CYCLING
SCHOOL TRAVEL BY BICYCLE

EVIDENCE AND KEY ISSUES

In London, 50% of children aged 5 to 16 walk to school, 19% are driven and 21% take the bus (Department for Transport, 2017)

Bicycle trips represent less than 2% of trips for children aged 5 to 16

Distance travelled to school in London is on average 1.3 miles for primary schools and 3.1 miles for secondary schools.

54% of parents find there are too many cars around school gates on the school run (YouGov, 2018)

Parents' main concerns regarding children cycling or walking are lack of safe crossings, intersections and heavy traffic (Timperio & al., 2004)

The main change required to increase the levels of cycling amongst children is to create safer travel opportunities. In terms of influencing parental behaviour, the knowledge that their children are being educated and informed on safe cycling is key.

LONDON CONTEXT

The UK has not got a cycling culture as strong as the Netherlands or Denmark, where parents and children are used to cycling together. The main fear for parents across Britain is the environment in which their children have to cycle. Local authorities can influence this by upgrading infrastructure but can also help improve children's ability to interact as safely as possible with that environment.

In London, Transport for London (TfL) and boroughs have undertaken many initiatives to increase the uptake of cycling. TfL has produced a guide of good practices, including the 'On your bike guidance book'. It has also developed an accreditation scheme, Stars, which rewards schools according to their level of involvement in promoting active mobility for children. A similar project, also named Stars, was managed by LEPT from 2013 to 2016 in London and eight other urban areas in the EU, which, in addition to the accreditation, created a network of young cycle ambassadors.

In terms of infrastructure, TfL are currently merging their cycle lanes (Quietways and Cycle Superhighways) into a single identifiable brand. Those routes can be integrated into 'cycle to school' maps developed by local councils. TfL have also developed Educational resources to promote active mobility (young ambassadors programme etc.). Finally, they offer a search tool for cycling skills lessons.

Most boroughs have school travel plans developed by officers, and these are complemented by various initiatives. Hackney, for example, holds an annual ride, Bike around the borough, dedicated to school children. Barnet has several schools rewarding pupils who walk, cycle or use public transportation to school once a week with 'Wow' Badges.

Another main tool being increasingly used by boroughs are school streets. These consist of vehicle access restrictions specifically around education establishments at school run times. Hackney recently produced a guide for implementing these, which they disseminated across the UK. LEPT also produced a briefing specifically on the topic which can be accessed here. It looks into liveable streets and other types of temporary road closures.

More globally, Britain has a national scheme which allows all bike riders to begin and improve their cycling skills with three levels of attainment. The scheme, bikeability, is organised at the local level, and most training takes place in Years 5-7 (children aged 9 to 12). Since the launch of the scheme, over 2,000,000 children have been trained. Adult training is also

available. The charity Sustrans, which promotes the use of cycling, is another key resource. It has been working with local authorities and providing them with one-year programmes, guidance and toolkits to help with the uptake of cycling. It also has produced a toolkit on developing a school travel plan.

INSPIRATION FROM ELSEWHERE

Across the world, there are multiple examples of actions designed to reassure parents and reduce their fears about allowing their children to cycle. Initiatives include:
- Awareness-raising campaigns on infrastructure improvements and safety;
- Road safety and bicycle training;
- Parents/children bicycle events at schools;
- Secure bicycle parking at visible locations at the entrance of schools;
- Banning dropping children in front of schools by car to encourage walking/cycling and reduce congestion (local car-free zone);
- Local buses accommodating bikes which would reassure parents in case of bad weather etc.;
- Collaboration with local employers to lease out cargo bikes for parents to drop their children to school;
- Neighbourhood walks and rides to discover the road to school together.

Education is a central element of getting children to cycle. Around Year 6-7, 90% of Dutch schools hold a national theoretical test on traffic rules and possible situations, and 80% hold a practical test overseen by the police. Similarly, France announced at the beginning of 2018 its intention to make cycle training compulsory for children in elementary schools.

Using gamification can also be a successful means of promoting active mobility: the Traffic Snake Game, initiated in London in 2008 achieved significant modal shift (8 to 17%) across the whole of Europe. Parents' involvement was mandatory as they were the ones allowing their children to shift modes (to car-pooling or cycling). The Traffic Snake project was accompanied by other local measures, such as newsletters to inform parents of changes to the traffic or parking around schools or 'pimp' your bike workshops at schools.

Setting up bike buses at local schools is also a solution to increase parents' trust in children's cycling. The idea is that five to eight children cycle whilst accompanied by one or two adults. It had been developed in various countries and requires parents to step up and respond to the challenge. A US-based charity has developed a tip sheet on how to organise bike trips, and an example of a participation form for parents can be found here.

In January 2019, the European Transport Safety Council published a report on the status of traffic safety and mobility education in Europe. It underlines the importance of articulating the sustainable mobility agenda and road safety. Establishing modal priority for vulnerable road users (cyclists and pedestrians) is particularly recommended.

The city of Amsterdam recently produced a walkability analysis of its roads to understand how the network was currently being used and where 'frictions' arise. For that, a model was developed based upon footway width, obstacles, bicycle parking and public footway obstructions. One can imagine such an analysis with the cycle path network, looking at how useable and accessible the infrastructure is. Developing maps of local cycling paths and distributing them at schools or promoting apps that display safe itineraries is another solution.

The transportation team from the city of Davis in California has developed such a tool. Beyond the specific school trips, planners are increasingly conscious of the benefits of looking at cities from a child's perspective. The rising paradigm is that a city that is planned for a 12-year old is also fit for older citizens and everyone in between. EU projects such as Metamorphosis are looking into that – and charities such as Sustrans and others are advocating it.