



Active travel to school



Definition

Active travel to school encompasses journeys to school involving walking, cycling, skating or skateboarding.

Why is it important?

Being physically active has multiple benefits for physical and mental health, as well as for learning.

There are growing concerns over low levels of physical activity in Scottish children and young people and this is closely linked with rising obesity levels.

Automation, technology, unsafe environments and increasing car use all contribute to children being less physically active.

Walking, cycling, skating or skateboarding to school can contribute to children being more active on a daily basis.

More school pupils walking or cycling to school will mean less cars, buses and taxis on the roads reducing carbon emissions and air pollution.

Active travel is the most practical and sustainable way to increase physical activity on a daily basis.

Current situation

In Glasgow, an average of 53% of primary school children walk to school. However in some neighbourhoods only 15% of primary school children walk to school while in other areas as many as 79% of children walk (based on Hands Up data from 2008-2015).

Levels of walking to school are similar among primary and secondary school pupils in Glasgow. However, the proportion of pupils cycling, using scooters or skating to get to school decreases when they move from primary to secondary school.

([Hands Up survey by Sustrans](#))

Are there inequalities to consider?

Levels of child pedestrian casualties are higher in more deprived communities (See [Understanding Glasgow](#); [GCPH report on road casualties](#)).

Child pedestrian injuries are still a major cause of death and serious injury among primary school age children.

Adult cycling casualties have been rising in recent years.

There are more adult commuting cyclists from the least deprived areas and also a higher rate of casualties among cyclists from these areas.

Challenges and solutions

Safety when travelling to school is a clear concern for parents and schools.

Investment in well-designed safe routes to school is needed.

Traffic restrictions and reduced speed limits around schools can help improve safety.

Training for bus drivers, cyclists (e.g. Bikeability) and other road users can also improve awareness and safety.

‘Complete networks of footpaths, bikeways, and public transit support both active travel and active recreation’. (Investments that work for physical activity)

Examples of positive action

1. Support for walking to school

Living Streets runs [WOW](#), a year-round walk to school challenge that rewards primary school pupils who walk to school at least once a week. They also have activities for pre-school children, as part of [Little Feet](#).

[Walk to School Week](#) held in May each year is organised by Living Streets Scotland, aiming to encourage families to swap four wheels for two feet.

A [Walking School Bus](#) is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. This can be as informal as families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers.

2. Young Place Changers

Sustrans supports ‘Bike to School Week’ which takes place every year in June and which they hope will increase pupil bike trips and decrease busy traffic on school roads.

Sustrans also funds cycle parking projects in schools throughout Scotland, with the aim of encouraging and enabling more pupils to travel actively to school.

Sustrans’ [I Bike project](#) works with schools in Scotland aiming to address the drop in cycling levels when children move from primary to secondary school and the gender gap that sees far less girls cycling to school than boys.

More information on the [Sustrans website](#).

[Bikeability Scotland](#) is a cycle training scheme (managed by Cycling Scotland) designed to give children the skills and confidence they need both to cycle safely on the roads, and to encourage them to carry on cycling into adulthood.

3. School streets

A pilot project in Edinburgh restricted motor vehicle use around schools in order to reduce the number of children being dropped off/picked up outside school by private car and to increase the level of walking and cycling to school.

Benefits:

- a reduction in vehicle speeds on both school streets and surrounding streets
- reduction in vehicles outside the school gates on school streets
- a net reduction in traffic volumes across school streets and surrounding streets
air quality improvements with associated reductions in Nitrogen Oxides
- an indication that walking to/from school has increased, and that car trips to/from school have reduced
- improved perceptions of safety associated with the restrictions
- improved perceptions of motorist compliance, especially amongst residents
(Edinburgh city Council, Transport and Environment Committee, Aug 2016)

Links to other issues

Levels of active travel are influenced by many factors including perceptions of safety, the speed and density of traffic, the quality and availability of safe routes, neighbourhood design and planning, air pollution, culture and attitudes to different forms of transport.

For further discussion of these issues please refer to the [Understanding Glasgow transport pages](#) and to the [active and sustainable travel section of the GCPH website](#).

Links to other resources

The [Active Healthy Kids Scotland Scorecard](#) provides a comprehensive summary of physical activity levels among Scottish children.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. NICE Public Health Guidance 41. [Physical activity: walking and cycling](#).