
Tackling the School Run

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1 Introduction

SYSTRA Ltd, in partnership with Wellside Research and Sustrans, were commissioned by the Scottish Government with a brief *“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 study arose as part of a package of measures announced by the Scottish Government in June 2015 to address climate change, which included the intention to revise policy towards tackling the school run. 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 to:

- 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.

This paper provides an overview of the research undertaken to gather the latest evidence on school transport choices and which approaches have been effective in influencing these. The paper will highlight key factors that are of importance to address the school run, central to which is that initiatives are complementary with approaches shaped around training, behaviour change and infrastructure working best in combination and require to be sustained in terms of funding and resource delivery.

The paper will conclude by outlining recommendations in terms of priorities for Government across different sectors to help inform the development of an integrated package of policies to address the school run and encourage more school journeys to be undertaken by active modes by school pupils across Scotland.

2 Research methodology

The study comprised three main phases, as follows:

Phase One: Desk-top Familiarisation Phase – this phase consisted 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.

The purpose of the desk-top review was threefold:

- To place the research within the broader policy context
- To update knowledge of what influences school transport choices; the effectiveness of initiatives currently underway in Scotland with the aim of altering school transport behaviours; the effectiveness of international initiatives, and how these might inform the Scottish context; and
- To contribute to the selection process to identify suitable case study initiatives/schools/areas for inclusion in the primary data collection phase.

Existing literature reviews and systematic reviews were a key data source. This was supplemented by the research team's own knowledge, and a further search of literature in turn provided additional links to other material. National datasets, such as the 2011 Census, Scottish Household Survey and associated publications such as Transport and Travel in Scotland were also identified and incorporated within the review. This phase was also informed by contact and discussion with stakeholders who also provided additional documentation. An extract of the reference list from the published report is provided in Section 6.

Phase Two: Qualitative Fieldwork – a mix of 11 case study schools were selected. Criteria for selection included consideration of the type of school, geography and levels of active travel to provide case studies with characteristics of relevance to this study. While the intention was not to obtain a representative case study sample, the study sought to include a range of different types of schools and settings. The fieldwork activities consisted 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.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the numbers of interview and focus group participants within the research.

Table 1: Interview and Focus Group Participants

Stakeholder	Primary School	Secondary Schools	Total
School Staff Interviewed	7	4	11
Pupils in Focus Groups	112	66	178
Parent Interviews	69	37	106
Local Authority Officers Interviewed	-	-	15

Other Stakeholder Officers Interviewed	-	-	9
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Phase Three: Analysis and Reporting – involved to provide recommendations that can inform the development of an integrated package of policies on tackling the school run.

3 Context

3.1 School travel trends

The Sustrans' Hands Up Scotland Survey (HUSS) is an annual survey undertaken in the second week of September each year. Established in 2008, HUSS is the largest national dataset recording how pupils travel to school across Scotland. The most recent available HUSS data for 2015 reported that over 2,060 schools took part in the survey across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

As shown in Figure 1, 49.7% of pupils surveyed in 2015 said that they normally travel to school in an active way (walking, cycling, using a scooter or skateboard). A further 7.8% of pupils said that they normally park and stride to school. 42% of pupils surveyed in 2015 said that they normally travel to school using only a motorised mode of transport. The majority, were either driven to school (22.4%) or took the bus to school (17.9%). A further 1.7% travelled by taxi.

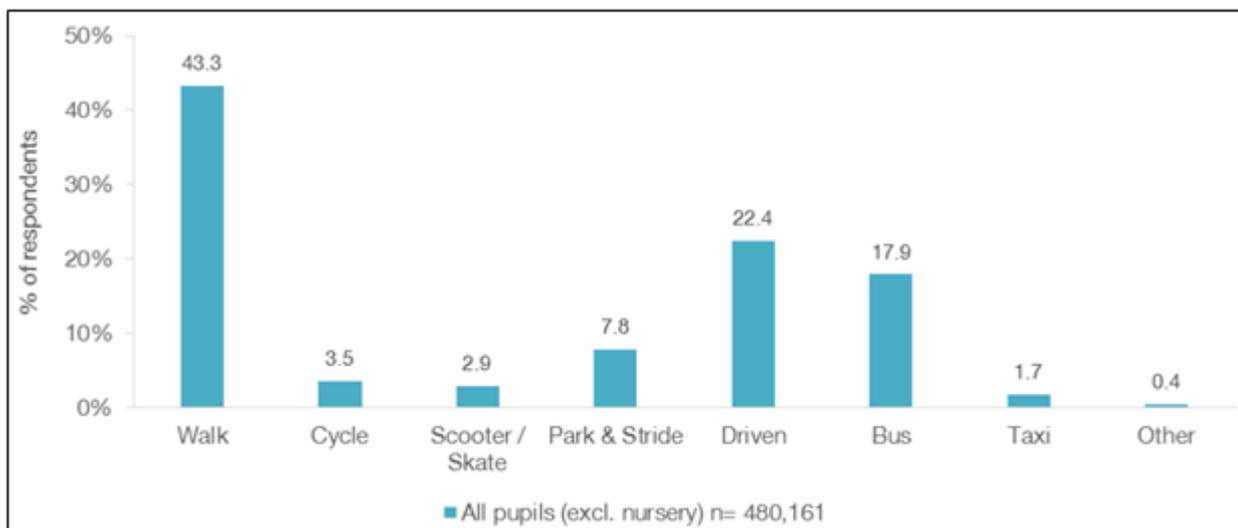


Figure 1: National Travel Modes - All School Pupils (exc. Nursery), (Sustrans, 2016)

Further analysis of 2015 HUSS survey data identified:

- Primary school pupils are more likely to travel to school actively. There is a decrease in car use from primary to secondary school, with increased use of public transport among secondary school pupils reflecting larger school catchments and associated school bus provision; and
- A comparison of independent and state school results showed that pupils at independent schools are less likely to travel to school in an active way than those in state schools (primary, secondary and special education needs (SEN))

In summary, school travel trends indicate that active travel accounts for the largest proportion of the school journey in Scotland, but varies between primary and secondary years as well as state and independent schools. This is reflective, in part, of the school catchment area alongside wider factors which are further explored through the literature review and fieldwork.

3.2 Policy

The promotion of active travel to school is an issue which cuts across different policy areas as summarised in Figure 2. The *National Transport Strategy* (NTS) sets the long-term vision for transport

policy in Scotland. It was first published in 2006 and more recently refreshed in 2015 followed by an announcement in August 2016 that a full review will be undertaken and now in progress. In terms of school travel, the NTS notes that:

“We need to tackle the congestion problems in many of our cities and towns, including those caused by the School Run which also lead to inactive lifestyles for our children and road accidents which cause deaths and injuries and contribute to problems of congestion and unreliable journey times.” National Transport Strategy (Transport Scotland, 2016)

The NTS is complemented by mode specific policies, including *A Long-Term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030* (Transport Scotland, 2014), *Cycling Action Plan for Scotland 2017 - 2020* (Transport Scotland, 2017) and *Let's Get Scotland Walking: The National Walking Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2014). Wider policies in relation to planning include the *National Planning Framework 3, Scottish Planning Policy, Designing Streets* (2010), *Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future* (2009) and *Creating Places* (2013). *Cleaner Air for Scotland - The Road to a Healthier Future CAFS* (Scottish Government, 2015) recognises that the health impact of air pollution can have a negative impact in terms of the loss of school time as a result of related illnesses.

From a health perspective, it is recognised there is strong evidence that being physically active is beneficial for the health of body and mind. In parallel, there is also recognition that active travel has a positive contribution to make in terms of physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles supporting *Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2010) and *A More Active Scotland: Building a Legacy from the Commonwealth Games* (Scottish Government, 2014).

3.3 Factors influencing school travel

The desktop review and fieldwork identified there are many and wide ranging factors which influence travel choices for the journey to school. These range from the individual level in terms of pupil and parent perceptions and travel distances through to the school in terms of how active travel is viewed and promoted. Wider local and national policy is also key in terms of home to school transport provision as well as considerations pertaining to planning concerning the location of schools and provision for active travel in both the surrounding environs along with the school grounds.

Wider aspects in terms of linkages between school travel and benefits of active travel in relation to, for example, health and well-being are more widely recognised. The intricate linkage between the school run is, however, more far reaching. Busy lifestyles and demands on time can influence travel behaviour as can flexible working practices, school wrap around breakfast and after school clubs. This can have an influence on travel choices through, for example, the trip chaining of the journey to school with another purpose such as a work or shopping trip and resultant impact of convenience on travel choice.

Transport and Travel in Scotland 2015 reported on the reasons for school travel choices in Scotland which are summarised in Table 2. Key points include:

- Of the pupils who usually walk to school, 90% do so because the school is nearby, while 41% who travel by car do so because it is the most convenient mode. 40% who use a school bus and 40% who use a service bus do so for the same reason – ‘most convenient’;
- The second most popular reason for those who travel by car identified that it served to offer the ‘safest method’ (20%), while for school bus the second most popular reason stated was also attributed to it being the ‘safest method’ and for service bus the second most common reason related to it being ‘too far to walk’; and
- The most popular reason for primary children not using public transport is that they are ‘too young to travel on their own’ (55%). For secondary aged children the main reasons are that ‘it is inconvenient’ (27%) and parents ‘prefer to use the car’ (49%).

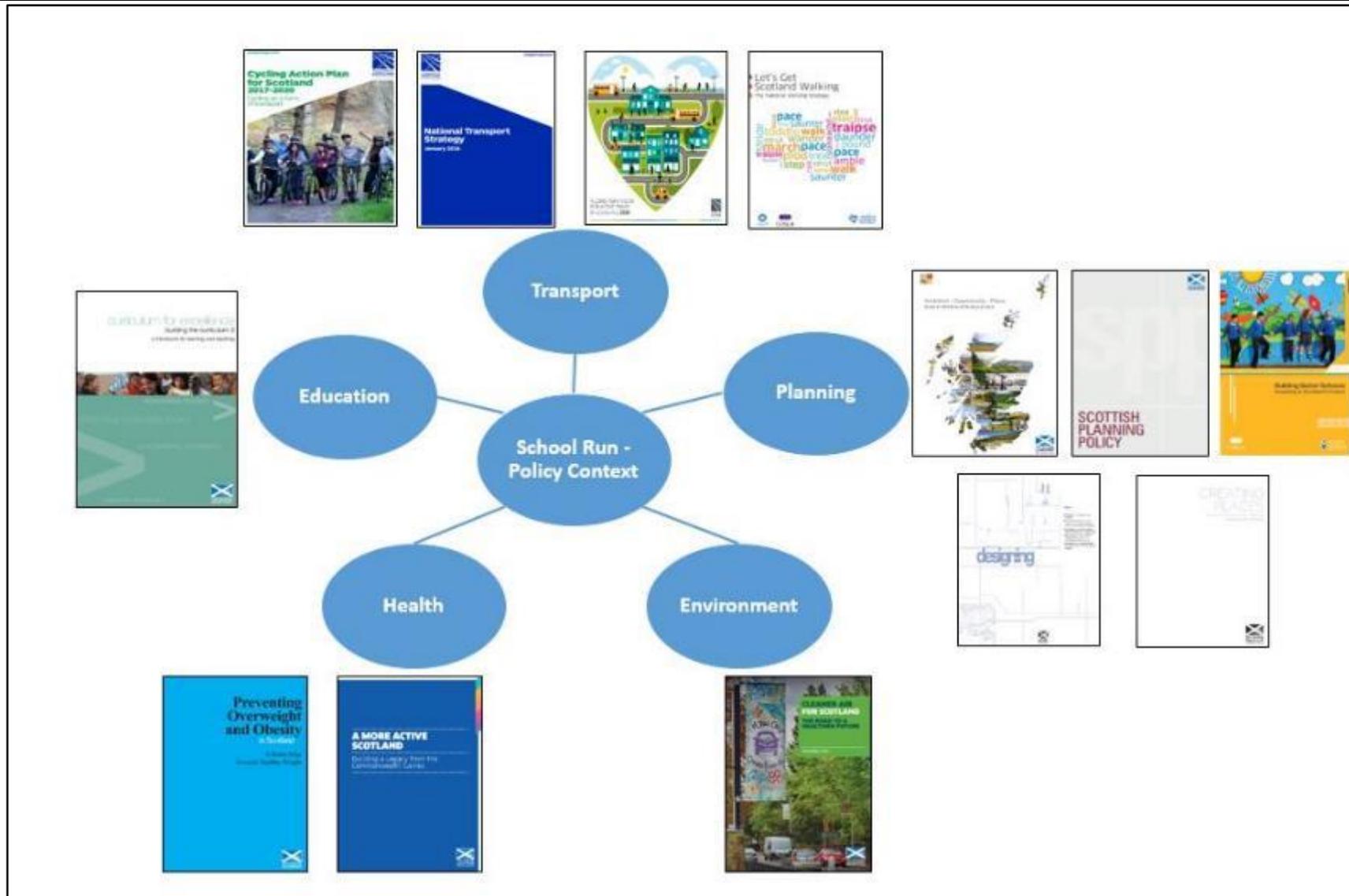


Figure 2: School Run – Policy Context

Table 2: Reasons for Transport Choice to Children's Full-time Education Establishment, 2004-2015 (Scottish Government, 2016)

Reason	Walking	Car or Van	School Bus	Service Bus
Close/Nearby/Not far away	90%	7%	5%	11%
Most convenient	8%	41%	40%	40%
Travel with friends	4%	1%	6%	4%
Safest method	1%	20%	22%	2%
Quickest method	4%	14%	10%	7%
Only method available	2%	11%	18%	23%
Too far to walk	0%	16%	21%	24%
No public transport	0 %	3%	4%	2%
Public transport unsuitable (e.g. too infrequent)	0%	2%	2%	0%
Good exercise/fresh air	5%	0%	0%	0%
No car/Transport	0%	0%	0%	3%
Cheapest method	0%	1%	1%	1%
It is free	0%	0%	14%	0%
On way to work	0%	9%	0%	0%
Too young to travel any other way	0%	7%	2%	1%
Relative meets child	0%	1%	0%	0%
Other reason(s)	0%	5%	1%	2%
<i>Sample size (=100%)</i>	<i>930</i>	<i>470</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>100</i>

3.4 School travel initiatives in Scotland

The research 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 wider desktop 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. This section provides a brief overview of some of the different types of initiatives in place to promote sustainable and active travel for the school journey:

3.4.1 School travel plans

School travel initiatives, including those developed as part of a School Travel Plan (STP), are intended to increase the number of pupils who travel by active and public transport to and from school. They also seek to help educate children in the issues surrounding personal health, the environment and the

benefits of sustainable transport, and to promote a more pleasant environment in the neighbourhood immediately surrounding the school.

3.4.2 Training

- **Bikeability (Cycling Scotland)** is a cycle training scheme designed to give children the skills and confidence they need to cycle safely on road, and to encourage them to carry on cycling in later years. Most training is delivered to pupils in schools, organised through their local authorities. Over 40% of primary schools in the 29 participating authorities offered Level 2 training in 2014-15 with participation showing an increasing trend as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Bikeability Level 2 Training: 2010-11 to 2014-15 (Cycling Scotland, 2016)

3.4.3 Behaviour change

- **Walk Once a Week - WoW (Living Streets)** has been running for nearly 20 years with the objective of encouraging school aged children to walk to school more often. Participation is encouraged by the reward of collectible badges which are awarded for all active travel journeys - cycling, scooting/skateboarding and park and stride as well as walking. While the scheme promotes walking at least once a week, the ambition is, however, for school children to walk as often as they can.
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- **Walk to School Week (Living Streets)** is an annual week-long event held every May in celebration of the walk to school. The challenge is for everyone, where possible, to walk (or cycle, scoot/skateboard, park and stride) every day during Walk to School Week. During Walk to School Week, the Walk of Fame now also takes place as well in the shoulder week before and after. This has been developed to provide inter-school competition and proven to have impact in terms of promoting increased levels of active travel and to have a long-term impact in maintaining levels.
 - **I-Bike (Sustrans)** is an intensive pro-cycling curriculum linked programme to schools in Scotland which takes the form of a variety of activities and competitions throughout the academic year. The overarching aim is to increase the number of pupils cycling to school and in leisure time. Specific aims are to counter the decline in cycling levels as pupils move from primary to secondary school and to recognise and support the different needs of boys and girls.

- **Give Everyone Cycle Space (Cycling Scotland)** is a campaign which runs every May with the aim to encourage more people to cycle by creating high levels of driver awareness around people on bikes to make Scotland's roads more cycle friendly. The campaign is advertised by different media including TV, billboards and on buses.
- **Junior Road Safety Officers (Road Safety Scotland)** is an initiative targeted at upper primary school pupils who are elected by their peers to be officers with responsibility for raising awareness of road safety in their school and transport issues more widely.
- **The Big Pedal (Sustrans)** is an inter-school cycling and scootering challenge. On each day of the challenge schools compete to see who can record the greatest number of pupils, staff and parents cycling or scootering to school. Schools log their journeys on the Big Pedal website and are given a daily score to help mark their progress. During the Big Pedal 2016, schools recorded over one million journeys by bike and scooter in two weeks.
- **School Camps (Cycling Scotland)** is an annual week-long residential camp targeted at S4 to S6 pupils to develop a project with a focus to promote cycling in their school which is complemented by certified bike maintenance, first aid and cycle training courses. On return to their school, pupils implement their project and are also encouraged to take part in wider activities such as led rides for pupils at feeder primary schools. S3 pupils have been included in some schools to extend the involvement period before pupils leave.

3.4.4 Infrastructure

- **Safer Routes to School** is a programme to fund infrastructure measures to promote safe access to schools, through for example signed off-road links to/from schools.
- **School Streets** is a scheme which involves the prohibition of vehicular traffic on streets within proximity to schools during the school travel period and are administered through Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). East Lothian Council is the first local authority in Scotland to introduce School Street TROs with City of Edinburgh Council also introducing a Pilot in 2015/16.
- **20mph speed restrictions** can be implemented by local authorities by different means including 20 mph speed limit zones; 20 mph limits and variable and part time 20 mph limits. Associated benefits of schemes in Scotland include safety for children walking around the area, safety for children to play in the street, better conditions for walking, less traffic accidents and better cycling conditions with related changes in the number of children travelling to school by active modes.

3.4.5 Curriculum and wider programme linkages

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is founded on the principles of a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum for 3 to 18 year olds in Scotland, and based around six levels – Early, First, Second, Third, Fourth and Senior. This approach provides opportunities to integrate different programmes into classroom learning, including initiatives with a transport theme. A number of the school based initiatives described above, such as Bikeability, WOW and JRSO, are complemented by classroom/teacher packs with suggested lesson plans linked to CfE. Wider initiatives with Curriculum links also include Eco-Schools Scotland, Clear the Air and Switch off and Breathe.

3.5 Fieldwork summary

This section highlights the main themes which emerged through the interviews with school staff, parents, pupil focus groups and discussions with local authority officers as well as other delivery partners are drawn together. Some quotes from the research are also interwoven into the text to illustrate the types of comments and points raised in the work.

3.5.1 Scottish school travel initiative delivery

Pupils involved in the research from the participating schools largely exhibited travel patterns reflective of national trends, characterised by a tendency for more journeys to be undertaken by active modes at primary school level and for bus travel to feature more in the travel of secondary pupils. Distance and associated catchment areas at the secondary schools were particularly reflected in mode choice. Home circumstances where pupils' parents had separated also had a bearing on travel.

Across both primary and secondary schools, the weather was not a particular factor in terms of mode choice, although some pupils who walked/cycled did comment they would go by car or park and stride if it was raining or snowing, whilst others noted they altered their route (although not their mode) during the winter months.

There was variation between primary schools regarding how pupils travelled to school when younger. In some instances, car travel had been more prevalent, with those now walking/cycling previously having been driven, but in other instances active modes had prevailed throughout. In general, secondary school pupils reflected that they had travelled more actively to school when at primary school.

“It depends on the time - if there is plenty of time it doesn't matter how you travel. On the days I work it is easier if I drive you half way and then you walk to school.” (Primary School Parent)

At the majority of schools there had been active participation in national level programmes to promote travel behaviour change. The initiatives were well received and overall viewed positively across different school settings, although the difficulty in sustaining longer term impact was raised as a consideration. Active travel was also typically considered as good, providing health and environmental benefits, as well as the opportunity to socialise with friends.

“Coming in in the morning [walking via a teacher led walking bus] particularly on a Wednesday and Friday the children are calmer...most definitely because they have had a chat, they love walking with the teachers as well.....so the whole school community is involved in it, the staff really enjoy that as well and the playground is calmer.” (Primary School Staff)

“It's not just about the health, it's the social benefit as well, and the emotional health, you see the children who are quiet, reserved and whose parents have left to walk and you see their self-esteem building and their confidence building.” (Primary School Staff)

“You can see them trying to compete with each other, and trying to get that competitive edge to them, which is good for us as it tends to help them all get a little bit more actively involved.” (Local Authority Staff)

3.5.2 Infrastructure and planning

Planning for sustainable and active travel to school at the outset is integral to providing a platform for journeys to be made with less orientation towards the private car. Strengthening of national and local planning guidance to consider development from the school perspective in terms of location, access to the school gate as well as physical layout of the school grounds is key to provide environs conducive to walking and cycling as well as the infrastructure within the school to facilitate this, such as secure

bike/scooter parking. Good relationships and pro-active support from the local authority are also important to combine to drive and implement successful infrastructure changes.

“Given the size and geography of [name of town], it should really be possible for all children to walk and cycle to the school, but at the present moment in time, it’s not safe enough.” (Primary School Staff)

“Our big issue is parking, so it is just looking for ways of getting the message [out] bringing it up at assemblies and newsletters to encourage considerate parking.” (Local Authority Officer)



“The biggest things to encourage children to go by bike/ foot/cycle is if you have a school that is close enough to home. Some local schools were recently closed in [location], the council should stop closing these schools.” (Primary School Parent)

“Encouraging people to use the schools that are nearer to them rather than using schools that aren’t...” (Secondary Pupil Parent)

3.5.3 Success factors and challenges

The research identified there are varied and key requirements to the success of school travel based initiatives. Key factors include:

- School level engagement and interest, mirrored by support from the local authority;
- Engaging pupils in the initiatives, both peer to peer and in terms of ‘taking messages home’ around the opportunity and benefits of active travel within the school setting;
- Infrastructure, training and behaviour change happening in tandem or at least the building blocks being in place to facilitate active and sustainable transport; and
- Capacity and resource, with an emphasis on a dedicated team or officer, to support the school to enable active and sustainable travel and with greater involvement from Education departments.

“There needs to be more of a commitment from education themselves, they need to be saying to Head Teachers and teachers in general, this is a good thing, there are other benefits, there are curriculum links so get on board with it.” (Local Authority Officer)

“To have a continued and long-lasting impact, any blanket push of an initiative should not be at the exclusion of other programmes.” (Stakeholder)

Resource constraints and the availability of funding are the expected biggest challenge to continued time and implementation of initiatives to support and embed sustainable travel behaviour in the school pupils of Scotland. Competing pressures on school staff and local authority officers and different priorities will also have a factor. Greater emphasis is required on the inter-linkages between transport and learning as well as transport and other policy initiatives with remits to improve the health and well-being, and physical activity of school children in Scotland.

“Funding and support, and having them both together, is vital.” (Local Authority Staff)

3.5.4 Cultural and social attitudes

School culture plays an important part in developing travel behaviour change success among its pupils. The overall ethos of the school is important, along with championing staff and engaged pupils taking responsibility for developing/leading initiatives.

“It’s always really good when you have a key member of staff in the school, because they’re the driving force, and the person you know to contact, but also it is quite fragile if there is only one person that you’re speaking to.” (Local Authority Staff)

Parental attitudes are equally important, but often considered to present a key challenge in changing pupil travel behaviour. Safety concerns, time, convenience and onward travel needs were often cited as reasons for parents to drive pupils to school. However, it was also noted that more general cultural/social attitudes towards driving/walking were engrained in society, making any behaviour change more difficult to realise. It appears schools require wider support in order to normalise walking and cycling, both to school and more generally.

“I think it tends to be a part culture and part upbringing thing...so that you will walk and that walking to school is not particularly seen as a hardship, a lot of them (pupils) have done it since primary.” (Secondary School Staff)

“If you get a lift you’re still tired in the morning, whereas if you get the fresh air in the morning then you wake up.” (Secondary Pupil).

“It is healthier and you meet your friends and walk with them.” (Secondary School Pupil)

4 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. Figure 4 summarises some of the key recommendations arising from the study.

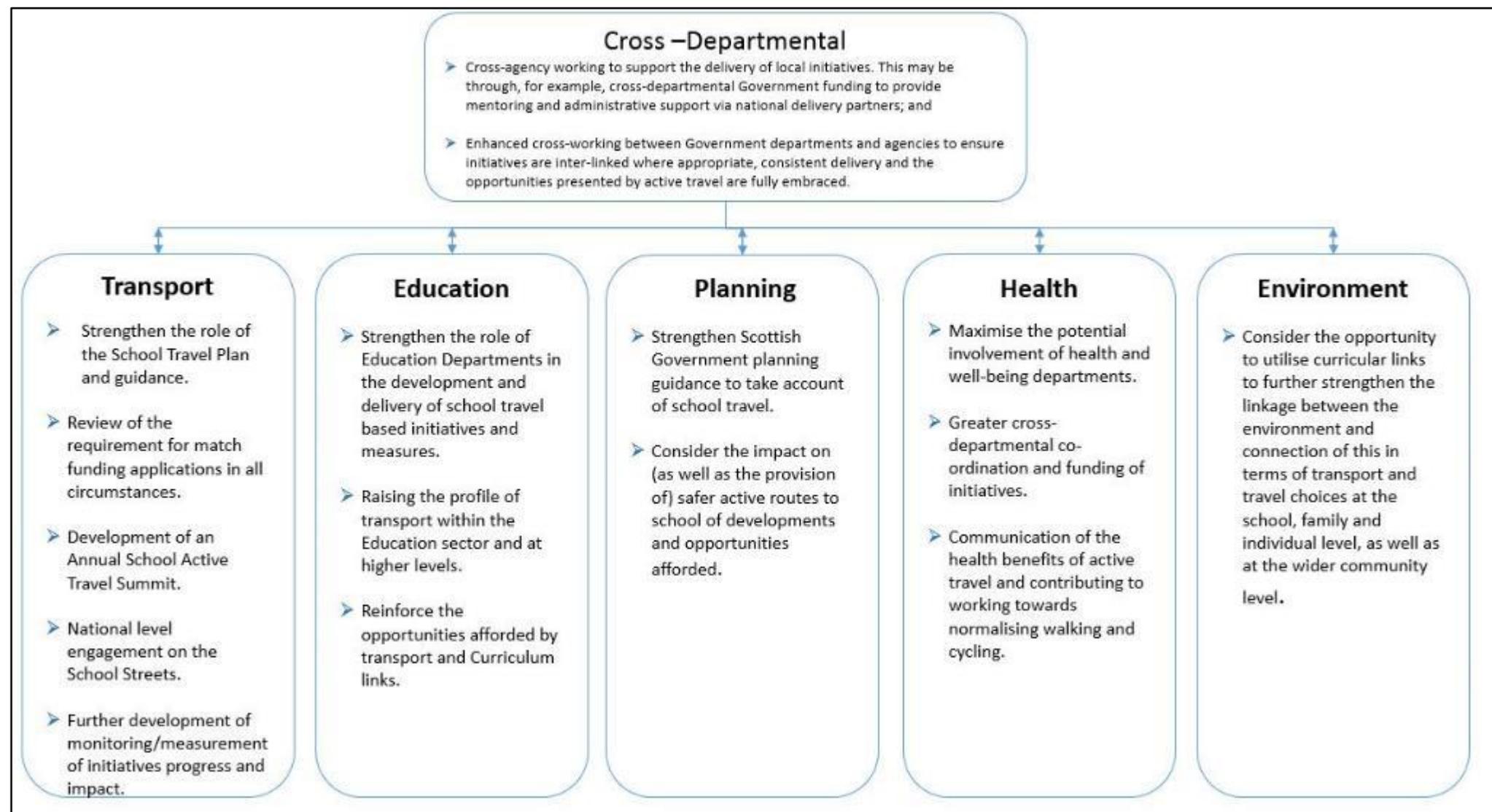


Figure 4: Key Recommendations Summary

5 Conclusion

This research highlighted that the school run is influenced by many different factors, and, therefore, a cross-cutting multi-disciplinary approach, underpinned by different and sustained intervention, is required to reduce the number of pupils travelling to school by car.

The research also illustrated the wide array of travel and behaviour change initiatives that have been implemented in schools across Scotland. There is an existing range of well-developed and well known national scale projects that local authorities and schools can utilise, and most case study schools had also developed a range of local initiatives, which varied in nature, scope and size. Schools have implemented both behavioural change initiatives and infrastructural measures/changes at the school gate and across their community to develop safer routes to school.

It was found that targeted initiatives have a positive impact, but sustained intervention is required to engender a step-change that reduces the number of pupils being driven to school. This includes providing the necessary joined up policy drivers at a local and national level across transport, planning, education, health and environment. Further infrastructure/physical interventions will only be effective if the necessary behaviour change initiatives are embedded in the school culture, local community and as part of a wider active travel strategy. This could extend beyond the school gate and into the workplaces of parents and carers responsible for the school run. Monitoring and evaluation activities which had been undertaken to understand and evidence the impact of initiatives reported a positive impact. Although outside the remit of this study, there is potential scope for further work to look at the impact of initiatives at the school and at a wider regional and national level.

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, it identified through the literature review and fieldwork, complementary elements that are of particular importance to address the school run. In summary, there is no single answer to increasing active travel for the school journey, but rather, a combination of key elements is important. Key aspects include:

- Provision of infrastructure to facilitate sustainable travel choices;
- Strong and solid delivery of training to allow safe use of the infrastructure;
- Regular and ongoing reinforcement of activities to promote and encourage behaviour change towards an increased number of school journeys being made by active and public transport modes; and
- Integrating active and sustainable travel fully into the school ethos and culture – e.g. by informing prospective parents that they would be encouraged not to take their children to school by car; having a committed Head Teacher etc.

Investment in programmes spanning training, behaviour change and infrastructure will achieve maximum benefit and flexibility should therefore be retained to ensure they are accessible and transferable to different school settings and wider school catchment communities. This will in turn serve to provide a favourable environment to boost active travel and assist in developing an active school ethos nationally, regionally and locally.

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The research study report was published in January 2017 and can be accessed at the following link -

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/01/8442/downloads>