

DATE: May 22, 2012

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Feasibility of Development of Active Transportation Plans for All Schools (Trustee Request #182)

ORIGINATOR: Brian J. Smith, Executive Director, Finance & Infrastructure

RESOURCE STAFF: Jenifer Elliott, Roland Labbe, Marco Melfi, Lorne Parker, Chris Wright

REFERENCE: March 13, 2012 Board Meeting (Board of Trustees)

ISSUE

The following amended motion was approved:

“In alignment with District Priority 4 (promote health and wellness for all students and staff) provide information on the feasibility, over the next three years, of the District developing active transportation plans for all schools to support safe and healthy transportation options for students.”

BACKGROUND

Currently, District trends indicate more students are being driven to and from school compared to students who are choosing to walk. Increased numbers of students being driven to and from school is also in contrast to past trends when walking or cycling were the dominant travel modes. Automobile usage in general has increased among all major cities in Canada. Edmonton was ranked as the city with the highest automobile usage by a 2008 Statistics Canada report. Reasons cited for the increase in students being driven to and from school include: safety, distance, convenience, expediency, weather, and program location.

This shift is observed equally at schools in suburban neighbourhoods and mature neighbourhoods in Edmonton. Similarly, schools offering regular programming or who draw students from their own neighbourhood and schools offering an alternative program or that draw from other neighbourhoods around the city are also experiencing increased numbers of students being driven.

The increased numbers of students being driven creates daily on site challenges for students, school staff and parents. School parking lots are not large enough to accommodate both staff and visitor parking. Available on-street parking in front of schools is limited and occupied quickly. The increased vehicular volume from parents during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up periods creates congestion in front of the school. The congestion impacts traffic flow and disrupts both yellow and ETS buses. Poor driver behaviour which includes disregard for signage, improper parking, illegal U-turns and unsafe drop-offs compounds the situation.

While all students cannot or will not be able to walk or cycle to school, the increasing vehicular traffic from parents around schools has implications for the safety of all students regardless of how they travel to and from school.

Strategies to decrease vehicular traffic from parents around schools and mitigate safety implications include, but are not limited to, promotion of yellow bus service, subsidized Edmonton Transit System service, driver awareness, AMA School Safety Patrol, active transportation promotion, and on site modifications in some instances.

Active Transportation refers to any form of self-propelled (i.e. non-motorized) mode of transportation that uses human energy such as walking and cycling. These modes may also be combined with public transit for trips to and from school, work and other community facilities.

Active transportation plans have several benefits:

- Improved safety of all students travelling to and from school
- More students walking and/or cycling to and from school
- Reduction in car volume, congestion and traffic concerns around schools
- Increased travel awareness
- Promotion of sustainable travel modes
- Improved health and fitness of students
- Positive environmental impact
- Positive contribution to a school's reputation

School Travel Planning (STP) is an initiative to develop active transportation plans at individual schools in Canada and around the world. It identifies why students are being driven, issues affecting the school as a result of high numbers of students being driven and explores school community driven strategies to mitigate safety concerns and promote active transportation.

STP involves a five phase process for each school: 1) Set-up; 2) Data Collection; 3) Action Planning; 4) Implementation; and 5) Monitoring and Evaluation (Attachment I). Each school community is guided by a facilitator through the process. The strength and success of the initiative at each school however, depends on the level of input and involvement from the school community. The bottom up approach allows the school community to identify the traffic issues and subsequent actions that are specific to the school. The action plan is therefore unique to that school.

In the first phase, an STP committee is created that includes school staff, parents, District Planning staff and municipal stakeholders interested in active transportation. The Data Collection phase involves a Classroom Hands Up survey, a Family Survey, a Walkabout and a Traffic Count around the school and neighbourhood. This phase identifies how students are travelling to/from school, the rationale for their travel choice, what (if any) barriers exist when walking or cycling and any suggestions to address these barriers (Attachment II - Johnny Bright School Survey Results). The Action Planning phase creates the action plan with information, initiatives and strategies to capitalize on the opportunities and address the challenges uncovered

in the previous phase (Attachment III - Johnny Bright School Action Plan). At the end of the process an action plan is created for implementation. The process from set-up (June) to implementation (following spring) needs one school year to be established. Once this STP committee is established the action plan is a “living” document that is to be implemented, monitored and updated year to year.

Active transportation and STP are promoted in Alberta by Safe Healthy Active People Everywhere (SHAPE), one of the founding members of the *Canadian Active and Safe Routes to School Partnership*. SHAPE has established a School Travel Planning Municipal Stakeholders Committee of different organizations interested in active transportation in Edmonton. The committee includes representatives from AMA School Safety Patrol, City of Edmonton Sustainable Transportation, Walkable Edmonton, Alberta Health Services, Edmonton Police Service and the Alberta Transportation Office of Traffic Safety. The committee’s purpose is to provide collective ideas and feedback from their diverse perspectives throughout the STP process for each school.

The Walkable Edmonton branch from the City of Edmonton has also initiated a larger Active Transportation Network. The Active Transportation Network, which meets every two months, is an opportunity for various organizations and groups promoting or participating in active transportation initiatives the opportunity to share information, resources and notices of upcoming events. In addition to the organizations listed above, the Active Transportation Network also includes representation from Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, the University of Alberta, Edmonton Transit System, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, Edmonton Bicycle Commuters and other City of Edmonton departments.

In 2009, Edmonton Public Schools partnered with the not-for profit SHAPE to pilot the School Travel Planning initiative in Edmonton. Three schools were part of the initial pilot: Baturyn, George P. Nicholson and Julia Kiniski schools.

In 2010, seven more schools were invited to participate in the School Travel Planning initiative: A. Blair McPherson, Caernarvon, Dr. Donald Massey, Elizabeth Finch, Esther Starkman, Florence Hallock and Johnny Bright schools. District Planning staff have also begun work to introduce School Travel Planning to Michael Strembitsky, Bessie Nichols and Major General Griesbach schools opening in September 2012.

CURRENT SITUATION

The development of active transportation plans at every school in the District would be a valuable and necessary traffic mitigation measure to address the increasing vehicular traffic from parents around schools and the associated safety implications. The feasibility of developing action plans for all schools over the next three years at this time would be challenging. The current approach, utilizing the School Travel Planning initiative, has had various levels of participation and success among the ten participating schools. District Planning staff are still refining the current approach and evaluating its effectiveness.

Another challenge in developing active transportation plans at more schools are the implications on partner contributions. SHAPE has led the School Travel Planning initiative with the assistance of District Planning staff since 2009. SHAPE, funded through various Canadian and Provincial grants, has provided guidance, time and resources to the School Travel Planning process at each of the participating schools. In addition to School Travel Planning, SHAPE is also responsible for organizing province wide events such as Winter Walk Day (February) and Wheel to School Week (June). However, given the fluctuations in SHAPE's funding, and other provincial commitments and responsibilities, increasing the number of schools participating in School Travel Planning too rapidly could limit the involvement of SHAPE. This would also impact the involvement and contribution of the organizations from the School Travel Planning Municipal Stakeholders committee.

With respect to the District specifically, District Planning staff support active transportation as one measure to ensure all students are safe travelling to and from school regardless of mode. While the development of active transportation plans, using the School Travel Planning initiative, is intended to be school community driven, the process requires the guidance of a facilitator, which District Planning staff has done. Establishing the process and developing a plan requires one year. A rapid increase in the number of schools developing active transportation plans would be challenging given current staffing and time resources. Two staff members have led the active transportation portfolio within the Planning department in addition to other department projects and responsibilities.

Based on the facilitation done with Johnny Bright School to assist with their STP process, the chart in Attachment IV illustrates the time required by District staff to develop an active transportation plan at one school.

KEY POINTS

- District trends indicate more students are being driven to and from school; this shift is observed equally at all schools in Edmonton.
- The increasing numbers of students being driven creates daily on site challenges for students, school staff and parents.
- The increasing vehicular traffic from parents around schools has implications for the safety of all students regardless of how they travel to and from school.
- Active Transportation refers to any form of self-propelled mode of transportation such as walking and cycling.
- STP is an initiative to develop active transportation plans at individual schools in Canada and around the world.
- STP identifies why students are being driven, issues affecting the school as a result of high numbers of students being driven and explores school community driven strategies to mitigate safety concerns and promote active transportation.
- Action plans are only one step in the STP process. The whole project, when done effectively, will take one year to develop with a strong commitment from the school community and the broader Municipal Stakeholders Committee.
- The development of active transportation plans at every school in the District would be valuable.
- The feasibility of developing action plans for all schools over the next three years at this time would be challenging.

- District Planning staff are still evaluating the effectiveness of the current approach using STP.
- Rapid development of active transportation plans at more schools may have implications on partner involvement and contribution.
- The time and resources required of District Planning staff will be limited given other projects and responsibilities.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I School Travel Planning Process

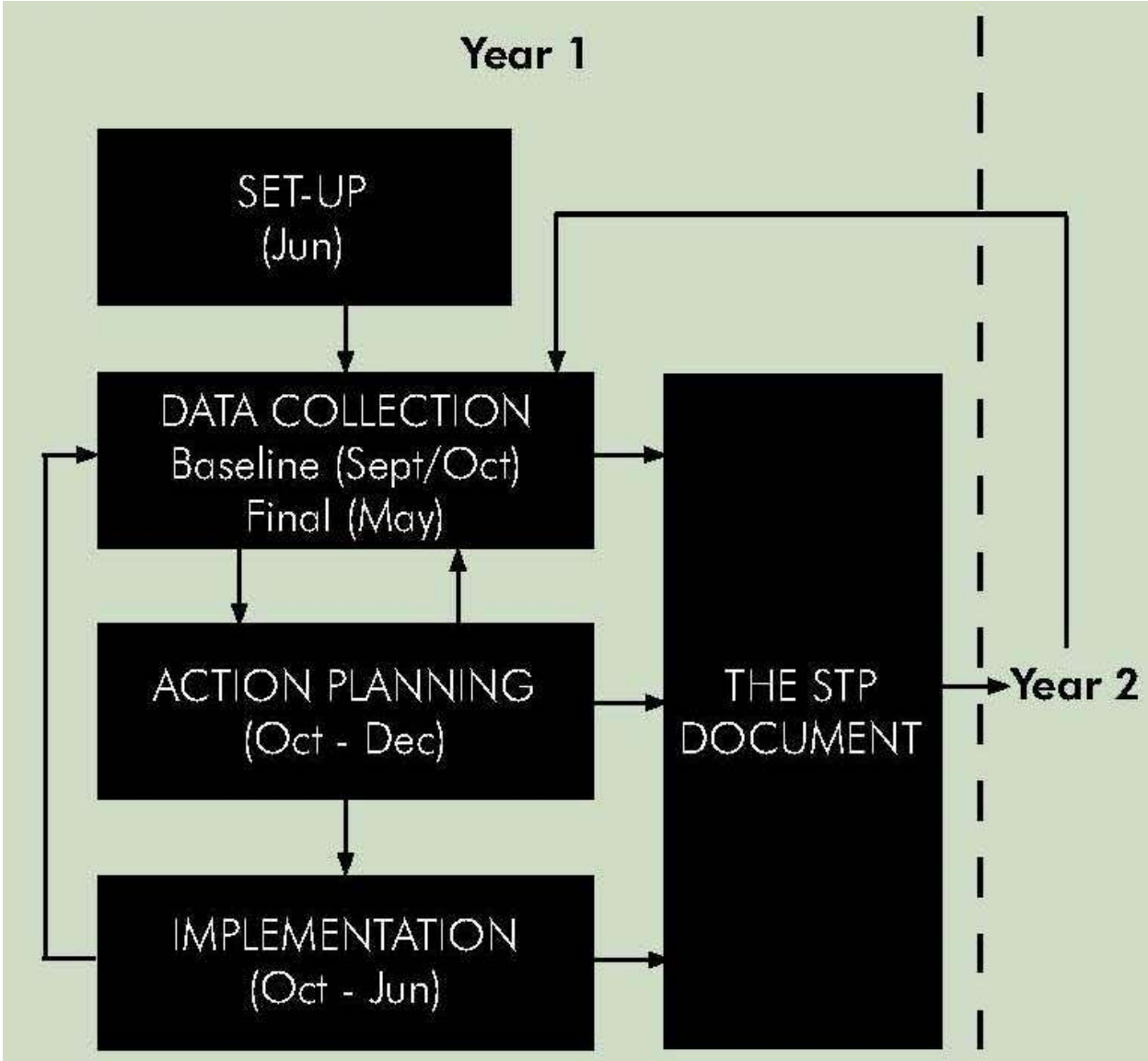
ATTACHMENT II Johnny Bright School Survey Results (Excerpts)

ATTACHMENT III Johnny Bright School Action Plan

ATTACHMENT IV Sample School Travel Planning Timetable for District Planning Staff

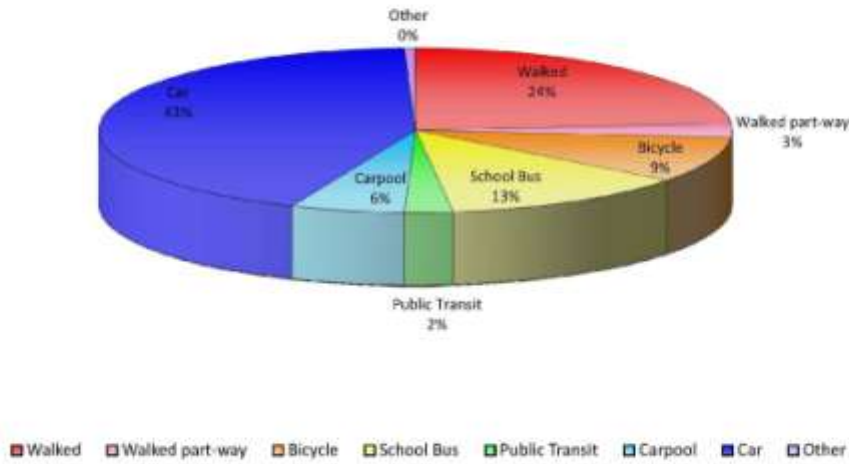
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SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING PROCESS

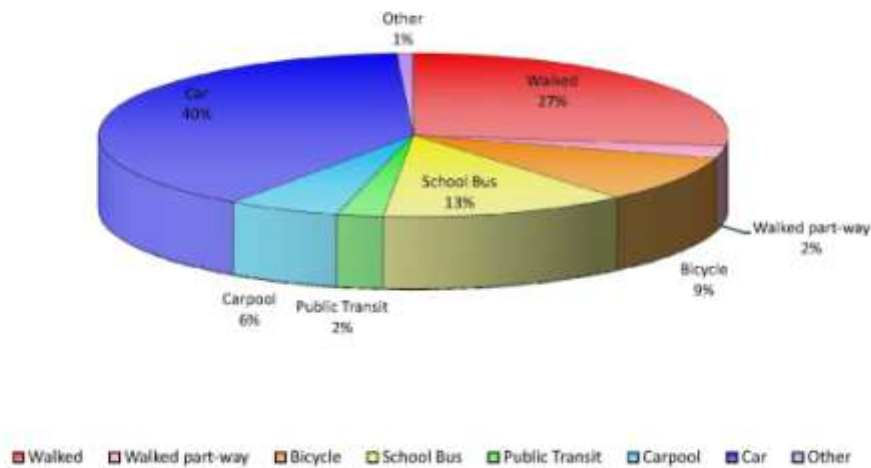


JOHNNY BRIGHT SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS (EXCERPT)
Classroom Hands-Up Survey

Student Hands-Up Survey:
Total Travel Mode TO School Over a Week

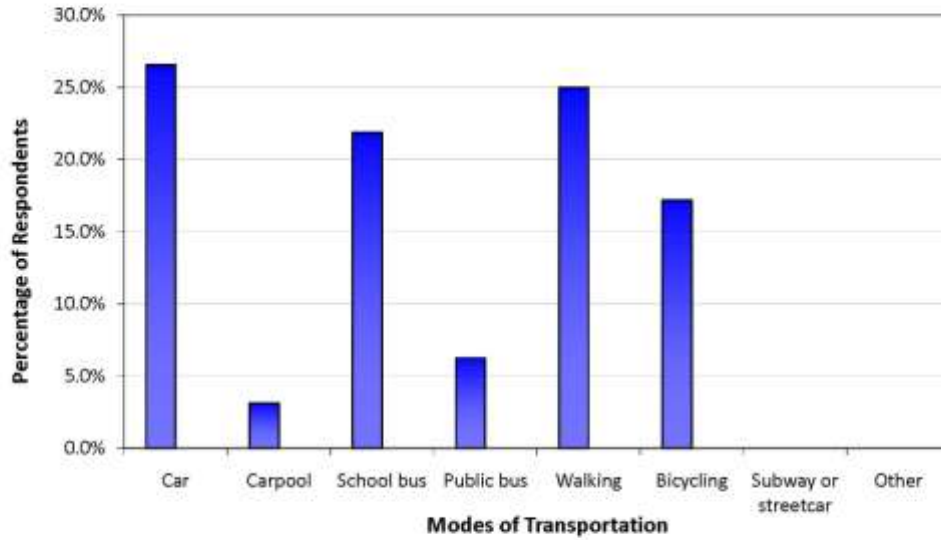


Student Hands-Up Survey:
Total Travel Mode FROM School Over a Week

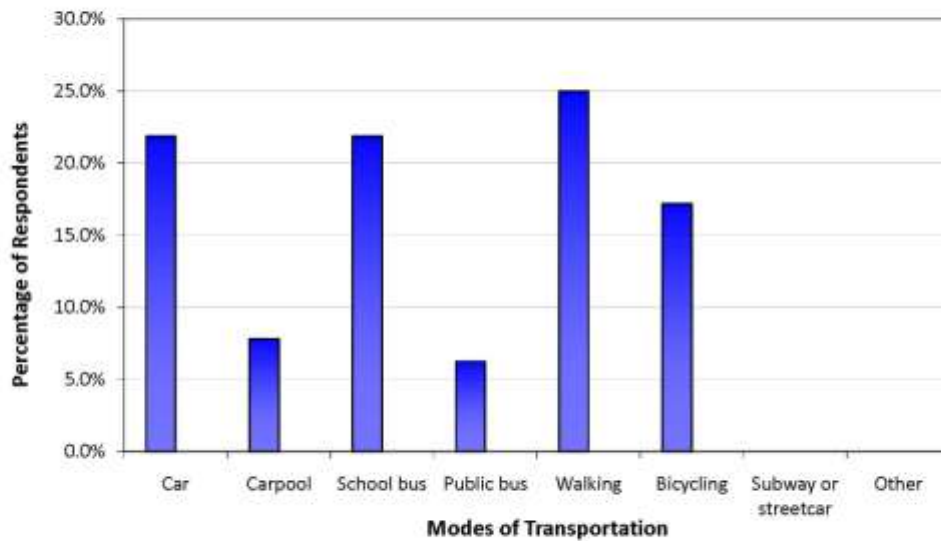


JOHNNY BRIGHT SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS (EXCERPT)
Family Survey

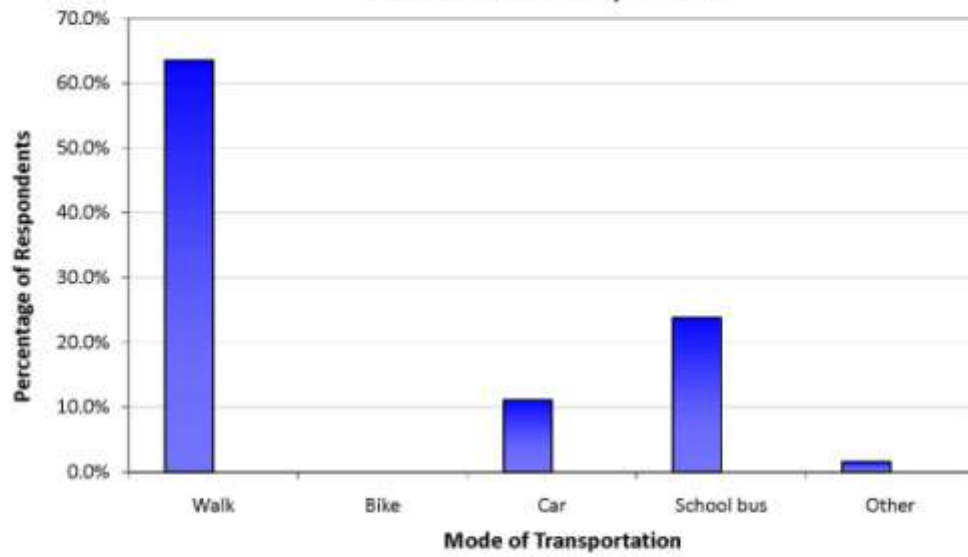
Q1/2 - How does your child usually get TO school?



Q1/2 - How does your child usually get FROM school?



Q11 - How did you (parent/guardian) travel to elementary school?



Johnny Bright – School Travel Planning – Action Plan
March 2011

1. Action Plan

Action / Initiative	Task	Responsibility	Timeframe	Cost & Source of Funds
Objective 1: To encourage more students to walk or cycle to and from school				
Walking School bus	Identify suitable drop-off locations; Generate interest	School	Ongoing vs one day a week/month?	
Make connections with other school events and/or active transportation events	Promote <i>Clean Air Day</i> , <i>Wheel today</i> (formerly Bike to School Day), <i>International Walk to School Month</i> , <i>Winter Walk day</i> etc.	School, PAC, EPSB, SHAPE		
Curricular connections	science (environmental impacts; emission reduction), math (costs savings); health (active lifestyle)	Teachers		
Bike Racks	Install another bike rack at the front of the school	School		
Walk/Bike to School Week	Encourage students to walk or bike to school every day during this week	School, PAC, STP partners	May 9-13, 2011; annual?	
Objective 2: To improve the safety of children en route to and from school				
Educate Students	Educate students in pedestrian safety, bicycle safety; explore curricula links	School, PAC, STP partners		
Snow removal	Speed up the snow removal process around the school	City of Edmonton	Winter	
Parent assisted valet	Parents assisting students exiting vehicles in drop-off	PAC	Ongoing	
Enforcement	Increased visits by Police during peak hours	EPS	Ongoing	
Education for Parents				
Objective 3: Increase Travel Awareness				
Education	Announcements at school, information in school newsletters, updates to School Council	Principal	Beginning April 2011	
Providing walking maps	Maps that highlight the pedestrian pathways and connections	EPSB; PAC		

Objective 4: Encourage sustainable travel modes

Walk/Bike to School Week	Encourage students to walk or bike to school everyday during this week	School, PAC, STP partners	May 9-13, 2011; annual?	
Connections with Spring Clean Up			Spring 2011	

Objective 5: Long-term (3-5 years)

Safety of all students	Safety traveling to/from school; safety around school in a.m. and p.m.			
Decreased traffic congestion before and after school				
Healthier students arriving at school ready to learn				
More kids using active transportation to get to school	Parents and students walking throughout the year			
Volunteer appreciation	Providing coffee (or other incentives), positive encouragement			
Build connections between parents				

Sample School Travel Planning Timetable for District Planning Staff

Task	Approximate Time Required by District Planning Staff
PHASE 1: SET-UP	
Invite participants from the school community	4 hours (includes set-up preparation and meeting)
Initial meeting with school staff and parents to form committee	
PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION	
Survey template modification (Classroom and Family)	2 hours
Distribute and collect surveys	2 hours
Data entry/tabulation of Classroom Hands-Up Surveys	SHAPE
Data entry/tabulation of Family Surveys	SHAPE
Submit data tabulations to Green Communities Canada for inclusion in national analysis	SHAPE
Traffic/Pedestrian/Cyclist Count	3 hours
School Site Visit & Walkabout	4 hours including site visit and data compilation
Analyze data and prepare summary report	1.5 hours
Communicate results to school community	2 hours
PHASE 3: ACTION PLANNING	
Facilitate development of Action Plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming with school community 	2 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Action Plan 	1 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Action Plan is approved by all relevant stakeholders 	2 hours
PHASE 4: IMPLEMENTATION	
Implement tasks in the Action Plan (Johnny Bright School examples):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Transportation Week 	School community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Routes to School Map 	5 hours (Includes all work done with Walkable Edmonton and the school community to prepare for the development of the map)
PHASE 5: ONGOING MONITORING	
Follow-Up Survey template modification (Classroom and Family)	2 hours
Distribute and collect follow-up surveys	2 hours
Data entry/tabulation of Classroom Hands-Up Surveys	SHAPE
Data entry/tabulation of Family Surveys	SHAPE
Submit data tabulations to Green Communities Canada for inclusion in national analysis	SHAPE
Analyze data and prepare summary report	1.5 hours