

Board of Health Briefing Note

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
Date: October 7, 2020
Topic: **Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter**
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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Timiskaming Board of Health:

1. Resolve to endorse the *Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter (Appendix 1a)*.

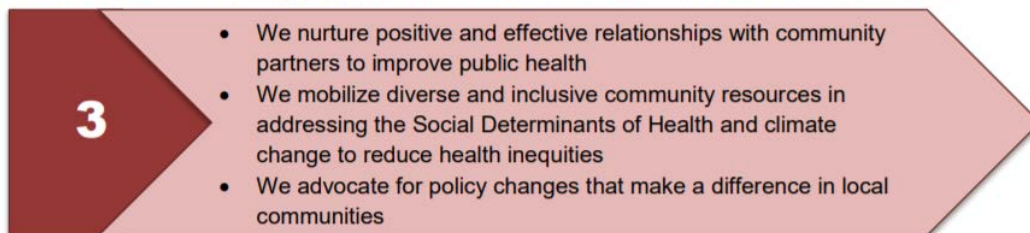
Issue

According to a recent national evaluation of physical activity, only 21% of Canadian children and youth regularly use active transportation to get to/from school.¹ We know that fewer children are walking and wheeling for the school journey today than in the past, and many children who could walk, wheel or bus to school are being driven in a private vehicle.² Students are missing out on a crucial opportunity to experience the physical, mental, social and lifespan benefits that getting active for the school journey has to offer, and coordinated multi-sectoral efforts between schools, school boards, municipalities and public health are needed to boost active school travel (AST) in Timiskaming District.

Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023

This work directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and supports the following THU 2019-2023 strategic directions 3 and 4:

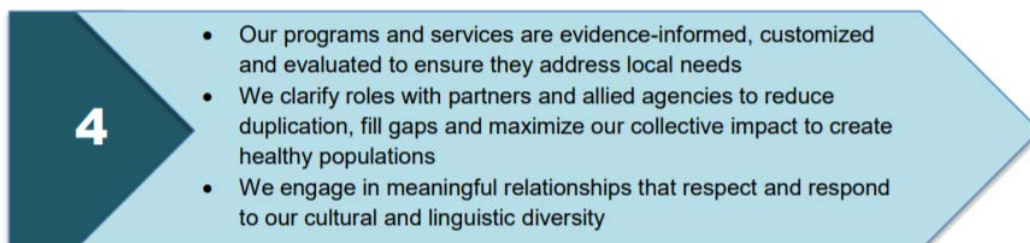
We collaborate with partners to make a difference in our communities



3

- We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health
- We mobilize diverse and inclusive community resources in addressing the Social Determinants of Health and climate change to reduce health inequities
- We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities

We adapt to address the diverse and changing local needs



4

- Our programs and services are evidence-informed, customized and evaluated to ensure they address local needs
- We clarify roles with partners and allied agencies to reduce duplication, fill gaps and maximize our collective impact to create healthy populations
- We engage in meaningful relationships that respect and respond to our cultural and linguistic diversity

Background

Getting active for the school journey is good for kids and families. Children who walk or wheel to school are more physically active and report lower levels of stress, depression and anxiety, and more happiness.³ Physical activity also supports healthy brain development, and using active transportation for the trip to school has been found to increase alertness and concentration during the school day, leading to improved learning and academic outcomes.⁴ Additionally, many health enhancing behaviours are learned in childhood, and using active travel is no different. Children who walk and cycle are likely to carry these behaviours into adulthood and become adults who use active transportation. Teaching students how to be safe pedestrians and cyclists from a young age helps to create a culture of respect between all road users.

Many elementary schools in Timiskaming were not designed to accommodate the level of traffic they now receive. When caregivers decide to drive instead of allowing their child to use a more active and sustainable mode of transportation, the increase in school-run traffic can result in congestion issues and dangerous driving behaviours, making school zones less safe for everyone.⁵ In addition to safety concerns, increased use of private vehicles for school drop-off and pick-up has been shown to significantly raise air pollution levels around schools, which can negatively impact the health of children.^{6,7}

In Timiskaming, bus transportation policies state that while all students in JK/SK qualify for busing, students in grades 1-3 who reside within 0.8 km of the school are considered to be in the 'walk zone' and are not eligible for busing. As students get older, the 'walk zone' increases. For grades 4-8, the distance increases to 1.6 km and students in grades 9-12 are required to walk if they live within 2.6 km of the school. When more children in the 'walk zone' use active modes of transportation for the school journey and more children who are in the 'bus zone' ride the school bus, school-run traffic is significantly reduced and the whole community benefits. Through a health equity lens, active transportation is universally affordable and allows the majority of children and youth to move around their community independently. Therefore, any work to create safer walking and cycling routes for students will also enhance the safety, connectivity and quality of life for the community as a whole.⁸

In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, promoting AST is more important now than ever. COVID-19 restrictions have led to children spending more sedentary time indoors; and with back to school, students are dealing with more stress, shortened recesses and restricted access to play structures. Considering reduced school bus capacity and physical distancing requirements, promoting active transportation and remote drop-off programming is key to reducing traffic and preventing safety hazards outside schools. Walking and cycling are safe, physically distant ways to get to and from school and fit much needed physical activity into the day, and should be promoted as the preferred option for all students not travelling by bus.⁹

While active travel has been part of THU's planning for a number of years, in 2019, THU received a \$60,000 grant from Green Communities Canada through the Ontario Active School Travel fund to offer enhanced AST programming. Using this funding, THU started the **Timiskaming Active School Travel Project**, a community-based initiative to enhance school zone safety and encourage students to walk and wheel to school through bilingual education and awareness campaigns. Development of the **Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter and Companion Document** (Appendix 1a and 1b) was

initiated by the **AST Steering Committee**, a table of local stakeholders that support project coordination and direction. Strengthening regional coordination and collaboration has been key to project success; and leveraging our collective resources and knowledge will continue to play a significant role in the implementation of Charter directives and long-term program sustainability.

Confirming local commitment to supporting active school travel reflects the direction of many municipalities, school boards, and health units across Ontario to encourage healthier, more active students. Endorsing the **Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter** (Appendix 1a) would add weight to the importance of active transportation-supporting programs, policies and infrastructure. While it has no legal status, the Charter serves as a statement of principles to guide schools, school boards, municipalities, student transportation and other community partners to consider how activities and decisions can encourage more active transportation in our communities. The Charter principles align with Timiskaming Health Unit's mandates to support a holistic approach to physical and mental health promotion, increase levels of physical activity among children and youth, and make active living easier in our communities.

Guiding principles of the Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter

Principle 1: Walking and cycling culture

Principle 2: Partnership, collaboration and shared responsibility

Principle 3: Street design for comfort, convenience and safety for all

Principle 4: Supportive land use and site planning

Links to Timiskaming Health Unit Action

Walking or wheeling for the school journey supports healthy child development and leads to lifelong habits of independent and active mobility. The Charter principles directly translate to work THU is currently engaged in. THU will continue to work in the following areas:

- Facilitate School Travel Planning process with 5 elementary schools, and provide indirect support to all elementary schools within the THU catchment area. (P1, P2, P3, P4)
- Lead AST steering committee to collaborate on direction, planning, implementation and evaluation of AST Project initiatives, including implementation of Charter directives. (P1, P2, P3, P4)
- Examine existing infrastructure and policies and advocate for changes to those that pose barriers to using active transportation. (P3, P4)
- Support municipalities with enhancing opportunities for physical activity and active transportation.
- Lead bicycle safety skills workshops with grade 4-5 students. (P1)
- Partner with Temiskaming Shores Bicycle Friendly Community Committee to implement Bike Exchange Event. (P1, P2)

Timiskaming BOH History

October 2018: Motion #49R-2018. Active outdoor play position.

November 2012: Resolution #03-2012. Active transportation.

January 2008: Resolution #01-2008. Call to Action: Healthy Weights-Healthy Lives in Timiskaming

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2. Ontario Active School Travel. (2018). Making the Case for Active School Travel: Fact Sheet and Reference List. Retrieved from: <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Making-the-Case-Dec-2018-En.pdf>
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Appendix 1a: AST Charter poster

Note: AST partner logos are included only as a visual. Listed partners are being engaged to add their endorsement to the charter.

TIMISKAMING

ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL CHARTER

This charter represents a long-term commitment to fostering a culture of active and sustainable travel where we live, learn, work, and play. Active School Travel (AST) refers to any form of human-powered transportation such as walking, wheeling, or using mobility assistive devices for the school journey. This charter upholds the principle that environments where active transportation is supported by the school and local partners promotes community safety and accessibility for all, regardless of age, ability or income.

I/We recognize the benefits associated with AST:



HEALTHIER CHILDREN



LESS TRAFFIC & POLLUTION




SAFER SCHOOL ZONES



BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

I/We support AST through commitment to the following principles:



WALKING & CYCLING CULTURE

Fostering an active community culture is essential to increasing the number of active trips.

PARTNERSHIP, COLLABORATION & SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Encouraging AST requires an ongoing interdisciplinary and collaborative approach between schools, communities, and government agencies.






STREET DESIGN FOR COMFORT, CONVIENIENCE, & SAFETY FOR ALL

The design of new streets or redevelopment of existing streets should include the integration of active travel facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit.


SUPPORTIVE LAND USE & SITE PLANNING


Plan, encourage, and facilitate the integration of active transportation systems in communities, including existing and future schools.






CONSEIL SCOLAIRE CATHOLIQUE DE DISTRICTS DES GRANDES RIVIÈRES


























JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S MOBILITY AND HEALTH

TIMISKAMING ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL CHARTER: HOW-TO GUIDE

Introduction

This companion document is intended to guide the signatories of the *Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter* with practical applications and actions for supporting more students to walk or wheel for the school journey. The actions on the next page serve as a starting point for fostering safe, healthy and connected communities.

Achieving these goals requires coordination of efforts across multiple stakeholders in our communities including school staff, school boards, parents and students, public health, police, transportation, planning and others. Development of the Charter was initiated by the *Regional AST Steering Committee*, a group formed to support the direction, planning and implementation of the *Timiskaming Active School Travel Project*.



Background

School travel planning is a provincially-led community-based model for implementing active school travel (AST) that systematically addresses barriers and incentives for walking to school. The Timiskaming Active School Travel Project brings school and community stakeholders together to identify barriers to students walking and cycling to school, devise an action plan to address the issues identified, implement those actions, and measure resulting travel mode and attitude shifts. Stakeholders collaborate to create and implement school-level actions plans that use equity, education, encouragement, engineering, and enforcement to address transportation and traffic safety problems, and support a shift in student travel behaviours towards more active and sustainable modes. The Timiskaming Active School Travel Charter serves as the first step toward fostering more active trips in our school communities.

How and when to use this charter:

The Charter reinforces the importance of active and sustainable transportation supportive policies, infrastructure, and programming. Each of these are referred to in the developmental stages of various AST-related actions being undertaken by school boards, municipalities, and other signatories. This Charter serves to guide school staff, students, parents, community partners and boards of trustees to consider how activities and decisions can encourage or impact active transportation.

Many high-level decisions in our communities can have an impact on active school travel. The decisions that school boards make about school catchment areas, site planning, school closures, academic programs and transportation services can lead to more students travelling further to school and being driven. Municipalities can prioritize active and safe routes to school in official plans and active transportation strategies, ensuring active travel infrastructure is available and maintained. Police and by-law services can support the implementation of safety education and enforcement actions. Public health can support education and encouragement activities related to health promotion, physical activity and injury prevention. Student transportation services can support policy development and help develop and implement school action plans. Our local elected officials can advise on travel issues and help move solutions forward.

When it comes to making sure students are able to get to school safely and enjoy the benefits of active travel, we all have an important role to play!

Charter Principles

Each AST principle provides a list of practical applications that can each serve as a starting point. Actions can be determined in the context of feasibility and local needs.

1. Walking and cycling culture

- ✓ Support the development and implementation of School Travel Plans for all schools
- ✓ Whenever possible, develop infrastructure and policies that support active transportation
- ✓ Promote and participate in the Timiskaming Active School Travel program and walk to school day events
- ✓ Integrate active and sustainable transportation education into the student curriculum to create a culture of respect between all road users

2. Partnership, collaboration, and shared responsibility

- ✓ Identify and eliminate barriers to using active and sustainable transportation for the school journey
- ✓ Work collaboratively to consider how activities, policies and decisions could encourage active transportation
- ✓ Act as a proponent for resources and investments to build active and healthy communities

3. Street design for comfort, convenience, and safety for all

- ✓ Conduct neighbourhood walkabout audits and traffic studies to support improved walkability and bikeability
- ✓ Maintain active school travel routes where demand warrants on a year-round basis
- ✓ Promote the benefits of safety enhancements including establishing safe active travel corridors to work and school

4. Supportive land use and site planning

- ✓ When planning school site or neighbourhood developments, consult best practices and consider how walking, cycling, and public transit use can be maximized
- ✓ Support the provision of end of trip facilities including bike parking
- ✓ Explore options to divert traffic away from the school zone such as Park 'N' Walk programming, off-site school parking, and school streets initiatives

