




Dayton Daily News
www.daytondailynews.com

 PRINT THIS

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

GET OUT!

Ken McCall: Let's help kids find a safe route to school

By Ken McCall

Staff Writer

Friday, July 27, 2007

What's wrong with this picture?

Our children are suffering an epidemic of inactivity, obesity, diabetes and asthma, and yet every school morning parents cause a traffic jam when they drive their kids to class.

Studies have shown that such parent shuttles account for up to a quarter of all morning commute traffic. But paradoxically, it's traffic that many parents cite as the reason they don't want their kids walking or biking to school.

As a result, the number of kids walking or riding their bikes to school has dropped precipitously in the last three decades, even among those who live close to school.

A 1999 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that only 31 percent of children 15 and younger who lived within a mile of school walked or biked compared to close to 90 percent in 1969.

"This is something that has disappeared out of our society, and the question is how do we get it back?" Jeff Olsen, a planning consultant from Alta Planning in upstate New York, asked a crowd of close to 60 educators and municipal officials gathered Tuesday morning at the Center for Regional Cooperation.

The Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission sponsored the meeting to try to help schools and cities figure out how to reverse the trend — and how to get federal money specifically targeted at addressing the problem.

Late last year, the Ohio Department of Transportation hopped onto a nationwide bandwagon called Safe Routes to School. The Ohio program aims to help make walking and bicycling to school a "safe and routine activity."

Julie Walcoff, the state program coordinator, said Ohio has about \$19 million to distribute in grants through 2009, and encouraged the officials in the group to apply.

Olsen's company is doing a study of the region's bikeways and will also draw up school travel plans for up to 60 local schools.

The benefits, he pointed out, include reducing the number of children hit by motorists, cutting congestion and air pollution around schools and improving children's health.

"These are all mom-and-apple-pie issues," Olsen said. "It should be very easy to convince policy-makers."

Although sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming devices and street signs are part of the solution, Olsen said education and incentive programs are critical for success. In Marin County, Calif., for example, a safe routes initiative resulted in a 64 percent increase in the number of children walking to school, a 114 percent increase in biking, a 91 percent increase in carpooling and a 39 percent decrease in children driven to school in a private car.

All in its first three years.

And the program involved almost no street changes.


"Most of that success is due to education, enforcement and encouragement," said Lauren Buckland, an Alta planner. "This was done just by changing people's behavior."

As a parent and someone who used to walk to school, I like that picture a lot better than the one we have now.

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-2393 or kmccall@DaytonDailyNews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.daytondailynews.com/search/content/oh/story/opinions/columns/2007/07/26/ddn072707getout.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.



Hey, Muggles!
How much do you know about Hogwarts?

... *Click here*
DaytonDailyNews.com