Implementing "School Streets" — Why, How and What the Pay-Off Is.

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland

1 Executive Summary

Based on the report by Mums for Lungs, *"The case for School Streets – a briefing for councils"* (July 2025) Mums for Lungs+1 this briefing considers the issues of pollution around schools and offers opportunities for local councils to consider traffic management and active travel options around school sites.

The concept of 'School Streets' restrict motor traffic outside schools during drop-off and pick-up times. They create cleaner, safer environments for children, encourage active travel, and can be financially self-sustaining. Over 1,000 schemes now operate across the UK, demonstrating strong public support and measurable benefits.

2 Overview

1. Context & Rationale

- Many roads immediately outside schools suffer from high volumes of motor traffic during drop-off and pick-up times — increasing risks of road-danger and exposing children (and adults) to elevated levels of air pollution. Mums for Lungs+2Clean Air Fund+2
- Children are particularly vulnerable to polluted air: research indicates that levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) and particulates near school gates are significantly higher than in many other settings. Mums for Lungs
- The "School Streets" model offers a practical intervention: at peak arrival/departure times the street(s) immediately adjacent to a school are closed (or restricted) to motor vehicular access, enabling more walking, cycling and scooting, reducing emissions and improving safety. Mums for Lungs+1
- Beyond air and safety, benefits include improved active travel habits for children (walking/cycling), calmer school-run environments, better conditions for learning (less stress, less pollution) and positive community signals about prioritizing children's health and mobility. Clean Air Fund+1

2. Evidence of Impact & Operational Viability

Air, Traffic and Active Travel Impacts

- The report notes that where School Streets are in place, research shows reductions in motor-vehicle traffic around schools, and reductions in NO_2 of around 23 % in some cases. Mums for Lungs+1
- For example: in one scheme in the London Borough of Dulwich (Bessemer Grange Primary) the number of car/van journeys fell by approximately 82 % and cycling more than doubled. Mums for Lungs
- Increased active travel (walking & cycling) not only reduces emissions but offers health and developmental benefits for children (improved attention, better behavior, fitness) and contributes to calmer streets around schools. Mums for Lungs

Cost and Financial Viability

- A key message: School Streets **can be cost-neutral or better** for Councils. In the FOI survey of London Boroughs by Mums for Lungs:
    - Average cost of implementation: ~£85,000-£100,000 (including ANPR cameras, consultation, Traffic Management Orders (TMOs), staff time) Mums for Lungs
    - Many schemes (those with enforcement through ANPR cameras) reported breaking even within ~2 years (as the payment fines/PCNs offset the costs) or even generating net income. Mums for Lungs
    - The surplus income must, under Section 55 Road Traffic Regulations 1984, be ring-fenced for public transport, highways and environmental improvements — so any earnings are public-benefit. Mums for Lungs
- Even where schemes are volunteer-staffed or unenforced (and thus less revenue) the core benefits (air, safety, behavior) still accrue; the financial case improves with enforcement and monitoring.

Feasibility & Uptake

- In London as of summer 2025 there are ~800 School Streets; outside London just over 200 across England, Scotland and Wales. Mums for Lungs+1
- The feasibility study (2021 by Mums for Lungs / Possible / Active Travel Academy) concluded that around half of schools in the four pilot cities (London, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol) were judged feasible for School Streets, and up to two-thirds may be feasible with appropriate adaptation. Squarespace
- However, barriers include: roads on major thoroughfares (A/B roads) where closure is impractical, funding/enforcement constraints, local resistance (from drivers/residents), and ensuring that alternatives (parking, servicing, access) are managed. Mums for Lungs+1

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3. Strategic Benefits for Local Authority / Council

- **Public health**: Reducing children's exposure to toxic air and traffic danger aligns with corporate health objectives, childhood health outcomes and duty of care for schools.
- **Transport policy alignment**: Encourages modal shift (walking, cycling), supports active travel targets, helps reduce peak congestion and supports low-emission zones/clean air strategies.
- **Climate / environment**: Fewer car trips = fewer emissions; School Streets can be a visible and high-impact signal of a low-traffic, child-friendly neighborhood approach.
- **Community engagement & equity**: The model offers visible improvement for school-run neighborhoods, builds parent/resident support, can reduce local nuisance, supports Schools' own green policies and links to wider agendas (air quality, health inequalities).
- **Cost-effectiveness**: If designed with enforcement (ANPR) it is financially viable; the pay-back time of ~2 years typical makes it a strong business-case.
- **Scalable & replicable**: With policy guidance (the UK Government's guidance for local authorities was published Nov 2024) and established toolkits now available, it is replicable across multiple schools. Mums for Lungs+1

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4. Key Implementation Considerations & Success Factors

Selecting Appropriate Sites

- Preferably side-streets adjacent to schools rather than major A/B roads; access restrictions should not force unsafe or congested detours. Squarespace
- Engage with schools, parents/carers, residents, businesses early: build community buy-in, address concerns (parking, drop-off for disabilities, deliveries).
- Consult and map existing traffic patterns; baseline air-quality/traffic counts help monitor impact and make business case.
- Consider enforcement model from the outset: manual barriers/volunteers may work short-term, but ANPR camera enforcement gives best financial/behavioral return.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

- Use appropriate Traffic Management Orders (TMOs), Temporary Traffic Orders for trial periods, followed by permanent orders if successful.
- Ensure financial flows of any PCN surplus comply with Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (ring-fenced for public transport/highways). Mums for Lungs

Monitoring & Evaluation

- Define success metrics: reductions in vehicle counts, reductions in NO_2/PM levels, increases in active travel, resident/parent satisfaction, school staff feedback.
- Use trial period (e.g., 6-12 months) to test scheme, make adjustments (entrance/exit times, size of closure zone, signage).
- Publish findings to stakeholders — transparency builds confidence and helps replication.

Communications & Community Engagement

- Strong emphasis on generating positive narrative: This is about children's health, safe streets, empowering walking and cycling. While some drivers may feel inconvenienced, broaden the framing: benefit to entire community (less congestion, cleaner air, calmer streets).
- Engage local schools (PTAs), parent/carer groups and local residents; provide clear information about timings, exemptions (emergency vehicles, disabled access), signage, alternatives.
- Celebrate successes (e.g., school walk/cycle days), show children and families using the space, produce simple infographics on reduction in traffic/pollution.

Sustainability & Integration

- Integrate the School Street scheme into wider active travel/clean air strategy: e.g., routes to school, secure cycle storage, education programmes in schools.
- Consider complementing measures: parking restrictions in buffer zones, enforcement of idling, traffic calming, improved pedestrian crossings, signage.
- Monitor for unintended consequences: displacement of traffic to neighboring streets, accessibility for local businesses/deliveries — address these proactively.

Financial & Operational Planning

- Budget initial set-up (consultation, TMOs, signage, cameras/barriers, staff time) – typical London figure circa £85k-£100k. Mums for Lungs
- Estimate revenue potential (from PCNs) based on local traffic levels, behavioral change will reduce PCNs over time, so plan for transition to more normal funding. Mums for Lungs
- Consider phasing: start with pilot school(s) to refine model, then scale across schools in a ward/borough.

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5. Risks / Challenges and How to Mitigate

- **Local opposition**: drivers, residents or businesses may raise concerns about access, parking displacement or congestion elsewhere. Mitigation: early engagement, clear communications, monitoring of spill-over, provide exemptions and adjust closure design if needed.
- **Enforcement shortfalls**: without effective enforcement, scheme may fail (traffic continues, benefits not realised). Mitigation: ensure ANPR or other reliable enforcement is included at design stage, budget for it.
- **Displacement of traffic**: traffic may shift to neighbouring streets rather than reduce. Mitigation: street-by-street monitoring, consider buffer zones or extend closure/controls, integrate with wider traffic management.
- **Inappropriate site selection**: e.g., streets serving major routes, high-volume traffic, or with no alternative for school access. Mitigation: feasibility assessment, choose streets where alternative routes exist, where disruption to wider network is minimal.
- **Equity consideration**: ensure the scheme does not unfairly burden certain groups (e.g., residents with mobility issues, local businesses). Mitigation: build exemptions where genuinely needed, ensure accessible drop-off points, consult with disability groups and businesses.
- **Funding sustainability**: initial revenue may drop as compliance improves; long-term funding should not rely purely on PCNs. Mitigation: integrate scheme within transport/clean-air budget, view as public health investment rather than purely revenue-driven.

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6. Recommendations for Next Steps

1. **Scope & Prioritise Schools** – Conduct an audit of all schools within the authority to identify opportunities for School Streets: map traffic volumes, air-quality data, school-run patterns, side-street suitability and stakeholder readiness.
2. **Pilot Scheme** – Select one or two schools in high-impact locations (high traffic/poor air quality) as pilot sites; define timings, enforcement mechanism, budget and evaluation framework.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** – Develop a communications and engagement strategy: meeting with schools, parents/carers, residents, businesses; prepare FAQs; signage and behavior change materials.
4. **Define Enforcement & Funding Model** – Choose enforcement option (ANPR vs volunteer barriers), estimate budget, revenue forecast, ensure compliance with ring-fencing of any surplus income.

5. **Monitor, Evaluate & Report** – Define metrics (traffic counts, air-quality, active travel mode share, stakeholder satisfaction); set baseline; schedule review at 6–12 months; publish outcomes and lessons learned.
6. **Scale-Up Strategy** – Based on pilot success, plan roll-out across additional schools, embed into borough/authority Active Travel and Clean Air Plan, secure ongoing budget and political support.
7. **Link to Wider Strategy** – Ensure School Streets are part of a wider borough strategy: e.g., low-traffic neighborhoods, active travel infrastructure, school travel plans, air-quality monitoring, behavior change campaigns.
8. **Ensure Equity & Inclusivity** – Build in accessibility (mobility-impaired access, school bus/drop-off needs), business and resident support; ensure transparent process and address concerns proactively.

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7. APSE Comment:

The School Streets model presents a compelling opportunity for local authorities: it supports child health, improves safety, fosters active travel, helps tackle air-quality and climate commitments, and can be implemented in a cost-neutral or net-benefit fashion. With clear evidence of meaningful traffic and pollution reductions, and operational guidance now widely available, councils are well-placed to deliver significant local benefits. A pilot, well-designed and community-engaged, offers a powerful first step towards embedding child-friendly, low-traffic school-run streets, delivering healthier, safer neighborhoods.

Nevertheless APSE recognises that the ability of working parents to get children to school, often on the way to work, may present barriers to implementation, which will especially be the case in areas which are poorly served by public transport options or in more rural areas where there is a greater reliance on cars to transport children to school. Sensitively dealing with these issues will be critical to success.

APSE would also suggest its member councils may wish to explore the innovative work in Derby City Council 'School Safe Havens' scheme. More information can be found through this link and Derby City Council's press release on the APSE sponsored MJ Award for Council Team of the year through this link.

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