

Tackling the School Run

Dr David Connolly, Pamela Gidney, Lynda Haughney, Jon Plant and Lynsey McNeill (SYSTRA Ltd), Elaine Wilson-Smith (Wellside Research) and Suzanne Motherwell (Sustrans)

In February 2016, the Scottish Government commissioned research to provide the latest evidence on school transport choices and which approaches have been effective in influencing these, in order to inform the development of workable and deliverable policies that minimise the proportion of journeys to school made by car while increasing the proportion choosing active travel. The findings are of particular interest to policy makers and practitioners working in transport, education, health, environment and planning with greater cross-departmental working integral to tackling the school run and promoting travel behaviour change.

Main Findings

The research identified there is no single answer to achieving high levels of sustainable transport in schools, but a combination of different elements is of importance. These can be summarised as follows:

- Provision of infrastructure to facilitate sustainable and active travel choices;
- Strong and solid delivery of training to allow safe use of the infrastructure;
- Regular and ongoing reinforcement of initiatives to encourage behaviour change and increase the number of school journeys being made by active and sustainable modes, complemented by periodic events and/or competitions to maintain interest along with incentivisation/reward; and
- Achieving buy-in from the whole school community (including staff, pupils and parents) as well as external parties (including local authorities and delivery partners) and integrating active and sustainable travel fully into the school ethos and culture.

Key challenges were also identified in promoting active travel and particularly in relation to:

- Addressing real and perceived safety concerns through the provision of infrastructure linking with the school gate. This was often found to be compounded by parking pressures and associated congestion at the school gate during drop-off/pick-up times;

- Resource constraints, both at the school level and in terms of dedicated personnel at local authorities, to lead, repeat and enforce the school run message at the local level;
- Sustaining active travel into secondary years due to a variety of reasons ranging from school catchments increasing in size, to school workloads/kit requirements and wider choices/increasing independence;
- Budgetary pressure and competing priorities at central and local Government, as well as within the financial year, school year and funding programme years which vary and can create challenges in terms of maximising the use and benefit drawn from available resources within a particular time period; and
- Tackling wider societal norms around car use, walking and cycling in particular.

Research Summary

Aims

The research was designed to provide:

- A summary (from current data and literature on current patterns and recent trends) about school transport choices in Scotland as well as elsewhere; and
- An appraisal of existing approaches to influencing school transport choices (in Scotland and internationally), including consideration of approaches that have been shown to be effective in different school settings, why they worked, how transferable these approaches are likely to be across school types and locations, and the extent of the impact in mode choice including the uptake of active travel.

The aims of the research were met by addressing each of the following objectives:

- Investigate school transport choices and what influences these at a local authority, individual school and household level;
- Map relevant activity that is already being undertaken to influence school transport choices (in Scotland and internationally), assess which approaches have been most effective and explore how these can be replicated;
- Explore examples from different school types in Scotland to gain a more detailed understanding of what is/is not working and why, in these different settings; and
- Advise where policy efforts would best be concentrated and the respective roles for education, transport and health portfolios in reducing travel to school by car and increasing the role of active travel.

Research Approach

The study comprised three main phases, as follows:

- A familiarisation phase consisting of a Literature Review, secondary data analysis, and stakeholder discussions, which informed the case study selection process and helped guide the design of data collection materials;
- A qualitative fieldwork phase involving a mix of 11 primary and secondary schools and consisting of:
 - Interviews with school staff – Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers or other members of the school staff;
 - Pupil mini-focus groups with P6, S1 and S3 pupils who currently travel to school by sustainable modes or have the option to do so;
 - Pupil led interviews with their parents at home; and
 - Local authority and other stakeholder discussions.
- Analysis and reporting of the data to produce recommendations that can inform the development of an integrated package of policies on tackling the school run.

Conclusions

The fieldwork illustrated the wide array of travel and behaviour change initiatives that have been implemented in different school settings across Scotland as well as training and infrastructure based measures. The literature review also identified measures implemented across the wider UK and internationally with the aim to increase travel to school by more sustainable modes of transport.

In summary, there is an existing range of well-developed and well known national scale projects in Scotland that local authorities and schools can access, and most case study schools had also developed a range of local initiatives, which varied in nature, scope and size. Some schools had implemented both behavioural change initiatives and infrastructural measures/changes at the school gate and across their community to encourage and facilitate more active and sustainable transport. Changes in other dimensions, in particular the Curriculum for Excellence and increased flexibility were also noted to have introduced the opportunity to integrate transport into classroom learning and complement the aim to increase active travel.

While the aim of this research was not to evaluate the effectiveness and success of individual initiatives in terms of changing travel behaviour towards more active modes, where the impact of initiatives had been considered a positive effect was generally reported in terms of encouraging active travel. There is though scope for further work in this area to identify impacts more at the school and wider national and regional level. Preliminary analysis undertaken as part of the study and findings reported in wider literature suggests a co-intervention approach with different initiatives working in combination is most effective, although more detailed analysis would be required to identify the significance and potential for differing

levels of impact taking account of wider factors, such as the characteristics of the school setting.

As well as the availability, shape and content of initiatives, the research also highlighted the importance of particular elements to address the school run. Central to this, is that initiatives are complementary with approaches shaped around training, behaviour change and infrastructure working best in combination and require to be sustained to increase the number of journeys made to and from school by more active and sustainable modes. Other key success factors include:

- The drive, motivation and enthusiasm of travel champions within schools (typically a member of school staff);
- Securing good levels of buy-in and engagement of pupils; and
- Proactive partners (such as the local authorities and delivery partners) as well as wider community participation and buy-in and the availability of funding and physical resource to implement initiatives and/or infrastructure changes and enforce restrictions where applicable.

Whilst this research arose as part of a package of measures to address climate change, the scope for the work did not require the identification or measurement of reduction in car use/distance driven, or air quality levels around case study schools. As such, the extent to which the efforts made by schools to tackle the school run are impacting on climate change/pollution levels cannot be established from this research. Further, the climate change agenda was not credited in the research as driving schools' delivery of behaviour and infrastructure change programmes. However, the research does suggest that schools' efforts to tackle the school run should indeed be contributing to the Government's commitment to address climate change, as well as wider health and well-being agendas, and transport objectives.

The findings and recommendations of the research do not in themselves provide a single solution or policy outline for tackling the school run, rather they will be used to inform future discussions on the possible options to reduce the impact of the school run. The evidence gathered will be used to develop an integrated package of policies on tackling the school run, with the aim of reducing the proportion of journeys to school made by car and increasing the role of active travel, consequently, reducing congestion and pollution.

Recommendations

The research highlighted there is a role for different departments at the national and local levels, to continue and have greater involvement in tackling the school run and promoting active travel/travel behaviour changes.

Cross-Departmental

On the whole, there appears to be scope for greater joint working and cross-departmental funding of initiatives and infrastructure developments across the various local and national Government departments. However, within this it will be important that the core messages and aims of initiatives are not diluted or

confused, so that schools can set clear priorities and be suitably supported to achieve these.

Specific cross-departmental considerations include:

- Cross-agency working to support the delivery of local initiatives against a backdrop of resource constraints. This may be through, for example, cross-departmental Government funding to provide mentoring and administrative support via national delivery partners; and
- Enhanced cross-working between Government departments and agencies to ensure initiatives are inter-linked where appropriate, consistent delivery and the opportunities presented by active travel are fully embraced. For example, strengthening of relations between Scottish Government/Transport Scotland, **sportscotland** (Active Schools) and Education Scotland (Daily Mile). The Daily Mile is an initiative where transport can directly positively contribute through embedding walking and cycling within everyday activity such as the journey to/from school and associated positive attitude towards physical activity and exercise.

Transport

The transport sector has to date led on supporting schools and the wider community to develop sustainable travel habits and to change social norms away from car use and towards active modes. While this is and will continue to be key, lessons from the research highlighted the benefits of community buy-in, and there may be scope to increase the role of the school community in the design of new infrastructure using some of the examples highlighted in this report. Further and wider engagement between transport and other policy areas is also a key dimension.

Education

Education is considered to have a greater role to play to drive forward messages to schools about the school journey, and to set priorities for schools. Stakeholders indicated that where behaviour change initiatives can be communicated to schools via the local Education Departments, the relationship with, and buy-in from the school was often better than those authority areas where other departments facilitated this. It was also shown throughout this study that the role of the 'travel champion', and the motivation and enthusiasm of that individual, is vital in the success of initiatives and instilling motivation and behaviour change in the pupils. As such, the importance of this role, and the benefits that the 'right person' can bring should be promoted to schools.

Planning

Similarly, a stronger and more pro-active role is suggested for Planning to provide a consistent structure and framework for new developments, particularly residential as well as school led developments, which considers access to and within the school gate from the outset. This includes, any new development that occurs on a popular route to a school which should also have consideration of the promotion/facilitation of active travel/safe routes incorporated at the planning

stages. A number of case study schools had benefited from infrastructure changes at the school gate and within the wider community, whilst others continued to suffer the negative effects related to parent's perceptions of safety regarding their route to school. Safer routes to schools are as equally vital in changing pupils travel choices as the provision of initiatives.

Health and Well-Being

The links between health and well-being and active travel were well known among respondents in this study with active travel promoted in schools during Health Weeks. However, it will be important that the health benefits of active modes continue to be communicated to/through schools, and therefore vital that a consistent message is maintained. There is the potential for health and well-being departments to become more actively involved in terms of their role in tackling the school run and there is scope for greater cross-departmental co-ordination and funding of initiatives. Health Departments can also assist in the reduction of car use more generally by communicating health benefits of active travel and contributing to working towards normalising walking and cycling.

Environment

Environment and Climate Change Departments also have a role to play and there is learning to be drawn in terms of looking at how health has become particularly embedded and associated with active travel choices at the school level. While there was an awareness of environmental aspects associated with sustainable travel, there is considered to be opportunity to utilise curricular links to further strengthen the linkage and connection of this in terms of transport and travel choices at the school, family and individual level, as well as at the wider community level.



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The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78652-751-6 (web only)

Published by the Scottish Government, January 2017