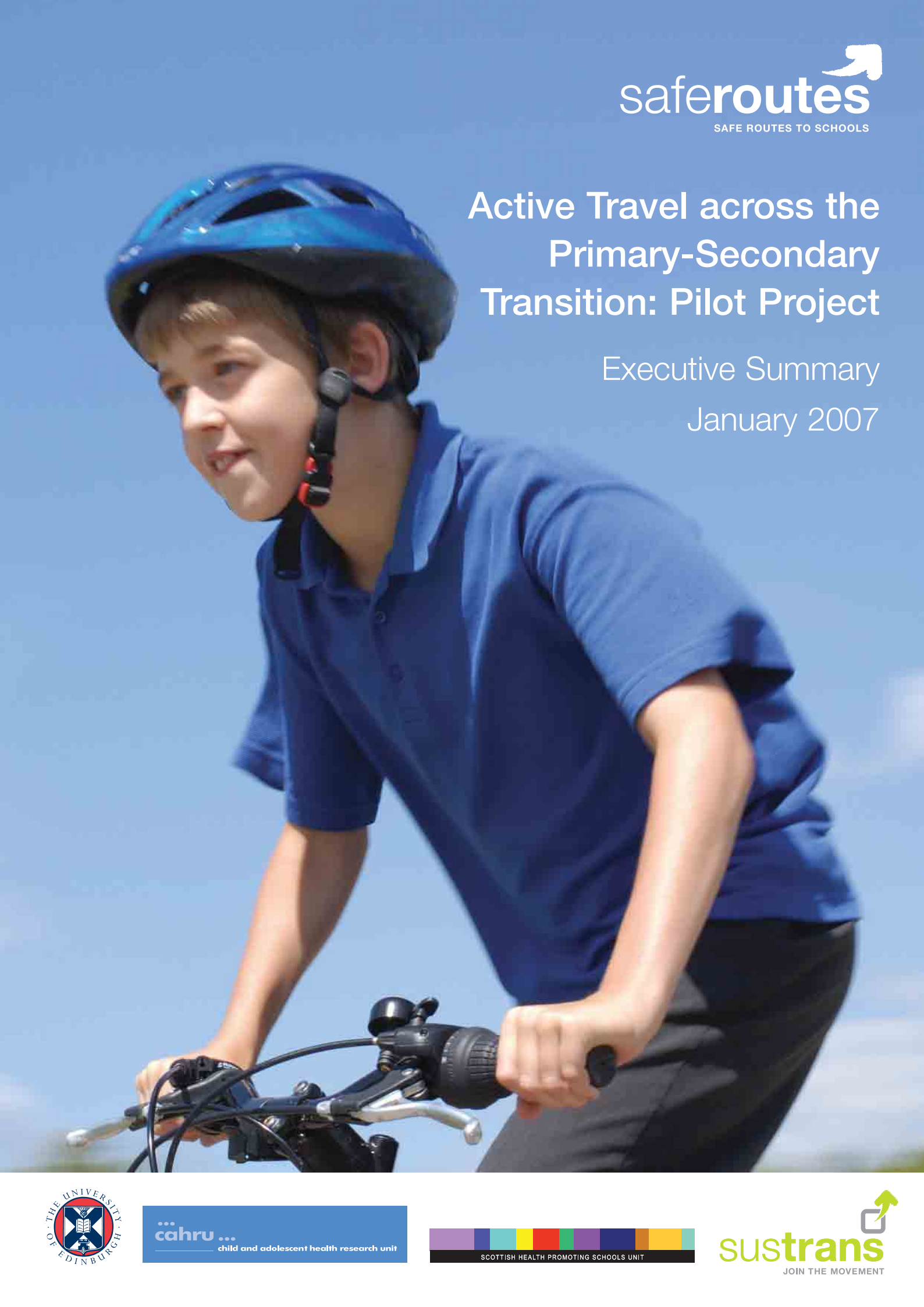


# Active Travel across the Primary-Secondary Transition: Pilot Project

Executive Summary  
January 2007



## Introduction

The benefits of physical activity are well established, but evidence suggests that many children in Scotland are not active enough to fully benefit their health. Walking or cycling to school can be seen as an effective and economic means of increasing children's participation in physical activity and also has many social and environmental advantages.

In 2006, Sustrans and the Scottish Health Promoting Schools Unit jointly commissioned a new pilot initiative to promote active school travel across the primary-secondary transition. This was in response to data showing that walking to school decreases as children move from primary to secondary school and concern that existing transition programmes do not include active travel. School Travel Coordinators were invited to submit proposals for pilot projects that would be led by a secondary school and focus on active travel. The three local authorities selected to participate were Argyll and Bute, Moray and the Scottish Borders.



## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of these pilot projects. A mixed methods approach was used to (i) explore the processes involved in development and implementation and (ii) assess the impact of the projects. Methods included a pupil survey, focus group discussions with pupils and interviews with key stakeholders.

Participating schools in the three pilot sites were similar in that they were located in small towns with a wider, predominantly rural catchment area. Geography was perceived as a key barrier to promoting active travel as many children are reliant on school transport. There was little opportunity to promote walking or cycling to school among

those pupils living in outlying villages. However, it was recognised that these pupils could benefit from learning about safe and active travel for journeys which may happen outwith the school day or when they are older and more able to make independent travel choices. In addition, safe travel at lunchtime was identified as an issue as this is a time when many secondary school children go out of the school grounds and good road safety awareness is essential.



In **Argyll and Bute**, the project focused on a 'transition challenge' for all S1 pupils at **Oban High School**. This was undertaken as part of the critical skills component of Personal and Social Education (PSE). Pupils were tasked with working in groups to design and develop

leaflets, maps and other resources which could be used to encourage P7 pupils at one of the feeder primary schools to walk safely to the high school when they moved up the following year. All pupil groups prepared a presentation for a panel of external judges and the winning group subsequently visited the primary school to give their presentation to the P7 pupils. The winning group were also awarded a prize of an adventure boat trip and this was considered to be an important motivating factor for the pupils.



In **Moray**, the project involved **Elgin Academy** and one of its feeder primary schools and had a particular focus on cycling. Both schools are located close to part of

the National Cycle Network and therefore the local infrastructure provided an ideal opportunity to promote cycling to school. In addition, through the School Travel Committee, Elgin Academy had recently installed new secure cycle storage. With support from the School Travel Coordinator and a P7 teacher, Junior Road Safety Officers (P7 pupils) were involved in conducting a survey of pupils, producing leaflets promoting active travel and mapping routes to Elgin Academy for all P7 pupils using postcode data. An important element of the project was a led cycle ride from the primary school to the Academy to show pupils potential cycle routes through the town.

In the **Scottish Borders**, the project was led by staff at **Hawick High School**. The school already had an active School Travel Group and had been engaged in promoting safe and active travel over a number of years. The pilot project provided an opportunity to consider the issue of



active travel across the primary-secondary transition which had not previously been addressed. A survey was conducted among all P7 pupils within the cluster primary schools and their parents in order to investigate current travel patterns and identify travel concerns. Results were used to create a transition pack which contained advice and

information including bus timetables and relevant telephone numbers. These were distributed to P7 pupils before they made the transition to secondary school. The pilot project also coincided with the launch of Hawick High School's Travel Plan. Accompanied by a teacher, a group of pupils cycled around the local area to distribute a copy of the plan to all the associated primary schools.

In general, it was felt that the projects had been a positive experience and had raised awareness of the benefits of active travel to school and opportunities for walking and cycling within the local area. In Moray, pupils from the pilot primary school were more likely to report that they had discussed school travel and been given travel information in P7 than pupils at any of the other associated primary schools. Levels of cycling were also high relative to other schools.

## The journey to school

Results from the survey of S1 and S2 pupils showed that three-fifths of pupils currently walk or cycle to school. Although there was little measurable increase in active travel as pupils moved from primary to secondary school, this was as expected given the scope and timescale of the projects. In all three schools, active travel behaviour remained fairly stable across the primary-secondary transition.

Most commonly, school journeys are less than fifteen minutes long, although one in five pupils said that it takes them over half an hour to travel to school. The longest journeys were mainly for pupils travelling by bus.

Pupils are most likely to travel to school with friends although almost one in five in primary school and one in ten in secondary school travel with an adult. Around one in ten pupils said they travel to and from school alone. Pupils said that travelling with their friends made the journey to school more enjoyable and helped them feel safer.

### Specific examples of good practice drawn from the three projects include:

- a survey of P7 pupils and their parents to identify school travel needs and concerns
- peer-led activities such as involving pupils in designing active travel leaflets or giving presentations to their peers or younger children
- active pupil participation on School Travel Committee
- using postcode data to map safe routes to school
- providing information for parents on school transport and local bus services
- embedding the project within the PSE curriculum
- including a practical element such as a led cycle ride to the secondary school.



## Barriers

Living too far away was the most common reason for not walking or cycling to school. Other common barriers were lack of time and having too much to carry. When asked what would encourage them to walk or cycle to school, pupils were most likely to identify factors associated with access routes to school such as continuous pathways, safe road crossings and wider footpaths. Over four-fifths of pupils also said that having lockers at school would encourage active travel.

## Benefits

Pupils identified a wide range of benefits of active travel. The most common were keeping fit; social benefits such as spending time with friends; staying healthy; being more environmentally friendly; and practical advantages such as saving money and getting to school more quickly. A number of pupils also identified mental health benefits such as increased confidence, feeling good, feeling calmer and sleeping better.

## The key to success

The process evaluation highlighted a number of factors which helped to facilitate the success of the project. Strong internal leadership and management, a positive attitude within the school and the willingness and enthusiasm of key members of staff were all essential. The value of having a 'school champion' who was passionate about the issue and could motivate others was also highlighted. Active travel initiatives focusing on the primary-secondary transition are most likely to be sustainable when they are integrated into existing programmes within schools. The use of critical skills within PSE at Oban High School was an excellent example of this.

Good partnership working was also essential for maximising the effectiveness of the projects. Schools have the opportunity to draw on the expertise and resources of a wide range of external agencies and individuals. In relation to school travel, these include Active School Coordinators, Road Safety Teams and other staff from the local council Transport or Roads department. As demonstrated at Hawick High School, local community groups and community councillors can also play an important role. School Travel Coordinators played a key role in bringing relevant partners on board. Partnership working was most

effective when there were: a range of people involved; shared aims and values; clear mutual benefits; willingness to contribute time and resources; and good communication channels.

As well as geographical location, other key challenges identified were lack of time, inadequate planning, lack of leadership, curricular pressures and poor communication. Developing strong primary-secondary links and establishing good communication between staff at participating primary and secondary schools was seen as critical for maximising the potential of transition-related work.

## Where next?

School staff within all three pilot projects planned to continue the work the following year with more time allowed for initial planning and preparation. Plans have also been made to extend the projects further including: Local Authority wide roll out of the transition project; introduction of a new scheme to promote cycle training among secondary school pupils; provision of a bicycle pool and storage facilities for Island pupils who live in hostel accommodation during term-time; and further development of support materials and travel information for pupils and parents.

To find out more about the schools who have taken part in transition work and to read this report in full please visit our website: [www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk)

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

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