

Safe Routes to School: Creating pathways for healthier living

BACKGROUND: The City of National City (NC) is 9 square miles bordering San Diego, the Navel harbor, and the US/Mexico border 15 miles to the south. NC has one of the lowest median household income levels in the San Diego region. The low income and tax base resulted in poor infrastructure and access to safe spaces for physical activity. These Social Determinates of Health (SDOH) are a primary cause of increased pedestrian injury and obesity in children in this community. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) investigates parental concerns, walking preferences, traffic concerns and infrastructure design to assist city planners in redesigning roads to promote active transportation and safety. The program also educates families on safe use of sidewalks, bike lanes and crossings. Ultimately the SRTS program encourages walking as a healthy, environmentally friendly means of transportation and supports the future infrastructure changes.

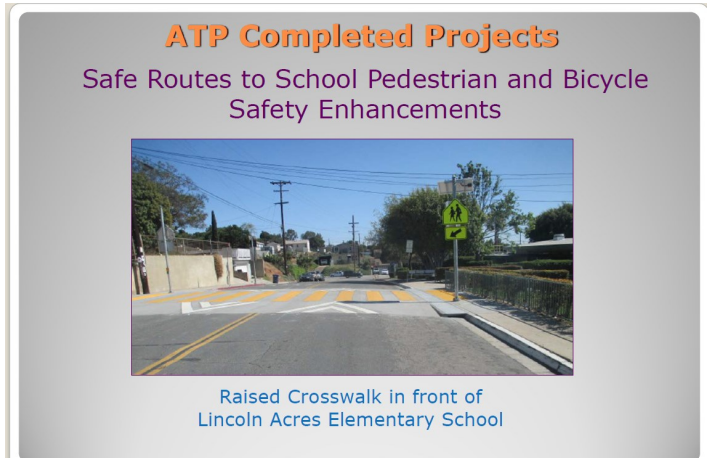
METHODS: In 2012, the SRTS team partnered with NC to identify infrastructure changes to improve the SDOH in the region. SRTS uses the Health Promotion model of the 5 Es (Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering and Evaluation). With a focus on Evaluation SRTS engaged the community in the change process.

Through quantitative and qualitative data gathering, engineers gained understanding of infrastructure concerns through the eyes of NC families. The SRTS team led community members to identify barriers to walking to school through "Walk Audits." Parent Surveys were also collected from all elementary schools which provided attitudinal data to highlight infrastructure barriers.

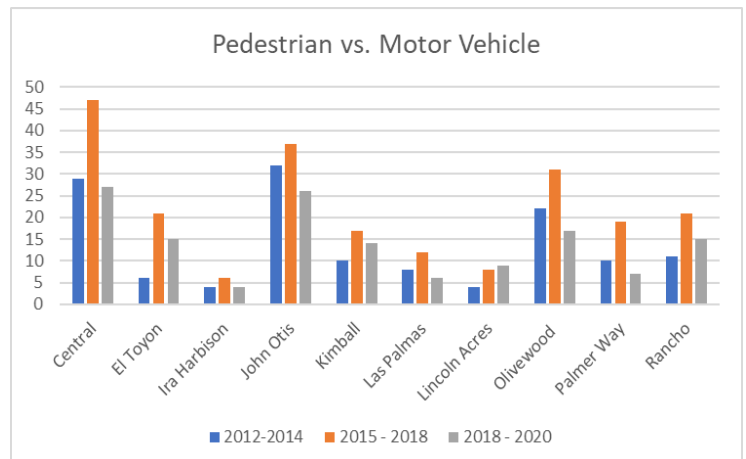
By analyzing data and holding Community Forums at each of the 10 National District elementary schools, NC families and community members identified barriers, ranking in order of importance and gave the output to the NC Engineer for review; while SRTS developed and implemented educational materials for safe walking and safe biking to students and parent groups based on those rankings.

RESULTS: The partnership between SRTS and NC supported the completion of a needs assessment required to compete for Active Transportation Funding. The needs assessment revealed necessary infrastructure changes to improve

safety by building "complete streets." Between 2015 and 2020, NC was able to complete \$30 million dollars of Active Transportation projects (see below).



By supporting changes to the built environment SRTS helped to improve the SDOH. As shown in the bar chart below, from 2012 to 2020, pedestrian and motor vehicles crashes steadily decreased.



CONCLUSIONS: From 2012 to 2020, Safe Routes to School was integral to improving city infrastructure and building community knowledge and skills for navigating structural changes. Informed by the community the City of National City enhanced active transportation by focusing on building safe routes to school.