

Walk This Way: Bringing Active School Travel Plans to Ontario School Boards

By

Krystal Perepeluk

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Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to assess the Halton Active and Safe Routes to School Project Plan and to discuss the applicability of the Halton project as a model for active transportation projects in other Ontario school boards. The Halton Project was analysed using the Green Communities Canada *School Travel Plan Document Requirements* to discover if it is a good example of a School Travel Plan (STP). The *School Travel Plan Document Requirements* were published by GCC to help schools and communities successfully implement comprehensive active transportation initiatives.

Methods employed in this report are a literature review of school active transportation, a review of the need for active school travel initiatives and reviews of current School Travel Plan policies and/or programs in other countries. In addition, a detailed case study of the Halton Active and Safe Routes to School Project was used to demonstrate what is presently being done in Ontario. The findings of the analysis were used to make policy recommendations and suggest that School Travel Plans be made part of the policy mandate in all Ontario School Boards. This report also recommends components of those plans that should be included if School Travel Plans are to be expanded in Ontario. The results of the analysis, identified best practices and recommendations are as follows.

International Best Practices:

The analysis of the international cases served to identify best practices from other programs around the world. These best practices can be applied to Active School Travel Plans starting up in Ontario school boards, as they are methods that have been

tested in similar schooling structures. In looking at other programs internationally the essential components for effective School Travel Plans were as follows:

1. A greater policy structure exists to support individual schools;
2. School Travel Plans are tailored to the needs of individual schools;
3. A school champion or individual school advisor is present who oversees School Travel Plan process;
4. The school champions or school advisors are managed by a higher agency from consistent programming;
5. Proper planning and pilot studies are undertaken before implementation.

Halton Best Practices:

Halton presents an Ontario example of a wide-reaching Active School Travel Plan program run within a school board. The findings of this report indicate several themes within the Halton project that are necessary to successful active school travel programs. The findings provide a model of the necessary components for the expansion of School Travel Plans into Ontario school board mandate into the future. Best practices from the Halton project that should be applied to other active school travel programs in Ontario are as follows:

1. A community champion is a strong component of the program;
2. Comprehensive walkabouts take place at each school to tailor the program to individual needs;

3. There is recognition of the importance of individual school circumstances, and school staff and administration are involved with the school board and stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation process;
4. Involvement of many different City and school departments.

In order to analyze the Halton Active and Safe Routes to School Project it was assessed on each guideline of the *STP Document Requirements*. The more STP elements present in the Halton plan, meant the more comprehensive the Halton plan was. The STP Document requirements are divided into 'required' and 'desirable'. It was found that Halton had 32 of the 34 required elements and 7 out of 19 desirable elements. Therefore, the Halton project serves as a good example of a School Travel Plan in Ontario. However, gaps were seen in accountability, the establishment of permanent roles and data collection. Therefore, this report recommends:

1. A school board wide School Travel Plan policy should be established. HDSB currently manages much of the program and implementation, but policy governing the mandate of the program has not been established;
2. The 'community champion' as outlined in the Halton Plan should be made a more permanent role with duties assigned to ensure consistency across future school travel plans;
3. A 'community champion' should be present in every school, with this position being maintained and monitored by the school board. For example, the position would be similar to the School Travel Advisor in the UK;
4. In terms of implementation, baseline data should be collected in the same season or time of year the program will be running and on the population that will be walking. This is to ensure results can be compared accurately and changes can

be seen. Data for the Halton pilot and project plan were collected at a different time of year and season from the actual implementation. Furthermore, baseline data was only collected from students in grades 3, 5 and 6 whereas implementation was with students in kindergarten through grade 8.

Overall, the Halton project serves as an example of a good School Travel Plan and is a comprehensive model of how School Travel Plans should be expanded into other school boards and schools in Ontario. The model used in this project should serve as the basis for expansion into other school boards. This report recommends that School Travel Plans be expanded throughout Ontario school boards with the Halton Active and Safe Routes to School Project serving as a model with the following recommendations:

1. The Green Communities Canada School Travel Plan model should be adopted as a standard for all Active and Safe Routes to School programs in Ontario,
2. The School Travel Plan model should be adopted by Ontario School Boards and implemented in each of their respective elementary and middle schools, as per example in Halton District School Board.
3. If Ontario school boards adopt a School Travel Plan, data on active school travel should be collected in the same manner across all Ontario school boards. Data should be collected at baseline from a representative sample of all grades of children being targeted. Having a consistent School Travel Plan model in each Ontario school board will provide consistency in programming and a basis for comparison.
4. In order for the STP model to work, partnerships with planners, teachers, parents, school boards and municipalities are required. School boards need to

work with these entities to make their programs works in each respective school. Halton did this, however it is an important part of the STP model and this collaboration should continue in each respective region if expanded to other Ontario school boards.

The recommendations being made combine the comprehensive best practices of international School Travel Plans, the Halton Active Safe Routes to School Project and address any gaps for future School Travel Plans. As school budgets get tighter, in some cases, and the number of children qualifying for bussing increases more focus should be put on school active transportation in Ontario school board mandate. Granted many children are unable to walk due to distance, time or other factors, but there are many children who would benefit from Active School Travel Plans but are a part of schools or school boards that do not have them.

Moving into the future, this report has shown examples of how having consistent School Travel Plans across Ontario through school boards can create a positive environment for active school travel. Green Communities Canada has set standard School Travel Plan requirements that make it easier for School Travel Plans to be implemented across Ontario. Expanding the project in Halton to all Ontario school boards allows for more consistent data collection on active school travel and allows for comparison across communities, schools and school boards. Halton shows how Active School Travel Plans can come together under the direction of a school board and community champion and the positive change that takes place. This positive change is seen not only in the school and community but in the children as promoting active transportation among elementary and middle school students allows them to set a strong foundation for a healthy lifestyle that will grow with them into adulthood.