

Risk Assessment of Walked Routes to School

Sustrans Cymru submission to Welsh Government consultation into Walked Routes to School

February 2014

Summary

Sustrans Cymru believes the underlying approach of Welsh Government should be that walking (cycling and scooting) to school is beneficial to pupils and to the wider community as a whole and should thus be encouraged and made safer and easier to do. This approach would be consistent with the aims of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 and the Programme for Government's aims of enhancing community safety and cohesion and improving public health.

We are concerned that, by overemphasising dangers that occur very infrequently, the approach of this consultation could actually discourage walking to school. This risks increasing congestion, which in turn creates an even less walkable environment and potential inactivity. Equipping children and families with the confidence and motivation to walk to school improves community cohesion and citizenship and helps build healthy physical activity into the daily routine.

Children enjoy walking to school with their friends and are concerned about speed of traffic, poor pavements and badly parked cars. If we are to encourage walking to school, the Welsh Government should focus on these areas. Article 31 of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of leisure activity and play to children.

The Welsh Government is known and admired elsewhere in the UK and throughout Europe for its commitment and the safety for children, including signing up to promote the Best Interests of the Child as part of UN guiding principles.¹ To be consistent with the progressive approach to children's rights elsewhere in Government, young people need to be enabled and empowered to develop independent travel habits.

Sustrans works with schools in seven authorities across Wales as part of our Bike It programme, funded by the Welsh Government. As part of our consultation response, we approached pupils at these schools to find out their views on walking to school. 193 children completed our survey, which showed:

- Children enjoy walking to school and find it fun and good exercise
- They want to walk to school with friends of their own age
- They perceive speed of traffic and badly parked cars to be the main barriers to walking to school

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and

¹ Children's Rights Wales, UNCRC <http://www.childrensrightswales.org.uk/uncrc-principles.aspx>

partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

Question 1: What are the weaknesses/strengths of the current risk assessment regime?

As highlighted in the consultation document, local authorities in Wales receive conflicting advice, with Road Safety GB Guidance differing from the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Operational Guidance.

We would not agree with the presumption that guidance needs to extend the criteria by which routes are judged to be safe – as covered in responses to other consultation questions.

We support the need for children to have more of a say of their walked routes to school and would see this as a key part of any new guidance.

Question 2: Do you think these proposals are a good idea? Why?

Sustrans Cymru believes that these proposals overemphasise certain dangers (e.g. lighting and 'stranger danger'), and will majorly lengthen the process of determining safe walked routes to school and ultimately add significant barriers to children walking to school.

Sustrans takes the view that a definition based on user attitudes and behaviour is more appropriate than one based solely on highway design and/or technical measures. A user based approach would be child-centred (what do children feel?), outcome-focused (what is safe enough to use?), evidence-based (what makes children and parents feel safer?), grounded in best practice (what actually works?) and be easily used for monitoring and evaluation (do parents and children feel safe? are concerns about safety a barrier to walking and cycling?).²

We strongly believe that some of the factors listed (e.g. taking walked routes away from areas of known drug dealing) are best solved through tackling the core issues (e.g. drug dealing) and not through advising children to make longer and less direct walking journeys, which is likely to result in a significant reduction in levels of walking to school. Our survey of children saw barely any mention of issues that weren't related to traffic and the built environment.

In responding to our survey, school children told us that they were concerned about the speed of traffic and poorly parked cars on their route to school. They felt measures such as increasing the number of Crossing Patrol Staff would make walking to school a safer experience, alongside slowing traffic and stopping cars parking on pavements.

Question 3: Can you suggest additional risk factors along walked routes to school (in addition to those already listed in Appendix B)?

We know from our work that slowing down traffic is crucial to getting more people to walk (or cycle) for everyday journeys, yet the issue is not referenced in Appendix B (and is referenced only in passing in the consultation document) – this is a top issue raised by children and parents when walking to school. 20mph speed limits are widely popular with the public, and even more so after implementation.³ A YouGov poll commissioned by Sustrans Cymru found that 60% of Welsh people favoured 20mph limits in residential areas, and that this would lead them to walk or cycle more often.⁴

² For more information on child-centred transport policies, see <http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/Routestoplay.pdf>

³ 20s Plenty for Us briefing paper http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/BriefingSheets/20mph_Support_Rises_Briefing.pdf

⁴ YouGov poll in Wales commissioned by Sustrans Cymru, 2013 http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/yougov_-_sustrans_results_-_cycling_-_130318.xlsx

Equally importantly, there is a significantly lower risk of a child suffering a serious injury – or being killed – if hit by a car at 20mph rather than 30mph.⁵

Our survey of children at Bike It schools found that 72% would feel safer walking if the speed limit on their route to school was 20mph.

A combination of factors makes a safe route to school, some physical, others personal. A safe route for one child may not be safe for another, and whether a route to school feels safe will depend on a number of factors which are specific to that journey:

- the age, confidence and skills of the child
- whether the child is cycling or walking
- the type, speed and volume of other traffic
- the facilities available for walking and cycling
- conditions when the route is used (both daily and seasonal)
- whether the child is alone or accompanied
- levels of usage and surveillance of the route⁶

Safe routes may be on-road, off-road and/or traffic-free, but they require more than highway measures. A holistic approach is required which includes a package of measures such as training in road safety skills for cyclists and pedestrians, initiatives such as walking buses, incentives and promotional activities, curriculum work, highway improvements and the provision of facilities such as cycle parking and waiting shelters.⁷

Implementation of a safe route typically involves a series of “hard” infrastructure and “soft” behavioural measures to increase children’s skills, confidence and awareness of safe routes.⁸

“Hard” measures	“Soft” measures
Traffic calming	School Travel Plan
Lower speed limits (20mph)	Pedestrian and cycle training
Zebra, puffin, pelican or toucan crossings	Bike maintenance sessions
Speed cushions	Walking buses or cycle trains
Alterations to the school entrance	Classroom activities
Paths exclusively for cyclists and pedestrians	Community involvement
Central refuges	Individual route planning
Crossing patrols	
Secure cycle parking	
Parking restrictions	

Question 4: When and how often should risk assessments of walked routes to school be carried out?

We would recommend that this process is married up with the duties imposed on Local Authorities under the Active Travel (Wales) Act, to avoid repetition of work. On a three year cycle, Welsh councils will be submitting maps to Welsh Ministers, identifying routes for active travel that meet

⁵ 20mph Limits for Cars in Residential Areas, by shops and Schools; Dorling, D
<http://www.roadsafetygb.org.uk/misc/fckeditorFiles/file/Danny%20Dorling%20-%2020mph%20Speed%20Limits%20for%20Cars%20in%20Residential%20Areas%20by%20Shops%20and%20Schools.pdf>

⁶ Manual for Streets p46-7

⁷ http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/transforming_young_peoples_travel_smarter_choices_for_everyday_journeys_0.pdf

⁸ http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/srs_safe_routes_fs01.pdf

new Welsh Government guidance. However, it would also be wise to re-assess routes when there are school expansions.

As part of the Personal Travel Planning and Associated Initiatives Programme, the Welsh Government has funded a new approach to Active Travel Planning for schools to be utilised by schools directly and local authorities across Wales. By supporting schools to fulfil curriculum and inspection requirements and Healthy Schools and Eco-schools criteria, the Smarter Journeys toolkit embeds travel planning as a core school agenda to be revisited annually.

Pupil participation is central to the approach and survey and site audit resources are included to capture pupil and parental knowledge of the school catchment and the barriers to walking, cycling and scooting to school.

National application of this resource would provide local authorities with annual information regarding barriers to walking to schools in support this risk assessment process, as well as enabling local authorities to easily consult schools (the hub of communities) with respect to duties of the Active Travel Act.

Question 5: Are there any other triggers that should result in risk assessment?

It will be important to consider the importance of walked routes to school when new homes and communities are built (for example through the Local Development Plan process). We have also raised this issue in relation to the Active Travel (Wales) Act

Question 6: At what stage, do you think, children should be able to walk unaccompanied to school? What factors should impact on/influence this decision?

Parents and Guardians are best placed to decide when their children should be able to walk unaccompanied to school. Through our practical projects, when we first start working with schools it is often the norm for children to be driven to school. Working with parents and teachers, many of these perceived barriers can be overcome without the need for infrastructure changes. For example, our Bike It project trebles levels of cycling to school without building new routes.⁹

By working with parents, we can help them better understand the learning process required by children to enable them to walk to school unaccompanied. Maturity and learning ability will be a better guide than age in determining when a child can walk to school unaccompanied. Our projects show that building a culture of active travel to school is an effective method for managing risk across the age range of key stage 3.

Question 7: How should the various criteria used to assess a route's availability be weighted?

Speed and volume of traffic should be the key considerations in determining the suitability of a walked route to school – and in addition the continuity of the route for pedestrians (e.g. how many guard rails interrupt the route; on how many parts of the route do cars have priority; is the pedestrian phase of traffic lights prioritised on routes to schools).

It is also important that local authorities and schools be allowed to determine the appropriate weighting for their area.

⁹ Children in Wales Pedalling to School More than Ever, Sustrans January 2014 <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/news/children-wales-peddalling-school-more-ever>

Question 8: What, in your view, would be the best standard format for conducting risk assessment (to help ensure a consistent approach across Wales) – for example, tick-box, proforma?

The risk assessment process should be kept as short and accessible as possible to be a realistic expectation on local authorities – conducting an individual risk assessment for each potential route to school will be an onerous and unachievable task for Local Authorities.

We would recommend a format that involves the community and the schools in question, as highlighted in our answer to Question 4.

Question 9: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Sustrans works with schools in seven authorities across Wales as part of our Bike It programme, funded by the Welsh Government. Operating in Wales since 2008, the programme seeks to give children, parents and teachers the information and skills necessary for them to cycle, scoot or walk to school on a regular basis. As part of our consultation response, we approached pupils at these schools to find out their views on walking to school.

“I find it fun and it wakes me up ready to go to school in the morning. It is exercising.”

Children who responded to the survey cited health and exercise as reasons they enjoyed walking to school, as well as the opportunity to meet their friends. Many also were aware that walking to school was good for the environment and was fun.

“By walking to school you are getting exercise and not polluting the earth by going to school in a car.”

In questions about difficulties of walked to school, which left children the opportunity to provide their own responses¹⁰, by far the most common answers related to speed and volume of traffic,

“there should be less spaces for cars to park because when cars zoom in to a parking space right next to me i get a bit scared”

anti-social parking (including on pavements) and a lack of Crossing Patrol Staff (commonly referred to as Lollipop Men and Ladies). It is particularly clear that children view cars as major barriers for them walking to school.

“well people could try and make sure they look out for children when they turn”

Other key response included:

- 72% of pupils said they would feel safer if the speed limit on their route to school was 20mph
- Just under one-in-three pupils walk with an adult on the occasions they currently walk to school

“Sometimes when i cross the road on the zebra crossing some cars just go past when i am going to cross the road.”

• Children see walking to school as a great opportunity to play and spend time with their friends – 7-in-10 pupils said they would prefer to walk to school “with their friends)

Our survey was completed by 193 pupils in years 5 and 6 from schools across Wales. We accept this may not be considered a representative sample, however. In Scotland, Sustrans is appointed by the Scottish Executive to undertake an annual travel to school survey. Over 95% schools take part. A similar exercise could be undertaken in Wales which would provide essential data to inform future travel to school initiatives.

¹⁰ See Appendix A

Within the crossings section on page 15 we recommend that the guidance makes reference to crossing times and ensuring crossing times meet the needs of children and carers over the age of 65.

Contact Details

Sustrans Cymru
123 Bute Street
Cardiff
CF10 5AE
Tel: 029 2065 0602
sustranscymru@sustrans.org.uk

Head Office
Sustrans
2 Cathedral Square
College Green
Bristol
BS1 5DD

Tel: 0117 926 8893
Email: policysubmissions@sustrans.org.uk

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VAT Registration No. 416740656

Appendix A

As part of producing our response to this consultation, Sustrans Cymru surveyed the views of children at schools across Wales. These surveys were completed anonymously.

The questions asked are as follows, with options for those questions that were multiple choice also included.

1. Beth yw enw eich ysgol? / What is the name of your school?
2. Ym mha grwp blwyddyn ydych chi? / What year group are you in?
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9
3. Beth sy'n dda am gerdded i'r ysgol? / What is good about walking to school?

4. A oes unrhywbeth sy'n ei gwneud hi'n anodd i gerdded i'r ysgol? / Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to walk to school?
5. Beth yw'r terfyn cyflymder mwyaf cyffredin ar eich taith o'r cartref i'r ysgol? / What is the most common speed limit on your journey from home to school?
 - 20
 - 30
 - 40
 - 50
 - 60
6. Pe bai hyn cael ei ostwng i 20 milltir yr awr, a fydddech chi'n teimlo'n fwy diogel wrth gerdded i'r ysgol? / If this were to be reduced to 20 miles per hour, would this make you feel safer when walking to school?
 - Yes
 - No
7. A oes unrhywbeth arall y gellid ei wneud i wneud i chi deimlo'n fwy diogel wrth gerdded i'r ysgol? / Is there anything else that could be done to make you feel safer when walking to school?
8. Pan yn cerdded i'r ysgol, gyda phwy ydych chi'n cerdded? / When you walk to school, who do you walk with?
 - Dwi byth yn cerdded / I never walk
 - Ar ben fy hunan / On my own
 - Gyda ffrindiau / With friends
 - Gyda plant hŷn / With older children
 - Gyda oedolyn / With an adult
9. Gyda phwy fyddai'n well gennych gerdded i'r ysgol? / Who would you prefer to walk to school with?
 - Ar ben fy hunan / On my own
 - Gyda ffrindiau / With friends
 - Gyda plant hŷn / With older children
 - Gyda oedolyn / With an adult