



July 8, 2020

Coordinator's Corner

Summer is finally here, but many of our favorite activities won't look the same this year. Nonetheless, there are still opportunities to have fun outside while staying safe. Walking and bicycling are great ways for people of all ages to get physical activity, and communities across Virginia are creating more places to do it and to do so comfortably.



In this newsletter, we'll meet a Chesapeake bike shop owner who helps schools maintain their bicycle fleets, and check in on this year's Bike to School Day, which students and their families participated in at a distance. Next, we'll learn how Covid-19 has affected walking and bicycling habits across Virginia, and how communities are creating space for people to walk and bike safely during the pandemic. We'll also share a new Learn it. Do it. Live it! resource on crossing guards.

As Virginia continues to reopen, we also have a reminder from Governor Northam to continue social distancing. And as more people return to work and travel, we have social media reminders about the rules of the road from the Toward Zero Deaths initiative, a statewide effort to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries. 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

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CALENDAR

JULY

Park and Recreation Month

AUGUST

13: QuickStart mini-grants due

SEPTEMBER

10: QuickStart and Walkabout mini-grants due

Friends and Faces: Walt Gonzales

Walt Gonzales is the owner of Peake Endurance, a bike store in Chesapeake that provides bikes to schools in Chesapeake and Virginia Beach. He's one of many community partners who make Safe Routes to School programs around Virginia successful and sustainable. We spoke to Walt about how he got involved, how we can make streets safer for bicycling, and his favorite places to bike.

Can you tell us a little about your store?

We're kind of a non-traditional bike store. We do full service, we do retail on a limited basis. We also have a Kickr studio, basically an indoor studio where you bring your own bike. It's like a spin class, but more high-tech.

How'd you hear about Safe Routes to School?

I've known about the program for a while. My wife's a health and PE teacher in Virginia Beach, so between her and former Chesapeake SRTS coordinator Chad Triolet and now current Chesapeake coordinator Dawn Cyr, that's my tie-in.



As a community partner, what do you bring to SRTS?

We've been involved since 2010. Virginia Beach City Public Schools actually bought bikes from us for use in their health classes, and we help maintain those bikes. We also maintain the bikes for Chesapeake Public Schools. Predominantly, we do a lot of maintenance and help with the bikes themselves. In the past, we've done fairs at a couple of the elementary schools and the middle schools, teaching safe riding.

Do you have any advice for other bike shops who want to work with SRTS?

Be in the community, be inside the community, be involved with the kids and parents. Try to promote outdoor riding! Partnering with schools, and teaching safe riding and the rules, have always been fun for us to do.

What can we do to encourage more kids to bike?

What [parents] hear, especially in Chesapeake, is that they don't have a lot of safe places for kids to ride. Honestly, my biggest frustration is the lack of infrastructure, and cities not being cognizant of when they build roads, they need to add sidewalks and shoulders. I realize that's a budget thing. But starting with that would be a way to get more people to ride. It would help with safety, it would help with pollution, and it would help with traffic. Here, you see kids walking in medians just to get to 7-11 or to go the store. [Communities] need to push for more safe routes everywhere, not only to and from schools. Especially in the suburbs.

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What are your favorite places to bike in VA?

We really like the Virginia Capital Trail in Richmond. That's a nice, long, steady route with parking. It's safe, it's maintained. Here in Chesapeake, the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail is nice and closed off. For some easier trails, maybe Northwest River Park in Chesapeake, or False Cape State Park in Virginia Beach.

Don't Forget Social Distancing

Governor Northam is easing public health restrictions with Phase 3 of Forward Virginia. While many businesses can operate at reduced capacity, the Governor continues to urge all Virginians to do their part to ensure the health and safety of the Commonwealth. This includes physical distancing between members of the public, practicing best hygiene practices, and using a face covering when possible.

Governor Northam's guidelines continue to apply to physical activity. As we enjoy the warmer days and opportunities to leave the house, exercise safe practices as you walk and bike.

- Wear a mask or face covering.
- Whether you're on the sidewalk or a trail, give passersby six feet of space.
- Wash your hands when you return home.

Recreational sports may be held outside if there are fewer than 250 attendees and participants maintain at least 10 feet of space. Gyms and other indoor exercise facilities are now allowed to open with limited indoor operations. [Learn more here.](#)

Walking and biking is as important as ever. These safety measures will keep you safe and protect others as we walk and roll.

Meet Your New Blue Ridge LTAC

The new Local Technical Assistance Coordinator for the Blue Ridge region is a familiar face: Katie Heuser, formerly the LTAC Program Assistant. Below, Katie tells us why she's so excited about her new role. You can learn more about her, and the other LTACs, [on our website.](#)



How have your experiences, both personally and professionally, prepared you to be an LTAC?

I studied and researched all types of transportation in college. I have also learned a lot from the past months as Virginia SRTS Program Assistant, and I look forward to being more involved as the Blue Ridge LTAC. I have always been interested in being a teacher, so being involved with SRTS has fulfilled that desire to better the lives of students, if in a different sort of way.

Did you bike and walk to school as a student?

I was a car-rider in elementary school, but my middle school was a block away from my house. I have great memories of walking to and from school with my friends everyday. One day, I forgot my jersey for a volleyball game, so (with my coach's permission) I ran home and back before the first serve! In my high school, there was a lot of status attributed to classmates who drove their own cars. I'm glad Safe Routes is teaching students at a young age that walking or biking is the environmentally-friendly, economical, and fun way to go!



Bike to School Day at a Distance

This year's Bike to School Day was the first that we've celebrated from our own homes. But some things never change; families across Virginia enjoyed the benefits of active mobility as they pedaled around. Schools championed Bike to School Day as an opportunity to ride together, apart!

Many students, like these pictured at Freedom Hill Elementary School in Fairfax County, biked to their school and look forward to biking to school together once again. While Bike to School Day may have passed, every day can be celebrated as a chance to enjoy biking and to remind Virginia's leaders of the importance of walking and biking facilities.

More People Walked + Biked During Stay-at-Home Orders

With schools closed and many non-essential employees working from home, communities everywhere have witnessed major changes in their transportation patterns. There are fewer cars on the roads and most public transportation systems are operating at reduced capacity. Many more people are walking and biking for both recreation and transportation, causing large increases in trail usage and bicycle purchases:

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) completed an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22 and found [nationwide trail usage had increased nearly 200 percent](#) compared to the same week in 2019.
- [Bike manufacturers and retailers are having a hard time keeping up with increased demand](#). The market research firm NPD Group reports "sales of commuter and fitness bikes in [March] increased 66 percent, leisure bikes jumped 121 percent, children's bikes went up 59 percent and electric bikes rose 85 percent." Bike shops around the country are sold out of many models and experiencing a backlog of repair requests.

Communities in Virginia are seeing similar trends. Local news outlets have reported on changes in biking, walking, and driving related to the pandemic:

- According to preliminary data from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, [crashes statewide dropped 78% in April 2020](#) compared to the previous year, though crashes involving bicyclists fell only 31%.
- [Ridership increased 65% in March](#) on the Virginia Capital Trail, a 51.7-mile paved pedestrian and bicycle trail between Richmond and Williamsburg.
- At Fat Frogs bike shop in Virginia Beach, [there are over 100 bicycles waiting for repairs](#). The current turnaround time is about four weeks.
- A survey conducted by the [Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) showed "a significant increase in walking, running and biking" as well as concerns about "the ability to properly social distance on sidewalks and trails." 63% of survey respondents supported expanding street space for pedestrians and cyclists.

See the other articles in this newsletter for more information on proper social distance protocol when walking and biking and examples of communities that have created extra space for people walking and biking.

Rethinking Our Streets in the Era of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the value of streets as public spaces. Due to concerns about the contagiousness of Covid-19, schools and business have been shut down and public transit has been curtailed, resulting in a dramatic decline in motor vehicle traffic. At the same time, the number of people out walking and bicycling has spiked and there is a need for streets to serve other purposes, like outdoor dining. This has prompted local governments in United States and across the globe to consider temporary modifications to their streets.

[Bogota, Colombia](#) was one of the first cities to act, opening 47 miles of temporary bike lanes, including 13 miles installed in one night on March 17. In April, [Oakland, California](#) announced plans to develop a 74 mile network of pedestrian and bicycle only streets to allow for social distancing. Oakland is not the only US city pursuing such changes. Many local governments have increased space for walking or bicycling during the pandemic,



including the cities of Denver, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Seattle, New York City, and Washington, DC. Closer to home, jurisdictions in Virginia are also taking action:

- [Fairfax County](#) has converted car lanes on Tysons Boulevard (pictured) to walking and bicycling space.
- In Arlington County, pedestrian signals are now automatic, so people don't have to push the "beg" button to get the walk signal.
- [Richmond](#) is working to identify streets it can convert to car-free "open streets."
- [Hampton](#) will close down two streets to make room for outdoor dining, while [Norfolk](#) and [Fredericksburg](#) will re-purpose parking spaces for outdoor dining.

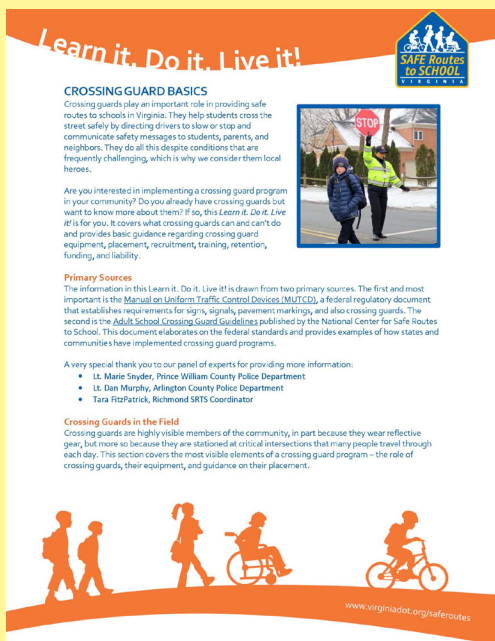
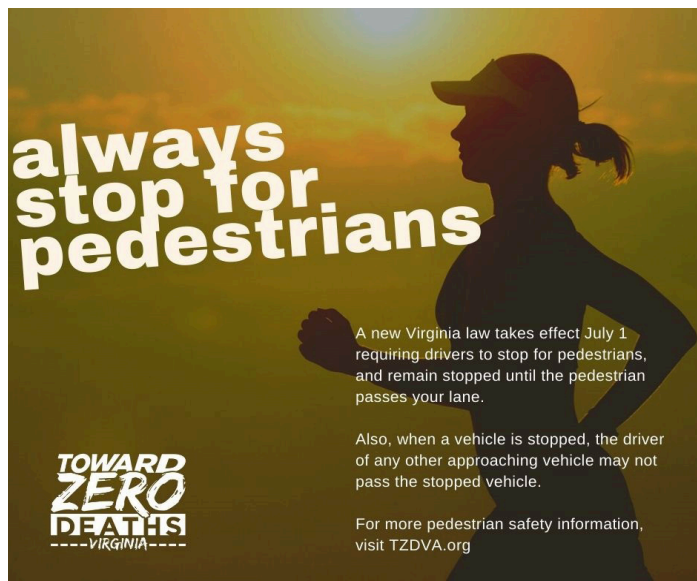
It is unknown how long these measures will stay in place, but one great benefit is the opportunity they provide for re-imagining how streets might function in a post-pandemic world.

Towards Zero Deaths in Virginia

Over 3,700 people have died on Virginia roadways in the past five years.

What can we do about it? The Virginia Department of Transportation has a new plan to reduce traffic deaths and injuries 50% by 2030, and eventually to zero, through enforcement, education, engineering, and emergency response strategies.

To help spread the word, you can download these great flyers reminding everyone of the rules of the road. For more information, visit www.tzdva.org.



New Resource: Learn it. Do it. Live it! Crossing Guard Basics

Are you interested in implementing a crossing guard program in your community? Do you already have crossing guards but want to know more about them? If so, our new Learn it. Do it. Live it! resource provides guidance regarding crossing guards in the field and behind the scenes.

[Read here](#) to learn more about crossing guard equipment, placement, recruitment, training, retention, funding, and liability. A big thank you to our panel of experts for providing valuable input.