



Milwaukee receives Vision Zero for Youth Innovation Award, recognition for efforts to support safe walking and biking amid COVID-19 pandemic

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (April 5, 2021) – The National Center for Safe Routes to School has named the Milwaukee Safe Routes to School Program the recipient of the 2021 Vision Zero for Youth Innovation Award. The program, which received leadership and support from the Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW) and Wisconsin Bike Fed, was selected because of its creative, community-driven efforts to support safe walking and biking for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Milwaukee Safe Routes to School Program provides an exceptional example of how organizations can come together to accomplish big things, even during incredibly challenging times such as those that communities have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Nancy Pullen-Seufert, Director, National Center for Safe Routes to School, UNC Highway Safety Research Center. “We are honored to present the Vision Zero for Youth Innovation Award to a program that has gone to great lengths to continue its engagement of children, families, and other community members during a time marked by distancing.”

Pullen-Seufert said the Award Committee wanted to recognize the Milwaukee Safe Routes to School Program and its partners for not only continuing but advancing its efforts to support safe walking and biking for youth, especially youth of color and in low-income neighborhoods, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite significant challenges to advancing safety improvements around schools and engaging with communities in-person during the pandemic, DPW staff continued to innovate and adapt by holding workshops and walks outside. These efforts ensured that physical distancing requirements were met while continuing to include parents, students, school staff, and neighbors in improving traffic safety around schools.

The Wisconsin Bike Fed also continued its efforts to encourage safe bicycling and get children outside throughout 2020. Its summer bicycle camps were modified to be fully outdoors, Safe Routes to School program elements were retooled into a ‘Safe Routes from Home’ curriculum, and the Champion Training program to train school staff to ride a bike to school continued.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett noted, “Fostering the next generation of civic leaders is vital to ensuring healthy neighborhoods and safe streets in Milwaukee for decades to come. This award shows what can be achieved when everyone, especially our youth, brings their creativity and local knowledge to the table.”

DPW Commissioner Jeff Polenske added, “The award highlights our department’s commitment to realizing safe and Complete Streets, especially around schools, by working with communities and building long-lasting relationships with partners such as the Wisconsin Bike Fed, Milwaukee Public Schools, and the Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers. We’re proud of the hard work these organizations, parents, students, and countless other neighbors undertake every day to make it easier for students and staff to bike or walk to school safely. We are excited to continue this work in the coming months and years as a leader in Milwaukee’s Safe Routes to School program.”



“The Wisconsin Bike Fed is grateful for this recognition by the National Center for Safe Routes to School,” said Michael Anderson, Program Manager, Wisconsin Bike Fed. “Our long relationship with Milwaukee Public Schools allowed us to creatively move our Safe Routes efforts forward during the pandemic. In 2021 we continue to support our young people in MPS virtually and in-person through after-school bike clubs, summer bike camps, and walking clubs. We are especially excited to collaborate with the Department of Public Works multimodal team again in the Fall 2021 school year and build upon our Child Friendly City work at Lincoln Avenue School including youth voices in the street design process.”

The National Center for Safe Routes to School is presenting the Innovation Award this year in lieu of the Vision Zero for Youth USA Leadership Award, which has been awarded annually since 2017 to recognize cities that are leading the way in prioritizing children’s safety while also improving pedestrian and bicyclist safety for all ages through Vision Zero. Due to the pandemic, the Vision Zero for Youth US Award Committee, which includes representatives from road safety organizations and government agencies, opted instead to recognize innovative approaches to road safety benefiting youth over the past year.

The Award is presented by the Vision Zero for Youth initiative, led by the National Center for Safe Routes to School with support from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, the FIA Foundation, and the UNC Highway Safety Research Center.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School will present the award in spring 2021. The city of Milwaukee’s innovative Vision Zero for Youth efforts will be featured in a forthcoming case study produced by the Center.

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Vision Zero for Youth

Launched by the National Center for Safe Routes to School in 2016, the Vision Zero for Youth initiative encourages communities and elected officials to focus safety improvements and efforts to slow traffic speeds where children and youth travel. Starting with youth can be the spark that creates community support for a broader Vision Zero program to eliminate all traffic fatalities. The initiative includes resources, ideas for taking action, opportunities for city leaders to commit and national and international recognition programs. Support for the initiative is provided by the FIA Foundation, UNC Highway Safety Research Center, and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. For more information about Vision Zero for Youth, visit visionzeroforyouth.org.

National Center for Safe Routes to School

Established in 2006, the National Center for Safe Routes to School helps communities change their culture around safe and active travel. Its role includes national coordination and technical assistance for US Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day, and providing tools, training, research and evaluation for safe walking and bicycling for children and youth. The National Center for Safe Routes to School served as US Federal Highway Administration’s clearinghouse for the federal SRTS program for eleven years. It is located at the UNC Highway Safety Research Center, hsrc.unc.edu.