# Cycling to school or college

## THIS BRIEFING COVERS:

School/college travel facts; the benefits of cycling to school/colleges; school travel plans and policies; cycle training, other activities and facilities; management and risks.

## HEADLINE MESSAGES

- Cycling to school or college helps pupils keep healthy and fit. It can also help boost their confidence, independence and sense of self-worth, plus their navigational and road-craft skills.
- Equally, promoting cycling to school is a good way to tackle local congestion, pollution and road danger created by the school run.
- Involving pupils, parents, teachers and school governors in joint action to make the trips they generate more sustainable can unite a school community and provide a learning experience in social and environmental responsibility and project management.
- Cycling is a skill for life. Encouraging as many children as possible to see it as viable transport helps ward off car dependency in adulthood, and contributes to reducing the volume of motor traffic in the future.

## KEY FACTS

- Although many children want to cycle to school, on average only around 1-3% do so each year in the UK. In the Netherlands, most children cycle to and from school.
- Walking and driving are the most common forms of transport for the school-run.
- Travel for education is responsible for about 29% of trips starting between 8 and 9 am.
- The average distance travelled to get to school/college is approximately three miles.
- The NHS recommends that 5-18 year-olds take at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, ranging from moderate activity, such as cycling and playground activities, to vigorous activity, such as running and tennis.
- In England, more than one if five children in reception class, and more than one in three in Year Six is overweight or obese. In 2015 amongst 5-15 year-olds, 23% of boys and around a fifth of girls met the Government's physical activity recommendations.
- In Scotland, 28% of 2-15 year-olds were either overweight or obese in 2015.
- In Wales, 11.6% of children in reception class were obese, with a further 14.5% classed as overweight in 2014/15. Amongst 4-15 year-olds, just half undertook physical activity for at least an hour on five or more days of the previous week, including 36% who did so every day.
- 10-16 year-old boys who cycle regularly to school are 30% more likely and girls seven times more likely to meet recommended fitness levels.
- Children who walk or cycle to school concentrate better than those who are driven there.

## Cycling UK VIEW

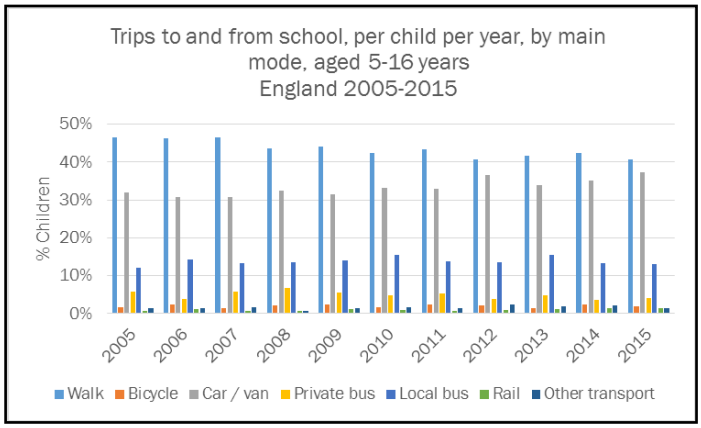
- Involving the whole school community (pupils, teachers, governors and parents), schools and colleges should:
  - Actively recognise the health, social, environmental and educational benefits of encouraging students and staff to cycle;
  - Develop, act on and monitor School Travel Plans that have cycling at their core; and publish pro-cycling policies;
  - Arrange for Bikeability training and other activities to promote safe, fun and responsible cycling;
  - Provide high quality facilities for pupils and staff who cycle (e.g. parking, lockers for equipment etc.).
  - Remove all barriers to cycling (e.g. bans on parking cycles on the premises);
  - Not impose restrictions on those who do cycle (e.g. a requirement to wear cycle helmets).
  - Work with the local highways authority to improve road safety in the area.
- Local authorities should:
  - Work positively with schools/colleges on cycling and offer resources to help them develop their travel plans;
  - Jointly identify hostile conditions on local roads and treat them to help make cycling to and from school/college as hazard-free, attractive and convenient as possible (e.g. by introducing 20 mph speed limits, providing safe cycling links etc.).
- School inspections and self-evaluations should assess the measures that school/colleges take to encourage active travel and reduce traffic volumes and road danger.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## 1. School/college travel facts

### How many children cycle to and from school?

- In England, only around 1% of children aged 5-10 and 3% of children aged 11-16 cycle to and from school on average each year.[1] Roughly speaking, this means that around 50,000 primary and 100,000 secondary pupils use their bikes for this purpose. The proportion fluctuates a little from year-to-year, but not by very much.
- In Wales (2014/15), regardless of distance from home to school, only 2% of primary school children and less than 1% of all secondary school pupils cycled to school.[2]
- In Scotland (2015), 1.9% of 4-11 year-olds and 0.3% of 12-18 year olds usually cycled to school/college. This is a drop on 2014, when these figures were 2.4% and 0.7% respectively. [3]




### How does cycling compare with other ways of getting to and from school?

- In England (2011-15), at 42% walking was the most common way for 5-16 year-olds to get to and from school (47% in 2005). Car/van was the second most popular way (35%). This compares to 2% for cycling.[4]
- In Wales (2014/15), around 39% walked, and 43% travelled by car/van, compared to a 1.5% share for cycling.[5]
- In Scotland (2015), walking claimed a 49% share, and car/van 26%, compared to 1.2% for cycling.[6]
- Between c1990 & 1999, the proportion of journeys to school by car went up from 16% to 29%.[7]

**How far to most children travel to school?**

- In England, the average distance travelled to school is only around 1.7 miles for children aged 5-10, and 3.4 miles for children aged 11-16.[8]
- In Wales (2014/15), the vast majority of primary school children travelled under three miles to school, and well over a third under half a mile. About 62% of secondary school pupils travelled under three miles, and 29% under a mile.[9]

**How much traffic does the school-run generate?**

- Travel for education contributes significantly to peak time traffic. It is the purpose of 29% of trips starting between 0800 and 0859 by all modes on weekdays, plus 21% of 'escort education' trips (where the traveller's only purpose is to escort or accompany another person).[10]
- Averaged over the whole year, the purpose of 28% of car trips starting between 0800 and 0859 on weekdays is education/escort education. This equates to c37% of car trips during term-time.[11]

**Good examples:**

- In the Netherlands, most children and students cycle to school or university.[12] Even amongst primary school children, levels of cycling are very high: round 49% of them cycle to and from school; 37% walk; and only 14% are brought and collected by car. In secondary school, the cycling share is even higher.[13] (26% of all trips are made by cycle in the Netherlands).

Many short car journeys in the UK to school could easily be converted into cycling trips, and some schools have achieved cycling levels well above the national average:

- Kesgrave High School in Suffolk has long been renowned for its cycling levels - around 60% of pupils. The school actively promotes cycling, provides well for it and considers it to be the 'normal' way of travelling to and from the premises.[14]
- Well over 10% of pupils at Dunbar School - the biggest primary school in Scotland - cycle regularly between home and the premises. The school has committed to its travel plan produced in 2005, promotes a cycling culture and is enthusiastic about Bikeability training.[15]
- Schools participating in Transport for London's STARS (Sustainable Travel: Active, Responsible, Safe) programme have reached an average 8% reduction in car use on the school journey. Many of the schools have actively facilitated cycling.[16]

## 2. The benefits of cycling to school/college

**Cycling UK view:** Involving the whole school community (pupils, teachers, governors and parents), Schools/colleges should actively recognise the health, social, environmental and educational benefits of encouraging students and staff to cycle.

### a. Health facts

- **Childhood obesity/inactivity**
  - In England, the prevalence of obesity amongst children in reception class rose from 9.1% to 9.3% between 2014/15 and 2015/16, and more than one if five is now overweight or obese. Over the same period, obesity rose amongst Year 6 children from 19.1% to 19.8%, and more than one in three children is overweight or obese.[17] In 2015, 23% of 5-15 year-old boys met the Government's physical activity recommendations (28% did so in 2008). Around a fifth of girls met the recommendations. [18]
  - In Scotland (2015), amongst 2-15 year-olds: 15% were considered to be at risk of obesity, with a further 13% at risk of being overweight; 28% were either overweight or obese; 77% of boys and 69% of girls met the physical activity recommendations.[19]

- In Wales (2014/15), 11.6% of children in reception class were obese, with a further 14.5% classed as overweight.[20] Amongst 4-15 year-olds, just over half said they had taken physical activity for at least an hour on five or more days of the previous week, including 36% who did so every day (i.e. enough activity to meet official guidelines).[21]
- In 2007, the Government-commissioned Foresight report predicted that, without action, 25% of children would be obese (not just overweight) by 2050 in the UK.[22]
- Apart from the short and long-term physical repercussions of an unhealthy weight, affected children also suffer from social, psychological and health problems.

**NHS physical activity guidelines for 5 - 18 year-olds**

To maintain a basic level of health, 5 - 18 year-olds need to do:

- at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day ranging from moderate activity, such as cycling and playground activities, to vigorous activity, such as running and tennis.

www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-young-people.aspx

- **Physical activity and fitness**
  - Cycling to and from school/college is a convenient way to help 5-18 year-olds meet recommended levels of activity levels (see text box above). As mentioned, most children don't have to travel any further than three miles. This suggests that many of the school journeys currently being driven could easily be cycled, especially if walking is being ruled about because it would take too long.
  - Cycling is very popular with children. In 2015/16, when asked whether they'd cycled outside school hours in the previous four weeks, over 29% of 5-10 year-olds said they had done so, making it their third most popular sports activity, superseded only by swimming, diving or lifesaving (53.5%) and football (32.2%). 26.2% of 11-15 year-olds also said they'd cycled (over half of them had participated in football). [23]
  - The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) strongly recommends active travel (walking and cycling) as a good way of promoting physical activity amongst children.[24]
  - A study of 6,000 pupils in eastern England found that 10-16 year-old boys who cycle regularly to school are 30% more likely and girls seven times more likely to meet recommended fitness levels.[25]
  - A study of Danish school children found that those who cycled to school were significantly more fit than those who walked or travelled by motorised transport and were nearly five times as likely to be in the top quartile of fitness, suggesting that cycling to school may contribute to higher cardiovascular fitness in young people.[26]
  - Another Danish study indicated that cycling to school lowered young people's risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD).[27]
  - Research has also shown that cycling to school: *"counteracted a clustering of cardiometabolic risk factors and should thus be recognised as potential prevention of type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease (CVD)".* [28]

## b. Social benefits

- Children enjoy cycling as a sociable activity and friendship ties have been found to influence their patterns of exercise significantly. According to a study from the USA, children's activity levels can be increased, decreased, or stabilised depending on the habits of their immediate social network.[29] School communities can capitalise on this.
- Whilst only a tiny percentage of children actually cycle to school, considerably more would like to do so: according to a 2010 survey of primary school children in England, 48% of boys and 50% of girls said they would like to have travelled to school by cycle that morning (12% and 10% respectively said they preferred the car).[30]

### c. Environmental benefits

- As mentioned (p3), around 29% of trips at peak time are for education purposes. This contributes to air and noise pollution, climate change, hostile road conditions and volumes of traffic that have a damaging effect on the quality of life for anyone living nearby. Schools that encourage walking and cycling as an alternative to driving help reduce the impact of these environmental nuisances.

### d. Educational benefits

- Cycling can inspire PE lessons and provide material for other subjects, e.g. maths and IT (collecting and interpreting data on local cycling levels); geography (local topography); design and technology (the mechanics of bicycles); PSHE (cycling responsibly, attitudes to cycling, benefits of exercise etc.).
- A Danish study of 20,000 children aged 5-19, found that those who walk or cycle to school rather than being driven are able to concentrate better, and the effect lasts all morning. [31] On-going research is also gathering more and more evidence to suggest that levels of physical activity are positively related to academic performance.[32]

## 3. The role of schools

**Cycling UK view:** schools and colleges should:

- Develop, act on and monitor travel plans that have cycling at their core, and publish pro-cycling policies.
- Arrange for Bikeability training and other activities to promote safe, fun and responsible cycling.
- Provide high quality facilities for pupils and staff who cycle (e.g. parking, lockers etc).

### a. School Travel Plans

School Travel Plans (STPs) set out how a school intends to make the trips it generates more sustainable. Most schools have developed an STP at some point, and cycling is often a key element.

While schools don't have to produce a travel plan by law, the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* s.76 gives local education authorities (LEAs) in England a general duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. [33] STPs are an ideal way of fulfilling this duty.

Good STPs involve the whole school community, e.g. governors, head and other teachers, parents and especially pupils. They also benefit from input and help from the relevant council (with road safety measures, for instance - see below). Some local authorities employ school travel plan advisers or other staff whose role may include helping schools develop and progress their STPs.

STPs need to measure their success against a baseline survey of travel patterns, and present clear targets, specific interventions and include agreed monitoring criteria.

**Sources for more information on School Travel Plans**

- *Travelling to School: an action plan*. 2003 (DfT / Department for Education). Covers the responsibilities of schools, local and national government. http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/travelling%20to%20school%20action%20plan.pdf
- *Home to School Travel & Transport Guidance* (Dept. for Education). Includes a chapter on sustainable school travel and the legal duties of local authorities in England under the *Education & Inspections Act 2006*. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/331654/Home_to_school_travel_and_transport_statutory_guidance.pdf
- *Developing a School Travel Plan: information for parents and schools*. (Sustrans). www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/srs_developing_an_stp_st16.pdf

### b. Pro-cycling policies and cycling 'champions'

Cycling UK urges all schools/colleges to publish a written commitment to cycling amongst its policies, and ensure that the whole school community is aware of it. Ideally, this needs to be accompanied by an explanation of how they'll promote and encourage cycling, and should not impose any restrictions (see Section 5 below, 'Management and Risk').

Any organisation keen to support cycling is well advised to set up a steering group or committee dedicated to making it cycle-friendly. At schools/colleges, such committees are usually inspired by keen cyclists or 'champions' and involve staff, governors, pupil and parent representatives.

### c. Cycle training

Most schools should be able to access Bikeability - or 'cycling proficiency for the 21st century' through their local authority. Bikeability is a cycle training scheme for both adults and children designed to give them the skills and confidence to ride in modern road conditions. There are three levels, with children typically starting Level 1 lessons once they have learnt to ride a bike. Level 2 is for 10-11 year-olds; and Level 3 for 11-18 year-olds at secondary school.

A report prepared for the DfT found encouraging signs that Bikeability, which was first introduced in 2007, is positively associated with higher levels of cycling to school.[34] Government funding is available to local authorities to provide Bikeability training.

For more on cycle training, see Cycling UK's briefing at:
www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/cycle-training

### d. After-school clubs

These are an enjoyable and sociable way of introducing cycling to young people and establishing its role in their lives for recreation, sport, exercise, and as a 'green' form of transport. Clubs can, for example, offer outings, training and maintenance sessions. Cycling UK might be able to help: www.cyclinguk.org/project/community-cycle-clubs

### e. Outside expertise

The charity Sustrans has been working in schools and in universities and colleges over a number of years to promote active travel. For example, its officers work with several schools in a given area, raising awareness among staff, pupils and parents alike, leading discussions in assembly and lessons, and organising events and activities such as 'bike to school' days, bike breakfasts and cycle training.
www.sustrans.org.uk/our-services/where-we-work/schools

### f. Cycle parking

Pupils, staff and visitors who cycle to the premises need somewhere sheltered, secure and convenient to store their cycles. Cycle parking facilities need to:

- cater for suppressed demand (i.e. not merely existing cycle levels);
- be designed to accommodate small as well as standard-sized bikes;
- be installed somewhere that won't attract vandals or thieves;
- be near enough to the school to make it convenient to use.

The local authority should be able to advise on planning permission, and some will help with the cost.

### g. Lockers

Children benefit from somewhere safe to store their cycling accessories during the day, as do staff.

## 4. Management and risk

**Cycling UK view:** Schools should:

- Remove all barriers that prevent children cycling (e.g. bans on parking cycles on the premises).
- Not impose unnecessary restrictions on those who do cycle (e.g. a requirement to wear cycle helmets).
- Work with the local highways authority to improve road safety in the area.

### a. Cycling 'bans' and fears

**Bans**: despite all the benefits of promoting and encouraging cycling, some schools still maintain anti-cycling policies. While they have no legal power to stop anyone cycling to or from the premises, they are entitled to prohibit parking on their sites. Unfortunately, this means that some schools won't allow children to leave their bikes on school grounds during the day, which effectively bans cycling or makes it very difficult for pupils and their parents to cycle there.

Some schools feel that they cannot provide cycle parking because space is short, but this problem can usually be overcome with the local authority's help. Others may simply have an aversion to cycling, often because of ill-founded fears about health and safety.

Cycling, however, is not an unduly risky activity, the health advantages are known to outweigh the risks and, as discussed above, children benefit in many ways from the physical activity involved and the sense of independence that cycling offers. Indeed, as cycling causes very little harm to other road users, promoting it as an alternative to driving is a responsible approach. After all, it reduces the risk to children from motor vehicles in the locality and around the school – risk which is, ironically, often quoted as the main reason why a school feels it cannot 'allow' cycling.

**Hostile roads**: if there are genuine concerns about busy roads or bad driving around the premises, the best approach is not to ban children from a healthy, clean and safe alternative to the car, but to tackle the source of the problem. This can be done, for example, by contacting the highways authority to see if they can improve the local road layout; and/or stressing the importance of considerate driving to everyone associated with the school/college. Faced with the twin crises of climate change and obesity, the last thing we should be doing is forcing more children into car-dependent lifestyles.

**'Stranger danger'**: some people are reluctant to let children make their own way to school because of 'stranger danger'. Incidents, however, are extremely rare, the fears of anything happening are disproportionate, and children can be given sound advice about what to do if they feel threatened.[35]

For more, see Cycling UK's briefings: *Cycling and road safety* and *Cycling and health.*
www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings

### b. Restrictions

It is important for schools/colleges to promote responsible cycling, e.g. safe riding habits on roadworthy bikes. A strong and positive cycling culture, Bikeability training and other lessons are the best ways of achieving this. In contrast, making cycle helmets compulsory or asking children to qualify for a 'cycling permit' puts a barrier in the way and could have a negative effect on numbers and the diversity of children making their way to and from school by bike.

**Cycle helmets:** imposing helmet rules is not justified on health and safety grounds given the uncertainties about their effectiveness. It can also discriminate against families who don't have the means to afford helmets. In Cycling UK's view, it should be up to parents to decide whether they want their children to wear helmets whilst cycling, and their decisions should be informed by clear information about the protection helmets offer. Cycle helmets are discussed more fully in Cycling UK's briefing *Cycle helmets*: www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings

## 5. Role of local authorities

**Cycling UK view:** Local authorities should:

- Work positively with schools/colleges on cycling and offer resources to help them develop their Travel Plans.
- Jointly identify hostile conditions on local roads and treat them to help make cycling to and from school/college as hazard-free, attractive and convenient as possible (e.g. by introducing 20mph speed limits, providing safe cycling links etc).

Local authorities have an important role to play in helping schools/colleges increase the levels of cycling amongst their students and staff. They should dedicate resources and officer time, and ensure that all departments are engaged. Working with the schools in the area, they can identify anything that deters people from encouraging children to cycle (e.g. speed of traffic, lack of crossing points, inadequate cycle training) and take action to tackle the problems (e.g. through 20 mph limits, installing zebra/toucan crossings, facilitating and funding Bikeability training etc.).

Transport for London's STARS is a good example of a local authority-led programme supporting schools to promote active travel: tfl.gov.uk/stars.

## 6. Role of school inspectors

**Cycling UK view:** School inspections and self-evaluations should assess the measures that school/colleges take to encourage active travel and reduce traffic volumes and road danger.

Arguably, encouraging sustainable, active travel and reducing road risk by working in partnership with the community and local authority are all activities that inspectors should consider when they evaluate, for example, the school's management and the well-being, safety and social development of its students. Now that self-evaluation is also an important element of inspection arrangements throughout the UK,[36] a school with a strong, ongoing Travel Plan (see 3a above) should be able to provide evidence that it takes these matters seriously.

Where a school does not address sustainable, active travel effectively, Cycling UK believes that inspectors should highlight this as a weakness, and advise the establishment to improve.

## FURTHER READING/WEBSITES/SUPPORT

- Cycling UK's Right to Ride to School campaign and toolkit - for people who need to tackle anti-cycling schools: www.cyclinguk.org/campaign/right-to-ride-to-school
- Sustrans' Getting Young People Active project www.sustrans.org.uk/our-services/what-we-do/getting-young-people-active
- Cycling Scotland's Cycle Friendly School Award and Cycle Friendly Secondary School Award - designed to support, provide resources and reward work that promotes cycling in schools: www.cyclingscotland.org/our-projects/award-schemes/cycle-friendly-schools/

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www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-travel-survey-statistics
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http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/walking-cycling-action-plan/?lang=en
[3] Transport Scotland. *Transport and travel in Scotland 2015*. Sept 2016. Table 15.www.transport.gov.scot/report/j450918-09.htm
[4] DfT. *National Travel Survey 2015*. July 2016. Tables NTS0613 (link above).
[5] Welsh Government. *National Survey for Wales 2014/15.* Active Travel – school children. Tables 2 & 9.
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[6] Transport Scotland. *Transport and travel in Scotland 2015*. Sept 2016. Table 15 (link above).
[7] School Travel Advisory Group Report 1998-1999. (Not online)
[8] DfT. *National Travel Survey 2015*. July 2016. Tables NTS0405. Sept 2016 (link above).
[9] Welsh Government. *National Survey for Wales 2014/15.* Active Travel – school children. Tables 5 & 12 (link above)
[10] DfT. *National Travel Survey 2015*. Sept 2016. Table NTS0502 (link above).
[11] Calculated from data requested by Cycling UK from DfT 17/1/2017.
[12] Statistics Netherlands. *Transport and Mobility 2015*. 2015. http://download.cbs.nl/pdf/2015-transport-and-mobility.pdf
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[19] Scottish Government. *Health of Scotland's Population* (obesity/physical activity). www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health
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[34] Steer Davies Gleave/DfT. *Cycling to School – A review of school census and Bikeability delivery data*. 2012
http://bikeability.org.uk/publications/
[35]For example, see https://www.netmums.com/child/essential-safety-for-kids---stranger-danger
[36] Information and guidance on school inspections is available from: Ofsted (England), www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted; Education Scotland, www.educationscotland.gov.uk; Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, www.estyn.gov.uk; and The Education and Training Inspectorate (N Ireland), www.etini.gov.uk.