The importance of children’s mobility

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Children’s mobility – what’s the issue?

Like adults, children need to be mobile to reach various opportunities in life. But:

- They are **smaller and weaker** than adults and so cannot walk as far or fast and are more vulnerable to outside forces such as cars and threatening adults.
- They are **developing physically and mentally**, so their capabilities change over time. They need to learn how to take decisions.
- They do not have **legal autonomy** and are dependent on adults for welfare and protection.

Society needs to balance the protection of children against letting them develop the independence that they will need in later life.
Walking and car use by children under 17 in Great Britain

Children are walking less than they used to, mainly because they are using the car more

Source: National Travel Survey
Fewer children are going out alone in Britain

• Fewer children are allowed out without an adult than in the past
• The graph shows the decrease in the numbers travelling to school alone
• This may reflect changes in parental attitudes, but also reflects the growth in children’s car use

Source: National Travel Survey
Why does the decline in walking by children matter?

• Reduction in physical activity – contributing to various long-term health conditions and obesity
• Less opportunity to interact with the local environment learning decision-making skills
• Less opportunity for developing social networks
• There is evidence that physical activity by children can influence examination performance
• But – there are risks (and perceived risks) that may affect parental attitudes and behaviour
Walking is the most active form of travel for children.
Walking is one of the best forms of physical activity for children.

The most energetic activities for children:

- PE and games lessons: 3.1
- Unstructured ball games: 2.8
- Structured ball games: 2.4
- Walking: 2.3
- Other unstructured activities: 2.1
- School break: 1.9
- Other structured sports: 1.8

Source: Children’s car use project at UCL
The perceived risks of children’s mobility
Why parents say they accompany their children aged 7-13 to school in GB (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic danger</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of assault/molestation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient to accompany child</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School too far away</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child might not arrive on time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child might get lost</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of bullying</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Parents could give more than one reason; ‘Convenient to accompany child’ was not an option before 2005

Are these the real reasons, and are the perceptions correct?

Source: National Travel Survey
Pedestrian casualties for children under 16 in GB

The risk is decreasing but the volume of traffic is higher than in the past and this may influence perceptions of the risks.
Fear of assault/molestation – ‘stranger danger’

- Disproportionate coverage of cases in the newspapers in Great Britain
- When there is a high profile case it is likely to influence attitudes to letting children out without an adult
- Note – assaults on teenage boys by gangs in are relatively common in large cities in Great Britain
Child abductions in Great Britain

The figures look quite high but:

- The figures include attempts that failed.
- The 2002/03 figures have been analysed in depth: only 68 (9%) were actual abductions by strangers. Of these only 12 had a ‘clear sexual motive’.

The convenience of the car – how cars are used to take children to or from school in GB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To school</th>
<th>From school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part of a journey to or from work</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined with another school/nursery trip</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined with a trip to or from somewhere else</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School journey sole purpose of trip</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CAPABLE project parents’ questionnaires
Distances to school are increasing in GB

The growth is related to both policy on school admissions and increasing car use

Source: National Travel Survey
Modern life – it’s complicated

Nature of urban areas
- Increased perception of risks of being outdoors
- Decentralisation of urban areas
  - Increasing distance apart of urban activities
    - Increased perception of risk from traffic to children
    - Increasing car availability
      - Increasing car use
        - Increasing car use by children
          - Less walking by children

More women in employment
- Increasing incomes
- Increasing car ownership
- More women in employment
  - Reduction in time available for taking children to activities
    - Fewer children at nearest school
  - Increased availability of personal home entertainment

Shift from free play to organised activities
- Policy on school choice
  - Fewer local trips

Increased perception of risk from traffic to children
Increasing children’s independent mobility (in Great Britain)

• Make the local environment safer for walking, cycling and playing by children

• Introduce initiatives to encourage children to walk more, evaluate the schemes and disseminate the findings

• Increase emphasis on closeness of school to home in the school selection process

• Discourage the use of ‘No playing’ signs

• Increase awareness of the long-term health implications of inactivity in childhood
Further information

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