



Spring 2021



Coordinator's Corner

This month, students in Virginia will begin returning to classrooms, one year after schools closed for in-person learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For many families, this will mean new routines and new challenges, as "back to school" will look very different than it did before.



Taking care of your physical and mental health remains a priority. Virginia Safe Routes to School stays committed to helping you and your families be healthy and safe in the months to come. In this newsletter, you'll find helpful ideas for how to do that this spring.

First, we'll hear how Charlottesville SRTS coordinator Kyle Rodland is researching how to make our streets safer for kids everywhere, not just around schools. We'll see how communities around Virginia are creating outdoor "traffic gardens" to practice safe walking and biking, and we'll learn how the SRTS programs in Galax, Loudoun, and Waynesboro are expanding access to bikes in their communities. Finally, we'll introduce our new SRTS Super Stars program, which celebrates the community heroes who make walking and bicycling possible.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the topics included here, please don't hesitate to reach out! You can call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send us an email at info@virginiasrts.org.

Regards,

Katherine Graham

Katherine Graham
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

IN THIS ISSUE

- Coordinator's Corner
- Calendar
- Friends and Faces: Kyle Rodland
- Help Inform the Future of VA SRTS!
- Winter Training Wrap-Up
- Do you know a SRTS Super Star?
- Tap into TAP and Build Safer Streets
- Planting Safety Seeds in Traffic Gardens
- Gearing Up For Bike Month

CALENDAR

MARCH

Park and Recreation Month

APRIL

- 1: QuickStart Mini-grant due date
- 22: Earth Day

MAY

- Bike Anywhere Month
- 5: Bike to School Day

Friends and Faces: Kyle Rodland

Kyle, tell us a little about you and your family.

I'm a family guy. I live in downtown Charlottesville, I've got two kids. One of my sons is going to kindergarten this year. We don't walk to school now because of the pandemic, but March 8 [when in-person school starts] I'll be leading a bike train, naturally. Other than that, I spend every moment of my free time mountain biking. We're kind of like a mountain biking active family.

How did you learn about Safe Routes to School?

I've been active in the bike community for a really long time, and was looking for a job with the city when the Safe Routes job popped up.

Basically three things that were required: bikes and walking, experience with educational settings, and events and recording. Those are three things I'd done professionally before – working in bike shops and racing professionally; I taught middle school for a year; and I was in the music and entertainment industry for about eight years doing backstage stuff.

You recently started a research group about equitable traffic design. How did that happen, and what are you looking at?

Our oldest son got an autism diagnosis maybe a year and a half ago. He walks and rides around town perfectly fine, but the world of a disability that is a non-physical disability was kind of opened up to me. I thought: how does this interact with my professional life? How can I dig into this, just to see what's there without an agenda?



Kyle Rodland is Charlottesville's SRTS coordinator, but his passion for safe streets goes beyond the schoolyard. We talked to him about some research he's doing with the University of Virginia.

Like why do we have school zones? What happens in a school zone? Most of the time the thing is like the speed limit drops. Is that a good thing? Yeah. Why is it a good thing? Because there are less traffic fatalities and injuries because cars are moving slower? Why do we need to slow traffic around a school? Traffic engineers say because there are children.

What about children makes it so that we need to slow the traffic down? We don't slow it down around other places like a grocery store or a bank. We wouldn't because it's an adult space. What about them being children makes it more risky? Is it awareness? Is it maturity level?

I don't have an answer for that. So the research group is about that: why do we design school zones like that? What else in our traffic design can we change to make it more equitable?

How did you get started?

My neighbor is the head of the University of Virginia (UVA) Child Development & Rehabilitation Center, so I just walked across the street and started talking to her about it. We've also been talking with the ADA Coordinator and traffic engineers from the city.

We're kind of opening our arms to anybody who would like to join, for whatever reason. We have medical professionals from UVA, but also people who have someone close to them who has a disability. I guess you could say the goal is to see what is there and bring that to the attention of the people who make the decisions.

I think it's important for people to have the mindset of discovery and listening when thinking about research, especially when it comes to anything dealing with equity...seeing what is there and letting the research tell us what it is, rather than trying to find something with the research.

Are you trying to change things on the city level, or on the state or national levels?

What's in front of me is the city level, currently. I would hope that it would trickle up and influence other locales, at least. I know that things other SRTS coordinators have done have influenced my work. For example, Tara [FitzPatrick] in Richmond [worked to move the crossing guards from the police department to the schools](#). That was huge, and as soon as I heard that I started talking to the schools [in Charlottesville], and we're doing the same thing here next summer.

What are your favorite places to walk and bike in Virginia?

For walking, my neighborhood in Charlottesville is my favorite. We walk out our front door and ten minutes later we're on the Downtown Mall. That's why we chose this neighborhood: we were looking for a place to raise a family and we definitely did not want to be immersed in the car culture. We just wanted to walk out the front door and go where we needed to go.

For riding, the Blue Ridge is one of my favorite places to ride. The roads up on the parkway are amazing! I also spend a lot of time over in the George Washington National Forest, and also in the mountains west of Charlottesville.

Help Inform the Future of Virginia SRTS!

VDOT is updating the SRTS Strategic Plan, a document used to strengthen and expand the program as well as advocate for federal funding. The [first Strategic Plan](#) was created in 2012. The 2021 update will reflect the growth and successes of the Virginia SRTS program and will outline strategies for the future.

Take less than 10 minutes to [fill out our survey](#) and share your thoughts on Virginia SRTS! Your feedback will help inform the Strategic Plan update. We want to hear about your local program and your experience with statewide events, grant opportunities, and program resources.

Winter Training Wrap-Up

Twice a year, SRTS coordinators from across Virginia meet up to learn new skills and exchange ideas. This year, our winter training took place virtually and covered a variety of topics.

One training covered how to modify lesson plans and teaching children with disabilities and special needs how to ride bikes. Another was a workshop with the [Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities](#) on combating unconscious bias in the workplace and in schools.

Coordinators also did a "Show and Tell" about their work this year, which includes some of the projects in this newsletter!



Do you know a SRTS Super Star?

The 2020-2021 school year has been full of challenges. Students, parents, teachers, and school administration have struggled with uncertainties. However, one thing can be certain – our Safe Routes to School friends are working hard to make walking and bicycling possible for families.



No matter if students are in-person or virtual, there are many committed people who are going above and beyond to encourage families to be active during the 2020-2021 school year. In honor of these dedicated community members, the Virginia SRTS Program has created a new recognition program: the SRTS Super Star award.

Who has helped you walk and bike more this past year? Recognize the SRTS Super Star in your community with a Thank You Card. The [Marketing Toolkit page](#) of our website has templates you can use.

Thank you to those who encourage your community to be active, whether or not students are walking or biking to school! The success of SRTS is due in large part to these Super Stars.

Tap into TAP and Build Safer Streets

Every two years, the Virginia Department of Transportation gives away millions of dollars through TAP, the Transportation Alternatives Program. It provides grants for transportation projects and prioritizes projects involving schools.

TAP grants can be used to pay for traffic calming measures, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, shared use paths, or pedestrian crossing improvements, like this one in Arlington shown below.

If you have a project in mind, now's the time to get a move on! Here are a few key dates to put on your calendar:

- April 14: Workshop for potential applicants
- July 21: Pre-application submission deadline
- October 1: Application deadline

TAP grants require a 20% local match, with VDOT covering the other 80% of a project's cost. TAP applications must be submitted by an eligible project sponsor, which can include local governments, transit agencies, school districts, and any other organization that has experience managing federal grants. To find out more, visit [VDOT's TAP webpage](#).



Planting Safety Seeds in Traffic Gardens

What is a Traffic Garden? We're not planting seeds, but we are cultivating the minds of kids!

A traffic garden is a temporary or permanent installation meant to simulate street environments and facilitate pedestrian and bicycle safety education for young children. Paint, chalk, or tape is used to set up a scaled-down street network on a parking lot, cul-de-sacs, or other paved space.

Traffic gardens are a great way to introduce kids to the rules of the road. Children on bikes or scooters have a space to learn about roads, intersections, and crossings away from cars. It's also a fun place to play while social distancing.

Traffic gardens can be found all over Virginia, like this one (below) at the Women's Club of Arlington. It was a joint, community-driven effort led by Phoenix Bikes, Discover Traffic Gardens and Potomac & Chesapeake Cycling with support from APS SRTS and BikeArlington.



Check out some other examples on the right.

Traffic gardens are relatively easy to make — typically just lines on pavement—and can be installed almost anywhere there is a paved surface, such as a publicly accessible location on school grounds, the blacktop at a local park, or a low volume neighborhood street. Add some signs and it's time to ride!

A traffic garden is a low-cost community resource that can be enjoyed by all. Advocate for your community to install one. Promote your traffic garden with outreach to parents and caregivers to make them aware of its location and how it can be used to teach children pedestrian and bicycle safety skills.

Our QuickStart Mini-grants can be used to fund traffic garden materials. Apply by April 1, 2021. [Visit our website](#) to learn more about QuickStart Mini-grants and other eligible activities.

Don't want to wait? Northern Virginia-based [Discover Traffic Gardens](#) has many resources and materials to set up a traffic garden yourself. DIY kits help you design and install a traffic garden from scratch. Fun guaranteed!



This Bristow family built a temporary traffic garden in their cul-de-sac with the help of some neighbors.



[This traffic garden at Hollin Meadows ES](#) in Fairfax County was partially funded by a QuickStart Mini-grant.

Gearing Up For Bike Month

Here in Virginia, we're looking at another socially-distanced Bike Month in May 2021. During the pandemic, riding a bicycle has provided kids and adults with important physical and mental health breaks.

Our 2020 Parent Survey revealed that while 49% of students were engaging in less physical activity in the fall than they were before schools closed in March 2020, 49% were biking more, and many families hoped that these habits would continue when schools reopened for in-person learning.

Whether you are learning in-person, virtually, or somewhere in between, there are plenty of safe ways to celebrate the magic of bicycling this spring. Check out the resource links below and read on to learn more about how three local SRTS programs are expanding access to bikes in their communities.

- [League of American Bicyclists – Bike Month Materials](#)
- [Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center - Planning Considerations for Walking and Rolling to School](#)
- [Virginia Safe Routes to School – Bike to School Day](#)

Loudoun Bike Giveaway Program

It's all but impossible to bike more if you don't have a bicycle to ride, which is why Janice Jennings and Mark Pankau, the SRTS coordinators in Loudoun County, are partnering with the Congestion Must Go campaign, Maverick Bikes & Café, and the



law offices of Abrams-Landau Ltd. to redistribute bicycles to students in need. The group has solicited bicycle donations from neighborhood associations and other community organizations, and Maverick Bikes & Café inspects and repairs to the bicycles to ensure they are safe to ride. Abrams-Landau Ltd. has donated 200 helmets and the SRTS program has purchased lights and locks to give away with the bicycles.

Repairing the bikes and purchasing additional equipment are the easy parts of the operation! There are numerous logistical challenges to getting the bikes in the hands of deserving students. After developing program guidelines and parent permission forms, the SRTS coordinators have been working with principals and parent liaisons at Title 1 schools to identify students in need of bicycles and gather the age and height data needed to ensure a proper fit. Loudoun County Public Schools have assisted with the transport of the repaired bikes from Maverick Bikes & Café to the schools where

they are distributed following social-distancing protocols. To date, 90 bicycles have been given a new life with new owners and the program shows few signs of slowing down.



Two Types of "Bike Libraries" in Galax

The presence of the SRTS program in Galax is not only apparent on the way to and from school or during PE classes. When elementary and middle school students are learning in-person, they can participate in bike clubs that go on social rides, participate in local parades, and they even took a field trip to the Helmet Lab at Virginia Tech. Although these clubs have not been able to meet this year, there are other ways for students and their families to explore the world of bicycling.

One way is to visit the Bike Library at Felts Park run by the Galax Department of Parks & Recreation. It was established in 2014 with funding from VDOT and

has remained open during the pandemic. There are approximately 30 bicycles and helmets in a range of sizes that can be "checked out" for free and ridden around the walking path at the park, or along the trails in New River State Park about a half-mile away. All equipment is inspected and sanitized upon return.

Galax residents can also learn more about bicycling at the regular library. Each year for Bike Month, Linda Mock, the Galax SRTS Coordinator, sets up a display with bike-themed books and information about the Bike Library. This year, Linda has also purchased several bike-themed children's books for the school library including *The Little Pig, the Bicycle, and the Moon*; *The Purple Bicycle*; *The Red Bicycle*; and *Bikes are Big on Planet Klynia*. She has recorded herself reading the books for teachers and parents to use during virtual learning.

Partnerships Lead to More Pedaling in Waynesboro

Although the SRTS program in Waynesboro took delivery of its new bike fleet right before schools shut down in March 2020, successful partnerships with other organizations have ensured the bikes have been well used during virtual learning. Last fall, SRTS Coordinator Susan Lendermon worked with the Department of Parks & Recreation, the YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club to deliver bike lessons to dozens of students.

All three organizations were looking for programming that could be safely offered during the pandemic and were easy to work with. The lessons were delivered outdoors, with everyone

wearing masks. To help with social-distancing, bikes are set up 6-feet apart before the lessons begin. After completing a helmet fitting, students go to one of the bikes and the group goes over the ABC Quick Check before they start riding. The bikes are disinfected after each use, and there are enough helmets to isolate them after they're used and have clean helmets available for the next class. This helps limit how often the helmets need to be sprayed with disinfectant, which lengthens their useful life.

While PE teachers will resume leading bike units when in-person classes start, this summer, Susan plans to return to the Boys and Girls Club to lead more classes.

