

18 June 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education & MPP King-Vaughan
Via email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Subject: Ontario Plan to Reopen Schools – Statement from the Ontario Active School Travel Council

The [Ontario Active School Travel Council](#) is composed of selected provincial leaders in active school travel working to advance the cause of walking and wheeling to school in Ontario by identifying and addressing strategic opportunities, priorities, and threats. [Our members](#) include representatives from school boards, school transportation consortia, municipalities, public health, police and non-governmental organizations.

As you and your officials work with school boards to determine how best to reopen Ontario's elementary and secondary schools next September in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, ***it is clear that new ways of thinking and new approaches to school operations will be essential to ensure student safety and well-being. The Ontario Active School Travel Council believes that this must also apply to planning for how Ontario students will travel to and from school.***

Therefore, the Council is pleased to submit the attached Statement for your consideration. It includes General Recommendations for Safe Healthy School Travel and Guidelines for School Travel Upon School Reopening

They are meant to assist the Ministry and its education partners in preparing for a “new normal” as it relates to the journey to school, one that will require a multi-modal approach to student transportation. We invite you to share them widely.

Respectfully,

Leslie Maxwell, MAPW
Acting Chair, Ontario Active School Travel Council
OntarioASTCouncil@greencommunitiescanada.org

cc. Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation
cc. Honourable Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General
cc. Cathy Abraham, President, Ontario Public School Boards Association
cc. Beverley Eckensweiler, President, Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association
cc. Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques
cc. Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario
cc. Marnie McCormac, Chairperson, Ontario Student Trustees Association
cc. Colleen Hogan, Director, School Business Support Branch, Ministry of Education
cc. Ontario Active School Travel Council
cc. Kate Berry, Program Director, Ontario Active School Travel, Green Communities Canada

Statement on the Reopening of Ontario Schools

(June 2020)

It is clear that new ways of thinking and new approaches to school operations will be essential to ensure the safety and well-being of students as they return to school this fall. The [Ontario Active School Travel Council](#) believes that this must also apply to planning for how Ontario students will travel to and from school.

The Council offers the following general recommendations and specific guidelines to assist the Ministry of Education, school boards, school transportation authorities and families in preparing for the reopening of schools as it relates to student transportation.

General Recommendations for Safe Healthy School Travel

- **Planning and communication should take into account all modes by which Ontario students journey to school: walking, wheeling (cycling, scootering, etc.), public transportation and driving, in addition to travel by school bus.** This reflects the reality that 60% of Ontario’s 2 million elementary and secondary students do not use school bussing services.ⁱ
- **Walking and cycling (while maintaining social distancing) are considered safe and healthy activities by public health authoritiesⁱⁱ and should be *intentionally* promoted as the preferred option for all students not travelling by school bus or public transit.** With capacity and ridership reductions in public transit and potential for the same in school bussing, this will be crucial to preventing a significant increase in traffic congestion and safety hazards around schools due to more children being driven by car.
- **School boards and transportation consortia should engage with their municipal and police partners to assess the anticipated traffic impacts and identify traffic safety measures for school zones. This is necessary to ensure a safe environment for increased volumes of student pedestrians and cyclists during morning and afternoon bell times. These measures may include:**
 - Limiting drop-off and pick-up activity on and around school sites.
 - Making provisions for ‘park and walk’ locations 1-2 blocks away from school.
 - Full or partial street closures on local streets.
 - Enhanced traffic safety supervision and education.ⁱⁱⁱ

Guidelines for School Travel Upon Reopening

- Students and parents must:
 - Walk or cycle whenever possible.
 - Stay at least 2 metres away from other students, parents/caregivers, Crossing Guards, foot patrollers and school staff at all times both on routes to school and at the school site. Wear a mask when this physical distancing is not possible.
 - Walk and cycle in single file as much as possible. Where more pedestrians are present on sidewalks or paths near schools dismount from bikes.
- Parents/caregivers should be encouraged to:
 - Allow their child to walk or cycle independently all or part way to school and practise their route to school before the first day of class.
 - Collaborate with other families and take turns leading small groups of children to walk or cycle together if their child needs to be supervised.
 - Park their vehicle one or more blocks from the school site and walk the rest of the way if they choose to drive their child to school.
- Schools should be encouraged and supported to provide expanded facilities for bicycle and scooter storage:^{iv}
 - Arrange and monitor storage racks to ensure physical distancing is maintained when students are locking and unlocking.
 - Allow bicycles and scooters to be locked to school fences to help increase storage capacity and maintain distancing.
- Support schools to communicate travel guidelines and route to school maps to their families.

Who We Are

The Ontario Active School Travel Council is an advisory committee composed of selected provincial leaders in active school travel (AST) working to advance the cause of AST in Ontario by identifying and addressing strategic opportunities, priorities, and threats. Its goal is to create a culture of active school travel and make active transportation and independent mobility normative for school-aged youth. [Our membership](#) includes representatives from school boards, school transportation consortia, municipalities, public health, police and non-governmental organizations.

ⁱ In 2017-18 only 40% of Ontario students received transportation services (bus, van etc.). See <https://files.ontario.ca/student-transportation-en.pdf>, p. 7.

ⁱⁱ See Public Health Ontario, <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/pub/2020/04/factsheet-covid-19-guide-physical-distancing.pdf?la=en>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://nacto.org/streets-for-pandemic-response-recovery/> for other options.

^{iv} As recommend by PHE Canada, [COVID-19 Pandemic: Return to School Canadian Physical and Health Education Guidelines](#), p. 18