ITN Receives Grant to for Safe Routes to School

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

A local organization is going to be ramping up efforts to promote biking and walking to school among Kodiak’s youth this year. Kodiak Island Trails Network received $65,000 from the Department of Transportation to promote its Safe Routes to School program for Kodiak’s four elementary schools and middle school. Tom Pogson is the director of marine programs and outreach for ITN and said the grant can only be used for non infrastructural work.

“It means it’s not intended to build sidewalks, build paths, redesign parking lots, add light posts. It’s intended to educate about the benefits and safety of walking and biking to school. Both environmental benefits and educate people about safety issues. It’s meant to encourage people and develop an attitude about encouraging people to safely let the kids walk and bike to school. And there’s an enforcement angle. And the enforcement angle is to work with law enforcement and make their presence known especially during drop off and pick up times. They enforce jaywalking, we haven’t had any serious accidents, but really any serious accident for a child would be the ultimate tragedy.”

Pogson said educational outreach will include things like a no jaywalking campaign for the Mill Bay Road and Powell Avenue area, among other things.

“Continue the bike rodeos and educate students and parents on bike safety skills and traffic laws and safe riding tips. Create some PSAs at the high school because we think there are a lot of young drivers and just make sure they are really aware that there’s a lot of kids milling around the middle school. There’s an encouragement piece, which is to encourage kids by providing incentive programs.”

He said they’ve done incentive programs before, where kids could win parties for their classroom depending on how often they biked or walked to school.

Pogson said walking and biking varies by school, especially considering some schools have more housing near by and are easily accessible by kids.

“Particularly the middle school, and particularly Main and Peterson, where there’s housing right by. Between 29 and 52 percent of the students at those three schools

walk or bike to school. At North Star it’s as low as 6 percent and at East it’s as low as 10 percent.”

North Star Elementary School numbers don’t surprise Pogson. He said the school faces many challenges when promoting biking and walking, especially considering there is no paved road or sidewalk leading up to it.

In general, he said the goal is to, when possible for students, promote biking and walking and how to do so safely and effectively. Other education efforts will include lighting up clothing during winter months and seasonal bear awareness.