



To: Transport Planners
From: Adrian Davis
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Subject: School Travel Toolbox: No 18 Making school travel plans work

Top line: School travel work can be highly effective in reducing levels of car use and achieving major improvements in safety.

How can we bring about a ‘step change in home to school travel’? This is what the national Travelling to School Initiative in England called for at its launch in 2003. With the support of school travel advisers, grants for schools and local transport funding for safer routes, all schools were asked to develop and sustain school travel plans. There are compelling reasons for focusing on the school journey. Nearly a third of children travel to school by car, and car use for travel to school has roughly doubled since the mid-eighties. Drivers joining the school run add significantly to peak traffic. In urban areas in term time, more than one in ten cars on the road in the morning rush hour is on the school trip, rising to nearly one in five before school starts.¹ Many schools struggle with traffic congestion at their gates. Research commissioned by the Department for Transport sought to capture the key elements of effective school travel plans in reducing car use and increase active travel.² This research involved 30 case study schools. For the case study schools the average reduction in total car use was 23%, with some high performing schools cutting car use by more than half.

1) School travel work can successfully cut car use and improve safety on the school journey. Teaching staff report an impressive range of other benefits – greater fitness, fewer weight problems, better attendance and children arriving at school calm and ready to learn. This section summarises the key findings and good practice recommendations to emerge from the study.

2) The most successful school travel plans typically focus on a variety of initiatives, include significant levels of awareness raising, and have mechanisms to ensure that they are sustained over time. Almost all good practice case studies had benefited from: – A positive relationship with the local authority – A head teacher that was supportive or very supportive of the travel work – Sustained travel work over two years or more – A significant level of awareness raising work – Leadership from a champion and/or working group.

3) Children’s involvement in decision-making appears to lead to more successful travel plans. Primary schools achieving greater change in car use had typically involved the school council in travel planning, a possible indicator that these were schools where pupils had a sense of ownership of the travel work and felt empowered within the school. Secondary schools achieving greater change in car use had typically involved their students in developing travel work and included travel work on the curriculum. The involvement of students was particularly common in schools that had been successful in increasing walking.

¹ Department for Transport, various years. *National Travel Survey*. London: Dept. Transport

² Newson, C., Cairns, S. & Davis, A. 2010. *Making school travel plans work: experience from English case studies*. Transport for Quality of Life.