



To: Place Directorate

From: Adrian Davis

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Subject: Essential Evidence on a page: No 146 Quantifying the transport-related impacts of parental choice in England

Top line: If parental school choice was replaced by a policy where each child travelled to their 'nearest school' car and bus travel vehicle miles travelled could be reduced. This could lead to less congestion on the roads during the morning rush hour, less cars driving near school gates, increased active travel and reduce CO2 emissions.

School travel is becoming increasingly car-based and this is leading to many environmental and health implications for children all over the world. One of several reasons for this is that journey to school distances have increased over time. This is a trend that has been reinforced in some countries by the adoption of so-called 'school choice' policies, whereby parents can apply on behalf of their child(ren) to attend any school, and not only the school they live closest to. The school run causes congestion in residential areas, increases carbon emissions and makes the area around schools unsafe for children as a result of increased cars parked on side roads, cars driving fast, and dependency on car use leading to health problems. Whilst often providing positive benefits for individual car users, such a trend has also been linked to a whole range of negative impacts that tend to worsen over time for society more broadly. These include: impacts on personal health (e.g. through increased levels of obesity as a result of reliance of car travel rather than active travel); on the environment (due to deteriorating air quality, increased CO2 emissions); and rises in traffic and congestion.¹

Travel behaviour of parents and their children in terms of trip characteristics (i.e. mode choice, journey length and cost) during the journey to school can be influenced by several contributing factors. These include various area factors (e.g. income deprivation and road density). In addition, personal factors (such as age, gender, ethnicity, income and attitudes) as well as policy choices put in place by the national and local government affect travel behaviour of the journey to school.

A study examined the traffic and environmental impacts of the school choice policy in England.² It analysed School Census data from 2009 from the Department for Education. Through modelling it predicted the impacts of children going to their current school versus pupils going to their nearest school. The model showed that car use fell from 32 to 22 % and bus use fell from 12 to 7 %, whilst active travel saw a rise of 17 %. With more children travelling to school by walking or cycling the current epidemic of childhood obesity could also be reduced through active travel. As well as being a healthier option for children, the reduction in car use could also mean CO2 emissions would fall by 0.78 % or the equivalent of 2,500 tonnes per day in England alone. This could result in an annual saving of over a million tonnes of fuel used in England as a result of school travel. This supports US findings that a change in the school choice policy can have significant benefits from a transport and environment view.³

¹ Valsecchi, C., Fergusson, M., Davis, A. 2007 Unfit for purpose, *How car use fuels climate change and obesity*. London: Institute of European Environmental Policy.

² Ristell, J. et al, 2013 Quantifying the transport-related impacts of parental school choice in England, *Transportation*, 40: 69-90.

³ Wilson, E, et al 2010 By foot, bus, or car: children's school travel and school choice policy, *Environment & Planning A* 42(9): 2168-2185.