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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **“Safe Routes Nebraska” One of 22 Programs to Receive National Recognition**

Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) earned top marks recently from the director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and was praised for their program’s success in the fight to combat childhood obesity.

Safe Routes Nebraska is one of only 22 programs to meet the four milestones established for state programs, according to Deb Hubsmith, director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, in written testimony to Congress Oct. 2. She testified on the Safe Routes to School: 2007 State of the States Report to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure at a hearing on the Federal Safe Routes to School Program Subcommittee on Highways and Transit in Washington, D.C.

The four milestones include hiring a full-time state program coordinator, establishing an advisory committee, releasing application deadlines to local communities and selecting and awarding funding for requested Safe Routes projects.

Chairman Jim L. Oberstar of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure said he is “pleased” with the progress programs such as Safe Routes Nebraska are making to improve children’s health safety.

“I’ve learned that rarely do you get the opportunity to change the habits of an entire generation,” Oberstar said in a statement at the hearing. “The Safe Routes to School program is our opportunity. Increased safety, healthier lifestyles, a cleaner environment; in these many ways, we can instill in our children positive habits that will last a lifetime.”

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## *Safe Routes Nebraska Program Recognized*

NDOR launched Safe Routes Nebraska in October 2006 and announced funds were available. Within two months, more than 160 intent-to-apply forms were submitted requesting more than \$18 million in funding for community or school programs. In May 2007, after extensive review by the state's advisory committee, NDOR awarded \$2 million for 23 Safe Routes Nebraska projects across the state. More than 80 applicants requested \$8 million in September. NDOR expects to announce award recipients in spring 2008.

"Although funding is limited, the overwhelming response to the program reflects that Nebraskans are committed to improving children's health," said Kelly Morgan, Safe Routes Nebraska Program Coordinator. "We are excited to help communities improve the health of Nebraska's schoolchildren by promoting opportunities to build safer walking and biking routes." To help potential applicants understand application requirements, Morgan and NDOR held workshops in Gering, Norfolk and Lincoln and met with educators at the Nebraska Council of School Administrators conference in Kearney.

"We wanted to ensure potential applicants understood the process and to provide them the tools to develop complete proposals," Morgan said. "Those areas of the state that didn't receive funding last year received additional outreach."

Morgan said communities can also implement programs that don't require funding. Safe Routes Nebraska provides free resources and educational materials for communities to promote healthier living and safe walking and biking routes. School administrators, community organizations and nonprofit agencies are encouraged to visit the Safe Routes Nebraska Web site at [www.SafeRoutesNE.com](http://www.SafeRoutesNE.com) to learn more about how to give kids a fun and safe way to incorporate exercise into their daily routines. Resources for download include classroom activities, a rewards program guide, frequent walker and biker cards and brochures.

What's more, Safe Routes Nebraska has developed partnerships with other agencies that are working to improve children's health, including Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Action for Healthy Kids and Keep Kids Alive Drive 25.

#MORE#

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“Laying the foundation to change the habits of an entire generation is a community effort. By working together to create an environment that allows children to walk and bike to school safely, we’re helping children live happier, healthier lives,” Morgan said.

Safe Routes Nebraska is part of the National Safe Routes to School program. Through the 2005 passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy For Users, known as SAFETEA-LU, Congress designated \$612 million toward developing the National Safe Routes to School program. Money is distributed to the Nebraska Department of Roads to fund education, planning and implementation of Safe Routes to School plans and programs.

For more information about how to apply for Safe Routes Nebraska funding or implementing a program in your community or school, go to [www.SafeRoutesNE.com](http://www.SafeRoutesNE.com).

#NDOR#

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