

Risk Assessment of Walked Routes to School

Consultation Response Form

Your name: Kevin Golding-Williams

Organisation (if applicable): Living Streets

E-mail / Telephone number: 020 7377 4907

Your postal address: 4th Floor, Universal House, 88-94
Wentworth Street, London. E1 7SA

Question 1: What are the weaknesses/strengths of the current risk assessment regime?

Question 2: Do you think these proposals are a good idea? Why?

We welcome the child centred approach at the heart of the revised walked route assessment procedure. However, we are concerned that the control measures described on pages 10-11 (learners) are overly focussed on the child or carer rather than improving the safety (both actual and perceived) of the surrounding road environment. This could include the installation of crossings, 20mph speed limits or reconfiguring road space or tackling issues such as pavement parking. This also applies to the crossings section on page 16. Furthermore, whilst walking buses are useful they take dedicated resource to establish and maintain compared to parents and carers walking children to school through informal arrangements.

It is important that primary school age children learn to walk to school on their own and gain important road safety skills prior to going to secondary school. The number of children killed or seriously injured as pedestrians rises markedly around the ages of 11 and 12 as they move from primary to secondary school, before declining somewhat from 13 onwards. It is known that children's spatial awareness does not fully develop until they near adulthood making them more vulnerable on the roads. We believe that this statistical 'spike' highlights the crucial role that parents can play in helping their children to learn road safety skills before they reach this dangerous transition. Whilst children's cognitive abilities develop at different rates, in most cases appropriate road safety skills can successfully be taught to children from early years upwards.

Question 3: Can you suggest additional risk factors along walked routes to school (in addition to those already listed in Appendix B)?

We have carried out research which highlights the range of barriers to walking to school over the last few years including [Breaking Down the Barriers](#), [Is it safe to let our children walk to school?](#), [Backseat Children](#) and our 2013 report [Must Try Harder](#) from which the statistics referred to below originate.

In *Must Try Harder* we highlighted that the key challenges to walking to school for children can be broadly divided into environmental and behaviour barriers.

Environmental barriers - these include infrastructure or design barriers which children encounter on the walk to school, or which prevent parents from letting their children walk. Speeding traffic scares over a third (36%) of children and young people about walking to school, whilst over one in five children and young people are concerned about the lack of safe crossing points on their journey. Busy roads, fast moving traffic and poor walking infrastructure are common barriers cited by parents.

Behavioural barriers – these include real and perceived barriers in the business of everyday life getting in the way of walking to school. For example, one in five primary school children don't walk to school because their parents state that they don't have time to walk with them. These lifestyle barriers can also originate from children and young people in terms of willingness to walk. 59% of primary school pupils are willing to walk up to 20 minutes of their journey to school but this decreases to 37% of secondary school pupils. Behavioural barriers also include fears or concerns which have a relatively low likelihood of occurring but the perceived risk is enough to deter walking to school. The most common perceived barrier is stranger danger with 39% of children and young people scared by the risk of stranger danger against the relatively very low risk of abduction.

Question 4: When and how often should risk assessments of walked routes to school be carried out?

They should be carried out as a regular part of a wider school travel plan but particularly when new schools are being planned or significantly expanded. They should also be reviewed in the light of developments along the route.

Question 5: Are there any other triggers that should result in risk assessment?

Regular reviews of the risk assessment should be inbuilt into the system by concerns raised by school children or carers regarding routes, in addition to other pedestrian users. These concerns should lead to further investigations by the local authority and other agencies such as the Police.

Question 6: At what stage, do you think, children should be able to walk unaccompanied to school? What factors should impact on/influence this decision?

We believe that while parents are of course right to be concerned about road safety, the best approach is not to avoid the risk altogether by resorting to driving their children to school, when they could otherwise walk, but to help to equip their children with the key life skills they need from an early age. An ideal way to do this is to accompany children to school during early years, passing on route finding and road safety skills until parents are confident that their children can make the journey unaccompanied.

We do not believe there is a set age by which children should be able to walk independently; rather we feel that parents should be helped to understand the learning process that their children need to complete in order to gain their independence safely.

Question 7: How should the various criteria used to assess a route's availability be weighted?

We would advocate a local approach to assessing a route which gives maximum weighting to local issues. Otherwise a bias weighting to a certain risk element may lead to unintended consequences which could lead to simple interventions being ruled out due to their lower weighting.

Question 8: What, in your view, would be the best standard format for conducting risk assessment (to help ensure a consistent approach across Wales) – for example, tick-box, proforma?

PACT meetings are highlighted on page 12 but we would recommend that the risk assessment is carried out in tandem with a Community Street Audit approach to identifying and rectifying barriers to walking to school. Community Street Audits are one of Living Streets key approaches to community engagement and street assessment, where small groups of local residents, traders, councillors and council officers, including vulnerable street users, are involved to assess a route on foot and identify problems and potential improvements. Improvement activity varies widely between projects according to the key needs identified by communities, and tend to fall into three main categories: community-led improvements such as litter picking, clean ups and planting; more in-depth improvements such as resurfacing or lighting improvements led by the local authority, and awareness-raising activities such as led walks, the design of maps and street parties.

We have used an adapted version of the Community Street Audit methodology in our work in primary and secondary schools. School Route Audits involve the whole school including children, parents, teachers and governors to identify barriers to walking to school in the local area.

Using this approach and funded in England by the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund we have worked since 2012 in partnership with Durham County Council to roll out our Walk to School outreach project in 11 local authority areas. At the end of year one, the project has already seen a 26% increase in the number of children walking at participating primary schools, equivalent to over 2 million new walking journeys by children and accompanying parents, the majority of which would otherwise have been made by car. We have also guided the investment of £140,000 worth of capital improvements to school routes, and new zebra crossings and pathways have already been completed as a result. Such an approach would well within the context of the guidance currently being developed for local authorities through the Active Travel Act design guidance process.

We have operated the national Walk to School (WtS) campaign since 1995 which aims to encourage all parents and young people to make walking to school part of their daily routine. In the last five years, our Walk to School message has reached over two million children across the UK and this year Living Streets will be working with over 650,000 children across more than 2,000 schools.

Question 9: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Please enter here:

It is recommended that the road casualty record along a route should be noted with special attention to collision danger spots. Whilst we would agree with undertaking such analysis it is important that the safety record is not the only consideration. It may well be the case that a good road safety record exists due to suppressed walking demand on certain routes where children are too afraid to walk.

On page 14 footpaths are considered in relation to the issue of step offs. As the Active Travel Act will require local authorities to map existing and future routes and networks it is important the local authorities consider the lack of footpaths under their broader obligations under the Act.

Within the crossings section on page 15 we recommend that the guidance makes reference to crossing times and ensuring crossing times meet the needs of children and carers over the age of 65.

Responses to consultations may be made public – on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be kept confidential, please tick here:
