

Blind Spots Unchecked:

How Ontario's New School Zone Signs Fail the Child-Friendly City Test

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Introduction

Imagine. You're eight years old, walking home from school. A massive new sign— two times taller than you — towers over the sidewalk near the crosswalk. You're excited to meet your friend who has already crossed the road. What you don't see is the car turning the corner.

This is what could happen in light of a recent policy decision. In November 2025, Premier Doug Ford's government removed all automated speed enforcement (ASE) cameras from Ontario's school zones. In Toronto, for example, 150 speed cameras will be replaced by just 20 enormous signs for 641 school zones (City News Toronto, 2025).

The problems extend beyond inadequate coverage. These oversized signs can create dangerous blind spots in the very spaces designed to protect children. A child waiting to cross behind the sign becomes invisible to drivers, and drivers approaching from certain angles become invisible to children. They might even become hide-and-seek playgrounds with potentially tragic consequences.

When policies affecting children's lives are made without considering their perspective, their safety, or their rights, we risk solutions that miss the mark entirely. This moment demands a Child-Friendly City perspective: one that places children's wellbeing at the center of urban planning.



8FT TALL NEW SIGN
COMPARED TO A 3FT
TALL CHILD



What is a child-friendly city?

The concept of a Child-Friendly City (CFC) offers a framework for evaluating whether urban policies truly serve children's needs. According to UNICEF, a Child-Friendly City is "a city, town, community or any system of local governance committed to improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction by realizing their rights as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." (UNICEF, 2017)

This isn't simply about adding more playgrounds or painting crosswalks in bright colors. A genuine CFC operates through what scholars call a "3-P scheme": provision, protection, and participation. (Mekonen, 2010)

Provision

Provision means ensuring adequate resources for children. In this context, this means effective traffic calming measures distributed where children actually are. Toronto has 150 speed cameras across its school zones; the province is providing just 20 oversized signs that do not rotate, for the city's 641 school zones. This isn't provision—it's a dramatic reduction in coverage that leaves the vast majority of children without enhanced protection. (City News Toronto, 2025)



641
school
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Previously
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TORONTO'S SPEED CAMERAS
DEMONSTRABLY PROTECTED CHILDREN
BY REDUCING SPEEDING BY

45%

Protection

Protection means actively safeguarding children from harm. Toronto's speed cameras demonstrably protected children by reducing speeding by 45%. It has been proven that speed cameras are an important tool to consider in improving pedestrian safety, particularly in school zones where vulnerable child pedestrians are concentrated (Howard et al., 2025). The replacement signs, however large and visible to drivers, may actually introduce new dangers through the blind spots they create. When a safety measure potentially increases risk, it fails the most fundamental test of protection.

Participation

Participation means including children's voices in decisions that affect their lives. Were any children consulted about removing the cameras they relied on? Did anyone ask children how they navigate around these massive new signs, or whether they feel safer with them? The absence of these conversations reveals a policy made for children, but not with them. Article 12 of the UNCRC guarantees children the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and this is a matter that we should listen to children.

CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS OPINIONS.
ADULTS SHOULD LISTEN AND TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

ARTICLE 12, UNITED NATIONS CONVENTIONS ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



The Missing Voices

When Children Are Excluded from Decisions About Their Safety

The absence of children's voices in Ontario's school zone policy reflects an overlook of child participation in urban planning and policy making.

Children's participation in urban planning processes yields better outcomes. Not only did children feel heard and valued, designers and planners also reported that children's input are insightful and effective (Bishop & Corkey, 2017) . When children are given the opportunity to act as design consultants, they provide insights that adults often miss. Children possess local knowledge of their home, school, and neighborhood geographies from a non-adult dominated perspective—they notice the shortcuts, the dangerous corners, the places where sightlines are blocked, because they experience these spaces differently than adults do. (de Andrade et al., 2016)

In this case, children could have offered crucial perspectives on how these oversized signs affect their navigation of school zones and whether they create new safety concerns. A child friendly city is not only a good city for children but also a good city according to and by children. (Riggio, 2002)





A Path Forward: What a Child-Friendly Approach Requires

Moving toward a genuinely child-friendly approach to school zone safety requires concrete actions at multiple levels. Here are five practical steps that align policy with children's rights and evidence-based practice.

Immediate Review and Reassessment: The province and city should conduct a comprehensive safety review of the new sign placement, specifically examining potential blind spots and sightline issues. This review should involve traffic safety experts, urban planners, and—crucially—children themselves who use these school zones daily. If safety concerns are identified, speeding cameras should not be removed and installation of the new signs should be paused until designs can be modified to eliminate hazards.

Restore Evidence-Based Measures: The data was clear: speed cameras reduced speeding by 45%, with even greater reductions for extreme speeding (Howard et al., 2025). While exploring complementary approaches to school zone safety, the province should reconsider the removal of a measure with proven effectiveness.



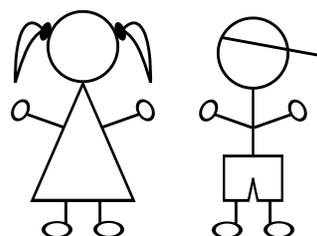


A Path Forward: What a Child-Friendly Approach Requires

Establish a Children's Commissioner for Ontario: Ontario should establish a Children's Commission –an independent office that advocates for children's voices in decisions that affect them, including urban planning and transportation safety. This is a permanent mechanism that treats children as rights-holders whose best interest must be at the core of policies.

Require Child Impact Assessments: All policies affecting school zones and children's public spaces should undergo formal child impact assessments before implementation. These assessments would evaluate how proposed changes align with children's rights under the UNCRC, examine effects across the 3-P framework (provision, protection, participation), and document whether and how children's perspectives informed the decision-making process.

Learn from International Models: Countries around the world have developed innovative approaches to child-friendly urban planning, like Australia, New Zealand, and Japan (Cordero-Vinueza et al., 2023). Ontario can reference their practices that have successfully integrated children's participation into policy development, implemented comprehensive school zone safety measures, and achieved measurable improvements in children's independent mobility and safety outcomes.



Conclusion



Ontario can choose to embrace a Child-Friendly City approach that places children's rights, safety, and voices at the heart of urban planning decisions. This means measuring policies not by their political convenience, but by whether they genuinely protect children, provide what they need, and include them as active participants in shaping their own communities.

Our children deserve a city that listens to them, learns from evidence, and puts their wellbeing above all else. Anything less falls short of the commitments we've made as a society that ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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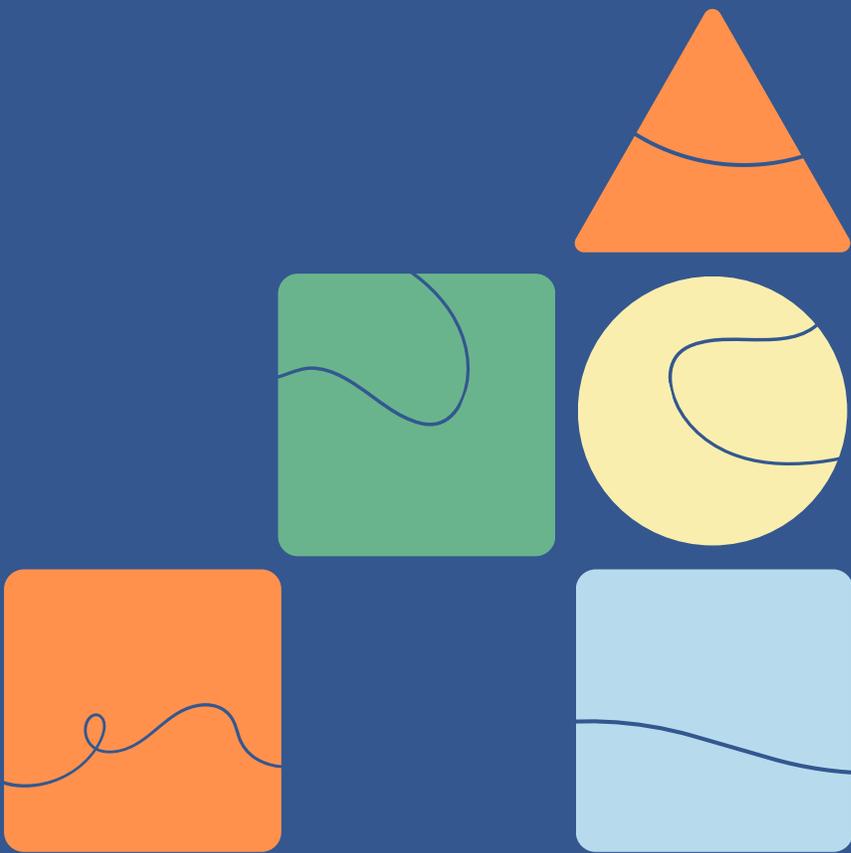
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