

City of Mississauga Corporate Report



Date: March 16, 2023 To: Chair and Members of General Committee From: Geoff Wright, P.Eng, MBA, Commissioner of Transportation and Works	Originator's files:
	Meeting date: March 29, 2023

Subject

Review of Mississauga School Streets Pilot Project

Recommendation

That the report entitled "Review of Mississauga School Streets Pilot Project", dated March 16, 2023 from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works, be received.

Executive Summary

- The School Streets Pilot was carried out in May-June 2022 at two locations.
- The key objectives of the School Streets Pilot were to increase awareness of active school travel and to increase active travel mode share for school trips.
- Data collected before, during and after the pilot demonstrates that: School Streets are an effective tool for increasing awareness of active school travel; they are supported by a majority of residents surveyed; and they are effective at increasing active travel and decreasing driving for school trips.
- School Streets are not necessarily appropriate for all school sites; assessing schools for their fit against specific criteria is key.
- Based on the results of the Mississauga pilot, School Streets appear to be a promising tool for promoting active transportation and reducing traffic congestion related to school travel. Staff are preparing to collect one-year follow-up data in Spring 2023 and are engaging with external stakeholders to develop a plan for a long term sustainable program.

Background

Mississauga's Transportation Master Plan identified that 10% of all trips in Mississauga are school trips, and that the number of Mississaugans under 19 years of age is expected to

increase by 14% from 2016 to 2041. Thus, school travel will be an enduring and increasing part of Mississauga's travel profile. Currently, approximately 30% of Mississauga students arrive to school by car. Many school zones face temporary congestion during drop-off and pick-up times, which presents traffic dangers, high concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions, and lost opportunities for students to get physical activity and develop the skills needed to travel actively and independently.

The City received funding from the Ontario Active School Travel fund in 2021, provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and administered by Green Communities Canada, to pilot a concept called School Streets. School Streets create temporary car-free environments in front of schools, with the goals of promoting active transportation, improving safety of the street during school drop-off and pick-up, and building community through providing a positive and unique opportunity for members of the school community to interact with one another.

The Mississauga School Streets Pilot project was delivered through a partnership between Green Communities Canada and 80 Cities. 80 Cities provided technical support on the project and monitored the project through ongoing check-ins, provided support with analysis of the evaluation data, and ultimately published a report of the findings across all Ontario municipalities where School Streets were piloted (Appendix 1).

At its March 30, 2022 meeting, General Committee reviewed a report entitled "Memorandum of Understanding for School Streets Pilot Project" (Appendix 2) which outlined the project. General Committee subsequently approved the staff recommendation to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Peel District and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Boards in order to run the School Streets Pilot Project (GC-0179-2022).

Present Status

The School Streets Pilot, including analysis of evaluation data, is now complete. Based on the results of the evaluation, School Streets appears to be a promising tool for reducing traffic congestion and promoting active transportation related to school travel. Staff are preparing to collect one-year follow-up data in Spring 2023 and are engaging with external stakeholders to develop a plan for a sustainable program over the long-term.

In April 2022, Mayor Crombie and Councillor Fonseca sent a letter to the Ministry of Education (Appendix 3) to advocate for the continuation of the Ontario Active School Travel fund. Unfortunately, this funding was not included in the Ministry's 2022-2023 budget.

Comments

1. Logistics of the Pilot

Planning for this pilot involved a comprehensive review of all elementary school sites in Mississauga to determine which schools to include (see Appendix 4 for a description of inclusion criteria).

Staff developed a shortlist of schools based on these criteria, and ultimately three schools agreed to participate in the pilot: Hillside Public School (Ward 2), Brian W. Fleming Public School (Ward 3) and St. Alfred Separate School (Ward 3). Due to their proximity to one another, the pilots at Brian W. Fleming and St. Alfred were implemented together. St. Alfred did not meet all inclusion criteria (i.e., their proportion of students living outside of school boundaries was higher than the 10% cut-off value, at 14%); however they were included in this pilot because they met all other criteria and were in close proximity to another participating school that did meet all criteria.

Staff obtained permits for temporary road closures in front of the participating school sites based on drop-off and/or pick-up times. The afternoon closure times were longer to accommodate requests by the participating school communities to use the closure area for student activities during class time leading up to dismissal. Volunteers monitored the barriers at the ends of the closure and escorted exempt vehicles through the closure area at a walking speed, when needed. Exempt vehicles included local residents with homes within the closure area, families with identified needs for accessibility accommodations, special education buses, and school staff.

The School Streets Pilot was carried out over three weeks in May-June 2022. At the Ward 2 location, the street was closed for 35 minutes during the morning drop-off period and for 50 minutes during the afternoon pick-up period. At the Ward 3 location, the street was closed for 70 minutes during the afternoon pick-up period only, at the request of the school communities. This closure was longer to accommodate the staggered dismissal times of the two participating schools.

2. Key Objectives and Results

The key objectives of the School Streets Pilot were to increase awareness of active school travel, to measure whether School Streets are acceptable to local community members, and to increase active travel mode share and decrease driving mode share for school trips.

Data was collected to evaluate the pilot's effectiveness at achieving its stated objectives. Data included:

- Community Surveys distributed to parents of students at participating schools and local residents, and advertised via City of Mississauga social media, conducted before and after the pilot (completed at both sites, all three schools)
- Classroom travel surveys conducted by teachers before, during and after the pilot (completed at both sites, Hillside and St. Alfred only)

- Active transportation counts conducted by City staff before, during and after the pilot (completed at both sites, all three schools)
- Automated Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Counts gathered before, during and after the pilot (completed at both sites, all three schools). AADT Counts collected data on the closure street as well as potential locations for diverted traffic identified by staff.

(a) Objective 1: Increase awareness of active school travel

Based on data from the Community Surveys, it was found that School Streets are an effective tool for increasing awareness of active school travel. Post-pilot the proportion of respondents saying their child normally travels by an active mode (i.e., bike, walk or roll) increased dramatically compared to before the pilot, while the proportion who reported driving their child to/from school decreased dramatically as well. Although self-reported measures tend to over-report active travel, the results reflect a greater awareness of active travel as being a preferred option after the pilot was complete.

(b) Objective 2: Measure acceptability of School Streets

Acceptability of School Streets to communities was also measured via the Community Surveys, where it was found that School Streets are supported by a majority of residents surveyed after implementation of the pilot. Acceptability to local community members increased after the pilot had finished compared to before, demonstrating that seeing the concept in real life helped gain buy-in from residents.

(c) Objective 3: Increase active travel and decrease driving to school

Objectively-measured data demonstrate that School Streets are highly effective at increasing active travel and decreasing driving for school trips. While they do disperse traffic away from the front of the school, they do not necessarily create traffic congestion elsewhere, depending on the location.

At the Ward 2 location, observed active transportation volumes increased by 45% during the pilot compared to pre-pilot, and remained elevated by 31% after the pilot, compared to pre-pilot. Traffic across all count locations decreased by 38% in the morning and by 15% in the afternoon.

At the Ward 3 location, active transportation volumes increased by 41% during the pilot compared to pre-pilot, and remained elevated by 6% after the pilot, compared to pre-pilot. Traffic across all count locations decreased by 10% during the afternoon closure.

At both the Ward 2 and Ward 3 locations, two weeks after the pilot had finished, all count locations saw decreases in overall traffic compared to baseline levels.

See Appendix 5 for detailed results for each of the three key objectives.

3. Challenges and Limitations

Despite the successes discussed above, some challenges were experienced during the pilot.

(a) Congestion

Localized congestion occurred at one of the alternate routes in the Ward 3 location, despite this not being an issue at the Ward 2 location. Research evidence from other Canadian School Streets pilots suggested this would not be an issue. There are a number of potential reasons to explain the varying results across the two Mississauga locations.

- (i) Students out of boundary: St. Alfred (Ward 3 location) did not meet the cut-off criteria for proportion of students living outside of the school boundaries. This combined with limited options for alternate off-site parking likely contributed to the congestion experienced on Tyneburn Crescent directly across from St. Alfred.
- (ii) Street design: The grid network street design at the Ward 2 location provided more options for through-traffic to avoid the closure, compared to the Ward 3 location which provided more limited options for alternate routes.
- (iii) Off-site parking options: The Ward 2 location is in close proximity to a City of Mississauga community centre with a large parking lot, which provided an option for caregivers to park and walk part way (based on anecdotal evidence).
- (iv) Road classification: Havenwood Drive, the street closed for the Ward 3 location, is a minor collector road, creating a higher likelihood of non-local traffic seeking alternate routes; Kelly Road, in Ward 2, is a local road.

(b) Volunteers

Staff time required for volunteer coordination and to monitor the street closure was higher than anticipated. Although the program recruited large numbers of Grade 8 and high school student volunteers, it proved difficult to recruit enough adult volunteers from the community to attend consistently, despite the offer of a modest honorarium.

(c) Community Acceptance

Although a majority stated they supported the concept of School Streets and there was an overall shift to greater acceptance of School Streets after the pilot compared to before its launch, 48% of community members remained unconvinced that restricting vehicle access near school zones was justified (38% said “no”, and another 10% were “unsure”). The most common reasons given for not supporting School Streets included time pressures related to work travel and transporting multiple children; perceptions that traffic congestion would be pushed to surrounding streets; and feeling that personal freedoms were being restricted by making driving a more difficult option.

Strategic Plan

The School Streets Pilot Program aligns with the *Move* pillar in the City's Strategic Plan. In addition, it also aligns with other key City strategies:

- Transportation Master Plan (TMP) –The School Streets pilot project aligns with the TMP vision to expand opportunities for active transportation for school trips, as well as the goal to enhance Mississauga's School Walking Routes program (Action 57).
- Vision Zero –The School Streets pilot project is one of the included actions of Mississauga's Vision Zero strategy (Action 90).
- Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) –The School Streets pilot project addresses the goal to develop targeted outreach and engagement opportunities for youth in Mississauga (Action 20-3).

Engagement and Consultation

Engagement with internal and external stakeholders has been foundational to the design of the Mississauga School Streets pilot project. A Project Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the Peel District School Board, Dufferin Peel District School Board, Student Transportation of Peel Region, Region of Peel, and Traffic Safety Council helped set the parameters of the project based on shared goals.

City staff presented the project to Traffic Safety Council in June 2021 and to the General Committee of City Council in March 2022, and received strong support at both.

City Councillors with shortlisted schools in their ward, including schools that ultimately agreed to participate in the pilot project, were given the opportunity to identify potential points of alignment and/or conflict with other community projects. All Councillors who were approached expressed support for the project. Subsequently, school board staff, school councils and staff from participating schools were consulted on the best approach for the project in their communities, including preferred dates and project scope.

Beginning in January 2022, City staff coordinated local project planning teams for each site of the pilot, including a diverse range of stakeholders (e.g., local residents, parents and guardians of children at the school, school board trustees and superintendents, representatives of local BIAs and community organizations, local high school students). City staff worked with these teams to create detailed plans of how the pilot would be implemented in those school communities. Each local team met virtually three times between January and the launch of the pilot, plus a community meeting open to the general public hosted for each location of the pilot.

A comprehensive communications strategy was delivered to ensure that all impacted community members had the opportunity to learn about and contribute to the project. In addition to the community meetings mentioned above, communications included notifications by social

media, digital signs within local community centres and libraries, mobile roadside signs, traffic signs, and a project web page; letters mailed to residents, and door-to-door communications and information packages for residents delivered by City staff and volunteers; and two community pop-up events per location. School staff, as well as members of agencies and organizations that worked closely with the local school communities, also helped advertise the project and opportunities for members of the community to be involved. Once the pilot had launched, project staff coordinated a photo opportunity with Mayor Crombie, Councillor Fonseca, and other dignitaries from the City and school boards, after which a news release was created to share what the pilot looked like in action.

Student leaders in each of the participating communities also played an important role in the planning and implementation of activities during the afternoon closure periods, which brought the School Streets to life and created a welcoming space for community members to interact in the newly-created space. Over 100 Grade 5 and Grade 8 students were engaged as ambassadors for the pilot at their schools, and over 50 high school students and five post-secondary students participated as members of local project planning teams and as volunteers to support activities (high school students) and monitor the closure area (post-secondary students) during the street closures. All students were provided with a letter of recommendation from the City of Mississauga recognizing their contributions to the project, and high school and post-secondary students were given the option to claim their hours volunteered toward community service credits for graduation. Any volunteer completing six or more shifts was also offered an honorarium.

The pilot also led to participating schools taking on other initiatives to promote active school travel. All three schools participated in a “launch” event promoting active school travel in advance of the pilot. Once the pilot had started, all schools participated in a number of additional activities, including bike repair and helmet fitting events led by members of Peel Multicultural Council; a bike rodeo led by City staff and conducted with support from Peel Regional Police; and bike and helmet giveaways with refurbished bikes donated from Roy McMurtry Youth Centre and Peel Multicultural Council. The Ward 3 schools also led a “Walk Across Canada” initiative within their schools to promote walking, and the Ward 2 school submitted an application to Peel Region for a new bike rack once the pilot had finished, as the pilot saw their existing bike racks being used beyond capacity.

Financial Impact

The funding for this project was provided through an Ontario Active School Travel grant (PN A21156, in the amount of \$30,000) and supplemented by the annual budget for the School Walking Routes program (PN 21156, in the amount of \$7,500), which this pilot supported. The in-kind contribution requirement of the Ontario Active School Travel grant was met through the provision of project management services and staffing of the street closure areas, when needed.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the Mississauga pilot, School Streets appear to be a promising tool for promoting active transportation and reducing traffic congestion related to school travel. Staff are preparing to collect one-year follow-up data in Spring 2023 and are engaging with external stakeholders to develop a plan for a sustainable program over the long term.

Attachments

Appendix 1: Ontario School Streets Project Final Report: https://www.880cities.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSSP-Summary-Report_Updated_.pdf

Appendix 2: Memorandum of Understanding for School Streets Pilot Project

Appendix 3: Letter to Minister of Education

Appendix 4: Inclusion Criteria for the Mississauga School Streets Pilot Project

Appendix 5: Key Objectives and Results for the Mississauga School Streets Pilot Project



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