

active school travel

Working with your Local Government

TO IMPROVE ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL



Local and Indigenous¹ governments are important partners when it comes to active school travel (AST) in your community. Whether you need permission to start a school streets program or you are advocating for better cycling infrastructure, local elected officials and city staff will play a role in making these important changes happen. Knowing how to connect with your local government to help move your initiatives forward and how they can support your programming is an important aspect of creating sustainable, community-driven active transportation initiatives. This guide will help you influence policy at the local level and make your interactions with local governments more straightforward.

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GETTING STARTED

Before you contact anyone, it's important to know who has the power or jurisdiction to support the changes you want to make in your community. Make sure you're engaging the appropriate level of government (think municipal, provincial, or federal) and the correct department. Check out [this resource](#) as a starting place if you're wondering who to contact about Active School Travel related topics.

Once you know that your initiative falls under municipal jurisdiction, the first place to start is to find out what active transportation plans already exist and how active school travel planning fits into the bigger local picture. Check out BC Cycling Coalition's [BC Safe Routes Now](#) map to see if your community has an active transportation plan. **School districts and School Boards** are often partners with these plans – reaching out to your school district and connecting with people who are supporting active transportation initiatives can help you to know what is already going on in your community and how you can get more involved.

¹ While the BC Healthy Communities Active School Travel Program funded and supported schools in Indigenous communities, the examples in this guide stem largely from settler schools. Each Indigenous community will have their own protocol for how to work within their own governance structure. Some of the information in this guide may be useful in these contexts but may not always be applicable.

HOW CAN I GET MY LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVOLVED?

One approach might be to invite members of your **council to join a walkabout** (sometimes called a walkability audit). Being able to observe the barriers to active transportation for themselves means they can take their own observations back to council for discussions. This adds credibility to the data collected on the walkabout and to furthering the discussions with local government staff and decision-makers.



Arden Elementary, in Courtenay BC, hosted a neighbourhood walkabout with local stakeholders including their principal, two teachers, five parents, two students of varying ages, a district facility staff member, a school board trustee, two RCMP officers and three city counsellors. Their findings were captured and debriefed with all participants, and recommendations were made for next steps and reported to the Green Team (a group of parents and teachers who support AST initiatives).

Get your initiatives on the agenda. It helps if you have a “champion” or someone on your team or committee to reach out and connect to members of your council or other local government staff. Attend public meetings at city hall or schedule an appointment with your elected officials or staff. Find ways to put your changes on the agenda. Work with people in transportation, health, and business sectors to bring the discussions to the table.

Use data to help make your point. Data can help tell the story that you want your community to hear. Local government staff and elected officials often receive considerable amounts of information and data. Make it easy for them to see what changes would be beneficial for the school and surrounding area. Present the data so that people can process information quickly and easily. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Using video is another way of sharing data visually that helps to tell your story of change. Highlighting changes and community involvement in a video means that you can show people the impact your initiatives can have in the community!



Phoenix Middle School, in Campbell River BC, carried out both family surveys and student surveys to gather information from the students themselves, and then compare that data to responses from parents.

“The data collection was used in a letter to the transportation department for SD 72, a presentation to City Council by [the Project] Lead and Grade 8 students, Master Transportation Plan input from the cycling coalition of River City Cycle Club, so it was a very valuable exercise. We’ve created a close working relationship with the Transportation Department for the City of Campbell River as well, as we have provided real data and comments from families and students about how to make AST easier in Campbell River.”

-Phoenix Middle School AST Project Lead



“On the heels of our Fall programming, we applied to bring a Delegation to City Council to request safety measures and traffic calming infrastructure changes in and around our school zone. We used the data from our Family Survey, as well as active travel research provided by the pilot program curriculum and support from the AST Program Lead, to outline and justify our major concerns and five main requests to address these issues. This was supplemented by a video we created to highlight student and community voices. This video showed the impact of active school travel efforts at our school. Since going to City Council in November, we have received a Notice of Motion indicating a resolution for City Council to consider our requests and direct City Staff to direct staff to prepare a report that outlines the options, costs, and feasibility for the safety improvements. The motion also includes the development of a Safe and Active Schools Program in collaboration with SD71 for ALL schools in Courtenay.”

-Arden Elementary AST Project Lead

Follow up with local Council members to keep momentum going and to keep active school travel on the agenda. This keeps the changes you are seeking top of mind for funding and policy change opportunities. It can also be helpful to share your successes. Sending a thank you note to city council recognizing staff by name can show that the changes made have benefited the community and result in more action over time.

WHAT INFORMATION DO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS NEED TO CHANGE AST POLICY?

Local governments need data and stories of success. What works? What have schools done in the past? What changes are possible? How will they help? What specifically do they need to change to improve AST related policies and infrastructure? It's important to be prepared with answers to these questions before you approach your local government. Before you can answer these, you need to have a good idea of what your own AST plans involve.



WHAT INITIATIVES SHOULD MY SCHOOL TAKE ON?

First things first. What does your school community want to do? What AST initiatives are realistic for your community to carry out that also meet the needs of students and parents? There are a few activities you can do to find out what your community already has, and what you can build on to increase active transportation in your community. One approach is to send out a **Family Survey** to find out how students and their parents are currently getting to/from school: do they walk/bike/roll or do they use cars? How often do they walk/bike/roll? How often do they use cars? What are some changes that your school community can make to increase the number of students that are able to safely walk/bike/roll more frequently to/from school?

Another approach could be to create a group of interested stakeholders in your community (e.g., students, parents, school administrators, district staff, city planners/staff, city councillors, police officers) and do a **walk-about** in the school neighbourhood to take note of what active transportation assets currently exist and what changes could help to provide additional support for active school transportation. For example, are crosswalks well-marked, well-lit, and have flashing lights? Are there sidewalks or walking paths that can be used safely by students? Are there well-marked bike lanes that can be safely accessed by students? Are school zones clearly identified with clearly marked speed limits? What space is available at the school for storing bikes during school hours?

Click [here](#) to see different ways to collect data and for examples of data collection tools.

WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN MY SCHOOL DO?

Now what? Do students in your community have access to bikes or scooters? Is the route to/from school a route that can be used safely? Have you shared a map of the best routes to/from school with parents? School-based activities likely need the support of school administrators, teachers, and possibly the school district. It's always best to ask your school first which activities are the most appropriate or realistic for your school. As well, some activities may require parents or caregivers to volunteer their time and support to help make these initiatives successful. Here are a few activities and initiatives that you can start with to help you with your school travel plan!

BIKE TO SCHOOL WEEK / WALK AND WHEEL WEEK

- Host a bike rodeo, a bike parade, or offer bike skills the week before. It adds momentum to the Bike to School Week, and kids feel more confident to ride to/from school if they spend some time the week before reviewing or learning new skills.
- Some schools that hosted bike rodeos created obstacle courses to add different learning experiences or skills for the kids. Some examples include teeter totter ramps, cone zones to help kids learn how to manage or handle their bikes and repair stations to learn how to fix chains or flat tires.
- Add prizes (for example, gift cards, pizza parties for a class, bike accessories like a bike light or helmet). Having prizes available worked well for most schools implementing initiatives to increase AST at their school – incentives for the kids helped to keep them motivated and excited.
- Think about equity when you plan your activity. Can you provide bikes for kids that don't have access to bikes? Can you initiate a recycle program for bikes that families no longer need, use, or have outgrown? Or maybe you could start a bike sharing program in your school community. Not everyone has access to a bike. Not everyone knows how to ride a bike or knows people who know how to ride a bike. Thinking about equity when carrying out an activity increases access to bikes or scooters will help to ensure everyone is included!
- For more information on how to get started visit the [School Travel website](#).



Gibson Elementary, a school in Delta BC, hosted a Bike to School Week which resulted in 128 first time ride/walk/roll participants. HopOn, a games-based cycling safety program, taught students in grade 4-6 bike safety lessons in advance of the week to improve confidence and skills.

In Spring and Fall of 2021 and 2022 **Sir William Van Horne Elementary** hosted Active Travel Weeks where students who used active transportation to get to school were entered into a draw to win gift cards.

Sangster Elementary in Colwood hosted Walk and Wheel to School Week with prizes, stickers, posters, and student leader greeters. The initiative resulted in students who had never walked to school together before, gathering in their neighbourhoods and biking and walking together. Students and parents both noted being proud of their growing independence.

SCHOOL STREETS

- Check with your local government to see if closing streets to vehicle traffic around your school is something that you can achieve. You could do it for one day, one week, or one month depending on how amenable your local government and the neighbours are to this idea. Start small and build up over time.
- Schools that facilitated this initiative found that this helped to increase walking and biking numbers.
- See this [School Travel](#) website on how to plan, organize, and launch a School Streets initiative at your school.



Sir James Douglas partnered with the City of Victoria to pilot the first School Streets initiative where the objective was to create safe access in the drop loop for kids walking and wheeling to school. Using the grant from BCHC's AST Program, they were able to continue with their School Streets initiative. The School Street was an important initiative that signaled to students, families, and staff that Walk & Wheel Month was underway. With the School Street they organized active recesses and invited teachers to make use of the street closure on specific days for their grade.

WALKING SCHOOL BUS

- Similar to a school bus, a Walking School Bus is a group of students that travel to and from school each day along a designated route, that can stop and pick up more students along the way.
- A Walking School Bus is a great way to have the younger students walk together to/from school. Research shows that giving kids the opportunity to be outside before and after school helps to improve their mental and physical health.
- High school students can help supervise – it provides them with leadership and volunteer opportunities!
- See [this website](#) for more information on how to get started!



Sir William Van Horne Elementary in South Vancouver hosted the Grade 7 Walking School Bus Challenge where students were encouraged to use active travel to get to school with another student and the classes were rewarded if they met participation targets.

Gibson Elementary started a successful Walking School Bus with approximately 25 students walking to school and 15-17 walking home, with 7 regular parent volunteers, and 30 high school students who signed up to help. The school has now hired a permanent crossing guard using the Vision Zero grant which has simplified the process of coordinating student volunteers and resulted in a consistently safer route to school.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Many of the activities and success stories detailed above share common factors of success:

- **Strong leadership** – whether it was one individual champion, or a group of teachers, students, parents, or a combination of all of these, successful AST initiatives have strong leadership to create awareness and excitement around the initiatives, to develop or strengthen partnerships with their school PAC, District PAC (DPAC), members of their local government, as well as local businesses and organizations.
- **Partnerships** – effectively leveraging multi-sectoral partnerships in various sectors including health, education, recreation, business, and transportation is key to building sustainable solutions. These partnerships help communities become more resilient through building connections and relationships across sectors.
- **Engagement and support from the school** – many parents are looking for opportunities to contribute to their local schools and this provides an opportunity for that. It also allows for a tag-team approach where parents and school staff are partners in supporting AST. This approach also creates the foundation for sustainability of the programs and activities at the school level and removes the pressure put on schools to ‘deliver’— it employs a ‘whole of community’ approach.
- **Involve students in the planning and leading** – involve students in the planning of events and to take on a leadership role. Encourage them to contribute by choosing how your school community will motivate other students to participate in active travel and how the journey to school can be more child-friendly, social, and fun for them.



WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1

WRITE AN EMAIL OR LETTER – Councillor emails are publicly available on local government websites or can be found through the CivicInfoBC directory at <https://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/people>. Many municipalities have correspondence policies that detail the process they will take once they receive your letter and ensure you receive an appropriate response.

2

PUBLIC HEARINGS – The Local Government Act requires that a Public Hearing be held before Council adopts a bylaw amendment. Public Hearings may be virtual or in-person and provide an opportunity for citizens to present their views on suggested changes. Residents can register to speak at the Hearing or some municipalities will also allow pre-recorded video submissions or live phone calls.

3

PRESENTATIONS – Citizens may request to place a formal presentation on the agenda of an upcoming council meeting. Learn more about the different types of local government meetings [here](#).

4

PETITION – Informal petitions can be used to bring attention to local issues. While there is no requirement for municipalities to take action, all residents are able to submit informal petitions to their local government corporate officer for council consideration.

5

ADVISORY BODIES – Local governments may establish advisory bodies to engage residents on policy decisions or proposed projects. Committees can either be standing (established by the mayor for ongoing matters) or select (established by council for ad-hoc matters). Committees typically include members of the public appointed based on their particular expertise and are tasked with making recommendations to the council.

TIPS FOR YOUR PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL

- Keep your presentation concise and to the point. Remember that your audience will include Council Members as well as the public. It's usually best to avoid using acronyms and make sure to emphasize your key message throughout the presentation.
- Check with your local government in advance to find out if/when you need to share your slides with them, so they are ready to go for your presentation. In some cases, you will be required to submit your presentation materials with your presentation request.
- Be prepared to answer any questions Council might have after your presentation.
- Visit your municipalities website to find out specifics on how to submit a request, presentation durations, rules and etiquette, and other information about the process.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Go By Bike: <https://gobybikebc.ca/resources-media/gobybike-for-schools/>

Walk and Wheel to School: <https://schooltravel.ca/activity/walk-and-wheel-day/>

Capital Regional District (CRD) Active School Travel: <https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-transportation/active-school-travel-planning>

City of Nanaimo: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/transportation-mobility/active-school-travel-program>