

Campaign for Safer Streets

Sustrans policy briefing

We want to see a safer school run. Let's make it happen.

We believe that every child has the right to walk, cycle or scoot to school.

To make this happen we need:

- Long term investment by government to transform routes and support walking and cycling at the local level.
- A national 20mph default speed limit in built-up areas to make everyone's journey safer and mark a shift in policy.
- Stronger duties and incentives to improve local walking and cycling networks and promote active travel.

Executive summary

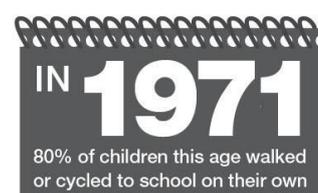
Every child should be able to walk, scoot or bike to school safely. Although most children live within walking or cycling distance, less than half walk and very few cycle. **The problem is that our streets are not safe enough for children to get to school the way that they want to: actively and independently.** Since the 1970s there has been a continual decline in children getting to school by foot or bike, and a corresponding increase in children being driven. Road danger, both real and perceived, has driven children off our streets and, increasingly, into the back of a car for journeys to school and beyond.

Road danger is the biggest cause of preventable death and injury among children. **In 2012, the number of children killed while walking or cycling on our roads was equivalent to over one primary school class, and the equivalent of over seven whole primary schools were seriously injured.** If so many children were killed or seriously injured in any other way there would be a national outcry and an urgent call for more to be done to address this failure to keep our children safe. Instead we have simply left parents and children to deal with the problem, often by driving to school, further adding to road danger.

The impacts go beyond those killed and injured. Everyone is affected by road danger, which is the biggest concern for parents and children on the school run. **Parents are far more concerned by road danger than stranger danger, and research shows that speeding traffic is the most common concern in our communities.** This is a big barrier to walking and cycling, while those that do walk or cycle face an unsafe and unpleasant environment because of the speed, volume, and behaviour of the traffic that surrounds them.



In 2012, 738 children were killed or seriously injured walking or cycling during school travel time



This loss of everyday physical activity, freedom and independence has had a profound impact on our children's health and well-being, life expectancy and educational attainment. 42% of children get less than half the recommended hour of physical activity a day. **As a result, this generation of children may be the first generation to have a life expectancy lower than their parents.** Children in the UK now lag far behind their peers in other nations when it comes to the freedom to get around under their own steam. In the Netherlands children cycle for 55% of all journeys, often unaccompanied. In England, 55% of all travel by children is by car.

The wider costs to our society are immense. **The school run is responsible for a quarter of road traffic at peak times in urban centres and is a major contributor to the £22 billion annual costs of congestion to the economy.** Inactivity already costs the UK economy around £20 billion every year, and this will rise through increased obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and chronic health conditions. Road collisions, carbon emissions, noise and air pollution add at least a further £18 billion every year.

This can be changed. The school run could be transformed in the next parliament.

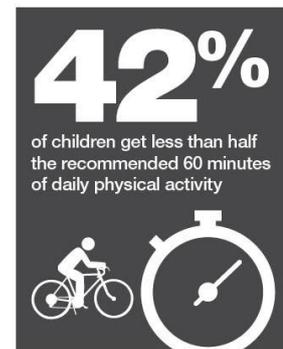
Parents and children want to see lower traffic speeds, better routes and practical help to enable them to walk and cycle. To enable this to happen we need political leadership, policy change and funding to provide the resources and incentives to transform journeys to school at the local level.

Specifically, this would require:

- Long term investment by government to transform routes and support walking and cycling at the local level.
- A national 20mph default speed limit in built-up areas to make everyone's journey safer and mark a shift in policy.
- Stronger duties and incentives to improve local walking and cycling networks and promote active travel.

A safe journey to school for every child could be delivered within existing spending commitments in transport, road safety and school travel; would offer excellent value for money, and would be good for our children, our health and our economy.

We want to see a safer school run. Let's make it happen.



The average journey to primary school is



and the average to a secondary school is



Both distances that can easily be covered by bike or foot



What is the problem?

Fewer children than ever are walking and cycling to school

Most children want to walk or cycle to school, and the majority live near enough to do so if the streets are safe. The average trip to school is only 1.8 miles for primary schools and 3.4 miles for secondary. Only for the shortest trips does walking and cycling exceed car use. For average length trips to both primary and secondary schools, car use is around twice the level of walking and cycling to school. For example, 59% of primary school trips of 1-2 miles, and 82% of 2-5 miles, were made by car in 2012.

Walking and cycling to school is declining. 47% of trips to and from school by primary school children (aged 5-10) were made on foot in 2012, compared to 53% in 1995/97, while car trips increased from 38% to 44%. For secondary school children (aged 11-16), walking trips fell from 42% to 38%, and car trips increased from 20% to 26% over the same period.¹

Too many children are killed or injured on the way to school

In 2012, 33 children (equivalent to over a primary school class) were killed, and 1,836 (equivalent to over seven primary schools) seriously injured, while walking or cycling on our roads. 738 children were killed or seriously injured while walking or cycling during school travel times. Nearly half of all school-aged child deaths were road deaths in 2011, and one in 56 children has been injured in a road accident in the last 3 years. Despite low levels of active travel, over half of children killed and injured were walking or cycling, the majority (97%) on roads in built-up areas. Road danger is the leading cause of preventable death and injury in childhood.²

Fear of traffic is a barrier to walking and cycling

Road danger has removed children from our streets because they and their parents feel unsafe. Half of children aged 7-10 are never allowed to cross roads on their own. In 1971, 8 in 10 seven and eight year olds walked or cycled to school on their own. In 2012 84% of children aged seven to ten were accompanied to school by adults.³ Road danger is the main factor when people decide how to travel to school, cited by half of parents as the reason for accompanying children to school, while concerns about stranger danger have fallen to a quarter of parents.

Unsurprisingly concern about traffic danger is even higher (60%) among parents who walk with their child to school. Those who choose to walk or cycle are also concerned about the safety of crossings and junctions, pavements that are narrow or parked on, noise, air pollution and driver behaviour, notably mobile use and parking around schools. Government data on crime and social attitudes consistently shows that the speed, volume and behaviour of traffic is a widespread problem in our communities.⁴

Car travel is bad for children's health and wellbeing

The school run is fundamental to shaping children's everyday patterns and lifelong habits of travel. Being unable to walk or cycle to school has a profound impact on our children's health and wellbeing, both in childhood and over the course of their life, including through physical inactivity, air pollution, road deaths and injuries. Children in the UK now lag far behind their peers in other nations when it comes to the freedom, confidence and independence to get around under their own steam.

Physical inactivity poses a serious and growing danger to our society. 42% of children do not meet the Chief Medical Officers' recommendation of an hour a day of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity. It is predicted that as many as 70% of girls and 55% of

boys could be overweight or obese by 2050. As a result this generation of children may be the first generation to have a life expectancy lower than their parents. Building physical activity into everyday activities is the most effective way to get this exercise, and for most these targets could be achieved by walking or cycling to school.⁵

The school run costs our economy billions every year

Car use on the school run contributes significantly to the cost of congestion in the UK which is estimated at £22bn every year. Physical inactivity costs a further £20 billion, and road collisions, carbon emissions, noise and air pollution at least a further £18 billion every year. The school run accounts for nearly a quarter (24%) of car driver trips by residents of urban areas during term time, with the morning and afternoon peaks mainly driven by education related trips. Most of these car trips could be avoided: only 8% are part of a longer trip to work, while the majority (72%) return straight home.⁶

How has this happened?

Transport policy has neglected local journeys

Existing policy and investment in local transport and road safety in England has failed to tackle - and has arguably contributed to - the decline in walking and cycling to school. More widely, transport policy has focussed on longer distance travel, mainly by car, and investment in roads. This has overshadowed the opportunity for most everyday journeys – the majority of which are short distance trips like the school run - to be walked or cycled.

Road safety policy has not made our streets safer. Initiatives from the Green Cross Code onwards have placed responsibility for improving safety on children, parents and individual drivers, rather than tackling the root causes of road danger. The priority has been to reduce casualties, often by restricting access by people on foot and bike, rather than reducing road danger. Reducing child deaths and injuries by scaring people off the roads is evidence of policy failure, not of success.

School travel policy ignores walking and cycling

Over £1 billion is spent on school travel annually in England, mainly on statutory provision. Local Authorities have duties relating to sustainable travel and safe routes, but it is up to authorities to assess routes and provide transport if they are not “safe” in a very narrow sense, on foot and accompanied if necessary. Most schools have a School Travel Plan, many of which aim to increase walking and cycling, but need support and resources to deliver them. School level monitoring of how children travel has not taken place as part of the School Census in England since 2010.⁷

Dedicated investment has transformed local routes and school travel

Evidence shows that capital investments have been highly effective in increasing cycling and walking to school (and for other local journeys) and has improved safety and perceptions of the school journey. Sustrans’ work to transform local walking and cycling routes has increased annual usage by children by 117%, and delivered a 151% increase in children using the routes to get to school. Department for Transport (DfT) analysis shows that such investment offers extremely high value for money, returning at least £10 (including congestion, physical activity, and safety benefits) for every £1 invested.⁸

Even more can be achieved by combining capital investment with revenue programmes to give children the skills, knowledge and assurance to travel to school on foot or by bike, including Bikeability. Sustrans’ own work with schools, which is part of the majority of programmes funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), has typically doubled cycling to school. Such packages have consistently reduced car use for school journeys by

around a quarter, increased walking and cycling, improved perceptions of safety and reduced casualties at the local level. They also boost children’s physical activity, contributing to a wide range of other benefits including, improved attendance, concentration and discipline in schools.⁹

What can we learn from other countries?

Other countries, notably in northern Europe, have maintained and increased levels of active travel to travel to school since the 1970s, through a nation-wide approach to road danger reduction, lower speed limits, street design and making walking and cycling the norm for everyday local journeys. Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden have made road danger reduction, particularly for children, an explicit policy priority, supported by substantial and long-term investment in walking and cycling, lower default speed limits in built-up areas, and statutory duties to reduce road danger and develop local networks of safe routes. In contrast in the UK and US, both the level of investment and political priority given to child road danger has been lower, leading to higher levels of casualties and less walking and cycling to school.¹⁰

	Policy and statutory framework	Good walking and cycling routes to most schools	Default speed limit in built-up areas	Long term investment in walking and cycling	Pedestrian deaths per million population	Walking and cycling to school
Netherlands	“Sustainable Safety” includes duty to classify & redesign roads to improve safety	Yes	20	Yes – at least £25 per head	3.9	86%
Denmark	“Safe roads to school” duty on municipalities and police to assess and provide safe routes	Yes	20	Yes – at least £20 per head	5.9	71%
Sweden	“Vision Zero” established legal targets to eliminate child road danger and child road deaths	Yes	20	Yes – around £10 per head	5.6	63%
England	Wide range of legal duties relating to school travel, road safety, sustainable travel, and health	No – around 5% of schools covered by Sustrans	30	No – short term grant funding of around £3.60 per head	7.3	43%
US	Federal funding bill only	No – 10% of schools have basic safe routes	15-55 (by state)	No – federal funding of £1.80 per head	14.2	13%

What is the solution?

How children travel to school depends largely on whether they have a safe local environment for walking and cycling or not. Parents and children want to see lower traffic speeds, transformed routes and practical support for walking and cycling. Evidence shows

that this approach works and offers value for money, but reversing the decline in walking and cycling to school requires more widespread and sustained adoption of what has already worked at the level of individual schools and communities across England.

Government cannot deliver this level of change on the ground directly, but it has a vital role to play in providing the policy framework, resources and incentives needed to enable change at the local level.

Sustrans is calling for a political commitment to the right for every child to be able to walk and cycle to school, backed by three specific policies:

- Long term investment by government to transform routes and support walking and cycling at the local level.
- A national 20mph default speed limit in built-up areas to make everyone's journey safer and mark a shift in policy.
- Stronger duties and incentives to improve local walking and cycling networks and promote active travel.

These policies are outlined in more detail below

Long term investment by government to transform routes and support local walking and cycling at the local level

Investment from national government is needed to provide the resources and incentives needed to improve things in the ground. Investment programmes through the LSTF and its predecessors in England have been highly effective in increasing cycling and walking to school and improving safety at the level of individual schools and local areas. However, we need to see more substantial and sustained investment to achieve the necessary change. A £650m annual fund would transform the school run by the end of the next parliament.

To enable an effective mix of interventions, the proposed fund should provide a mix of capital and revenue. It would not be ringfenced internally or be used solely for school travel, but as an indication it would enable the following:

- £250m a year for capital improvements to transform routes and networks around every school in England over a decade.
- £200m/year revenue element for programmes to support active travel in schools and develop local long-term strategic plans to transform local cycling and walking networks.
- £200m a year to redesign streets and support the introduction of area-wide 20mph speed limits across the country by the end of the next parliament.

The next government should provide clear policy objectives and resources, but decisions on packages of investment are best made locally – this is the lesson learnt from those countries with the highest levels of walking and cycling.

A national 20mph default speed limit in built-up areas to make everyone's journey safer and mark a shift in policy

As a key element in improving actual and perceived road safety – and to signal a shift in government priorities and its approach to road safety – a reduction in the national default speed limit in built-up areas from 30mph to 20mph would ensure that the majority of school journeys would be made along streets with slower speeds.

There is strong evidence that 20mph speed limits are effective in making the roads safer for children and young people, and increasing walking and cycling. In Bristol, area-wide 20mph pilots saw increases of 12% in walking and cycling and 35% of people felt safer. 20mph

streets have 40% fewer road casualties with the greatest reduction in numbers of young children killed and injured. Default 20mph limits are also cheaper to implement and can reduce the need to spend on significant new infrastructure.¹¹

Stronger duties and incentives to improve local walking and cycling networks and promote active travel

Local authorities in England already have a wide range of relevant statutory duties, including those relating to school travel, road safety and sustainable transport, but these have failed to halt the decline in active travel, even for the those journeys that are easiest to change such as the school journey. These duties could be strengthening, simplified and reduced by providing a single focus on reducing road danger for children, bringing together national government policy and local plans to transform local streets and routes.

There are a number of potential models for this, including the right to a Safe Route to School in Denmark, the Sustainable Safety framework of danger reduction in the Netherlands, or Vision Zero in Sweden. Closer to home, the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places a duty on local authorities to map and develop a long-term plan for improvements to local walking and cycling networks, and to promote active travel more widely.

Where would the money come from?

This policy could be delivered within existing spending plans in the next parliament. HM Treasury has committed £2 billion annually to the Local Growth Fund (LGF) in England for the remainder of the spending period. Existing local transport budgets comprise half of this, but the remainder has not been allocated. Although the LGF should be a key source of local investment in local walking and cycling schemes, analysis of draft Local Authority major schemes and Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) suggests that sustainable, local and active travel is a low priority.¹²

Extending the existing LSTF revenue (£78.5m in 2015-16) and capital (£100m/y) elements would create a dedicated £650m fund for investment in local sustainable travel initiatives. Part of this could come from the unallocated portion of the LGF or be top-sliced from existing LGF transport funds. Further capital investment could be secured from the £15.1 billion allocated to road infrastructure in the next parliament. This would leverage and support further investment and revenue from other sources, notably existing Local Authority spending on school travel (around £1 billion per year) and road safety (averaging £600m per year 2005-11).¹³

What would be the benefits?

Enabling more children to walk and cycle to school would be good for our children, our health and our economy.

- **Improving safety.** Lower default national 20mph speed limits would make children safer. Preventing current levels of child pedestrian and cyclist casualties would be worth £515 million per year, £200m on the school journey alone. There would also be significant savings in emergency admissions and healthcare costs.¹⁴
- **Cutting long term health costs.** Evidence shows that the most effective way to increase levels of physical activity in children is through walking and cycling as part of a daily routine. Increased levels of physical activity in children will benefit their health and reduce the costs of physical inactivity to our health budgets. Enabling more children to walk and cycle to school would address physical activity deficits, reducing future health burdens and healthcare costs.
- **Reducing congestion.** Increased walking and cycling to school would reduce congestion. There are currently over 11 million car journeys made daily between home

and school across all UK primary and secondary schools. Every 10% reduction in car trips to school would take 118m car trips off the road per year, an annual benefit of £46m per year.

- **Supporting education.** Enabling more children to walk and cycle to school would improve access to education and help them to benefit from a choice of schools - as well as the academies and 16-19 academies - particularly children from poorer households who do not have a car. There is strong evidence that existing programmes to increase cycling and walking to school are linked to significant improvements in behaviour, concentration and educational performance among school age children.
- **Helping working families.** A family can save £650 per year from not using a car for the school run. Together the 7.7m families with school age children could save over £5 billion every year.

Safer streets and journeys to school would also support a wide range of broader policy objectives in education, health and transport, and help millions of households who face social exclusion and barriers to education, jobs and training because of transport poverty.

About Sustrans

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 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.

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¹ Unless noted all data is from: DfT 2013 National Travel Survey 2012; DfT 2014 Reported road casualties Great Britain 2012; DfE 2012 Schools, pupils and their characteristics; DfT 2013 English Road Safety Comparison

² Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health 2014 Why do children die?

³ Shaw et al 2013 Children's independent mobility in England and Germany 1971- 2010

⁴ ONS 2012 Crime in England and Wales; DfT 2012 British Social Attitudes Survey 2011

⁵ DH 2011 Start Active, Stay Active; HSCIC 2013 Health Survey for England 2012; APCPA 2014 Tackling Physical Inactivity; NHS 2008 Healthy Weight Healthy Lives

⁶ Cabinet Office 2009 Costs of urban transport; DfT 2013 Speech by Baroness Kramer

⁷ Transport Select Committee 2009 School travel; DfE/Atkins 2010 Evaluation of the Travelling to School Initiative; DfE 2010 School census

⁸ CLES 2012 Evaluation of Sustrans sustainable transport infrastructure work; Sustrans 2010 Review of the Impact of Interventions on School Travel; Sustrans/Cycling England/DfT 2006 Links to Schools; Sustrans 2014 Linking Communities programme evaluation

⁹ DfT 2010 Summary report on Sustainable Transport Towns; Cairns et al 2004 Smarter Choices: changing the way we travel; Davis 2010 Children's physical activity and academic achievement; Newson et al 2010 Making School Travel Plans Work

¹⁰ Koornstra et al 2002 Road safety in Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands; ACT 2011 Active travel to school literature review; Fietsberaad 2010 Cycling in the Netherlands; Copenhagen 2012 Bicycle account; Swedish Government 2014 National transport plan; Johansson et al 2012 Active commuting to school among Swedish children; ABW 2014 Bicycling and walking in the US

¹¹ Bristol City Council 2012 Cabinet report and research findings; Haringey Council 2011 Scrutiny review: 20mph speed limit; London Assembly Transport Committee 2009 Braking Point: 20mph speed limits in London; LGiU 2013 Area-wide 20mph neighbourhoods

¹² CBT 2013 Where the money's going?

¹³ HMT 2013 National Infrastructure Plan

¹⁴ DfT 2012 Valuation of road accidents and casualties; NWPHE 2011 Road Traffic Collisions and Casualties in the North West of England