Rethinking the street design of school streets in Vienna

School Streets in Vienna

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Problem Statement: School Streets in Vienna

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Context

The current street design in school areas does not meet the needs for safety, mobility and leisure as they mainly prioritize car mobility and parking. Vienna ranked 17th on the 2025 European “Streets for Kids” city list (Clean Cities Campaign, 2025), with only 10 temporary school streets in place and 93 car-free zones around schools (VCÖ – Mobilität mit Zukunft, n.d.). The traffic intensive situation in Vienna is perceived as dangerous by parents, thus one in two children is always accompanied to school, most often by car. This intensive presence of cars hinders school goers independence, mobility patterns and access to safe play and socializing areas (Stark, J., et al., 2018). Furthermore, the school streets and traffic calming in the school surroundings are based on bottom up efforts from the schools and parents clubs, which causes the implementation to be slow and inconsistent across the city.

Core problem

Car centric street designs in school areas prioritizes car parking and convenience instead of the needs for safety and leisure of school goers. This results in low safety, limited freedom of movement and hinders the development of active and sustainable mobility behaviours in children.

Causes

The main root cause is the historic car centric street design, neglecting the needs for safety and independence of school kids, but also other social groups.
Second is governance issues, the initiation of the school streets is done by the schools and parent clubs, the district councils only approve and support these activities (Mobilitätsagentur Wien, n.d.). And third, traffic calming is not implemented citywide, action is slow due to split decision making powers and different local attitudes.

Effects

In Vienna schoolgoers face high safety issues due to traffic. This comes with lower air quality and noise pollution, as well as numerous psychological aspects. The culture of shuttling children to school is encouraged by the easy access cars have to the school buildings in Vienna. Because of this, Viennese children are less mobile than children from other parts of Austria. And if these mobility patterns continue, they are under risk of developing “a learning deficiency, a slower development of social behaviour, missing balance or spatial awareness” (Stark, J., et al., 2018, p. 32), not to mention a lack of development of “psychomotor and cognitive abilities, such as spatial orientation, perception and estimation of distances, time and speed” (Ibid). Which can inevitably lead to children without these skills to be less aware and prepared to navigate the urban environment in the future, thus leading to more traffic accidents.

Furthermore, children exposed to less sustainable mobility practices are less likely to develop sustainable mobility behaviour while growing up. Which means that the mobility patterns children and young people are exposed to will have a strong impact on their mobility behaviour as adults. Thus, children who were driven to school every day are more likely to use a car in their adult life than walk or cycle (Aliyas, Z., et. al. 2025).
While on the other hand, walking or cycling to school has been recorded to be very beneficial for both children and parents. In children it has been linked to better physical health, social skills and even higher academic performance. While parents who chaperone their children "consistently reported lower commuting stress, greater travel satisfaction, higher life satisfaction, and healthier body mass index scores" (Alfaro, E., et al., 2025, p. 6). And not to mention a closer bond with their children.
Despite travel to school on foot being "a significant contributor to overall child active behaviour, (...) other forms of activity incorporated into children's daily routines are vital contributors to children's daily movement targets" (Zougheibefl, R., et al. 2021, p. 2). On this basis, if school streets were implemented more widely and school foreyards expanded into the streets around schools, permanently forbidding cars, this would change the relationship of both children and parents with the space around schools. Currently the "results reveal that unsupervised play in the vicinity of the residential environment is not possible because play areas are difficult to access or displaced by car traffic" (Stark, J., et al., 2018, p. 32). Thus, this kind of change would provide a more safe and comfortable environment for children to spend their leisure time outside of school hours, and create a more 'activity-friendly neighbourhood', as well as a place of belonging that could foster children's socialisation (Zougheibefl, R., et al. 2021, & Gill, T., 2021).

Stakeholders

- **High-power/high-interest:** MA46, MA18, MA19, MA28, schools, parents' clubs, and district councils.
- **Low-power/high-interest:** parents, children, residents, NGOs, and the Mobilitätsagentur
- **High-power/low-interest:** Wiener Linien and the BMK
- **low-power/low-interest:** local businesses, real estate, MA56, and the Ministry of Education
- More detailed description and Power-Interest Matrix can be found here

Governance context

The Schulstraße Wiener Modell allows temporary traffic restrictions near schools, legally supported by §76d StVO. Schools and parent groups must initiate the process, with approval required from the district council and MA46. Once approved, the district provides signs and barriers, but schools are responsible for daily implementation. While the Mobility Agency of Vienna offers consulting, there are no incentives from higher authorities to prioritize these measures. As a result, closures often depend on local engagement rather than actual need. Apart from the administrative perspective, the Urban Mobility Plan Vienna 2025 promotes active, safe mobility (BMK, n.d). The District walking master plans and city programs promote community use of public space and further support small-scale interventions (City of Vienna, 2020).

Opportunity for change

If the problem is not addressed, children will continue to face unsafe and unhealthy school environments, mobility habits will remain car-oriented, and inequalities between districts will persist. This is a strategic moment because Vienna performs poorly in European school street rankings (Clean Cities Campaign, 2025), major transport projects are concluding and limited budgets may shift attention toward small, effective traffic-calming measures.

The city could actively reach out to schools and district councils in order to initiate the school streets, at first as temporary closures and in later stages as car free zones - implemented in multiple steps utilizing the space by removing parking lots and using temporary, flexible street scaping elements, similarly as in the case of the Elementary School in Herzgasse in the Supergrätzl Favoriten (Mobilitätsagentur Wien, 2022).

Entry points for action include the district walking master plans, and the upcoming Urban Mobility Plan Vienna 2035, which can be leveraged to establish clearer, city-wide standards for safe school streets.

Appendix on the Problem Statement

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Academic Sources

Aliyas, Z., Thompson, C., Bakkali, F., Collins, P. A., & Frohlich, K. L. (2025). *Reclaiming urban space for children: Examining the impact of School Streets on independent mobility and active transport*. Canadian Journal of Public Health. Springer Nature. https://link.springer.com/article/10.17269/s41997-025-01058-w.

Gill, T. (2021). *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities*. London: RIBA Publishing. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360655710.

Starka, J., Frühwirthb, J., & Aschauera, F. (2018) *Exploring independent and active mobility in primary school children in Vienna.* Journal of Transport Geography. Elsevier. https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0966692317300479.

Alfaro, E., Valle, E., Valle-Escolano, R., Useche, S. A. (2025). *Parenting 'on the move'? Active school commuting is linked to parents' well-being and children's academic performance*. Wellbeing, Space and Society. Elsevier. https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S2666558125000375.

Zougheibe, R., Jepson, B., Norman, R., Gudes, O., Dewan, A. (2021). *Is there a correlation between children's outdoor active mobility behaviour and neighbourhood safety? A systematic review of the evidence*. BMJ Open. https://bmjopen.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-047062.

Non-academic sources

BMK – Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz (n.d.). *Straßenverkehrsordnung (StVO)*. Accessed 15.11.2025. https://www.bmimi.gv.at/themen/verkehr/strasse/recht/stvo.html.

City of Vienna (2020). *Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) Vienna*. Accessed 20.11.2025. https://sump-central.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SUMP-Vienna.pdf.

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Stadt Wien (2025). *Schulwegsicherheit wird in Wien großgeschrieben*. Accessed 20.11.2025. https://presse.wien.gv.at/presse/2025/08/28/schulwegsicherheit-wird-in-wien-grossgeschrieben.

Stadt Wien – Mobilitätsagentur A (n.d.). *Masterplan Gehen*. Accessed 19.11.2025. https://www.wienzufuss.at/masterplan-gehen/.

Stadt Wien – Mobilitätsagentur B (n.d.). *Schulstraße*. Accessed 19.11.2025. https://www.wienzufuss.at/schulstrasse.

Stadt Wien – Open Data (2025). *Schulen Standorte – Dataset*. Accessed 20.11.2025. https://www.data.gv.at/datasets/30a369ca-4922-3a30-8cf2-94b958cbd893.

VCÖ – Mobilität mit Zukunft (2023). *VCÖ: Im Vorjahr in fünf Wiener Bezirken kein Schulwegunfall*. Accessed 20.11.2025 https://vcoe.at/presse/presseaussendungen/detail/vcoe-im-vorjahr-in-fuenf-wiener-bezirken-kein-schulwegunfall.

VCÖ – Mobilität mit Zukunft (n.d.). *School Streets improve safety outside schools*. Accessed 20.11.2025. https://vcoe.at/publikationen/vcoe-factsheets/detail/school-streets-improve-safety-outside-schools.

Mobilitätsagentur Wien (2022). *Supergrätzl Favoriten: Herzgasse wir zur neuen Fußgängerzone*. Accessed 8.12.2025. https://www.wienzufuss.at/news/supergraetzl-favoriten-herzgasse-wir-zur-neuen-fussgaengerzone/.

Further relevant readings

Kodukula, S., Rudolph, F., Jansen, U., & Amon, E. (2018). *Living. Moving. Breathing.* Hamburg: Greenpeace Germany https://greenpeace.at/assets/uploads/pdf/presse/living_moving_breathing_-_greenpeace_city_ranking_report_0.pdf

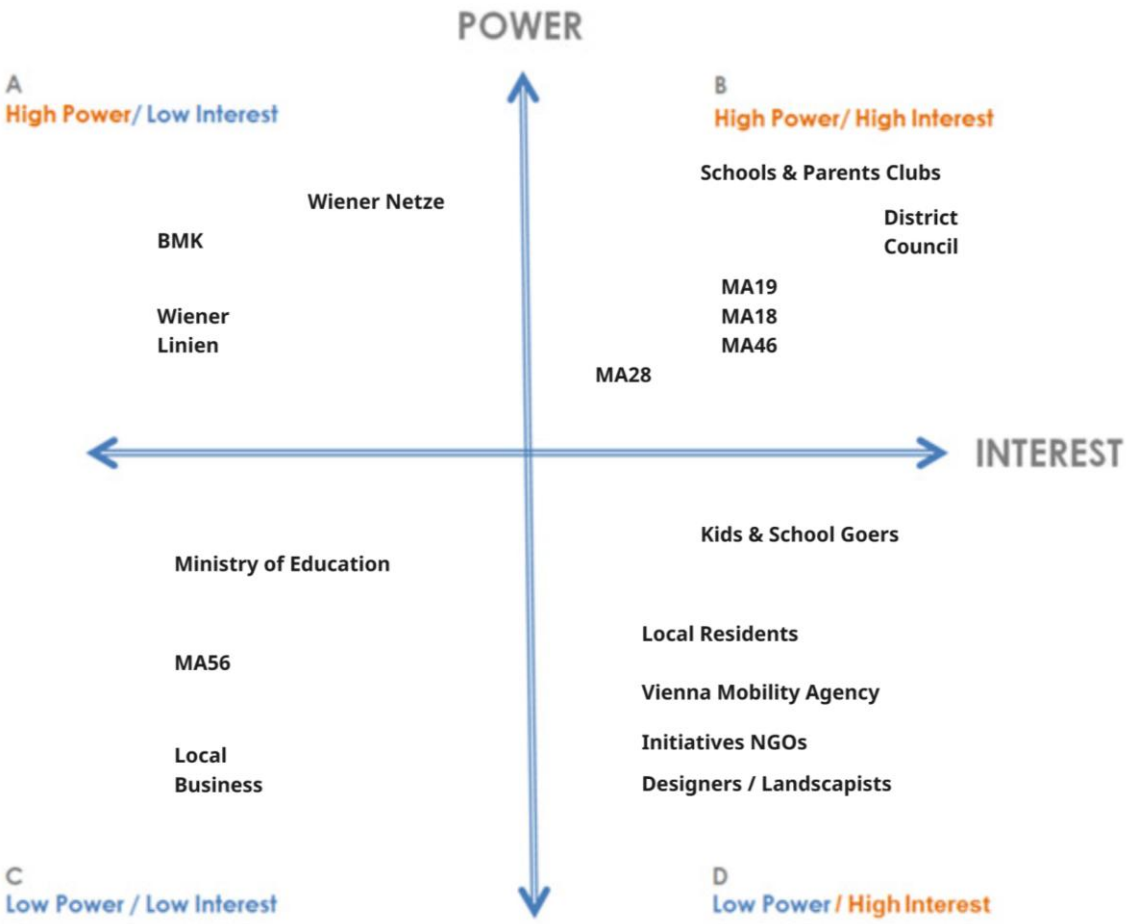
Transport for London (2021). *School Streets: Intervention Sites vs. Control Sites Full Report* https://content.tfl.gov.uk/school-streets-evaluation-report-website.pdf

This report from London provides an interesting insight into the effects of the school streets on the mobility behaviour, as well as into the attitudes - the acceptance and awareness of the school streets, what to note here is this report is dated in the time when some of the covid-prevention measures were still in place.

Clean Cities Campaign (2022). *Residents in European cities overwhelmingly support school streets, new survey* https://cleancitiescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/School-Streets-Survey_w.pdf

In this short summary the results of a survey from across selected European cities about the attitudes and support of school street are presented. It claims the support of school streets among the citizens is very high. Furthermore it includes a proposed six steps for establishing school streets, which can be of high relevance for our further work in the policy brief.

Stakeholder Mapping : Power-Interest Mapping

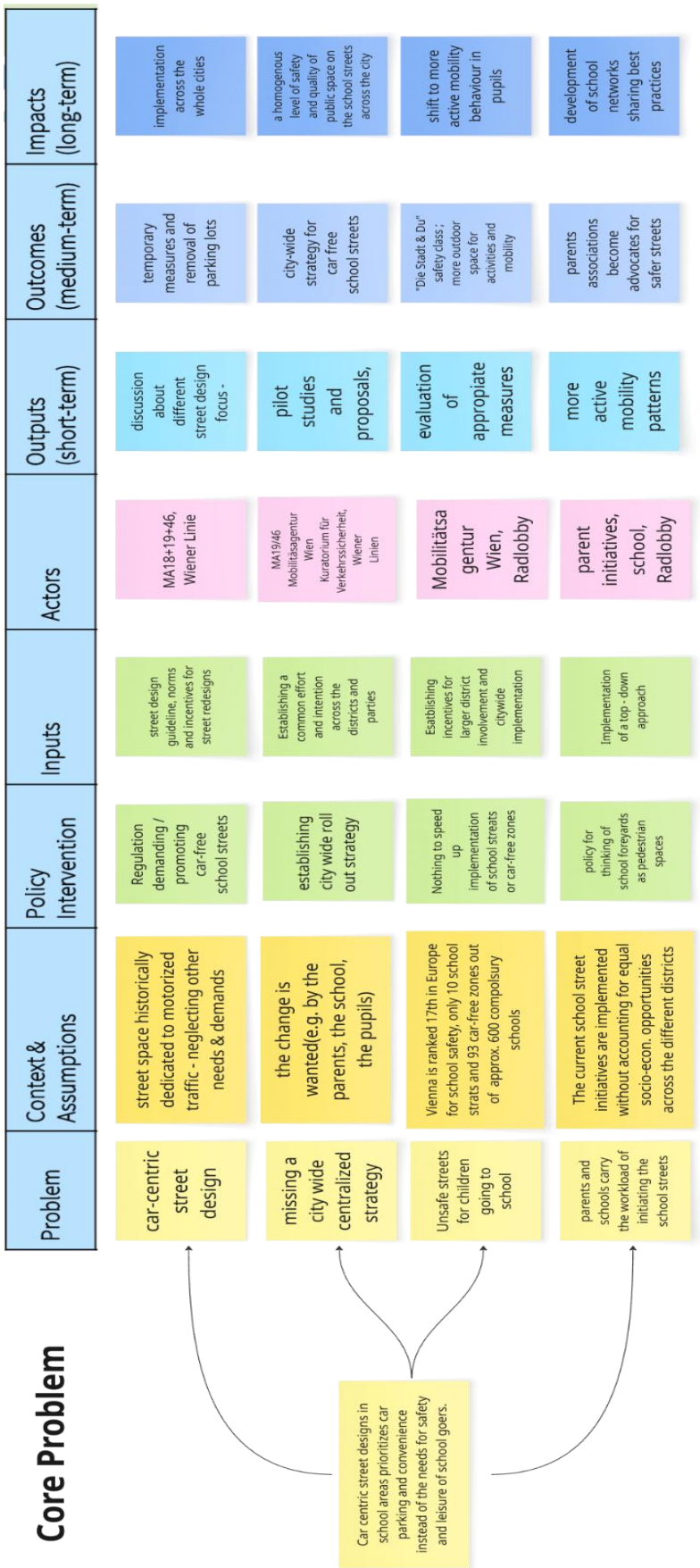


The various factors in regard to school streets in Vienna clearly shows the complex nature of this topic, here is to note that the initiatives coming from schools and parents need further approvals and decisions made by the district councils and especially by MA46. But there is very little to no impulses coming from higher instances of the city administration. More complex changes to the street scape in front of school like car free zones and redesigns involve even more actors and their approval- having a high power but not necessarily interest in this topic.

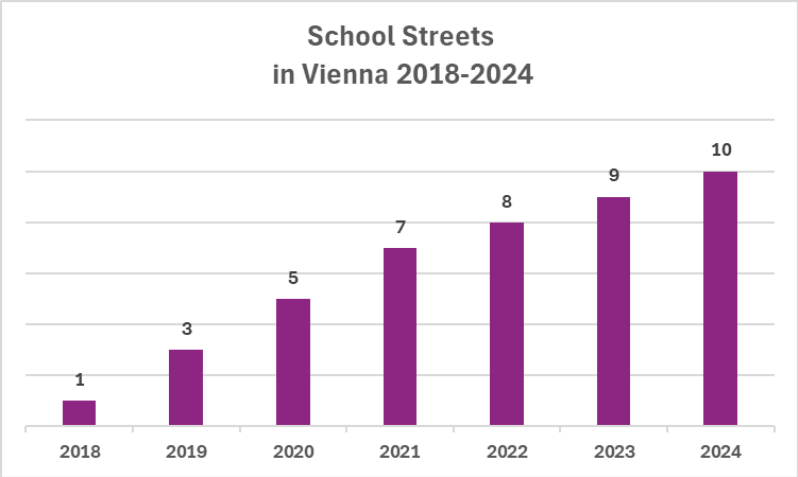
Theory of Change

Our group identified the car-centric design of most school streets in Vienna as the core problem which impacts the safety, leisure time and mobility patterns of pupils. The underlying problems are various and range from the lack of a top down approach, thus burdening initiative groups, to current policies which only put the car problem on hold, but do not structurally address it(e.g. context: like the 30-min school day car limitation). We believe that through implementing a city wide roll out strategy, which promotes school foreyards as pedestrian spaces, we can improve the mobility patterns of the target groups. Thus, the long term goal of our policy would be to achieve a homogenous(regardless of district and/or socio-economical status) level of safety and quality of school foreyards across the city of Vienna.

Supporting Visuals:

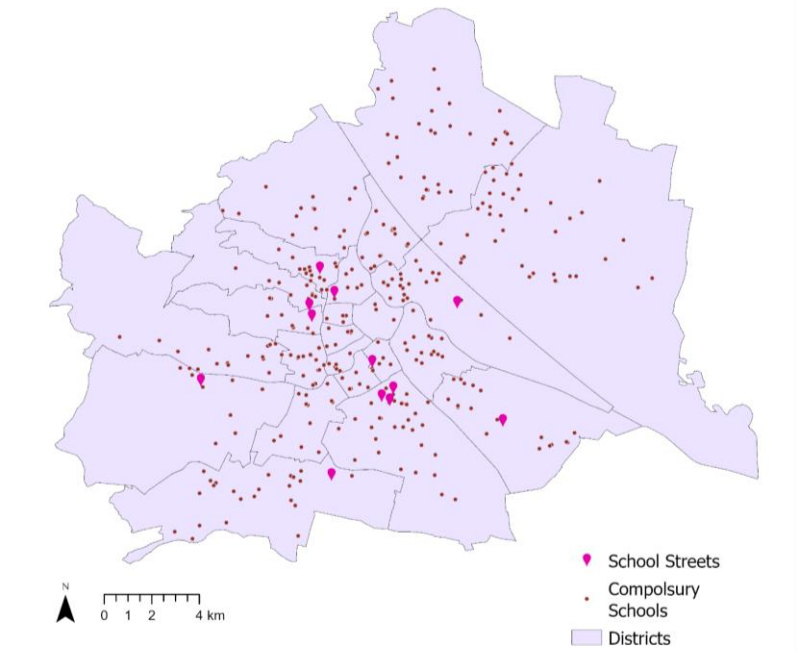


Charts & Maps

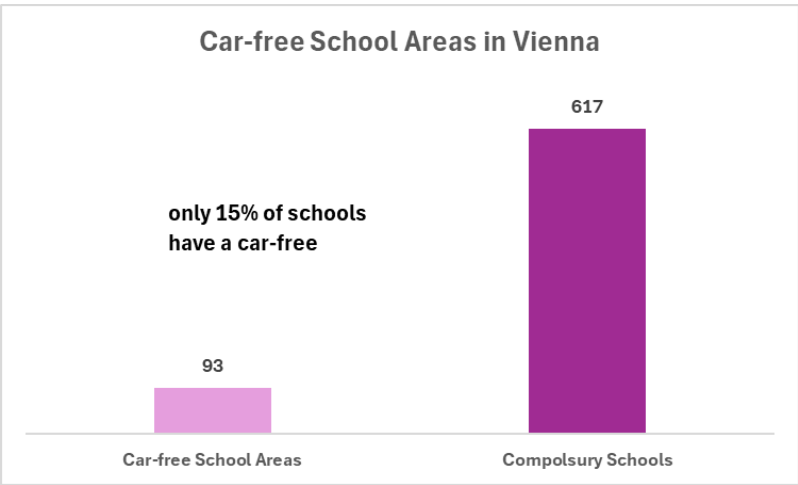


Number of temporary school streets in Vienna since the introduction of the school street concept in 2018.

Source: Mobilitätsagentur Wien, n.d.

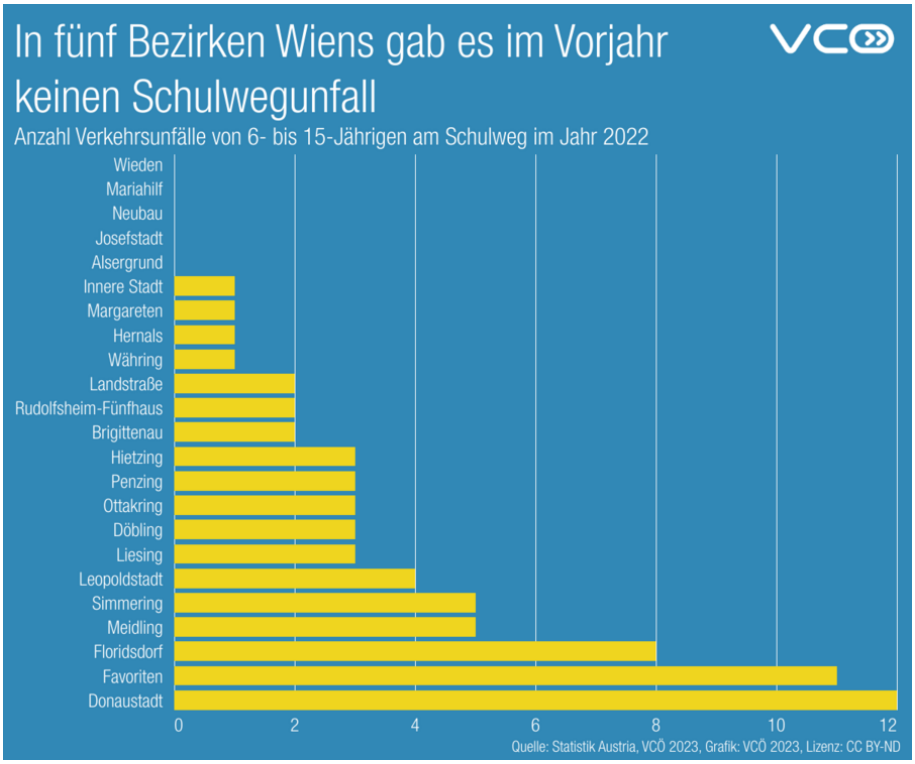


Comparison of the temporary street schools locations to all the compulsory school locations in Vienna, Sources: data.gv.at , 2025



Car-free school areas (entry streets or surrounding) , as of 2025.

Sources: Stadt Wien,2025



Distribution of the traffic accidents on the way to school across Viennese districts in 2022. Source; VCÖ-Mobilität mit Zukunft, 2025

Images

Mittelschule Quellenstraße 144, Source: Google Street View
The picture shows how busy the road is next to a school and how much usable space cars occupy.

Volksschule Märzstraße 148, with temporary traffic calming in place, 2021. Source: Google Street View, 2025. And this picture shows how much space around a school is opened up when cars have restricted access.

Parents advocating for car-free school streets in the Vereinsgasse in the 2nd district. A top-down approach ist desired.
Source: geh-doch.wien(n.d.): https://geht-doch.wien/schulstrassen/