

Saving Money and Time with Active School Travel

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Executive Summary

Ontario's provincial and municipal governments are increasingly committed to creating more walkable and bikeable communities. Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies are being implemented across the province to shift the peak-period use of single occupancy vehicles to transit, car pooling and active travel. Moreover, as Ontario faces a large deficit, the need for policies that simultaneously save money and support healthy lifestyle choices like active transportation has become more apparent than ever.

There is growing movement amongst municipalities to incorporate the 'school run' into their TDM programs as travel to and from schools generates a large and growing number of daily trips by car resulting in excessive and frustrating school-hour congestion.

Currently, active travel is not considered by the Ministry of Education or school districts to be a part of overall student transportation services. For many historical and cultural reasons, there is a clear bias in Ministry and school district budgets in favour of motorized transportation with school buses and the infrastructure to accommodate, and in some cases, encourage children being driven to school. For example:

- The Ministry currently allocates approximately \$800 million per year for school bussing. This represents an average of \$371.74 per enrolled student – yet the many students who live within 'walking distance' to their schools receive no benefit from this expenditure as none of these funds are allocated to active travel.
- Schools that wish to encourage walking and cycling must raise their own funds to provide such basic items as secure bicycle racks or storage facilities for inline skates and skate boards. This poses a significant barrier to active school travel.

For a relatively minor investment of approximately \$10 per student towards the school travel plan process, the Ministry and school districts can start to reduce current transportation expenditures while setting the groundwork for students to lead much healthier lifestyles through policies and actions that support walking and cycling to school. The benefits of increasing active school travel include:

- **increased health:** reduced long-term rates of disease and better academic performance for children;
- **cleaner environment:** improved local air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions;
- **curriculum support:** practical application of environmental education, healthy schools, and eco-school policies;
- **more robust community:** infrastructure improvements for active travel to school also enhance connectivity and quality of life for the community as a whole;
- **improved safety:** fewer traffic-related injuries among children;
- **reduced costs & saved time:** parents, schools, school boards and municipalities can all realize savings in time as well as operating and capital costs when motorized school travel is reduced.

- **Since 1985, the proportion of Canadian children regularly walking to school has fallen by 50% to just 1 in 3.**
- **The Ontario Ministry of Education currently spends about \$800 million annually on school bussing. It spends \$0 on walking & biking to school.**
- **The shift back to active school travel requires commitment at the highest levels of government and proactive leadership from the Ministry of Education, school boards and the Ministry of Transportation.**

For the health and safety of Ontario's children, it is essential that a shift back to active transportation as the main way of getting to and from school be embraced at the highest levels of government and that key Ministries and groups show proactive leadership in this area.

Key recommendations of this report are summarized below. Refer to the main report for full details.

Ministry of Education

1. Expand the current mandate to “provide safe transportation choices to and from school” to **include ALL students regardless of where they live** (i.e. including those within walking distance).
2. Review existing guidelines for school transportation consortia and expand their mandate to **include school-based TDM**.
3. Make **School Travel Planning a mandatory requirement for all Ontario schools**.
4. **Support the execution of the mandate** with dedicated personnel.
5. **Provide funding** for schools for active travel infrastructure like secure bike racks, signage, secure storage for inline skates, skate boards and helmets.
6. Implement a **Ministry-wide anti-idling policy** for all schools as a way to reduce fuel costs and the associated air pollutants.
7. Work with the Ontario Ministry of Finance to ensure that **any savings gained from the school transportation budget be put into the education budget**, and not returned to the province's general revenues. This will provide a better incentive for school districts to implement TDM policies and work to reduce transportation costs.
8. With school districts, **review existing policies for new school siting and construction** to ensure active travel is moved to the top of the transportation hierarchy, thereby encouraging active school travel for the majority of students.

School Boards/Districts

1. **Implement health, safety and environmental policies that encourage active school travel.** Examples include: standardized cross-district walking boundaries; school site planning that incorporates walkability principles; anti-idling policies; promotion of Healthy Schools, EcoCertification and Safe Schools recognition.
2. **Endorse and adopt the *Child and Youth Friendly Land Use Transport Planning Guidelines for Ontario* giving specific consideration to Guidelines 16-18.**
3. **Designate resources** to support the needs of students who use active transportation.
4. **Include active travel** within the province's guidelines for Daily Physical Activity (DPA).
5. **Perform a full cost analysis** of parking lot creation and maintenance to determine where savings can be found through a TDM approach to school travel.

Ministry of Transportation

1. Mandate active transportation planning to be part of municipal transportation goals, with particular **focus on school-based TDM initiatives**.
3. **Support School Travel Planning** with Ministry staff assigned to assist in the creation of provincial active travel policy statements and TDM, specifically for schools.
4. **Provide partial funds**, to be supplemented by the Ministry of Education and local municipalities, for schools to complete travel plans and then support school districts and municipalities in the implementation of those plans through provincial infrastructure funds for school areas.
6. **Endorse and adopt the *Child and Youth Friendly Land Use and Transport Planning Guidelines for Ontario*.**

It is recognized internationally that it will take the combined effort of many agencies working together to produce mass behavioural change toward active travel, but it is clear that schools offer a logical activation point because policies implemented at provincial, regional and local levels can encourage real action that will benefit the all Ontarians, starting with our children.