Jason Gilliland, working with collaborators from University of Toronto, University of Nottingham, Brescia University College, Carleton University, Western University, Green Communities Canada and the London District Catholic School Board have been awarded $1M in funds from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research for their project “Examining how a school travel planning program can change children’s school travel modes, physical activity, and pollution around their schools.”

This project proposes an innovative school-based transportation intervention to build lifelong healthy physical activity habits. In the project, Dr. Gilliland and his collaborators will work with a partnership of local school boards in a School Travel Planning Program to examine how that program can improve active school travel, physical activity levels, and reduce air pollution around schools. Students in grades 4-6 at 24 schools will be involved in the project. Twelve schools will receive an intervention that includes a combination of engineering changes to the school neighbourhoods that make it easier to walk or bike to school, education, encouragement of active travel, and enforcement of existing traffic laws. The other 12 schools will act as controls. The researchers will study the differences in travel mode, physical activity and air pollution between the two school groups. The researchers anticipate that students in the intervention school group will use more active travel modes, be more active, and have better air quality around school. They hope the results of this study can contribute to designing more effective school travel planning programs across Canada to address the worrisome 20 year trend of a decline in the share of students who have been using actives modes of transport to get to school.