

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area  
School Travel Household Attitudinal Study***

Every day in Toronto and surrounding areas children and youth are making trips to and from school, and a host of other destinations. How they travel on those trips has significant impacts on their health and the community. Further, the travel modes that adults choose have short and long terms impacts on children and youth, in addition to environmental and economic consequences.

Statistics show that children and youth make more than half of all school-day walking and bicycling trips; however, this group's travel by car, as passengers, increased substantially between 1986 and 2001. For 11- to 15-year-olds the per capita increase was 83% (*Transportation Tomorrow Surveys*).

The design of our neighbourhoods, the auto-dependency of our cities and towns, and increasing traffic and eroding levels of mutual trust have far-reaching effects on children and youth. The research literature shows they result in physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, traffic-related injury, respiratory illness, stress, loss of independent mobility and exposure to carcinogenic substances. Increased passive travel via automobile is also associated with reduced academic performance and compromised emotional development (*Kids on the Move in Halton and Peel: Final Report*).

In 2006, the Government of Ontario established Metrolinx with the mandate to champion, develop, and implement an integrated multi-modal Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the GTHA. The RTP, *The Big Move*, envisions that, 25 years from now, one in five trips to work will be taken by walking or cycling and 60% of children will walk or cycle to school. The RTP Big Moves (#4, #7) and strategies (#2, #4, #7) pertain directly to walking and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

***THE RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS***

Metrolinx conducted the first focused study of household mode choices and attitudes regarding elementary school travel in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) in Fall 2009. The study of 1,000 households across the GTHA investigated school travel behaviour, perceptions towards active and sustainable modes of travel, and existing school travel infrastructure and programs.

This research is part of the 2.5-year *Stepping it Up* pilot project led by Metrolinx in partnership with the Region of Peel, the City of Hamilton, Green Communities Canada, and the University of Toronto, with funding from Transport Canada's ecoMOBILITY program. This project focuses on identifying the possibilities for enhancing and encouraging use of active and sustainable travel

options. *Stepping it Up* began to roll out school-based activities at participating elementary schools in Fall 2009. By the pilot project's end in December 2011, 30 schools will be participating in project activities.

Preliminary findings of the GTHA study include:

- 32% of elementary school students are primarily travelling to and from school by *automobile* (39% are walking, 21% are in school buses, and 9% are cycling, carpooling, taking public transit or using other ways)
- 9% of students are travelling differently on their trip *to school* versus *home from school*, with the most common combination being *driven to school and walking home*
- 21% of students living *within 1 km* of their school and 43% of those living *between 1 and 2 km* of their school are *being driven*
- Parents whose child is driven to school report that they use this mode due to *lack of other options* (38%) and *concerns about other methods* (24%) of school travel
- 78% of parents expressed some level of concern about *strangers or bullies* approaching their child if they travel alone, and 40% disagreed with the statement "*people drive safely enough in my neighbourhood*"

The following preliminary findings of the study represent opportunities to improve levels of active school travel:

- 58% of parents say their child's school is close enough to *reasonably walk or bike*
- 64% of children being driven *live within 2 km* of the school, and *over half* of these overall automobile trips to and from school are *made solely for the purpose of dropping off and picking up a child* (i.e. not part of a commute to and from work or other destination)
- 42% of those parents whose child is driven would be *interested in considering a different mode* of school travel
- 56% of parents whose child is currently driven see the option of their child walking or biking to school as *convenient and appealing*

### *NEXT STEPS IN THE RESEARCH*

Further individual and household level data will be collected through participating schools throughout the project period to further quantify the issues, challenges, and opportunities associated with school travel. For more information on the *Stepping it Up* pilot project and the study report (anticipated to be available in late December 2009) visit: [www.metrolinx.com/schooltravel](http://www.metrolinx.com/schooltravel)