

THE SECRET OF OUR SUCCESS

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1. PROBLEMS OF THE 'SCHOOL RUN'

It is widely recognised that too many parents are driving their children to and from school unnecessarily. At 8.50am almost 1 in 5 cars on the road in urban areas is going to school (Transport White Paper, DETR, 1998). There have been major changes in pupils' travel to and from school over the past decade. In 1986 nearly 60% of school journeys made by children aged 5-16 years were on foot and only 16% were driven. By 1996 the proportion of children walking had fallen to 49%, while 29% were driven to school (Transport Statistics Report, DETR, 1999). These statistics are similar to those in Renfrewshire, where 51% of children in primary school walk to school and 37% are driven (Great School Travel Tally, Renfrewshire, September 2005). Not only does this add to the existing congestion but also cars are causing chaos at school gates making it difficult and often dangerous for pupils to cross the road to enter their school.

Children driven to school are losing out in many ways. In heavy traffic, levels of traffic fumes are higher inside than outside the car (School Travel Resource Pack, DETR, March 2000). Children need the daily exercise that walking or cycling to school can offer. Evidence shows that more active children are likely to become more active adults (Guidance How to run Safer Routes to School, Scottish Executive). That means less risk of heart disease, obesity and other health problems in later life. For older children, making their own way to school is a chance to learn 'skills for life', becoming more independent and self-confident. Research has also shown that children who have walked to school settle down to morning lessons more quickly than those who have been driven to school by car. ('Walk to School Campaign Guide', Living Streets, March 2003).

In response to the problem, the Scottish Executive provided guidance on safer routes to school and from this starting point the role of School Travel Plan Co-ordinator has been created in local councils to help schools deal with the problems of congestion. The school travel plan co-ordinator works with educational establishments in their area to assist them in developing a school travel plan.

1.1 What is a School Travel Plan?

A school travel plan is a document that aims to tackle the transport problems in and around a school. It sets out a school's individual aims and objectives and an action plan detailing what measures will be carried out to reduce the problems caused by the 'school run'. The package of measures put forward will also highlight the health and environmental benefits of walking and cycling

and encourage more pupils, parents and staff to use their car less often on school journeys.

School travel plans involve both the school and the local community. Representatives such as, pupils, head teachers, school staff, parents, community police officers and the wider community can all become involved by forming a working group. They will then look at the specific needs of their school and are responsible for developing the plan with the assistance of the School Travel Plan Co-ordinator. The plan sets out aims, objectives and targets and is updated at regular intervals. Targets are monitored and reviewed as necessary.

1.2 Benefits of a School Travel Plan

A successful travel plan will not only enhance the reputation of the school but will also bring about some of the following benefits:

- Reduce congestion at the school gate by encouraging parents, pupils and teachers to choose walking, cycling and public transport;
- Improve relationships with school's neighbours and local community by reducing traffic around the school;
- Improve health and fitness through walking and cycling;
- Improve children's travel awareness and road user skills;
- Look in detail at needs on the school journey and attempt to address them by finding the right solutions for each individual school, For example, by establishing safer walking and cycling routes;
- Reduces stress and time spent in traffic jams around the school; and
- Contribute to a school's Environment or Eco-school Policy and their Health Promoting School Policy;

A school travel plan is an opportunity for schools to identify and promote practical alternatives that meet the varied needs of the school community, which will encourage parents to consider different ways of taking their children to school. For example, a 'walking bus', car sharing or 'park and stride.' These are discussed in detail later.

For a travel plan to be a success, parents, pupils, staff and local people must be kept informed of progress and their views should be regularly sought. The working group could use meetings, newsletters, surveys, newspapers and radio to both give and receive information.

1.3 Renfrewshire Council's Starting Point

Following the publication of the Scottish Executive's Safer Routes to Schools Guidance the Council began to explore possibilities for new, innovative ways of reducing congestion in and around schools in Renfrewshire.

In 2001, as part of a pilot exercise, a variety of exploratory methods was coordinated through the Traffic and Transportation Section in conjunction with the Education Department. Four schools were selected by the Education

Department, the Council's Access Officer was nominated to work with 2 of these, the Road Safety Training Officer with one and the Education Department's Health Promoting Schools Project Coordinator with the fourth. Liaison took place with the Traffic Section's Implementation Team who looked to investigate and address engineering concerns raised by the schools through the surveys being used at the time. During this period implementation of the voluntary 20mph scheme was being rolled-out around all Renfrewshire Schools.

Initial findings from the above pilot gave some interesting indications of difficulties being encountered and highlighted possible ways that the initiative could be supported and taken forward.

Firstly, lack of funding to take such an initiative forward meant that the workload had had to be split between sections and across Departments' and added to the nominated Officers' existing workloads. This resulted in a dilution of approach as the amount of time that could be devoted to the task did not meet the demand of the workload. The fragmentation was further exacerbated by the differing focus of expertise of those involved, e.g. health, congestion, road safety and environment. Specific training programmes had not been developed at this stage to guide those working in this field to draw together and promote all the relevant areas. A further funding issue identified was the lack of budget for marketing, promotional items and measures, in order to whet school's appetites, promote what was being attempted to the wider community or address issues that were raised. Development of a school travel plan by the school was identified as fundamental to achievement of targets. Finally, it became apparent that in some instances the schools that had been selected, whilst not against the concept in principle felt that this was yet another initiative for them to add to their already long list.

It seemed that dedicated funding for staff and training would be necessary for such an initiative to flourish. In addition, new ways of approaching and engaging schools to 'buy-in' to the concept of school travel planning would provide the way forward.

1.4 Funding / Employment of First STP Co-ordinator

Beginning in the Summer of 2003 with the backing of Scottish Executive funding, Renfrewshire Council employed their first School Travel Plan Coordinator. By securing a good grounding in all aspects of related research through both training courses, funded by the Scottish Executive, and available information and resources, ideas were developed for marketing the benefits of undertaking school travel planning to head teachers.

Building early partnerships with those in the education, health and engineering sectors ensured essential close, cross-working relationships were forged. During the first year a further 8 schools were selected to come on board. The benefits to health, the environment and beating congestion were all used as ways to persuade schools of the advantages. In addition, enthusiasm and an extremely pro-active approach by the School Travel Plan

Co-ordinator, including an invitation to all schools to participate in Walk to School Week, resulted in approaches from other schools interested in coming on board. Marketing the product had paid real dividends.

However, there was only one pair of hands to undertake the task in hand. A way of balancing the workload against the demand had to be found. This was addressed by the increase in the ring-fenced allocation from the Scottish Executive in the second year, resulting in an ability to engage a second (part-time) School Travel Plan Co-ordinator.

1.5 The Way Forward

Following this, in October 2004 Renfrewshire Council employed an additional (part time) School Travel Plan Coordinator and was therefore in a position to target more schools. Specific objectives had to be decided upon and each stage of development had to be carefully planned in order that this initiative could be taken forward in an effective and positive way.

As school travel planning was a new initiative the majority of head teachers were not yet aware of it. If our campaign was to be a success it was essential to get the message across to as wide an audience as possible. However, it was also important that schools came on board willingly, as developing a travel plan involves a fair amount of work. Ultimately it is the school's decision how much time and effort they wish to put into their travel plan and how detailed they would like the document to be. Whilst the School Travel Plan Coordinator supports schools as much as possible, schools have to actually put together and write the plan themselves.

It was decided that the most effective way forward would be to write to all head teachers inviting them to develop a travel plan with the assistance of the School Travel Plan Coordinators. A short questionnaire was attached asking them to highlight their particular concerns associated with travel to and from their school, such as parking and congestion, active health, road safety, environmental issues etc. This proved to be a great success and many requests were received from head teachers to visit them to explain the process involved.

The first priority was to meet the head teachers who were interested. During these initial meetings an explanation of the work involved was given along with examples of completed travel plans from schools in the UK. Detailed information relating to what a travel plan is, the benefits to the school and local residents, the various initiatives they could become involved with and how the School Travel Plan Co-ordinator could assist them were all discussed. It was also particularly important to show the head teachers how developing such a plan could be incorporated into the curriculum so the whole school could become involved.

These meetings were very productive and every head teacher agreed that they would like to go ahead with the initiative. Many of them were also keen to emphasise that for the majority of parents the main reason for choosing to

drive their children to school is fear of traffic dangers. It was therefore important to stress to the head teachers that whilst Renfrewshire Council wanted schools to develop a travel plan, the initiative was not simply about encouraging walking and cycling to school. It was also about ensuring that this was done in a safe manner. It was explained that in order to achieve this the first stage of developing a school travel plan would be to set up a working group. This would be followed by consultation by way of a travel survey.

1.6 School Travel Plan Working Group

The Working Group is responsible for developing and writing the travel plan with the assistance and guidance of the school travel plan co-ordinator. The head teacher is encouraged to involve representatives such as parents, staff, pupils, local councillors and the community police when appropriate. For the group to be a success it is important to stress to head teachers that the pupils chosen should be enthusiastic and willing to speak in assemblies to their peers about the travel plan.

As a first step the group needs to agree a format for their travel survey as this information is fundamental to the development of their plan. As school travel planning is a relatively new concept, very few people in the working group will know much about what is involved. It is absolutely essential that the school travel plan co-ordinator attends these meetings armed with lots of illustrative literature, lots of ideas and boundless amounts of energy and enthusiasm! If it can be demonstrated that the work involved is fun and not too onerous then those in the group, particularly the children, will take part with great gusto! Things are then more likely to develop at a good, steady pace with the whole of the school getting involved with the travel plan.

1.7 Travel Surveys

The surveys form the basis of a travel plan so a great deal of work was put into producing them. Not only was it important that to get all the relevant information from them, it was also important that as many as possible were returned to the school.

Separate surveys were produced for parents, pupils and staff, with the costs being met from the school travel planning budget. (Please note that the surveys are available from the author). Head teachers were asked to arrange for the pupils' survey to be completed in class and for the parents' survey to be taken home. A covering letter signed by the head teacher was compiled and attached to the parents' survey. This explained the purpose of the travel survey, how Renfrewshire Council are actively looking for ways to improve conditions for children travelling to and from school and that it is important that the needs of each parent are known. So parents understood that their opinions were valued. A question inviting parents to highlight any areas of their child's route to school that they considered as unsafe or they thought could be improved was included. They were asked to explain why they thought the route is unsafe and how it could be improved. Suggestions were

given to help them, such as the condition of pavements, road signs, and road marking, overgrown vegetation, poor crossing facilities or traffic speed.

Parents were also asked if they would be prepared to park and stride, (i.e. park a bit away from the school and walk the rest of the way), car share with other families, how likely they would be to let their child use a walking bus service and whether they would be interested in volunteering to become a trained walking bus parent.

Levels of returns varied between each school however, on average approximately 50% of the forms were received back from the parents. The return rate tended to be higher where the forms were completed as part of a homework exercise.

It was realised from the outset that collation of the surveys would involve a lot of work, as it would require a database to be set up and take a lot of time to input the data. In view of this, a decision was taken to arrange for this to be carried out by the administrative section within the Planning and Transport Department. Head teachers were delighted with this decision.

The surveys have proved to be very informative. Perhaps the most important information from them has been the comments made by parents highlighting the particular locations on routes to school that they feel are unsafe. This has meant that investigations can be undertaken to see whether engineering work is required to improve safety. For locations where this is not the case meetings have taken place to establish whether alternative solutions can be found.

1.8 Initiatives to get the schools involved

The initiatives that are promoted in schools play a key role in the success of a travel plan. If staff, pupils and parents cannot be engaged then the travel plan will not succeed. Although various initiatives have been compiled by the School Travel Plan co-ordinators for the campaign, it is up to the working group and head teacher to decide which ones they would like the school to take part in and to develop and implement their own.

The initiatives that have been suggested are not only fun and practical but they also have a purpose, which is to achieve regular modal shift from car driven school journeys to those made on foot. It is widely acknowledged that achieving long-term change in travel behaviour is not something that will happen overnight. The following campaigns are however, proving to be popular and are helping schools to achieve their goals:

- **Walk to School Weeks in May and October each year.**
Promotion of National Walk to School Week in May 2005 and International Walk to School Week in October 2004 and 2005. To help publicise these campaigns all participating schools are supplied with large colourful PVC banners which they tend to display on the school gates. They have also received bookmarks, badges, travel diaries,

survey sheets and posters to help engage the children and to make the campaign a success.

- **‘Wow’ Schools**

Schools are being encouraged to become WOW schools, which stands for ‘Walk on Wednesdays’ or ‘Walk Once a Week’. The WOW campaign is being promoted to try to make the walk to school campaign as inclusive as possible. It encourages those families who cannot walk to school every day to choose at least one day a week on which they will endeavour to walk to and / or from school.

- **‘Golden Trainer’ Award**

During the Walk to School Week campaigns pupils in Renfrewshire were in competition for the Golden Trainer. Each morning teachers asked pupils how they travelled to school each day and recorded responses. At the end of the week the total numbers of pupils walking to school each day in each class were calculated. The class with the highest percentage of pupils walking to school every day of the week were awarded the ‘Golden Trainer’. This has proved to be a great incentive for children to participate in the competition and some schools also use the trainer in their ‘WOW’ campaigns.

- **Cycle Parking Facilities**

The travel surveys carried out in primary schools in Renfrewshire showed that many children would like to cycle to school. However, cycle parking was an issue so in order to encourage cycling to school it was important that high quality cycle parking facilities were installed.

Over the last 24 months, 32 schools in Renfrewshire have now had secure cycle parking installed. This includes 28 primary and 4 secondary schools. Furthermore, as a consequence of close partnership working, 2 of the cycle stands were provided by the Education Department and 1 by ‘Have a Heart Paisley’.

A further benefit of providing cycle stands is that the number of primary schools participating in the Scottish Cycle Training Scheme has increased over the last 24 months from 63% to 67%. Many of the schools no longer have the problem of where to store bikes during the 6 week period of cycle training and this has persuaded more schools to participate in the scheme.

- **‘Keep the Zigzags Clear’**

Most schools in Renfrewshire have zigzag lines painted outside their gates and Renfrewshire’s Road Safety team has issued primary schools with large colourful PVC banners asking parents not to park on the zigzags. The ‘Parksmart’ Campaign, co-ordinated through the West of Scotland Road Safety Forum, directly targets this issue using a variety of media and resources such as, radio advertising, leaflets to all new primary 1 parents, and posters for schools. In addition, as part of

their school travel plan, pupils in some working groups have written newsletters to parents to remind them of the need to park sensibly outside school.

- **‘Park and Stride’.**
Parents and children are being encouraged to include at least some walking on their daily journey to and from school via a park and stride scheme. Permission is sought from the likes of supermarkets, pubs, leisure centres and churches for parents to park at their premises on a short-term basis as an alternative to parking directly outside of the school. This initiative is a particular favourite with those schools that have afternoon congestion problems. At these schools many parents arrive up to 30 minutes before the end of the school day in order to grab the best and nearest parking space to school for a quick getaway! It is recognised that habitual parking behaviour will be difficult to break but are encouraging schools to engage pupils in their appeal to parents to support this initiative.
- **‘Whatever the Weather Walk Together’**
In October 2005 we organised a postcard competition encouraging children and their parents to walk to school and to raise the awareness of International Walk to School Week. A thousand entries of very high standard were received and a great deal of thought had been put into producing some novel pictures.
- **Newsletters**
Many children in the working groups like sending newsletters to parents and this has shown to be a particularly effective way of conveying information if the letter is coming from them rather than the head teacher. Parents are more likely to sit up and take note of what is being said if the message is from children. So far the newsletters have been very colourful and attractive as their own artwork has been used and the pictures have been scanned onto the newsletter.
- **Lesson Plans**
Suggestions are made to head teachers about how the campaign can be included into the curriculum. For example, under citizenship pupils can investigate the impact of transport on the local and global environment. Maths – pupils can look at the results of their travel survey to produce bar graphs and pie charts. Science – pupils can look at the effect of exercise on the resting pulse rate of their travel. Geography and the local environment – we provide the school with an A0 sized “super” map so pupils can mark where they live in relation to the school. A discussion can then take place regarding how the children currently get to school and alternative ways of doing so.
- **School Assembly Presentations**
Pupils in the working group are encouraged to take part in assemblies to promote the work they are doing as part of the travel plan. For instance, if National Walk to School Week is approaching they can

inform their peers what it is about, how they can participate in the campaign and ask for any suggestions on how to make the event a success.

- **Parents' evenings and induction days**
Presentations are made at these events, which are an invaluable means to both promote and inform parents about the school's travel plan. This is also an opportunity to ask for new volunteers for the working group.
- **Health days**
Many schools hold health days or weeks, taking part in these events allows further promotion walking and cycling to school.
- **Theatre shows on road safety**
Every year Renfrewshire council chooses schools to receive a visit from a local theatre company. Three different plays are shown for various age groups - P6, S1 and S6. These have been well received and the pupils are encouraged to take part in workshops following the play to make sure the road safety message has got across. Pupils from S1-S6 have access to follow-up resources.
- **Road safety talks**
Some of the benefits of working closely with the road safety team have been that if a particular need is highlighted by a school in the course of developing their travel plan, the close-working arrangement means the road safety team are aware of issues as they arise.

It is always stressed to schools that for a campaign to be effective it must involve as many pupils, teachers and parents as possible. In order to expand the reach of our campaigns involvement from the local or national media is sought wherever possible. This has included press coverage in the Paisley Daily Express, a feature on Radio Scotland's Sports Weekly in May 2005 promoting National Walk to School Week and a celebrity visit to a local primary school by John Beattie, who previously played rugby for Scotland. Other items have included feature articles in the quarterly Renfrewshire Council magazine and an advertising article in St Mirren's Football in the Community programme.

Another important part of campaigning is evaluation. As some of our campaigns have been up and running for a reasonable period of time, consideration is now being given to measuring what has worked well and looking at areas where improvement could be achieved.

1.9 Partnership Working

To assist in the work with schools partnerships have been formed with others such as, Active School Co-ordinators, Education Department, Road Safety team, Eco-schools, local community police, and local councillors. Schools have found it helpful when the School Travel Plan Coordinator have been able

to engage others as this makes the project more interesting and varied for the children and teachers. In addition, this can in some cases provide the campaign with extra resources.

2.0 Results so far

Having actively worked with schools in Renfrewshire over the last 24 months, 33 (63%) primary schools and 3 (25%) secondary schools have to date engaged in the school travel planning process. Two schools have completed their school travel plan and it is expected that this number will increase substantially over the next 12 months as schools continue to work hard to achieve their goal. It has been found that the whole process is more likely to be a success if the working group and the school as a whole take their time to plan and implement suitable initiatives throughout the year. In doing so, the project is more likely to succeed and have a lasting effect on parents and pupils' travel patterns.

Whilst the take up rate amongst primary schools has been pleasing, secondary schools have proved to be particularly difficult to engage. This is mostly due to time restraints and pressure on the school curriculum. Head teachers simply find it too difficult to include school travel planning within the timetable. The most obvious area in which it can be included is citizenship but even then it is not straightforward. This is a national challenge that is currently being investigated by Sustrans in terms of the transition between primary and secondary stage. Renfrewshire Council will continue to look at different ways to assist head teachers in being able to promote safe and healthy travel choices to pupils at secondary school.

2.1 Campaign Results

Walk to School Week campaigns, which take place in May and October every year have been a tremendous success. This is illustrated by the results below.

Walk to School Weeks in Renfrewshire (May 2004 – October 2005)	
May 2004	21% participated
October 2004	29% participated
May 2005	79% participated
October 2005	88% participated

The above table shows that over 3 campaigns we have increased the numbers of schools participating in Walk to School to nearly 90%.

The table below shows the numbers of schools taking part in the 'Great School Travel Tally' in September 2004 and 2005.

Renfrewshire's Great School Travel Tally September 2004 and 2005	
Primary Schools	Number of School's Participating
2004	51 (98%)
2005	51 (98%)
Secondary Schools	
2004	9 (75%)
2005	10 (83%)

The following table shows the results from the Great School Travel Tally over 2004 and 2005.

Renfrewshire's Great School Travel Tally Results for 2004 and 2005		
Primary Schools	Walking	Car
2004	50%	37%
2005	51%	37%
Secondary Schools	Walking	Car
2004	42%	22%
2005	39%	21%

If we compare the figures of primary schools in Renfrewshire, the average number of children walking to school in 2005 was 51% and during International Walk to School Week in October 2005 this figure increased to 76%. As a way of comparison, the national average of children walking to school in Scotland is 52%, (stats from the Scottish Household Survey 2003/2004).

2.2 What the future holds

Our aim is to continue to engage as many primary and secondary schools as possible and to work closely with those schools currently developing a travel plan. An additional 8 schools are already committed to developing a travel plan within the next 12 months.

As a result of measures that have arisen from surveys, quite a number of the 35 schools already developing a travel plan are now asking for engineering works to be carried out. These measures are presently funded from Renfrewshire Council's Walking Cycling Safer Streets budget. Investigation has been undertaken for most of the requests and this will continue as more arise as a result of the consultation process. Measures will be prioritised where the biggest benefits in increasing the number of children walking and cycling to school safely can be gained. Once these works have been implemented re-surveys will then be carried out to establish if an increase in those walking and cycling has occurred.

In addition, evaluation of the initiatives ongoing in schools and re-surveying of schools that have completed their travel plan will be conducted on an annual basis. Ultimately our success will be measured on the impact we are having on the numbers of children and parents walking or cycling to school.

A great impetus has been started in Renfrewshire through school travel planning and schools are engaging enthusiastically in the process with guidance and steer from the School Travel Plan Coordinators. The last 24 months have been an exciting and innovative time for all involved. It has also been a steep learning curve for the school travel plan co-ordinators and no doubt will continue to be so.

If an impact is to be gained on changing the long-term behaviour amongst users with the associated benefits of reducing congestion, enhancing health, the environment and road safety, then it is essential that funding is continued beyond 2008 so that work can continue on school travel plans, schools engage in the associated initiatives and annual reviews are undertaken.

Overall we are delighted with our results so far but realise we still have a long way to go in achieving our ultimate goal of reducing the number of journeys to school made by car.

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