

CITIES DESIGNED FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS

The Role of School Travel Planning and Engagement in Winnipeg

Choi Ho

University of Manitoba
MCP Candidate

| Jamie Hilland

Urban Systems
Sustainable Transportation Planner

ABSTRACT

The integration of School Travel Planning as part of the engagement and design process is leading edge for the City of Winnipeg. In particular, the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project is a unique and best practice initiative involving School Travel Planning and Engagement (STPE). The project directly engages students at three schools within the study area to identify existing issues and to propose solutions with the goal of advocating for and improving active school travel. The STPE techniques and activities put to use demonstrate the project team's commitment to learning from students and a commitment to designing cities for students, by students. The following case-in-point provides a brief context of School Travel Planning, the facts of the case study, outcomes of the Walk Bike Project, and the lessons learned to both understand and commend the role of STPE in Winnipeg.

1.0 / CONTEXT

SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING

"School Travel Planning is a community-based model for implementing active school travel that systematically addresses barriers to and incentives for walking [biking and rolling] to school" (Ontario Active School Travel, n.d.).



FIGURE 1 | Children on Rollerblades and Scooter

ENGAGING STUDENTS

Student engagement is trending; the reasons are threefold:

1) Community Hubs

Children are an integral and central member of our communities. Engagement with students makes sense.

2) A Wedge Issue

Approaching initiatives and the issues from an argument for safe streets and child-friendly cities is less controversial and an argument many stakeholders can agree on.

3) Next Street Users

Children are the future users of our streets. It is vital their voices are heard and to understand: What do children envision for their city? How can student engagement directly influence the design of our cities?

"School Travel Planning...systemically addresses barriers to and incentives for walking to school"

— Ontario Active School Travel



FIGURE 2 | Students on foot at Crosswalk

THE SIX E's

A comprehensive approach with School Travel Planning initiatives and programs to get students walking, cycling, and rolling addresses the 6 E's (Ontario Active School Travel n.d.; Zimmerman, 2015):

1) Education

Foster the skills, confidence and awareness to allow students to walk and wheel to school safely

2) Encouragement

Inspire students, parents and school staff to try active travel

3) Engineering

Create safe school sites, neighbourhoods and school routes

4) Enforcement

Ensure traffic and parking rules are obeyed to improve safety

5) Evaluation

Use data to design effective solutions, measure success, and demonstrate impact

6) Equity

Ensure initiatives benefit all demographic populations

QUESTION

What role can School Travel Planning and Engagement (STPE) play in the design of Winnipeg?

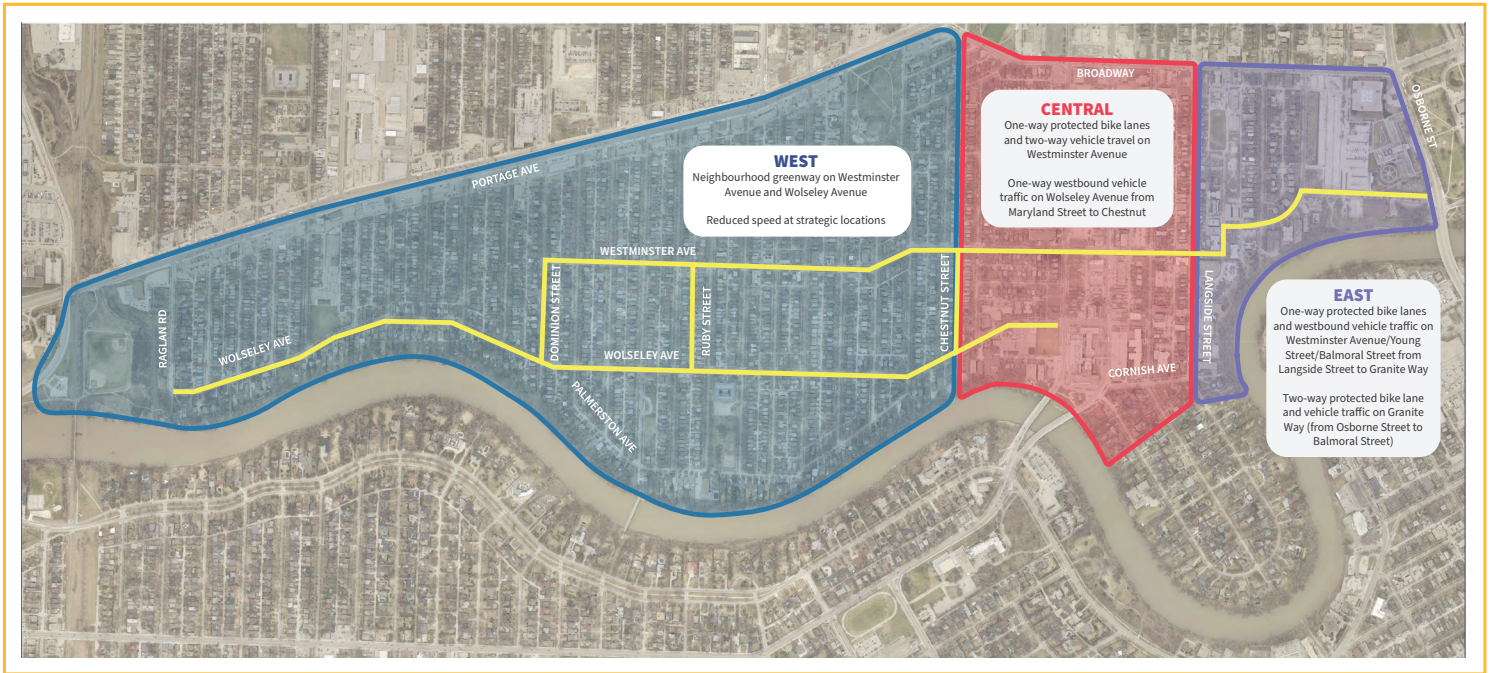


FIGURE 3 | Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project Study Area

2.0 FACTS OF THE CASE



WOLSELEY TO DOWNTOWN WALK BIKE PROJECT

"The City is currently undertaking the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project to identify options to improve travel choices, accessibility and connectivity" (City of Winnipeg, n.d.).

"The study area runs east-west through Wolseley Avenue/ Westminister Avenue, Balmoral Street, and Granite Way. When completed, the corridor will provide improved connections to the Omand's Creek pathway, the protected bicycle lane on Assiniboine Avenue and Sherbrook Street, the bike lane on Maryland Street, and the planned neighbourhood greenway on Ruby Street" (City of Winnipeg, n.d.).

PROMOTION

The STPE-specific promotions included the following:

- 1) **Letters** sent home with all students inviting families to participate in many and multiple engagement techniques
- 2) **Emails** sent home with all students inviting families to participate in many and multiple engagement techniques
- 3) **Posters** printed and distributed to promote STPE activities

PROJECT TIMELINE

Below is the most current version of the project timeline for the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project:

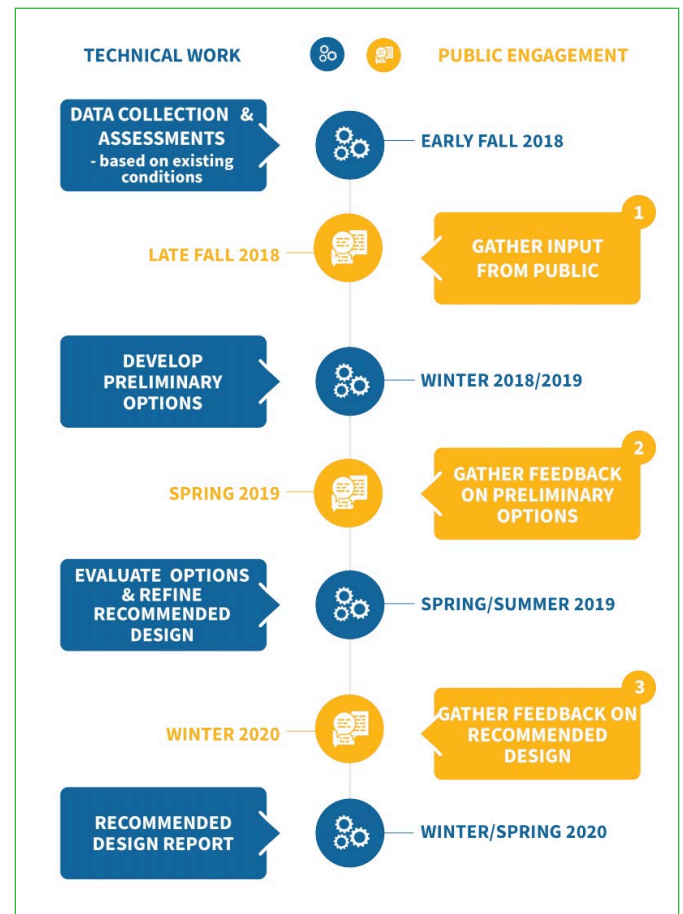


FIGURE 4 | Timeline for Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project

SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT (STPE)

From November 9th to December 7th, 2018, Phase I of the School Travel Planning and Engagement (STPE) for the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project took place at Laura Secord School, Mulvey School, and Wolseley School. Students, parents, school staff and community stakeholders engaged in the STPE process to “identify safety issues and barriers to active school travel, and propose solutions on how to address these concerns” (City of Winnipeg, n.d.).

ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

In Phase I, data was collected from students using a number of traditional and innovative engagement techniques (City of Winnipeg, n.d.):

- **Parent Advisory Committee Meetings**
The project team presented at the 3 schools about the STPE process, project timelines, and invited them to join a working group for their respective school.
- **STPE Online Survey**
STPE included an online survey available from November 9th to December 7th, 2018 on the project webpage.
- **Hands Up Survey**
Students completed hands up surveys to indicate how they travel to and from school (bike, walk, roll, school bus, public transit, or car). The STPE schools also previously recorded over 10,872 hands-up surveys which provided an accurate measurement of transportation mode share.
- **Student Engagement Workshops**
The project team asked students to indicate what safety concerns they had on their school journey, and to share ideas on how to improve their travel to and from school.
- **Community and School Trip Maps**
As part of a classroom exercise, students were asked to indicate their main mode of travel to and from school and to draw their community based upon their school journey.
- **STPE Walkabouts**
Students, parents, school staff, and STPE resource team members were invited to participate in school walkabouts. Participants assessed the conditions for travel around each school, identified current issues and suggested solutions.
- **STPE Visioning Workshops**
Parents at the 3 schools and STPE resource team members were invited to attend visioning workshops. Each group created a School Action Plan that would help facilitate a culture of active and safe school travel.

STPE RESOURCE TEAM MEMBERS

An STPE resource team was comprised of key stakeholders:

- Manitoba Public Insurance
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- City of Winnipeg
- Winnipeg School Division
- Winnipeg Police Service
- Principals of the 3 schools

ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS



Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

3 Meetings
41 PAC Members



STPE Online Survey

285 Responses



Hands Up Survey

959 Recorded Answers
10,872 Cumulatively



Student Engagement Workshops

481 Participants



Community and School Trip Maps

882 Maps



STPE Walkabouts

47 Participants



STPE Visioning Workshops

41 Participants

3.0

OUTCOMES

WALK BIKE PROJECT NEAR COMPLETION

After Phase I, a STPE facilitator met with the Parent Advisory Committees (PACs) at Laura Secord School, Mulvey School, and Wolseley School to share the results of the STPE activities and presented the project team’s recommended design.

The STPE initiative concluded in February 2020. “The project team will use feedback from all phases of engagement to confirm and finalize the recommended design. Once the design is finalized, it will be posted on the project website and presented to Council for budget consideration prior to construction” (City of Winnipeg, n.d.).

“...almost all students expressed a strong desire to be able to either walk or ride their bike to school, but felt that current road design and conditions were a barrier”

— STPE Key Finding



FIGURE 5 | Students at Crosswalk in Winter

STPE KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are summarized below (City of Winnipeg, n.d.):

- A majority of students, parents and staff at the 3 STPE schools identified vehicle volume and driver behavior as their concerns for students travelling to and from school.
- A large number of parents and almost all students expressed a strong desire to be able to either walk or ride their bike to school, but felt that current road design and conditions were a barrier.
- Several locations along Wolseley and Westminster Avenues were identified as either lacking in pedestrian crossings, having crossings that were too far apart, or as having pedestrian infrastructure that respondents perceived as dangerous by families in the area, especially crossings where students have been stuck and injured previously—most notably in the eastern portion of Westminster Avenue.
- Common themes in the STPE online survey included vehicle volumes, vehicle speeds, non-compliance of vehicles at stop signs, and the lack of cycling infrastructure as barriers to active and safe school travel.
- Workshop participants identified improved connection between the 3 schools as a key goal, working collectively to improve the safety of children in the community on their way to and from school.
- Dangerous driving behaviours by those dropping off students in the vicinity of the schools was identified as a major concern of walkabout participants during school arrival and dismissal. These included parking in no stopping zones, dropping students off while at stop signs, and double parking.
- Many of the children interviewed wanted to be able to ride their bike to their school, but did not feel that it was safe to do so without cycling infrastructure of some kind that would separate them from traffic.
- Many children also expressed a desire to walk to school with friends, but were unable to do so due to the perception that there is a “very high” volume of vehicles on the roads in these communities. They also indicated that this perception makes it difficult for children to be allowed to ride their bikes to school as well.

“The three [School] Travel Planning and Engagement reports provide a lot of great data! I really appreciate the amount of feedback you were able to get from the students themselves and am thrilled to see that the work done here will inform the design concepts for the Wolseley to Downtown project!”

— STPE Participant

STPE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORTS

An STPE report was completed in February 2019 for each of the 3 schools in the study area. The reports provided a concise summary of the STPE engagement process and techniques:

- 1) **A walkabout summary** detailing the locations, issues, and potential solutions;
- 2) **A visioning workshop action plan** detailing goals, barriers, comments, and proposed action plan items plus who the action should be designated to, for example, the City of Winnipeg, School Administration/School Division or Winnipeg Police Services;
- 3) **Student feedback** detailing observed issues and concerns traveling to and from school and;
- 4) **Next steps** detailing how the input will be used to inform the development of proposed design concepts for the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project.

STPE STUDENT COMMENTS

- **Laura Secord School Room 116:** Students preferred to see bike facilities located on Wolseley Avenue from Omand Park to Furby Street.
- **Laura Secord School Room 206:** More busses, more bikes, more walkers, less cars.
- **Laura Secord School Room 110:** Install a crosswalk, and reduce the number of cars at the intersection of Greenwood Place and Wolseley Avenue.
- **Laura Secord School Grade 4 French Immersion:** Lack of respect for patrols by people in vehicles was noted by the patrols.
- **Mulvey School Room 18:** Students identified the intersection of Wolseley Avenue and Maryland Street as being difficult to cross on foot, with small sidewalks and many vehicles turning off of Maryland Street onto Wolseley Avenue westbound.
- **Wolseley School Room 8:** Students wanted to see detours provided for people walking and cycling when there is construction blocking sidewalks and bike lanes.
- **Wolseley School Room 8:** Students suggested an underpass for pedestrians to cross Portage Avenue to the West End, from a location near the school.
- **Wolseley School Room 10:** Students wanted more streets to be built for little kids at their school.



FIGURE 6 | Students Walking and Biking Together

4.0 / LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned from School Travel Planning and Engagement in the City of Winnipeg’s Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project are discussed below. Of note, the lessons learned represent not only the successes of the STPE project but also the areas for improving STPE to design a Winnipeg for students, by students.



FIGURE 7 | Children on Scooters



PLUG INTO BEST STPE PRACTICES

- School Travel Planning is a community-based model other cities have already implemented for various initiatives and programs. A successful School Travel Planning and Engagement process requires the project team to be on board with and plugged into best STPE practices. It is important to know what other cities are doing well and what can be learned from other cities to best suit and thrive in the Winnipeg School Travel Planning context.



EVALUATE LOCAL STPE PRACTICES

- School Travel Planning and Engagement is regarded as an inclusive approach to address the barriers to and incentives for more students walking, biking, and rolling, etc. At the same time, an evaluation of the STPE process in Winnipeg may aid to increase the inclusivity of student engagement. Take a moment to reflect on the successes and lessons learned to uncover areas to improve local STPE practices.

How to increase inclusivity of STPE initiative?

Reflect on the successes and lessons learned to uncover areas to improve local School Travel Planning and Engagement practices.



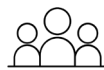
PRACTICE INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- School Travel Planning and Engagement techniques can be a bit different from traditional engagement techniques. The project team must practice innovative ways to engage students, best examples include a “My Community and School Trip Map” as well as community walkabouts.



USE TRADITIONAL ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- Equally important to innovative engagement techniques are traditional engagement methods such as stakeholder committees, working groups, and hands-up classroom surveys. The common and more familiar engagement techniques are fundamental to the STPE process.



DETERMINE APPROPRIATE STUDENT AGE LEVELS

- When it comes to School Travel Planning and Engagement, it may be difficult to determine the appropriate student age or grade levels to engage with. At times it may not be possible or in the project or student’s best interest to engage all or certain cohorts of students at a given school.



RECONCILE ABUNDANCE OF DATA

- Reconciliation is twofold in terms of data collected from students, parents, staff and community stakeholders in matters that require STPE:

The first relates to reconciling the abundance or overload of data coming in from the multitude of participants. Being able to analyze and synthesize data is critical to the public and key stakeholders’ understanding of the concerns and future direction of the project.

The second relates to reconciling data where there is no clear consensus. Where does the project team land on an issue or decision when the data is weighted on results that are polarizing or counter to priorities addressed from other sources of data?



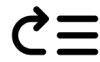
CONSULT VERSUS INFORM

- The School Travel Planning and Engagement process is successful if community stakeholders are consulted versus informed. The former involves not only informing members but acknowledging concerns and aspirations, plus how input can influence the design of the city. In fact, participants may feel more confident about the decision-making process and decisions if two-way communication is present.



FUND INFRASTRUCTURE AND EDUCATION

- To realize the possibilities of School Travel Planning and Engagement projects, there must be funding for both infrastructure and education initiatives; a budget that allots for one over the other is not recommended. Combining funding for both will enable the project team to possess greater flexibility and greater financial resources to rise above and beyond.



MEET STUDENT PRIORITIES

- The School Travel Planning and Engagement process works well if student priorities are met. The project team must ensure that what students are advocating for comes across in the dialogue, public-facing documents, and final design of our cities. How, then, can the project team work around push backs to not lose sight of what students are concerned about and what students envision for Winnipeg? How can the STPE process be improved to meet the concerns and needs of students in regards to school travel to and from school?



DESIGN FOR AND FROM STUDENT IDEAS

- To genuinely design cities for students, by students, translating the information and concerns raised by children into the design process is of the essence. A good way to do this is to design for and from student ideas; this can come out of direct student participation in School Travel Planning and Engagement events. The project team then must take the steps to carry forward the results in any final decisions and design drafts or proposals presented to the City. A showcase of what students advocate for may go a long way in exceeding the goals of STPE, that is, to improve travel choices, accessibility and connectivity for all students.

How to activate the school community?

Get parents to draw attention to the importance of school travel and then combine that with advocacy for infrastructure improvements.



TIME TO WRAP UP

- The project timeline for a School Travel Planning and Engagement process is unpredictable. Take caution to obstacles along the way that may make a project run long and thus over budget. It is important to establish an initial project timeline to communicate to all parties the duration and length of the sum of engagement parts; it is also important to know when to move along and when to wrap up a STPE project. In the end, all intended engagement activities may or may not get completed as planned.



ACTIVATE THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

- To build up community level thinking, it is essential to activate the school community. Leadership stemming from parents, for example, may help to draw attention to the importance of school travel and then combine that with advocacy for infrastructure improvements; this holds the means for modeshift and the legacy of STPE.



FIGURE 8 | Students Walking

5.0

CONCLUSION

Returning to the question: What role can School Travel Planning and Engagement play in the design of Winnipeg?

The facts of the case study, the outcomes of the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project, and the 12 lessons learned are evident that the STPE practice is cutting edge.

The integration and promotion of STPE in Phase I of the project is a first and best step to bring student concerns and priorities regarding active school travel to the forefront. The establishment of an STPE resource team, the use of innovative and traditional engagement techniques plus the engagement by the numbers highlight the inclusive, commendable, and comprehensive aspects of STPE that stand out as a best practice for the City of Winnipeg. The outcomes and lessons learned jointly speak to the challenges and concrete ways to best and better practice STPE. Finally, an emphasis on direct engagement with students to identify their issues and vision for Winnipeg is the success of the Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project. School Travel Planning and Engagement in Winnipeg can play a significant role in shaping cities designed for students, by students.

REFERENCES

City of Winnipeg. (n.d.). Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project. Retrieved February 8, 2020, from <https://winnipeg.ca/publicworks/pedestriansCycling/walkbikeprojects/wolseleytodowntown.stm>

Ontario Active School Travel. (n.d.). School Travel Planning. Retrieved March 8, 2020, from <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/school-travel-planning/>

Zimmerman, S. (2015, November 4). The 6 E's of Safe Routes to School: Embracing Equity. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from <https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/blog/6-es-safe-routes-school-embracing-equity>

Image Resources

Cover Image: Box City. Retrieved from <https://www.planning.org/blog/blogpost/9127770/>

1. Children on Rollerblades and Scooter. Retrieved from <https://utown.ubc.ca/discovering-utown/utownubc-community-programs/walkn-roll-school>
2. Students on Foot at Crosswalk. Retrieved from <https://activeforlife.com/walk-bike-to-school/>
3. Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project Study Area. Retrieved from <https://winnipeg.ca/publicworks/pedestriansCycling/walkbikeprojects/wolseleytodowntown.stm>
4. Timeline for Wolseley to Downtown Walk Bike Project. Retrieved from <https://winnipeg.ca/publicworks/pedestriansCycling/walkbikeprojects/wolseleytodowntown.stm>
5. Students at Crosswalk in Winter. Retrieved from <https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/crosswalk-enhancements-designed-to-make-trip-to-school-safer-in/article-15fae458-1ab6-11ea-93ea-d0115791affe.html>
6. Students Walking and Biking Together. Retrieved from <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/mnsaferoutes/news-events/photo-contest.html>
7. Children on Scooters. Retrieved from <https://bicyclexp.com/kids-scooter-kick-skate/>
8. Children Walking. Retrieved from <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/mnsaferoutes/news-events/photo-contest.html>
9. Parent and Children Crossing Street. Retrieved from <https://www.feliciachangphotography.com/blog/vancouver-documentary-photos-school-day-grind>



FIGURE 9 | Parent and Children Crossing Street