



**STAFF REPORT  
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Road Safety for School Children**

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|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Date:</b>             | September 12, 2016               |
| <b>To:</b>               | Board of Health                  |
| <b>From:</b>             | Acting Medical Officer of Health |
| <b>Wards:</b>            | All                              |
| <b>Reference Number:</b> |                                  |

**SUMMARY**

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School aged children who walk and cycle to school can establish healthy and active lifestyle patterns that continue throughout their lives. Unfortunately, in Toronto only 7% of students (grade 7-12) are meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines. In Toronto walking to school has declined from 59% to 45% (11-13 year olds) and 35% to 29% (14-17 year olds) since 1986.

While walking and cycling have many health benefits, people that walk and cycle face a higher risk of injury or death as a result of collisions with motor vehicles. Youth have a high proportion of pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities. Research has found that in Toronto the risk of pedestrian and cyclist injury in children travelling to school is associated with characteristics of the built environment, including road design and road speeds.

Many communities are interested in improving road safety in their neighborhoods, but complex decision-making structures in the City of Toronto make it difficult to understand how to request active transportation improvements.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Health about collaborative initiatives that promote road safety for school children, and specifically about a new community-based resource *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools - Understanding Your Policy Options in the City of Toronto*.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **The Acting Medical Officer of Health recommends that:**

1. The Board of Health request that the Acting Medical Officer of Health continue to collaborate with Transportation Services and its Road Safety Task Force to partner on initiatives that improve safety for all road users, especially for school children, and to promote awareness of the *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools*.
2. The Board of Health request that the Acting Medical Officer of Health collaborate with the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to consider promotion of road safety initiatives, such as the *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools*, to relevant community agencies and neighborhood groups in the City's Neighborhood Improvement Areas.
3. The Board of Health forward this report along with the *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools* to the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, le Conseil scolaire Viamonde, le Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud, for their consideration and endorsement, and ask them to promote it widely through avenues such as EcoSchools, and parent and school councils.
4. The Board of Health forward the report (September 30, 2016) and *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools* from the Acting Medical Officer of Health to the City-School Boards Advisory Committee, 8-80 Cities, Canadian Automobile Association, City of Toronto Road Safety Advisory Group, Cycle Toronto, Community Bicycle Network, Culture Link, David Suzuki Foundation, Green Communities Canada, Metrolinx, Ontario Public Health Association, Parachute, Share the Road Cycling Coalition, Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank, Toronto Police Services, Toronto Student Transportation Group, University of Toronto's School of the Environment and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Walk Toronto.

### **Financial Impact**

The recommendations have no financial impact beyond what has been approved in the current year's budget.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

In June 2014, City Council adopted a report from the Medical Officer of Health that reported on the results of Active Transportation Demonstration Projects. Speeding, particularly in residential areas, was a common concern reported by the communities in the demonstration projects. Speed contributed to the real and perceived lack of safety for non-motorized road users, especially young children.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.HL31.2>

City Council adopted a report in June 2014 that recommended the creation of a School Zone Safety Working Group. In April 2015, Council directed the General Manager, Transportation Services, in consultation with other City divisions to report to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee on a comprehensive plan to improve road safety, including the creation of a Road Safety Advisory Group. Toronto Public Health was identified as an internal partner on these groups.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.PW31.11>  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.PW2.11>

In June 2015, the City-School Boards Advisory Committee received a presentation titled "Build for Walking: Safe Environments for Active School Transportation". The Committee recommended the presentation be forwarded to the Medical Officer of Health, among others, for consideration in the development of the City of Toronto's Road Safety Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=11468>

In July 2016, City Council approved the Road Safety Plan (RSP) – an action plan to reduce the number of traffic-related deaths and serious injuries on Toronto's roads. The RSP emphasizes protection for the most vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, older adults and school children.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.PW14.1>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Regular physical activity such as walking and cycling has many important health benefits, including reducing the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some types of cancer. Increases in walking and cycling also have positive effects on mental health such as lower rates of depression and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> The overall risk of all-cause mortality is reduced when people increase the amount of physical activity in their daily routine.<sup>1</sup>

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guideline for Children and Youth recommends 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity daily for school aged children (5-11 years old).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, only 14% of 5- to 11- year-olds (and 5% of 12- to 17-year-olds) in Canada meet this recommendation.<sup>3</sup> The Healthy Futures: 2014 Toronto Public Health Student Survey showed that only 7% of students (grade 7-12) were meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines.<sup>4</sup>

Opportunities for physical activity that most youth have in their daily lives include travelling to school. School aged children who walk and cycle to school can establish healthy and active lifestyle patterns that continue throughout their lives. A Metrolinx Smart Commute study examining changes in school travel in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), showed that as the number of children and youth walking or biking to school declined over a period of 25 years, the number being driven/driving

more than doubled.<sup>5</sup> In Toronto, walking to school has declined from 59% to 45% (11-13 year olds) and 35% to 29% (14-17 year olds) since 1986.<sup>5</sup> The Healthy Futures Survey found that only 36% of youth in grades 7-12 had used active transport to school.<sup>4</sup>

While walking and cycling have many health benefits, people who walk and cycle face a higher risk of injury or death as a result of collisions with motor vehicles. Compared with people using cars or public transit, pedestrians and cyclists are more likely to be injured or killed per trip or per distance travelled. A recent report from Toronto Public Health noted that youth have high rates of pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Between 2008 and 2012, there were 109 pedestrian injuries and fatalities per 100,000 persons ages 15-19 and 53 pedestrian injuries and fatalities per 100,000 persons ages 5-14.<sup>1</sup>

Youth under 19 years of age also experienced a high rate of cyclist injury compared to other age groups. Between 2008 and 2012, there were 44 cyclist injuries and fatalities in persons ages 11-14 per 1 million cycling trips, and 38 cyclist injuries and fatalities in persons ages 15-19 per 1 million cycling trips.<sup>1</sup>

The speed of a vehicle has an impact on both the likelihood of a collision and the severity of injuries for those involved. One study estimated the risk of a pedestrian fatality at 50 km/hr to be twice as high as the risk at 40 km/hr and more than five times higher than the risk at 30 km/hr.<sup>6</sup> A recent review of the evidence of the health impact of reduced speeds (zones and limits) found a reduction in traffic collisions, injuries, traffic speed and volume, as well as improved perceptions of safety.<sup>7</sup>

Lowering speed limits is an important way to improve safety; however, they are only part of the solution. Recent research from York University has found that in Toronto the risk of pedestrian and cyclist injury in children travelling to school may be associated with characteristics of the built environment, including road design.<sup>8</sup> Street design that includes narrower and fewer travel lanes, medians, and other traffic calming measures are effective ways to reduce speeds and therefore lower collision rates.<sup>9</sup> The York University study also showed that low socio economic status increased the risk of child pedestrian collisions by 2.4 times.<sup>8</sup> Children from lower income families may live in high traffic areas with higher posted speeds, more road crossings and they encounter more motor vehicles every day, thereby increasing the risk of injury.<sup>10 11 12</sup>

## **COMMENTS**

### **Safer Streets Near Schools**

Toronto Public Health has been active in the area of active and sustainable transportation for a number of years. Individuals engage in active transportation by using their own energy to walk, cycle or roll. Toronto Public Health's Active Transportation Demonstration Projects (2014) found that although communities may be interested in improving road safety in their neighborhoods, complex decision-making structures in the City of Toronto make it difficult for residents to understand how to request active transportation improvements.

The *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools: Understanding Your Policy Options in the City of Toronto* (Attachment 1) is based on research into the barriers that exist for the public when requesting road safety improvements. The research was undertaken by a team of collaborators from the University of Toronto School of the Environment, Toronto Public Health, Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Cycling Think & Do Tank, and CultureLink Settlement Services. The project lead was Green Communities Canada, with Masters students from York University and University of Toronto. This research was funded by the Healthier Cities and Communities Hub Seed Grant initiative, a consortium of three funding partners: Toronto Public Health, The Wellesley Institute and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. It was also supported by Mitacs through the Mitacs-Accelerate Program, a research internship program.

The research was focused on the experience of individuals and groups who had successfully and unsuccessfully requested traffic calming improvements in their neighbourhoods. An aspect of the research was to examine City of Toronto processes, especially those related to traffic calming and speed reductions near schools. Interviews were conducted with City staff and Councillors who have been involved in neighborhood requests to obtain additional insights about the process.

The outcome of the research is a *Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools: Understanding Your Policy Options in the City of Toronto* (Attachment 1). The Guide brings together a number of policies from the City of Toronto that residents can use to request road safety street improvements. It explains the policies step-by-step, and shares advice about which ones may be most relevant to residents, especially school and parent councils.

The Guide provides health information on active transportation along with additional resources and information about the value of lowering speeds, traffic calming, pedestrian crossings and other intersection and crossing treatments. It has several sections that describe different possible paths to improve road safety. Path One focuses on reducing speed limits and illustrates the City policies for 30km/hr speed limit policy; 40 km/hr speed limit policy; and district-wide speed limit reduction. Path Two discusses traffic calming measures and provides information about the City's Traffic Calming Policy. Path Three focuses on improving intersections and major crossings. The Guide also includes a petition template, visioning worksheet, as well as sample emails and letters to help the community when they submit road safety improvement requests to the City.

The Guide will be promoted by the agencies who collaborated on the project through various strategies including newsletters, web based information and social media. While the primary target audience is parent and school councils, the Guide is also of value to local neighbourhood associations and community agencies who want to explore strategies to improve local road safety.

## **Improving Road Safety near Schools through Community Partnerships**

In addition to collaborating on the Guide, Toronto Public Health is also committed to improving road safety for children through actively collaborating with many partners and committees that support safe and active transportation in schools. These partnerships work to promote and support the creation of safe spaces in and around school zones.

Currently, Toronto Public Health works with school boards, parents, parent councils and students of all ages on School Travel Planning. School Travel Planning (STP) is a comprehensive program that brings community stakeholders together to: identify the barriers to active and sustainable transportation in a given school community using data collection tools; devise an action plan for dealing with the issues identified; then implement those actions; and measure the resulting changes in attitudes and travel behaviour.

Toronto Public Health is a member of the Toronto School Travel Planning Committee with Green Communities Canada, Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, Transportation Services and City Planning. This committee uses school travel planning facilitators to oversee and support school travel planning as requested. Its work also builds on the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Boards' Charter for Active, Safe and Sustainable Transportation.

In addition, TPH is a member of the GTHA Active and Sustainable School Transportation (ASST) Hub partnership. This group is in the development phase of a local Toronto (ASST) Hub. The group's goal is to get more children in Toronto to walk, bike or roll to school and to do so in a safe manner.

Toronto Public Health continues to work with Transportation Service's Road Safety Advisory Group and School Zone Safety Working Group to advocate for policies and initiatives that improve road safety

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### **SIGNATURE**

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## ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1: Guide to Safer Streets Near Schools: Understanding Your Policy Options in the City of Toronto

## REFERENCES

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