

Michigan wins first annual James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award

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Agency: Transportation

October 30, 2007 - - At a ceremony in the nation's Capitol today, Lauren Marchetti, director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School, presented the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) the first annual national "James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award." U.S. Rep. Oberstar presided at the presentation of the award that bears his name in recognition of his role in creating the federal Safe Routes to School (SR2S) funding program in 2005. This first-ever award recognizes exemplary effort on the part of a state department of transportation in developing and launching the program.

"Every child who walks or bikes to school has a right to be safe," said Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm. "Everyone benefits from Safe Routes to School programs that encourage children to be active and healthy."

The federal SR2S program will provide a total of approximately \$16 million to Michigan from fiscal year 2005 through 2009, for investment in projects to create and improve infrastructure (sidewalks, marked crosswalks, etc.) to make routes safe, implement law enforcement strategies (police patrols, crossing guards), and begin education and encouragement programs to ensure that parents and students know how to walk and bike safely, and to provide incentives to get kids moving.

State Transportation Director Kirk T. Steudle said that MDOT could not have achieved this recognition without the core network of state level partners working with the department: the Michigan Departments of Education and Community Health, Michigan State University and Wayne State University, nonprofit groups including the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the League of Michigan Bicyclists, and Programs for All Cyclists.

"Our most important partner from the beginning has been and continues to be the Michigan Fitness Foundation/Governor's Council on Physical Fitness (MFF). MDOT and MFF have worked together on Safe Routes in Michigan since 2003, when MDOT funded MFF to develop Michigan's Safe Routes to School Handbook," said Steudle.

The handbook is available to any elementary or middle school in Michigan interested in developing a plan of action to create safe routes for their school. Since announcement of Michigan's program and handbook in May 2006, over 250 schools in Michigan (more than 5 percent of the state's elementary and middle schools) have registered to undertake the handbook planning process which, when completed, qualifies schools to apply for funding.

Michael Eberlein, MDOT's SR2S coordinator, said that the rapid growth of interest in SR2S in Michigan has been very gratifying.

"Our partnership approach at the state level is replicated at the local level by school planning teams that typically include parents and students, teachers and administrators, police agencies and public works departments, health officials and interested citizens. The list goes on. All of these partners have something to contribute in identifying barriers to safe walking and biking, and creating strategies to eliminate them," said Eberlein.

Typically, these partners bring resources, too, human or financial, since the limited federal funding can't take care of every need at every school, he added.

Protect Michigan families: Where Workers Present Drive 45! - A message from MDOT and Michigan's Give 'em a Brake Safety Coalition