Planning for the Kids

An investigation into creating active and safe routes to school through School Travel Planning

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Introduction

For decades, cities and towns in Canada and the United States have prioritized transportation infrastructure that often exclusively favours automobiles. As a result, physical inactivity has been consistently on the rise. Of particular concern is the level of inactivity among children and youth, which has been described as an international epidemic (Mammen et al, 2013). What is more, safety around school zones has also been declining. More cars in school zones are resulting in increased pedestrian and cyclist collisions. However, Canadian communities have begun to incorporate more active modes of transportation into their infrastructure planning and funding (Urban Systems is currently conducting a national active transportation survey to establish a clearer picture). For example, the City of Winnipeg approved its Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies (PCS) in 2015, which provides a long term policy framework for active transportation in the city. One of the goals of the PCS is to promote active transportation in the city, and it identifies Active and Safe Routes to School (Direction 3E) as a key direction. At the centre of facilitating the use of active modes of transportation for school travel is School Travel Planning (STP).

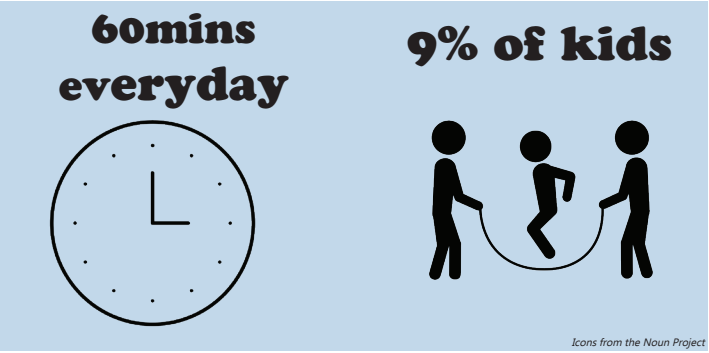
School Travel Planning

School travel plans are community based initiatives focussed on promoting more physically active modes of transportation for students arriving and leaving school. Typically, these modes include walking, cycling, and transit, while carpooling can also be included. STPs help to reduce automobile traffic around schools, and as a consequence improve the safety of school zones. They are also intended to address important issues of physical health, sustainability

and environmental impact of how students travel to school. Since there is a wide range of people involved in school operations, as well as student transportation and safety, effective and successful school travel planning requires engaging a diversity of stakeholders. Thus, STPs are "multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, school specific initiatives that engage a range of stakeholders (public health, police officials, municipal planners, traffic engineers, school boards, parents, students, administrators and teachers" (Mammen et al, 2013: 55).

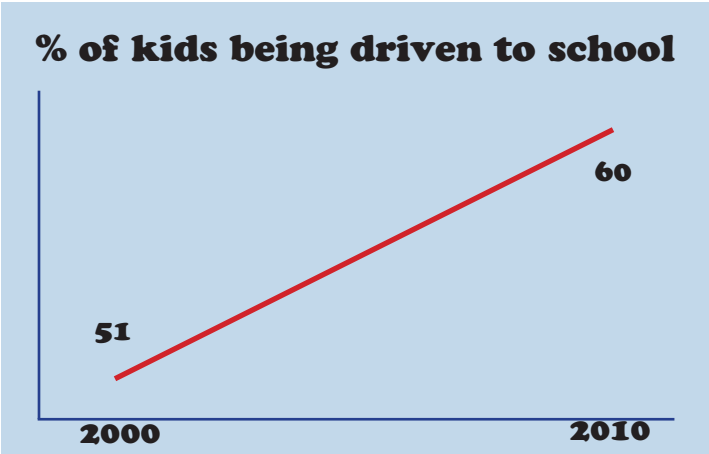
Benefits of School Travel Plans

There is a strong case for why school travel planning ought to be adopted by schools and school boards because of the many benefits it provides. Creating the conditions that promote healthy students is one of the goals of STP. The recommended amount of daily physical activity in Canada for children and youth is 60 minutes (Canada.ca). However, only 9% of children and youth are attaining that amount on a regular basis. There are a number of adverse health effects from a lack of physical activity like weight gain, the onset of chronic diseases including obesity, type II diabetes, as well as poor mental health conditions. Children in Manitoba have a high rate of type II diabetes, which is contributed to by diet and levels of inactivity (Green Action Centre, 2017; Canadian Diabetes Association, 2016).



Generally speaking, since the 1980s there as been a shift away from the use of active modes of transportation by students for their school commute. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of 5-17 year-olds using an inactive mode of transportation, like a bus, car or train to get to school increased from 51% to 62%, and this trend has also been observed in Manitoba(Mammen et al, 2013: 55; Green Action Centre, 2017). School travel planning can assist in getting students to achieve the recommended 60 minutes per day physical activity. The benefits of STP are to alleviate the negative health outcomes from a lack of physical activity described above.

Since more students now than in the past are traveling by car to and from school, the associated negative impacts on the local environment have also increased. Increased emissions resulting in poor air quality results in a higher risk for negative health outcomes for students (Safe Routes to School, 2018). These issues include allergic reactions and respiratory health issues. Some research suggests that exposure to air pollution can have a negative impact on the cognitive development of students because children are more vulnerable to negative environmental stressors like air pollution and heat, which can result in negative socio-economic later in life (Adams & Requia, 2017). With the increase of car use for students' school journeys comes an increase in congested school zones, which is a less safe environment for students. Managing the traffic around schools during peak hours poses an extracurricular burden on school staff. Reducing the number of students relying on a private automobile to travel to school will also decrease in greenhouse emissions alleviate the traffic congestion around schools.



Background

Green Communities Canada, a non-profit, is responsible for introducing School Travel Planning to Canada. In 2006-2009, a pilot project was conducted to develop a detailed toolkit, and was supported by the Public

Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as well as the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC), and was informed by best practices in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States (City of Winnipeg, 2017). Three schools in Winnipeg participated in the pilot, and when the initiative was expanded into larger national project of 120 schools, 12 schools in Manitoba participated, four being in Winnipeg. Out of the national pilot program came a lot of momentum for the school travel planning process, and Manitoba emerged as a leader in this area. In 2012, the Winnipeg based Green Action Centre was awarded the Manitoba Planning Excellence Award for their work in STP (Government of Manitoba, 2012). The award recognizes innovative planning initiatives of individuals, organizations, companies, municipalities or planning districts aimed at enhancing their communities (Green Action Centre, 2012).

While there are several specific examples of school travel plans to draw from, this Case-in-Point will focus in on Greenway School. It recently completed its second school travel plan in conjunction with the Wolseley to West Alexander Corridor study done by the City of Winnipeg. It was one of three schools along the Ruby/Banning Streets corridor that completed a STP, but is the only school building on a previous STP, which it completed in 2011.

Best Practice and Process

School Travel Planning has a well-established framework, and step-by-step process that are meant to guide a STP initiative to a successful outcome. The framework is organized as the 6 E's, which serve as overarching conceptual guidelines to ensure a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable approach to school travel planning.

The school travel planning process

The School Travel Planning process is divided into 5 key steps that are designed to compliment the other. They are meant to build a cohesive and broadly informed and supported plan. The goal of these steps is to build a cohesive plan that is informed and supported by stakeholders. The steps demonstrate how an effective planning process is a critical part of any STP initiative.

Step 1. Program Set-up

Schools interested in participating in creating a school travel plan should first be identified. Often, schools will have already shown interest in school travel planning. It's crucial to establish a STP working group for an individual school, the school board, as well as at a municipal level (working group graphic). Once these initial activities have been addressed, school communities can be notified about a STP project.

The 6 Es

Education: The goal is to build confidence, awareness and skills among students and other stakeholders that will allow students to actively travel to school safely. A large body of material exists to support education activities for walking and cycling. Some typical activities include traffic safety training, cycling skills workshops, and school route mapping.

Encouragement: Students, parents and school staff need to be inspired to try active travel modes, especially if it's new. Events can be organized to generate enthusiasm for walking and wheeling.

Engineering: On the physical and infrastructural side, safe and accessible school sites, neighbourhoods, routes to school need to be created. Wayfinding signs, parking restrictions, crosswalk improvements among others can be incorporated to support active travel.

Enforcement: Paramount to creating a safe environment for active travelling for students is to ensure traffic and parking rules are obeyed around schools. This requires monitoring speeds, ticketing traffic violations and supervision for student-off locations.

Evaluation: Through proper monitoring and data collection before and during a school travel plan has been implemented will help to demonstrate its value and effectiveness. This will also help to adjust and adapt a program in order to improve it.

Equity: It's important to support STP initiatives in communities of all socio-economic levels. Equity should also be a common thread through the other E's, keeping in mind the needed of people with accessibility issues. The goal of STP is to address the barriers to a healthy, safe and equitable environment.

Icons from the Noun Project

Step 2. Data Collection & Problem Identification

Data collection about a school's transportation and safety issues helps to create a picture of their current conditions. In classroom and take home surveys for families are used to gather behaviours, while traffic counts, and community walkabout activities are used to observe both quantitative and qualitative measures. The collected information is then analyzed and compiled into a summary report which is then shared with stakeholders. From this report, priority routes can be identified, and a map of neighbourhoods where students live and how they commute can be put together.

Step 3. Action Planning

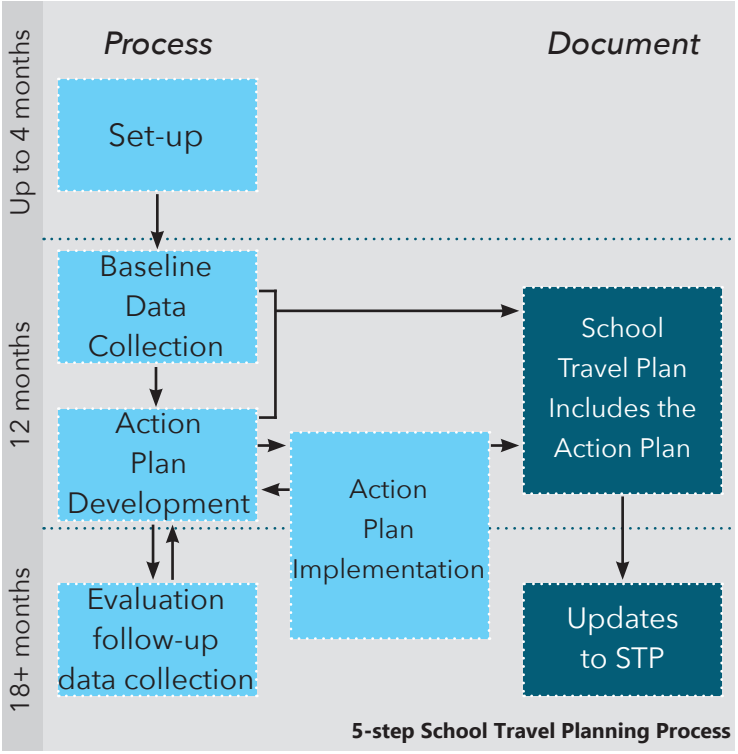
With the support of the different working groups, an action plan is then designed and written. Each school should be provided a written copy of their school travel plan for them to share among their stakeholders for review, input and eventual approval.

Step 4. Implementation

The community should be well-informed of the impact of the implemented strategies because they will be meant to change behaviours. All stakeholders should be encouraged to help implement the action plan, primarily facilitated by each school, the working groups, and hired professionals.

Step 5. Ongoing Monitoring

In order to determine the effectiveness of each school travel plan, data should be collected on a regular basis, compiled, analysed, and summarize. The successes of the STP initiative should be communicated with the school community and to the general public for broader promotion. Adjustments should also be made based on what the data indicates are the important areas for improvement.



5-step School Travel Planning Process

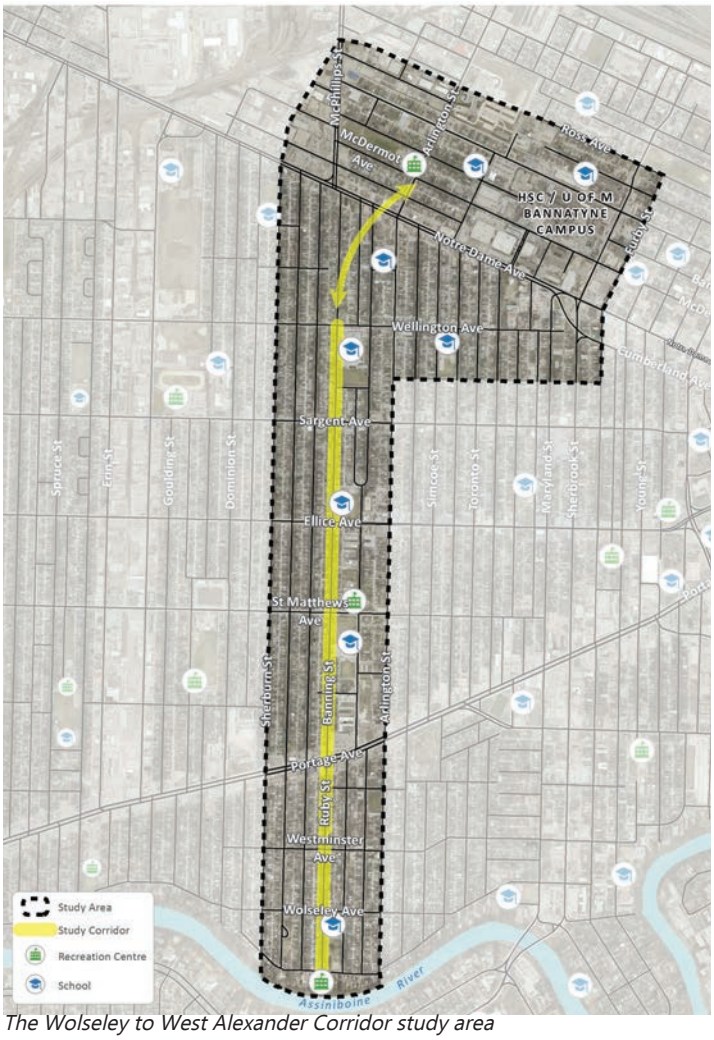
Lessons Learned from Greenway School

The School Travel Planning process that Greenway School went through in 2011 resulted in a number positive changes to the surrounding infrastructure. For example, a crosswalk with bulb outs was installed on St. Matthews Ave and Banning St, the installation of a student and staff bike cage, school safety murals designed by students, improvements to the student drop-off zones, and closing off of a laneway connecting Burnell St and Banning St (City of Winnipeg, 2017).

St Matthews Ave and Banning Street bulb-out with student designed safety murals on the fence.

Project Coordination

In 2017, Greenway School revised its School Travel Plan. As mentioned above, the new STP was in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg Walk Bike Project Wolseley to West Alexander Corridor. As a result, the STP initiative was funded by the City. The recent trend in Winnipeg of STP being integrated into Walk Cycle projects (East Fort Garry etc.) suggests that it will continue to enjoy wide acceptance and application. As long as the funding is available, it's likely that STP will



The Wolseley to West Alexander Corridor study area (City of Winnipeg, 2017)

become more integrated in schools.

Establishing a Strong Baseline

There are a number of highlights from Greenway's STP process. Establishing a strong baseline from which to evaluate the effectiveness of the School Travel Plan is crucial. The collection of travel behaviour data from two different times of the school year (February and May) through in class surveys as well as take home family surveys was an important step. One criticism of some STP processes is the failure to establish a strong baseline through data collect at the same or similar times of the school year (Mammen et al, 2015).

Engaging Stakeholders

Engaging stakeholders through several meetings and school site visits were essential to establishing a strong baseline, as well as making the process collaborative and inclusive. A walkabout with members of the STP working group identified areas of concern

STP working group meeting for a neighbourhood walkabout in 2017.

and barriers to active and safe routes to school. For example, drive behaviour, which include speeding, right and left turn conflicts with people walking and riding, aggressive driving, and compliance with adult crossing guards (City of Winnipeg, 2017). The drop-off and pick-up zones around the school were also identified as areas of concern, again with respect to driver behaviour. Possible solutions to the identified issues were then discussed (City of Winnipeg, 2017).

Include Students

The Greenway STP made use of photovoice, a useful and fun tool to engage students in order to gauge their perception of the surrounding environment. With photovoice, students took pictures of their school neighbourhood, and were then able to share their thoughts using both words and pictures. This has proven to be an effective way to reach decision-makers and effectuate positive change in a neighbourhood (City of Winnipeg, 2017).

Community Engagement

Community engagements play a pivotal role in STP. They help to build support within the community, and importantly, translate support into action. Healthy Streets Day was an all day community consultation and engagement event for the Wolseley to West Alexander Corridor project organized and hosted by a partnership between Green Action Centre, the City of Winnipeg, Urban Systems, and Intergroup (Green Action Centre, 2017). Students, teachers and parents from all four schools located along the corridor, including Greenway, participated in the event. Its

Healthy Streets Day community engagement for the Wolseley to West Alexander Corridor project organized and hosted by a partnership between Green Action Centre, the City of Winnipeg, Urban Systems, and Intergroup (Green Action Centre, 2017)

purpose was to allow students and other stakeholders the opportunity to enjoy the streets free of cars, and think about active school travel. Art played a major role in the event, since the whole corridor became a surface to paint and decorate.

Final Thoughts

While engaging events and encouragement activities are useful to increase the profile of active school travel, using a planning approach and bringing all stakeholders to the table through School Travel Planning is where we actual change is made possible.

School Travel Planning focusses on supporting students in getting to school using an active mode of transportation like walking, cycling, or even transit. AT helps to support the physical and mental health of students. STPs are also designed to reduce automobile traffic around schools to improve student safety as well as environmental conditions. However, for a School Travel Planning initiative to be a successful requires a broad base of stakeholders to support and act to implement it and monitor its effectiveness overtime.

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