

Introduction



Everyday, thousands of children and young people living in Northern Ireland travel to and from school using the bus, car, train, taxi, walking, cycling or by using some other form of transport.

What did we want to find out?



We wanted to find out more about **how** children and young people travelled to and from school and **what** they liked and did not like about these journeys.

- We talked to pupils about their journey travelling to and from school
- We looked at bullying on school buses and pupils' concerns about safety
- We talked to parents and key decision makers about school transport issues
- We looked at how many pupils walk, cycle or use the car/bus/train to get to school
- We examined the rules (policies) which control how school buses operate
- We also considered what other researchers had written on this issue

How did we do this?



We trained a group of young people to work with researchers from the University of Ulster to help them talk to pupils in 12 primary, post-primary and special needs schools about travelling to school. Some pupils expressed their views through pictures,

others drew posters, some pupils wrote stories and others simply talked about their experiences.



A total of 1394 pupils of all ages completed a questionnaire. Questionnaires were also completed by key people who make important decisions about school transport and by 293 parents. We also talked to eight groups of young people about their experiences of travelling to and from school.

Pupils' Concerns about School Transport



Pupils had very similar views on school transport issues no matter what age they were or the location of their school.

They were especially concerned about:

Buses

Many pupils did not feel safe travelling on school buses because they were overcrowded with few seatbelts. Although some children liked bus journeys because they could chat to friends, others complained about bus drivers, the lack of bus shelters and buses not arriving on time.

Traffic

Many pupils expressed concern about the speed, noise and fast flow of traffic outside their school.

Walking

Pupils who walked to school were concerned about the lack of places where they could safely cross busy roads and some children were uncomfortable walking home late from school when it was dark. Some children living in the countryside also felt there weren't enough footpaths on busy roads.

Cycling

Very few pupils cycled to school because of busy roads although those who did wanted safer cycle lanes and better facilities in the school to store their bikes at school.

Bullying

Some pupils were worried about bullying on buses when there was no adult on board to supervise. Some pupils described bus journeys as "scary" and "frightening". Some pupils were unhappy about fighting and pupils smoking and drinking at the back of bus.

Special Needs

Pupils in special needs schools were concerned about buses arriving late and the lack of adult supervision on the buses and wheelchairs not being securely fastened into place.



Parents' Concerns about School Transport



Parents and guardians also had concerns about school transport issues. These included:

Traffic

Parents were concerned about the safety of children entering and leaving the school because of fast flowing traffic. They wanted better parking for parents dropping off and collecting their children.

Buses

Parents wanted better bus driver training, more seatbelts and CCTV cameras on buses and they wanted an adult to travel on bus journeys to help make pupils' journeys to and from school safer. Parents were also worried about overcrowding on buses.

Footpaths

Parents were concerned about the state of footpaths and they wanted extra patrols and crossings outside schools to ensure pupils crossed the road safely.



What needs to happen next?

As a result of the research, a number of suggestions were put forward to ensure that children and young people can travel safely to school.



1. We need decision makers to meet and decide how they might solve these issues.
2. We need to look at how far pupils have to walk to school to see how this affects the demand for school buses.
3. We need to reduce the number of pupils travelling to school by car.
4. We need to ensure that buses are not overcrowded.
5. We need better footpaths and cycle lanes.
6. School starting and finishing times could be changed to reduce traffic pressures.
7. Pupils' behaviours on buses need to be monitored by CCTV or by bus supervisors.



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Safer Journeys to School

A summary of how children and young people travel to school

For Young People in Post-Primary Schools

