

# Quarterly update: 9

April 2020

*An overview of developments in active school travel with provincial significance during the past quarter. Please let us know if we've missed anything. For elaboration and discussion at the Council meeting.*

## **Ontario Schools Closed.**

The Ontario government announced the closure of all schools effective 23 March as part of measures to control the spread of COVID-19. The closure has since been extended to 5 May 2020. Roll-out of Learning from Home programs by individual school boards began 6 April. This closure is having a significant impact on all AST programs and projects in the province, as no school-based activities, events or meetings can proceed during the closure. GCC is assessing these impacts and developing contingency plans in the event that the closure is extended.

## **OAST Fund.**

GCC has submitted a formal request to the Ministry of Education for an extension of the OAST program's Transfer Payment Agreement deadline from 31 August to 31 December 2020 to create the option for spring events and activities to be re-scheduled to the fall. A decision from the Ministry is still pending.

## **OAST Network.**

- Membership has increased to 90 members.
- Coaching Sessions:
  - Social Marketing & Active School Travel 101: Insights from an Expert attracted 35 Network members on 2 April.
  - Planning is underway for a session focused on effective storytelling in early June.
- Walking School Bus (WSB) Partners: A conference call with WSB stakeholders from across Ontario was held on 7 April to provide updates and share lessons learned. This followed on a previous call held in late 2018. A summary document will form the basis for updated WSB information and resources to be shared with Network members and added to the OAST website later this spring.
- A conference call with STP Facilitators to discuss responses to COVID19 will take place in the near future.

## **Encouragement Events.**

- Winter Walk Day (WWD) 2020: A total of 339 schools registered for this year's event compared with 469 in 2019. A significant factor in the decline is likely the labour situation (including rotating strikes) that impacted many extra-curricular activities in schools across

Ontario this year. Electronic certificates of participation have recently been sent electronically to all participating schools. In addition the following schools will receive Scholars Choice gift cards:

Tarentorus PS	Algoma DSB
St. Basil CS	Dufferin Peel Catholic DSB
Holy Rosary CS	London District CSB
École Jeanne-Lajoie	Conseil scolaire Viamonde
Dr Robert Thornton PS	Durham DSB
Rouge Park PS	York Region DSB
Chicopee Hills PS	Waterloo Region DSB
Laurelwoods PS	Upper Grand DSB
Anson Park PS	Toronto DSB
École Sainte-Trinité	Conseil de district catholique de l'est Ontarien

- Spring into Spring 2020 : This event, which normally takes place throughout April, has been cancelled due to the school closures. GCC is instead encouraging alternative, safe walking and cycling activities via social media.
- Bike to School Week 2020: Scheduled for late May, this event has been postponed by organizers. Discussions are underway about rescheduling to fall 2020.

**E-newsletters.** Due to COVID19 and the school closures GCC has made changes to its schedule of e-newsletters:

- The spring issue of the iWalkiWheel News (targeting schools) has been cancelled.
- The April and June issues of the OAST News will be replaced with one issue in May (timing to be confirmed based on if/when schools re-open).

**Webinars.** The *Teach Them And They Will Walk: Innovations in pedestrian safety education* webinar on 4 March attracted 113 participants and included presentations from London, Waterloo and Ottawa. The next OAST webinar is scheduled for 12 May and will highlight examples of school wayfinding initiatives from York Region, Toronto, London and Gatineau (Québec).

### **National Active Transportation Strategy.**

In early March, Halifax MP Andy Fillmore confirmed publicly that he has been tasked by Minister of Infrastructure and Communities Catherine McKenna to lead the development of a national active transportation strategy. The announcement comes after years of urging by walking, cycling, and AST champions including GCC, Vélo Canada Bikes, and Active School Travel Canada. Other major supporters include CAA, Heart & Stroke, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Canadian Urban Transit Association. A process for developing the strategy has not yet been announced as the COVID crisis monopolizes government attention and resources, however GCC is very encouraged by this important step forward.