

Hands Up Scotland Survey 2023: Overview

An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland – May 2024

The annual Hands Up Scotland Survey, now in its fifteenth year, is published by Sustrans. The survey is funded by Transport Scotland and is designed to provide reliable and up to date information on mode of travel to school in Scotland.

The question posed to all school pupils and nursery children is, 'How do you normally travel to school?' with a choice of travel modes.

The travel modes are categorised as follows:

- **Active travel:** walking, cycling and scootering or skating
- **Public sustainable travel:** bus
- **Multi-mode travel:** park and stride (driven part of the way by car and walk the rest)
- **Private motorised travel:** driven (car) and taxi.

Over three-quarters (78.9%) of all state schools in Scotland (excluding nurseries) took part in the 2023 survey. Responses were received from over 443,000 school pupils and over 39,000 nursery children.

A full report detailing the national level findings and greater technical detail on the data collection is also available. This overview is an accompaniment to that report.

Key findings

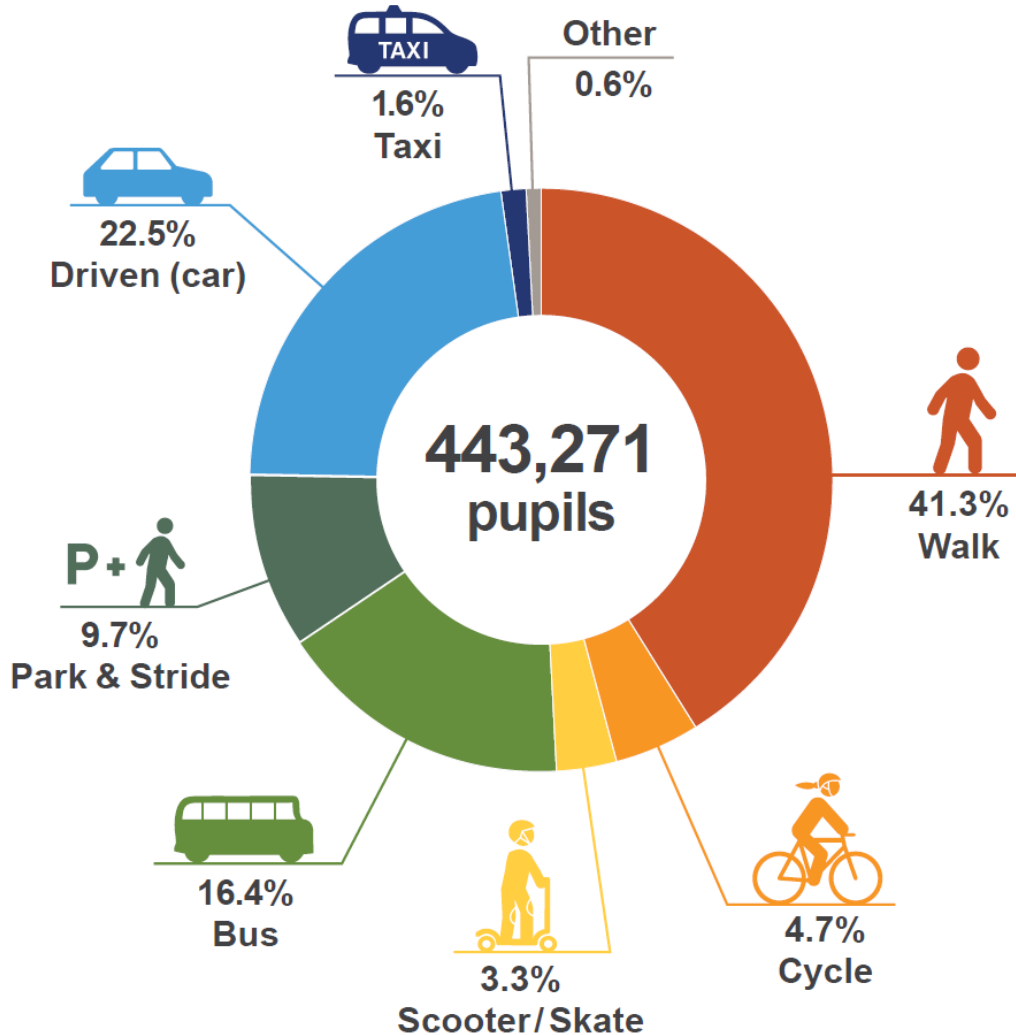
Active travel to school has declined since 2022, but remains higher than the pre-pandemic levels of 2019.

The key findings from the 2023 survey are:

- In 2023, the percentage of school pupils travelling actively to school, either by walking, cycling, scootering or skating, is at 49.3%. This represents a continued decrease since a 51.2% high in 2020, but is still higher than the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (47.8%)
- Cycling is at its highest level of the past ten survey years at 4.7%, 0.8 percentage points (pp) higher than the previous year
- Walking rates decreased for the third year in a row, decreasing by 1.3pp, but is still by far the most common way school pupils get to school
- The percentage of pupils scootering or skating to school increased to 3.3%, its highest level of the past ten survey years
- Bus use has increased for the third year in a row, increasing by 0.6pp to 16.4%. This is comparable to pre-pandemic levels and is the highest level since 2017
- The proportion of pupils being driven to school saw a 0.6pp drop since 2022, to 22.5%. This is the lowest level since 2016.

National results 2023

Chart 1: National travel modes: proportion of participating pupils travelling by different modes (all school pupil responses exc. nursery children), 2023.¹



Active travel

49.3% (218,447 out of 443,271) of school pupils (state and independent schools combined) surveyed in 2023 said they normally travel to school in an active way, with walking as the most common mode of travel to school.

Public sustainable travel

16.4% of school pupils (72,859) in 2023 said they normally travel to school by bus.

Multi-mode travel

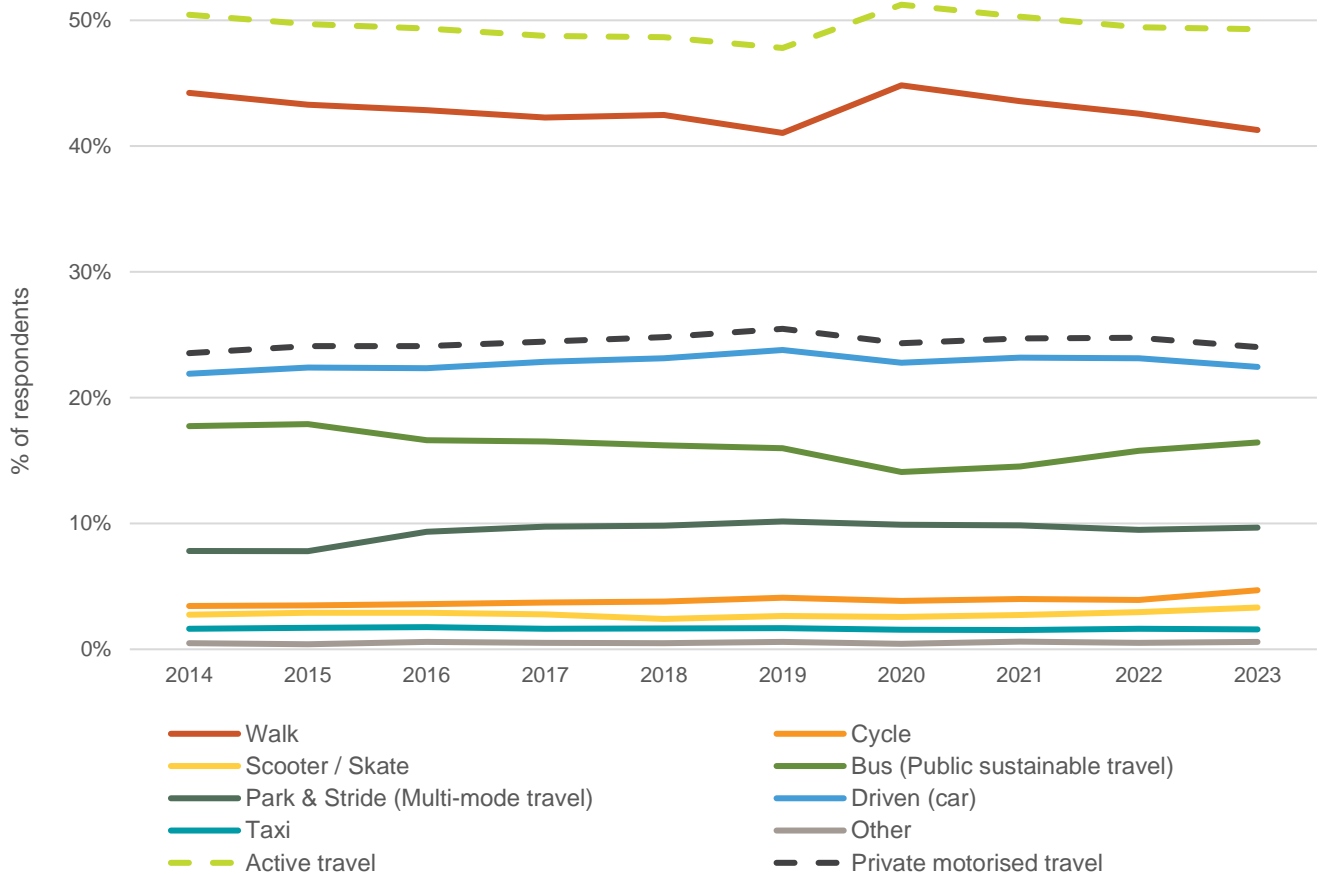
9.7% of school pupils (42,845) in 2023 said they normally park and stride to school.

Private motorised travel

24.0% of school pupils (106,512) in 2023 said they normally travel to school using private motorised transport.

Trends in the 2014-2023 results – All schools

Chart 2: National travel modes and categories: all schools (exc. nursery), 2014-2023²



- Since 2014, active travel to school has remained the most frequently reported mode of travel to school in Scotland
- In 2014, 50.4% of pupils in all schools (exc. nursery) reported travelling actively to school. This percentage has fluctuated, peaking at 51.2% in 2020. Active travel to school has since decreased. Between 2022 and 2023 it decreased by 0.1pp from 49.4% to 49.3%, though remains higher than the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (47.8%)
- Levels of pupils in all schools (exc. nursery) travelling to school using private motorised transport have increased from 23.5% in 2014 to 24.0% in 2023. However, in 2023, levels decreased to their second lowest level of the past ten years, decreasing by 0.8pp since 2022
- Overall, the proportion of pupils travelling to school (exc. nursery) by bus has declined over the past ten survey years, from 17.7% in 2014 to 16.4% in 2023. However, bus use increased in 2023 for the third year in a row, increasing by 0.6pp from 15.8% in 2022
- The proportion of pupils travelling to school by park and stride has shown an overall upward trend over the past ten survey years from 7.8% in 2014 to 9.7% in 2023. Levels have increased by 0.2pp since 2022 but are 0.5pp lower than the 10.2% high, recorded in 2019.

Response rates

- A total of 1,955 schools took part in the 2023 survey. This represents 18 fewer schools than in 2022
- State school responses as a proportion of all state schools in Scotland were at their highest in 2015 at 81.1%. Since then, levels have fluctuated between 70.9% and 79.3%.³ In 2023, the state school response rate decreased from 79.3% in 2022 to 78.9%
- Responses were received from 443,271 school pupils in 2023. This represents 13,424 fewer school pupils than in 2022
- 434,967 state school pupils took part in the 2023 survey, which equates to 61.6% of all state school pupils enrolled in Scotland. The number and proportion of state school pupils responding to the survey has fluctuated year by year, decreasing from a high of 480,155 (70.9%) in 2014 to 434,967 (61.6%) in 2023.

Key results tables

Table 1: National travel modes: by school type, 2023.⁴

School type	Walk	Cycle	Scooter/ Skate	Bus	Park & Stride	Driven (car)	Taxi	Other	Total
Nursery	34.3%	4.7%	3.5%	2.5%	4.2%	49.2%	1.0%	0.5%	39,889
Primary	42.6%	6.6%	5.1%	6.3%	12.3%	25.5%	1.3%	0.2%	283,241
Secondary	40.6%	1.4%	0.1%	35.0%	4.7%	16.0%	1.3%	0.9%	149,386
SEN	2.4%	*	*	29.2%	0.0%	8.5%	48.9%	10.8%	2,340
Independent	19.1%	1.3%	0.5%	23.6%	12.3%	38.3%	0.3%	4.5%	8,304
All state schools (exc. nursery)	41.7%	4.8%	3.4%	16.3%	9.6%	22.2%	1.6%	0.5%	434,967
All schools (exc. nursery)	41.3%	4.7%	3.3%	16.4%	9.7%	22.5%	1.6%	0.6%	443,271

Table 2: National travel modes: all schools (exc. nursery), 2014-2023.⁵

Year	Walk	Cycle	Scooter /Skate	Bus	Park & Stride	Driven (car)	Taxi	Other	Total
2014	44.2%	3.4%	2.8%	17.7%	7.8%	21.9%	1.6%	0.5%	487,147
2015	43.3%	3.5%	2.9%	17.9%	7.8%	22.4%	1.7%	0.4%	480,161
2016	42.8%	3.6%	2.9%	16.6%	9.3%	22.3%	1.8%	0.6%	458,145
2017	42.3%	3.7%	2.8%	16.5%	9.7%	22.8%	1.6%	0.5%	473,160
2018	42.5%	3.8%	2.4%	16.2%	9.8%	23.1%	1.7%	0.5%	468,537
2019	41.0%	4.1%	2.7%	16.0%	10.2%	23.8%	1.7%	0.6%	472,617
2020	44.8%	3.8%	2.6%	14.1%	9.9%	22.8%	1.5%	0.4%	405,917
2021	43.6%	4.0%	2.7%	14.5%	9.9%	23.2%	1.5%	0.6%	418,147
2022	42.6%	3.9%	2.9%	15.8%	9.5%	23.1%	1.6%	0.5%	456,695
2023	41.3%	4.7%	3.3%	16.4%	9.7%	22.5%	1.6%	0.6%	443,271

Endnotes

¹ Table 2.1 in supplementary National Results Excel file available to download from:

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/hands-up-scotland-survey>

² Active travel is the combination of Walk, Cycle and Scooter / Skate. Private motorised travel is the combination of Driven (car) and Taxi.

³ All state schools: primary, secondary and SEN schools in Scotland, excluding nursery.

⁴ Table 2.3 in supplementary National Results Excel file available to download from:

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/hands-up-scotland-survey>

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