

A recent survey may help promote county-wide initiatives to encourage safe alternatives to car travel.

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A quarter of Year 7 boys want to cycle to school

Where there's a will there is not necessarily a way, according to some preliminary results from a county-wide survey of 3,447 secondary-school pupils in Devon.

On average, fewer than 2% of this group cycle to school. Yet in answer to a question in the SHEU/Devon County Council Travelwise survey, an average of 13% of the pupils that did not cycle said that they would like to — and 23% of the Year 7 boys came into this category.

The aims of the Travelwise survey, which was initiated by Peter Gimber, Manager of the Devon County Council Road Safety Unit, were to understand the travel patterns and travel aspirations of secondary pupils on the home-to-school journey.

The information will help guide the Council's Travelwise programme by seeing where scope exists to provide or encourage safe alternatives to car travel. It is intended that surveys be repeated in order to monitor any changes in behaviour resulting from local partnership.

Year 7, 9 and 10 pupils in 15 secondary schools and community colleges answered a special questionnaire during the 1997 summer term. The 38 questions provided more than 120

separate pieces of information about the young people's journey to and from school, any road accidents they have suffered, feelings about safety and vulnerability, and other factors to do with road use and safety.

How the pupils travel to school

Of immediate interest is their current method of travelling to school.

Car	26%
School bus	31%
Other bus	6%
Train	1%
Taxi	1%
Bicycle	2%
Walking	39%

If they travelled by two or more methods in the same journey they were allowed to state this, but the great majority appear to have used just one form of transport.

It will be noted that the school bus accounts for almost a third of the journeys. Almost 2 in 5 of the pupils walk to school; a quarter go by car, and 1 in 50 cycles.

Some significant 'travelling' groups

Once the data had been processed, interest was concentrated on the following groups:

- The 20% of pupils that want to travel by car but do not.
- The 13% of pupils that want to travel by bicycle but do not.
- The 18% of pupils that do not want to have to walk.
- The 3% of pupils that never feel safe when travelling to school.
- The 29% of pupils that have already had a fairly serious accident when cycling.
- The 10% of pupils that expect to have a cycling accident within the next two years.
- The 33% of pupils that are afraid of going to school because of bullying.
- The 52% of pupils that are in favour of creating more cycle lanes.

The 'frustrated car passengers'

This group do not travel by car, but want to. It is characterised by the following statistically significant links within the data, when compared with the whole sample:

- **their journey to school is more likely to take 20 minutes or longer;**
- **they are less likely to feel safe travelling to school at the moment;**
- **they are less likely to consider themselves fit or very fit.**

More than half of this group currently walk to school.

One of the concerns of county planners, crossing patrollers, the police, and the schools themselves is the number of cars that accumulate outside school entrances to drop off and collect children. If this group of pupils had their way, then the number of cars needed to carry this sample could almost double — 46% rather than 26% of the school population would travel by car.

We do not know why they are not brought by car, but the reasons could include:

- impossible logistics, or lack of transport;
- 'social responsibility' or green feelings;
- promoting exercise (for walkers at least!);
- economy.

On the face of it, discouraging the use of cars in this context is sound policy. But what about the link with perceived safety? Are some of the youngsters that want to travel by car seeking refuge from bullying or violence, rather than just comfort and convenience?

The 'frustrated cyclists'

This group would like to cycle to school if they could. Compared with the rest of the sample:

- **more currently travel by car;**
- **more always enjoy being out on their bicycle;**
- **fewer always wear a safety helmet;**
- **more believe that new cycle lanes should be provided;**
- **more of the younger pupils, particularly boys, are found in this group;**
- **more of this group enjoy PE.**

Although an average of 13% of the whole sample come into this group, its significance becomes even greater if we analyse it by year and gender. The values in parentheses are the percentage that currently do travel by bicycle:

	Year 7	Year 9	Year 10
Boys	23(2)%	17(6)%	16(2)%
Girls	10(0)%	5(0)%	3(0)%

To anyone concerned at young people's low general levels of physical activity, these figures must generate feelings of frustration. Can more be done to enable youngsters to 'get on their bike', as recommended by Ken Fox in his article on page 56?

Reasons for not cycling despite wanting to may include:

- no serviceable bicycle;
- perceived risk of accident;
- perceived risk of theft.

These perceptions could be in the pupil's or the parents' mind.

The seasonal aspect may also need to be considered when rating the risk involved (in mid-winter it can be quite dark when leaving for school and returning home), although the survey was carried out in summer.

Enquiries forming part of the questionnaire survey have revealed that some pupils are not cycling because there is nowhere at school for them to leave their bicycle. Some schools seem

If the children who wanted to travel by car had their way, 46% rather than 26% of all the pupils would be driven to school.

Can more be done to enable youngsters to 'get on their bike', which is what some say they want?

to look upon bicycles as bad news and are determined to keep them out at all costs; others, perhaps, would like to take responsibility for their safe keeping but feel unable to do so.

The 'reluctant pedestrians'

This is the group that walk but would prefer to travel by some other means. Compared with the rest of the sample:

- more of this group travel to school alone;
- fewer feel safe when going out and about during the day and after dark;
- more come from families that do not own a car;
- fewer come from families that own three or more cars.

One reason for not wanting to walk could be dislike of walking! However, there could be other explanations, including:

- longer journey time than if transported;
- lack of company;
- fear of harassment.

The link with car ownership suggests that some of these reluctant pedestrians would otherwise be transported by car. However, although there is a positive link with concern about personal safety when out and about, fear of going to school because of being bullied does not appear as a significant factor.

We note that more girls than boys walk to school, and also that more girls would still prefer to walk if they had a choice. But only about 5% of the sample could be called 'frustrated walkers' — pupils that would like to walk but are not allowed to.

The 'anxious travellers'

The group that never feel safe when travelling to school shows the following comparison with the rest of the sample:

- more travel by the school bus;
- more have a journey time of over 20 minutes;
- more fear being bullied at school;
- more have been knocked down by a vehicle and needed treatment;
- more have had an accident that needed treatment when travelling in a bus or coach.

The anxious travellers' responses suggest a

history of vulnerability.

This group is likely to travel by the school bus, and anecdotal data from some of the schools involved in the survey suggest that the school bus journey can be an unpleasant, even distressing, experience.

The fact that the school bus is a necessary evil for some pupils is suggested by the comparative figures for those who do travel by one and those (in parentheses) who would prefer to do so, given a free option:

Boys	33.9(19.1)	30.1(18.6)	34.0(16.6)
Girls	31.4(21.5)	21.4(16.3)	33.4(19.7)

On average, fewer than 20% would wish to use the school bus, although more than 30% do so.

The 'wounded cyclists'

This group reports having had injuries from a cycling accident that required treatment by a nurse or doctor. Compared with the rest of the sample:

- more are likely to cycle in the dark or in heavy traffic;
- more have been knocked down by a vehicle;
- more expect to be involved in a future cycling accident;
- fewer fear going to school because of bullying.

More boys (32%) than girls (24%) are found in this group.

The fact that the 'wounded cyclists' are less likely to feel concerned about bullying suggests an aggressive, risk-taking lifestyle that deters (or even impresses) would-be aggressors.

The 'pessimistic cyclists'

The group that expect to be involved in a cycling accident within the next two years are, like the 'wounded cyclists', more likely to ride in the dark or in heavy traffic. Another link was also discovered:

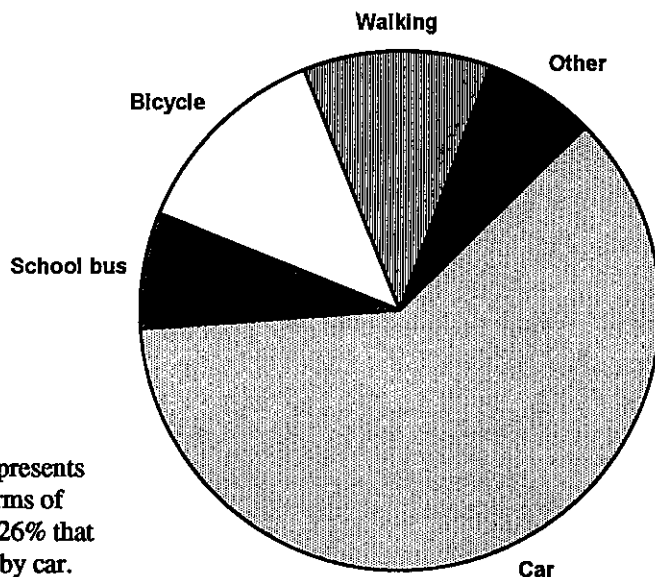
- more believe that environmental pollution is going to get worse.

They are also slightly more likely to believe that the provision of cycle lanes would improve their safety.

It is interesting that there is no significant difference between the two groups in the levels of use of a safety helmet when cycling.

Some schools appear to be determined to keep bicycles out at all costs.

Anecdotal data from some of the schools involved in the survey suggest that the school bus journey can be an unpleasant, even distressing, experience.



This diagram represents the preferred forms of transport of the 26% that travel to school by car.

The 'nervous arrivals'

This important group, which has already been the subject of articles in *Education and Health* (for example, Vol. 14 Nos. 1 and 2), are sometimes, often, or very often afraid of going to school because of bullying. Compared with the rest of the sample:

- fewer feel safe on their journeys to and from school;
- fewer feel safe when generally out and about by day or night;
- more feel that keeping healthy is just a matter of luck.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the use of the school bus does not appear as a significant factor, suggesting that for this group it is better to travel than to arrive.

More girls than boys fear going to school because of bullying. It is a real or imagined problem for 47% of the Year 7 girls.

The 'cycle lane' option

A large group considers that providing more cycle lanes would be an important way of improving safety levels. The first two links, compared with the rest of the sample, are not surprising:

- more in this group would prefer to cycle to school;
- more currently cycle to school;
- more report enjoying PE;
- more report that they are fit or very fit.

Increasing the attraction of cycling will include making the journey safer and more enjoyable, and also offering safe storage at school.

Although new cycle lanes may facilitate journeys already being made, they can also create new safe routes and therefore, in principle, increase the attraction of cycling in urban areas.

Tackling the car problem

The impetus behind this project was to see if there are any feasible ways of reducing the number of cars taking young people to school.

This article has looked at several groups that would prefer a different method of travel to the one they currently use.

However, one group that we have not yet examined contains the young people that currently travel by car but would prefer not to: the 'reluctant car passengers'.

Surprisingly, when we examine this 26% of the sample in order to find out how they would prefer to travel, the breakdown looks like this:

Happy travelling by car	61%
Prefer to walk	12%
Prefer to cycle	13%
Prefer school bus	7%
Prefer other methods	7%

Which means that 39% of these car journeys are not to the pupils' liking, and that a quarter of them would prefer to walk or cycle.

Conclusion

As far as county planners are concerned, this survey has revealed two particularly useful indicators of the young people's travel preferences:

- 13% of the whole sample would like to cycle, but do not.
- 39% of the car travellers would prefer to travel by some other method.

So there is substantial enthusiasm within the school population for increasing the use of bicycles and reducing the use of cars. In particular, if cycling is made more attractive, then more people may want to cycle, and the momentum for change will increase. This will include making the journey safer and more enjoyable, and also offering safe storage at school.

These are just two groups within the whole sample, and we have already referred to the 20% that would like to go by car, but do not. However, the way ahead is surely to try to build on the first two statistics, encouraging choices that are healthier in all senses of the word.