

Transforming young people's travel

Smarter choices for everyday journeys





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Foreword

Success for Sustrans is when people are able to choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and our environment. This means people of all ages and abilities being able to walk, cycle and use public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

That's why we've concentrated on the travel and play needs of children. If we can create the right space for young people to be out and about by foot and bike, independently and actively, then others will follow.

Enrique Penalosa, a former mayor of Bogota in Columbia and pioneer in the innovative use of public space, put it brilliantly: "Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for all people."

But you have to start somewhere, and the school journey is a natural beginning. It's usually short and local, perfect for walking and cycling. A huge part of children's lives, it's also a great way of establishing an active travel habit from an early age.

We've been inspired by evidence and examples in Denmark and the Netherlands, where cycling in particular is so ingrained and public space so successfully created around their needs, that Dutch children make over a third of their trips by bike¹.

Sadly, whilst our children have Dutch-style aspirations, with nearly half wanting to cycle to school², only 1-2% achieve this UK-wide³. Turning this desire into reality is clearly the right thing to do, and has so many benefits:

- **increased physical activity**, tackling our chronic obesity problem and even helping improve academic results
- **a cleaner environment**, lowering both local air and noise pollution, and helping us achieve our carbon targets
- **reduced congestion** that improves the reliability of our road network.

We're thrilled that, with our partners and the children themselves, we are able to transform the lives of young people all over the UK. This success comes from building skills and confidence, in children and parents, combined with delivering safe walking and cycling routes, and developing community consensus to reduce traffic speeds and volume.

As you will see in this report, the more we put into our efforts to get children out of the back seat and onto their feet or two wheels, the more they – and we – will get back.



27%

the number of children regularly cycling to school where there is a Sustrans officer working²



65%

the increase in walking when working with rural schools in Northern Ireland⁴



890,000

bike and scooter journeys to school in the Big Pedal 2012, the UK's biggest school cycling competition⁵

How do we increase levels of walking and cycling by children?

- we work with children in schools to give them the skills and confidence to travel under their own steam, and their parents and teachers the peace of mind to let them
- we create a pro-cycling and walking culture in the school community, inspiring children and their parents to get involved and generating positive publicity, with far-reaching benefits beyond the school gate
- we create networks of walking and cycling routes around schools to create safe routes for children, and others, to get about more by foot and bike.

Around schools:

Wherever possible we also work with our partners to make the streets around schools safer for children by improving crossings or building new walking and cycling routes linking schools to their community and the National Cycle Network.

We focus on:

- auditing existing walking and cycling provision in and around schools
- conducting walking and cycling feasibility studies
- design and delivery of improvements to crossings and access points around schools, and reducing traffic speed
- design and delivery of walking and cycling routes to schools
- installing cycle and scooter storage.

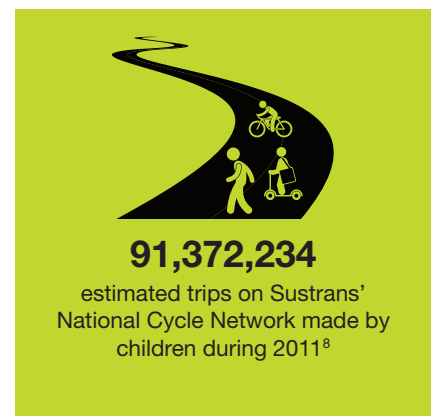
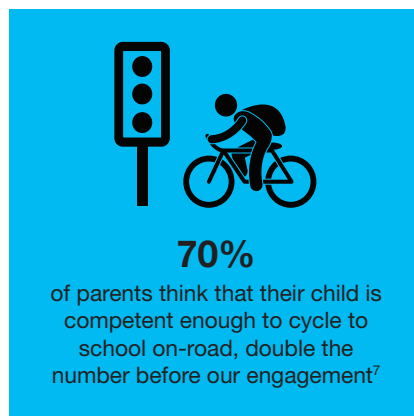
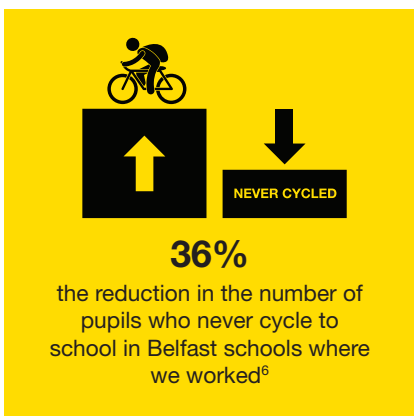
In schools:

Our officers deliver a planned programme of activities to increase walking and cycling and create a supportive environment.

They do this by:

- working with the school management team to gain their full support for the programme
- using every opportunity possible to explain the benefits of cycling and walking to the children, their parents and teachers
- addressing parental and school concerns about the safety of children getting around on foot and by bike, with the help of the local authority and other partners
- organising practical activities that help give people confidence to walk and cycle more, including group cycle rides and walks, cycle training and bike maintenance
- linking cycling and walking to the school curriculum
- providing training opportunities for teachers and parents, enabling them to start leading activities themselves
- organising local events, generating positive publicity and motivating children, parents, staff and community members to join in
- arranging UK-wide mass-participation events, such as the Big Pedal
- providing ongoing support of schools as they progress through the Sustrans School Mark, our scheme to recognise and encourage long-term commitment to cycling and walking.

The evidence shows that creating safe routes to and around schools, combined with a focus in school on walking and cycling, achieves the greatest success.



Benefits to children

48% of children want to cycle to school², but nationally only 2% do³. Whilst 47% of children aged five to 10 walk to school³, this is 11% fewer than in 1995³, and the number being driven the average 1.5 miles to primary school³ is increasing each year.

Where we work to increase walking and cycling the impact is dramatic:

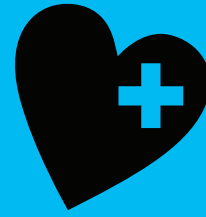
- 27% of pupils cycling regularly to school, up from 15%²
- double the levels of everyday cycling, from 4% to 8%²
- reduction in children who never cycle to school from 72% to 52%²
- work with schools in rural areas of Northern Ireland resulted in an average increase in walking from 20% to 33%⁴
- completion of a typical safe route to school in Watton, Norfolk, led to a fivefold increase in the number of children walking to school⁹.

This change has many benefits...



more active parents: 53% cycle more
23% walk more⁷

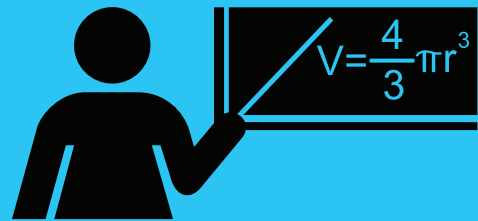
quality family time: "we used to go on not many bike rides but we go on loads now - it's good having more time with your family". "it helps get the family out the house instead of them just sitting watching TV"¹⁰



52% of parents report their child is more active and a third feel their child is generally healthier¹¹

walking and cycling increases the total amount of time children spend being active each day¹²

pupils who don't normally enjoy sport benefit: "cycling has got the pupils that aren't natural team players involved in exercise"¹³



a recent review of **14 studies** concluded that 'participation in physical activity is positively related to academic performance'¹⁴

children report feeling more alert when they get to school, and more able to concentrate in class¹⁵



"because we've done more, we've done right hand signals... I used to be scared when you take your hand off to signal, in case I fell off, but I'm not anymore"¹⁶

walking and cycling to school encourages children to be "active and also responsible", providing "a good sense of freedom and independence" and building "self-confidence"¹⁷



More girls cycling, more often

Fewer girls cycle to school than boys, especially in secondary school, and evidence shows that girls are less physically active as they get older. Our focus on girls at schools in Perth and Edinburgh saw daily cycling to school amongst girls increase from **1% to 5%**¹⁸. And regular cycling outside of school, amongst older girls in particular, increased dramatically, from **17% to 58%**¹⁸.

Our approach included three days of fun activities where girls discussed their issues and barriers to cycling, explored natural beauty and fitness, and the role cycling can play in looking and feeling great whilst being a really easy way to get around.

The course also focused on cycling skills and basic bike maintenance, and rides on cycle paths to increase familiarity with the local area, enthusing the girls involved:

“I’d never cycled before and now I do it all the time. It was fab!”. “The whole project has encouraged me to cycle more. It was such a good idea and it was so much fun.”

Children inspired... and inspiring

At just seven years-old Fraser was presented with a trophy for completing **1,000 miles** by bike to school, after being inspired by our work. Now eight, **he has cycled to school every day since he was five**, with dad Steve and younger brother Matthew.

His enthusiasm is boundless “...cycling in the fresh air is healthy and helps save the earth... it also helps with my fitness for football, swimming and gymnastics.” Steve agrees. “I tell him cycling is cheaper, Fraser comes home from school and tells me about the benefits of cycling, how it’s good for your health and the environment.”

After dropping Fraser off, Steve continues with Matthew to pre-school, but doesn’t stop there. “We always cycle at weekends – we recently did a lovely ride from Exmouth to Budleigh Salterton on the disused railway path. I do the shopping by bike and put it in my panniers, it is easier and cheaper as **you don’t need to find a car park or get stuck in traffic...**”

8% 

the average number of pupils cycling every day after a year of Sustrans’ work, four times the national average²

The benefit to schools

At peak times in the morning and afternoon, the areas around schools become very congested with cars – 43% of journeys to primary school are made by car³, despite being around a 20-minute walk on average.

General growth in traffic, with the expansion and building of new schools to cater for our growing population, will increase car use on the school run. A concerted effort by schools to encourage walking and cycling can break this spiral.

Our work significantly reduces dependence on cars, creating a safer, more pleasant environment around the school, with more active pupils and engaged parents:

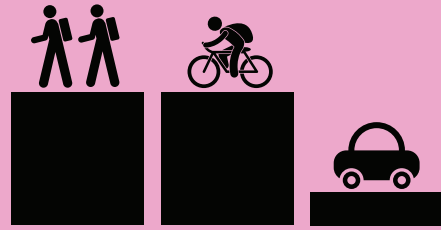
- in Northern Ireland, where we combined the development of safe routes with increasing walking and cycling, car use reduced from 64% to 49%⁴
- parents and teachers say that children arrive “more alert and ready for action.”¹³



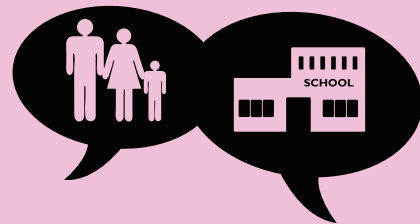
cross-curriculum learning: “The way in which cycling has been incorporated into cross-curricular activities is amazing. We’ve had art work, science lessons, eco work, carbon footprint education and even bike poetry sessions during book week!”¹³

supporting and motivating: alongside training of staff and parents, Sustrans’ School Mark scheme fosters and rewards a long-term culture of walking and cycling

environmentally-aware children: cycling and walking are seen as “helping you get fit and they’re both better ways to come to school because of cars polluting the earth”¹⁰

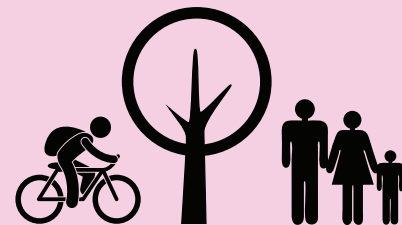


at Crossflatts Primary School in Bradford we’ve worked over several years to create safe routes around the school and increase cycling and walking. Half of the children consulted were initially driven to school, but now walk, cycle or scoot, and **70% of pupils now travel actively every day**¹⁵



school staff widely report that family members formerly not seen in school get involved in running activities to encourage walking and cycling

in addition to the children we directly engage, **11% of their adult family members** and **27% of their siblings** get involved¹¹



in Conwy, Wales, the number of pupils being driven to schools every day was reduced from **37% to 27%**, whilst everyday cycling climbed from just **2% to over 10%**¹⁹

Joan Aldridge, principal at St Mary’s Primary School, Derrytrasna, saw car use reduced: “Parents are now happy to allow their child to walk or cycle home from school as the school area is now perceived as a safer place.”



Cycling in the curriculum

Chris Donovan, headteacher of St Anne's Primary School in Surrey, is delighted with progress in his school:

"When we started, **only 1% of children cycled** regularly and we had no cycle storage, **now 23%** do and we have sufficient storage for 40 bikes, with our two sheds regularly full. St Anne's is close to some busy roads and... we have a wide catchment area. What I find particularly pleasing is that working with Sustrans has helped overcome these barriers to raise cycling levels to the high ones we have now.

"Cycling is now included in our 'learning journey' curriculum and we offer bike skills activities as part of PE lessons in a number of year groups. Cycling is becoming an embedded part of our school culture.

"As we have progressed, we have taken increasing responsibility for our own development, so that the work we do is now sustainable. Working towards the **Sustrans School Mark awards** has helped shape what we have done and given useful pointers of new things we could try and we are now working hard to achieve the Gold Award."

Academic achievement

At Kesgrave High School in Suffolk over half of their 1800 pupils cycle to school. Graded "Outstanding" by Ofsted, the deputy head, Brian Hawkins, sees a link between pupils being active on the school journey and attention levels in the classroom.

"... It is always difficult to categorically state that cycling improves performance but the school has a very high number of cyclists and walkers and is very successful in terms of examination outcomes across the board. **Pupils who cycle to school certainly arrive awake and ready to fully function throughout the day.**"

95%



teachers who say that pupils we work with are more physically active²⁰

The benefit beyond the school gate

Schools are often at the heart of communities, and the school run can be an unpleasant experience for local residents. And with nearly a quarter of cars on the road at 8.35am taking children to school³ (with 72% of these returning straight home again³), the impact on traffic flow is enormous.

Between 1990 and 2006, emissions from school travel increased by 59%²¹, the largest percentage increase within the overall carbon footprint for schools. This has implications for local pollution and carbon targets.

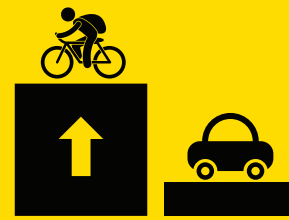
Increasing levels of walking and cycling to school means less congested roads, improved journey time and predictability for other car users, and a reduction in CO₂ emissions, pollution and noise.



active for life: in a recent survey of adults who cycle regularly, **96%** learned to ride a bike as a child, with **nine out of 10** able to ride a bike by the age of eight²²

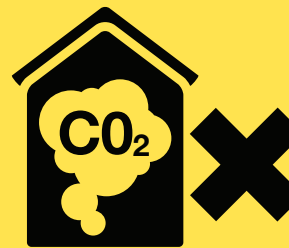
community cohesion: "One of the remarkable findings... is the way that cycling and walking can be used as a tool to bring communities together, helping them develop a sense of shared identity"¹⁵

inspiring others: in our survey of partners **89%** said we'd helped to establish local examples of good practice, and **77%** that we'd inspired other schools to take action with regards to school travel²³



where we work in schools to increase cycling, car use on the school run reduces by an average of **11% over a year**²

an assessment of our work – where we expect to achieve an average reduction in pupils being driven every day of 11% in 165 schools, there is an estimated value of over **£3.3 million** in reduced congestion in just three years²⁴



transport generates 16% of the school sector's total carbon emissions²¹. Short car trips, like the school run, are the most polluting and inefficient

parents who report driving less often since their child was engaged in cycling or walking to school are making an average of five fewer trips by car per week⁷



in Blyth, following improved walking and cycling access to schools, journeys by foot or bike by people **over the age of 65** nearly doubled, with older women making seven times more trips by bike than before. Commuting on these routes now accounts for over one in five journeys, compared to less than one in 20 previously²⁵

Access for all

Our programme to extend the National Cycle Network into communities UK-wide is benefitting many schools. **New networks and crossings of busy roads and railways have been bringing together communities**, providing traffic-free walking and cycling routes.

Adam Croft, headteacher at Charles Darwin Community Primary School in Northwich, told us about the difference a new bridge has made in accessing a local pool for swimming lessons. Whilst only a few hundred metres away, it is across a river so the school had to hire a bus – partly paid for by parents and carers.

“The opening of the Riversdale Bridge has had a huge impact... Now that we are able to walk the short distance safely we are obviously saving on the bus expense, **the children get some fresh air and exercise on the journey** and I can be far more flexible with regards to which children I take as there is zero cost to parents.

“I am also aware that the opening of the bridge has proven extremely beneficial to those families who live in Kingsmead on the opposite bank and attend my school.”

Connecting communities

Another success is the Padiham Greenway, a former disused railway line in Lancashire. With the help of the community and local authority, we converted it to a safe walking and cycling route to connect children to their school, and the wider community to each other.

Evaluation of the impact reveals a strong sense of community pride in the development of the Greenway, and in Padiham as a place to live. Parents say that the communities either side of what was previously a physical barrier have been drawn closer together. **As a result of the Greenway, they say Padiham has generally improved as a place to live**, creating not just an invaluable link but a more attractive environment to live in.



4:1 £
£

benefit to cost ratio of walking and cycling routes to schools developed by Sustrans²⁶

Working together...

We work in a variety of settings with a wide range of people, and are able to draw on a wealth of experience that ensures people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys. Our flexibility means we can provide different solutions for different partners.

For example, North Tyneside Council and the North of Tyne NHS asked us to develop an initiative to increase the number of pupils cycling and walking to school specifically to increase overall levels of physical activity among pupils and their parents.

For the 12-week pilot we drew on our experience UK-wide to develop a range of activities to engage Year Five pupils in walking and cycling. We then compared the results with a control school of similar size and location where baseline surveys showed a similar travel pattern for school journeys.

Overall, whereas at the control school there was a slight decrease in the percentage of children travelling actively to school, at the school where we worked there was a clear increase in levels of active travel.

The level of reported physical activity in these children more than doubled from an average of eight periods of physical activity per pupil per week to 19 periods¹⁷.

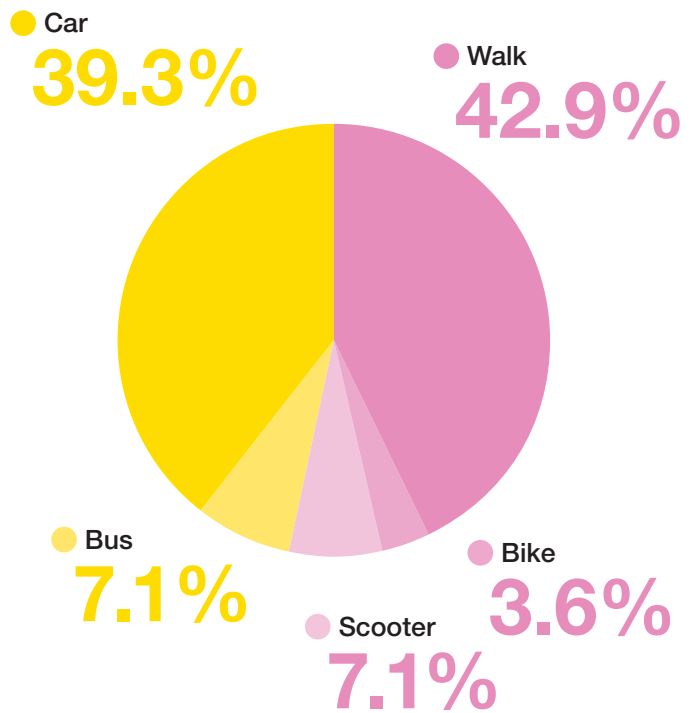
Several parents also noted a positive change in their travel behaviour. One parent, who now walks and cycles more and drives less, said:

“All physical exercise should be encouraged and made a part of everyday life to reduce obesity”¹⁷

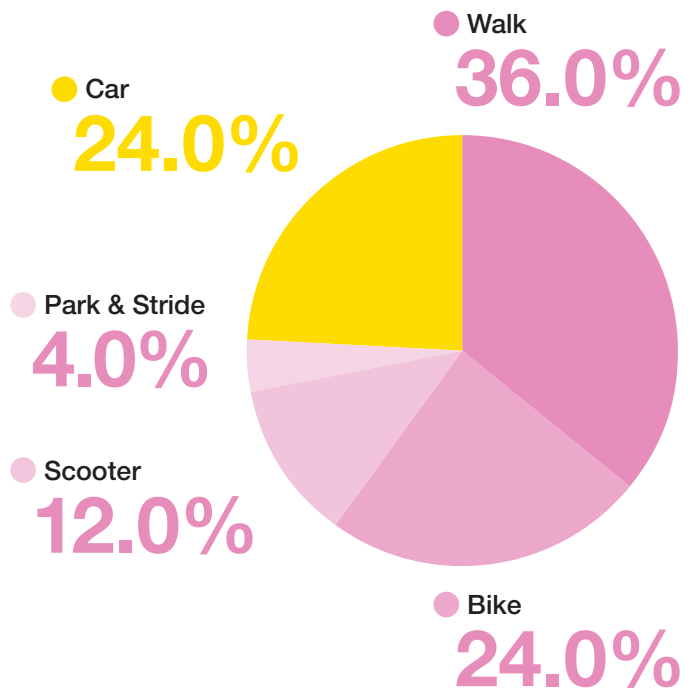
Qualitative research reveals wider benefits, with pupils and parents reporting an increased sense of wellbeing, freedom and independence. In addition, school staff observed a sense of pride and ownership amongst participating pupils, in the project and in their active travel choices.

The pilot has resulted in a wider roll-out, and we are now working to increase levels of physical activity in a range of schools in Tyne and Wear.

Travel behaviour **before** Sustrans



Travel behaviour **after** Sustrans



We have been transforming young people's travel since Sustrans began in 1977 and our aim is to benefit many more every year. Can we help you make a difference?



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Get in touch

We hope that this report has demonstrated the enormous potential for increasing walking and cycling amongst young people, and the benefits of this in raising levels of physical activity and tackling congestion.

If you'd like to work with us or discuss how we can best achieve what you need, then please get in touch via our dedicated email address youngpeople@sustrans.org.uk, or for more information visit www.sustrans.org.uk

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About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices

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