



To: Transport Planners

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Subject: School Travel Toolbox: No 16 Safe Routes to School in Europe

Top line: Safe Routes to Schools was first developed in Denmark in response to high child road deaths as mass motorisation started. A similar reaction occurred in The Netherlands.

During the period 1955-71, Denmark had the highest rate of child mortality due to road collisions in Western Europe. Reaction to this situation took several forms but most importantly a new Road Traffic Act was implemented in 1976, incorporating the statement: "It is the responsibility of the police and the road administration, upon consultation with the schools, to make provisions for the protection of children against the dangers of motorised traffic on their way to and from school".

There was also concomitantly an increase in demand from schools and parents for traffic restraint measures to protect children against the dangers of traffic. Subsequent introduction of slow speed areas resulted in an 85% reduction in collisions and funding budgets were made available for SRS studies (including surveying children) and for building the schemes. In general, schools and parents were very satisfied with the projects and considered the routes safer than before.¹ Environmental concerns were also pushing traffic issues up the political agenda.² In Odense, often named the 'home of safe routes to schools', it has been found that safe routes to schools projects benefit adults as well as children. Specifically, for children the benefit has been that traffic calming measures in Odense may have enabled many children over generations to cycle, offsetting concerns related to more recent rises in car traffic and higher car ownership.³

There were similar strands in policy development in modern transport planning in The Netherlands. Increasing child road traffic fatalities from the 1960s, as per in Denmark, also lead to a successful national campaign for a change in national transport policy, led by Stop de Kindermoord (Stop the Child Murder). By the late 1970s it was generally accepted in Dutch transport planning that in residential areas the speed of traffic would have to be 30 km/h. At this speed it was recognised that serious or fatal injuries were low.

Two large-scale 30 km/h demonstration projects, in Eindhoven and Rijswijk were conducted. These applied a range of traffic calming measures from relatively cheap speed restricting measures to new street designs not so dissimilar to Woonerfs. They also included measures to redirect through traffic away from residential areas. The combination of restrictions on through traffic and restricting the speed of traffic travelling in the zones was most effective out of three options tested. This included addressing unsafe school routes or school surroundings. The researchers stated that the traffic calming measures introduced were more likely to have positive effects in the most dangerous urban areas. "The effects of 30 km/h zones appear to have a positive effect on road safety. Speeds are lower, there is less through traffic and the residents are happy"⁴

¹ Nielsen, O. 1990 Safe routes to school in Odense, Denmark, in Tolley, R. (ed) *The Greening of Urban Transport: Planning for Walking and Cycling in Western Cities*, London: Belhaven.

² Jamison, A., Eyerman, R., Cramer, J. and Læssøe, J. 1990 *The making of the new environmental consciousness*, Edinburgh: University Press.

³ Jensen, S. 2008 How to obtain a healthy journey to school, *Transportation Research Part A*, 42: 475-486.

⁴ Janssen, S. 1991 Road safety in urban districts. Final results of accident studies in the Dutch Demonstration Projects of the 1970s, *Traffic Engineering and Control*, June, 292-296.