

## Manitou receives federal Safe Routes to School funding

**By Jeanne Davant**

The City of Manitou Springs and its project partners were awarded just over \$117,000 recently by the Colorado Department of Transportation's Colorado Safe Routes to School program to implement improvements that will engage local school children to walk and bike safely to school.

The Colorado Safe Routes to School program provides schools and community groups with the funding needed to develop a Safe Routes to School program. Improvements include safety education and promotion as well as engineering solutions to encourage children to get the exercise they need to lead happy, healthy lives.

Manitou Springs' project includes replacement of an existing foot bridge over Fountain Creek and a new pathway from the 400 block of El Paso Boulevard to Manitou Avenue. An enhanced crosswalk on Manitou Avenue and a new sidewalk on El Monte Place will also be installed as part of this project. The Safe Routes to School application was developed with project partners, Drive Smart Colorado, Partners for Healthy Choices, and Manitou Bikes, who will provide the educational components of the project.

Manitou Springs School District 14 will provide the important connection to the City's school children. Concrete Couch, with assistance from the Rocky Mountain Field Institute, will coordinate design and construction of the grant-funded improvements.

Manitou Springs also thanks the Manitou Masonic Lodge who has been working with the City for a number of years to get the bridge and access upgraded.

Childhood obesity rates have more than tripled in the past 30 years while the number of children walking and biking to school has declined.

According to the 2001 National Household Travel Survey, less than 16 percent of students between the ages of 5-15 walked or biked to or from school, compared to 42 percent in 1969.

The Colorado Safe Routes to School funding will benefit local school children and encourage community involvement in the Safe Routes to School effort.

"Currently, kids coming from the neighborhoods in the northeastern part of Manitou Springs are forced to use this connection through the Masonic Lodge property on El Paso to get to school and transit. The conditions are anything but safe and discourage walking to school," said planning director Dan Folke. "We are excited for the opportunity to encourage alternatives to being driven to school and look forward to completion of improvements, which also serves as a section of the City's CreekWalk Trail."

Through the 2005 passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), Congress designated a total of \$612 million toward developing the National Safe Routes to School Program.

The Colorado Safe Routes to School program received over \$8 million in funds for fiscal years 2005 to 2009 from the National Safe Routes to School Program. Schools and communities across Colorado are eligible to apply for a portion of these funds to help promote walking and biking and to build safer routes to and from school.

For additional information on both the State Program and the Manitou Springs Project, please visit [www. saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org) or [www.manitousprings-co.gov](http://www.manitousprings-co.gov).

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