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ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL TOOLKIT

An active school travel advocacy & placemaking
resource centring the insights of young people

Developed by Jay Pitter Placemaking | October 2022

Authored by Jay Pitter, Principal Placemaker





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Introduction

What if space was created for young people to co-lead active school travel initiatives?

Many municipalities and active school travel organizations are working tirelessly to encourage active school travel such as walking, cycling, rolling and skateboarding. However, youth rarely have an opportunity to shape the priorities, key messages and engagement initiatives. This approach is not consistent with the disability justice mantra, “Nothing about us without us.” While adults such as parents/caregivers, educators and city staff play an important role in increasing active school travel, it’s important to centre the lived experiences and intelligence of young people who will ultimately live with the social, environmental and health impacts related to this important issue. So, future leaders and active school travel advocates, this toolkit is for you.

Although it is written by me, a middle-aged lady, this toolkit was developed in close collaboration with young people. As a part of a larger project with the Town of Ajax, I worked closely with Armi De Francia, Active Transportation Coordinator at The Corporation of the Town of Ajax, to lead a workshop with a small group of young people to gain their insights about the urgency, barriers and benefits related to active school travel. For example, today only 25% of 5–17-year-olds living in Canada embrace active school travel. Far too many young people, perhaps even

yourself, are missing out on the benefits, such as improved collective youth mental and physical health, optimal academic performance and participation in combating the climate crisis. So, the young people who participated in the workshop also wrote personal stories related to their active school travel experiences to encourage others, which I highlight in this toolkit along with their photos. In addition to learning from these rich youth contributions, the young people we engaged also entrusted Armi and I with personal experiences and concerns related to class, gender, disability and race—issues rarely discussed when advocating for increased active school travel. While the multiple benefits of active school travel far outweigh the risks, it is important to recognize how various aspects of your identities impacts the journey to school.

So, while this Active School Travel Advocacy Toolkit isn't written by a youth, it is informed by the diverse experiences and brilliance of young people. This toolkit includes helpful active school travel statistics, stories, strategies for engaging parents/caregivers and peers, and checklists. I also unpack five active school travel advocacy activities that youth can lead with their peers to make positive change. Every once in a while, I use fancy words that I briefly define in the margins of the toolkit. However, I promise that I haven't used corny terms like "hip" or "cool" in an attempt to be a relatable adult, because you'd see through that. In fact, this toolkit is written similarly to the way I write for my clients or university-level urban planning students, because I respect your immense capacity to learn new things that will help you to fight for your futures. Based on my many professional placemaking experiences collaborating with young people, I'm confident that you will play an important role in advancing active school travel advocacy initiatives. You've got this, and I mean all of you, regardless of identity, popularity or place of residence.

someone who
leads the design
programming
and/or policy of
public spaces

You are the change.

Sincerely,



Jay Pitter, Principal Placemaker

Jay Pitter Placemaking

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Acknowledgements

Jay Pitter Placemaking would like to acknowledge the invaluable insights of youth contributors and the Town of Ajax for both embracing and supporting the coordination of this toolkit development process. Also, the practice acknowledges Debra Scott, for the passionate insights she contributed based on her former experiences as an Active Kid's Club leader and avid active school travel champion. For the entire practice, this project is personal, steeped in our deep commitment to ensuring that a sustainable, equitable and healthy future awaits our children and all young people.

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Background

Q: What exactly do we mean by active school travel?

A: Active school travel refers to enjoyable and healthy ways of travelling to school such as walking, rolling, cycling and skateboarding. Sustainable options such as taking the school bus and using public transportation are also often referenced as good options alongside active school travel.

Q: Why did Jay Pitter Placemaking and the Town of Ajax collaborate on this toolkit?

A: The Youth Active School Travel Toolkit is part of the Town of Ajax's Equity in Active School Travel Project 2021-2022. Despite multiple efforts by the municipality, many children and youth are still driven to school and remain at risk due to unsafe driving behaviours in school zones; they also miss out on the numerous benefits of active school travel. Seeking to improve engagement and leverage community strengths, the Town of Ajax contracted Jay Pitter Placemaking to lead a scope of work which included: a review of the Town's broader active transportation initiatives and policies; assess the Town's previous

the area
around a
school where
there is a
high number
of young
pedestrians



active school travel engagement initiatives and public education messaging; lead an equitable community engagement session for Town staff; and co-create an equitable active school travel community engagement plan in collaboration with transportation staff. While undertaking this scope of work, Principal Placemaker Jay Pitter noted the lack of meaningful engagement across most active school travel programs and extended additional services to create space for direct youth engagement, culminating in this Active School Travel Advocacy Toolkit.

Q: Why include the voices of young people?

A: Young people are most impacted by active school travel issues and opportunities related to sustainability, safety, independence, and physical and mental health. As such, young people's voices—stories, knowledge, ideas, concerns and priorities—should be included in active school travel initiatives.

Q: Who is this Active School Travel Toolkit for?

A: This toolkit is for

- » Young people interested in enhancing their physical and mental health, academic performance, and sense of independence through active school travel;
- » Young people who care about their peers and the planet, and are interested in learning how to use their powerful perspectives to advocate for greater active school travel;
- » Parents/caregivers, educators, municipal staff and other adults interested in more meaningfully collaborating with young people when leading active school travel conversations and initiatives.

This toolkit contains information that you may use to better understand active school travel from a youth perspective and tools you may use with the young people in your life to support their leadership.

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PART ONE:

Making the Case for Active, Sustainable and Joyful School Journeys

Active School Travel Youth Stories

A lot has been written about the direct benefits of active school travel on youth, but we wanted to confirm that by inviting a small group of diverse youth to share their stories with us. And we're so glad we did, because as it turns out, there are even more benefits than popularly discussed. Here is what your peers had to say about the benefits of active school travel. As you read each story, take a moment to make note of the experiences and ideas that most resonate with you and complete the three reflection questions at the end of the section—individually, with your family, with a small group of friends and/or with your entire class.

← an idea you
relate to
or strongly
agree with



Youth
Contributors





Aside from a couple of girls at my school, I never really saw girls on skateboards but in eighth grade, I decided that it might be a good way of travelling to school. My dad skateboarded a bit when he was younger, so he was immediately into it. Actually, both of my parents were supportive and agreed to register me in private lessons, so I could learn basic skills like balancing on the board, pushing off and pivoting.

On the first day of ninth grade, I felt ready to give it a try. The street and intersection close to my house is very busy and so I walked the first few minutes with my skateboard in hand. After making it across the massive intersection and onto a pedestrian pathways, I nervously mounted my skateboard. I was surrounded by a bunch of other ninth-graders, older students and couples caught up in their own conversations, sometimes loudly laughing. I was afraid of falling down in front of everyone, especially on my first day of high school, but I confidently pushed off. In that moment, my stomach settled down and I started enjoying the extra cool feeling of wind going through my hair as I was gliding along. A few students gave me supportive nods, which felt really good. Having struggled with anxiety and social stuff at school, I really appreciated the sense of accomplishment and confidence I felt from skateboarding to school.

That first day skateboarding to school set a good tone for me. I just felt so much more confident and determined, and I carried that feeling throughout the year—meeting new friends, taking on new academic challenges and getting great grades.”



One winter day on my way to school, I discovered that I preferred walking in smaller groups than larger ones. That morning, I was walking in a large group of seven students, so it was difficult for my ideas to be heard and I felt invisible as others' words thundered over mine. The next day, I was in a smaller group of three and I felt more connected to my peers because it was easier for us to listen/talk to each other. While in the small group, it helped me distinguish who my real friends were because I had a chance to see who they truly were. Personally, I felt like the support in the smaller group was much better because I could hear genuine thoughts from my real friends, and I could share anything easily due to our trust. In contrast, I had to be cautious of what I would say in the large group because I didn't know if I could trust everyone.

Overall, from my experience of walking to school, I have learned that quality outweighs quantity when it comes to friendships"



“ ‘Sammie, let’s go! I want to bike another way to school today. Let’s go past the pond and see if the alligator is still there.’ We found out later it was a muskrat.

My brother and I always tried biking different routes to school, so we had to communicate and come up with a plan prior to leaving home. Going different ways resulted in us crossing new streets, so we made sure to follow the road rules. We always made sure to tell our parents which way we would go and how long it would take us so that we were safe. Through this practice, I was able to build a better and trusting relationship with my brother and parents. I was able to teach my brother different road rules, learn independence and responsibility, and be aware of our surroundings while having fun!

I believe the years we spent riding our bikes to school will help me and my brother become better drivers, as we will be more aware of school areas, kids on bikes and walking. These times spent with my brother can never be taken away and I will remember them for many years to come.”



I had a test on trigonometry during the first period, and I was super nervous. Trigonometry wasn't my best unit, so I was especially nervous to go to class and write the test. Tests always stress me out; I feel underprepared, like I'm going to fail and my mark is going to plummet as a result. When I'm nervous, my stomach twists, my palms sweat and I seem to forget how to breathe.

Walking to school helped calm me down before my test; I knew I was nervous so I tried to look for avenues to settle my mind. As I was admiring the emerald green tree leaves and the vibrant yellow dandelions, I spotted my favourite neighbour sitting outside on her porch and ended up having a quick conversation with her. She gave me a pep talk and helped me realize that one test wasn't going to define who I was. A little while after, I saw a group of people walking their dogs. Dogs are one of my favourite animals, and seeing so many of them made my day. After having these engagements while walking to school, I realized that walking to school played a really big role in my mental health.

If I had gotten a drive that morning, I wouldn't have been able to soothe my nerves as easily as I did walking and interacting with people and nature."



“When walking to school, I became closer to my community. I started to build a relationship with an older lady in my neighbourhood. She was 32-years-old at the time. I met her while walking to school near my elementary school. At first I only said hi, but soon I got to know her better and I got to know about her life. We talked about issues that are not widely known in the community or to me, like the construction of a new school nearby.

This informal mentorship relationship allowed me to see a new perspective of life as a grown adult. I was also able to get advice from her in a safe public space as I shared some things that were going on in my life. She gave me advice about friends in school and she gave me advice on how to be safer when walking to school too. It allowed me to feel better when I was talking to her. I was able to build a nice relationship with someone in my community. This only happened when I was walking. If I'd had a ride to school, I wouldn't have been able to meet her.”



I have been walking to school since I was 10 years old. I have always loved it because I would be walking with friends and having so much fun. I became friendlier with many people I usually would not talk to in class. There was one walk after school that I will never forget. I was around 12 and it was mid-November. I was walking with a couple of people I usually walked with, a few guys in my grade I normally would not hang out with and a girl I was good friends with. We didn't want to do the same thing as always and go straight home, so we decided to go to a park nearby. It was a bit cold out, but that didn't make it any less fun. We went on the swings and then on the slide. Afterward, we just sat around the park talking about our lives and things happening at school. Two of them brought their longboard and penny board, so we spent some time trying to ride them without falling, filled with many laughs. The time flew by and before we knew it, it was time to go home for dinner.

I realize now that I would never have got to experience that time at the park, and so much more, if I'd had a ride home instead. I've really learned to appreciate just how much the short walk home has impacted my time in elementary school and the connections I've made with people, even in the present, for the better. Things are a little different now since I take the bus to and from school, but I still love the little walk from the bus stop and wouldn't trade it for the world."

A portrait of Fraser Roberts, a young man with short brown hair, wearing a light grey t-shirt. He is standing outdoors in front of a blurred background of green trees and a blue sky. The photo is framed with a light purple border.

FRASER

Roberts



In grade six, I would always wake up late and be rushing to school, making the morning super chaotic for everyone. I would be trying to do everything at once, getting dressed, brushing teeth, a typical movie scene: throwing clothes around, running, grabbing a piece of fruit then running out the door with my mother screaming.

I vividly remember, though, one morning I was unexpectedly up early. Why? I have no clue. My mum said to me, “Why don’t you walk to school, since you have the time?” First, I protested; it was mid-March, so it wasn’t the best weather. Regardless of my protest, out the door I went, walking to school. I didn’t have a phone then, so I couldn’t listen to music. I truly felt present. I found myself saying hello to people walking by, which created a sense of connection, and I admired a tree I hadn’t noticed before. That time felt like my own. As soon as I got into the car when I was being picked up from school, I remember saying to my mum, “I’m going to walk again.” The rest was history.

Now that I’m in high school, I’ll walk to school or home whenever I can. It’s the perfect time to decompress and help me separate my school life from my home life. Walking has many benefits, both mental and physical. Although I do it for the mental benefits, the physical health benefits are great. During the online period of school due to COVID, I missed walking to school. It was depressing and my daily routine felt mundane. With the return to in-person school, I’ve become more social. I’m sleeping better and I’m feeling connected to my community again.”



I have never been allowed to walk by myself, considering... you know, I'm a girl. I've always wanted to walk to school, though; I loved nature, it gave me a sense of clarity.

I was in eighth grade when I finally decided that I needed to start walking to school. I asked my parents, and they said that I could only walk if I took my 11-year-old brother with me. My brother and I didn't have a good relationship, we were always either fighting or never talking to each other. I thought that this could be a good opportunity for my brother and I to start communicating like civilized humans, so I said, "why not?" The next day, we started walking to school and it was quite awkward at first, so I decided to break the ice and start a conversation. It was like meeting a new person. I asked him about some of his favourite hobbies and things to do, along with things like his favourite food and season. He told me that he enjoyed art, mostly sketching. I was surprised because I also really enjoy art, any form of it. We also share the same taste in music and have the same favourite season. By the time the conversation ended, we were at school already. I was surprised, there is much more to my brother than his yelling and punching. We walked back home together and listened to music while talking about how our day was and what we did. By the time we got home, I realized that my brother was an amazing person.

As the days went on, we continued to walk to and from school, and each time we'd talk about different things. We started to share secrets, only telling each other and no one else, not even our parents. He became like my best friend."

Reflection Questions



Which story most resonated with you? Why?



Which story highlighted a new active school travel benefit you'd most like to experience?



How can all of these youth stories and/or others be used to encourage a greater number of young people to embrace active school travel?

Active School Travel Benefits and Statistics

Based on the youth stories shared in the previous section and [research findings](#), here is a list of benefits and statistics that support previous, and many other, firsthand youth active school travel stories.

← facts, statistics and conclusions that have arisen from formal studies, oftentimes led by universities

Benefits

1. Increases positive health outcomes such as lowering young peoples' body mass index (BMI), contributes to better bone health, maintains good blood glucose, insulin and triglycerides levels and improves cardiovascular health while building independent mobility¹;
2. Creates an opportunity for youth to develop compassionate and responsible relationships with younger siblings and neighbourhood children they are chaperoning to school;
3. Positively influences kids' moods, feelings and attitudes in relation to their perception of their communities and environments²;
4. Interactions with trees, parks, crossing guards and dogs, as well as active school travel programs more broadly, evoke positive feelings in young people³;
5. Promotes a healthy sense of independence and self-confidence;
6. Increases levels of alertness and attention during the school day⁴;
7. Establishes safe(r) [acquaintanceships](#) with caring adults such as neighbours, crossing guards and convenience store owners;
8. Contributes to better interactions between young people and their parents compared to those who travel by car⁵;
9. Creates opportunities for young people to socialize outside of cafeteria cliques and close-knit friend groups;
10. Creates opportunities for young people to develop an appreciation for trees, flowers, birds and other beings that comprise their local ecologies;
11. Choosing active transportation mitigates the impacts of climate change by decreasing Greenhouse Gas emissions and improving air quality⁶;
12. Sparks joy.

← someone you know who isn't a close friend

-
1. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) *Making the Case for Active School Travel: Fact Sheet & Reference List*, p.3 <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Making-the-Case-Dec-2018-En.pdf>
 2. Wilson, K., Coen, S. E., Piaskoski, A., Gilliland, J. A. (2018) Children's perspectives on neighbourhood barriers and enablers to active school travel: A participatory mapping study. *The Canadian Geographer*, p.12 https://theheal.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Wilson_et_al-2018-The_Canadian_Geographer_2F_Le_G-ographe_canadien.pdf
 3. Wilson, K., et. al. (2018) p.12
 4. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) p.4
 5. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) p.4
 6. Brand, C., Dons, E., Anaya-Boig, E., Avila-Palencia, I., Clark, A., de Nazelle, A., Gascon, M., Gaupp-Berghausen, M., Gerike, R., Gotschi, T., Iacorossi, F., Kahlmeier, S., Laeremans, M., Nieuwenhuijsen, M.J., Orjuela, J.P., Racioppi, F., Raser, E., Rojas-Rueda, D., Standaert, A., Stigell, E., Sulikova, S., Wegener, S., Panis, L.I. (April 2021) The climate change mitigation effects of daily active travel in cities, *Science Direct*, Volume 93 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1361920921000687>

Statistics

Only **9%** of Canadian children and youth (ages 5-17) get the recommended **60 minutes** of daily physical activity.⁷



Gender, age, and socio-economic status (SES) have been identified as potential moderators of Active School Transport (AST).⁸



58% of parents walked to school when they were kids

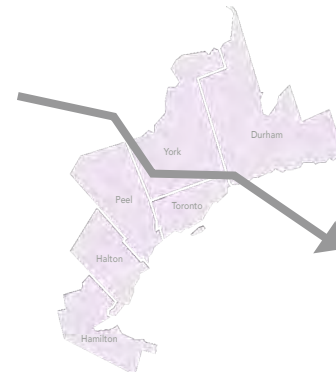
28% of their children walk to school today.⁹

Findings from North America, Australia, New Zealand, and the Czech Republic indicate higher levels of AST for **boys more often** than girls, while gender differences have not been observed in studies from Switzerland and Norway.¹²

Contemporary studies suggest that AST is associated with a wide range of factors, such as demographic (gender, ethnicity, age), family (parental education, household income, car ownership), social (individual and parental attitudes and concerns, social and cultural norms), environmental (school distance, safety, walkability, traffic calming, infrastructure, recreational facilities, centralization), and policy-related factors.¹⁰

There are five interacting levels of influence affecting AST behaviour. At the intrapersonal (i.e., child) and interpersonal (e.g., parent, family, peers) levels, a child's age, gender, ethnicity along with their parent's work schedule, socio-economic status (SES), and perceptions regarding AST safety can all influence AST behaviour.¹¹

10% point decline between 1986 and 2006 for 11-13 years old (53% to 42%) and 14-15 year olds (39% to 31%) within Canada's largest metropolitan region: the **Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)**.¹³



7. Ontario Active School Travel (2020) *An Urgent Problem*, bullet point 2 <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/an-urgent-problem/>

8. Haug E, Smith ORF, Bucksch J, Brindley C, Pavelka J, Hamrik Z, Inchley J, Roberts C, Mathisen FKS, Sigmundová D. (February 2021) *12-Year Trends in Active School Transport across Four European Countries-Findings from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study*. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. p.18 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7926861/>

9. Town of Ajax (n.d.) *Active & Safe Routes to School, Town of Ajax Manual*. p.4 https://www.ajax.ca/en/inside-townhall/resources/Transportation/ASRTS/ASRTS_Manual_fnl_web.pdf

10. Haug, E. et. al (2021) p.2

11. Mammen, G. (2016) *School Travel Planning in Canada: A Holistic Examination of Program Impact on Active School Travel*, A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences University of Toronto, p.3 https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/73050/1/Mammen_George_201606_PhD_thesis.pdf

12. Haug, E. et. al (2021) p.7

13. Mammen, G., (2016) p.3



VS



Nearly **two-thirds** (64.5%) of students from the **suburban** school typically used an active travel mode (walk or bike) to school in the morning, compared to only **one-quarter** (25.5%) from the **urban** school.¹⁴

At the physical 'built environment' level, the spatial **distance between the home and school** environments, street density and connectivity, degree of pedestrian infrastructure, and environmental aesthetics have been shown to influence AST.¹⁵



Children who walk to/from school relative to those who are driven can gain an **additional 2,200 steps** and 15 to 45 minutes of daily physical activity.¹⁹

This increased physical activity on the school journey has been found to lower BMI over time, improve cardiovascular health, increase alertness and attention during the school day.²⁰

Out of almost 118,000 students at 552 schools, the average proportion of children using AST was 54.3%, with variability among cities from a low of 39.5% in Laval, Quebec to 69.7% in Montreal, Quebec.¹⁶

The average proportion travelling to school by school bus was 16% but ranged greatly by city: from 0% in Vancouver to 54% in Laval.¹⁷

Cycling was highest in Calgary at 7.7%, and lowest in Surrey at 1.4%.¹⁸



Only **21%** of Canadian children and youth, aged 5 to 19, typically walk or wheel to and from school,

while **63%** use inactive modes (e.g., car, bus). **16%** use a combination of active and inactive modes of transportation to/from school.²¹

14. Wilson, K., et. al. (2018) p.4

15. Mammen, G., (2016) p.3

16. Rothman, L., Hagel, B., Howard, A., Cloutier, M.S., Macpherson, A., Aguirre, A. N., McCormack, G.R., Fuselli, P., Buliung, R., HubkaRao, T., Ling, R., Zanotto, M., Rancourt, M., Winters, M. (2021) Active school transportation and the built environment across Canadian cities: Findings from the child active transportation safety and the environment (CHASE) study, Preventive Medicine, Volume 146, p.4 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743521000542>

17. Rothman, L., et. al. (2021) p.4

18. Rothman, L., et. al. (2021) p.4

19. Mammen, G., (2016) p.2

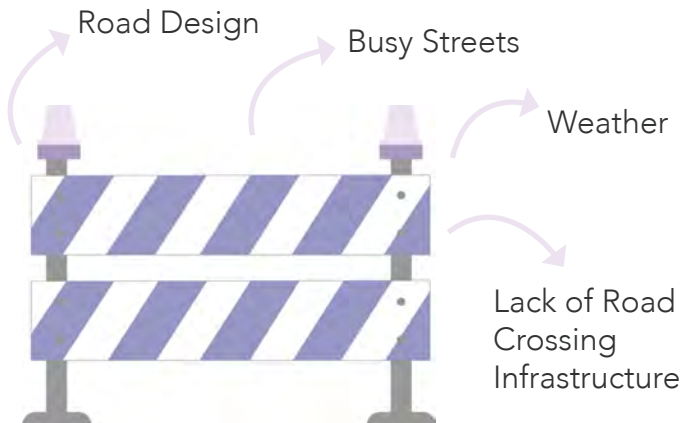
20. Mammen, G., (2016) p.2

21. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) p.1

More than one-third of Ontario's greenhouse gas pollution comes from transportation and vehicle emissions.²²



Reducing the number of children being driven to school reduces greenhouse gas emissions and particulate air pollution around the school; this **improves air quality** and reduces associated risks of lung and cardiovascular diseases.²³

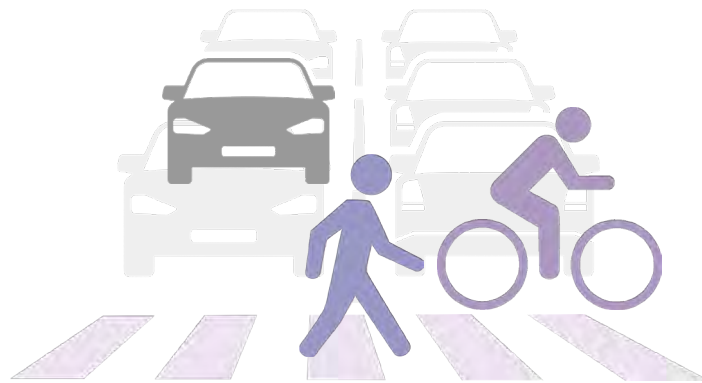


Safety-related barriers included challenges crossing the road, traffic, and busy streets.²⁴

Children emphasized safety

as an important part of their school journey experience. Interactions with people while travelling to school were particularly important enabling features, especially the familiarity of people, travelling to school with friends, and walking with a sibling. Crossing guards were another significant safety-supporting feature.²⁵

Improving conditions for walking and biking can have a positive impact on local economies and equity and can attract customers and new businesses to an area, **making neighbourhoods more desirable** places to live.²⁶



Reducing traffic volumes creates safer school zones. Improving walking and cycling routes to school also enhances the safety, connectivity, and quality of life for the community as a whole.²⁷

22. Ontario Active School Travel (2020) *An Urgent Problem*, bullet point 7 <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/an-urgent-problem/>

23. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) *Making the Case for Active School Travel: Fact Sheet & Reference List*, p. 4

24. Wilson, K., et. al. (2018) P. 8

25. Wilson, K., et. al. (2018) P. 7

26. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) *Making the Case for Active School Travel: Fact Sheet & Reference List*, p. 5

27. Ontario Active School Travel (2018) *Making the Case for Active School Travel: Fact Sheet & Reference List*, p. 4

PART TWO:

Confronting Complexities and Concerns

Overlapping Active School Travel Factors

Given all the positive stories, benefits and statistics, you may be wondering why every young person doesn't simply choose to embrace active school travel. The answer is both complex and uncomfortable. Active school travel is not simply a matter of choice, it's a matter of a range of overlapping factors. What this means is that first and foremost, we need governments and decision-makers to create new policies that limit the speed of cars or the development of highways, and invest in infrastructure such as safe crosswalks and protected bike lanes.

funds used to build or maintain infrastructure such as protected bike lanes, crosswalks and pedestrian pathways

We also need to understand how equally important, but less quantifiable and/or discussed factors such as race, gender and economic family status impact how safe and joyful the journey to school is. A disabled girl using a wheelchair may not be able to travel to school with her friends because of uneven sidewalk surfaces and a lack of ramps. A pair of Black brothers may not ride their skateboards to school because of frequent police profiling in their neighbourhood. A Muslim girl wearing a hijab may not ride her bike to school because of unwelcoming stares. A group of tween girls may not walk to school because of cat calls from older boys.

able to be expressed as an amount
how much money your family earns

We're not suggesting that all youth from these and other identities experience active school travel challenges. However, through our conversations with young people and our review of the research, we know that young people are navigating overlapping socio-spatial challenges coupled with invisible policies that negatively impact their active school travel journeys. We also know that there is a hesitation to openly discuss challenges related to race, class and gender-based discrimination because of fear of sparking contentious conversations or taking attention away from infrastructure-based advocacy efforts.

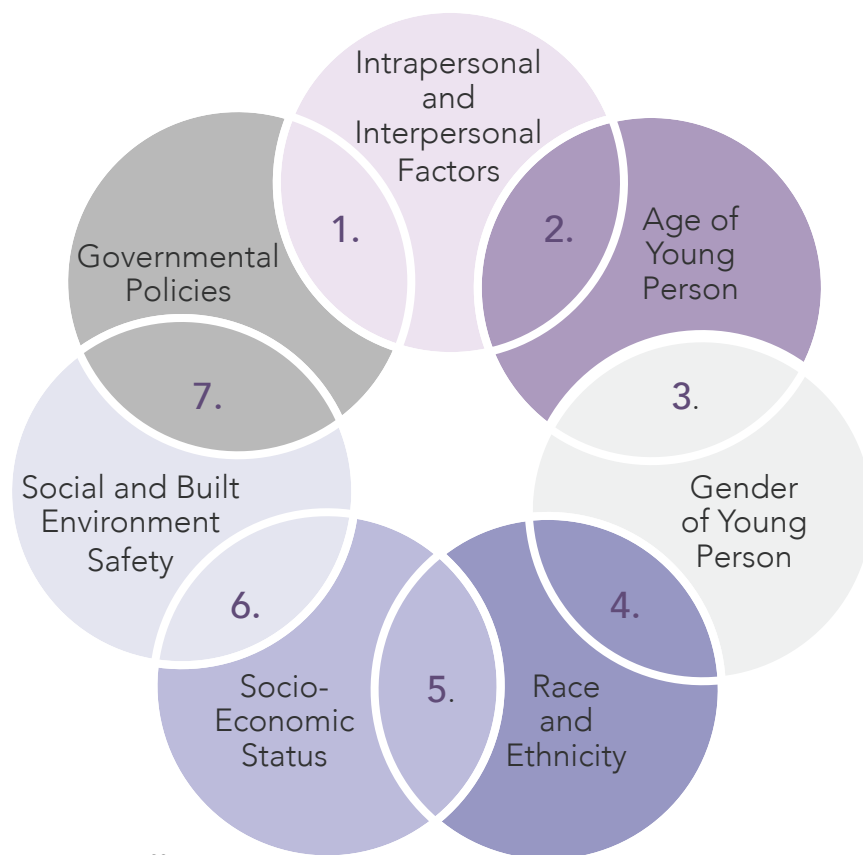
the dynamic that is created when social identities, interactions and power relations intersect with the built environment/ physical space

In fact, many adult active school travel advocates believe highlighting these issues may deter young people and their parents/caregivers from embracing active and sustainable ways of travelling to school. However, we believe the opposite. Many of the social challenges young people encounter on their walk to school exist in the playground, classroom and local pizza shop. By honestly highlighting the fullness of young peoples' identities and lived experiences, along with policy and built environment issues tethered to multiple overlapping factors, we are simply keeping it real.

a term from the 'hood for telling it as it is

By presenting overlapping factors impacting active school travel, and refusing to avoid challenges that cause discomfort, we are honouring the diverse experiences of young people and creating the conditions for comprehensively addressing all active school travel barriers.

Overlapping Active School Travel Factors



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28. This diagram is informed by Mammen, G. (2016) *School Travel Planning in Canada: A Holistic Examination of Program Impact on Active School Travel*, A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences University of Toronto, https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/73050/1/Mammen_George_201606_PhD_thesis.pdf

Tips For Addressing Active School Travel Concerns

Again, we keep it real in our practice and never shy away from addressing concerns or uncomfortable challenges. We understand that some young people, and apparently a growing number of parents/caregivers, have numerous concerns related to active school travel. While some of these concerns—such as the fear that walking to school is less physically safe than being driven in a car—are not factually-based, we believe that it is important to address all fears, both real and perceived, to create positive change.

➤ a thing that is not known or proved to be true

Here are a few tips to address parent/caregiver concern about your physical and psychological safety related to you travelling to school alone:

- » Using this toolkit, sit your parent/caregiver down and share the overwhelming benefits of active school travel, pointing out the ones that would be most valuable for you.
- » Identify one or two neighbours or friends who could join you on your journey to school.
- » Identify a safe community space located between school and home, such as a trusted neighbour's home, community centre or local business, that you can take refuge in if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable for any reason.
- » Invite your parent/caregiver to support you in mapping out a safe(r) route to school during school travel hours, and together, identify a safe(r) community space to take refuge in should an incident arise, as well as safe(r) street infrastructure such as crosswalks. Also, prompt your parent/caregiver to note the number of other young people and adults travelling to school at that time.
- » If you have access to a cell phone, offer to turn on the location sharing feature during your active school travel journey.
- » Establish a quick text check-in routine with your parent/caregiver.

Here are a few tips to address your concerns or the concerns of other young people

- » If you are being cat-called or bullied by fellow students on your journey to school, report it to a trusted teacher, guidance counsellor or school administrator. We understand that reporting these kinds of incidents often leads to greater harassment of all kinds. If you are concerned about this, consider suggesting that your school issue a general announcement or convene a special assembly rather than referencing you specifically. That stated, in the case of extreme harassment of any kind, do not hesitate to openly and loudly involve all adults that can help to secure your safety.
- » If you witness other young people being cat-called, bullied or harassed in any way on your active journey to school, be a good bystander by making compassionate eye contact with the youth(s) involved. Move closer to the youth(s) being harassed if it's safe to do so, and ask the youth(s) if you can join them for the rest of the journey if it's safe to do so. If you've identified a safe(r) community space along the route, suggest that you and the youth(s) being harassed go to that space. In the case of extreme harassment of any kind, do not hesitate to openly and loudly involve all young people and adults that can help to secure the safety of you and your peers.
- » If you are uncomfortable at a busy crosswalk or wide street intersection, wait for a group of other young people and adults also actively travelling to school before crossing.

***Note** that there are many dimensions to safety and that individuals ultimately have the right to make choices that best suit their situations. The advice provided above is intended to help you and your families help address safety concerns. However, as a practice, it is not our intent to be prescriptive and we cannot be held responsible for outcomes derived from the aforementioned advice or any other content provided in this toolkit.

Making Your Journey Joyful and Safe

- 📍 — Give yourself extra time so that you do not have to rush, and can occasionally take short, joyful pauses to enjoy street art, green space and animals such as birds, squirrels and friendly neighbourhood pets.
- 📍 — Break away from playground and cafeteria cliques, and embrace a diverse group of peers on your journey.
- 📍 — Identify a safe(r) community space located between school and home, such as a trusted neighbour's home, community centre or local business, that you can take refuge in if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable for any reason.
- 📍 — Refrain from texting and limit music volumes while travelling to school to ensure that you are aware of other active travellers and vehicles.
- 📍 — Politely share and cede space with other active travellers, especially those who face additional risks in public spaces such as elders, disabled individuals and groups that include young children.
- 📍 — Bring an extra layer of clothing and the appropriate accessories, such as warm hats and gloves, for all-season active travel.
- 📍 — Be a positive bystander and support peers being harassed in ways that keep you safe(r).
- 📍 — Pack a healthy light snack and water to stay replenished on your journey.
- 📍 — Pay attention to uneven and slippery surfaces.
- 📍 — Always use crosswalks and stoplights when crossing all streets, both wide and narrow, and make eye contact with drivers before crossing.
- 📍 — Contribute to creating a sense of belonging for all peers on your journey through positive gestures such as extending a quick greeting, head nod and/or smile.

PART THREE:

Becoming an Active School Travel Advocate



Head and Heart

Oftentimes advocacy is focused on strategy, statistics and other forms of quantitative data. These are very important aspects of advocacy, especially in this era of opinions and claims of disinformation. However, it is also important to lead with heart and emotions. By sharing your personal story and emotions—in a manner that protects your boundaries and makes you feel comfortable—people are better able to understand your “why”, meaning your deepest motivation for change-making. Emotions also significantly influence cognitive human processes, which affect our behaviours. Here are a few reflection questions to help you lead with your head and heart:

the mental processes involved in comprehending, evaluating and remembering information



Why do you care about getting more young people to embrace active school travel?



How have you personally benefitted from embracing active school travel?



What is one active school travel experience or moment that demonstrates why you care?



What are three facts you find most compelling about active school travel?



What are three benefits you find most compelling about active school travel?

FIVE Advocacy Activities

The following five active school travel advocacy activities will allow you to utilize the information and approaches presented in previous sections of this toolkit along with your personal lived experiences. These actions address overlapping socio-spatial and policy challenges, while encouraging you to build relationships and learn new skills through the advocacy process. This is the true goal of all forms of equitable place-based advocacy: to transform our relationship with ourselves, other people, systems and the places we collectively inhabit in positive ways.

Advocacy Activity

Municipal Deputation

Description:

A municipal deputation is a short statement (often three–five minutes) presented by an individual or group to committees and advisory groups that report back to city council and other decision-makers. They are an important pathway for formally participating in the political and civic process by voicing your opinions on issues such as safe streets, affordable housing and parks.

Required Time:

2–2.5 hours

Key Action Steps:

- » Identify an active school travel topic you want to present on. Example: lack of safe street infrastructure, such as traffic lights or protected bike lanes, along your route, or dangerous car congestion at the drop-off/pick-up point in front of your school.
- » Find out when, where and how to make a deputation in your city.
- » Sign up on the speakers' list a week before the meeting, if permissible and possible.
- » Identify three key speaking points in the following order: thank the chair and committee for the opportunity to be heard, introduce yourself and/or group, explain your concern (head, heart, story and statistic), propose a solution or action you'd like to see taken, and close with a commitment to follow the conversation.
- » Write or type your key speaking points out. Rather than striving to memorize every single word, internalize your key points and speak from your heart.
- » Practice your deputation with peers or your family. Three–five minutes is not a long time to present an important idea, so practice and ensure that you are 45–60 seconds under your designated time to give yourself a buffer in case of nerves or a slightly slow start.
- » Councillors may ask you questions during your deputation. Try some Q and A during your practice to ensure that you are comfortable answering questions.
- » On the day of deputation dress in a manner that makes you feel comfortable and confident. Bring a peer or parent/caregiver along for moral support and rock your deputation!

Note(s):

Many deputations are theme-based and/or hosted by committees that address specific topics. Contact your municipality to find out more about these types of details as they differ across cities. To learn more about deputations, check out the Town of Ajax's website: <https://www.ajax.ca/en/inside-townhall/speak-before-council-or-committee.aspx>

Advocacy Activity

Active School Travel Route Audit

Description:

An active school travel route audit is a process that enables young people who navigate streets and green spaces on the way to school to assess their overall quality. This process provides an opportunity for youth to proactively highlight both attributes and challenges along the route so that professionals who design, manage and monitor streets can respond to their insights.

Required Time:

2.5-5 hours

Key Action Steps:

- » Gather a small group of peers (and parents/caregivers if you'd like) to participate in the audit.
- » With a small group of peers and/or parents/caregivers, review the following 10-point audit checklist (feel free to add a couple of other important checklist points if desired):
 - Does the route have well-connected streets with ample sidewalk widths, protected bike lanes and/or pedestrian pathways?
 - Does the route have clear wayfinding (signage/information systems guiding people along the journey)?
 - Is there seating, drinking fountains, restrooms, and other infrastructure that supports increased frequency and duration of active transportation?
 - Are there street trees and other forms of greenery?
 - Are sidewalks and paths smooth, sufficiently wide, with curb cuts and turning radii adequate for a wheelchair or walker or scooter?
 - Are there safe(r) community spaces (trusted neighbours' home, community centres or local businesses) along the route?
 - Does the street have adequate lighting?
 - Is there a buffer (street furniture, trees and other sidewalk infrastructure) separating pedestrians from moving vehicles?
 - Are traffic speeds and calming interventions (speed bumps, crosswalks, stoplights etc.) appropriate?
 - Are there paths with auditory crossing signals, adequate crossing times, clear signage, visible access ramps, and connections to walking, cycling, and public transit routes?
- » Print a copy of the checklist above for everyone in the group (or access via digital devices), and together, go out and audit the route. Check off points that adhere to the checklist criteria. Take clarifying notes if a more detailed response is required for any of the checklist points, or if you have an observation outside of the checklist points.
- » Afterwards, compare notes with your group and co-create a collective checklist with agreed upon responses. Attach this document to an email or letter to municipal leaders (mayor, chief planner, transportation planner, etc.). Also, concerns emerging from this audit could also be the subject of a municipal deputation and/or article in your local newspaper.

Note(s):

This is a good participatory learning experience for students. Feel free to share this audit with your teacher and suggest that they integrate the audit above (with credit to Jay Pitter Placemaking) into a class assignment.

Advocacy Activity

Cross-Cultural Understanding Walk/Roll

Description:

Cross-Cultural Understanding Walks are active school travel walks aligned with various annual holidays/milestones such as Orange Shirt Day (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation), International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Black History Month and other days that recognize diverse cultural concerns and celebrations.

Required Time:

1–3 hours

Key Action Steps:

- » Identify a holiday/milestone that you would like to recognize with a cross-cultural understanding walk.
- » Two weeks before this holiday/milestone, invite two to three peers from diverse cultures to join you on your journey to or from school. Explain that this walk/roll is intended for everyone to get a better understanding of each other's cultures. Also, you may want to lead a larger group walk. This can be done by asking six to eight of your friends to also invite two to three peers from diverse cultures to join the walk on the same holiday/milestone.
- » Establish a meeting date, point and time with your peers. The evening before the walk/roll, send a reminder out along with three questions to guide your cross-cultural walk/roll conversation. Here are some examples of questions you may want to explore:
 - Why is this holiday/milestone important?
 - Are any of the historical points or cultural practices similar to those in my own culture?
 - What is an inspirational lesson or takeaway from this holiday/milestone?
 - Is there something about this holiday/milestone that brings up difficult feelings for me such as sadness or guilt? If so, how can I transform these feelings into compassion and positive action?
 - What are small, everyday actions we can take as young people to recognize this cultural holiday/milestone year-round?
- » Afterwards, reflect on ways that you can intentionally use active travel time as a way of casually learning more about the cultural backgrounds of your peers and expanding your friend group.

Note(s):

This is a good participatory learning experience for students. Feel free to share this audit with your teacher and suggest that they integrate the audit above (with credit to Jay Pitter Placemaking) into a class assignment.

Advocacy Activity

Active School Travel Assignment

Description:

An active school travel assignment explores an aspect of your journey to school as it relates to a particular subject matter such as English, art or geography. By integrating active school travel in your class work, it will amplify the issues and benefits while allowing you to bring your real-life experiences into the classroom in creative ways.

Required Time:

1.5–6 hours

Key Action Steps:

- » Identify the subject that you would most like to incorporate insights and content from your active school journey travel into.
- » Listen out for an opportunity to incorporate your active school travel journey into an assignment related to your preferred course, or approach your teacher and request advice for incorporating your interest into course work.
- » Decide on your active school travel assignment topic and approach. Here is a list of active school travel assignment ideas that span a few curricula subjects/focal points:
 - Document trees and other flora on your active school travel route for a science project.
 - Take cell phone images and/or make drawings of an interesting part of the landscape or building on your active school travel route for an art project.
 - Interview a group of peers about their active school travel experiences for an English assignment.
 - Create a map of points of pauses, accessibility or inaccessibility, public art and important community spaces along your active school travel route for a geography assignment.
 - Track your feelings related to physical and mental health for one month in a journal for a health and physical education or sociology course.
- » Afterwards, consider how you could repurpose your assignment as an out-of-classroom advocacy tool through media, social media, letter to decision-makers or municipal deputation.

Note(s):

The assignments listed above are good participatory learning assignments for students. Feel free to share these assignments with your teacher and suggest that they integrate one of them into their syllabus.

Advocacy Activity

Neighbourhood Newspaper Article or Blog

Description:

An active school travel newspaper article or blog should be consistent with the core focus of most media stories: somebody, doing something, for a reason. It should answer the classic Five Ws: who, what, where, when and why. However, some newspaper articles and blogs simply present lists of tips, checklists and facts. Regardless of approach, writing a newspaper article or blog is a great way to convey the importance of active school travel to a broader audience outside of your immediate circle.

Required Time:

2–4 hours

Key Action Steps:

- » Identify three media outlets/platforms and the story you would like to tell or information you would like to share. Be sure to consider the time of year that topic would most likely be discussed. Media would likely be most interested in active school travel stories during back-to-school or when the weather turns cold and people need more encouragement to continue active travel to school. Also, if your topic is more theme-based—meaning addressing a particular benefit or concerns related to active school travel such as mental health, youth health and environmental sustainability—you can also approach media during holidays/milestones linked to those issues.
- » Write a brief media pitch, not more than five-sentences, summarizing your idea, stating how it connects with their audience and highlighting why you are the perfect person to write the article or blog. Send your pitch to one media/platform at a time, giving each a week to respond. Be sure to start pitching well in advance of your desired publishing date.
- » Here is a simple article or blog template to guide your writing:
 - Open with a strong statement, statistic, story or question that presents a specific problem or opportunity related to active school travel
 - Unpack your main three points in three paragraphs incorporating head, heart, story and statistic.
 - Conclude with a call to action or vision statement for the future.
- » If your pitch isn't accepted by a media outlet/platform, do not give up. Ask for feedback from the media contacts, and if you receive helpful notes, incorporate them as you write your article. You can then submit it to your school newsletter or your municipality to be published on their website. You can also self-publish if you have a blog site of your own. makers or municipal deputation.

Note(s):

When writing an active school travel advocacy article, avoid using a lecturing tone and ensure that your problem statements are balanced out by possibility statements. Also, consider and connect your ideas to the values and circumstances of your readers.

What is your active school travel advocacy idea?



Advocacy Activity

Description:

Required Time:

Key Action Steps:

Note(s):

From Reflection to Action



Which of the active school travel advocacy actions above is most aligned with your personality, passion and strengths?



When is the best time for you to lead this active school travel advocacy action?



Who can you approach for support with leading this active school travel advocacy action?



Based on your review of this Active School Travel Toolkit, what is your number one takeaway or idea?



Jay Pitter Placemaking is an award-winning, bi-national practice mitigating growing divides in cities across North America. The practice leads institutional city-building projects focused on public space design and policy, mobility equity, cultural planning, gender-responsive design, transformative public engagement and healing fraught sites. Additionally, Jay Pitter, Principal Placemaker, shapes urgent urbanism discourse through media platforms such as the Los Angeles Times and Canadian Architect. Ms. Pitter is a sought-after speaker who has delivered keynotes for organizations such as United Nations Women and the Canadian Urban Transit Association, and is also an urban planning lecturer who has engaged students at Cornell University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton University and numerous other post-secondary institutions. Guided by Ms. Pitter's expertise, which is located at the nexus of urban design and social justice, the team translates community insights into the built environment and urban policy.

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