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Mayor Ballard, U.S. Transportation Secretary, Rep. Carson Encourage Students to Walk and Bike to School

INDIANAPOLIS – U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard, and U.S. Representative Andre Carson joined elementary students in Indianapolis today to showcase the federal “Safe Routes to School” (SRTS) program and to highlight First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move!” initiative.

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The Secretary, Mayor and Congressman escorted students to St. Thomas Aquinas School on “Walk to School” day to encourage children nationwide to walk and bike safely to school, while helping to reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution near the school.

“Ensuring that children have safe routes to walk or bike to school directly correlates with the City of Indianapolis initiatives to create a more connected city and encourage physical activity,” said Mayor Ballard. “The Office of Sustainability is working with public and private partners to invest in urban infrastructure including sidewalks, trails and bike lanes to improve connectivity so that children and adults have safe routes to walk or bike to their destinations. Many thanks to Secretary LaHood for taking the time to visit Indianapolis and educate the public on the importance of safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.”

“In Indianapolis and cities across the United States, many parents are just looking for a safe way for their kids to get outdoors and exercise,” said Congressman Carson. “Through the Safe Routes to School program, we have an opportunity to give our kids a safe environment through improved infrastructure and education programs where they can develop healthy habits that they will carry with them for life. Today, as one in three kids are struggling with their weight, I applaud Secretary LaHood for recognizing just how important this program is to our city and to our young people.”

St. Thomas Aquinas is one of thousands of schools that participate in the SRTS program. It has received $302,000 in SRTS grants since 2007 and now operates two daily “walking school bus” routes as well as three other routes that operate two or three times a week. Walking school buses encourage more students to walk and bike to school with the help of parent volunteers who supervise the route.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has provided more than $615 million to state departments of transportation in SRTS funding since the program’s creation in 2005.

In 1969, according to FHWA data, about half of all students walked or bicycled to school. Forty years later, fewer than 15 percent of all school trips are made by walking or bicycling, 25 percent are made by school bus, and more than half of all children arrive at school in private automobiles.

First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move!” initiative seeks to increase physical activity among an increasingly sedentary generation of children. One out of every three children is now overweight or obese, which increases their risk of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer as they get older. As walking and biking has declined among children, and rides to and from school have increased, traffic congestion and air quality around schools have worsened as has pedestrian and bicycle safety.

“The success of Safe Routes to School can only grow with the continued involvement of parents and others working to keep children safe and mobile,” said Secretary LaHood. “Walking to school is healthy, fun and safe – and we want to keep it that way.”

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