

## **What is Active Transportation?**

Active transportation is any form of human-powered transportation – walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, in-line skating, skateboarding, snowshoeing and skiing.<sup>1</sup>

## **Why consider Active Transportation?**

Active transportation provides students the opportunity to be physically active on a regular basis<sup>2</sup> and helps them to achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity. Regular physical activity can reduce the growing rate of childhood obesity, type II diabetes, and chronic health conditions in later life.<sup>3</sup>

The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth 2011 reports that only 9% of boys and 4% of girls meet the new Canadian guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity daily for children. The report can be found at:

[http://activehealthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/ReportCard2011/AHKC2011\\_ShortForm\\_ENG\\_FINAL.pdf](http://activehealthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/ReportCard2011/AHKC2011_ShortForm_ENG_FINAL.pdf)

Physical activity prior to the school day helps prepare students for learning by increasing their ability to concentrate on academic pursuits, decreasing anxiety and stress, and increasing socialization.<sup>4</sup> It has similar benefits at the end of the school day.

Active transportation opportunities teach children important road and traffic safety skills. It equips them to safely explore their community rather than becoming 'cul-de-sac kids', limited to the entirely safe and unchallenging environments of their back yard or immediate neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup> They develop complex skills and judgment that may otherwise be unavailable to them.

## **Societal Benefits**

Active transportation also promotes several societal benefits including social, environmental, transportation and economic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). *What is Active Transportation?* <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/at-ta-eng.php>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Active Living Research. Active Transportation: Making the Link from Transportation to Physical Activity and Obesity. Summer 2009.*

<sup>4</sup> *Green Communities Canada. Saving Money and Time with Active School Travel. March 2010.*

<sup>5</sup> *Centre for Sustainable Transportation, University of Winnipeg. Child- and Youth-Friendly Land-Use and Planning Guidelines for British Columbia. April 30, 2010. Richard Gilbert and Catharine O'Brien.* <http://www.kidsonthemove.ca/uploads/Guidelines%20BC%206.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *PHAC. Op. cit.*

As a community utilizes more active transportation, it becomes more robust: the infrastructure improvements made to make walking to school safer (e.g. more sidewalks, bike lanes) benefit the whole community. Other members of the population utilize the improved infrastructure and reap the same health and safety benefits of increased daily exercise. Community connectedness improves: more people out walking means more people on community streets, meeting and interacting. Walking clubs and friendships develop. More ‘eyes on the streets’ also means more general community safety as people watch out for each other, their properties, and their children.

Fewer vehicles are on the road emitting environmental pollutants when a community engages in more active transportation. School busses make fewer stops which leads to less idling, less time sitting on a bus for those students who must be bussed, and less time other vehicles must stop for the on- and off-loading of students. Vehicle emissions lead to more smog, which in turn can be a trigger and possible cause for childhood asthma.<sup>7</sup>

Older school buses (built before 2007) expose children within the bus to air contaminants unless they are retrofitted with special filters and other equipment to reduce emissions. Bus drivers can also reduce self-pollution of the onboard environment for students by following strict anti-idling and other driving strategies. For more information, check out:

<http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/files/Factsheet-Operators-Sept%2028,%202010.pdf>

Vehicular traffic lessens as more students walk and bike to school and as more people move from place to place to carry out their daily chores, such as shopping, by active transportation. Traffic congestion is relieved at schools and major intersections by fewer cars on the road. Fewer accidents occur with fewer cars. The danger to students posed by parents driving to and from schools is reduced.

Economic benefits are realized as roads, travelled less frequently by vehicles, need less repair and maintenance. Fewer roads and intersections are required as traffic lessens, allowing for redirection of infrastructure spending from roads to parks, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and other recreational structures. Families spend less on gas and car repairs.

### **Why consider Active Transportation in the context of Health Promoting Schools?**

Walking is a basic form of active transportation. Most everyone can walk so it provides an opportunity for everyone to participate in this very healthy activity.

No special equipment or clothing is required, eliminating barriers to students’

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<sup>7</sup> California Air Resources Board (2002) *The Children’s Health Study*, Fact Sheet, available at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/chs/CHSfact.pdf>.

participation on the basis of resources. It is an activity that can be done in almost any location and at all times of the day or night.

Walking can be done at various levels of intensity and can be incorporated into daily activities. It is easy to build on previous accomplishment so adding distance and/or steps, thereby measuring improvement. It is perfect for goal-oriented people who thrive on measureable improvement and getting to the defined goal, such as a particular location.

### **Barriers to Active Transportation**

Canadian and American research has identified a number of factors that are barriers to children walking to school.<sup>8 9 10</sup> These barriers are often related to parental perceptions around child safety.

The following discusses commonly perceived barriers and strategies to reduce them.

### **Distance to School**

Boundary is a rural district and as such, many students live distances from schools that prohibit regular active transportation. The transportation policy of School District No. 51 (Boundary) provides bus transportation for K-3 students who live 4.0 km and 4-12 students who live 4.8 km. from their neighbourhood catchment school.

Intentional strategies may have to be used to increase active transportation when students live at too great a distance to walk or bike to school. An example is the use of *staging areas* – places where there is room for school busses to load and off-load some distance from the school and from where students can follow a safe route to school. Another strategy is to *walk during lunch* and break times.

### **Traffic Danger**

When active travel to school is increased, there are fewer traffic-related injuries among children.<sup>11</sup> “Given that traffic fatalities are the leading cause of injury death in Canada for children over the age of one year,” this is a huge societal benefit of active transport.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CDC Kids Walk to School. “Then and Now – Barriers and Solutions.”

[http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/then\\_and\\_now.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/then_and_now.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Christina Kober. “Kids Walk: Then and Now.” Clemson University. 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Health Promotion E-Bulletin. “Using Child-friendly Maps to Promote Active Transportation.”

<http://www.ohpe.ca/node/10496>.

<sup>11</sup> Green Communities Canada. “Saving Money and Time with Active School Travel” March 2010

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Institute of Child Health (2000). “The Health of Canada’s Children, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Canadian Institute of Child Health, Ottawa.

One researcher found that “50% of children hit by cars near schools are hit by cars driven by parents of students.”<sup>13</sup>

Exceeding the speed limit in and around schools in the 30 minute period before and after school was found to be common (2/3 of drivers).<sup>14</sup>

Active school transport must be coupled with the *teaching of road safety* to students of all ages. Students will learn important skills for walking and biking safely on roads with other traffic. This training will help students develop a sense of responsibility for their own safety in all situations.

Initiatives such as *no stopping zones*, *improved signage*, and *traffic redirection* around schools will also add to the safety of students. Speed tracker signs and increased speed limit enforcement may improve traffic safety around schools.

*Walking School Busses* and *Bicycle Trains* also add safety for younger students. “A Walking School Bus or Bicycle Train is simply a group of children walking or cycling to school with one or more adults (or senior students). Informal groups may involve two or three families who take turns walking or cycling with their children to school. It can also be formally developed and organized with a specific route consisting of established meeting points, specific times for the bus, and a particular list of children involved with volunteer parents assigned to act as Walking School Bus or Bicycle Train leaders. In some schools there are one or two buses coming from a few neighbourhoods. In other communities the Parent Advisory Council develops a network of Walking School Buses or Bicycle Trains, so that families from all neighbourhoods surrounding the school can take part.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Adverse Weather Conditions**

Students may not have adequate cold weather clothing for walking to school during the winter months. From anecdotal reports, school lost-and-found collections have numerous hats, mitts and other warm weather clothing that can be redirected to students without them. It is also known that most schools hold outdoor sport and activity days for which students must be warmly dressed. If warm clothing can be accessed for such special occasions, it should not be a barrier to regular active transportation to and from school.

### **Fear of Crimes against Children/Child Abduction**

All parents worry about the real but statistically small number of children who go missing from their schools/communities.

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<sup>13</sup> [CDC Kids Walk. op. cit. 4.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [ibid.](#)

<sup>15</sup> HASTE. “What is a Walking School Bus/Bicycle Train.” <http://www.hastebc.org/tools/what-walking-school-busbicycletrain>

“The majority of missing children turn out to be runaways. Abductions account for less than 1% of all missing children. Two thirds of abductions are by a parent.”<sup>16</sup>

More information can be found at:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x1998002-eng.pdf>

As more people in a community engage in active transportation, a situation of ‘*more eyes on the street*’ develops. In other words, more adults, youth and children are available to watch for, report, and intervene in suspicious situations in any number of situations. Streets and communities become safer because pedestrians are not isolated.

### **What Does This Mean to Parents?**

Active transportation practices at schools will mean different things to different people, depending on what your current practices and routines are around getting children to and from school.

If your children currently walk or bike to school, it will mean positive feedback for them, possibly with rewards such as stickers or points toward some goal. Encourage them to tell you about this feedback and why active transportation is a healthy choice. Ask them to take you on a tour of their route to school and point out where their friends live, where they cross the road and other points. Observe their road safety practices and where they would go for help if they ran into a problem.

If your children are bussed, you may be encouraged to have them consider active transportation rather than taking the bus. They may be dropped off at a staging area and be required to walk up to 1 km. to their school. Weather-appropriate clothing would be required. They may be encouraged to join a walking group at lunchtime.

If you drive your children to and/or from school, you may be required to stop farther away from the school than you are used to. This is an opportunity to walk 1 – 2 blocks to the school with your children, if it is your habit to see them get right up to the door or into the schoolyard. You may be rerouted away from students’ walking routes and crosswalks as you drive away.

You will have opportunities to engage in active transportation yourself. You will be asked if you are interested in volunteering as a leader of a walking school bus or bike train.

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<sup>16</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. *Missing and Abducted Children*. By Brian Reingold. Juristat. Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol. 18 no. 2. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x1998002-eng.pdf>

## **Additional Resources**

Many resources are available to promote active transport. Links to some are provided here.

The Centre for Sustainable Transportation.

<http://www.kidsonthemove.ca>

HASTE – Hub for Action on School Transportation Emissions

<http://www.hastebc.org/>

ASRTS - Active and Safe Routes to School

<http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/>

Green Communities Canada

<http://greencommunitiescanada.org/index.php>

Public Health Agency of Canada – Physical Activity

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php>