

Children's Mobility, Health and Happiness

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Abstract:

Context:

This presentation will report on the exciting developments in Canada for active school travel. We are utilizing a School Travel Planning (STP) model framework, created over the past three years, and applying research on children's health and happiness. With our partners, Dr. Catherine O'Brien of Cape Breton University and Dr. Guy Faulkner of the University of Toronto, and funding from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer through their Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) initiative, over the next two years we will disseminate the STP model while including indicators for measuring happiness. This groundbreaking project will shed new light on the links between active transportation, health, happiness and chronic disease prevention and provide the evidence, through ongoing measurements, to ensure the long-term sustainability of this work across Canada.

School-related travel is an important focus of chronic disease research and policy because the associated physical activity addresses risk factors for cancer, obesity and diabetes, while also reducing the direct production of harmful mobile source emissions (e.g. particulates, CO₂, NO_x, HC) that are associated with respiratory illnesses. In addition, adequate participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence can be critical to the prevention of chronic disease later in life through the establishment of healthy lifestyle patterns. STP offers a long-term approach to changing school transportation behavior, and is also consistent with cancer prevention policy recommendations that encourage multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral interventions that involve whole communities.

Aim:

The project aims to contribute to cancer prevention strategies, policies and practices regarding physical activity and healthy lifestyles and help prevent other chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, by applying best available knowledge.

Methodology:

Through matched funding support to each province and territory in Canada, Green Communities will facilitate and guide the implementation of the project to:

- Incorporate happiness indicators into existing STP survey tools.
- Provide data analysis at baseline and at the end of one year in each school.
- Through traffic observations and walkabouts.

Results/Conclusions:

The long term goal of STP is to stimulate modifications to municipal and school board policies and practices so that active transportation to and from school is commonplace. Through this project we hope to reach 48,000 students and their families in each province/territory in Canada, engage multiple community stakeholders in each region, and provide evidence to move the STP process into long-term sustainable policies.

Author Bio:

Since 1994 Kennedy has worked in the non-profit sector to promote and encourage people to walk, working extensively with municipalities and schools. Accomplishments include: Ontario's Active & Safe Routes to School; co-host Walk21 Toronto 2007; Walkability Roadshows; Walking Master Classes; 2007 World Record Walk; lead of a \$2.2M expansion of the School Travel Planning model framework for Canada.

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Project Objectives

The Canadian School Travel Planning (STP) is initiating active school travel projects in every province and territory in Canada between January 2010 and March 2012 and to demonstrate that these provincial and territorial projects will be on their way to sustaining themselves – or that a concerted effort has been made in this regard. As well, the STP process aims to contribute to Canadian cancer prevention strategies by stimulating modifications to local, regional, provincial/territorial and national policies and practices that will lead to active school travel once again being commonplace.



At the start of the project six provinces has an Active & Safe Routes to School program. As a result of the STP national pilot at October 2010 we disseminated the project across Canada with only have one Territory to bring on board - Nunavut.

Project Rationale

Many children around the world today travel to and from school in a car, and in Canada, many travel in a school bus - in some communities students travelling by vehicle

can be as high at 80% of the school population. Family travel decisions are based on distance, schools of choice, building 'big box' schools at the edges of communities, more single parent families, both parents in the workforce, time constraints and convenience. School zones have become one of the most dangerous places for children travelling actively, as they try to negotiate their way through the maze of illegally parked vehicles. The STP process aims to deal with school travel more efficiently and effectively while encouraging higher rates of AST thereby decreasing vehicle impacts at school zones over time.

Background

The Active & Safe Routes to School program has been around in Canada since 1996, but it wasn't showing significant signs of sustainability so in 2006 Green Communities conducted research into international best practice of School Travel Planning models. See <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/schooltravel.asp> for a copy of this document, updated in the spring of 2010.

Canada is a large and diverse country with policy and decision-making assigned at the provincial level, so, unlike the United Kingdom and New Zealand a 'one-size' approach to policies is not possible. The Canadian STP model framework recognizes the unique

differences across Canada and sets out to demonstrate that active school travel is possible and desirable in many different settings.

Using the results of the best practice research, we created the framework for a Canadian STP model, and we pilot tested it between 2007 to 2009 in 3 schools each in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. The results of this pilot project can be reviewed at <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/schooltravel.asp>.

In 2009 we expanded the project to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and The Yukon Territory.

In January 2010 we were awarded a \$2.2M Cdn grant from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer to disseminate the STP model framework across Canada. We are one of 7 projects funded through CPAC's initiative: CLASP (Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention).

The STP Process

STP is a proven Transportation Demand Management (TDM) tool that gets to the heart of school run issues. It is comprehensive process that brings together all key community stakeholders that have anything to do with how children travel to their local school, it systematically reviews current school zone and community traffic issues, collects data that help to set realistic targets and then creates a plan for each school.



This figure shows the typical community stakeholders involved in the STP process.

STP is both a document (a plan of action created for each school) and a process through which we can deliver active school travel programming as well work to influence and change school travel policies.

The STP process supports local, regional and national goals around

chronic disease prevention, injury prevention, traffic safety, climate change and air quality.

To complement the Municipal steering committee, each participating school creates their own STP committee, consisting of the Principal/Vice-Principal, a teacher or two, parent council representatives and parent volunteers, school administration, students if possible – along with the local STP facilitator.

Sustainable Happiness

The CPAC grant has allowed us to also incorporate two significant related pieces of work: the Child and Youth Friendly Land Use and Transportation Guidelines (see <http://www.kidsonthefirstmove.ca>); and the introduction of a Sustainable Happiness model created by Dr. Catherine O'Brien of Cape Breton University (see <http://www.sustainablehappiness.ca>).

Dr. O'Brien's definition of sustainable happiness is:

Happiness that contributes to individual, community and/or global well-being and does not exploit other people, the environment or future generations.

Sustainable Happiness questions have been inserted into our STP Family Survey and Catherine and her team are now creating curriculum for elementary schools which will be delivered to teachers and educators across Canada.

Sustainable Happiness Questions in STP Family Survey

- Q12. The way my child **usually** travels to school contributes to his/her:
 - physical well-being, e.g. healthy heart, bones and muscles
 - emotions and overall well-being, e.g. happiness, relationship with friends
 - well-being of our community, e.g. students get to know neighbourhood
 - environmental well-being, e.g. less pollution

Evaluation

The University of Toronto is a significant partner in the project, assisting with the creation of the survey instruments and the analysis of the data collected from across Canada. For the first time in Canada we will have comprehensive data on the journey to/from school.

We are collecting four types of information from schools at the start of the project (baseline) and at the end of the school year (follow-up):

- Classroom Survey
- Family Survey
- Neighbourhood Walkabout
- Traffic Observations