



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: April 11, 2022

SUBJECT: Active School Travel & School Street Test Programs
PREPARED BY: Loy Cheah, Senior Manager, Transportation, Ext. 4838
Fion Ho, TDM Coordinator, Transportation, Ext. 2160
David Porretta, Manager, Traffic Engineering, Ext. 2040

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the staff report titled “Active School Travel & School Street Test Programs” be received; and,
- 2) That the School Street Test Program be approved and, as part of this pilot, the temporary, full road closure of Stricker Avenue between Hammersly Boulevard and Fred McLaren Boulevard be approved; and
- 3) That the City contributes \$3,500 from project #21025 Cycling & Pedestrian Advisory Committee to the School Street Test Program; and
- 4) That staff report back on expanding the Active School Travel Program beyond this pilot; and further
- 5) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

This report provides an update on the Active School Travel Program implemented since 2019, and request Council to approve the implementation of the School Street Test Program.

BACKGROUND:

Being driven to school contributes to negative community and public health outcomes

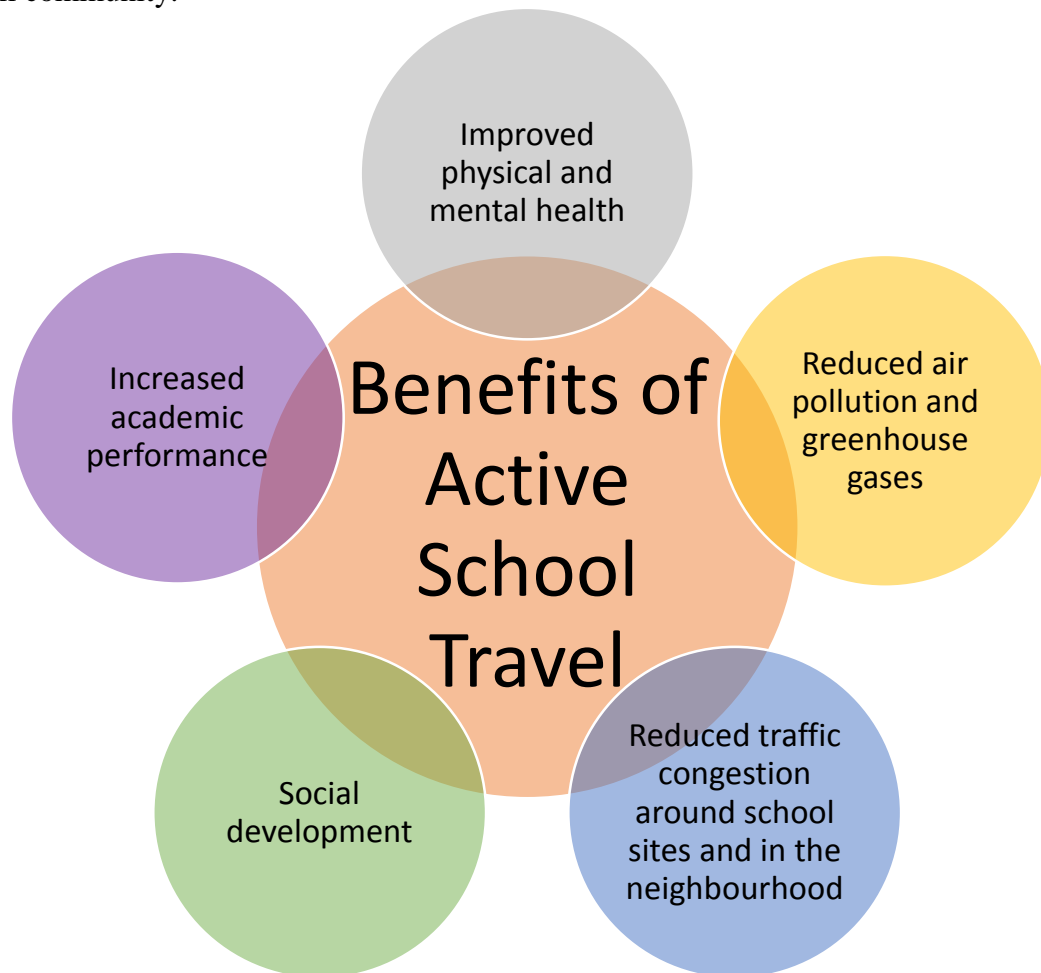
When students are driven to school, instead of walking or wheeling there, they miss the opportunity for physical activities, fresh air and quality interaction with parents, caregivers and friends. Motorized vehicles at or near a school contributes to traffic congestion, creating less safe conditions for those who wish to walk or wheel to school, and adds to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions to the environment. Also, school staff often spend time dealing with traffic issues and complaints as opposed to focusing on education.

In 2018, Metrolinx released the “School Travel in York Region” report that envisions 60% of children will walk or cycle to school by 2041. Against policy direction, the rates of kids being driven to school continues to grow since 1986 (14.7%) and has more than doubled in 2016 (33.9%). York Region has the highest driving rates in the GTHA. This concerning

trend indicates that more effort is needed to encourage students to walk or cycle to/from schools in Markham.

Active School Travel programming is effective in helping counter current trends

Active School Travel (AST) was introduced as a solution to support more students to walk, bike and scooter to and from school, and address issues of increasing driving rates noted above. AST has many well-known benefits to children, youth and families, as well as the overall community:



The City has been a key partner in an Active School Travel program since 2018

The York Region District School Board (YRDSB), in partnership with York Catholic District School Board, York Region and City of Markham, received grants from the Ontario Active School Travel Funds (OAST) - Green Communities Canada in late 2018 for implementation of the "Active School Travel (AST)" pilot in Markham.

The AST pilot was launched in May 2019 and scheduled to end in June 2020 but was extended to June 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of seven (7) Public and two (2) Catholic elementary schools across the City of Markham were strategically selected to participate (see Attachment 'A' for participating school list). The AST pilot involved a number of initiatives including: marketing and outreach, school classroom competitions,

parent connection (group walking), sidewalk stencils, wayfinding signage, traffic and pedestrian safety enhancements (No Stopping Signs, Redline No Stopping Zones, Ladder Crosswalk Markings, School Zone Road Stencils), and Walking Wednesdays (Kiss & Ride Facility Closure). See Attachment 'B' for examples of these measures and initiatives.

On October 23, 2019, an official media launch took place at John McCrae Public School where the local member of Provincial Parliament as well as the Deputy Mayor, local Ward 6 Councillor, City of Markham staff, YRDSB staff, York Region staff, York Regional Police and parents were in attendance to support the event.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

Despite the abrupt school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall AST program was well-received and achieved an overall increase of 7% (from 63% to 70%) in active school travel amongst the 9 participating schools between May 2019 and October 2020.

Markham has been successful in AST programming

The City's AST model has demonstrated great success, with program elements being adopted by the Town of Newmarket and City of Vaughan, and the AST program's wayfinding signage also being used as a template in other York Region municipalities. Markham's AST program has received growing attention when presented at various webinars organized by Ontario Traffic Council and Green Communities Canada and attended by representatives from cities across and outside of Canada.

A School Street is an extension of AST programming, requiring limited and temporary road closures

To expand and build upon the momentum of the AST program, YRDSB received additional OAST funds to pilot a "School Street" Test Program in Markham in 2021. The School Street Test Program is an innovative extension to the AST program. This project is a collaboration between Green Communities Canada, 8-80 Cities, City of Hamilton, City of Mississauga, City of Markham and YRDSB.

School Streets are temporary, full road closure of streets directly in front of schools during peak school drop-off and pick-up times to create car-free zones that facilitate a safer environment for active school travel. By restricting vehicular traffic during these peak times, School Streets also offer other benefits:

- Improves air quality
- Promotes physical activity and healthier lifestyles
- Fosters community connection
- Facilitates active and independent mobility
- Reduces traffic congestion and car access around schools

School Streets originated in United Kingdom and have spread to cities around the world, including in Canada, and are supported by the Ontario government and the Ministry of Education. To date, School Streets tests have been conducted in Toronto, Ottawa and

Kingston. This Markham pilot would be the first School Street Test Program in York Region.

The School Street Test Program will allow Markham to learn from the results and prioritize public safety

Similar to the AST program, the implementation of the first-ever School Street Test Program in York Region will provide learnings to better understanding how this program could impact active school travel in a suburban context. The plan is to run a “proof of concept” test on a relatively quiet street.

The School Street Test Program will demonstrate Markham’s continuing leadership in active transportation and AST programming. The City of Markham will demonstrate its prioritization of public safety by creating a safer environment that promotes and encourages more school-age children into walking and cycling.

The planning and design of this test program was led by YRDSB and involved staff from various City departments (Engineering, Operations, Corporate Communications), the John McCrae Public School principal and school parents, Markham’s Cycling & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (CPAC), York Regional Police, and the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation.

A School Street Pilot has been planned on Stricker Avenue

Markham’s first School Street Test Program is proposed to take place at John McCrae Public School during the month of May 2022. The pilot involves the limited and temporary closure of Stricker Avenue between Hammersly Boulevard and Fred McLaren Boulevard. Stricker Avenue is a local residential street in Ward 6 and the School Street closure area includes a block of 15 dwelling units with driveway accesses (see Attachment ‘C’).

This pilot School Street zone will be closed to regular vehicular traffic on four (4) consecutive Wednesdays (on May 4, May 11, May 18 and May 25), from 8:15am - 9:15am and 3:00pm – 4:00pm only. A traffic control plan is in place to ensure that the roadway remains closed to vehicular traffic, with exceptions for residents of the 15 dwelling units, school buses, emergency vehicles and school staff. Road closure traffic signs, traffic barricades and traffic cones will be used as shown in Attachment ‘C’. As well, contract workers will be stationed at the southern barriers (at Fred McLaren Boulevard) to manage the limited vehicle access, as noted above, during the School Street operation.

City Staff will monitor safety concerns throughout the duration of the test program. Safety issues or significant concerns that cannot be adequately addressed may require a pause and/or changes to the initiative.

A comprehensive consultation and communications plan has been developed and is being implemented

As this pilot project involves the closure of a City street, even if limited and temporary, a comprehensive consultation and communication plan has been developed to ensure full information is provided to the local community and their understanding of the impacts to traffic flow in the neighbourhood.

Staff from YRDSB and Engineering have worked closely with the John McCrae Public School principal and school parents, Markham's Cycling & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (CPAC), York Regional Police, Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, and City's internal departments (Operations, Corporate Communications) in the development of the School Streets Test Program. 8-80 Cities has also provided monthly consulting and guidance.

In addition, the CPAC Councillors (Deputy Mayor, Wards 3 and 8 Councillors) and the local Ward 6 Councillor have been consulted and are supportive of the initiative.

The comprehensive communications strategy is to inform, educate and promote the School Street Test Program to the local community and school parents/caregivers. This includes creating a website, placing mobile signs around the school and marketing on social media. Local residents living in the adjacent neighbourhood will be provided with information letters. School parents and caregivers are also provided with at least two (2) letters from YRDSB to inform them about the test program. A survey link will also be setup to receive feedback prior to and after implementation of the School Street Test Program.

Limited and temporary full road closures of Stricker Avenue to occur in May 2022

As noted above, the closure of Stricker Avenue is scheduled on four (4) consecutive Wednesdays (on May 4, May 11, May 18 and May 25), from 8:15am - 9:15am and 3:00pm – 4:00pm only, with a media launch event planned on May 4, 2022. A detailed data collection and field review exercise will evaluate the effectiveness and overall success of the test program. The final reporting and data analysis of the School Street Test Program is expected to be completed by Fall 2022.

Therefore, staff recommend that Council endorse this School Street Test Program and the temporary, full road closure of Stricker Avenue for the above noted period of this pilot.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The School Street Test Program is largely funded by the Green Communities Canada's OAST grant of \$27,500 to the school boards. The City of Markham will contribute \$3,500 of funding and in-kind staff hours to support the implementation of the pilot by the school boards. Markham's contribution of \$3,500 will be funded from account 083-5350-21025-005 (Cycling & Pedestrian Advisory Committee).

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not Applicable

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

In the Building Markham's Future Together Strategic Plan, the Active School Travel Program and the School Street Test Program aligns with the strategic focus for a Safe &

Sustainable Community by improving and making active transportation an attractive and sustainable mobility option.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Operations and Corporate Communications departments have been involved in the development of the School Street Test Program.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Frank Clarizio, P.Eng.
Director of Engineering

Arvin Prasad, MPA, RPP, MCIP
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 'A' – Active School Travel Participating Elementary Schools

Attachment 'B' – Sample of AST Implementation

Attachment 'C' – Proposed School Street Road Closure Traffic Control Plan