

Our growing use of cars has a variety of environmental, social and health consequences. Some are highly visible and directly relevant to everyday life. For example, accident statistics show that our roads are dangerous, while traffic congestion has adverse effects on our health and well-being. Other impacts are less immediately obvious but no less important. For example, the gases and chemicals released by engines make a large contribution to global warming and air pollution. Indeed climate change is fast becoming the greatest challenge we face in the coming century.

The more we use cars, the more the air becomes polluted. Exhaust fumes contain carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, volatile organic compounds and particulates, all of which are harmful to health when released into the atmosphere. Soot particles cause lung damage, especially when they contain chemicals such as benzene.

Increasing amounts of urban traffic – partly caused by greater distances between home and places of work – have created fear of traffic. Because people feel less vulnerable driving compared with walking or cycling, more and more trips are being made by car. The resulting lack of exercise can cause problems for health and overall fitness.

- On average, one in seven children suffers from asthma; this figure increases to one in three in inner city areas.
- In slow moving traffic, pollution levels are higher inside cars than outside.
- Cycling or walking briskly for half an hour a day can halve the risk of heart disease.

Sustainable transport is any means of transport which reduces fuel consumption, pollution and car use. This includes cycling, rail and bus transport, walking or even travelling by scooter.

### **Transport and schools**

Young children today have far less freedom than their parents had at the same age. Fear of traffic and stranger danger, combined with the overall increase in general car use and ownership are leading to an increasing number of parents taking their children to school in the car. This has a number of consequences for pupils and staff, particularly in terms of pupil health and well-being.



Walking and cycling are excellent forms of physical activity and the journey to school can make an important contribution to increasing these activity levels. Patterns of activity are set in early childhood, so early lack of exercise can lead to a higher risk of future obesity, high blood pressure, poor psychological well-being and

coronary heart disease. Walking and cycling can help children to gain confidence and make friends, helping both to increase independence and traffic sense. Current research also suggests that more active children arrive at school more alert and focused and achieve better academic results.

YoungTransNet surveys show that many young people would like to travel in a more sustainable way, with 30% of them saying they would like to cycle to school. Statistics from the Department for Transport, however, show that currently only 1% of them do. Surveys also show that over half of all primary pupils live within a mile of their school, yet one-third are driven there.

Safe Routes to Schools (SRS) projects, run by the national organisation Sustrans, are a good way for pupils to consider alternative forms of travel and help improve access to the school for walkers and cyclists. The projects encourage and enable children to walk and cycle to school through a combined package of practical and educational measures, to:

- Improve road safety and reduce child casualties
- Improve children's health and development
- Reduce traffic congestion and pollution

SRS projects are child-centred. They build on small steps to raise awareness and change travel behaviour and benefit the whole local community by helping to create safer, healthier environments.

National Curriculum links with transport can be made in English, maths, ICT, science, design & technology, art and design as well as literacy and numeracy. The geography curriculum makes specific reference to road traffic, road safety and sustainability.

Each school is different, with its own local problems and possible solutions. Developing a school travel plan can help ensure the complete situation is considered and that appropriate action is taken. All local authorities have Local Transport Plan funding for Safe Routes to Schools, road safety training and education campaigns. There will also be a local school travel advisor who can offer help and guidance.

### **School Travel Plans**

Schools can meet the main requirements of the Eco-Schools transport theme by drawing up a school travel plan. A school travel plan is a package of ideas and actions drawn up by the school community to promote more safe walking, cycling and shared transport to and from school. In developing a travel plan, school communities show a commitment to promote sustainable travel.

Using a school travel plan, Children, parents and school staff are encouraged to think about the environment and lead fitter and healthier lifestyles, through the promotion of Walk to School campaigns, using children's long term walking incentive schemes such as the excellent WOW (Walk on Wednesday scheme), and through the promotion of cycle training and the National Bike Week campaign. More information on School Travel Plans can be found on the [Sustrans website](#)

### **Further information**



For useful information, practical advice and lesson ideas surrounding the theme of walking to school, visit the [Walk to School Campaign website](#). The Walk to School campaign is run by national charity Living Streets, and aims to encourage all parents and children to make walking to school part of their daily routine. The campaign has existed since 1995, and reaches over 2 million children each year. The campaign consists of two awareness events (Walk to School Week in May, and Walk to School Month, October) and a year-round walking promotion scheme called WoW (Walk Once a Week).

For examples of how Eco-Schools have tackled transport issues visit the Case Studies section. In particular read how Millfield Primary School in Norfolk developed a sustainable transport project called Stamp Stanley, which was voted European winner in the Toyota Environment and Innovation competition in 2007. The Links and Resources section also provides details of organisations that will be able to offer your school help on transport issues.