

School Streets to shape child-friendly cities



Photo: Sergio Gatto

What are ‘School Streets’ and why do they matter?

School Streets are accessible spaces around schools where *“walking and cycling is prioritised over motorised traffic, at least during school drop-off and pick-up times. Timed traffic restrictions can be enforced using cameras or temporary bollards.”* Motorised traffic is restricted in favour of walking and cycling, at least during drop-off and pick-up times.

Children are particularly vulnerable to air pollution and at risk from road collisions with cars. School streets address these issues by reallocating public space towards children and away from cars at the time when children are most exposed to air pollution. They provide immediate health benefits, through improving air quality in the vicinity of the school, and they also encourage physical activity by inviting families to switch from driving to walking, cycling or public transport.

The rise of School Streets can be attributed to their affordability, simplicity of concept, ease of implementation and popularity amongst children, parents and teachers alike. Evaluation and monitoring of existing initiatives show measurable, positive impacts in most cases, and demonstrates that School Streets can contribute real solutions to some of our most pressing urban challenges.

School drop-offs represent a significant share of motorised traffic. Transport for London estimated in 2018 that 25% of weekday morning peak car trips are caused by school drop-offs, a total of 254,000 trips a day¹. From 2006 to 2016, around one in three trips to school in the Brussels region was made by car.²

Key figures and benefits of School Streets

Reduction in car travel: According to a TfL study on the impacts of School Streets in London, parents report driving less by car to school, (an 18% reduction).³ A similar study in Oxford on School Streets showed a 22% reduction. The overall share of cars amongst all school trips was reduced by 3 (Vienna, Austria)⁴ to 7 percentage points (Oxfordshire, UK)⁵. An evaluation of School Streets in Flanders, Belgium and Edinburgh, Scotland identified an overall reduction of car traffic, not only on the School Streets themselves but also in the surrounding streets. The reduction in average traffic flows ranged from 6% (Flanders)⁶ to 9% (Edinburgh)⁷.

Improved road safety: In England and Wales, 35% of incidents where children were killed or seriously injured occurred during the travel to and from school⁸, a striking illustration of the need to provide safer routes to schools. Children, parents and teachers across various countries report that the streets feel safer once a School Street has been created: 65% of pupils in Oxfordshire⁹, 66% of parents in Edinburgh¹⁰ and 87% of teachers in the Flemish region¹¹ report that School Streets feel safer.

Better air quality: School streets curb air pollution by reducing motorised traffic near schools. In Brent, Enfield and Lambeth in the UK, School Streets led to an impressive 23% reduction in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution.¹² In the Flemish Region of Belgium, NO₂ levels around School Streets were reduced by around 20%.¹³ Similarly, a study of London schools found that a School Street reduced outdoor particle concentrations by up to 36%.¹⁴

More active travel: School streets encourage walking and cycling to school, though the extent to which they can do so depends strongly on the local context. In London, 27% of parents reported walking more and 6% reported cycling more as a consequence of School Streets.¹⁵ In Flemish School Streets, 3% more cyclists have been counted throughout the day, compared to before their introduction.¹⁶ In nine School Streets evaluated in Oxfordshire, active travel increased by 6.3%.¹⁷ In Hackney, London, the number of children cycling to school increased by 51% between 2017 and 2019¹⁸, while the number of children walking to school went up by 30% during the same period.

Both parents and children support School Streets: Surveys in Belgium¹⁹, Canada²⁰, France²¹ and the United Kingdom²² repeatedly show that School Streets are popular amongst parents and children, with a strong majority of both supporting them. Likewise, a survey carried out among residents of five European major cities by Kantar Public on behalf of the Clean Cities Campaign revealed that an average of 71% of residents supports the creation of School Streets.²³



In a nutshell, School Streets support child-friendly cities in the following ways:

- ▶ School Streets have a positive effect on traffic reduction, as well as general improvements in road safety, without causing disruptions in nearby streets.
- ▶ School Streets have a considerable positive effect on air quality, reducing pollution levels on streets surrounding schools.
- ▶ School Streets are a good starting point towards a modal shift to active travel, and have proven to increase the percentage of pupils walking and cycling to school.
- ▶ School Streets can help children form healthy active travel habits at an early age, making them more likely to continue walking and cycling as adults.
- ▶ School Streets are popular – they receive support from children, parents, teachers and the wider community.
- ▶ School Streets put child-friendly urban planning front and centre, and support stronger community bonds.

Recommendations by the Clean Cities Campaign:

- 1 Develop a clear plan** to roll out School Streets in front of all kindergartens, elementary and middle schools by 2030 at the latest, with intermediate annual targets.
- 2 Roll out temporary street closures first**, and use the time to engage with residents, schools, parents and children themselves in the definition of the project. Consider tactical urbanism as a way to roll out a temporary School Street.
- 3 Make School Streets permanent.** Limiting hours to only drop-off and pick-up times can work for temporary School Streets but ultimately, most School Streets should become permanent. This will support a lasting change of transport patterns and make enforcement easier.
- 4 Install and maintain the necessary (basic) infrastructure.** School Streets require (basic) infrastructure to ensure permanent closure of the street to cars, such as bollards, flower pots, barriers. Some of these can be built locally, such as the 'Wikiblocks' used in Toronto. Plan an awareness raising campaign with parents who drive on the benefits of School Streets. Consider incentivising and promoting autonomous initiatives by parents and teachers, such as bike to school days.
- 5 School Streets need to be coupled with a programme to increase the safety and ease of journeys to and from school by bike, on foot or with public transport.** It is essential that the way to school be safe, which usually also requires infrastructure improvements. Appointing mobility managers for each school (district) should also be considered to act as a link between residents and the school community on the one hand, and city hall and the local transport authority on the other hand.

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