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HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Collaboration and Community Sustainability in Rural States

TIM ARNOTI: Thank you very much. You're probably wondering why is a Highway guy here (laugh) talking to the Public Health world about St. Francis School. Let me tell you, it's an honor to be here. I believe, and I've told a lot of people, that if we're really going to be successful in this program, I really, truly believe the Public Health world is the group that's going to carry us across the goal line.

This is a grassroots, nontraditional grant program run by Federal Highway. My presentation is divided into sort of three groups, a little bit of history about the St. Francis School program, then actually what's required by law and then what we've accomplished to date. But basically in a nutshell, it is a grant program to make grants to local communities to try to get kids in K through 8, more kids who walk and bike to school.

I always tell people what is past is prologue. This is sort of the history of St. Francis School. It didn't just start yesterday. It's been around for thirty years. It came from Europe, Denmark and then we did two pilots here in the United States. I know some of these acronyms are new for the public health world. That

last bullet is the recent Transportation Reauthorization Ways Legislation. Some people know it as the infamous bridge to nowhere legislation.

Let me just ask you by a show of hands in this room. When you were kids, how many here walked or biked to school? How many children, your children, grandchildren or whatever, walk or bike to school? It's pretty dramatic, isn't it? You can see the numbers there. I mean, they've really come down for lots of reasons, for lots of reasons.

You know, when we teach this course, they call it the good, the bad and the ugly, and this is a slide from the ugly. This is -- many of you probably are familiar with places like this. There may not be the environment to walk. You wouldn't put a kid out there. You have this rush hour traffic, you've got air pollution problems, you have all sorts of problems.

How many people have households that look like this I tell my wife our household is not going to look like this. We just got our oldest daughter her first little electronic thing and, I have to tell you, it takes incredible amount of self-restraint from heaving that thing. But I have to tell you, I didn't think about this. It ran out of batteries. The batteries went dead. She said, "Dad, dad, can you go get batteries?" I said, "Sure, someday."

But I have to tell you another thing. It's a little bit humbling for me to come in here and talk to you about physical activity and I have whole series of VC slides that are coming up. For me, talking to you is sort of preaching to the choir, to you who are the experts in this field. But you can see that -- frankly, I digress for a minute. Highways are more than just highways. We are very involved in safety, very involved. It's more than just the roadway and the car and traffic. We have all sorts -- our highest priority is safety, so we're very proud of the activities we do on the Bicycle and Pedestrian programs.

Some of you may be familiar with this Time Magazine cover. I think it's 2003. I tell people, when you look at those numbers, and I know the General Accountability Office recently came out with their updated report reaffirming 20% of the kids are projected to be obese by the year 2010. I mean, 2010 is three years, 2.7 years from now or whatever. It's around the corner. But that last bullet is, to me, the most sobering. We looked at that. There are, I understand, a number of senior professionals that are really speculating about this issue.

Okay, now my next slides, these are a series of five-year increments. Now I may have borrowed this from some of your data. We appreciate that, thank you. But, you know, as we go through these five-year slides, you will see the maps start to fill in and start to get darker and you'll see some percentages increase. I mean, we go back to '85 and I think most of you are familiar with the Body Mass Index which is apparently most accepted in your profession.

Okay, 1990. You can see it getting darker, still holding on to the 10 to 14% category. You go to '95 and we all of a sudden jump to a new category, a darker blue, 15 to 19%. It's amazing. That's twelve years ago. Then, you know, I always like this slide because it's like Colorado is hanging on. Hang on, Colorado. You're doing it. Then we have a new category greater than 20% and then the last slide we have for 2005. Once again, Colorado has moved, but they're still hanging on in the last category. We now have another new category, 30 to 34%. So it's pretty dramatic and I think you folks are very familiar with the crisis out there. I really, truly believe that, when we go out to communities and talk about getting kids more active and walking or biking to school, the thing that probably resonates the most with parents today is the issue of overweight and how can they get kids more active.

What I'm going to do now, and one of the last things we say, borrowing from your world, is that we're telling you, you know, you should have sixty minutes today. It doesn't have to be intense. It can be moderate. I just know from my own kids when we have these snow days and these ice days and they don't get out for recess, I mean, the payback's at home, when they get home. It's like they're bouncing off the walls. Finally, the big thaw comes, you send them outside and, you know, run, run some more, run again (laugh). It's just the kids need the activity. I mean, come on. They need that level of activity. They need to get that energy and burn it.

I'm going to describe the federal program to you now. This is what was passed in law and what we're doing. Now you're going to look at that number. That's a big number, $612 million dollars. By law, this goes to the State DOTs, State Departments of Transportation. We have those three requirements, that second bullet, under law. Those are in priority order. Two days before I started this job, because of some weird funding cycles how this all happened, two years of money was put on the table. I walked in this job and I started. I mean, this big bill passed and we had lots of activities to implement, this being one of them. And because of the funding cycle, they had two fiscal years worth of money within six weeks, the State DOTs. I have slides that will show you how much your state has, each of your states. So there was no doubt in my mind. That first item under the second bullet, we had to tackle quickly.

The next one, we're not going to be successful [inaudible] the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse is so instrumental to this program and I have a website and more information about that later in this presentation. Then lastly, we have a national task force. We have a couple members from the public health community, American Academy of Pediatrics, and State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association representation on our task force as a federal advisory committee.

Anyhow, that last bullet for those who are familiar with work in state government, this is a pretty significant issue. Many agencies have hiring freezes. I didn't know this until I started this job. Many agencies have to go to their state legislature for approval to hire somebody, and along comes this little program. In the highway world, it's not a real big dollar program, requiring the state to hire a fulltime person. State DOTs who are strapped for cash, strapped for people, have all sorts of needs, said, "What?" And the response was, "It's the law." It kind of ends the conversation.

These next two slides are straight out of the law and a purpose of the program. This is statutory language. It's very, very clear what it's about. Enable and encourage children to walk and bike to school and make it safer. Then lastly, this is some indirect benefits from those if you get more kids walking and biking and reduce traffic, etc., etc. It's a great picture, isn't it? We have an International Walk to School Day, the first Wednesday in October.

Okay, let's talk money. How much is there? Now $612 million is quite a bit, but when you spread it out over five years and then spread it out over 51 DOTs -- and the reason we say 51 is because the District of Columbia has a Department of Transportation, so they're in the game -- it really slices it down and you see how the funding ramps up. Congress put a simple formula in law and that is a state's percentage of the national total of kids in K through 8. So it's a very straightforward formula. They did create a floor for those Vermonts and

Wyomings and North Dakotas. Every state gets at least a million dollars every year.

Now this is a pretty busy slide, but this is from law. This is straight out of statute. These are the eligible categories. Now here's the challenge. The challenge is a lot of state DOTs are very good on the infrastructure side. On the education and encouragement side, some are comfortable with, some aren't. So for some state DOTs, this is pretty novel in trying to take an education and encouragement program and an infrastructure program, and you can see the percentages. By law, 70% of the money goes to infrastructure, 10% goes to non-infrastructure, the education and encouragement, and there's a 20% overlap that is flexible between infrastructure and non-infrastructure. They can't transfer it out of the program, so they have to spend it within the program. States are handling it in all sorts of different ways. Some are making hard decisions, some are waiting to see the applications come in.

The other thing I say about this slide is under some of these categories -- and I know coming from the public health world, you may not be as familiar with, you know, traffic calming lanes. I mean, some of those are pretty broad areas, so in our guidance that we have on our website to the state DOTs, we give illustrative examples of what may fit under there and, by no means, want to try to list everything since the list would be too long.

Congress has encouraged the states to run a competitive application process. Traditionally, a state would put out what we call a call for applications. A state doesn't have to. It's not a requirement of law; it's a suggestion of law. By law, I think they want to catch them when they're young; high school, too late. Can't change habits once you get to high school. But it's for K through 8. They put this two-mile rule around it for infrastructure and then, on the education and encouragement, there's no two-mile rule with the exception of the traffic education and enforcement. I personally wish they would not have put the two-mile rule around traffic education. I'm not quite sure why that's -- we had our lawyers take a look at that and were unable to get them to guess on it.

You know, you have to appreciate legislation if you ever have to implement it (laugh). It's a short little piece in the bill. The bill is like a thousand pages. This may be a page and a half. Within that page and a half, there's like twenty shalls. Shall do this, shall do that, shall do this. We said, wow, that's a lot of things we have to do, we must do. In our guidance to the states, let's make it as flexible as possible within this framework.

State DOTs have done a lot of different things with it. I mean, by law it goes to the State DOT, but some of them have very active -- by law, I should tell you, in every State DOT, there is also a Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator. That person is different from the St. Francis School coordinator. We spend a lot of time telling them about that difference, but that person is different. So a lot of

them has said bundle this in what we call the Bicycle and Pedestrian office. Other words have put in different offices. We're probably right now an implementation past the first wave, or the first wave is cresting with most states that either have an application process open or closed the first cycle.

Many states have these advisory committees. A lot of public health people I know are members of the advisory committees. I should say, advisory committees I'm aware of have a public health representative. You can see how they set up someone's infrastructure -- not infrastructure. Some of them have a planning phase or whatever.

Okay, here's where we are today. Of the 51 DOTs, as of March 1, Oklahoma just started. We have four DOTs, Hawaii, District of Columbia, North Carolina and South Dakota. Now North Carolina had a fulltime coordinator and she just accepted another job, so we feel very confident they're going to fill that. Hawaii is in the hiring process. D.C., we're in constant communication with them about let's move it. And South Dakota is a different story. Anybody here from South Dakota? We'll leave it at that. They just have some issues with being mandated to run this program when they have so many other needs. They're a low population western state, seasonal, etc., etc. It's been discussed at a very high level with them and this is who had that discussion.

We brought all the coordinators to Washington last year. I should tell you, it's freezing day, it's absolutely freezing. It was the biggest heat wave we had in twenty years (laugh), which is now looking very nice. In August in Washington, we brought all the coordinators in for a three-day orientation training session. Standing in the middle is the godfather, sponsor, congressional hero of this program, Chairman Jim Oberstar. Who here is from Minnesota? Any Minnesotans? Come on. Nobody cold weather? He's the biggest and most influential Bicycle and Pedestrian advocate on Capitol Hill. Before the last election, he was the number one Democrat on the committee. He has been in Congress for over forty years and now he's in charge. He's the one that got this program authorized in the past.

Okay, let's talk about your particular dollars for your state. I mentioned, sort of, there's a quirk in the way the funding cycle worked. I told you, within six weeks, we had two years of money to the states; within fourteen months, three years of funding with the State DOTs. In effect, you can see at this bottom, it's five years of funding in four years. Okay, the next three slides -- well, no, let me tell you where we are by -- I'm sorry, it's coming up. Where are we today? I'm sorry, we don't have an update as of February or March. We have sixteen states, about $18 million dollars, close to 300 schools. I mean, the states are really just starting. Once again, in state government, understand what it's like to launch a new program, a new federally assisted program.

Okay, here are the funding breakouts. Five year estimates for each state. This is based on three years of actual plus two years of rejected. So if you see somebody with five, knowing they're a minimum state because it has five years of funding. It's like those slides spend the money. I should tell you, Federal Highway takes $3 million off the top every year to run the program and that's really for the work we do at the Clearinghouse, the task force.

Let's talk about the Clearinghouse. If you remember that second bullet early on, create a Clearinghouse. Back in May, we awarded a contract to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Highway Safety Research Center. This is really a huge piece and part of the success of the program. They have a wealth of information on their website. Getting started, an interactive map of the state coordinators, an online guide, you can ask questions, you can look at the funding. It doesn't have -- and I apologize. This is an old slide. There is a link about the task force, the minutes from our last meeting, the next coming meeting, who's on the task force, what's the purpose of the task force, etc., etc.

We just had our first meeting in January, a very multi-disciplinary group, public health very prominent on our national task force. The charge of the task force is to submit a report to the Secretary for Congress about developing a national strategy for advancing safe routes to school. Here's our bragging sheet. We're very proud of the work we've done to date. That third bullet should say 47 fulltime coordinators now. I have to tell you, you know, when it has a high-level interest in

Congress, they give you money to help stand up the program and you have a very specific mission. And if you get the right people lined up, I mean, you really can make a difference and get things moving.

Let me just talk a little bit about how you can get involved. You know, this is sort of outside your portfolio, perhaps, and stuff you deal with on a day-to-day basis, but like I said from the very beginning, I truly believe that if we're going to be successful in this program, it's the public health world that's going to carry us across the goal line.

I would tell each and every one of you -- and the last slide, we'll have the link for the Clearinghouse -- go find out who your state coordinator is. Call them, email them. Get on their website. Most of them have websites. Find out if they have an advisory committee. If public health is not represented, ask them if you can represent them or if they have any problems with it. You know, what about call for applications? When are they coming out? What are the emphasis areas, etc., etc.? Then go to the center's website. I mean, there's all sorts of information there about getting started, etc., etc.

And the last thing I wanted to mention is that STIPDA has a call for grant applications. It's a mini grant program that's funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration which is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation. Paula Bower right here is with the National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration. They can talk to you more specifically about that if any of you have questions. That's the website you want to write down right there, saferoutesinfo.org. They have an 800 number if you want to talk to somebody personally, and thank you very much for your time.