

Kids Reimagine School Streets

What would streets look like if we built them for kids? This question guides 'Kids Reimagine School Streets', a collaboration between non-profit organizations, 4 elementary grade schools in 3 communities, university students, designers, fabricators, and local community members. The aim: to co-create safe, comfortable, and interesting routes to school; and to empower kids - and the rest of the community - to lower their carbon footprint by walking and biking for daily trips. Active travel reduces pollution and leads to improved physical and mental health, and better school grades.

This program takes kids out of the back seat (figuratively and literally) and gets them involved in planning low carbon, healthy communities. It connects city builders with students' point of view, and shows kids they can make a difference when it comes to climate change. Results of the project include educational resources, summary publication and video, tactical urbanism projects in three neighbourhoods and 'Neighbourhood Active Travel Networks' proposals to turn three school communities into walkable, safe and welcoming places.

Collaborative Process with School Communities

The project used a participatory co -design process that engages grade 4-6 students to evaluate and reimagine their daily routes to schools. Through hybrid in-person and online sessions with the project team, students learned about the power of design to transform their built environment, brainstormed ideas to make their neighbourhoods more safe and fun, and created physical 3d models of a design intervention around their school.

Temporary Street Interventions

Building on the momentum of the collaborative process, tactical urbanism interventions were implemented adjacent to schools, including the Connaught Play Street and Meridian Active Alley (installed Summer of 2022), and Martindale Calm Collector (slated Spring 2023). Each intervention was precedent-setting, and encouraged more walking and biking by students and the larger community. Weekly pop-up activities took place at Connaught from June - August 2022 and provided free, family-friendly outdoor events.

Network Active Travel Networks (NATN)

In addition to the shorter-term interventions, NATN's were developed to create long-term plans for active travel.

Connaught's NATN features a long green finger park that transforms a paved rail corridor into meandering paths and brings new ways to play and commute, like skiing and skating, to downtown. Trees and plants in low-speed streets running east-west provide drainage, address the heat island effect, and connect local shops, parks, pools, schools, and other community amenities.

Martindale's NATN uses green woonerfs to make new routes efficient, beautiful and fun. Martindale Boulevard - the neighbourhood's main street and the only way in and out of the community - is transformed into a Complete Street with wide colourful sidewalks and spaces for walking, play, transit, cars and bikes.

Meridian's NATN separates industrial traffic from community life using vehicle barriers. Bike lanes and green space connect Franklin LRT station with the school, local organizations and businesses. Parking lots around the transit hub become "Station City" - a commercial area that makes better use of high-value land, while adding convenience, greenery, comfort and greater safety.