

# Children's Active Travel in New South Wales

Resources for parents/carers and communities



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# Introduction

Active travel means walking, cycling, scootering, skateboarding or any similar transport where human energy is spent to travel. The health benefits of active travel are well recognised, particularly as an alternative to motorised or sedentary forms of transport. Using public transport almost always includes walking to and from destinations, and therefore also can be considered as active travel.

NSW has plans to increase the number of walking and cycling trips, including the Sydney's Walking Future and Sydney's Cycling Future. NSW has State Plan targets to more than double the mode share of bike trips made in the Greater Sydney region, and increase the mode share of walking trips made in the Greater Sydney region to 25%.

Most attention has been paid to adult trips, but children also need to travel to socialise, study and to participate in sport and recreation. In 2014, the NSW Active Travel

Charter for Children was launched, supported by 15 agencies, including NSW Health, Transport for NSW and the Department of Education and Communities. This Charter identified the many health, social and environmental benefits of children's active travel and noted a number of strategies to increase children's active travel. View the NSW Active Travel Charter for Children [▶](http://www.preventivehealth.net.au/childrens-active-travel.html)  
<http://www.preventivehealth.net.au/childrens-active-travel.html>

Research from around the world has shown that children's local active travel to places they regularly go to provides significant benefits for children. In addition to the many important health benefits from physical activity, walking and bicycle riding can improve children's concentration.

For example, a 2012 study in Denmark found that children who cycle or walk to school demonstrate a measurable increase in concentration that lasts for up to four hours. Supervised active travel can lead to increased independence and positive self-esteem, and contributes to safe mobility.

To further encourage children's active travel, new resources have been produced to assist parents/carers and various community groups. These resources have been prepared specifically for the main stakeholders involved in children's active travel, including parents/carers, local government, schools, sports organisations and shopping centres.

While children do learn about road safety at school as part of the primary school curriculum, safety needs to be the foremost concern for any kind of active travel. Parents/carers have responsibility for how their child(ren) travel to the activities they are involved with.

**Important road safety messages include:**

- + Up until at least the age of 10 years old, always supervise your child very closely, holding their hand when crossing the road. When riding a bicycle, children must always wear a correctly fitted helmet that complies with the Australian and NZ standards; and
- + Up until at least 10 years old, children should cycle in a safe place off road and away from vehicles and driveways. Children aged 10-12 years should avoid cycling near busy roads.

## Children learn by example, and parents/carers can be powerful role models. Research shows that the involvement of parents/carers in physical activity can increase a child's participation.

If children see the significant adults in their lives walking or cycling to places, or using public transport, they are more likely to learn that this is everyday behaviour and learn the skills associated with it (eg putting on a bicycle helmet, reading a bus timetable).

Set a good example for your child in the following ways:

- + Regularly participate in physical activity yourself.
- + Walk short distances instead of taking the car. Encourage and support walking and cycling to shops or local venues.
- + Walk and/or ride your bicycle to work or the shops.
- + Take your child for regular walks around the neighbourhood. Babies and young children can be pushed along in prams – once they get older, encourage them to walk part of the way.
- + Reinforce the social benefits of being active as well as the physical benefits, by talking with your child while you walk, or talking with neighbours or friends you may see.
- + Help your child develop skills and strategies for coping with different physical activity environments.
- + Restrict television watching, surfing the net and playing computer games to less than two hours per day. Limit viewing to programs that family members specifically want to watch. When the program is finished, turn the television off.

For any person or group wanting to encourage more children to walk or cycle to the places they go to, then taking a systematic approach is likely to deliver the best results.

Go to [Develop an Active Travel Plan](#) ➔ click on “The Action Plan Template” to open the word document. This will help you document your context and active travel plans.



# Getting started

This is a guide on how to encourage and promote active travel to and from a facility, venue or school.

## 01 Identify a champion

This may be you, or someone in your group who volunteers to be a co-ordinator or champion. It usually helps if this person is passionate about active travel, physical activity, and health and wellbeing.

## 02 Involve other people

Promoting active travel, or lobbying for environmental changes to make active travel safer and easier for children, is not always straightforward. Having the support of other people can make the journey easier. These people can be other parents/carers, community organisers, local government or school staff, and everyone has something to contribute. Telling other people about what you want to achieve is also a good way to get active travel on other people's agenda and start getting a working group together. Some local Councils have a road safety officer, and these people can be very helpful.



## Develop a plan

The aim of developing a plan is to have a roadmap to healthier, happier and more productive children. This plan is really just a set of simple documents that set out where you are starting out from, where you want to get to and how you plan to get there.

### 01 Where are you starting from?

Whether you want more children to walk or ride to the park, pool or sporting field, or shops or school, it's a good idea to find out how children currently travel there. You need a baseline to work from, so the first step is to complete a short and simple survey of current travel behaviour. This could be basic poll at the entrance to a building, or a 'hands up' survey of a team or class, asking how they travelled there that day. A generic template survey form is available in the [Resources section](#) ➔

## 02 Find out barriers and enablers to walking and bicycle riding

Many of the barriers and enablers to walking and cycling are common to different venues, like busy streets, lots of cars and poor road crossing points. However, there are often also quite specific issues that need to be identified, and which can make a big difference. For example, there might be a shared path that could be enhanced without too much effort and make a really useful connection and therefore enhance a particular route. Alternatively, crossings may need to be re-positioned after land use developments.

The best way to find out these things is to conduct a brief survey or interview of parents/carers, children or facility users. Some draft questions can be found in the [Resources section](#) ➔

## 03 Review the current active travel facilities

Find out if the venues you are looking at (eg pools, parks, schools, shops) have facilities for parking bicycles/scooters and storing gear like helmets; what condition they are in; how well they are used; if the facilities are located in the right place; and what options you have to provide more facilities. This review can be undertaken by the champion or working group. Please see the links at the end of this section for some suggestions for what to look for. [Facility review](#) ➔

## 04 Set targets

Set targets, making them specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related. Your main target will be to increase participation in safely walking and bicycle riding to the main places children travel to. For example, you could set targets that aim to increase the proportion of children safely walking or bicycle riding to the local pool, or who walk or ride to school at least once a week. You can also set targets for participation in specific initiatives.

## 05 Then determine how you will get there

The ideas and suggestions in these active travel resources will help you to enable and motivate greater children's participation in walking and bicycle riding in your community.





## Road Safety

Always remember that children need to learn about road safety, and parents/carers should actively manage their children's safety. It is recommended that you read [Transport for NSW Road Safety Issues Around Schools](#) to familiarise yourself with all of the key road safety messages. These are written for school travel but most messages also apply to all venues children travel to.

## 01 Sign up to some bicycle skills training for children and parents/carers

Learning how to ride a bicycle safely is the first step for any child who wants to ride with their parents/carers to places of interest. Parents/carers are usually the ones to encourage their kids to hop on the bike, but there are also a number of organisations that provide bicycle skills courses. These include:

AustCycle ➤ <http://austcycle.com.au/>

BikeWise ➤ <http://www.bikewise.com.au/services-courses/cycle-courses/city-cycling/>

Sydney Bike Skills ➤ <http://www.sydneybikeskills.com.au/>

Bicycle NSW ➤ <http://bicyclensw.org.au/events/courses/skills/beginner/>

It is recommended that you read Section 5 of the Transport for NSW Road Safety Issues Around Schools ➤ to familiarise yourself with all of the key road safety messages for helmets and safety on wheels.

## 02 Using maps to consider walking and cycling routes with the children

Part of children growing more independent is learning about how to travel safely, and thinking about choosing routes is one learning activity. If talking with your own child, or a group of children, about how they could walk or ride to sport training, the shops or school, using a map can be fun.

1. Find a map covering the area in which your child or a group of children live
2. Plot where the children live on the map and the location of popular places to go
3. Plot the safe walking and bicycle riding routes from home to those places

Prioritise routes that are completely separated from traffic but remember that children under 12, if accompanied by an adult, can ride on the footpath; also remember that all children under 10 must be accompanied and holding the hand of an adult when walking

4. Children can identify interesting points along the routes
5. Travel the route with your child(ren)!

There are helpful resources from the Transport for NSW website [Safety Town](#) ➤

[Creating a Journey Planner \(p35\)](#) ➤

[Risks and Hazards and what to do](#) ➤

[Keep Sprocket away from busy roads](#) ➤

### 03 Take part in Walk Safely to School Day and/or Ride2School Day if available

You can ask your school if they are participating in Walk Safely to School Day or Ride2School. Walk Safely to School Day (WSTSD) is an annual, national event when all Primary School children will be encouraged to walk and commute safely to school. It is a Community Event seeking to promote Road Safety, Health, Public Transport and the Environment. Ride2School is a national program that supports over 2,000 schools across Australia.

### 04 Organise a Walk / Ride on Wednesday

'Walk / Ride on Wednesday' aims to build on the progress made during events like Walk Safely to School Day and Ride2School Day to make walking/cycling to school a more regular occurrence. Of course, it does not have to be regularly walking/cycling to school. If local, it could be the weekly trip to piano lessons, or sports practice.

### 05 Offer travel information

Offer travel information to parents/carers, to make it easier to use public transport (and get some walking to and from bus stops and stations). [A local government project](#) with child care centres successfully encouraged some parents/carers to change some of their trips to increase active travel. This included public transport timetables, local walking and cycling maps, and information about the value of active travel.

Travel access guides as their names suggests, are guides to help people get to and from places using active travel. They are used by organisations that generate lots of trips to them, such as workplaces, schools, hospitals, or entertainment centres, and can contain maps with walking and cycling routes, bus or train stop locations and timetables, and helpful advice on how to switch from car journeys to active travel. A report that evaluated active travel strategies, including travel access guides, is available [here](#).

### 06 Consider accessing an existing program

For cycling, some organisations offer support. These include [Bicycle NSW](#) and [Bicycle Network](#). The Pedestrian Council of Australia is the organiser of [Walk Safely to School Day](#).



## Pull it all together in a plan

You can use the template document provided in the resources below to write up your plan, or make a simpler version. Once you have completed it, share it with other interested stakeholders. Get feedback and make any necessary changes.

## 01 Resources

The following are weblinks to resources to help you and your working group prepare a plan to encourage active travel for children:

[Hands up survey form](#) ➤

[Parent/carer survey](#) ➤

[Information pack for parents/carers](#) ➤

[Facilities review](#) ➤

[Develop an Active Travel Plan](#) ➤

(click on “The Action Plan Template” to open the word document)

[Walk/Wheel once a week guide](#) ➤

[Park and Walk or Ride](#) ➤

[Bicycle skills training \(AustCycle\)](#) ➤

[Safety Town resources](#) ➤

You may not need to use all these resources, only those that will help you achieve what you want. Your approach needs to reflect the local needs of the community group, local safety issues and conditions. Additional support may be available from the Health Promotion teams of your Local Health District, from your local Council (some of which employ Road Safety Officers), the Road Safety Education Officers from either the Department of Education and Communities, the Association of Independent Schools of NSW or the Catholic Education Commission NSW.

## 02 Promote your plan

Now your plan is ready, you can promote it by:

- + Sending your plan to stakeholders (eg local council, sporting clubs, facility managers, parent/carer groups, schools) and ask them what they can do to help
- + Write a short piece for the newsletters of different organisations (eg clubs, shopping centres)
- + Make the plan available from local web-sites of community organisations
- + Ask your local newspaper to do a story on your plan

The resources of [Safety Town Activities](#) ➤ : create your road safety campaign (see pg 52) may help you.

### 03 Evaluate your plan

You will want to know if you have made progress towards your targets. It is important to remember that if you do not monitor what you are doing you cannot evaluate.

The following are a set of easy, practical ideas to help you monitor and evaluate your progress:

- + Conduct a baseline 'Hands Up' survey (if you are working with a group of children) every few months
- + Conduct a parent/carer's survey before and after your main strategies have been implemented.
- + Count how many bicycles and scooters are parked outside your organisation or the facilities or venues where children travel to
- + Count how many children participate in any initiatives you run, or ask the parents/carers to count

That's it! Once you have the data, share your success with everyone. You can also repeat some of your initiatives, and continue to monitor how things are going.

### 04 Key resources

['Hands Up' survey instructions and data collection form](#) ▶

[Facilities review and guide to choosing and locating facilities](#) ▶

[Develop an Active Travel Plan](#) ▶

(click on "The Action Plan Template" to open the word document)