

INQUIRY INTO CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

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So many things to say, many of which ought to be obvious, but there appears to be a national cognitive dissonance that blinds people to the main problem. The single most dangerous thing to a child's life is the motor vehicle. You want to tackle obesity then here's one significant element:

Why we allow dangerous driving to continue, particularly in school zones is beyond me. It is not only an immediate danger to children, it has a long term effect on the abilities of everybody by preventing children from accessing active travel. Ironically the need to drive children to school for their safety is also the cause of the danger, and poor driving behaviour around schools by parents is chronic.

There is a great deal of evidence that shows that children who regularly walk or ride to school do much better than those who are driven in cars. Don't take my word for it - look it up.

Ban non-local parking and stopping around the school for approximately 500 metres, more if necessary, and enforce with local laws officers.

Extend the footpath width at the crossing so that children have a shorter distance to travel.

Calm street traffic in the area with 30 kph limits, speed humps, chicanes and one way streets that are permeable to bicycles with contraflow lanes.

Build a network of safe connected and contiguous bike paths radiating out from the school. These are much cheaper than any road infrastructure and return genuine benefits to the community. Support the school's active transport policy with advertising revenue from local businesses building bike parking hoops and sheds.

Set up "walking bus" and "cycling bus" systems, where a parent or teacher takes a group of students from anything up to 5 km away and cycles or walks with them to school, adding kids along the way. These have been very successful in many cities. Support children getting to school independently by getting cars off the streets and people onto the streets.

It's not rocket science. If you want to see how all this works in the real world have a look at these films on Vimeo: Lakewood, OH: The Suburb Where Everyone Can Walk to School In Portland Every Day is Walk & Bike to School Day!

In addition, we need to be developing safer local residential streets where children can play safely as we did when I was young (I am 61 now). Projects such as this ought to be done on permanent bases, not just temporary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7lwTYWf4AQ> "Reclaiming Streets for Play, Playing Out, GreenTalk 2011, Bristol, UK"

I want a city where it is not only safe, but pleasant for women and children to ride their bikes freely to school, shops, sports and their friend's houses; where children can play in the street and know that they will not be run over by through traffic.

One thing stands in the way of that vision, and it is the total dominance of our streets by motor vehicles. That has to change if we want a livable city. I don't hate cars. I hate what we have allowed cars to do to us.

There's an urban planning cliché "a city for people, 8 to 80 years old". That's what we need if we are to be serious about obesity.