

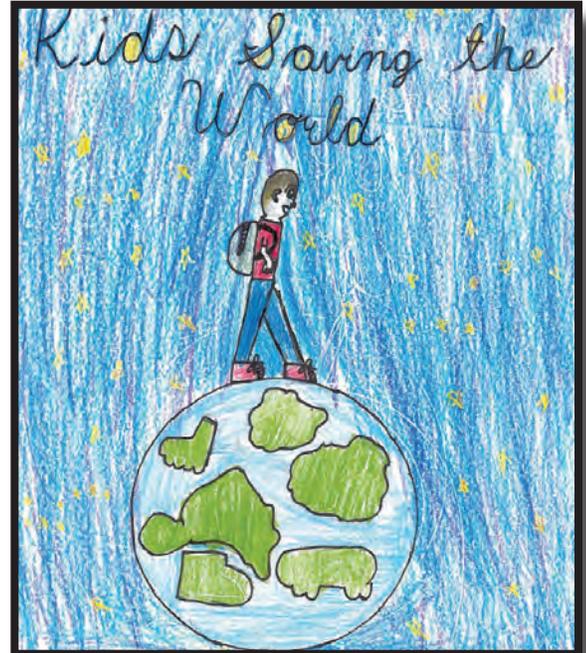


# Children's Mobility, Health and Happiness: A Canadian School Travel Planning Model

## 2012 National Results - Executive Summary

The daily physical activity of walking or cycling to school contributes to a healthy lifestyle that studies show can decrease the risk of obesity, diabetes and some cancers - and it also reduces harmful emissions in areas where children spend much of their outdoor time, which can reduce risk of respiratory illnesses. In addition, the daily active school commute lends an opportunity for graduated independence and unstructured outdoor time that increases happiness levels and can increase mental acuity. But without organized active transportation plans, policies and programs that support walking or cycling, more and more parents are driving their children to school instead.

*Children's Health, Mobility and Happiness: A Canadian School Travel Planning Model* used Active and Safe Routes to School programming combined with Transportation Demand Management principles to encourage active and sustainable modes of school travel for students, families and staff. The project addressed barriers to active travel caused by attitudes and car-dominant design in school neighbourhoods in an effort to reduce the potential health risk to children at over 120 schools spread across every Province and Territory in Canada.



### What we did

We surveyed parents before and after the project to gauge family attitudes and practices concerning the school commute and we asked children in class how they traveled to school before and after the project, too. In total, 18,547 parent surveys were completed and 451,257 student trips were recorded.

Baseline survey results were combined with neighbourhood walkabouts and traffic observations so that School Travel Planning municipal and school committees were able to create feasible action plans where each stakeholder could fulfill their part. For example, campaigns encouraging walking might be made by school level stakeholders, while traffic calming measures like bump-out curbs might be completed by municipal stakeholders.

### Why we did it

#### Parents who walked to school now drive their children

We asked parents how they got to school when they were children, and compared the results to how their children get to school today. A whopping **41% of today's students arrive in personal vehicles** when only 13% of their parents did, making access to schools unsafe, increasing caustic vehicle emissions and preventing children from a chance to cut sedentary time and increase the daily physical activity they need to live longer, healthier lives.

Parents	Children
58% walked	28% walk
27% were bussed	20% are bussed
2% cycled	2% cvcle
13% were driven	41% are driven

baseline data



## What we discovered

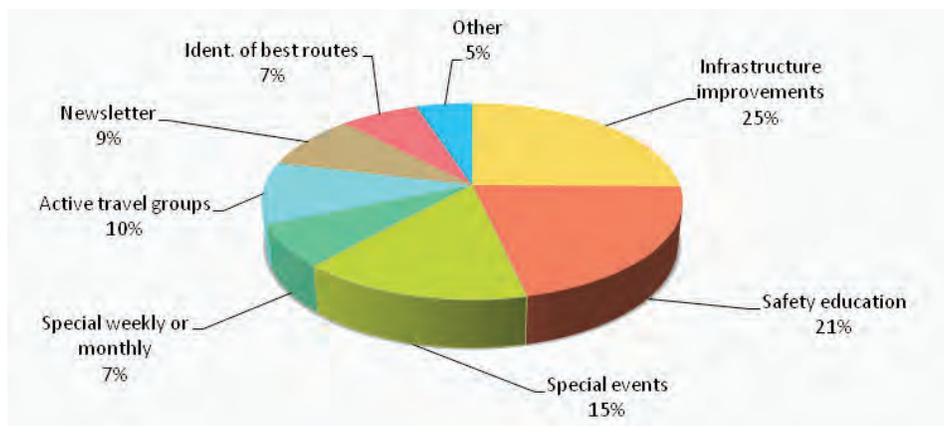
### School Travel Planning measures cause a shift towards active travel

Many schools are just beginning to implement the bigger action items in their School Travel Plans, and we're seeing a one per cent shift towards active travel on a national scale already. When more action items are completed at schools across the nation, we expect more change.

Some provinces saw a shift of up to six per cent and some individual schools saw a shift of over twenty per cent. As we dissect what happened differently at the high-results schools and provinces, we will update our toolkit to reflect lessons learned so that future schools will have the best chances to see greater shifts.

### Parents told us what worked

Parents identified the top four most effective activities as infrastructure improvements (25%) like bump-out curbs that shorten the crossing distance and give walkers a clearer sight line, safety education (21%) like CAN-BIKE instruction to develop bicycle safety skills, special events (15%) like a Walk/Wheel Wednesday that gets whole schools talking about walking and cycling to school, and active travel groups (10%) like Walking School Buses, bicycle trains and walking buddy programs.



## Trends

Our School Travel Planning measures were noticeably more effective with families whose children were older, whose parents perceived the neighbourhood to be safer and who lived closer than one kilometre from school. Walking School Buses, bicycle trains and walking buddy programs can help to fill in the gaps and make neighbourhoods feel safer for parents who are unable to accompany their children for the school journey. These active travel groups may encourage busy parents of younger children to let them develop active travel habits and benefit from a healthy, happy journey every day by commuting with an older child or another parent.

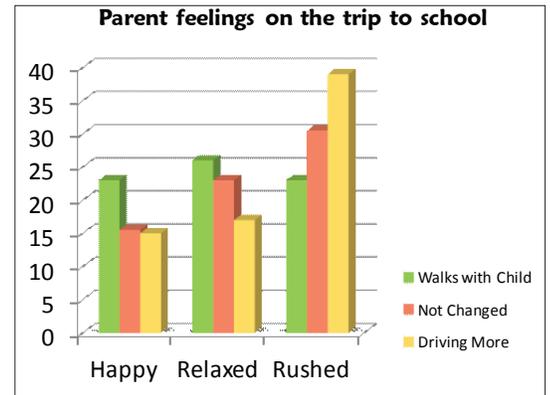




## What we discovered

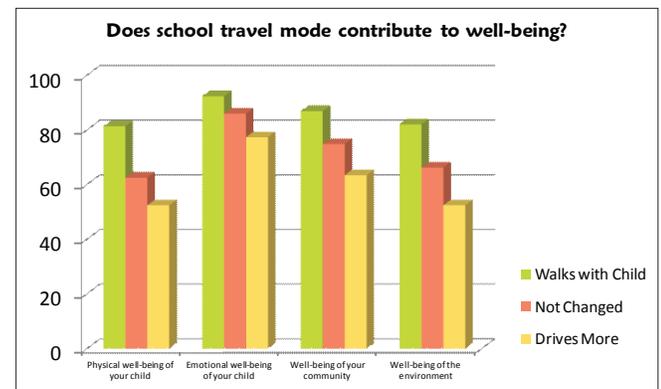
### Walking parents are happier

We asked parents how they felt on the school journey and it didn't surprise us that more walking parents than driving parents reported feeling happy. We've had some parents tell us it's the "best part of the day" and others tell us it's a great time to have that "tell me one great thing about today" chat. Walking parents also seem more connected to their communities and despite the fact that they spend more time on the commute than they would if they drove, they report being less rushed than those who drive.



### Walking parents make the connection to well-being

Parents who walk also make the connection to physical, emotional, community and environmental well-being more readily than those who drive. It seems driving parents are reticent to acknowledge the impact of their choice on the earth and their community. We may have more success changing travel modes among these parents by showing them evidence that they can reduce stress, sleep better and increase their mental acuity – not to mention keep their children happier and healthier for life, too!

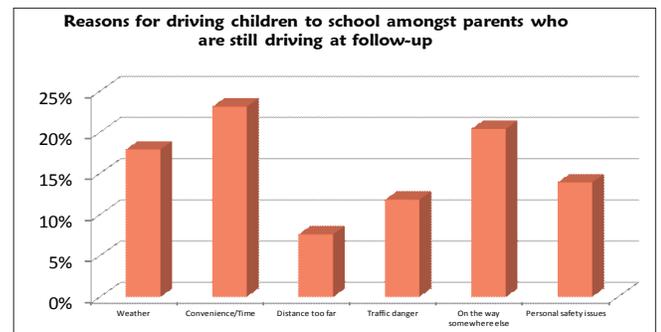


### Why parents drive

Parents who still drove after our School Travel Planning interventions cited the following top 3 reasons for doing so:

- **Convenience / time management**
- **Trip chain (I'm on my way somewhere else)**
- **Weather attitudes**

We can make the trip more convenient with walking and cycling groups that mean parents can allow their children to walk with others.



### Walking and cycling towards a better world

Imagine if you will, that things like time management never got in the way of a parent's wishes and consequently every one of the 1126 families across Canada who reported driving less after School Travel Planning interventions actually stopped driving to or from school altogether for the next school year. If they do, they will:

- *Contribute to 427,880 walking trips*
- *Add 6,418,200 minutes of walking among students*
- *Prevent 427,880 vehicle km travelled*
- *Eliminate 365,837 tonnes of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions*
- *Prevent 7426 kg of criteria air contaminants (air pollutants that cause acid rain, smog and other health hazards)*

**20% of driving parents told us they would consider allowing their child to cycle to school if the school had adequate facilities to keep their bicycles safe.**



## Next steps

### What we can do now

This project shows us how we can nuance our approach to affect more change. We can:

1. **Provide guidance to parents to organize Walking School Buses and bicycle trains**
2. **Promote walking buddy programs for older students so they can have independent mobility with more eyes on the street**
3. **Find ways to get bicycle racks at schools; provide bicycling education, and work towards policies that will make this a priority in school transportation budgets.**
4. **Continue to work towards infrastructure improvements**
5. **Target parents with messaging especially concerning convenience, weather and trip-chain mentality**
6. **Stress the environmental, community and personal well-being benefits associated with the trip**
7. **Use event days to show driving parents how little time it takes to walk from their homes**

The School Travel Planning model is effective because many stakeholders work together towards the same goal. To build on the momentum produced by the *Children's Mobility, Health and Happiness* project, we look forward to continuing to work with stakeholders across the nation to disseminate strong family campaigns that will convince parents that walking is the best choice and to create more organized active transportation plans, policies and programs that support walking or cycling to school across the nation.

When we adapt communities with children's mobility in mind, we create spaces where whole communities can actively travel. And when walking and cycling to school becomes the norm for Canadian children, the risk of obesity, chronic illness and some cancers will decrease while our communities will become more connected and filled with cleaner air, creating healthier and happier families for generations to come.

## A few School Travel Planning successes



Walking School Buses



Reduced speeds in some school zones



Barrier walls protecting children from cars



Exciting walking events



Walking buddy systems



Beautiful slow-traffic streets



Parking lot safety measures