



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council

File No.: 5640-07

From: Director of Operational Services

Date: February 25, 2026

Subject: Safe and Active School Program - Engagement and Preliminary Results

PURPOSE: The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Council with a comprehensive update on the Safe and Active Schools (SAS) Program, including its strategic alignment with Council's priorities, the program foundation and scope, engagement outcomes from the first phase of delivery, actions completed to date, and the next steps that will lead to a final set of recommended improvements for Council consideration later this spring.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Safe and Active Schools (SAS) Program is a city-led initiative delivered in partnership with School District No. 71 and supported by regional and provincial partners. The program is designed to identify traffic safety concerns on streets fronting and adjacent to schools, assess barriers to walking and cycling, and develop short, medium, and long-term measures that improve safety and support active travel for children and families.

The program directly advances Council's Strategic Plan and Strategic Priorities, particularly within the Streets and Transportation, Municipal Infrastructure, and Good Governance focus areas. Council has identified pedestrian safety, speed management, traffic calming, and active transportation as ongoing, resourced priorities through 2026 and beyond, and the Safe and Active Schools Program is explicitly identified as a key initiative supporting these objectives.

Recognizing the level of engagement, coordination, and analysis required for successful delivery, administration initiated the first phase of the SAS Program in 2025 with three elementary schools: École Puntledge Park Elementary School, Courtenay Elementary School, and Valley View Elementary School. These schools were selected using objective criteria, including recent and planned road safety improvements, collision data, public inquiry volume, and geographic distribution across the City.

Engagement results from participating school communities demonstrate a clear and consistent message. Many respondents do not currently perceive school neighbourhoods as safe for children to walk, bike, or roll to school, and parents remain cautious about encouraging active travel under existing conditions. At the same time, there is strong community support for the City investing resources into the Safe and Active Schools Program, indicating both concern and confidence in the program's intent.

In response to early observations, staff have already implemented several near-term operational improvements and coordinated education and enforcement initiatives with partner agencies. The project team is now reviewing all engagement input and will develop a short list of recommended actions for community review in March 2026. Following community consultation and technical analysis, a final Safe and Active Schools Program report for the three participating schools will be brought forward later this spring, including prioritized recommendations and an implementation pathway for future Council consideration.

BACKGROUND:

The Safe and Active Schools (SAS) Program was established to improve road safety near schools and increase the number of students walking, cycling, and rolling to school. The program supports broader community objectives related to reducing vehicle speeds and congestion in school areas, improving air quality, and helping children develop healthy and sustainable travel habits.

Within City boundaries, there are six elementary schools and three secondary schools. The SAS Program is structured as a repeatable framework that can be applied across multiple schools over time. Rather than focusing solely on isolated infrastructure improvements, the program integrates education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering considerations, supported by meaningful engagement with school communities and partner agencies.

To support program delivery over the 2025 and 2026 school years, the City retained Urban Systems through a competitive procurement process. The consultant's role includes coordinating and facilitating engagement, supporting data collection and analysis, preparing school-specific best-routes mapping, and developing school travel plans with action plans that identify issues, priorities, timeframes, and responsible parties.

Given the sensitivity of school-area safety issues and the significant staff and consultant resources required, the City focused the first phase of delivery on three elementary schools in 2025. This approach allows the City to establish a strong evidence base, refine engagement methods, and develop a practical implementation model that can be expanded to additional schools in future years as funding and resources permit.

Program timing also reflected coordination with key partners, including the School District, to ensure appropriate approvals and alignment prior to engagement and implementation.

DISCUSSION:

In 2025, City staff and Urban Systems completed the foundational work required to deliver the first phase of the Safe and Active Schools Program.

This work included recruiting and registering participating schools, introducing the program at Parent Advisory Committee meetings, and establishing a multi-agency resource team to guide planning and implementation. The resource team includes representation from School District No. 71, Island Health Authority, Courtenay RCMP, BC Transit, the Comox Valley Cycling Coalition, Comox Valley Regional District, the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, the Comox Valley Farmers Institute, the Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Area, ICBC, and other community and non-profit organizations. K'ómoks First Nation will be engaged as a participating government partner.

Engagement activities were a central component of the first phase. Six in-person school walkabouts were conducted across the three participating schools, with a total of 73 adults and students participating. A school community survey generated over 130 responses and 589 unique comments. Classroom "hands-up" travel mode surveys were also completed, capturing 2,923 individual responses. Together, these engagement and data collection efforts provide both qualitative and quantitative insight into current travel behaviours, safety concerns, and opportunities for improvement.

Engagement Results and Key Performance Indicators:

As part of the engagement process, key performance indicators were established to measure perceptions of safety, comfort encouraging active travel, and support for the Safe and Active Schools Program.

Survey results indicate that many respondents do not currently believe their neighbourhood is safe for children to walk, bike, or roll to school. Across all three school communities, a majority of respondents scored in the detractor range, resulting in a combined Net Promoter Score of -52.4. This result highlights perceived safety as a significant barrier to active school travel.

This resulted in a total **Net Promoter Score of -52.4** for all 3 schools (See Figure 1 below).

- 61.9% of survey respondents selected between 0-6 (Detractors)
- 28.6% of respondents selected 7 or 8 (Passives)
- 9.5% of respondents selected 9 or 10 (Promoters)

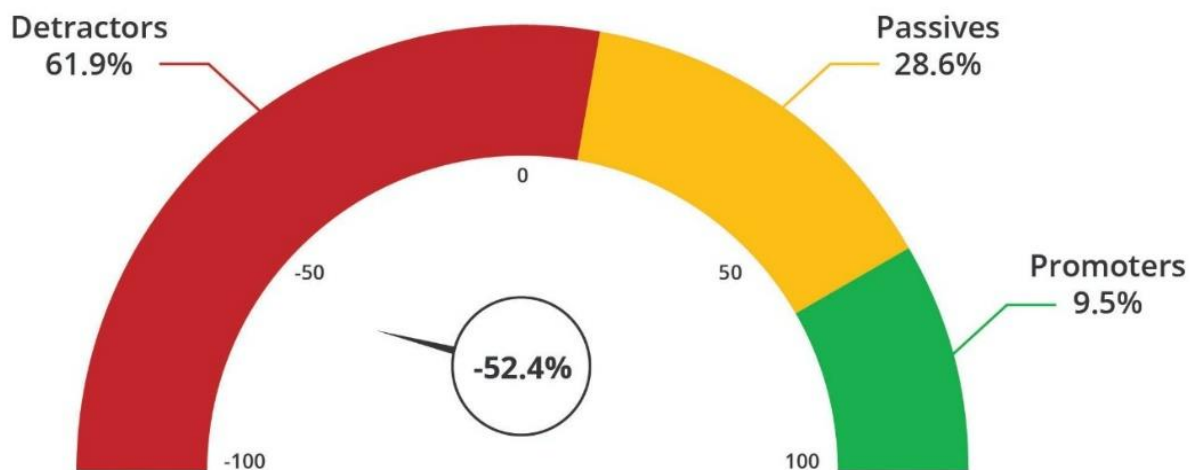


Figure 1. Road safety total NPS score for all three school communities.

When asked how likely parents are to encourage their children to use active transportation to attend school, responses were mixed but remained slightly negative overall. While a meaningful proportion of respondents expressed strong support, the combined Net Promoter Score across the three schools was -5.2, suggesting that comfort levels are not yet sufficient to support widespread behaviour change without further improvements.

This resulted in a total **Net Promoter Score of -5.2** for all 3 schools (See Figure 2 below):

- 44.3% of survey respondents selected 0-6 (Detractors)
- 16.5% of respondents selected 7 or 8 (Passives)
- 39.1% of respondents selected 9 or 10 (Promoters)

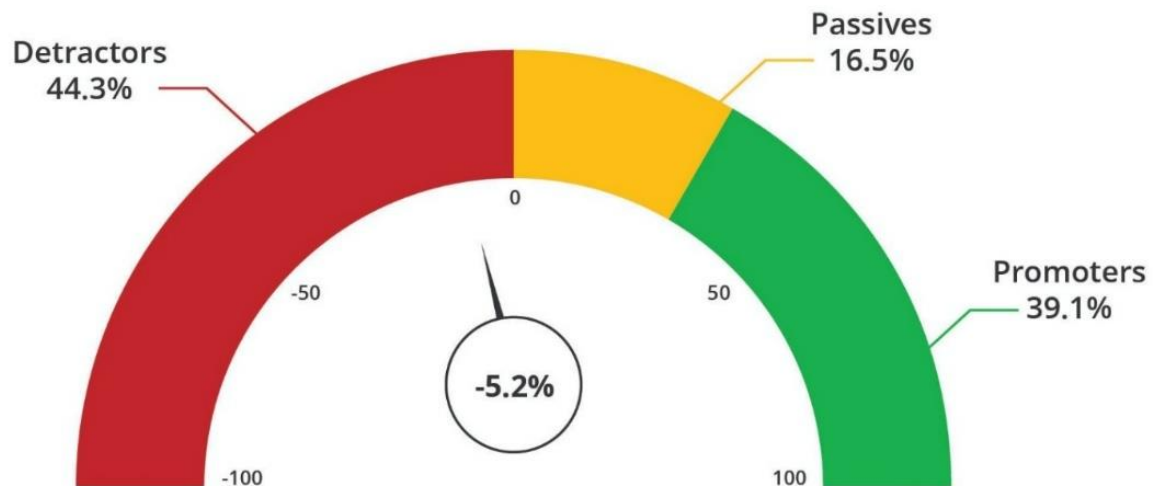


Figure 2. Level of comfort total NPS score for all three school communities.

In contrast, support for the Safe and Active Schools Program itself was strong. Over half of respondents indicated they would strongly recommend the program as a worthwhile investment of resources and time, resulting in a combined Net Promoter Score of +26.3. Taken together, these results demonstrate that while safety concerns persist, school communities value the program and support continued City leadership in addressing these issues.

This resulted in a total Net Promoter Score of +26.3 for all three schools. (See Figure 3 below):

- 26.3% selected between 0-6 (Detractors)
- 21% selected 7 or 8 (Passives)
- 52.6% of respondents selected 9 or 10 (Promoters)

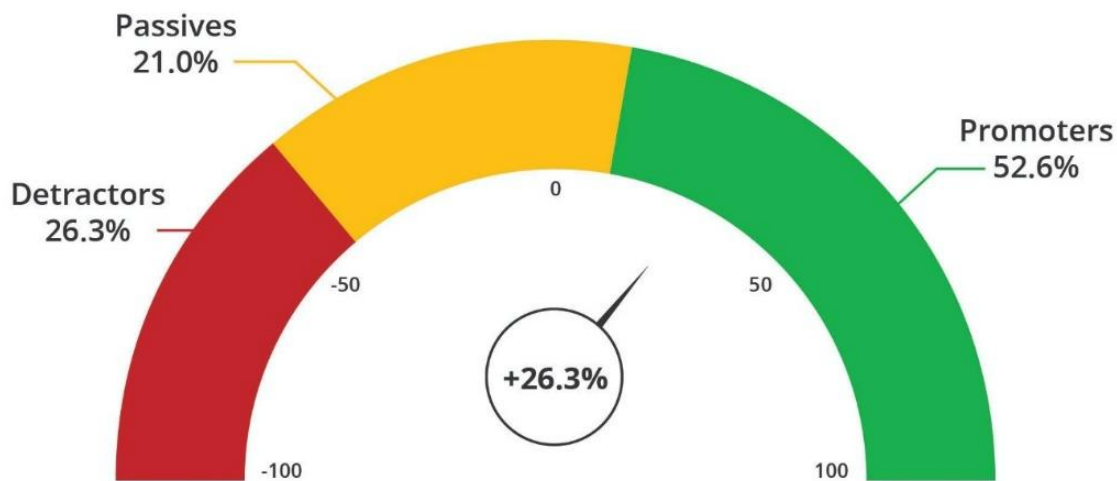


Figure 3. Worthwhile investment of resources and time NPS score graphics for all three school communities.

Early Actions and Responsiveness:

While the Safe and Active Schools Program is intended to inform longer-term planning and investment, staff also responded to early observations through near-term operational actions.

These actions included a back-to-school driver awareness campaign, deployment of speed reader boards, and completion of infrastructure reviews and repairs around schools, including pavement markings,

vegetation trimming, crosswalks, sidewalks, and flashing beacons. Staff coordinated with the RCMP on education and enforcement initiatives, including increased patrols during peak drop-off and pick-up times and positive reinforcement programs.

Pedestrian crossing timing was improved along Lerwick Road at Idiens Way and Malahat Drive through cabinet upgrades and the addition of a leading pedestrian interval, increasing crossing time by five seconds in all directions. In addition, staff will be launching in 2026, a school-zone pavement marking improvement program using large-scale, high-visibility thermoplastic markings designed to increase driver awareness and reduce speeds near schools.

Next Steps:

The project team is currently reviewing all 589 unique comments received from school communities and interest holders and assessing each suggested improvement for feasibility and potential impact. This work will inform the development of a short list of recommended actions and initiatives.

These preliminary recommendations will be shared with school communities for consultation in March 2026 through an open house and recommendation survey, consistent with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. Input from this stage will inform refinement of the recommended actions.

Following community consultation, the project team will complete technical analysis and develop a final set of recommended actions. A final Safe and Active Schools Program report for the three participating schools will be presented to Council later this spring, including recommended infrastructure improvements, policy considerations, and programs to inform future implementation planning and budget discussions.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The Safe and Active Schools Program is consistent with and supportive of Council's adopted Strategic Plan and Strategic Priorities. The program advances Council objectives related to road safety, active transportation, infrastructure prioritization, and partnership-based governance, and establishes a scalable framework that can be expanded to additional schools as resources permit.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Safe and Active Schools Program is being delivered within the existing 2026 Financial Plan. Any additional capital improvements identified through the program will be brought forward to Council for consideration and approval prior to implementation.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Program delivery is being managed within existing staff and consultant work plans. No additional administrative resources are required at this time to complete the current phase of work.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

The Safe and Active School program supports Council's priorities by advancing improvements to active transportation infrastructure, strengthening accessibility across the community, and improving road safety. This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

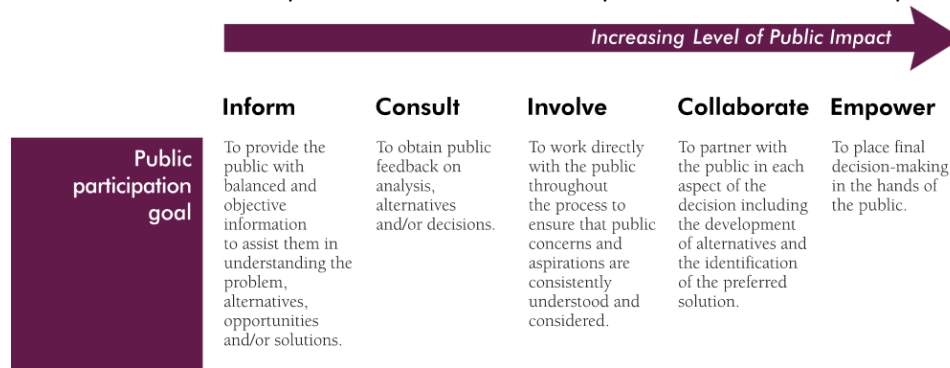
- Good Governance - Explore and establish a partnership approach with SD71 on mutual interest topics: active travel and traffic planning, shared facilities, community use of schools, climate, reconciliation, child care and youth engagement

- Municipal Infrastructure - Complete accessibility audit of public facilities and develop implementation policy for capital improvements

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public engagement to date has included school walkabouts, surveys, and advisory committee participation. The next phase of engagement will include a public open house and recommendation survey to seek feedback on proposed actions prior to finalization.

Staff would inform the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the “Safe and Active School Program - Engagement and Preliminary Results” briefing note.

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