

REPORT

Engineering Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 26, 2025

From: Lisa Leblanc
Director of Engineering
File: 05.1035.10
(Doc# 2689222v7)

Item #: 2025-149

Subject: **Response to Council Motion: School Streets Pilot Program**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the School Streets Pilot Program not be pursued due to significant unbudgeted costs and impacts on high-priority work plans, as outlined in the report titled "Response to Council Motion: "School Streets Pilot Program" dated May 26, 2025.

PURPOSE

To report back to Council on the logistical, transportation, and financial requirements to introduce a School Streets Pilot Program to provide a car-free block beside a school that is otherwise open for walking, biking, and rolling during pick-up and drop-off times for a one-month period in the 2025/26 school year.

BACKGROUND

On December 16, 2024, Council passed the following motion:

1. BE IT RESOLVED that staff report back to Council on the opportunity for the City of New Westminster to partner with the Society of Children and Youth BC to explore implementing a safe street initiative around selected schools; and

2. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff work with School District 40 to identify which schools would be appropriate to launch a School Streets Pilot Program that would reflect the principles of the National and/or BC Active School Streets Initiative; and
3. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff report back on the capital and operating costs associated with the implementation of a School Streets Pilot Program; and
4. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that staff be directed to work with SD40 and other partners to update our Safe Routes to School maps.

A School Street is a car-free block beside a school that is open to walking, biking, and rolling at the start and/or end of the school day. A School Street initiative can range in duration from a single day to a full school year or beyond; the program can vary in daily duration depending on the jurisdiction from a full-day event to only occurring during pick-up and drop-off periods. For the Pilot project contemplated herein, the City would intend for the street closure to occur at the beginning and end of school days during the drop-off and pick-up periods. The purpose of the program is to encourage students to walk, cycle, or roll to and from schools and to reduce vehicle congestion and associated noise and emissions at the school frontage. For 30-60 minutes at the beginning and end of each school day, motor vehicle operators are not permitted to enter or exit the block where the School Street is in effect. Vehicles parked within the School Street block and requiring the use of the street to exit, would be required to remain during the closure.

The City has previously worked with the Society of Children and Youth BC (SCY) to implement a brief (90 minutes) pop-up, School Street demonstration event during the BC Active Transportation Summit hosted in New Westminster on June 18-19, 2024. To deliver this 1-1/2 hour event, City staff spent approximately 25 hours working with SCY and coordinating with School District 40 (SD40). Coordination commenced with SCY in April 2024 to identify a ranked list of three schools where a School Street demonstration could be implemented. SCY coordinated with individual schools to gauge interest in participating. Lord Kelvin Elementary School was selected and the School Street was designated along Hamilton Street between 10th Street and the lane on the west side of the school. Notification letters were prepared and distributed by SCY to residents impacted by the street closure along Hamilton St.

The Hamilton Street closure to traffic was activated using a badminton net, a bicycle and scooter course, imagination playground blocks, bubbles, and chalk. This School Street-Play Street was staffed by SCY staff, and monitored by City Transportation Staff. All street activation materials were supplied by SCY. The cost to the City was entirely in-kind, through staff involvement; there were no new or contracted staff engaged, and instead existing staff were reassigned from other projects. The staff that supported this event are responsible for a number of other duties, including responding to inquiries from residents

and reviewing and approving Street Occupancy Permits and Traffic Management Plans for construction, special events, block parties, and other street uses.

DISCUSSION

Based on lessons learned from other municipalities in the region, a one-month pilot (with street closure during the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up periods) would provide sufficient time to collect data and evaluate the impact on student and parent travel behaviour. This would require a street adjacent to the participating school to be closed to vehicle traffic from 7:30am - 9:00am and 2:30pm - 4:00pm on each school day during the Pilot.

According to SCY, a School Street typically requires a nine-month lead time to develop and plan. For a School Street Pilot program, a volunteer-led model would be implemented, in which trained volunteers would be responsible for monitoring the School Street area and maintaining safety during the road closures. Volunteers would be trained to monitor the space and manage any potential conflicts with motorists attempting to access residences or destinations located within the School Street block closure.

Street Occupancy Permits and Traffic Management Plans would be required and Transportation staff would be responsible for reviewing, approving and monitoring them.

SCY has confirmed to City Staff they have capacity to partner with the City to plan and implement a School Street Pilot program at one school for a period of one month. The level of support provided by SCY to aid with the implementation of the School Street Pilot depends on the financial commitment the City is willing to make, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Financial Commitment & Associated Responsibilities

Funding Option (for one school for one month)	City Responsibilities	SCY Responsibilities
\$5,000 City-led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead planning and coordination of the School Street initiative • Oversee permitting and street closure management, including Traffic Management Plans • Coordinate data collection before, during, and after School Street initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to City staff on School Street planning and implementation • Provide supports on an as-needed basis

Funding Option (for one school for one month)	City Responsibilities	SCY Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Surveys of parents and students for experience feedback. ○ Traffic counts on streets surrounding the school before and during the School Street closure. • Coordinate volunteer recruitment and training • Handle community communications and event logistics • Approximately 150 staff hours required. See Table 2: School Streets Summary of Risks, for details on staff requirements. 	
\$10,000 Collaborative Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee permitting and street closure management, including Traffic Management Plans • Manage communications with school community • Coordinate data collection before, during and after School Street initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Surveys of parents and students for experience feedback. ○ Traffic counts on streets surrounding the school before and during the School Street closure. • Collaborate with SCY and SD40 to recruit and train volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to City Staff on School Street planning and implementation • Support with creating and delivering communications materials • Support with data collection and management • Support with street activation materials • Collaborate with the City and SD40 to recruit and train volunteers

Funding Option (for one school for one month)	City Responsibilities	SCY Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 100 staff hours required. See Table 2: School Streets Summary of Risks, for details on staff requirements. 	
\$15,000 SCY-led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support on an as-needed basis Oversee permitting and street closure management, including Traffic Management Plans Approximately 50 staff hours required. See Table 2: School Streets Summary of Risks, for details on staff requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead on planning and coordination of the School Street initiative Collaborate with SD40 on volunteer recruitment and training Coordinate data collection before, during, and after School Street initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys of parents and students for experience feedback. Traffic counts on streets surrounding the school before and during the School Street closure. Manage community communications and event logistics

School Streets require support from many stakeholders, including community organizations, municipal staff, school staff, students, parents, caregivers, elected representatives, community members, and volunteers to aid in the daily implementation.

Overall, there are three key phases for School Street implementation, with details on the required activities for each phase provided in Attachment 1.

School Street closures would need to be staffed by a minimum of two volunteers during each session (AM and PM). According to SCY, a School Street program would require approximately 160 volunteer shifts for a one-month implementation at a single school.

Transportation staff consulted with the City's Volunteer Coordinator to assess the feasibility of supporting a volunteer model for the pilot with City resources. It was confirmed that the City does not have sufficient internal resources to recruit, train, and schedule volunteers for this initiative. Coordinating volunteer shifts would require a significant number of volunteers and require approximately 50 hours of staff time, which is currently not feasible for staff who are focused on other existing priorities.

The City does not have sufficient staff resources to coordinate the significant volunteer support required. SCY and the school participating in the School Street Pilot would be required to organize their own volunteer or staff support unless additional resources are provided through an enhancement to the Operating budget to support this program.

An alternative to the volunteer model would be a paid model whereby Traffic Control Personnel or trained auxiliary staff are hired and paid to monitor the space. This would provide a higher level of assurance that the space would be safely operated, but would substantially increase the cost for this initiative. City staff need to gather more information to estimate the full cost of pursuing a paid model.

Lessons Learned & Risks

The City of Vancouver, in collaboration with the Vancouver School Board, implemented a School Streets program in 2023. Lessons learned from City of Vancouver staff are provided in Attachment 2 and are incorporated into discussion throughout this report.

Implementing a School Street initiative, particularly under a volunteer model, presents significant risks. There are risks associated with the reliance on volunteers for daily implementation and traffic management, displacement of traffic congestion to adjacent streets, and potential delays in emergency response. The reliance on volunteers in operational roles creates potential liability issues, necessitating insurance coverage to address potential incidents. A summary of risks is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: School Streets Summary of Risks

Risk Category	Description
Day-to-day Risks	<div>Safety and logistical issues:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict management with drivers unwilling to adhere to street closure.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Have learned from Vancouver experience that volunteers have experienced verbal abuse and have had drivers ignore them and drive their vehicles into the closed School Street area.• Potential for volunteers to miss their School Street shifts, resulting in potential safety issues with less on-site supervision.</div>

Risk Category	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential unsafe behaviour by students and users, such as running into the roads adjacent to the closure or failing to follow safety instructions.
Expectation Risks	<p>Parents' expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High expectation of success without full understanding of constraints. Misaligned expectations between parents and volunteers may lead to confrontations if parents expect more stringent street closure controls than is feasible.
City Staff Implications	<p>Work plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced capacity to work on other priority work plan items to support School Street implementation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time commitment dependent on which funding commitment is selected, although impact of any program is expected to be high. One full-time Transportation Planner would be responsible for coordinating and implementing the School Street. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would result in reduced capacity for other key City priorities including development application (housing) review, active transportation initiatives, policy development, including response to provincial housing legislation, and transportation data management related to Vision Zero initiatives. A Transportation Technologist would be required to develop the Traffic Management Plans for the School Street closure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would result in reduced capacity for responding to correspondence from residents, review and approval of Street Occupancy Permits for City capital and development-related construction projects, and special events. A Transportation Engineer would be required to review and approve the Traffic Management Plans for the School Street closure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would result in reduced capacity for committed Engineering programs and projects, including Active Transportation Network Plan, road safety, bus speed and reliability, and walking infrastructure projects.
Long-term Risks	<p>Scalability and demand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for many schools to request participation, greatly increasing the demand on staff and resources.

Risk Category	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ City would need to balance interest from the School Community and potential negative feedback from the surrounding community. <p>Duration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools may request the School Street closure be implemented for an entire school year, creating further resource challenges. <p>Budgetary pressures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term or expanded implementation may require more funding than originally planned. <p>Volunteer vs. Paid Model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to continually find volunteers which may prompt the need to adjust the program to a paid model, greatly increasing the resource and funding demands of the program.

Furthermore, in light of the recent Lapu Lapu Day Festival tragedy in Vancouver, staff have enhanced concerns with respect to on-street activities involving the public. Staff across multiple departments require time to review these requirements to ensure due diligence with respect to the City's liability and the safety of the public. This is essential to ensure safety during any potential street closures and to determine what additional measures are required to ensure all students and users of the School Street area are protected. Municipalities from around the Lower Mainland, along with the provincial government, have begun to review their approaches to street festivals to better ensure safety and security for these types of events. The outcomes and findings of these reviews are still to be determined, and there is a desire for a reasonably consistent regional approach to these types of street closures. The implications of changes to protocols and procedures – in terms of staff and/or financial resources – are unknown at this time.

Summary

School Streets are promoted to create safer environments for children, improve air quality adjacent to participating schools, reduce congestion immediately adjacent to schools, and encourage more independent mobility for children. However, staff are uncertain about the long-term benefits of a School Street initiative. A School Street implementation may result in short-term changes in travel behaviour for the duration of the pilot, but it is unclear if it would lead to sustained shifts in transportation behaviour and habits relative to other programs, such as the Walking School Bus. Additionally, there are concerns that traffic congestion would be displaced to different streets adjacent to or near the school, thus making no meaningful impact in reducing congestion. Data collection during a Pilot would be necessary to quantify these impacts.

The City already collaborates with SCY on the delivery of other programs focused on promoting active travel to school and reducing families' overall reliance on private vehicles for trips to and from school, particularly the Walking School Bus program. The Walking School Bus Program currently operates two routes year-round at two schools, with an expansion to three routes planned to begin for the 2025/2026 school year. The cost for the existing program is similar to the anticipated cost for a one-month School Street Pilot at one school, as described in the next section.

The Walking School Bus program has been popular, and is evidently effective at replacing trips by parents to school in their vehicles with walking opportunities for children. This program also promotes independent mobility amongst youth, operates for the entire duration of the school year, has fewer staff resource demands for delivery, and is effective at replacing private automobile trips.

School Streets present a challenge to implementation due to staffing and financial resource requirements associated with implementation, the currently uncertain safety requirements due to a changing environment regarding on-street events, and the unclear effectiveness and benefits of implementation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The School Street initiative is currently unbudgeted for 2025, putting existing financial commitments at risk if budget were to be reallocated. While direct financial costs are reasonably known for a Pilot program, the initiative would require significant staff time and resources, and would require a nine-month lead time for planning and development. Implementing the program would require significant time commitment from staff, approximately 50-150 staff hours depending on the level of funding provided to SCY, and would require reallocation of Transportation staff's 2025 and 2026 work plans, impacting other key priorities as outlined in Table 2.

There are various funding levels that the City could provide to SCY to obtain their support, as detailed in Table 1. These funding contributions range from \$5,000-\$15,000. To minimize impact to staff resources and work plans and increase SCY's involvement, a \$15,000 commitment would be required.

In addition to the funding that would be provided to SCY to support implementation, there are several other necessary expenses that may fall outside the scope of their support. These costs would include the development of promotional materials and event signage, securing appropriate event insurance, conducting traffic counts to support planning and evaluation, and purchasing materials to facilitate street activation activities. These supplementary costs are essential to ensure the success, safety, and visibility of the event. The total estimated cost for these additional items is up to \$10,000.

In addition, contingent upon consultation with the New Westminster Police Department, SD40, SCY, and other pertinent stakeholders, it may be necessary to implement additional safety measures to ensure the protection of students and other users of the School Street area. At this time, the scope and financial implications of these potential safety enhancements are uncertain and will be determined through engagement with the stakeholders mentioned above.

In total, it is estimated this program would require a budget commitment of at least \$25,000 to support implementation under a volunteer model, not including the in-kind staff time and undetermined potential safety enhancement measures.

NEXT STEPS

With current staff resources, the City does not have the capacity to implement a School Street initiative in 2025 and staff are recommending that the City not proceed with a Pilot program.

The City will begin to work with SD40 to update the Safe Routes to School maps for each Elementary and Middle School in New Westminster.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

A School Street Pilot initiative, implemented on a one-month basis, would provide a car-free public street space adjacent to a school, which would continue to be open to walking, biking and rolling but not vehicle traffic. Although a School Street could temporarily shift the pick-up and drop-off behaviour of students, it is unclear if it would result in long-term mode shift or improve road safety.

The closure of a street block adjacent to a school would have vehicular circulation impacts, including queuing, and potential for a redistribution of congestion onto other nearby streets. It is not possible to fully evaluate the impact a School Street may have on the transportation network until a school is selected for a Pilot program. If the City proceeds with a Pilot and a school is selected, staff would need to do further investigation to anticipate these issues and consider what mitigation measures could be put in place and develop a traffic management plan for the School Street.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Community Services and Finance Departments aided in the development of this report. Staff are also in the process of engaging with New Westminster Police on potential additional safety measures.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That the School Streets Pilot Program not be pursued due to significant unbudgeted costs and impacts on high-priority work plans, as outlined in the report titled “Response to Council Motion: “School Streets Pilot Program” dated May 26, 2025;
2. That the School Streets Pilot Program not be pursued in 2025 due to significant unbudgeted costs and impacts on high-priority work plans, and that staff be directed to report back to Council with more information on the enhanced safety considerations and associated costs, potential costs for a paid School Street model, and City liability risks associated with the implementation of a School Street Pilot Program, with a report back to inform the 2026 budget process.
3. That staff be provided with alternate direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of a School Street Pilot Program, designed to provide a car-free block beside a school that is open to walking, biking and rolling, would provide a temporary opportunity for the City to promote active travel and support independent mobility. Pursuing this program would require substantial modification to existing City staff work plans.

The implementation of a School Street initiative would divert staff resources away from key City priorities, including development application review, permit approvals for construction and special events, traffic data and safety analysis in support of Vision Zero, and the advancement of other key transportation initiatives.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – School Street Planning Details

Attachment 2 – Lessons Learned from City of Vancouver

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Steven Mater, Transportation Planner

This report was reviewed by:
Erica Tiffany, Supervisor of Transportation Planning
Mike Anderson, Manager of Transportation
Kathryn Holm, Deputy Director, Engineering

This report was approved by:

Lisa Leblanc, Director, Engineering Services & Deputy CAO

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer