

WALKABILITY & CHILDREN

Remember walking to school as a child – through the blizzard, uphill both ways? That is a memory the majority of children today will never have, exaggerated or not. In the late 1960s, around 90% of students walked or cycled to school, today it's 30%. (CDC, ND; CRB, 2008)

While the biggest issue that discourages children from walking to school is parental fear, the built environment also plays a role in shaping our children. As a result, child obesity continues to rise at unprecedented levels. Studies are finding that limited mobility in their neighbourhood impacts children's independence, self-esteem, sense of responsibility, tolerance and social interaction skills. (Crowhurst Lennard, 2007; Vachon, 2007; Crider, 2007)

In an effort to improve opportunities for children to safely move about their neighbourhoods, schools, parent groups and municipalities are looking at a number of options, especially around ensuring children can safely walk to school. (CDC, ND; Van Vliet, 1983; Denver et. al, ND)

Walking school buses – a group of children, sometimes with an adult depending on their age, walk to school together, picking up other students along the way.

Walking promotion – schools hold 'walk to school' days, sometimes monthly, sometimes weekly encouraging parents to walk with their children to school

Improving infrastructure – a lack of sidewalks is often an impediment to walking to school. Schools are working with municipalities to assess the connectivity of sidewalks in their neighbourhoods and many new sidewalks or sidewalk connections are being added.

Improving crosswalk safety – painting new crosswalks, repainting existing ones, improving traffic signage or even stationing volunteers or crossing guards at intersections ensures improved safety for children walking to school.

Traffic calming – speed bumps, reduced and enforced speed limits, and other traffic calming methods slow traffic in the neighbourhoods and around schools where children will be walking, greatly reducing the chance of accident and injury.

It takes more than the occasional playground to make children an integral part of our communities and to ensure children feel they belong and are welcome there.

REFERENCES:

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CTV.ca newstaff. *Few kids walk to school anymore, study finds*. December 3, 2008. www.ctv.ca
Crowhurst Lennard, Suzanne. *Designing Healthy Cities for Children*. Presentation at IMCL Conference, 2007.
Vachon, Genevieve. *Fighting Teenagers Sedentarity: the challenges of mobility in exurbia*. Presentation at IMCL Conference, 2007.
Crider, Linda. *Safe Routes to School*. Presentation at IMCL Conference, 2007.
Denver, Kohl and Partners, and Chael, Cooper and Associates. *Design Guidelines for pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood schools*. ND.
Van Vliet, Willem. *Children's Travel Behavior*. Ekistics. Jan/Feb 1983.

TO READ:

Waving good-bye to the bus by Caitlin McDevitt talks about how increasing transportation costs of bussing students is being addressed through walking school buses.

Find it at:

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/157579>

TO WATCH:

How walkable is your neighbourhood? Try this quiz and see how your neighbourhood rates.

Find it at: <http://www.stalbert.ca/smart-growth-public-consultation>

TO DISCUSS:

To discuss this week's topic, article or video, join our Smart Growth St. Albert Fan page on Facebook.

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PLACES TO SEE:

In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Sherwood Forest Elementary School found that only 20 – 30 students were walking to school, less than one percent of their students.

They implemented a number of initiatives: worked with the City to add a connecting sidewalk between two existing sidewalks, holding "Walk to School with us this Friday" events and encouraging the students to wear their school t-shirts, partnering with a local church so families living far-away could park in the church lot and participate by walking the three-quarters of a mile from the church to the school, stationing volunteers along the route to ensure safety at crosswalks.

As a result, about 175 people participated.

The articles and video referenced in this Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the position of the City of St. Albert and are meant to encourage debate and discussion.

NOTE: There is no full bulletin this week.