

Schools Mobility Programme Update to SPC September 2022 – Niamh Ni Cholmain

Background

Dublin City Council is providing schools with works to improve safety at the school gate through the National Transport Authority funded **School Zones** and the **Safe Routes to School Programme**. The School Zone project commenced in 2020. The **Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Programme** was launched by the Government in March 2022.

Both projects aim to create safety for children walking and cycling to school.

School Zone

A School Zone is an initiative designed to give priority to students at the school gate by freeing up footpaths and reducing vehicle drop-offs, pick-ups and idling. The aim is to reduce congestion and increase safety at the front of school and enable safe active travel to and from school. The School Zone raises awareness of the presence of the school and may consist of the following elements. Pencil shaped bollards on the path or carriageway to prevent illegal parking, painted colourful circles and gateway school zone road markings to raise awareness of the presence of the school and improved road safety signage to improve driving and parking behaviours. Parents are encouraged not to drop off or collect in the area marked out by pencils and road surface markings.

Safe Routes to School

In contrast to School Zones which have a focus on improving safety directly at the school gates the SRTS programme expands its remit past the school. It has a broader menu of measures like improved crossings and dynamic road signage alerting drivers to slow down along the route to school as well as the provision of cycle parking infrastructure within school grounds. As part of the SRTS assessment Green Schools conduct parent surveys of where and how school journeys are undertaken and walkability audits of surrounding roads. They also support SRTS installed infrastructure using an education and information programme on the benefits of the programme.

Applications for School Zones and Safe Routes To School

Dublin City Council received 119 eligible applications for a School Zone. There are 27 Safe Routes to School Round 1 applications and 23 for Round 2. Twenty five of the SRTS Safe Round 1 applicants are also School Zones applicants and 14 have received a School Zone.

Current Status School Zones

School Zones have been installed at 67 Schools with 52 awaiting treatment. Schools in 30 km/h roads were initially prioritized for treatment.

The breakdown of the completed School Zones per Dublin City Council administrative areas are 14 for the South East Area, 15 for the South Central Area, 14 for the Central Area, 9 for the North Central Area and 15 for the North West Area. The breakdown of School Zones awaiting treatment are 14 for the South East Area, 3 for the South Central Area, 13 for the Central Area, 17 for the North Central Area and 5 for North West Area.

At the start of 2022, the 67 completed School Zones were invited to complete an online survey of their experience of the School Zone. Over 20% of the schools made a submission. The schools identified a reduction in the parking on the footpath, illegal parking congestion and speeding post School Zone installation. 97 % of the schools agreed that the School Zone improved the safety at the school gate. The schools rank Park and Stride (leaving *the car a short distance from the school and making the last leg of the journey on foot*) followed by walking and cycling buses as future initiatives which they would be interested in setting up to support active travel.

The School Warden Service has conducted an audit of all completed School Zones and have made recommendations for all schools awaiting School Zones so that they are aligned to the current needs of school wardens. The results of the audit will be used to improve the completed School Zones.

An Taisce Green Schools Education Unit have issued a set of communications to schools with completed School Zones on the use of School Zones and the benefits that School Zones provide to students and the community.

Next Steps

In June 2022 the National Transport Authority requested school gate safety improvement works by the end of 2022 for any SRTS Round 1 applicant which had not received a School Zone. A consultant engineer has been appointed to accelerate the delivery of the designs for front of school safety improvement works at 10 locations covering 13 SRTS schools. 3 adjacent schools will benefit from these works. These schools are distributed per administrative area is as follows 4 are in the South East Area, 2 are in the South Central Area, 2 are in the Central Area, 5 are in the North Central Area.

All schools have been assessed by the School Mobility Officer and the engineer. The assessment involves interviews with school principals, observations at school opening and closing times, interviews with school wardens, school caretakers and in some cases parents and residents. An Taisce Green Schools also provided parent travel to school surveys and walkability audits.

Concept designs for school gate safety improvement works are currently being developed. It is proposed to issue all schools with these concept designs to share with their school and local community and for display at the school gates for 2 weeks so that communities know that these works are happening. The designs will also be displayed for 2 weeks on Dublin City Council's website and any comments will be viewed within that timeframe as part of final design development. The schools will be given a final design for approval. This method of community engagement will be a trial for the first 3 schools undergoing design.

Any School Zones which are currently at final design stage but which require minor design amendments will be progressed by the end of 2022.

The School Mobility Officer continues to do school gate observations at drop off or collect times on an ongoing basis. We are working with Parking Enforcement, Road Safety, School

Warden Service, Local Area Offices and An Garda Síochána Community Gardaí to understand and address continued dangerous and illegal driver behavior. The School Mobility Officer is also working with Green schools to promote the effective use of front of school safety works and to monitor the effectiveness of the SRTS programme.