

## The Findings

# Local Government Policies

How do public policies such as comprehensive plans, land development ordinances and zoning laws measure up in terms of promoting built environments that encourage walkability? To answer that question, an audit of Newville Borough and North Newton Township's ordinances and local comprehensive plans was conducted to answer questions such as?

- Are areas around schools zoned for higher density development?
- Are sidewalks required in new developments?
- Are new streets designed with pedestrians in mind?
- What policies and enforcement are in place to properly maintain sidewalks and cross walks?

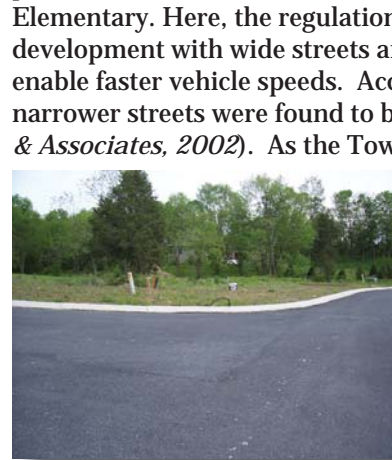
Many times, comprehensive plans encourage policies to enhance walkability in communities but existing regulations work against compact development and safety design standards that promote walkability.

Overall, Newville Borough's requirements for new development provide for sidewalk construction and street design standards that support pedestrian mobility. Newville's challenge is the lack of sidewalks and dangerous intersections in older, established areas of the Borough.



This intersection at North Corporation and Steelstown Road in Newville Borough illustrates an extremely wide turning radii and lack of sidewalks and curbs that makes crossing the street dangerous.

North Newton Township's zoning and subdivision regulations warrant a closer look within the pedestrian shed of Newville Elementary. Here, the regulations require residential development with wide streets and wider curb radii that enable faster vehicle speeds. According to a recent study, narrower streets were found to be the safest (Source: Swift & Associates, 2002). As the Township considers zoning, it may want to consider allowing a higher density of housing units within the school walking zone or adopt a mixed use zoning district that mimics the flavor of downtown Newville. In this way, a greater number of school-aged children could walk to school.



Sir William Drive in North Newton Township

Funding for the Carlisle Area Safe Routes to School project is provided by the Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation.



## Next Steps...

# Action Planning - Strategies

The Newville SRTS Task Force developed goal statements that reflect their collective vision as follows:

*Walking and biking will be enhanced and increased in our community through public and private partnership.*

### General Goals



- ▲ To increase walking in the community and walking to school
- ▲ To decrease the number of bused students within a 1/2 mile distance of school by eliminating roads classified as hazardous
- ▲ To decrease the number of students arriving by private vehicle

### Engineering Goals



- ▲ To enhance safety and design
- ▲ To engage PennDot in snow removal along walking routes
- ▲ To expand the walking area defined by the district/ eliminate hazardous busing

### Education Goals



- ▲ To increase the public awareness of the importance of sidewalks
- ▲ To provide/incorporate education of walking in school lesson plans
- ▲ To provide education for the whole community – town meetings
- ▲ To provide education to children on how to be a safe pedestrian/ped safety

### Encouragement Goals



- ▲ To encourage walking and biking
- ▲ To motivate children to choose walking

### Enforcement Goals



- ▲ To develop a safety patrol program
- ▲ To expand the number of student and adult guards at key intersections and school crossings.

During the fall of 2008, two workshops will be held in Newville to develop specific strategies and actions to support the Newville School community's vision and goals. The Action Plan component is the core of the overall Safe Routes to School plan. Interested parents, residents of Newville or North Newton Township, teachers, law enforcement or municipal officials are welcome to attend and provide input. For more information on the strategy meetings, contact Doris Ditzler at the Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation at 960-9009 Ext 7.

# Needs Assessment for Safe Routes to School

## Improving Health, Safety & Transportation at Newville Elementary School



In 1969, 42 percent of elementary students walked to school. By 2001, that figure dropped to 16 percent.

Some of the reasons for the dramatic shift are evident — small neighborhood schools gave way to large schools built on the edges of towns and cities making walking to school nearly impossible. Traffic congestion and speeding cars can make walking a dangerous daily adventure.

But it's not just distance and concerns about traffic safety that keep our kids from taking a healthy jaunt to school every day. Working parents cite convenience, fears about stranger danger, and bad weather as reasons for why mom or dad drives a student to school, even when a child lives within a "walkable" distance to school.

The walk to Newville Elementary School is currently being evaluated under a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) project, funded by the Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation. One of the Foundation's reasons for supporting this project is its focus on prevention and education in fighting obesity and the prevalence of overweight children in its service area. Today, nationwide, there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980. Walking 1/2 to 1 1/2 miles a day to school may help some kids battle the unwanted pounds and the many chronic health related risks associated with childhood obesity.

Walking to school is a perfect target for young residents to adjust their transportation choices to alternative methods of transportation. From a broader perspective, all residents will benefit from reduced traffic conditions, safer streets and better air quality.



Parents driving children to school account for 20-25% of morning traffic. (NHTSA 2003; Dept. of Environment)

Over the past six months, a task force comprised of volunteers representing parents, Newville Elementary, Newville Borough and North Newton Township has taken a close look at how students who live within a distance considered "walkable" currently travel to and from Newville Elementary, reasons parents don't allow their children to walk and what changes could be made so that more kids can experience a safe, healthy and enjoyable walk to school.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report summarizes a comprehensive assessment of Newville Elementary's walking routes to school in addition to parental and student attitudes towards walking for transportation. The assessment work included the following tasks:

- Transportation Surveys - asked students and parents how students travel to school and reasons why they walk or don't walk.
- Neighborhood Walkability Assessments - volunteer teams evaluated common walking routes for obstacles to safe walking and bicycling.
- Sidewalk and Crosswalk Inventories - studied conditions of walks and intersections.
- School Site Audits - evaluated school property and nearby streets for safety hazards and unsafe pedestrian and driver behavior.
- Task Force Workshops -- Volunteers identified barriers to walking safely to school, solutions to those barriers, and community assets that would help make a SRTS program successful.
- Ordinance Audits - examined municipal land development and zoning ordinances to identify barriers to building more walkable neighborhoods.
- Key Person Interviews - explored attitudes and ideas from a diverse set of key stakeholders to help shape a SRTS program that best benefits Newville Elementary.

"Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far." Thomas Jefferson

## The Findings Neighborhood Assessments

The neighborhood assessments focused on the **built environment**- those parts of a community that are human-made such as buildings, sidewalks, and street networks that connect us from place to place. Newville's SRTS Task Force team evaluated the existing street network with an eye towards connectivity and potential barriers to walkers. Connectivity characterizes the ease of moving between origins and destinations such as households and schools. The team found that the local street system lends itself to facilitating the mobility of students to school and is one of the greatest community assets to help make a SRTS program successful. Newville's neighborhood blocks offer the choice of taking multiple routes to school. The Neighborhood Assessment did, however, identify locations where the system is deficient and requires improvements to enhance connectivity and safety. See the map on page 3 for locations of identified sites of concern.



**#27 West Main Street & West Street Intersection**  
Issue: faded crosswalk, parking on Main Street near intersection

West Main & West Streets

### #24 West Main Street and High Street Intersection

Issue: no crossing guard, faded crosswalks

### # 18 North High Street

Issue: Cars parked on sidewalk



North High Street

### # 5 North Corporation & East Main Street Intersection

Issue: busy intersection heavily used by motorists to avoid red light at Rts. 233 and 641, faded crosswalks

### #28 Steelstown Road

Issue: No sidewalks, fast vehicle speeds; Classified as hazardous



Steelstown Road

### # 1 E. Main Street at Big Spring Bridge

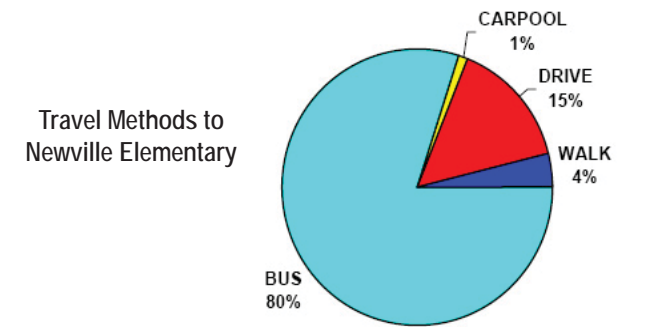
Issue: No sidewalk along bridge

### #22 Shepherd Road & North Corporation Intersection

Issue: No sidewalks, wide turning radii (65 homes planned when fully built out in nearby subdivision)

## The Findings Transportation Survey: Getting to School

The results of a Travel Survey sent to all Newville parents reveals that roughly 4 - 5% of students walk to and from school on a routine basis, or about 20 students. Newville Elementary has 40 students designated as walkers. As many as 70-80 students live within 3/4 of a mile from school and could conceivably walk, provided the routes are safe and parents feel comfortable about letting their children hoof it to school. This represents roughly 21% of the student body.



Newville Parent Transportation Questionnaire 2008

**Why Parents Drive:** The top three reasons given by Newville parents as to why they drive their children to or from school are 1) convenience (includes picking up kids on way home after work), 2) after school activities, and 3) bad weather. Children being too young, safety concerns, and distance were also commonly cited.

**Help Break the Cycle!** With fewer kids on foot or bike, there are more cars on the road. Parents driving their children to school make up 20-25 percent of the morning traffic on average. The more traffic increases, the more parents decide it is unsafe for their children to walk or bike, adding even more cars to the morning chaos in school zones.

Eighteen percent of the Newville Elementary student population is designated as walkers, however the survey numbers demonstrated that only 4% of students are walking to and from school on a regular basis. More congestion in around school neighborhoods impacts the existing walkers.

### Overcoming Barriers to Walking

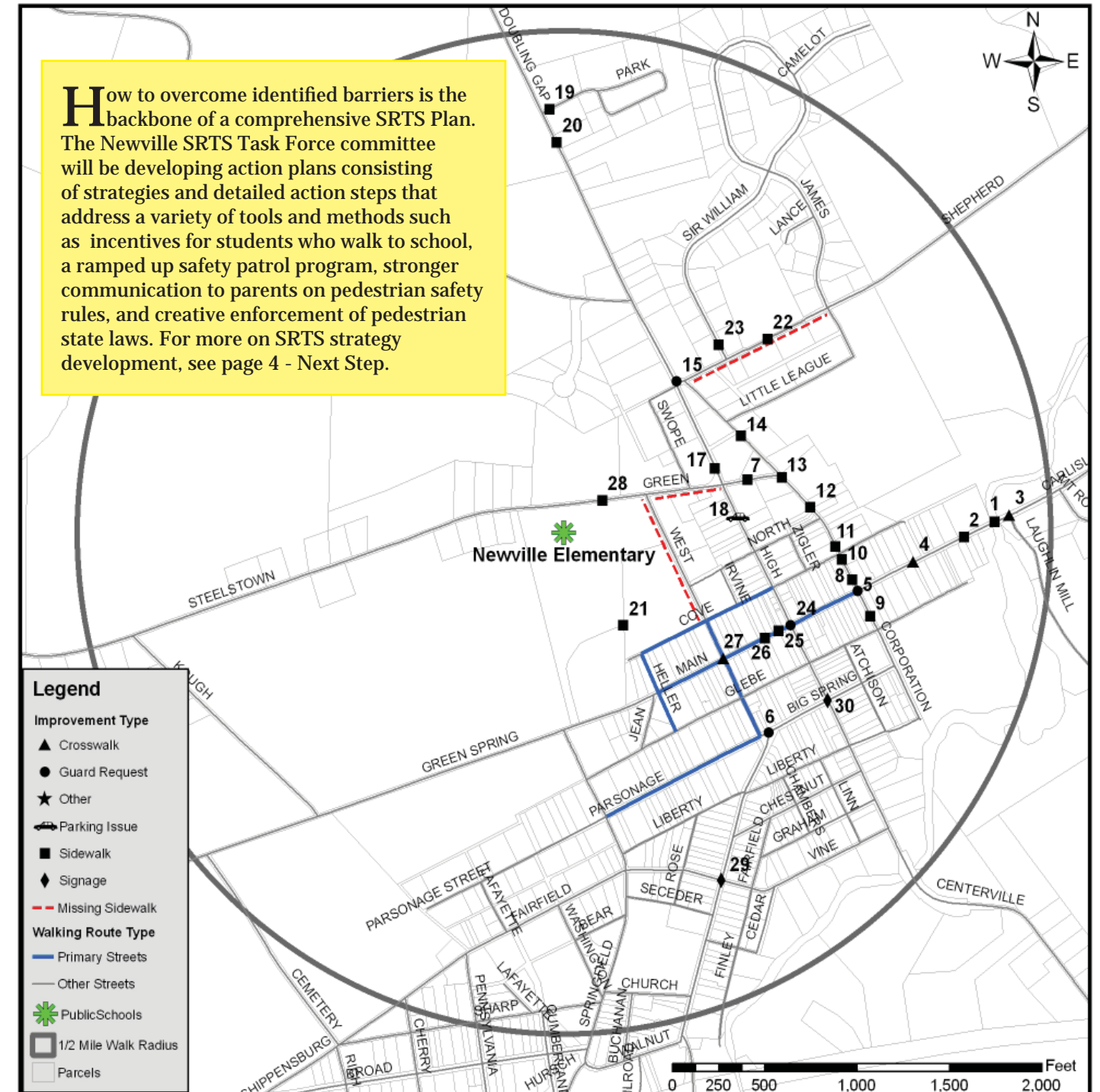
Newville's SRTS Task Force also discussed obstacles to walking and identified the following as the top four barriers to walking safely to school:

- Parent convenience
- Lack of crossing guards and safety patrols
- Lack of sidewalks
- Perceptions of acceptable walking distances

## The Findings Newville's Walking Zone

Neighborhood walkability encompasses many elements: distance, safe pathways, traffic control, and connectivity. The national Safe Routes to School program has defined a "walkable" distance for elementary school students as 1 mile from school. Areas of highest priority for enhancing walkability usually fall within a 1/2 mile radius from the school grounds, as depicted on the map below. Pennsylvania state legislation amended the Public School Code (P.L. 30, No.14, March 10 of 1949) to identify the walkable limits, based on distance for students as follows: K- Grade 5 up to 3/4 of a mile; and for all secondary school students up to 1 1/2 miles.

### Sites Identified for Potential Improvement



**H**ow to overcome identified barriers is the backbone of a comprehensive SRTS Plan. The Newville SRTS Task Force committee will be developing action plans consisting of strategies and detailed action steps that address a variety of tools and methods such as incentives for students who walk to school, a ramped up safety patrol program, stronger communication to parents on pedestrian safety rules, and creative enforcement of pedestrian state laws. For more on SRTS strategy development, see page 4 - Next Step.