

Mr Dedes
General Manager
City of Ryde Council
cityofryde@ryde.nsw.gov.au

24th June 2019

Dear Mr Dedes

**Re: School Traffic and Parking Study
West Ryde Public, Holy Spirit Catholic Primary, Meadowbank Public,
Truscott Street, Ryde Secondary College
(Submission from Northern Sydney Local Health District)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the School Traffic and Parking Study for the above-mentioned schools. Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) Health Promotion is committed to ensuring that the built environment has a net-positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals and the wider community, including school aged children and their families.

We commend City of Ryde Council conducting these traffic studies to '*improve pedestrian access routes to and from the schools, such as footpaths and road crossings, in order to reduce reliance on driving*' and to '*identify localised education and enforcement needs, to address the behavioural issues for each school*'. This aligns well with the NSW Active Travel Charter for Children¹ and active travel objectives of the NSW Health state-wide Live Life Well at School (LLW@S) program². The LLW@S program requires schools to achieve minimum standards in Active Travel as one of eleven desirable practices.

Active Travel and Health

Reducing childhood overweight and obesity is one of the NSW Premier's Priorities. The prevalence of overweight and obesity in NSW is estimated between 22.9% among primary school children and 27.4% in secondary school³. In NSW, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children and adolescents who are driven to school by car from 36% in 2010 to 43% in 2015³, particularly among children and adolescents from:

- Urban areas (from 37% to 47%)
- High SES backgrounds (from 33% to 45%)
- English-speaking backgrounds (from 36% to 42%)
- Middle Eastern cultural backgrounds (from 45% to 66%)

Active travel such as walking and cycling can have a positive effect on their mental and physical health⁴. An analysis of nine studies found that children who actively commute to school accumulate significantly more daily physical activity than their chauffeured school mates⁴.

Reducing reliance on cars around schools not only improves safety but can also improve air quality around schools⁴. Anecdotally, parents who idle their vehicles during the school pick up contribute to harmful emissions from their vehicles. In Australia, metropolitan school children are exposed to the highest levels of emissions during their commute to school⁵.

Supporting Active Transport

The factors which influence travel behaviour in school children are distance to school, parents' perception of safety and features of the built environment- including pedestrian infrastructure,

¹ NSW Active Travel Charter for Children <http://www.preventivehealth.net.au/childrens-active-travel.html>

² NSW Government *Live Life Well @ School* <http://www.preventivehealth.net.au/live-life-well--school.html>

³ Hardy LL et al (2016) NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2015: Full Report. 2016 Sydney: NSW Department of Health www.health.nsw.gov.au or www.sydney.edu.au/medicine/public-health/panorg/

⁴ L. Kent, J & Thompson, S (2019). Planning Australia's Healthy Built Environments. 10.4324/9781315524573.

⁵ Mazaheri, M et al (2014) 'School children's personal exposure to ultrafine particles in the urban environment'. Environmental Science & Technology 48(1), pp. 113-120

traffic and perceptions of safety⁴. Our submission focuses on addressing the built and natural environment as well as strategies to increase the community's capacity to increase active transport and reduce dependence on cars.

Recommendations:

1. Prioritisation of pedestrians and cyclists

Parents' perception of safety is a strong predictor of children's travel behaviour⁴. If parents perceive a school route as unsafe i.e. with high traffic volumes and lack of crossings - their children are less likely to regularly walk or cycle to school.

Upgrades to footpaths, new cycling infrastructure and pedestrian fencing along key routes should be prioritised in the Council's delivery programs. The feasibility of creating 'car-free' zones and reserving kiss and drop zones for people with special needs, disabilities, equipment should be considered.

2. Traffic calming and hazard reduction

In negotiation with NSW Transport, measures to slow traffic through pedestrian crossings, speed limits and traffic calming infrastructures should be prioritised along key routes to schools based on feedback from local users. We also suggest considering the recent publication from the Heart Foundation⁶, which outlines opportunities for cost-effective active travel infrastructure improvements within the walking catchment of a school.

3. Increase shade and tree canopy along key walking routes

Trees provide direct and indirect benefits to urban landscapes⁷. They enhance the health of our environment, by producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide and trapping airborne pollutants. They reduce glare, deflect wind, provide shade and reduce heating and cooling costs. Council should prioritise, along key pedestrian routes to schools, the provision of tree canopy's which are evergreen, non-deciduous and do not have lifting roots systems or produce flowers/seed pods that pose slip/trip hazards which can pose fall/trip hazard to pedestrians.

4. Update Travel Access Guides and safe walking routes

In view that there have been changes in transport routes since the Go Active 2 School guides were produced during 2012-2013⁸, we recommend as part of this program of works, that the Council work with schools and NSLHD to review and disseminate the Travel Access Guides.

5. Tactical Urbanism and safe routes to school

Strategies such as tactical urbanism⁹ should be supported by Council and integrated into policy to support schools in using a pop-up approach to activate walking routes in the short term. The Council could consider working with its Arts and Culture team to provide guidelines on how schools engage their local community on initiatives such as street libraries and public art displays. The Council can provide technical advice to ensure safety of walking routes are prioritised.

6. Community Education

Educational strategies, both formal and informal, can help combat parental perceptions of safety as a barrier for active travel to school⁴. 'Walking buses' have been shown to increase children's active commuting and physical activity and could be implemented with the school community¹⁰. 'Park and walk' could also encourage parents and children to walk at least part of the way to school to increase physical activity⁴.

⁶P Murray, M Kelly, and L Connell (2018) Urban Design Study – Active Travel to School. Architectus (Sydney). Heart Foundation. Available at www.healthactivebydesign.com.au/active-travel-to-school

⁷ Government Architect NSW (2017) Greener Places. Draft Policy <https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/policies/greener-places>

⁸ City of Ryde Council (2012) Travel Access Guides <https://www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/Community/Community-Safety/Safety-for-Kids/Go-Active-2-School>

⁹ Pop-Ups for Safe Routes to School Using Tactical Urbanism to Promote Safe Routes to School Programs (2017) <https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/fact-sheet/tactical-urbanism-and-safe-routes-school>

¹⁰ Heart Foundation Movement Network evidence base <http://www.healthactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/movement-networks/evidence/>

Education to the school community should also incorporate awareness on the impact of private vehicles on air quality and safety. Car idling should be discouraged through such education.

7. Land use and connectivity between destinations

Providing shortcuts can help shorten distances travelled on foot and encourage active travel by school children⁴. A future consideration for the Council through its DCP and LEP is to require private developments to address the street connectivity and movement systems in relation to key destination to schools.

NSLHD Health Promotion appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the School Traffic and Parking Studies. Should you have any queries about this submission please contact the undersigned at Ryde Hornsby Health Promotion Unit on 8877 5184. Health Promotion looks forward to continuing its work with City of Ryde Council to support projects that benefit the health, wellbeing and safety of the community.

Yours sincerely,

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Live Life Well at School

Live Life Well at School is a collaborative initiative between NSW Ministry of Health and the education sectors in NSW. The program aims to address the NSW Premiers Priority to reduce overweight and obesity rates of children by 5% by 2025. NSLHD assists schools to develop whole of school strategies and foster community partnerships to support physical activity and healthy eating for students and families.

Active travel is an initiative within the Live Life Well at School program that encourages parents, carers, students and staff to get active on their journey to, from and outside of school. The following school strategies are recommendations from the NSW Active Travel Charter for Children:

- Promote the benefits of safe active travel to families through the distribution of: School newsletters, pamphlets, Active Travel Parent/Carer Information Pack
- Provide end of trip facilities to promote active travel by installing either: Bike parking loops/rack or, Bike sheds or, Parking for scooters and skateboards
- Encourage parents and carers to 'park and walk' with their children to school through: Disseminating the *Park and Walk* resource, Promoting the activity in the school newsletter and at Kindergarten orientation
- School offering workshops and/or lessons to parents and children on safe walking, cycling and scootering
- School participates in: Ride or walk safely to school days each year

Schools working collaboratively with local government to improve local infrastructure for safe active travel such as foot paths, shared paths and safe bicycle paths networks can help to increase physical activity levels of their students and community.

For more information contact Steffi Meagher or Chelsea Holcombe at NSLHD Health Promotion on 8877 5321.