

Why not ask a local store, church, community centre or other neighbourhood hub for permission to use their parking lots for drop-offs?

École Howden in Winnipeg made arrangements with the local CanadInns to use their parking lot adjacent to the school yard for this purpose. It's a win-win situation – the hotel contributes to the broader community, the parents and school buses have a safe place to drop off their children and the students get to run and play in the school yard for the rest of their trip to school.

4.6 NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKABOUTS AND WALKABILITY SURVEYS

Conducting a Neighbourhood Walkabout and doing a Walkability Survey can be a useful tool to understand the barriers and best routes for children to walk or bike to school. The tools below will guide you in this process.

The Neighbourhood Walkabout should be organized to coincide with pick-up or drop-off at the school. All stakeholders should be identified and present to participate in the walkabout. Determine the scope of the walkabout before you begin; i.e., decide if you will look only at the area immediately surrounding the school, or if you also need to look at safety concerns further away.

Doing the walkabout and survey helps to identify and understand the safety issues around the school through direct observations of the problems. Some common issues include traffic congestion around the school and excessive speeds.

At the end of your Neighbourhood Walkabout, you want to end up with a written description of the problem(s), aided visually with area maps. Maps can be obtained through the school division or from your local municipal transportation engineer.



Photo: Nick Gaudin, Teacher, École Howden (Winnipeg)

Walkabouts are an integral component of the School Travel Planning process, involving members of the school community, local municipality, elected officials and the police service. If you are developing a School Travel Plan, please follow the specific instructions for a Neighbourhood Walkabout from your School Travel Planning Facilitator.

Landscape Architecture Magazine reports: "If you pine for the days when kids walked or rode their bikes to school, try fixing the sidewalks. In areas where municipalities installed curb cuts, traffic lights and other pedestrian-friendly changes, researchers saw a 15% increase in walking or biking among school children."

Through this process you'll find out what the current parking allowances and restrictions are, where the conflict between pedestrians/cyclists and vehicles happens and why. Out of this process, an agreed upon action plan can be developed. Be sure to document who will do what and when. Agree to timelines and schedule follow-up meetings to keep everyone on track.

Who to include

Neighbourhood Walkabout stakeholders could include:

- School administration and staff (teachers, principal and/or vice-principal)
- Parents
- Students
- Local police
- School trustee for the area
- Local city or town councillor
- Municipal traffic engineer
- School division staff involved in transportation coordination
- Local interested residents
- Representation from other schools in the area, especially if schools are back-to-back or in close proximity

Start by having the principal or parent representative give an overview of the issues and update the group on relevant information such as recent 24 hour traffic/volume counts, results of previous traffic studies, collision statistics, what's been tried in the past, etc. (This information can be obtained through your municipal transportation department.) Be sure to allow a few minutes for introductions of stakeholders.

Ask attendees of the walkabout to sign in and provide contact information for future reference and distribution of minutes. Before you begin, designate someone to take minutes of the

discussion, and encourage everyone to write down their observations to help later with the discussion.

Create your checklist

In the pages that follow, you'll find a checklist and other information that has been created by the Active and Safe Routes to School Program in Manitoba. There are also a variety of other checklists that have been prepared by other Safe Routes to School programs in Canada and internationally. We have provided the names of a few below. They might help you adapt our Neighbourhood Walkabout questionnaire so that it captures all of the issues present in your community.

- Walkable America Checklist – available at www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf. An excellent resource available in hardcopy by order or electronically by download from their website. It provides information for a parent or teacher to take a walk with a child and assess together the walkability of their neighbourhood. It also contains a walkability rating scale and provides advice on how to resolve identified problems.
- The Safe Routes to School program in California, organized by the California Dept. of Health Services, has prepared a Walkability Checklist designed specifically for students to complete. It is available in four languages – Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese and Hmong. Copies can be obtained through California's Walk a Child to School Day Headquarters, toll-free at 877-4-Safe-Rt or email SafeRt@jba-cht.com.
- The Safe Routes to School program in the United Kingdom, organized by Sustrans, has excellent student walkability questionnaires. These have been designed for students of all ages, including high school. Refer to Frequently Asked Questions at www.sustrans.org.uk/about-sustrans/faqs.

Document findings and report back

Add your findings from the walkabout to a map obtained from your school division or municipal traffic engineer. It may also be useful to provide photographs and a short report along with the map that outlines the problems identified and the proposed solutions. Decide who will create this report and when it will be ready. Distribute a copy of the report, photos and map to all the walkabout participants.

The report can be used to make a case for infrastructure changes in the school community or help to prioritize fundraising projects at the school. For example, perhaps a crosswalk needs to be added or moved, which would be a municipal responsibility, and a bike rack needs to be added, which could be a fundraising project for the school.

Once these infrastructure changes are made, be sure to follow up with another walkabout a month or two later to see if they've made any difference. Continue to monitor traffic and safety to continually improve on the safe routes to school.

Create a Best Routes to School Map

Once the Neighbourhood Walkabout has been conducted and the infrastructure has been improved, you can create a Best Routes to School Map to distribute to parents and students at the beginning of the school year. Section 4.7 will give you some ideas and tools to create your map.



TRAFFIC SURVEY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKABOUT QUESTIONNAIRE

Prepared by Active and Safe Routes to School Manitoba
A program of Green Action Centre

Identifying specific transportation and safety issues at school sites and preparing a plan of action to deal with the identified issues is paramount to the success of any Active and Safe Routes to School Program (ASRTS).

Why conduct a neighbourhood walkabout?

As you begin to develop your ASRTS program, it is a good idea to have a clear understanding of the issues you are attempting to address. The most common reasons cited for schools wanting to implement an ASRTS program are:

- Traffic congestion around the school that makes it an unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Heavy traffic volumes and/or excessive speeds by motorists on streets around or near the school, making the journey to school unsafe.
- Children who are walking alone and may be victims of bullying or harassment, and are vulnerable to abduction.

Ultimately, what you want to end up with is a good written description of the problem(s) that you face at your school, aided visually with area maps indicating problem areas and ideal safe routes to school. School Boards or local Transportation Engineers can provide schools with maps, and will often be valuable contacts and allies in helping make positive changes in the community. Before conducting your survey, determine the scope of your walkabout – will you focus only on the immediate area around the school, or do you also need to investigate safety concerns further away?

Things that you want to consider initially when conducting a traffic survey around your school include:

- What are the current parking allowances and restrictions?
- Where do the conflicts between pedestrians/cyclists and vehicles occur and why are they happening?
- Where are the areas along routes surrounding the school where pedestrians/cyclists are most at risk from motor vehicle traffic?
- What are areas where pedestrian/cyclist traffic and vehicle traffic co-exist well? Why does traffic function well in these particular areas?
- What changes can be made to problem areas that will help to improve the interactions between pedestrians/cyclists and motor vehicles?

Out of these questions and answers an action plan can be formulated that everyone agrees to – be sure to document who will take care of what and when. Agreed-to timelines and follow-up meetings help to keep everyone on track.

Through this all, it is important to remember that plans and situations change, and it is good to be flexible and open to new information throughout the development of your program.



I want to do a traffic survey around my school. Who should I involve and when should I conduct the survey?

Plan your traffic survey and neighbourhood walkabout for before or after school during peak pick-up and drop-off times – when the problems you are hoping to address through your Active and Safe Routes to School Program are most evident. It is equally important to involve people who have the capacity to make change in the community or who have particular expertise that you think is important to the success of your program. These people include, but are not exclusive to:

- School administration (Principal, Vice-Principal)
- Superintendent or School Division personnel
- Concerned parents and caregivers
- Local police (many schools have liaison officers)
- School Trustees
- Representative from the local health unit
- Students (especially student patrols)
- Local residents' groups
- The Parent Advisory Council of the school
- Local transportation engineers
- Mayor
- City Councillor
- If you are hoping to include a school bus drop-off zone away from the school as part of your ASRTS program, you may also want to invite a school bus driver or the transportation coordinator for your school division

Start your neighbourhood walkabout and traffic survey with an introduction by the Principal or parent representative so they can share new updates with the participants (i.e.: recent information about traffic volumes, what's been tried in the past, results of previous traffic surveys, etc...). Introductions should then be conducted and participants should sign in with their names and contact information for future reference and for distribution of minutes, etc.

Neighbourhood Walkabout and Traffic Survey Report

Add your findings from your walkabout and survey to your community map and provide a written report of the findings. Request that the Transportation Engineer include these findings in the master map for your area. Include photographs in your report of problem areas and areas with positive things you would like to see implemented elsewhere. Distribute a copy of the report to all participants from the walkabout and use it to lobby for positive changes in the community to help make it safer for children walking to and from school.

Other considerations:

There are many other things to consider when implementing your ASRTS program. Conducting take-home surveys for school parents is an important and valuable way to get information about their travel habits to and from school as well as their concerns related to letting their children walk or bike to school.

Specific considerations when conducting a traffic survey and neighbourhood walkabout:

School site:

- The number of arrival and dismissal times at school
- School entrances for kindergarten students
- Teacher parking area/available visitor parking
 - Potential for vehicle and pedestrian conflict
 - Size and design of parking lot. Is traffic flow clearly signed?
 - Pavement markings on the parking lot
 - Parking and driving behaviour of driving parents
- Walking paths to the school
 - Where are the access points for students?
 - Potential for conflict with vehicles
 - Lighting along walkways
 - Maintenance of walkways, i.e. snow and ice removal
 - Alternate school grounds access routes
- Bicycle facilities
 - Bike racks
 - Bike paths or lanes
 - Potential for conflict with vehicles
- Location of School Bus Loading Zone, if applicable
 - Where do students wait for the buses; what type of supervision is employed
- Number of buses, vans and handicapped vehicles employed
- Location of garbage dumpsters and other school maintenance equipment
- Emergency vehicle access

Areas surrounding the school site:

- Volume and speed of traffic on surrounding streets – perceived and real – obtain latest 24 hour counts
- Are there sidewalks? How far do they extend around the school and the surrounding community?

- Pedestrian crossing devices present and utilized
- Number and position of bus/student patrollers (if any – are they needed?)
- Sight distances of school crossings to road curves and bus zones
- Number and position of adult crossing guards (if any – are they needed?)
- Placement of school crossings in relation to driveways and bus loading zones
- Timing of traffic lights
- On-street signs
- Providing a “hand-to-hand” area where parents of kindergarten students can take their children into the school

Non-traffic items to consider:

- Types of buildings surrounding school: residential, commercial, industrial, vacant/rundown
- Location of other public spaces near school: parks, community centres, libraries, churches
- Number of shade trees on streets
- Green space vs. concrete space
- Graffiti on buildings
- Physical state of the sidewalks
- Size of the sidewalks
- Garbage along the routes to school
- Snow piles at intersections or along route that may be climbing/sliding hazards
- Obstructions on the sidewalks (i.e. branches extending into walking space, broken concrete and tripping hazards, etc.)
- Block Parent or Neighbourhood Watch community – if so, where are Block Parents located?

(This list has been used with permission from the Green Communities Canada Association ASRTS Resource Guide, 2nd Edition; Page 44.)

Walkable Routes to School Survey

Take a walk through your neighbourhood and see how safe and easy it is to be a pedestrian. Place an “X” next to any items that you found to be a problem on the route to and from school and record the location of the problem after the item. Use this form to help you identify the safest route to and from school and identify and prioritize the problems in your neighbourhood that need to be made more safe.

Route taken: _____

1. SIDEWALKS LOCATION	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> There are no sidewalks	
<input type="checkbox"/> There are sidewalks, but they are not continuous	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks are broken or cracked, making them unsafe or difficult to walk on	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks are blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, dumpsters, etc.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks are too close to fast-moving traffic	
<input type="checkbox"/> There is not enough room for two people to walk side by side	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks do not have ramps (curb cuts) for wheelchairs, strollers, and wagons	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cars or trucks are blocking the sidewalk	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____	
Overall rating of sidewalks: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor	
2. STREET CROSSINGS LOCATION	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Road is too wide to cross safely	
<input type="checkbox"/> Need traffic signals	
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic signals make pedestrians wait too long before crossing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Need pedestrian crossing signals/audible signals	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pedestrian crossing signals are not long enough for pedestrians to reach the other side of the street	
<input type="checkbox"/> Need marked pedestrian crosswalks	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parked cars on the street or utility poles are blocking the view of traffic	
<input type="checkbox"/> Trees or plants are blocking the view of traffic	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____	
Overall rating of street crossings: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor	

3. TRAFFIC AND DRIVER BEHAVIOUR	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers do not stop at stop signs	
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers do not obey traffic signs	
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers seem to be going too fast	
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers do not yield to pedestrians	
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers do not look before backing out of driveways	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____	
Overall rating of traffic and driver behaviour: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor	
4. SAFETY	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not feel safe because of the amount of traffic	
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not feel safe because of the behaviour of drivers	
<input type="checkbox"/> Streets do not have enough lighting for walking when it's dark	
<input type="checkbox"/> People are loitering along the route	
<input type="checkbox"/> Unleashed dogs are along the route	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vacant buildings and run-down property are along the route	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____	
Overall rating of safety: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor	
5. APPEAL	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Locations need more grass, flowers, trees, etc.	
<input type="checkbox"/> There is garbage along the route	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____	
Overall rating of appeal: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor	
6. OVERALL RATING OF SCHOOL ROUTE WALKABILITY	LOCATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent: Walking to school is easy, pleasant and safe	
<input type="checkbox"/> Good: There are a few problems with walking to school, but children can do it safely	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fair: Walking is difficult; safety is a concern on many of the routes to school	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor: The routes to school are unsafe for children to walk	
<p>What would you like to change most about the walk to school? _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	