**Press release - Embargoed until 00:01am (BST) Friday 29th May 2020.**

**NGOs call for urgent implementation of “School Streets” in light of schools reopening, after new survey reveals parent concern over street safety**

* **New survey finds six out of ten parents are worried about increased levels of traffic when lockdown is lifted.**
* **Based on this research, ten NGOs have come together with an urgent call to Councils to make walking and cycling safer so children can travel to and from school safely when schools reopen next week.**
* **The ten NGOs recommend “School Street” schemes (which close roads to cars during pick up and drop off times) as particularly important as schools try to manage social distancing at the school gates, along with street improvements to make every child’s journey safer to walk and cycle.**
* **The ten NGOs are made up of** [**Global Action Plan**](https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/)**,** [**Mums for Lungs**](https://www.mumsforlungs.org/)**,** [**Living Streets,**](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/)[**Possible**](mailto:https://www.wearepossible.org/)**,** [**ClientEarth**](https://www.clientearth.org/)**,** [**Cycling UK**](https://www.cyclinguk.org/)**,** [**Asthma UK & British Lung Foundation Partnership**](https://www.asthma.org.uk/about/the-partnership/)**,** [**FIA Foundation**](https://www.fia.com/fia-foundation)**,** [**Ella Roberta Family Foundation**](http://ellaroberta.org/) **and** [**Guy’s and St. Thomas’ Charity**](https://www.gsttcharity.org.uk/)**.**

The NGOs are calling on Councils to listen to public feedback and Government social distancing guidelines to ensure children are safe on our streets after lockdown. The NGOs are asking councils to take the lead in working with parents and schools and to trial “School Street” schemes in light of the phased reopening of schools next week.

The survey1, commissioned by Global Action Plan and carried out by [Opinium](https://www.opinium.co.uk/), finds that six out of ten parents are worried about increased levels of traffic when lockdown is lifted, but that they are also keen to play their part. Over half (53%) plan to walk or cycle more than they did before after lockdown, and the vast majority of those that plan to be more active (79%) say that restricting vehicle access at certain times of the day would be helpful.

In response to the survey, the NGOs are calling on Councils to use £280 million of funding2 that has been made available by governments in UK for Local Authorities to build cycle lanes, widen pavements and restrict motor traffic to make our neighbourhoods safer. Such action would be supported by the majority of the public:

* 69% of the public – including those *without* children – want to see communities retain safer roads and fewer car journeys when lockdown eases.
* Social distancing requirements at the school gate risks children and parents spilling out into the road making vehicle restrictions on school streets an urgent safety need.
* With the public advised to only use public transport as a last resort, a surge in car travel is possible if families do not feel it is safe enough for their children to walk or cycle to school. The majority of all adults want to see more space for pedestrians (63%), and cyclists (52%).
* Increased traffic will increase air pollution which is particularly dangerous for children as it stunts their lung development. [Leading scientists](https://www.cleanairhub.org.uk/news-stories/air-pollution-sector-statement-regarding-covid-19) say that the coronavirus may be more dangerous for people whose lungs are already affected by air pollution. The survey also found half (50%) of expecting mothers and parents of children under 10, are now much more concerned about air pollution since lockdown.

The group of NGOs are also promoting actions the UK public and parents can take to make roads outside their schools safer, including contacting their local council to ask for [“School Streets”](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/safer-routes-to-school), [cycling space](https://action.cyclinguk.org/page/59646/action/1?ea.tracking.id=web) and [social distancing space](https://www.cyclinguk.org/covid-19-safe-space-social-distancing).

**Chris Large, Senior Partner at Global Action Plan, says:** *“Returning to school is full of anxieties for parents and simple street improvements would drastically reduce the worry over children being able to get to school safely. Some Local Authorities are doing a great job of making active travel safer, but some have not even started. Whether a child’s neighbourhood keeps low traffic and clean air beyond the end of the lockdown shouldn’t be a postcode lottery”.*

**Dr. Alison Cook, Director of External Affairs at the British Lung Foundation, says:***“Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to our health. It increases everyone’s risk of respiratory disease and children’s lungs are particularly vulnerable. Pollution can harm growth of lung function in the womb, during childhood and right up to the late teens. For children with asthma, high levels of air pollution are linked to increased asthma attacks. As children start to go back to school, it's more important than ever that we protect their lungs through initiatives like School Streets.”*

**Jemima Hartshorn, Mums for Lungs, says:** *“Many parents tell me that it has been such a relief to be able to cycle or walk with their children without feeling pressured by traffic or scared of air pollution, but the prospect of that traffic returning is a real cause of stress.”*

**Jenni Wiggle, Living Streets Interim CEO, says:** *"Parents' concerns about the back to school traffic are totally legitimate and while the pandemic has been a truly nightmarish time for so many of us, one positive thing has come out of it - we are experiencing the lowest levels of traffic since 1920 when Living Streets was set up. More families walking to school is something we've wanted to see for a long time, and we hope many will decide to walk or cycle local, everyday journeys like the walk to school. School Streets have a real part to play in improving the area outside the school gates, making them a safer and cleaner place to spend time."*

**Sarah Hannafin, Senior Policy Advisor, National Association of Headteachers, says:** *“There are many logistical challenges that need to be overcome to keep children safe as they return to school, both inside and outside the school gate. How families travel to and enter school premises is a big concern. These measures could help to keep everyone safer and to maintain some of the positive environmental consequences of lockdown.”*

**Roger Geffen, Policy Director at Cycling UK, says: *“****It is clear that use of public transport and school buses will be seriously constrained for a while. That is why Cycling UK is now urging councils throughout Britain to install pop-up cycle lanes and pavement widenings, 20mph speed limits, ‘school streets’ schemes and to close rat-runs. Enabling pupils and their parents to cycle and walk for the post-lockdown school run is vital to avoid it being even more car-dominated than before, and instead to prepare for a green and healthy recovery.”*

**Zoe Paramour, a teacher at South Hampstead High School, London, says:** *“Schools are facing a series of challenges as we start to return to the classroom, central to all of these is ensuring our pupils are kept safe at all times. That means safe within the classroom and outside of our school gates. Measures to reduce car use will increase road safety, improve air quality and help keep children active. They need to be prioritised and put in place ready for schoolchildren to return.”*

**Jack Sloan, Headteacher at Hanover Primary School Islington, London, says:** *“At Hanover Primary School, we were lucky enough to have established a school street before lockdown began. Support for the scheme was overwhelming from our parents, staff and from the wider community, because people could see the benefits that it would bring- including better air quality, a reduction in traffic and the increased safety to children and families that this would bring, and a more sociable and relaxed start the school day, enabling children to start school ready to learn. When considering reopening the school to more children after lockdown, drop-off and pick up are the most complicated and potentially risky times of the day in terms of infections-control. Maintaining school street status will enable us to better stagger entry and exit from the school, and Will ensure that children, staff and their families are able to socially distance more easily. We can’t imagine returning without a school street for this reason alone. The additional benefits that closing our street bring only add weight to the argument that the school street programme must be protected and extended further.”*

**Amy Foster, PSHE Lead at Bessemer Primary, London Borough of Southwark, says:** *"It's desperately sad to think that all the hard work that has been done over the last year in raising awareness over the dangers of air pollution could be so swiftly undone. We are only starting to learn how air pollution is implicated in both the spread and impact of COVID-19 and it is imperative that we keep fighting for clean air around our schools so we can safeguard the health and wellbeing of our communities. However, removing motor traffic from our school streets is not only about clean air. It is about improving mental health and wellbeing, mitigating against the effects of anxiety, as we create calmer streets where socially distanced play and conversation is possible and healthy travel habits enabled."*

**Jim Leedham, parent in Tottenham, London, says:** *“I'm very concerned about air quality after lockdown. It's been really noticeable how much better the air in our local area has been, and this is clearly due to the reduction in traffic. With the government advising people to drive rather than to take public transport, I fear that air quality levels may become worse than ever. I'm very concerned about the impact that this could have on the development of my young children's lungs. I would love to see a focus on better walking and cycling infrastructure, reducing through traffic, and things like School Streets.”*

**Steve Marsland, Head Teacher at Russell Scott Primary, Manchester, says:** *“My school serves a town centre community, next to a large retail park and motorways intersections where children walk around busy main roads and streets rammed with cars. When the school and the roads return to normal so will the pollution and the dangers. Social distancing will be the norm for a long time to come but not with children and adults piling out of cars and rushing into school. Being a town, we are surrounded by businesses and factories as well as residential which means trucks and lorries as well as cars are moving around the area causing congestion and everything associated with it.*

*My school has been campaigning for years to have “School Streets” - we have even taken to the streets with our Junior PCSOs handing out advice to parents about how they are polluting and endangering children by driving and parking close to the school. Now is the time to make a stand up clean up our environments starting with our roads. Our children are going to pay for this pandemic well into their later lives at least let's improve their health and life chances whilst we have the impetus.”*

**Notes to Editors**

1 The survey was carried out by insight agency Opinium, it gathered a nationally representative sample of 2,002 respondents from across the UK. The survey was completed between 07/05/20 – 11/05/20.

2 A [£250 million emergency active travel fund](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking) has been made available in England to support greener, active transport modes. Local Authorities in Wales have been [invited to submit expressions of interest](https://gov.wales/written-statement-funding-local-sustainable-transport-measures-response-covid-19) to introduce temporary measures to improve the safety conditions for sustainable and active travel methods, though exact funding has not been specified. The Scottish Government initially announced [£10 million](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.transport.gov.scot%2Fnews%2F10-million-to-support-pop-up-active-travel-infrastructure%2F&data=01%7C01%7Croger.geffen%40CyclingUK.org%7C521cef95eb404bd5695908d802e35227%7Cda6b1118d522464c91ae44ffddc646d5%7C0&sdata=iplZnyX66bJaM3a%2FTTrWMy%2BTNIAquq6lPhMh3bWLKM4%3D&reserved=0) in funding as part of their Spaces for People initiative, due to demand an additional [£20 million](https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/guidance-and-next-steps-for-passengers-and-transport-sector/) in funding has been made available. In Northern Ireland central body [DfI Roads is responsible for public highways](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/dfi-roads), therefore there is no specific funding available for Local Authorities.

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