

Walking, wheeling and cycling to school



Gweithredu ar
Hinsawdd Cymru
Climate
Action Wales



Mae Trafnidiaeth Cymru yn eiddo i
Lywodraeth Cymru
Transport for Wales is owned by the
Welsh Government



TRAFNIDIAETH CYMRU
TRANSPORT FOR WALES

Introduction

What

This guide is intended to get more school children and their parents or guardians to cycle, walk or wheel to school.

It has been designed to help local authorities engage children, parents, guardians and schools to put in place effective initiatives, events and campaigns.

It is intended as a useful, practical document. We've undertaken research to ensure this guide promotes interventions that have worked previously.

We welcome the feedback of children, guardians, parents, schools and local authorities. We'll integrate this feedback into future versions of this guide.

Why

There are many benefits to children and young adults travelling actively to school. Walking, wheeling or cycling builds a child's self-confidence and independence.¹ It is an easy way to integrate exercise into children's day. Physical activity appears to improve children's academic outcomes.²

There are also wider community benefits. Fewer cars outside schools should increase safety and improve air quality. It could decrease the number of cars on the road.

A poll by Sustrans Cymru showed that 78.2% of Welsh primary school children want to travel actively to school.³ Currently, 51% travel by car.⁴ Local authorities have a key role to play in making this change happen.

How

Transport for Wales and Welsh Government are working with local authorities to change the way people travel. We're doing that through targeted interventions that we know work.

This guide provides a number of interventions, events and campaigns to be run at a local level. These are intended for communications professionals to use to promote active travel. These are key messaging to help overcome barriers to more children travelling actively to school.

It highlights a number of interventions that have been shown to work. We will update these case studies and tools as we better understand what works for communities in Wales.

78.2%

of Welsh children would prefer to get to school by active means⁵

Families could save money by walking to school over taking the car⁶

60% of primary school children live within a mile of their school⁷



Key messaging

Safety

Concern around safety is often cited as a reason why parents do not want their children to walk, wheel or cycle to school.⁸ It is important that any promotion of cycling engages with these legitimate concerns. Messaging could stress the increased independence children who travel actively to school.⁹

Other UK local authorities have had [success with closing roads](#) around schools to cars during drop-off and pick-up times. Local authorities can apply for funding through the [Safe Routes in Communities](#) grant to develop school streets schemes.

Local authorities could tie in active travel promotion with wider road safety events. For example, Living Streets research has shown an increase in children walking or cycling to school when 20mph speed limits are introduced.¹⁰

Money saving

Walking, wheeling and cycling to school is potentially cheaper than driving.¹¹ Highlighting the money saved on fuel, parking and repairs could be helpful messaging.

It is important to recognise that cycling comes with an often substantial initial outlay. Surveys have shown more primary school children in Wales scoot or skate to school—this may be another mode to highlight.¹² Cycle hire and second hand sales are another way pupils can get into cycling more cheaply.

To prevent and mitigate against theft, encourage schools to have enough secure cycle and scooter parking.

Time saving

Walking, wheeling and cycling to school can be faster than driving. 60% of primary pupils live within a mile of their school.¹³ This represents a walk or wheel of under 20 minutes and a much faster scoot or cycle.

To reinforce this message, local authorities and schools could work with Sustrans Cymru on their [Active Journeys programme](#).

Some parents and guardians report that they do not have time to walk or wheel with their child to school and reach work on time.¹⁴ They could benefit from collective community measures such as walking and cycling buses. Local authorities could also encourage businesses to increase flexible working and working from home to allow parents and guardians to travel actively with their children.

Health

Regularly walking, wheeling and cycling to school could help improve the physical health of children and young people.¹⁵

A walk or wheel of thirty minutes or more to school and back could help fulfil the activity guidelines of the Chief Medical Officer. Currently, less than half of Welsh children reach this goal.¹⁶

As far as possible, involve children and young adults in planning and leading events, engagement and campaigns.¹⁷ This will help embed active travel in their everyday lives.

Environmental

The Welsh Government has set the goal of 45% of journeys being undertaken by sustainable means by 2040.¹⁸ Increasing the frequency of children travelling actively to school is a key part of this.

Cars produce localised air and noise pollution. Cars idling at the school gate can increase air pollution. Reducing the number of children being driven to school can help reduce this pollution.



Campaigns that work

Start small

Start small. Travel behaviour does not change overnight. Success could be a person walking to school one day a week where before they drove every day.

Start with one-off events that coincide with special days or weeks. These one-off events can then build up to more frequent events throughout the year.

Living Streets runs a [Walk to School Week](#) in May. Sustrans runs a [Big Walk and Wheel](#) event in March. Their websites have lots of child-friendly campaign material.

Living Streets runs a more general [National Walking Month](#) in May.

Make it fun

If children enjoy their commute to school, they are more likely to stick with it. For younger children, gameifying their journey to school can often be successful.¹⁹ For older children, emphasizing the social aspect can encourage teenagers to travel more actively.²⁰

Living Streets has a [Walk to School Challenge](#) that rewards children for travelling actively to school. It allows schools to track how their pupils travel to school.

It is vital to engage them effectively. Use simple language and messaging to ensure that children of all ages can engage. As far as possible, involve children and young adults in planning and leading events, engagement and campaign activities.²¹

Create a community

Initiatives that target schools are more likely to be successful than targeting individual children. Embedding [School Travel Plans](#) can help build a dedicated community of people who commute by walking and wheeling.

Setting up a walking or cycling bus can encourage more pupils to get involved. The Safe Routes Partnership have a [step-by-step guide](#) to setting up a walking bus. Sustrans have a set of resources for setting up a [FRideDays Bike Bus](#).

Research has shown that the success of these buses rely on committed members of staff or enthusiastic parents or guardians.²² Local authorities might want to set up a network of people interested in and already running buses to better support them.

Embedding successes

Effectively evaluating events and campaigns can ensure that the right audience are reached and influenced. Encourage primary schools to take part in the annual [Travel to School Hands Up Survey](#). The results from this survey inform school travel planning at a local and national level.

Encourage schools who are new to active travel planning to join national networks such as the [Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes](#).

Schools could incorporate active travel into their curriculum. This would help contribute to the [Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience in the new Curriculum for Wales](#).



Endnotes

- 1 Living Streets, [Swap the school run for a school walk](#) (Undated), p22
- 2 Dwyer T, Sallis JF, [Blizzard L, Lazarus R, Dean K. Relation of academic performance to physical activity and fitness in children.](#) *Pediatr Exerc Sci.* 2001, pp225–37.
- 3 [Cross-party Group on the Active Travel Act, Active Travel to School Toolkit](#) (2021), p9.
- 4 Welsh Government, [National Survey for Wales headline results: April 2021 to March 2022](#) (2022).
- 5 Cross-party Group on the Active Travel Act, Active Travel to School Toolkit (2021), p9
- 6 Christina Bengston, [How much money can you save by cycling?](#) (2023).
- 7 Welsh Government, 'How far child travels to primary school', 2014-15, [National Survey for Wales](#)
- 8 Louise Lester and Rob Howard, [Associations between perceptions of road safety and active travel for school children and their parents - a health needs assessment](#), *International Journal of Sustainable Society* (2019), pp94-107.
- 9 Living Streets, [Swap the school run for a school walk](#) (Undated), p22.
- 10 TfW, [Default 20mph speed limit on restricted roads: Phase 1 areas. Final monitoring report](#) (2023).
- 11 Christina Bengston, [How much money can you save by cycling?](#) (2023).
- 12 Public Health Wales, Travel to School Hands Up Survey 2023 (2023), p3.
- 13 Welsh Government, 'How far child travels to primary school, 2014-15, [National Survey for Wales](#)
- 14 Living Streets, [Swap the school run for a school walk](#) (Undated), p18.
- 15 Lucinda E. Saunders, Judith M. Green, Mark P. Petticrew, Rebecca Steinbach and Helen Roberts, [What Are the Health Benefits of Active Travel? A Systematic Review of Trials and Cohort Studies](#) (2013).
- 16 Welsh Government, 'Child active 1 hour or more a day 7 days a week (age 3-17), 2021-22', [National Survey for Wales](#)
- 17 Places for Everyone, [Designing for Children & Young People: Walking, wheeling, cycling](#) (2023), p24.
- 18 Welsh Government, [Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy 2021](#) (2021).
- 19 Emma Coombes, Andy Jones, [Gamification of active travel to school: A pilot evaluation of the Beat the Street physical activity intervention](#), *Health & Place* (2016), pp62-69.
- 20 Levi, S., & Baron-Epel, O, [Adolescent Perspectives on the Impact of Peers and Social Media on Active Travel and Physical Activity: A Mixed Methods Study.](#) *Journal of Adolescent Research* (2024)
- 21 Places for Everyone, [Designing for Children & Young People: Walking, wheeling, cycling](#) (2023), p24.
- 22 NICE, [Physical activity and children Review 5: Intervention review: Children and Active Travel](#) (2008), pp45-48.

