New Jersey Safe Routes to School
Urban Demonstration Program

LEAP Academy Charter School
Camden, NJ

School Travel Plan Brief

In 2008, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) conducted its NJ Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Urban Demonstration Program in three New Jersey cities: Trenton, Newark and Camden. Given the commitment to SRTS exhibited by the Camden stakeholders and at the City's request, NJDOT agreed to provide additional resources to help Camden jumpstart their city-wide SRTS program.

In 2009, NJDOT launched their Extended NJ Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Urban Demonstration Program in Camden, which built on lessons learned from the previous Urban Demonstration Program, and provided SRTS assistance to two additional Camden schools, LEAP Academy Charter School and Rafael Cordero Molina Elementary School.

NJDOT with technical assistance from The RBA Group and the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University provided planning assistance to LEAP Academy Charter School to develop a SRTS School Travel Plan.

A School Travel Plan "maps out" how to improve pedestrian and bike travel to and from school. A School Travel Plan identifies:

- Where students currently walk and/or bike
- Where students would walk or bike if they could
- What changes need to be made so that students can and will walk and bike safely to school

The LEAP Academy Charter School Travel Plan is a working document intended to set priorities for increasing the number and safety of students walking and bicycling to and from school. The School Travel Plan serves as a basis for the organizing and funding of those priorities and as a model that can be replicated across Camden and in other areas of New Jersey. In order for a School Travel Plan to be complete, it must contain six elements:

1 School Description
2 SRTS Task Force and Partnerships
3 Barriers & Opportunities to Walking and Bicycling
4 Maps of the School Neighborhood
5 Action Plan
6 Program Evaluation and Monitoring

This School Travel Plan Brief is a summary of these six elements as identified in LEAP Academy Charter School Travel Plan.

One of the objectives of the Safe Routes to School program is to make the program accessible to diverse participants, especially schools and communities with limited resources and staffing to spearhead new initiatives. This is particularly important, as schools in low income areas often have higher than average child pedestrian crash rates and a greater need for a SRTS program, yet may not be able to successfully access these funds.

The purpose of the New Jersey Department of Transportation Urban Demonstration Program was to ensure that all children, regardless of where they live, can benefit from SRTS programs. The goals of the program are to:

- Assist urban areas that have shown interest in SRTS programs but may not have the resources to succeed on their own, and
- Develop a model for use in urban areas across the state.

The Urban Demonstration Program focused on schools in Camden, Trenton and Newark. It was modeled after an earlier demonstration program completed in 2006 which consisted of pilot testing the New Jersey SRTS program in three communities - urban, suburban and rural. Both programs resulted in the development of School Travel Plans for each of the pilot schools.

1. School Description

LEAP Academy is located in the Cooper Grant Historic District in Downtown Camden which is located on the south side of the Ben Franklin Bridge and adjacent to the Delaware River Waterfront. The area is part of Camden's University District. This section has a limited number of family residences due to its proximity to the college campus and large downtown office/commercial business attractors such as the Camden Aquarium and the Municipal Complex. There are a number of vacant buildings but recent City redevelopment efforts have brought additional housing units to the area.

The school campus consists of two separate buildings, the Charter School and University Charter High School. Enrollment at LEAP is by choice and is available to residents of Camden County. District busing is available for all students that live more than 2 miles from the school.

Grade Levels:	Pre-K-6th (Charter School)
	7th-12th (University Charter High School)
Student Population:	780 (both campuses)
School District:	Camden City
Location:	Cooper Street between N 5th and N 7th
Student Demographics:	52% Hispanic
	47% Black
Home Language:	54% English
	46% Spanish

2. SRTS Task Force and Partnerships

A key element in the process was to conduct outreach efforts to the city and school communities and establish a Task Force. Generally each school would have its own Task Force. However, since R.C. Molina Elementary School and LEAP Academy Charter School, are located a half mile apart, the Task Force was combined. The aim was to engage active community groups and local organizers who will support and sustain the SRTS program over time. In Camden, the Task Force was comprised of:

- Camden's Division of Special Grant Projects
- Mayor's Youth Council
- Camden City Council
- Safe Kids NJ
- Camden Police Department
- Camden City Public Schools
- R.C. Molina Elementary School
- LEAP Academy Charter School
- Camden Board of Education
- City of Camden Department of Planning
- Hopeworks 'N Camden
- Camden School Based Youth Services Programs
- Cross County Connection TMA
- Cooper's Ferry Development Association
- Brain Injury Association of NJ
- Community Health Outreach Consortium of South Jersey
- AAA South Jersey
- Camden Greenways, Inc.
- Save Our Waterfront, Inc.
- CAMConnect

3. Barriers & Opportunities to Walking and Bicycling

Information gathered from stakeholder interviews, student travel surveys, a community workshop, a field investigation, and crime data and a crash analysis was used to assess existing conditions and identify opportunities to improve conditions for students on their way to and from school.

Key Issues/Concerns

The following were identified as concerns around the school neighborhood by parents, students and school officials:

Vehicle blocking crosswalk

- Cars not yielding to pedestrians
- Motorists rolling through stop signs
- Congestion
- Parents double and triple parking during drop-off / pick-up
- Speeding

Parked cars force bus to drop students far from the curb

Classroom/Walkabout Session

The project team along with six 4th graders performed a walkability assessment of the school neighborhood. A walkability assessment is a means of ranking neighborhood features including how well drivers behaved, how easy it is to cross the street, and if there was enough room to walk. The students noted that:

- The sidewalks are crowded by high school and college students who are "moving like bees"
- Drivers drive too fast
- They often see "scary" people
- More grass, flowers and trees are needed to spruce up the neighborhood
- Loiterers in front of the college make it difficult to get by and are intimidating

How did the neighborhood score?

Okay, but it needs work.

Community Workshop

Parents/caregivers, school officials, police and community leaders attended an evening workshop to discuss Safe Routes to School for both R.C. Molina and LEAP Academy. Participants identified barriers, areas of concerns and opportunities around both schools through facilitated discussion and hands-on mapping exercises.


*Workshop attendees participating in a mapping exercise*

4. Maps of the School Neighborhood

These maps illustrate the existing conditions in the neighborhood of the LEAP Academy Charter School, the Barriers and Opportunities for students walking to and from school, and some Neighborhood Recommendations to improving facilities so their trips are safer.

Barriers & Opportunities
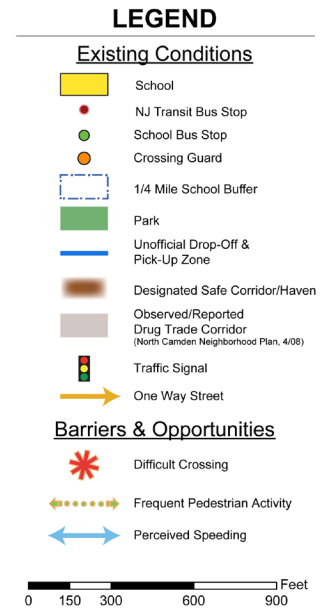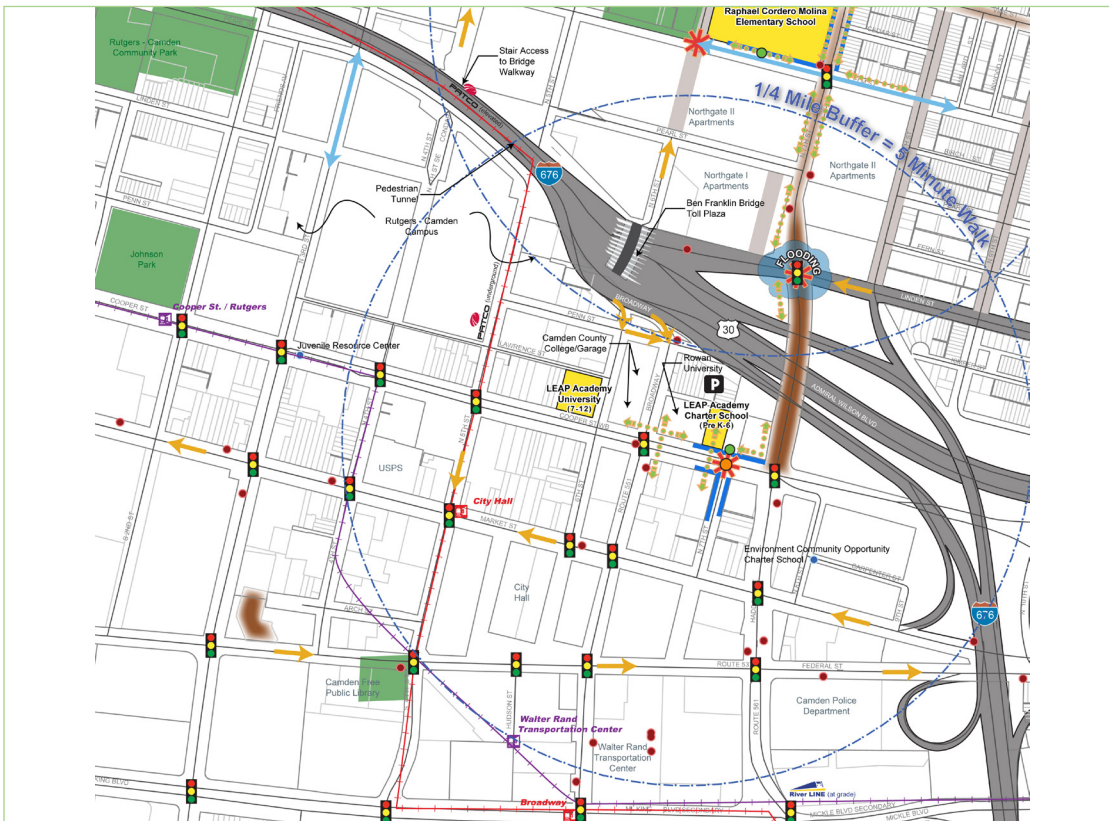
Neighborhood Recommendations
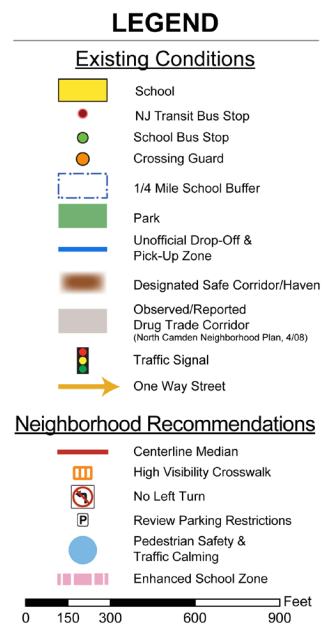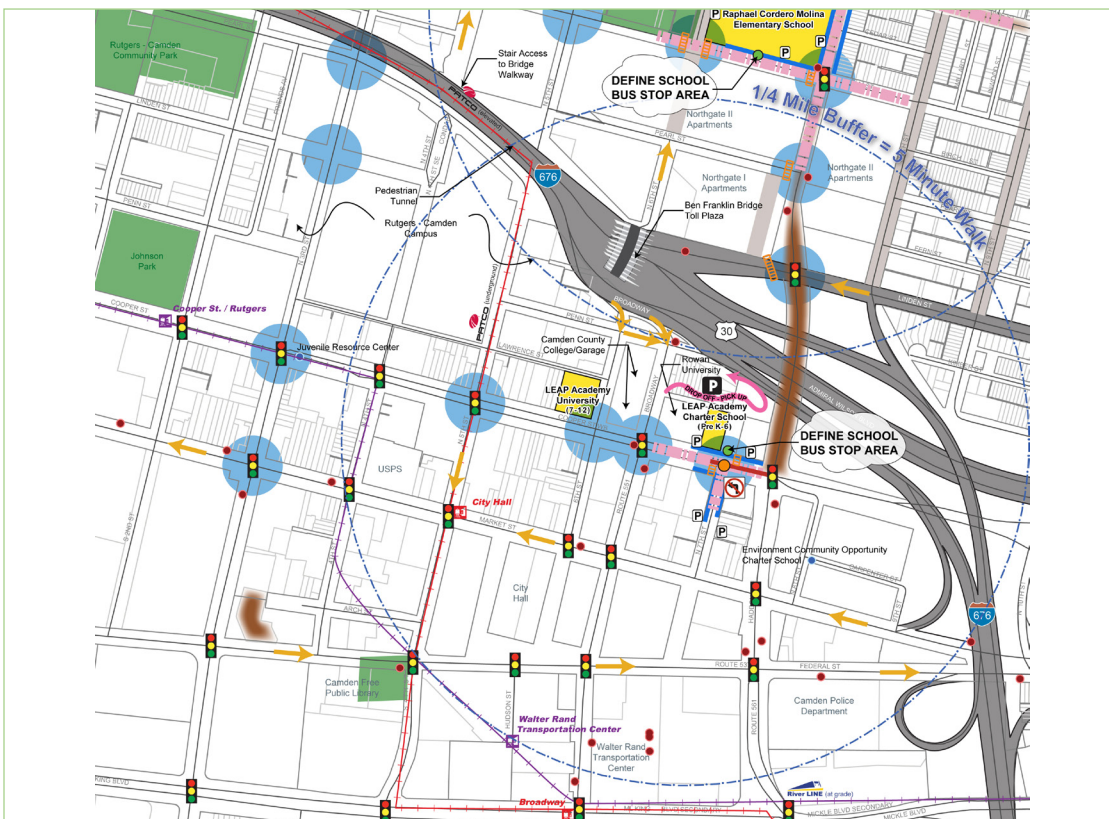
5. Action Plan

The plan of action for implementing the LEAP Academy Charter School SRTS program is intended to increase safety for students on their walk to and from school and when appropriate, encourage more students to walk. In addition to the actions, the School Travel Plan identifies a responsible party for implementing them, a time frame and a level of cost. Listed below are 5E action items from the School Travel Plan.

Engineering

- Conduct a parking utilization and circulation study and investigate options for drop-off/pick-up procedures
- Clearly define and enhance school zones
- Enhance/designate priority school routes with signs, pavement markings or in-ground medallions/markers
- Install high visibility crosswalks
- Provide pedestrian safety, traffic calming and streetscape improvements along Cooper Street, N. 3rd Street and N. 7th Street
- Restrict left turns onto Cooper Street from N. 7th Street
- Clearly define where parking is prohibited adjacent to intersections (daylighting)
- Install secure bicycle parking in a well-lit location
- Extend centerline median on Cooper Street to east Haddon Avenue

Education

- Conduct community-wide outreach on benefits of SRTS
- Introduce pedestrian safety classes into the curriculum by using materials from the WalkSafe Program
- Include health benefits of SRTS programs in teacher training and student curriculum
- Issue press releases and/or pass resolutions showing commitment to SRTS
- Educate parents and students on the school policy for pick-up and drop-off
- Distribute walking school bus options to school families
- Circulate school walking event information with municipal utility or tax bill

Enforcement

- Post clear parking regulation signs at all drop-off and pick-up locations
- Include education materials about the dangers of speeding when issuing citations or warnings
- Conduct a series of pedestrian decoys
- Maintain police presence at major pedestrian crossings
- Educate students on bicycle and pedestrian safety
- Consider posting speed monitoring signs on Cooper St
- Reinforce parking procedures

6. Program Evaluation and Monitoring

Utilizing the NJDOT SRTS Toolbox Fact Sheet, *"Evaluating your SRTS Program"* as a guide, LEAP Academy Charter School will conduct classroom/student hands-up travel pattern surveys and parent/caregiver take-home attitudinal surveys to evaluate its SRTS Program over time.

Definitions

En·gin·eer·ing: creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safe and accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.

En·force·ment: partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws (i.e. speeding, idling, cell phone, yield-to-pedestrian) are obeyed in the vicinity of schools and initiating community enforcement, such as crossing guard programs.

Ed·u·ca·tion: teaching children and parents about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.

En·cour·age·ment: using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling to school on a regular basis.

E·val·u·a·tion: monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of data before and after the intervention.

Encouragement

- Define recommended walking routes by providing maps and installing pavement markings and/or signs
- Establish a SRTS Committee to lead the effort
- Work with the Brain Injury Association of NJ to prepare for and participate in International Walk to School Days
- Distribute a Safety Pledge for parents and students
- Start a "Frequent Walker Card" system or a "Golden Sneaker" award for classrooms
- Hold a bicycle rodeo
- Consider taking on snow removal responsibility along identified routes to school
- Proclaim "Crossing Guard Appreciation Day"
- Pass a resolution of participation
- Create a parent appreciation initiative

Evaluation

- Perform speed studies before and after the initiation of any physical or programmatic measures
- Conduct a survey to define mode choice so there is a baseline to assess future efforts
- Conduct school commute time parking studies
- Conduct a preference survey
- Conduct tracking exercises for distances students walk

NJDOT SRTS: www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/srts/
NJ SRTS Resource Center: http://policy.rutgers.edu/vtc/srts/