

# Active School Travel

## *'A route to improvement'*

[Final Version 1.0]



A national plan for improvement prepared for the  
Active Travel Board by Public Health Wales and the  
Active School Travel National Advisory Group

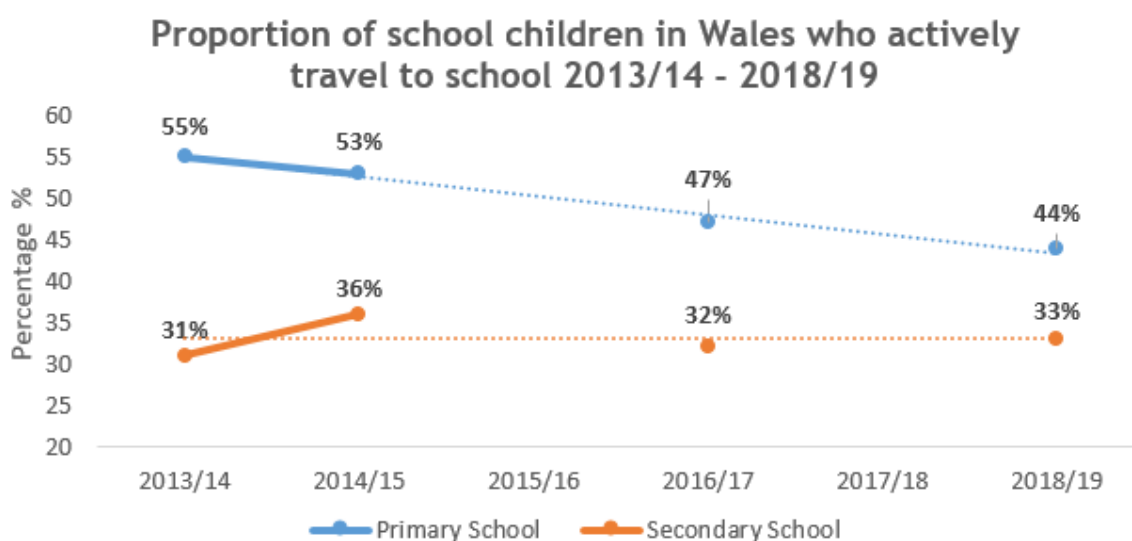
2021

## Why is Active School Travel Important?

Active school travel (AST) has multiple health, social and economic benefits for individuals and communities. Increasing active school travel will increase physical activity, improve air quality and have positive impacts on climate change. To date our collective efforts have not been successful in raising AST levels across Wales. Achieving our collective goals will require significant diversification and scaling of efforts at local, regional and national levels.

## Where are we now?

From 2013/14 to 2018/19, the number of primary school children actively travelling to school has gradually declined from 55% to 44%. This equates to an estimated 30,000 less children travelling to and from school actively. Among secondary school children, the rates have remained largely unchanged. However, as would be expected in part due to rurality, rates do vary significantly across Wales, from 47% amongst secondary school children in Cardiff, to 17% in Ceredigion<sup>1</sup>.



Source: Welsh Health Survey (until 2015) and the National Survey for Wales

A programme of work delivered at the sufficient scale and pace is required to halt the decline of AST in Wales and then sustainably increase levels for the long term.

There needs to be a step change in the way we approach improving AST at local, regional and national levels, to achieve our collective aspiration. Reshaping the policy environment, refocussing interventions towards the known influences of AST.

## What are the key influences on active school travel?

Evidence reviews and research undertaken by Public Health Wales concluded that AST is a complex behaviour with multiple drivers. The factors identified generally fell into three categories: *physical environment* (e.g. street connectivity, traffic safety, travel distance); *social characteristics* (e.g. family support, social cohesion, school support) and *socio-demographic*

<sup>1</sup> School Health Research Network, 2019/20

*characteristics* (e.g. car ownership, number of children, household education). The evidence also suggested that *walkability, perceived traffic safety, perceived personal safety* (e.g., low likelihood of bullying or injury) and positive social interaction within the neighbourhood were the most consistent factors associated with AST behaviours.

Public Health Wales commissioned a piece of detailed qualitative research with parents in both AST and non-AST households across Wales (rural and urban) in order to gain more insight into the factors that influenced travel to school. The parents of primary school children that lived up to 1.5 miles away from school and secondary school children that lived up to three miles away from school took part in focus groups and further individual in-depth interviews to explore in detail their beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and intentions on their child or children engaging in AST or not.

**Table 1: Influences on Active School Travel**

Sub-theme/category	Positive Influences	Negative Influences
<i>Environmental Factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good Weather</li> <li>• Daylight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor Weather</li> <li>• Reduced daylight hours</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<i>Socio-demographic Factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbourhood socio-economic status</li> <li>• More than one parent in the household</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car ownership</li> <li>• Low household education</li> <li>• Low household income</li> </ul>
<i>Beliefs about travel by car</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fits with parents' routine</li> <li>• School is close</li> <li>• Difficulty parking, traffic and congestion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't fit parents' work routine</li> <li>• Habit</li> <li>• Driving more convenient (time management)</li> </ul>
<i>Parent Factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Quality time with child</li> <li>• Socialise with other parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality time with child in car</li> </ul>
<i>Parents views on child</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusting in the child's capabilities</li> <li>• Develops independence</li> <li>• Enjoyment</li> <li>• Social benefits/peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about the child's capabilities</li> <li>• Negative experience e.g. distance, terrain, antisocial behaviour</li> </ul>
<i>Parent Concerns - Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route not too unsafe with traffic</li> <li>• Feels fairly safe from strangers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic safety</li> <li>• Stranger danger</li> <li>• Being protective</li> </ul>
<i>School factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School discussing issue (e.g., learning about carbon footprint)</li> <li>• Good storage for clothes, bikes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of secure cycle / scooter, clothes storage</li> </ul>

A key finding to emerge from the research was that parents and their beliefs and perceptions were often the key drivers behind whether their children engaged in AST or not. It was also evident that parents whose children travel actively and those who do not generally identify the

same barriers or concerns, particularly around safety and household chaos in the morning. The difference was that parents whose children travel to school actively were much more aware of the benefits of AST and were able to balance these against the barriers/risks.

The research indicates that increasing rates of active school travel will require a focus on parents as the primary audience, particularly for primary school children and addressing the actual and perceived risks and benefits of AST.

## What needs to change and how?

To deliver change at a population level we will need coordinated, cross policy and cross sector working focused on a shared understanding of the changes required and how they are best achieved.

Effort and focus should shift away from educational approaches aimed at individuals and structural interventions developed in isolation to an integrated package of options and measures using best practice approaches in behaviour change. This should link in with existing national AST initiatives, broader active travel agenda and funding opportunities (e.g., the Active Travel Fund, Welsh Government).

There are just under 1500 schools across Wales and around 470,000 pupils, increasing active school travel by 1% point a year would mean an increase in the number of children travelling actively to school of 4700. The actions we take need to be able to deliver change at that scale, year on year and to sustain the change.

The primary influences will not be the same in all communities. The first stage is to understand at community level what the key influences are for that community. Once these are identified, we need to focus our collective efforts on the actions which have been shown to work in Wales or elsewhere and adopt these. There are no easy solutions to complex problems and a range of complementary actions will be required to achieve change.

To deliver sustained improvements in AST we will require concerted action at national, regional and local levels, drawing on the assets of various partners in the true spirit of shared responsibility. This may mean significant changes to the ways many of us and our organisations work but in turn will provide new opportunities.

## The Route to Improvement

A series of strategic objectives has been identified to support change accompanied by a more detailed delivery plan, which is included as Table 2.

- **Develop and agree a shared stated ambition and joint policy goals with challenging but achievable targets across policy areas within government.**

In recognition of the key role increased AST plays in delivering on priority areas within the *Programme for Government* it is important that there is a shared understanding of the main drivers and areas for change; a shared understanding of how change can be achieved. This needs to be translated into specific asks and deliverables, via the relevant accountability mechanisms, within different parts of the system to achieve that change.

- **Develop and implement a behaviourally informed mass communication intervention with parents/guardians as the primary audience**

The learning from the research and insight gathered about the influences on AST needs to be translated into a behaviourally informed programme of mass communication that seeks to positively influence knowledge, beliefs and behaviours. The audience for this programme of work should be parents.

- **Focus capital investment on environmental and structural change that addresses the key barriers to active school travel with an emphasis on secondary schools and School traffic free zones.**

Ensuring that capital and infrastructure programmes are integrated with and informed by behavioural science is critical. Three clear priorities are emerging. The first should enable secondary school pupils, who are of an age where they can be independently mobile, to travel to school actively if they live within three miles of the school. This should focus on safe cycling routes from key residential communities. The second priority should focus on reducing the barriers to cycling and walking through the provision of safe and secure storage for clothing and cycles at school. The third priority should focus on supporting traffic free exclusion zones around schools to enable a healthy choice on how to travel.

- **Develop national guidance for the development of local community school travel improvement plans**

AST Improvement Plans should be developed at community not school level. While schools are important partners in the process, they do not have the necessary levers to mobilise action across a community for change. Local Authorities and their partners need to be supported to develop community level plans in partnership with the community that will address the primary concerns and barriers within that community.

- **Build a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement for AST in Wales**

To date little of the action undertaken to promote active school travel has been appropriately evaluated. It is difficult therefore to know which things are making a difference and which are not having the full impact anticipated. Not having good information on what is working makes it difficult to improve and to spread best practice. There is a need to strengthen the routine monitoring of active school travel and provide information at a level that can inform action e.g. school, community, and local authority. In addition, strengthening skills and capacity for evaluation across the system and building relationships between academic centres and those delivering key actions is essential. Finally, there is a need to better share current knowledge and evidence of what works in a way that is accessible to those who need to make decisions and take action.

Table 2: Active School Travel - Improvement Delivery Plan

No.	Action	Timescale S (1yr), M (2-3yrs), L, (4-5yrs), C (continuous)	Lead & Partners [emboldened stakeholder denotes 'Lead']
<b>Develop and agree a shared stated ambition and joint policy goals with challenging but achievable targets across policy areas within government</b>			
1	Agree goals and targets for AST rates for primary and secondary school children based on AST feasibility	S	<b>Welsh Government</b> , PHW, local authorities
2	Develop and agree a shared framework to guide action on AST across policy areas	S	<b>Welsh Government</b> , PHW, Third sector, Local authorities
3	Review and align existing programmes and activities to support delivery of the agreed framework e.g. Healthy Working Wales; Eco Schools, WNHSS.	M	<b>Welsh Government</b> , PHW, Third sector, Local authorities
4	Convene a <b>strategic</b> Active School Travel group	S	<b>Welsh Government</b>
<b>Develop and implement a behaviourally informed mass communication intervention with parents/guardians as the primary audience</b>			
5	Undertake a behavioural analysis	S	<b>PHW</b>
6	Develop specification for procurement and manage process to development	M	<b>PHW</b> , Welsh Government, Third sector
7	Implement mass communication campaign	M	<b>PHW</b>
<b>Focus capital investment on environmental and structural change that addresses the key barriers to active school travel with an emphasis on secondary schools and School traffic free zones.</b>			
8	Produce supplementary best practice guidance that focuses on enhancing active travel schemes grant applications (i.e. Active Travel Fund, Safe Routes in Communities, Road Safety) for AST improvements.	M	<b>Welsh Government</b> . Local authorities, PHW, Third sector
9	Review and if necessary strengthen guidance on Sustainable Communities for Learning to strengthen active travel	S	<b>Welsh Government</b> , PHW, Local Authorities
10	Develop guidance for local authorities to increase focus on active school travel in planning for new residential development or community infrastructure	M	<b>Welsh Government</b> , PHW, Local Authorities
<b>Develop national guidance for the development of local community school travel improvement plans</b>			
11	Develop guidance and tools to support an AST needs assessment within a local area	M	<b>PHW</b> , Third sector, Local authorities, Welsh Government
12	Recruit pilot areas to support the development of guidance on developing local community school travel improvement plans	M	<b>PHW</b> , Local Authorities, Welsh Government, Health Boards
13	Develop a <i>What Works Toolkit</i> of evidence-based AST interventions to support local action	M	<b>PHW</b>
<b>Build a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement for AST in Wales</b>			
14	Develop a standardised AST evaluation framework	M	<b>PHW</b> , Third sector, Local authorities

15	Roll out the <i>Travel to School Hands Up Survey</i> for annual administration across primary schools in Wales	S	PHW, Health Boards, Local Authorities, Third Sector
16	Develop a programme of skills and capacity development for active travel evaluation	M	PHW, Welsh Government

Public Health Wales, Health Improvement Division, 2021

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Ratified by the Active Travel Board on 02/12/2021