

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Report No</b>	<b>ECI/12/2022</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Economy and Infrastructure

**Date:** 25 August 2022

**Report Title:** School Street Zones Trial

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide members with information regarding the purpose and benefits of School Street Zones, the aim of which is to make the streets outside schools a safer and healthier place for children.
- 1.2 One of the purposes of School Streets Zones is to reduce the amount of traffic on the streets outside / around school entrances at the beginning and the end of the school day, and therefore create more attractive conditions for pupils to walk, cycle, scoot, or wheel to and from school.
- 1.3 Another benefit of the scheme is based on the understanding that whilst some parents/carers will continue to drop off / pick up pupils by private car, this will occur across a more dispersed area, rather than directly outside the school entrances.
- 1.4 This report assesses the trials of School Street Zones in other Local Authorities in Scotland, provides recommendations for future actions, considers a possible way forward and seeks to inform a policy decision on whether the introduction of School Street Zones in Highland should be pursued and how they should be implemented.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to: -
  - (i) **Note** the outcomes of the School Street Zones in other Local Authorities in Scotland;
  - (ii) **Agree** that the sites identified in paragraph 9.2 of the report are selected as the pilot locations;

- (iii) **Approve** an 18-month trial of School Streets Zones at four locations in Highland as per paragraph 9.1; and
- (iv) **Note** that the findings of the trial and a recommended policy position will be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – Staff time and resources will be required to approach schools and undertake the initial consultation and assessment. Further staff time and resources would be required to prepare policy, design, and implementation of a programme of School Street Zones. This will require to be resourced with support from the Sustrans Bike officer and balanced with other planned priorities. This work will be carried out within existing internal and external funding streams.
- 3.2 **Legal** – School Street Zones require to be supported by Road Traffic Regulation Orders. Enforcement of School Street Zones under the authority of an Experimental or Temporary Traffic Regulation Order in Highland would be undertaken by Police Scotland.

An experimental traffic order is defined as one made for the purpose of carrying out an experimental scheme of traffic control. The experiment cannot last for more than 18 months, but where an experimental traffic order was originally made for less than 18 months, it can be extended up to a maximum of 18 months.

A Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) or Temporary Traffic Regulation Notice (TTRN) is made when it is necessary to temporarily stop or limit vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic along the highway, including roads and rights of way to facilitate planned works and activities. The TTRO can be made for up to 18 months, but an extension of 6 months can also be applied for.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – The School Street Zones (closure and restrictions) projects elsewhere in Scotland have brought enhancements to life, health, education and learning through reducing the number of vehicles within the School Street Zones for periods of 30 minutes at the start and end of the school day. The opportunities for pupils to walk, wheel, scoot and cycle to school has the potential to reduce childhood obesity and provide pupils with opportunities to gain practical road safety skills and knowledge. Blue badge holders are exempt from the order so can travel into and out of the zones during the periods of restrictions. Exemption permits are also available for all School Street Zones residents with a motor vehicle registered at their address.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – A School Street Zones policy would contribute to the corporate and LOIP priorities relating to Climate Change / Active Travel and promoting sustainable, healthy & connected communities and a growing diverse and sustainable economy.

3.5 **Risk** – There are no specific risks associated with this report. However, there are risks associated with the implementation of a School Street Zones trial, these include lack of enforcement, insufficient local community support to progress projects, non-compliance by motorists and no change in parental behaviour. The purpose of the trial sites is to assess these aspects.

3.6 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications.

## **4 Background**

4.1 School Street Zones are when the roads around a school are temporarily restricted to motorised vehicles on each school day, during set times when pupils are being dropped off / picked up. Residents who live on the restricted roads are permitted to continue to use their vehicles. Access for doctors and utility companies is also generally permitted.

4.2 The purpose of a School Street Zone is to remove / drastically reduce the number of moving vehicles in the vicinity of a school to:-

- encourage active travel and its associated health & environment benefits;
- reduce road safety risks; and
- tackle air pollution

4.3 Enforcement of a School Street Zone and the associated Road Traffic Order is carried out by Police Scotland.

## **5. School Street Zones in other Local Authority Areas**

5.1 In November 2019, Moray Council agreed to the trial of a School Streets closure scheme at two locations in Moray, funded from the Cycling, Walking & Safer Routes grant. The schools selected were New Elgin and Seafield Primary Schools in Elgin.

5.2 Initially officers were working towards the implementation of the School Streets pilot projects for April 2020. However, implementation was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic that saw the temporary closure of school buildings and changes to day-to-day operation at schools' once pupils returned. In February 2021 it was apparent that primary schools were going to re-open and move towards 'near normal' operations. Officers therefore worked towards the implementation of the two School Street closure schemes in time for the return of pupils to the school buildings.

5.3 An Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) was advertised and progressed for each school, to enable the legal restriction of motor vehicles on the relevant streets. Drivers were made aware of the restrictions at each location through the installation of large signs at all entry points to the school streets zone, which 'flash' during the operating periods. Police Scotland have the powers to enforce the School Streets restrictions.

- 5.4 As part of the ETRO, exemptions for specific vehicle types were included, for example emergency vehicles, doctors, utilities companies. Residents with vehicles registered at an address within the School Streets closure are also exempt from any restrictions if they apply for a permit through Moray Council. Forty-three permits have been issued to residents within the New Elgin zone whilst thirty-three permits have been issued to residents within the Seafield pilot project area.
- 5.5 The ETRO for each school ran for a period of 18 months, which began on the date that the ETRO was first advertised (5 March 2021).
- 5.6 To evaluate the two School Street schemes, several surveys were undertaken, encompassing:-
- traffic counts: carried out at each school site, 'before' and 'after' the implementation of the School Streets schemes;
  - perceptions: determined via questionnaires sent to residents around the two schools and to parents/carers of pupils at both schools once the School Streets schemes had been operational for nearly two school terms; and
  - school travel data: comparison of the Living Streets' interactive Travel Tracker data where pupils record their travel mode on an ad-hoc basis for the months of September 2019 (before) and September 2021(after).
- 5.7 The traffic counts undertaken following the introduction of the closures showed that there had generally been a decrease in traffic at the survey locations, except for during the afternoon 'school pick up' period at New Elgin primary school. Reductions in traffic levels ranged between 27% and 43%. Whereas the increase in traffic levels observed at New Elgin was 15%. The survey location for New Elgin was just outside the School Streets closure. Therefore, this increase may in part be a result of parents/guardians parking as close as possible to the scheme.
- 5.8 As residents who live within the School Streets scheme are permitted to pass through during the closures, it was never anticipated that all traffic would be removed during the school drop off and pick up periods, only that there would be a reduction in through traffic and in the levels of parents/guardians parking outside/near the school entrances. Residents are issued with a permit, which is displayed on their windscreen.
- 5.9 Average traffic speeds have decreased by 13% and 12% during the hours, which include school 'drop off' and school 'pick up' times respectively on one street near New Elgin school. Whereas on one street near the second school they have seen a small increase where the average vehicle speeds have slightly increased by 1% and 2% respectively.
- 5.10 The two main issues where concerns were raised in a survey of parents and residents with regards to the School Streets zone were in relation to the restrictions not being obeyed unless they were enforced by the Police, and parking at school drop off and pick up times moving onto adjacent streets.

5.11 Based on information provided throughout the pilot monitoring period, occasional requests for Police presence were made at both locations. Police Scotland issued 28 fines along with numerous warnings to motorists (not officially recorded) during October and November 2021. Whilst the Police are aware of the non-compliance at both schools, insufficient resources are cited as to why they cannot regularly be present in the vicinity of the schools.

Observations of activity around the school and the comparison of the Travel Tracker survey data before and after the scheme implementation confirms that the proportion of travel by walking, cycling, and scooting at both schools has increased.

5.12 Experience gained through the two pilot projects in Moray identified the following key determining factors:-

- School Streets which act as a through road are more challenging and resource intensive to enact and enforce;
- there needs to be strong ongoing commitment from the school and the school community to encourage active travel and considerate parking behaviours; and
- there needs to be appropriate locations for 'Park and Stride' to minimise any impact of indiscriminate parking on the streets surrounding a School Street Zone scheme.

5.13 The schemes have just recently (Feb 22) been made permanent by Moray Council.

#### 5.14 **Perth and Kinross Council – School Exclusion Zones**

5.15 School Exclusion Zones (SEZ) have also been trialled at four locations by Perth & Kinross Council to make the streets outside the schools a safer and healthier place for children. This approach is being expanded in Perth and Kinross and they are currently working on a larger SEZ proposal at two primary schools in Perth.

5.16 They worked with Sustrans and used Local Authority / Scottish Government funding to improve the infrastructure around the current schools and have plans agreed for future work.

5.17 The schools selected for the initial trials were based on locality and suitability for such a scheme to be in place, and through buy in from school management and parents / local community.

5.18 The proposed future locations are in the City of Perth and include more than just the immediate school street but also several surrounding streets to allow any displacement to be over a wider area and benefit the residents as well as children attending the school.

5.19 School Street closures which restrict the use of cars and other motorised vehicles from streets outside and/or around school entrances have also been implemented in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

## 6. Academic Research

6.1 In a report in 2020 from the Transport Research Institute (part of Napier University) titled - 'School Street Closures and Traffic Displacement Project: A Literature Review' with semi structured interviews, the author Dr Adrian Davis, Professor of Transport and Health at Edinburgh Napier University, said: "It is noteworthy that such a simple intervention can have really positive impacts in terms of increasing children's physical activity levels and with this the associated improvements in wellbeing. School Street Closures looks to be a win-win for residents, schools and children and their families".

6.2 The report found that:-

On the motivators of the street closure schemes there is:-

- strong evidence that reported road casualties were not a motivator of the closure schemes;
- strong evidence that local perceptions of danger and safety risk were the key motivators; and
- strong evidence that the key purpose or one of the key purposes of the schemes was to increase the number of children travelling actively to school.

On the impact of the schemes on active travel, vehicle levels and on local support there is:-

- medium strength evidence that in almost all cases the total number of motor vehicles across school closures and neighbouring streets reduces;
- medium strength evidence that active travel levels increased at the schools with street closures; and
- medium strength evidence that closures are supported by most parents and residents living on the closed and neighbouring streets and that their support increases after any trial period.

On the impact on neighbouring streets there is:-

- strong and consistent evidence that traffic displacement does not cause road safety issues of any significance and those mitigating measures, where needed, have been applied successfully;
- medium strength evidence that perceived road safety on surrounding streets as well as the closure streets improves as active travel increases; and
- medium strength evidence that alternative parking schemes such as "Park and Stride" help reduce traffic displacement although a small number of badly parked vehicles can remain an issue.

Key lesson Edinburgh - A key lesson learned from the pilots was the need for infrastructure provision: ensuring peripheral streets can accommodate displaced traffic movements and contain appropriate parking capacity; those peripheral streets can safely enable new 'Park and Stride' movements via appropriate footways and crossing points; and sufficient space and visibility options for positioning signs (entry, and potentially internal repeater signs).

## **7. School Streets Zones for Highland**

- 7.1 There has already been interest in the introduction of the School Streets Zones concept to the Highland area from local primary schools.
- 7.2 Through consideration of this approach, it would support the investment in Safer Routes to School measures including traffic calming and increased pupil awareness of Road Safety around their school through such programmes as the Junior Road Safety Officer scheme (JRSO).
- 7.3 The School Street Zones approach would also compliment the work underway in relation to refreshing or developing School Travel Plans in Highland at both Primary and Secondary level to promote and support, 'sustainable, active and safe' travel to and from school.
- 7.4 This trial approach will also include working with the Authorities Environmental Health Team to develop a training / awareness programme with school JRSO's to install and monitor Air Quality monitors at school street locations (Pick Up / Drop Off etc), congestion points etc. The results of this will allow schools to highlight to parents the benefits of a reduction in car usage / parking at these locations on the environment.
- 7.4 From work undertaken by the Road Safety Team in schools through questionnaires and surveys over the last 12 months it is evident that a significant number of pupils wish to travel to school by bike, scooter, or walking, rather than by car.
- 7.5 Road Safety and unsafe routes to school are the main reason given by parents for not allowing their children to walk or cycle to school. Congestion and bad parking by parents around schools also feature highly when asked about issues with cars around the school including Pick Up and Drop Off zones.

## **8. Initial location consideration in Highland – Duncan Forbes Primary School**

- 8.1 The School Street Zone work initially within Highland has focused on developing the process and this included selecting the correct initial location. Staff from Highland Council and one of the key Active Travel Partners, Sustrans (I Bike), worked through an initial criteria, including:-
1. schools where Nursery expansions have increased school roles; and
  2. short list developed from the above to focus on schools with known congestion issues.

Following this Duncan Forbes Primary School, Inverness was selected as a pilot school due to strong resident and school management / Parent Council support for intervention around congestion and concerns regarding Road Safety and to support the promotion of active travel at the school.

- 8.2 Discussions and planning were held with the Partner Agencies, School Management, Parents and local residents at Duncan Forbes Primary School, Culloden, Inverness to commence a trial at that location.

8.3 The trial planning involved the following work already undertaken at Duncan Forbes Primary so far:-

- plan for location of closure agreed – Culloden Park cul de sac;
- Park & Stride location identified – Culloden House Avenue;
- Ward Business meeting consulted & very supportive (pre new Council elections in May);
- Parent Council briefed and very supportive of plans;
- School Assemblies held to share plans with pupils;
- letters shared with Parents & residents to outline plans;
- Partner Agencies are supporting this closure – Community Policing, Living Streets;
- in-person awareness raising & consultation at school pick up time;
- monitoring of traffic in Culloden Park & Culloden Court completed to check baseline;
- continuous Air Quality Monitoring in place beside proposed closure;
- monitoring Plan in place – surveys developed, and Pupils' travel modes tracked in daily travel tracker; and
- Pupils and volunteers in place to steward school streets.

8.4 Actions still to be carried out:-

- approve Exceptional (or Temporary) Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and communicate to stakeholders; and
- implement formal residents permits.

8.5 Following several meetings in relation to the School Street Zone at Duncan Forbes Primary School this approach was paused as it was felt it be more appropriate for the authority to develop a policy position with clear guidance relating to the selection / suitability criteria and conditions around a school that would result in a School Street Zone project being promoted and implemented.

8.6 Issues identified on this initial trial included practical and governance points that required to be addressed as follows:-

Practical considerations:-

- Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) will be required to contain permit scheme details which apply to the school streets so those details must be known prior to order being prepared; and
- Highland Council School Street zone permit scheme has not been set up yet and must be in place, with appropriate signage installed at location, by the go live date of the TRO

More importantly governance and oversight needed to address the following points:-

- Duncan Forbes Primary School Street Zone trial, initial proposal for 12 months, would be an entirely new measure for Highland intended to have a significant impact on road safety / management and local community in vicinity of the school;



- Highland Council's position on how the trial is to be assessed and possible wider roll-out should be considered in advance given that there will inevitably be requests from other schools; and
- School Streets Zones or equivalents are being rolled out across the country so there are likely to be wider implications for Highland Council and Highland area.

## **9. Moving forward with School Streets Zones in Highland**

9.1 Following consideration by the Road Safety Team, trial sites including Duncan Forbes Primary School have been identified using the criteria in para 9.2 below.

Initial consideration of locations to launch along with Duncan Forbes Primary School have resulted in the following locations being proposed for the trial, Bishop Eden (potentially St Josephs), Kirkhill and Pennyland Primary Schools.

The trial project is proposed to run from October 2022 at Duncan Forbes (start of new term), Jan 2023 at the three other proposed locations through to April 2024 (this allows for approximately 18 months' worth of evidence gathering in total).

The trial sites will measure success in achieving the purpose of School Streets (as set out in section 1) by assessing:-

- reduction in vehicle movements;
- levels of active travel in pupils, parents and staff;
- perception of safety; and
- road safety collision statistics

9.2 To gain the most benefit and improve active travel the following criteria has been designed regarding selection of schools / appropriate sites for the School Streets initiative:-

- 1) the proven positive support from school staff, parents, and parent councils, with schools willing to formally sign a written commitment to ensure that they will pro-actively promote the scheme to parents, regularly ascertain pupil travel data, and facilitate the gathering of views from parents/the school community;
- 2) the current number of travel planning, walking, cycling, and curriculum initiatives being undertaken;
- 3) the practicalities of delivering the scheme, including availability of diversion routes around the closure, the ability of surrounding streets to accommodate displaced traffic movements including appropriate areas for parking;
- 4) the school entrance preferably must not be on a bus route, but this would not preclude an assessment being undertaken at that location for suitability;
- 5) the availability of suitable 'Park and Stride' locations (i.e., alternative locations where parents can park away from the school and walk, e.g., non-residential parking areas), with surrounding streets being able to safely enable 'Park and Stride' movements via footways and crossing points;

- 6) high levels of car use to/from the school (taking into consideration the size of the school);
- 7) high levels of congestion at the school entrances;
- 8) the proposed School Street Zone have little by way of alternative trip attractors (i.e., care homes, doctors' surgeries) that would necessitate increased vehicle exemption permits; and
- 9) the School Street Zones have sufficient space and visibility options for the positioning of signage (at entries and potentially internal repeater signage).

9.3 It is proposed that to move the permit scheme forward work will be undertaken in partnership with the Traffic Management & Control Team to allow a policy to be put in place making use of current parking / resident permit schemes to develop a suitable permit for the residents in any areas partaking in the School Street Zones scheme.

9.4 The various schemes listed above have had different success in terms of social compliance rather than legal enforcement. Whilst the legal powers will be present for the schemes the intention with support from Police Scotland is for community buy in and support rather than a more robust approach which would be heavily reliant on our partner agency at Police Scotland.

9.5 Funding is already in place to promote / support the Duncan Forbes School Street Zone scheme but to fully embed this in council policy a more robust form of funding will be required for future schemes. The intention will be to fully cost each potential scheme and review the cost benefit to local communities over the 18-month trial period to allow consideration for allocation of funding. Options will include Active Travel funding and Safer Routes to School Funding streams.

## **10. Summary**

10.1 There is the potential for a School Street Zones policy to enhance the health and environment for young people and to address road safety perceptions / concerns, however, it is important to assess the likely effectiveness, feasibility, and affordability of such a policy. Conducting an objective trial with assessment criteria will enable Committee to make an informed policy decision at a future date.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

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