Governments
- **Sub-recipient:** Center for Sustainable Suburban Development, UC Riverside
- **County:** Riverside

Project Area – Three school districts within the Coachella Valley

Project Focus – For two periods each day, school sites create a community's biggest traffic and child safety problems. The traffic issues are just one symptom of a broader problem: California school districts are answerable only to the state's Department of Education for design approval on their school sites. In many cases, this means the districts see no need to consult with local planning authorities. As a result, there is often a poor fit between what is happening on nearby streets and the design of the school. With rising concerns about childhood obesity, declining fitness and growing susceptibility to diabetes, getting children to walk or bike to school more often is important.

Project Goals – This project will work to create a better model for integrating school districts into local planning efforts with regard to traffic, child safety and health, and community facilities use and development. Better design of neighborhood schools and more consultation by schools with local planning authorities would create better integration of school facilities into their surrounding communities and will

promote more walking and biking. Reduced use of cars and buses for transporting children to school would reduce the traffic congestion near schools. Fewer trips and less idling while waiting to get to the drop-off point would also reduce air pollution. Better design of drop-off and pick-up points would reduce traffic from those parents who do drive their children, while also increasing child safety. The Project's final product - a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - is meant to be a model for participation and communication among parents, students, and school district representatives; city and regional governments and agencies; public health officials; and interested members of the community aimed at ensuring safe routes to school and greater walkability, in general.



Community Outreach – CVAG and CSSD arranged a series of area meetings with participating schools in the Coachella Valley, Desert Sands, and Palm Springs school districts, as well as interested local government managers.

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Participants included school superintendents, municipal traffic safety personnel, local parent-teacher groups, etc. Meetings involved representatives of the three school districts, as well as 10 area cities and the Riverside County Department of Public Health. These meetings culminated with two half-day conferences at the UC Riverside's Palm Desert Campus. The meetings presented the results of data collection efforts to date, and facilitated round-table discussions regarding key areas of concern that should be included in the MOU document

Project Outcome- CSSD and CVAG anticipated several deliverables for the Project. The first was the MOU between cities and schools that aimed to facilitate cooperation between cities and schools, with attention to relevant local and regional planning bodies, to locate schools where the traffic grid was amenable to the safety of children. Second, the Project investigated a number of alternative strategies to compare school designs and location standards to find a "best of fit" criteria, which can be used as a local standard (where none currently exists) for ensuring that children can travel to and from school safely so that they may exercise and interact with others.

Challenges

- **Infrastructure Concerns** – Providing safe routes to school begins with providing an infrastructure environment that promotes "walkable" sidewalks and streets.
- **United Community Effort** – Creating safe travel paths for students cannot be the work of schools alone. Rather, such a project should be viewed as a community-wide concern.

Successes

- The infusion of federal funds nationwide led to a recent burst of planning and collaboration in finding solutions to the provision of "walkable" routes to school. As an outgrowth of the Project, several successful State and Federal "safe routes to school" grants were awarded to Coachella Valley school districts to address physical issues that impeded the ability of students to walk to school.