

# MAKING CHILDREN COUNT

A Call to Action to Increase  
Active School Travel in Manitoba



## BACKGROUND

The Active and Safe Routes to School program at Green Action Centre has worked with communities in Manitoba for over a decade to educate, advocate, and take action on increasing children's mobility. Active transportation is on the decline in Canada, as part of a decades-long international trend toward more sedentary lifestyles and increased dependence on vehicles. We're here to reverse this trend.

Our youth are living in a state of health and environmental crisis. There is considerable evidence that confirms active school travel has vital physical, mental, and environmental health benefits. In order for us to address these important issues, we need decision-makers to take ownership over active school travel and work together to address it.

If Manitoba wants to make positive change towards the health of our youth and the environment, we need to be innovative. This includes bringing researchers, planners, engineers, health professionals, policy makers, parents, school communities and other key stakeholders together to work towards a coordinated approach to get more children walking and cycling to school on safe routes. We all have a role to play, and we need to act now.

## HOW YOUNG PEOPLE GET AROUND IN MANITOBA

From 2015-2017, Active and Safe Routes to School led a province wide study to better understand how children travel to school. Over two years, 305 schools across Manitoba conducted classroom surveys, using the innovative tool BikeWalkRoll, for one week, three times a year (October, February, and May). A school's BikeWalkRoll score is based on the proportion of students that chose active travel (bike, walk, or roll). BikeWalkRoll data analysis and project support was provided by a Technical Working Group. This report includes key results, health challenges faced by youth, and actions to improve active school travel rates.



## 2/3 CHILDREN IN MANITOBA ARE NOT ACTIVE ON THE TRIP TO SCHOOL

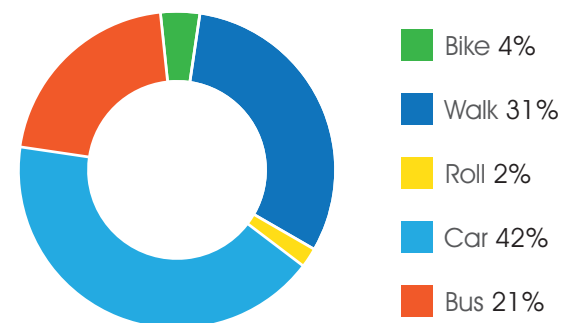


When sorted by grade, classrooms in middle school had the highest BikeWalkRoll scores, while early school classrooms had the lowest. Active school travel tends to be seasonal, with an extra 3% of student's walking and cycling in May compared to October, and 5% fewer students in February.

## AS NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKABILITY INCREASES, RATES OF ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL INCREASE

Improving the WalkScore of a neighbourhood by 10 points would be expected to cause an additional 1.37% of students to actively travel to school.

## BIKEWALKROLL IN MANITOBA



Manitoba's BikeWalkRoll score is **37**.

# HEALTH CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH IN MANITOBA

## Environment



Traffic congestion directly linked to poor air quality and increased greenhouse gases around schools.

## Safety

Vehicle collisions **2<sup>nd</sup>** leading cause of injury death in Manitoban children.

**1000+** “risky driving behaviours” caught during annual Winnipeg school zone safety test in 2017.



## Diabetes

Manitoba has one of the highest rates of type 2 diabetes in children in the world.



## Physical Activity

In Manitoba, **45%** of the population is inactive.

Only **9%** of Canadian children aged 5–17 get the 60 minutes of heart-pumping activity they need each day.



## Obesity

Almost **29%** of Manitoba children are obese or at risk of obesity.

**60% to 90%** of obese adolescents remain obese into adulthood.

# THE BENEFITS OF ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL

- » Increases physical activity throughout the entire day.
- » Reduces traffic congestion, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- » Results in fewer injuries when paired with appropriate infrastructure.
- » Increases readiness to learn and can lead to higher grades in school.
- » Increases exposure to sunlight, which helps regulate sleep patterns.
- » Enhances neighbourhood safety, social connectivity, and sense of community.



# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Parents

- » Organize a Walking School Bus or Bike Train in your school community.
- » Talk to school administration about prioritizing active school travel.
- » Ask your local councillor and MLA to support active transportation policy and infrastructure.
- » Flex your schedule to include walking or biking your child to school, or park and walk partway.

## Schools & Divisions

- » Organize and support walking and cycling programs, with the necessary infrastructure (bike racks/cages).
- » Participate in International Walk to School Month, Bike to School Month, and Clean Air Day.
- » Develop School Travel Plans that address barriers to active transportation, led by a Divisional Active Transportation Coordinator.
- » Implement active transportation policies, including anti-idling policies which encourage drivers and school bus drivers to curb fuel consumption.

## Decision Makers

- » Create and adopt policies that prioritize active school travel.
- » Prioritize active transportation infrastructure that works for all ages.
- » Restructure school transportation budgets to include active transportation.
- » Financially support school divisions in the development of School Travel Plans, including implementation and infrastructure funds.



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