

CITIZENS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

ACCESS RESTRICTIONS: LIVEABLE STREETS,
PLAY STREETS AND SCHOOL STREETS

EVIDENCE

- One in three children in the UK are growing up in cities with unsafe levels of particulate pollution (Unicef UK, 2017).
- Exposure to air pollution may be harming all organs of the body (Schraufnagel & al., 2019).
- 63% of teachers would support a ban on motor vehicles outside schools (Sustrans, 2019).
- Nearly a third of children ages 2-15 are overweight or obese (UK National government, Childhood obesity action plan, 2017).

CHALLENGES

Changing the way streets are used to prioritise pedestrians and vulnerable road users by restricting motorised vehicle access to some streets.

Restricting access to vehicles in the streets surrounding schools at school run times or for longer periods to reduce children's exposure to bad air quality.

More generally, transforming city streets into less 'hostile' places by closing off traffic, with soft or hard measures, for children to play (play streets) and for everyone to enjoy (liveable streets).

LONDON CONTEXT

The Greater London Authority and Transport for London's [Healthy Streets Approach](#) is a key element of the current Mayor's Transport Strategy. It consists of [ten indicators](#) including increased walking, clean air or noise reduction. With boroughs managing 95% of London's roads, they are at the heart of this strategy.

Motorised vehicles on roads cause harm to health due to particulate pollution as well as noise and pose a potential threat to

vulnerable users, especially children. To reduce the impact they have on children's health, several boroughs have been implementing school streets, including [Lewisham](#), [Islington](#) and [Camden](#). Hackney has published a [guide for local authorities](#) who wish to explore the possibility of implementing school streets. Boroughs and UK public authorities can implement the measure by using experimental traffic orders, which allow parking authorities to modify traffic or parking regulations for an 18-months period requiring no prior public consultation: consultation takes place alongside the trial, allowing for citizen feedback on the actual effects of the scheme. There may be some public backlash, but results tend to be positive in the long run, with high levels of acceptance once the scheme is in place. This was the case in the [pilot led by Croydon](#).

Expanding on school streets and in partnership with Public Health England, thirteen boroughs are experimenting with 'School Superzones'. The aim is to improve children's health through a range of interventions within 400 meters around the school. Measures include traffic reduction, improvement of pedestrian footpaths and restrictions on unhealthy food advertising. There is important flexibility for boroughs in the uptake of measures and the choice of location.

Playstreets in London are supported by [London Play](#), a charity funded by the Department of Health since 2013 to increase physical activity levels in children. Twenty-four boroughs have implemented [play streets](#) with the organisation's help, mostly at residents' request. Residents play a very important role in grassroots push for the implementation of play streets. In the East London borough of Hackney, [Hackney Play Streets](#) is a charity supported by the borough and led by a member of the community. It offers resources for residents and for establishments to set up school play streets.

London Play also conducts pilots such as the [Play Quarter Pilot](#) in Enfield,

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complementing the school street closures with other measures at neighbourhood scale to improve children's experience. These include a peer buddy system for children to play and safe points, such as a community café or a corner shop. The key in successfully organising such schemes is to include residents, local shop owners, schools and other relevant stakeholders.

Boroughs usually allow for residents to request a play street near them for a set or recurring date. In Hounslow for example, citizens can request it and if approved, have an open play street within six weeks, and for free. The council emphasises the importance of community involvement. Their timeframe is quite short, other boroughs having longer implementation periods: it is dependent on the authorities' current scope to act. In terms of impact, in an evaluation report, Hackney underline that although initially, interest for play streets started in relatively affluent areas, requests to implement them now also come from more deprived areas of the borough.

INSPIRATION FROM ELSEWHERE

Bolzano in Northern Italy was the first local authority to put in place school streets in the 1990s, closing off streets 15 minutes before and after school run times. The idea has since then expanded across Europe and elsewhere. Major cities, such as Vienna and Edinburgh have made their school street trials permanent.

In the UK, International NGO Friends of the Earth produced a briefing on how to implement School Streets, providing examples, a budget estimation for implementation and demonstrating the positive outcomes of the schemes. Similarly, a toolkit was produced by European funded project Bambini on implementing play streets, providing a step-by-step guide and examples.

Led by local non-profit Lab van Troje, the Ghent Living Streets experiment took place in the city from 2012 to 2017. Every year for a month, it allowed citizens to turn their streets into a Living Street and create a

safer space according to their local needs. In 2016, some of these were especially designed according to children's needs, providing guidance for involving children in the planning procedure.

The Horizon 2020 Metamorphosis project is also focusing on transforming neighbourhoods to make them more welcoming for children. Their website presents various case studies on trial road closures, the reuse of existing street space such as parking spaces or vegetable streets (streets with plants and vegetation) across the EU. School streets and play streets do not require any specific equipment but can be complemented with tactical urbanism measures, such as the above-mentioned vegetable streets.

Beyond school and play streets, European cities have experimented with road closures, temporarily for events such as the European Mobility Week or in a recurring manner like Paris, who in 2016 introduced a monthly closure of circulation on the Champs-Élysées, its main avenue, and surrounding streets. The French city has also closed one of its major arteries to traffic to transform it into a leisure space with bars, benches and sports grounds. The implementation caused a divide in the public opinion regarding the potential report of traffic on other streets but is widely appreciated by residents of the immediate areas and tourists.

Access restrictions can be categorised differently according to purpose and duration, but globally serve a similar aim to improve the urban resident's quality of life. Costs range widely, with very low costs for small interventions such as temporary play streets (barriers) and higher costs for more substantial and long-standing schemes that require more planning and political intervention such as the closure of a main artery to traffic.