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By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times How local children get to school could be getting safer in the near future. The Kansas Department of Transportation is currently accepting applications for its Safe Routes to School grant, and the Liberal Police Department once again has the opportunity to apply for the funding.

Liberal Police Chief Al Sill spoke to city commissioners Tuesday about the grant, saying the grant had been applied for in 2012, but due to lack of funding, the application was denied.

Sill added, though, that LPD was encouraged to apply again this year. He said some changes were made this year, including having police agencies apply for the grant, rather than an agency such as the Liberal Area Coalition For Families which applied for it last year.

“Now, it’s our responsibility to take care of this,” Sill said. This year’s grant program also has match money involved. “It’s a two-phase grant,” Sill said. “The first phase is the planning phase in the amount of \$12,000, with a 20 percent match. The second phase is the actual implementation of that grant, and that is a \$200,000 grant, again with a 20 percent match.”

Sill said he has been working with officials from USD No. 480 who had proposed making a \$25,000 match on the district’s behalf for driveway structures built in the area the grant is targeting, but he said the grant’s fine print does not allow for that work.

“We can’t make improvements to any bus stops with regards to this grant,” Sill said. “This grant is specifically targeted for pedestrian and bicycle traffic to enhance and enable children to have safe means to get to school other than motor transportation.”

Sill said a large part of this is to help promote healthier lifestyles, reduce obesity in children and to reduce emissions and pollution.

He said the purpose of Tuesday’s presentation was simply to ask the commission for its support to apply for Phase I of the grant.

“Phase II is going to be a lot more difficult because then we’re going to have sit to down with five different entities and collaborate on how we’re going to implement such a grant and commit anybody to any kind of match money,” Sill said. “All I’m asking for is permission to apply for this grant for Phase I, which is a \$12,000 grant with a 20 percent match, but we can come up with that through our labor costs, administrative fees and such.”

The deadline to apply for the grant is June 7.

“This grant was just given to us a short time ago,” Sill said. “We have not had the means to make any significant concrete plans as of yet, but that’s going to be part of Phase I.”

The commission voted unanimously to allow the police department to apply for Phase I of the Safe Routes to School grant.

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