



# Cass Lake-Bena Schools

## Safe Routes to School Success

### Background

In 2013, The Cass Lake Bena School District, in collaboration with the City of Cass Lake, approached the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) for assistance in applying for a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Technical Assistance Grant which would enable the community to receive planning assistance from the Region Five Development Commission.

### The Planning Process

After Cass Lake-Bena Schools was awarded the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Technical Assistance Grant in 2014, Region Five Development Commission staff, in coordination with school and city staff, developed a local SRTS planning team that would guide the development of the SRTS plan. The steering committee was responsible for administering both the in-class student tally and the parent survey. In addition, the planning team conducted a walk audit of school property during school dismissal in order to observe the traffic patterns of school buses, parent's vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians during this peak time.

Through the planning process, it became apparent to the planning team and school staff that the narrow road from the school to Highway 371 was congested during these peak times. This created an unsafe situation for students with buses, family vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians all sharing the same narrow road. One planning team member noted that the unsafe situation would only get worse during the winter months with high snowbanks.

### Planning Team

The planning team was selected as a broad representation of the community, with stakeholders representing the school district staff, school board members, the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Cass County, Leech Lake Diabetes Clinic, and Pike Bay Township.

### Student & Parent Survey

In the course of developing the Cass Lake SRTS plan, the planning team administered an in-class student tally in order to determine baseline information regarding how many students are currently walking and biking to school. Once equipped with the baseline information from the in-class student tally, the planning team administered a 16-question parent survey with the goal of determining the main reasons why parents allow or do not allow their children to walk or bike to or from school.

# Safety, Health, Community & Choice

## Walk Audit

The planning team also embarked on a walk audit around school property during school dismissal and parent pick up to observe any congestion issues or safety concerns. On the walk audit, participants were encouraged to view the route through various lenses, including that of a small child, considering if the route would seem daunting, or through the lenses of a disabled student, taking careful note how conducive the infrastructure is for blind persons or wheelchair usage. In addition, the group observed the overall lack of sidewalks and trails around the school.

## Identified Issues

Based on the collected input mechanisms used during the planning process, the most critical issue and safety concern identified by the planning team was the lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure along the narrow roadway leading from the school to the Heartland Trail and Highway 371. The planning team also recommended several programs, plans, and projects in areas ranging from education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering, and evaluation.

## Project Solution

The Safe Routes to School Plan was formally adopted by the Cass Lake-Bena School Board in May of 2015. Shortly thereafter, the Cass Lake-Bena School Board moved efficiently towards implementation by preparing an application for a competitive grant program through MnDOT known as the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program. The TA program is an annual, competitive grant program with approximately \$1.8 million in funds allocated annually for a 14-county area.

In the spring of 2016, The Cass Lake-Bena School District was awarded \$168,538 to construct a multi-use path and install lighting from the school to Highway 371. Trail construction began in September of 2017 and the trail and lighting installation was completed and operational for student pedestrians and bicyclists to use in October 2017.



“If we can have better opportunities for students, community members, and families, it’s exciting. A lot of great people are vested.”

**Karolyn Roebuck**  
Grants, Testing and Compliance  
Coordinator Cass-Lake Bena Schools

# Community Perspective



## Safety Concerns

When Karolyn Roebuck became the Grants, Testing and Compliance Coordinator for the Cass Lake-Bena School District (CLBS), she quickly saw a need that the school district had been trying to address for many years – a safer route for students to be able to walk and bike to school. The district serves a high poverty (84%, 2010) student population, with most students bussing to school, and others walking or riding bikes on a narrow trail with little or no shoulder paralleling a busy highway.

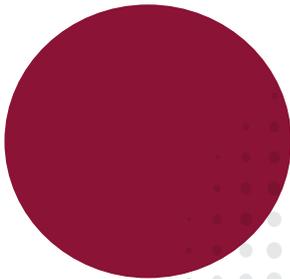
## Planning Grant

“Let’s apply for a planning grant to make sure all connections and needs assessments are done to be able to move forward,” was Karolyn’s recommendation to school administrators, after contacting Tad Erickson, R5DC Regional Planner, to apply for a SRTS Planning Grant. She knew that her goal to sustain a project through this planning process would build capacity through partnerships and working together, resulting in more success. Right away a team was assembled; they jumped into the walking audits, conducted surveys, and developed a good plan that the school board adopted. “Everyone made a commitment to see things through, from the school district, to the city, to the Leech Lake Tribe, to the county.”

## Community Catalyst

“It was very critical that Region Five Development Commission guided us through the process to have a really good plan, giving us the opportunity to get a grant to fund the bike and walking trail,” stated Karolyn. Completed in October of 2017, the biking and walking trail provides a safe route to connect students and the community from the Heartland Trail and Highway 371 right to school doors.

“This has led us to work together on other projects,” because “Safe Routes to Schools connects with goals of increasing physical activity in a safe way,” said Karolyn. Chosen as one of four schools in MN for a MN BCBS Health Learning Connection Pilot, with a focus on health, physical exercise and learning, administrators already had increased awareness from the SRTS process, and quickly approved extra P.E. and Health classes. Going through R5DC to develop a sound SRTS plan catalyzed the community, according to Karolyn. “If we can have better opportunities for students, community members, and families, its exciting. A lot of great people are vested.”



## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$168,538** for Trail & Lighting Project

K-12 Students **1,033**

**2017** Project Completion

