

# Pupil's engagement and participation in School Travel Plans

## Introduction

An essential outcome (or aim) of any school travel plan (STP) is getting children and young people to walk, cycle or take the bus to school instead of coming by car. It should be common sense therefore, to seek to ensure the active involvement of pupils throughout a plan's development and implementation.

However there is much evidence to suggest that many STPs are being developed with little engagement of or participation from pupils. This is ironic given that school pupils often want to travel in an environmentally sustainable way, as the graph below indicates. Reasons can vary with age, reflect a concern to help protect the environment, and or a wish to travel independently of their parents.

In research carried out in Scotland children and young people showed a good understanding of how their travel behaviour impacts on the environment, their health and their independence. Health benefits ranked high amongst the factors taken into account when young people decide how to travel.<sup>(1)</sup>

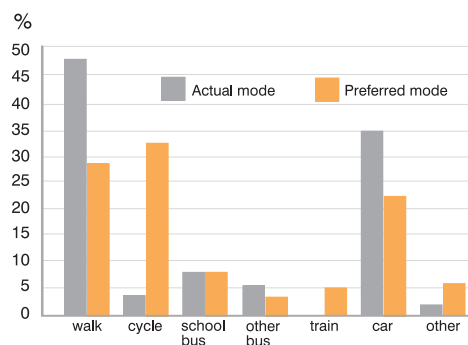
## Young People's Participation

Fortunately, the importance of engaging pupil participation in STPs is being recognised in many areas, including guidance coming from government.

In England, one requirement for STPs being submitted for the government's School Travel Initiative capital grant is that pupils should be consulted as to 'how they would like to travel to/from school'. In Scotland, the guidance for Local Transport Strategies also says that children and young people should be consulted.



**Travel to School**  
Young TransNet survey of 175,808 pupils 2005



Department for  
**Transport**

The **Safe Routes to Schools** project is co-ordinated by Sustrans and provides support to local authorities, schools and parents. 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.  
National Cycle Network Centre, 2 Cathedral Square, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5DD



# Pupil's engagement and participation in School



In 1991 the UK signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 states that:

*State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity.*

More recently Children's Commissioners have been appointed in each of the nations across the UK. Their remit is to focus on children's rights and protection ensuring they have a voice in their communities and decisions that affect them.

**“Providing an opportunity for pupils to contribute actively to the formulation of school travel plans for their school is essential.... because they will have the best insight into what travel plans will work more realistically for them and their parents or guardians.”**

Nigel Williams Northern Ireland Commissioner for Young People

## Participation is not just a travel survey

Participation means the direct involvement of children in decision-making about matters that affect their lives, whether individually or collectively.<sup>(2)</sup> Participation is important generally in democratic processes and for social inclusion. Children and young people need to feel that they are active citizens with a voice. There is an intrinsic value in being asked for their view, a matter of pride and respect, though many make clear that their views should have an impact - a tangible outcome.

**“If we seriously mean to improve the life conditions for children we must, as a minimum precondition,**

**establish reporting systems in which they are heard themselves as well as reported on by others”.**

Qvortrup ,1990 <sup>(3)</sup>

## Sustaining School Travel Plans

A STP is a living document which grows and develops over many years. Its success is ultimately dependent on a school taking ownership and responsibility for its maintenance.

Where school travel work becomes routine and embedded into core aspects of a school the likelihood of sustaining the travel plan long term is increased. This can often be achieved when:

- school travel work is part of the curriculum, as demonstrated in Sustrans curriculum guidance
- school travel work is linked with other initiatives such as Healthy Schools or Eco Schools awards
- pupils and / or the school council think about the STP and provide ideas for its further development on at least an annual basis, for example, as part of the monitoring and review process
- someone within the school community takes on the role of a champion for the STP and associated initiatives.

Effectively engaging pupils in the development and delivery of a STP goes a long way to ensure the travel plan is not left on the shelf.

Research suggests that children and young people have much to offer in terms of their participation and ideas for change. It demonstrates that they do not exercise rights irresponsibly but rather understand that doing things responsibly can open opportunities to do other things.<sup>(4)</sup> They can be shrewd observers of

their local streets, have ideas for improving the local environment and have the capacity to understand that certain constraints and barriers are difficult to remove.<sup>(5)</sup>

## Approaches to children's views and participation in school travel work

Given that all schools are unique, the way in which a STP is approached will be very different from one school to another. Examples of approaches which a school might take to ensure participation by young people include:

- school councils having a decision making input to the development and maintenance of the STP, including setting targets and taking responsibility for some of the objectives
- conducting travel surveys of whole school community, pupils analysis of results and discussion of these in class time as part of whole school project
- curriculum work including presentations to key decision makers such as councillors, local authority officers and parent teacher associations. See the range of links to the curriculum on our website.
- focus group work following on from initial travel surveys
- peer education; working with feeder schools and partner schools
- using Theatre In Education as a way to initiate further curriculum work on school travel issues and the STP

## Case studies

### 1. The Coppice Primary School, Worcestershire

The school's eco committee, made up of 16 elected Key Stage 2 pupils, helped develop the school's STP. The committee met with their local school travel adviser to discuss school travel issues and explored reasons why children living within walking distance of school travelled by car.

To tackle the problem pupils came up with the 'Bring a Friend to School Week', building on the success and popularity of Walk to School Week. The eco committee decided that pupils should design posters to promote the week and offered incentives to reward participants. This initiative has been included as a development task in the STP for implementation on an annual basis.

### 2. Stockton-on-the-Forest Primary School, York

In addition to the school council the school has a separate 'Travel Plan Council' (TPC) made up of pupils and a teacher representative. The group have met fortnightly for two years.

The TPC draws up the school's STP action plan in consultation with the teacher on their committee and then sets about delivering the targets. They co-ordinate publicity campaigns, investigate ongoing road safety problems, lobby the council for changes, organise termly assemblies and write letters to parents. The Committee Group Action Plan for 2004/2005 included: meeting the cycling officer to relocate the bike sheds, sending out a survey to establish interest in a walking bus and designing a new cycle path through the grounds. The head teacher never bypasses the children – even decisions on teaching resources related to travel are made by the TPC



**3. Douglas Ewart School High School, Dumfries and Galloway**

At this rural school, many pupils make the daily journey by bus with some travelling up to 18 miles. Pupils thought the anti-social behaviour on their school bus was unacceptable. Working with the school travel co-ordinator, they set up a pupil bus user group with representatives from across each year group. The group has developed and owns policies relating to the school journey. They have dealt with vandalism by forming a seating plan, and agreed on a music policy.

**4. Hertfordshire STARS!**

Hertfordshire County Council are piloting School Travel Action Rangers (STARS!) as a way to involve children in the delivery and development of STPs. The role of a STAR will be to promote safe, sustainable travel through assemblies and noticeboards. In return, the participating primary schools will be supported by visits and resources from the local school travel advisor. If successful the scheme will be offered to all schools in the county with school travel plans.

**5. Rhymney Comprehensive School, Caerphilly**

Five pupils and a teacher cycled in Holland to see how the design of

walking and cycling routes could be improved. They visited the European Commission and on their return, presented ideas to local councilors and traffic planners. As a result they were able to persuade the local authority to invest in new walking and cycling routes to their school.

**Further information and a full briefing paper about Participation in School Travel Plans can be found on [www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk)**

References

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2. Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A. and Tisdall, K. (2004) Moving the participation agenda forward, Children and Society, 18, pp. 77-96
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5. Davis, A. and Jones, L. (1997) Whose neighbourhood? Whose quality of life? Developing a new agenda for children's health in urban settings, Health Education Journal, 56, pp. 350-363.



Further information

Visit the Safe Routes to Schools website [www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk) for:

- latest news and information on Safe Routes to Schools
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**For Safe Routes to Schools enquiries call 0117 915 0100 or email [schools@sustrans.org.uk](mailto:schools@sustrans.org.uk)**

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