Why School Travel Planning in Waterloo Region?
Active Transportation Charters

Active Transportation Charter

Active transportation consists of human-powered forms of travel such as walking, cycling, inline skating, skateboarding and manual wheelchairs. Active modes of transportation can be efficient alternatives to automobile travel.

Walking, cycling or other active modes of transportation are a vital part of an individual’s daily physical activity. By using active modes of transportation to school, students gain independence that contributes to their social and psychological development. This prevents them from learning and fosters a lifelong habit of using active modes of transportation. By reducing automobile use, air quality around schools can be improved. In order to travel safely, conveniently, directly and comfortably, employees, parents and students require adequate infrastructure, programming and a supportive environment to meet their travel needs. This Charter promotes the principles outlined in Ontario’s Framework for a Healthy School.

To ensure active modes of transportation are safe, comfortable and convenient, the Waterloo Region District School Board respects the following principles:

**Accessibility**
Active modes of transportation are direct means of accessing educational facilities by everyone.

**Activity and Learning**
Active physical activity prepares students to learn more effectively.

**Equity**
Active modes of transportation are the only modes of travel that are universally affordable, and allow the majority of children and youth to travel independently.

**Personal and Community Safety**
An environment in which people feel safe and comfortable using active modes of transportation increases community safety for all.

**Health and Well-Being**
Active modes of transportation are proven methods of promoting personal health and well-being.

**Environmental Sustainability**
Active modes of transportation rely on human power and have negligible environmental impacts.

**Community Cohesion and Vitality**
A supportive active transportation environment encourages and facilitates a caring and connected local community.

To create an environment in all parts of the region that encourages and supports active modes of travel, the Waterloo Region District School Board will work with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, individual citizens, parents, community and school groups, businesses and the local municipalities to:

- Support and encourage the adoption of Active and Safe Routes to School programs in schools across the Board
- Encourage the development of School Travel Plans for every school
- Improve end of trip facilities (e.g., equipment storage and/or bicycle racks, access to showers, provision of sidewalks and shaded areas, etc.) to support active transportation
- Participate in regional and international walk to school day events and other initiatives encouraging active transportation
- Incorporate active transportation encouragement policies in facility planning decisions
- Encourage the Ontario EcoSchools consortium to include school initiatives that encourage active transportation into the Ontario EcoSchools certification requirements
- Support research on active transportation
- Support policies to improve the condition of sidewalks, walkways and pathways
- Advocate for safety enhancements including establishing safe active transportation corridors for travel to school and the workplace
- Encourage interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration of schools, communities and government agencies
- Develop policies that incorporate these principles into Board decisions
- Identify needs for retrofitting all neighborhoods’ communities with more efficient active transportation and transit infrastructure that encourages intermodal travel

Active schools encourage and facilitate active living and support student health, vitality and safety. This will result in decreased automobile dependence and traffic congestion, lead to cleaner air and support student achievement. Such environments improve the quality of life for all school community members and contribute to engaged learners in caring and connected schools.

“Encourage the development of School Travel Plans for every school”
Multiple Benefits of STP

• School Travel Planning aims to get more families walking and wheeling to/from school by bringing together community stakeholders to identify barriers to active transportation for each school and develop a written action plan.

• Benefits include increased physical activity, reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality, enhanced neighbourhood safety and a greater sense of community.

Source: Active and Safe Routes to School. School Travel Planning. Available at: http://saferoutestoschool.ca/school-travel-planning
Why STP now?

• In one decade (2000 to 2010), the proportion of 5- to 17-year-olds using only inactive modes of transportation (e.g., car, bus, train) to get to and from school increased from 51% to 62% in Canada

Source: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. 2010-11 Physical Activity Monitor. Available at: www.cflri.ca
What has changed?

According to the 2014 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card:
• 58% of parents walked to school when they were kids, but only 28% of their children walk to/from school today\(^1\)
• 13% of parents were driven to school compared to 41% of their children today\(^1\)

Why should schools care about STP?

By supporting active transportation we:

• Allow children to gain independence
• Improve academic performance through increased Daily Physical Activity
• Reduce traffic congestion
• Reduce environmental impact of travel
• Improve the quality of life for all school community members
• Build lifelong healthy habits by normalizing walking/biking as part of a child/family’s lifestyle (healthier kids = healthier adults)
Who’s responsibility is STP?

- It is the responsibility of the whole school community which includes:
  - Parents
  - Students
  - School staff
  - Board staff and Trustees
  - Municipalities
  - Public Health
  - Police
  - Ministry of Education
  - Community members
  - And more...
Independent Mobility

MOTHER: Vicky aged eight in 1979 was allowed to walk to the swimming pool alone half a mile away.

SON: Ed, now eight is only allowed to walk on his own to the end of his street (300 yards).

GRANDFATHER: Jack aged eight in 1950. Able to walk about one mile on his own to the woods.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER: George aged eight in 1919. Allowed to walk six miles to go fishing.

Healthier Kids

• By walking to school, students get more exercise, reduce their risk of obesity and diabetes, and improve their overall health.¹

Address negative health outcomes:

— Physical inactivity

• Leading to cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, obesity, high blood pressure

— Asthma due to poor air quality

Sources:
The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines

For children: 5-11 years

Guidelines

• For health benefits, children aged 5-11 years should accumulate at least **60 minutes** of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily. This should include:
  – Vigorous-intensity activities at least 3 days per week
  – Activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 days per week
  – More daily physical activity provides greater health benefits

**60 minutes = approximately 12,000 steps**

Only 9% of 5 to 17-year-olds meet the daily recommendation of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA).

60 minutes = approx. 12,000 steps

Sources:
Better Academic Performance

• Students who exercise before school are more focused and engaged, and get better grades.²
• Healthier children miss fewer days of school.³
• Acute bout of moderate intensity exercise improves mood ⁴ self-esteem ⁵ and reduces anxiety ⁶ which may contribute to reduced mental stress to a cognitive stress task after exercise

Sources:
Pre-adolescent children were found to perform better on an academic achievement test of reading after acute exercise (full grade level increase).

Spelling and mathematics achievement were unaffected in this study, but have been shown to improve in other studies.

Sources:
Traffic Safety

• Estimates of 10 to 25% of morning rush-hour traffic is attributable to families driving their children to school.¹,²

• Getting children to walk to school reduces traffic congestion and lowers the risk of crash incidents.³

Sources:
Improved Environment

• Fewer car trips means lower greenhouse gas emissions and decreased levels of air pollution. This, in turn, minimizes children’s exposure to pollutants, which is of particular benefit to students with asthma.

• Children are exposed to up to 8x more traffic-produced pollution particles in a car than walking on a sidewalk

Sources:
Family Convenience

• Existing drop-off routines often involve potential conflicts between cars, school buses, and kids who are walking or biking.

• Walk to school programs (e.g., walking buddies, walking school bus) provide convenient ways for younger children to get to school with supervision.

• Replacing short motorized trips with walking could increase the physical activity level of children and contribute to meet the recommended guidelines. It could also reduce their dependence towards adults for moving around.¹

Sources:
Community

• Active and Safe Routes to school programs build community cohesion, and encourage students to socialize with neighbours and students in different grades and classes.

• Active transportation improves the quality of life for all community members
References

• Active and Safe Routes to School. School Travel Planning. Available at: http://saferoutestoschool.ca/school-travel-planning
• Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. 2010-11 Physical Activity Monitor. Available at: www.cflri.ca
References