

2/5/24

Alice Boden

Statement to Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel

Resources included:

The Toxic School Run (UNICEF)

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/UUK-research-briefing-The-toxic-school-run-September-2018.pdf>

School Streets to Shape Child-Friendly Cities (Clean Cities Campaign)

https://cleancitiescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/School-Streets-Factsheet_w.pdf

I am a resident of Bath, a mother of two school aged children and a GP. I am here to urge you to view your decisions about school streets from a child and public health perspective. As the President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said last year:

“Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, with children being particularly vulnerable. All children deserve the opportunity for the best chance for a healthy start in life. Exposure to air pollutants during pregnancy and early childhood can have harmful and irreversible effects on the development of the lungs and other organs leading to potential long-term health effects well into adulthood.”

A study in London - discussed in the UNICEF report distributed to you - found that children received 15% of their daily exposure to air pollution during travel to and from school. Children are disproportionately vulnerable to air pollution: both because of their developing lungs, and because they breathe faster and are nearer to the level of car exhausts. Studies of school streets in the UK have demonstrated reductions of nitrogen dioxide levels of 23% and particulates of up to 36%. School streets could therefore have a positive impact on the health of children in Bath and North East Somerset, both now and for the rest of their lives.

National guidelines recommend at least 1 hour of physical activity each day for all children. However, less than half of children are currently achieving this. A School Streets pilot in Hackney, London demonstrated a 51% increase in cycling to school and a 30% increase in walking. As GPs, we are currently seeing both increasing levels of obesity and more children struggling with their mental and emotional wellbeing. A 2017 study demonstrated a positive association between active travel to school and psychological wellbeing.

As a Mum of children who have attended local schools in Oldfield Park throughout their school lives, I have seen this at first hand. We have experienced the social and emotional benefits of walking to school. My children have grown up within their community rather than being driven through it, and they now walk confidently to their secondary school. However, my youngest daughter has asthma and often feels wheezy and tight chested after walking home along busy roads.

In the years from 2019-22, there were 211 child deaths in the UK due to road traffic accidents. 35% of serious injuries and deaths of children in road traffic collisions occur during travel to or from school. School Streets could make travel to school safer by reducing road traffic on the surrounding streets.

So, in conclusion, your decisions on School Streets could improve the physical and mental wellbeing of generations of children in Bath and North East Somerset. You have the power to prevent potentially fatal asthma attacks, improve children's lung health, prevent future ill health, improve children's psychological wellbeing and prevent injuries and deaths on the roads. Thank you for listening.

References / further reading:

Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health, statement from President:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-launches-action-support-clean-air-human-rights-bill>

Physical activity guidelines for children:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people-5-to-18-years>

Children's activity levels:

<https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/childrens-activity-levels-hold-firm-significant-challenges-remain#:~:text=Children%20and%20young%20people's%20overall,and%20physical%20activity%20a%20day.>

Increase in walking and cycling with school streets pilot in Hackney:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-hails-success-of-schools-streets-programme#:~:text=Hackney%20Council's%20School%20Streets%20pilot,cent%20reduction%20in%20tailpipe%20emissions.>

Active travel to school and psychological wellbeing:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325540291_Active_school_travel_attitudes_and_psychological_well-being_of_children

National Child Mortality Database: [https://www.ncmd.info/publications/report-child-accident-](https://www.ncmd.info/publications/report-child-accident-injury/#:~:text=There%20were%20211%20deaths%20of,and%2078%20in%202021%2D22.)

[injury/#:~:text=There%20were%20211%20deaths%20of,and%2078%20in%202021%2D22.](https://www.ncmd.info/publications/report-child-accident-injury/#:~:text=There%20were%20211%20deaths%20of,and%2078%20in%202021%2D22.)

Road Injury Prevention: Resources to support schools to promote active travel:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505277/25_Feb16FINAL_DOCUMENT.pdf

Department for Transport (2015) Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2014 Annual Report