Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Pop-Ups for Safe Routes to School
Using Tactical Urbanism to Promote Safe Routes to School Programs

The traffic cones, plants, and colorfully painted tires are arranged as a curb extension, which narrows the road in order to slow traffic and shortens the crossing distance for people walking. Photo: TrailNet

What Is Tactical Urbanism?

The key hallmarks of tactical urbanism projects are that they are temporary, low-cost, and inclusive of the community in their design and implementation. Because of their temporary nature, tactical urbanism projects are made to be low-cost. They use household or construction materials to mimic permanent infrastructure, typically rely on volunteers to set up, and as such, cost markedly less than permanent infrastructure projects. Mike Lydon, an urban designer from Street Plans Collaborative, is credited with coining the term "tactical urbanism" in 2010. These days, tactical urbanism takes many forms and can be employed to accomplish a variety of ends, including, but not limited to, traffic calming, economic development, and making communities more beautiful.

So you want to make an intersection safer? What would help you visualize that: a temporary traffic installation to show road users and community members what the street could look and feel like, or a lengthy report with diagrams and memos?

While engineering studies and reports are important pieces of traffic safety improvements, they are not the most accessible way to present new ideas to and get feedback from communities. That's why a new tool for advancing Safe Routes to School is popping up in communities across the country. Parents, advocacy groups, and engineers are installing temporary crosswalks, curb extensions, and roundabouts to show how easy it is to make changes that make it safer and more inviting for kids to walk and bicycle to school. Referred to as "pop-ups" because they may "pop-up" overnight, these temporary demonstration projects fall under the umbrella of tactical urbanism, the practice of temporarily making public spaces more walkable, bikeable, attractive, and useful. How does the process for pop-up projects work? In simplified form, a community or organization identifies a public place that could be improved. Next, the local jurisdiction grants permission for a temporary installation at the site, and an organization or city agency installs the temporary features. The public uses it, provides feedback, and, in the best case scenario, the feedback on the temporary feature informs the development of permanent improvements.

This fact sheet outlines how pop-up projects can be used to advance Safe Routes to School projects, discusses the benefits of this type of demonstration project, provides examples of communities that have used pop-ups to advance Safe Routes to School, and shares resources for helping you create pop-up Safe Routes to School projects in your community. For tips on how to create a pop-up project, see our companion fact sheet, Where the Duct Tape Meets the Road: How to Create Pop-Up Safe Routes to School Projects.

Pop-Up Projects and Safe Routes to School

How can pop-up projects support kids walking and biking to school? Pop-ups can play a role in many aspects of a Safe Routes to School program. Comprehensive Safe Routes to School programs use a framework called "The Six E's" to help kids safely and conveniently walk or bike to school, and pop-up projects can address several of the Safe Routes to School E's, including education, encouragement, engineering, evaluation, and equity. (Enforcement is not particularly relevant to tactical urbanism.)

Engineering: More often than not, pop-up projects are used to demonstrate the value of and potential for improvements to street features or infrastructure, known as engineering. By using temporary installations to calm traffic and create crosswalks and protected bike lanes, among other options, pop-up projects can serve as a pilot for the kinds of engineering improvements that have been demonstrated to improve safe walking and biking to school.

Encouragement: By design, pop-up projects are typically colorful, eye catching, and spark intrigue. The novelty of new street features appearing seemingly out of nowhere tends to inspire curiosity, which can motivate kids and families to walk or bike to school out of interest in checking out this new feature near their school. These projects are often even more effective when done in concert with existing encouragement programs; for example, demonstration

projects that take place on Walk/Bike to School day, or a bike rodeo that can take advantage of temporary infrastructure. By designing colorful, attractive, unique pop-up demonstrations and conducting robust community outreach, pop-up Safe Routes to School projects can encourage people to get out and walk or bicycle to see and try out the temporary infrastructure.

Education: Educational opportunities abound with pop-up Safe Routes to School projects. Before the pop-up project gets installed, there is an opportunity to teach kids and parents about traffic safety when seeking input on developing the pop-up project. When the pop-up is up and running, there is an opportunity to teach students how to take advantage of the new and improved infrastructure to walk or bicycle to school safely.

Evaluation: For most pop-up Safe Routes to School projects, the ultimate goal is to make lasting change. Pop-up projects are a chance to show that if you make it easier and safer for kids to walk and bike to school, more kids will do so. Pop-up Safe Routes to School projects create a time and place to gather data on travel mode, traffic speed, and feedback on the installation in order to make the case for permanent infrastructure investments.

Equity: Many pop-up projects try to engage community members, seeking meaningful input and participation from the parents, school administrators, and students about what would make it easier and safer for them to walk or bike to school. As such, these projects have the potential to improve equitable implementation of Safe Routes to School projects. Additionally, permanent traffic calming and street safety improvements are capital-intensive, meaning that places most in need this type of infrastructure are less likely to receive it. Pop-up projects can spur traffic safety improvements, even if temporarily, and inspire advocacy in places that need them most.

Using duct tape, these volunteers are creating a pop-up buffered bike lane in Burlington, Vermont. Photo: Street Plans Collaborative

Why Use Pop-Up Projects to Advance Safe Routes to School?

Pop-up Safe Routes to School projects yield many benefits.

- These projects help make the case for permanent infrastructure improvements by demonstrating the value of investments that make it easier, safer, and more inviting for people to walk, bike, and spend time places. Pop-up Safe Routes to School projects can show, for example, that if you make it safer for people to bike to school, more kids will bike to school.
- As temporary installations using household materials like car tires, planters, and traffic cones, pop-up Safe Routes to School projects are inexpensive, especially when compared to the cost of permanent infrastructure. For decision-makers, it's easier to say "yes" to larger permanent infrastructure investments after they've been presented to and tested by the community in the form of a pop-up project.
- Because the projects are temporary and low-cost, they are flexible. A community or school district can make changes to design much more easily when working with hay bales and paint than after concrete has been poured.
- Because of their temporary nature and emphasis on community engagement, projects can generate community interest, feedback, and support throughout the process, and can help students, parents, and decision-makers visualize what change could look like. This is critical for Safe Routes to School. One reason some parents don't allow their kids walk or bike to school is perceptions of safety, so these pop-up installations can help them see the potential.
- Pop-up projects can be effective to help make the case by gathering data – showing, for example, that if you put a crosswalk at an intersection leading to a school, more kids will walk to school.

Examples of Pop-Ups Supporting Safe Routes to School

St. Louis, Missouri

Trailnet, a St. Louis bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organization, hosted several pop-up safe streets demonstrations throughout the city of St. Louis as part of a Plan4Health grant. Trailnet worked with community partners to develop pop-up traffic calming installations, using traffic cones, plants, colorfully painted tires, and spray paint to create temporary crosswalks, roundabouts, and narrow streets to slow traffic. These traffic calming installations truly "popped-up," lasting for ten hours or less. During the pop-up demonstrations, Trailnet staff and volunteers talked with community members walking by, getting their feedback about the installations and their ideas on what else would be needed to improve safety. One of these pop-up events was at Woodward Elementary School to improve safety for kids walking to school. As these traffic calming installations raised awareness about the potential for infrastructure changes to support walkable, healthier communities, Trailnet worked with BJC School Outreach and the City of St. Louis to design permanent infrastructure changes to increase safety for children and families walking to Woodward Elementary School. Funded by the Missouri Foundation for Health's Healthy Schools Healthy Communities program, Woodward school now enjoys an updated crosswalk, curb ramps, bump outs, and stop lines to make it easier and safer for children to walk to school.

After a successful pop-up demonstration project, Woodward Elementary School's now has a permanent crosswalk, bumpouts, curb ramps, and stop lines that make it safer and easier for children to walk to school. Photo: Trailnet

Hay bales, spray paint, and traffic cones are used to create curb extensions to narrow the street in order to slow traffic and shorten the crossing distance for people walking. The temporary crosswalk makes it clear that children will be crossing the street here to reach their school. Photo: Alta Planning + Design

Montclair, New Jersey

For International Walk/Bike to School Day, Walk Bike Montclair, the local bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organization in Montclair, New Jersey, partnered with the Montclair Police Department to create a pop-up protected bike lane around Edgemont School to facilitate safer passages for students arriving on bike. Volunteers used spray paint to draw images of bicycles in the lane and lined the lane with safety cones. Walk Bike Montclair first launched the pop-up bike lane in 2015 and has now re-created the installation each year on International Walk/Bike to School Day. The idea was inspired by an article on PeopleForBikes' website encouraging organizations to copy the Minneapolis Bike Coalition's pop-up bike lane. Since its publication, the article has launched several copycat tactical urbanism projects.

Coalinga, California

The City of Coalinga, California hired Alta Planning+Design, a design and planning firm, to prepare its Active Transportation Plan. Alta wanted this plan to be informed and inspired by the needs and desires of community members. In order to engage residents, Alta decided on a tactical urbanism installation at the school as a way to reach children and parents. To make the pop up, Alta designed and installed temporary crosswalks and curb extensions to calm traffic and make it safer for children and families to walk to school. In addition to the pop-up treatment, Alta organized four Walking School Buses and hosted a community meeting to solicit input from residents. Over two hundred children walked to school the day of the pop-up installation. The treatments will be included in the city's active transportation plan, which will hopefully lead to permanent infrastructure being installed in the future.