

## Promoting Walking to School in Scotland: What Works

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### 1. Introduction

Travel to school has been a major focus for travel behaviour change programmes in Scotland since the 1990's. During this time Living Streets have lead on many of the walking programmes, including implementing the annual Walk to School Week, WOW - the year round walking challenge, and latterly introducing the innovative Travel Tracker online journey recording tool.

Evaluation suggests that these behaviour change programmes have had an impact, with WOW evaluated as having delivered a 13%<sup>1</sup> increase in active travel levels at participating schools.

Overall however, the situation in Scotland remains stable, rather than showing significant improvements. Factors making progress challenging include parent attitudes, school estate rationalisation and catchment planning. Thinking about the safety of the area surrounding their child's school, the issue that worries Scottish parents the most (52.8%) is vehicles driving too quickly<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Understanding the importance of the walk to school

Reversing the decline in walking to school remains an important goal for policy makers and practitioners, across departments within local and national government.

Both transport and non-transport factors affect school travel behaviour, and all travel choices take place within a changing economic and social context where employment, social, educational, environmental and health issues interact in complex ways with travel supply and demand.

The net effect of these changes in recent years has been the decline in levels of walking to school across Scotland. Pressure for more car travel to school has come from changing educational needs and school locations, lifestyle changes, changing family structures, settlement patterns, employment changes and demographic changes.

Table 8-2 National travel modes: all schools (excluding nursery), 2008-2015<sup>39</sup>

Year	Walk	Cycle	Scooter /Skate	Park & Stride	Driven	Bus	Taxi	Other	Total
2008	48.3%	2.8%	0.7%	6.1%	22.0%	18.2%	1.4%	0.5%	<b>396,377</b>
2009	47.0%	2.3%	0.6%	6.7%	23.3%	18.1%	1.6%	0.4%	<b>415,804</b>
2010	45.8%	2.8%	0.7%	7.4%	22.9%	18.2%	1.6%	0.5%	<b>439,401</b>
2011	45.9%	3.0%	1.0%	7.5%	22.4%	18.2%	1.6%	0.3%	<b>427,104</b>
2012	45.1%	2.9%	1.6%	7.8%	22.2%	18.2%	1.7%	0.5%	<b>457,488</b>
2013	44.1%	3.5%	2.8%	7.5%	21.4%	18.8%	1.6%	0.4%	<b>467,397</b>
2014	44.2%	3.4%	2.8%	7.8%	21.9%	17.7%	1.6%	0.5%	<b>487,147</b>
2015	43.3%	3.5%	2.9%	7.8%	22.4%	17.9%	1.7%	0.4%	<b>480,161</b>

Sustrans / Scottish Government Hands Up Survey – travel to school

Table 8-2, Hands Up Survey data 2008-15, indicates a slight overall decline in active modes of travel to school in Scotland during the 8 year period that this survey has been taking place.

Walking as the main mode of travel to school has decreased the most, with a drop of 5% since 2008, while cycling and scootering to school have seen a combined increase of 2.9% during the same period. Along with an increase of 1.7% in the amount of 'Park and Stride' being recorded in the Hands up Survey the combined active share of travel to school has remained stable.

This is reflected in the reported number of driven journeys to school, which has remained within the range of 21-23% throughout the survey period.

**Table 9-1 National travel modes: by school type, 2015<sup>44</sup>**

School Type	Walk	Cycle	Scooter /Skate <sup>45</sup>	Park & Stride <sup>43</sup>	Driven	Bus	Taxi	Other	Total
Nursery	39.3%	3.2%	3.8%	3.7%	46.1%	2.7%	1.0%	0.3%	<b>21,398</b>
Primary	44.6%	5.1%	4.5%	10.0%	26.8%	7.1%	1.7%	0.2%	<b>298,194</b>
Secondary	42.7%	1.0%	0.2%	4.1%	14.3%	35.9%	1.2%	0.7%	<b>173,841</b>
SEN	2.0%	0.5%	*	*	3.4%	41.0%	48.5%	4.6%	<b>2,165</b>
Independent	14.9%	1.3%	1.4%	10.3%	46.2%	23.2%	0.3%	2.4%	<b>5,961</b>

The impact of larger catchment areas is illustrated in table 9-1 by the prevalence of motorised modes of travel to Independent schools.

The most important family and lifestyle factors affecting the propensity to walk are parental choice of travel to work (e.g. dropping children at the school gate when passing), parental social attitudes, number of cars in households and distance from school. Concerns about safety deter parents from allowing their children to travel independently. Parental work schedules are widely reported as a key constraint on walking.

In 2015 Living Streets commissioned a survey<sup>3</sup> of just over a thousand parents of primary age children to help determine some of the most important factors influencing their decisions about the journey to school:

- 95% of parents said that improving children's health was a priority for Government
- 86% of parents support 20mph speed restrictions and parking enforcement around all schools
- 82% feel more schemes such as Park and Stride should be a government priority
- 76% of parents with children at primary school think getting more children walking to school is a right priority for the new government
- 67% of parents believe more needs to be done to increase children's confidence in using the streets
- 63% support increasing car-free zones outside of school
- 42% of parents with primary school children have witnessed verbal or physical aggression between other adults immediately outside the school gates

### 3. The Living Streets approach – WOW

**WOW**, the year-round walk to school challenge from Living Streets Scotland rewards primary school pupils who walk to school *at least* once a week with a monthly collectible badge, helping create a healthy habit for life.

The WOW challenge has been running in Scotland for over a decade. During this time the programme has been refined and updated but the concept of **recording** and **rewarding** active travel choices has been retained throughout.

Key to the programme's success is embedding the process of recording and rewarding into the daily school routine and strengthening cross curricular links to support learning.

For example; the design of the badges, by the pupils themselves as part of a national art competition, has become an opportunity to increase engagement and drive up enthusiasm for the scheme. Recent yearly badge themes have linked to curricular topics in geography, history, the environment and healthy living and supported monthly learning resources and lesson plans provided for teachers.



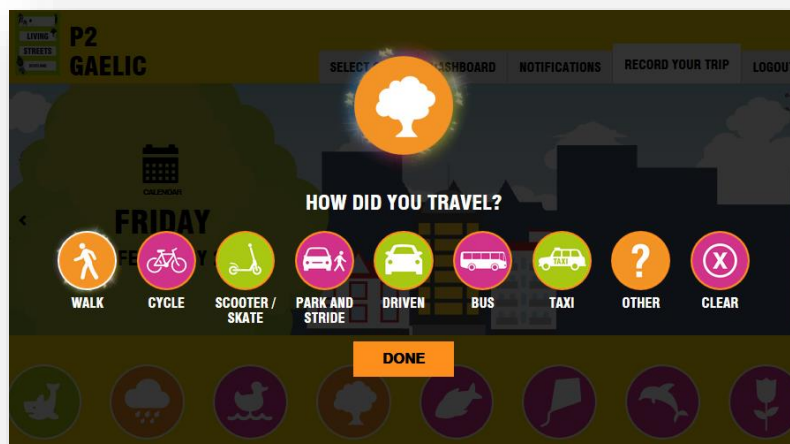
Highland Cow Badge Design Winner – Perth and Kinross

As part of WOW, the innovative Travel Tracker online tool has been developed to enable schools to easily record and reward walking and other sustainable journeys using the classroom interactive whiteboard.

Previously, wall charts had been provided to record the daily trips to school and assess which pupils were due to receive a badge reward at the end of each month.

The use of an online tool, rather than paper charts, has greatly simplified the process of recording and rewarding journeys and enabled local authority partners to readily review, in real time, the impact of WOW and other behaviour change initiatives.

Participating WOW schools have shown a 13 per cent increase<sup>4</sup> in walking and a similar percentage reduction in driven journeys to school.



Daily journey logging on the Travel Tracker – matching mode choices to the Hands Up Survey

**3.4 million journeys** were recorded on the Travel Tracker in over **200 schools** across **18 Local Authority** areas in Scotland during 2016. Of these journeys **2.6 million** were active in part or total.

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To increase engagement further WOW schools in Scotland are offered the opportunity to play the 'Walk of Fame', inter-school competition at various points throughout the year. Participating schools are sent a daily top ten Walk of Fame, compiled from participation and active travels levels recorded by schools on the Travel Tracker.

Pupil participation in the competition, measured by the number of registered users on the Travel Tracker, increased by 24.4% during a recent Walk of Fame promotion and active travel levels (based on Hands Up Scotland survey data categories; Walk, Cycle, Scooter/skate and park and stride) were maintained significantly above the national average at between 79% and 82% during the period of additional promotion.

#### 4. Supporting soft measures with street closures

The City of Edinburgh Council based its 'School Streets' project on the successful school street closures in neighbouring East Lothian Council. Eleven schools across Edinburgh which suffered problems with high volumes of traffic were selected to trial school street closures. Experience from the pilot study shows an overall positive response from pupils, parents and teachers, and that opinions of the project tended to improve once the trial had begun. Some residents in the surrounding areas raised concerns, but solutions were found in many cases (e.g. by issuing permits to ensure continued access). Following the implementation of the trial, there was a:

- 9% (parents) and 21% (residents) increase in agreement that motorists were complying with the rules<sup>5</sup>
- 20% (parents) and 16% (residents) decrease in those who thought that school street closures negatively impacted upon their day-to-day life
- 3% increase in children walking to school
- 2% increase in Park and Stride
- 6% decrease in children being driven to school

Comments from Chris Powell, Head Teacher, Cramond Primary School, Edinburgh on the School Street closures:

*"The amount of traffic directly outside the school's main entrances has reduced significantly. This has made it safer for our children when walking along or crossing the two main streets directly outside our school.*

*"Some residents and parents were initially upset with the street closures. Local residents were issued with passes, which allowed them to drive in the closed off streets at any time."*

And on the impact WOW alongside the street closures:

*"Our students love earning badges through Living Streets' WOW project and take a lot of pride in choosing healthier and more environmental friendly ways to travel to and from school."*

#### 5. The way ahead – challenges and opportunities

The changes that are happening across the Scottish school estate, with a falling number of schools overall leading to larger and less walkable catchments have a significant impact on levels of walking to school. Alongside this, in situ 'health promoting' interventions, such as school ground walking programmes, potentially reduce the incentive for schools to participate in walk to school programmes, which are more challenging because they focus on the behaviours of parents as much as pupils.

Stronger and more deliberate application of proven behaviour change methodologies, such as the Scottish Government's ISM behaviour change toolkit, should be applied to the walk to school. These tools are ideally suited to tackling the common barriers associated with - increasing levels of walking to school; addressing perceptions about safety, helping to re-establishing social norms through programmes such as WOW, and introducing material changes such as street closures.

More joined up and interdepartmental working will be required to develop a truly sustainable school estate; not one that is reliant on motorised transport solutions to access state of the art facilities designed in isolation from the communities that they serve.



Example of a walkable neighbourhood  
(Designing Streets)



Example of poor spatial planning and low  
priority given to active travel.

## Conclusion

The most effective processes to manage growth in walking to school systematically address all of the factors affecting school travel choices. Only removing one barrier can leave other obstacles resulting in little or no overall effect. Similarly, short term 'one off' type initiatives may provide good awareness raising opportunities but often result in limited long term impact.

As a long term, embedded, behaviour change programme WOW has demonstrated that alongside other interventions, such as school street closures, infrastructure improvements and inter-school competitions, real and significant changes to the levels of walking to school can be achieved.

Scotland could be setting an example for other parts of the UK with a focussed, consistent and clearly funded approach to support the walk to school, leaving a healthy, walking legacy for generations to come.

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## References:

- 1, 4 2013 WOW Scotland impact evaluation report
- 2 March 2016 survey by Onepoll
- 3 Living Streets / YouGov poll April 2015
- 5 Edinburgh Council – School Streets Pilot Evaluation

Living Streets acknowledge Derek Halden Consultancy for their contributions to this paper