

13. Involving children and youth in identifying and resolving problems

Children and youth already have a lot of information and ideas about land use and transport, especially the latter. It's hard to live in our society without travelling a lot and being affected by other people's travel. However, children and youth often see the world differently from adults, and do not always share their attitudes. This includes attitudes about land use and transport issues.

Even though young people necessarily pick up a lot from everyday life, formal education about land use and transport can help them figure out some of the more complex relationships. For land use, the Canadian Institute of Planners has developed a good resource that can help planning professionals and educators provide instruction about urban planning and community development. It is *A Kid's Guide to Building Great Communities: A Manual for Planners and Educators*.¹¹⁹

There is no equivalent resource for transport issues, and the *Kid's Guide* mentioned in the last paragraph hardly touches on the powerful interactions between transport and land use. However, there are teaching resources on transport. A good example is *You Can Clean the Air*, a CD-ROM produced by the Region of Waterloo in Ontario (see Box 10). Another, directed more at high-school students, is the set of resources at YWALK's Web site.¹²¹

Box 10. Region of Waterloo's statement concerning its teaching resource for use with Grade 3 students: *You Can Clear the Air*¹²⁰

The Region of Waterloo wants to encourage the use of alternative transport, moving away from total dependence in this Region on motorized personal vehicles—cars, vans, trucks, SUVs, etc.—and moving toward a community where more people walk to where they want to go, bike, take the bus, or carpool. The expected outcome of this classroom program from the Region's perspective (Planning, Housing & Community Services and the Transportation and Environmental Services Departments) is to increase the knowledge, skills, and understanding among Grade 3 students with respect to:

- transport options available, including driving, busing, biking, walking, and choosing the alternative best suited to specific needs;
- air quality and the impact they can have as individuals and groups on local and regional air quality through their own transport choices;
- understanding the impact of transport choices on air quality within our communities, Ontario, and globally;
- understanding the relationship of air pollution to personal and environmental health;
- understanding differences and the relationships and links between air quality, climate change, ozone depletion, and environmental and human health, and how transport choices impact these issues; and
- understanding the relationship between transport and land use planning/design of urban communities.

With or without formal education about the issues, there is a need to involve young people more in transport and land use planning. There are at least three good reasons for doing this.

The first is that, as documented above, there is a set of problems concerning transport and young people, and the young people themselves, who experience these problems, are likely to be able to contribute to solutions.

The second is that some transport modes involve substantial numbers of young people. More than half of walking and cycling trips can be made by young people, who can also make more than a fifth of transit trips.¹²² As for any other activity, it's a good strategy to involve the 'customers' in figuring out how things can be improved.

The third reason is that transport and land use provide good issues around which to introduce young people to the practice of government and democracy. Early involvement in government is becoming a recognized tool for education about these practices. Transport and land-use issues often affect young people directly in ways they can feel quite strongly about, and the competing positions and trade-offs are usually easy to grasp.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), through its Child-Friendly Cities program, places much importance on involvement of young people in local decision-making. Indeed, such involvement comprises the first two items in the program's definition of a child-friendly city (Box 11).

Box 11. UNICEF's concept of a Child Friendly City¹²³

A Child Friendly City is a local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children's rights. It is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city
- Express their opinion on the city they want
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Receive basic services such as health care and education
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Walk safely in the streets on their own
- Meet friends and play
- Have green spaces for plants and animals
- Live in an unpolluted environment
- Participate in cultural and social events
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.