

Let's transform the 'school run' to protect children's health and their future, say charities

August 28, 2020



To protect children's health, wellbeing and futures, we need to work together to transform the school run so all pupils can get to school via climate-safe, healthy modes of travel, say a group of national charities.

The alliance of eight organisations (Bus Users, Campaign for Better Transport, Community Rail Network, Community Transport Association, Collaborative Mobility UK (CoMoUK), Greener Journeys, Living Streets, Sustrans) is appealing to families to support their children to walk, cycle or use public transport as much as possible as they return to school. The group is working proactively with local authorities, government and transport partners to ensure that every child can get to school sustainably.

This year's post-lockdown return to school will see journeys increase. The group warns that a return to private vehicles will lead to an unsustainable increase in traffic, affecting children's health and wellbeing, and jeopardising efforts to reduce carbon emissions to net zero. The alliance is highlighting that efforts are needed within communities to remove barriers, so that every child can walk or cycle, use public, school or shared transport, or a combination, when they travel to school.

School run facts:

- On weekday mornings, nearly one in four cars on our roads are on the school run;
- Over the years, the proportion of children getting to school by car has gone up, while walking and cycling has declined;
- Enabling more children to regularly walk or cycle, at least part way to school, is one of the best ways we can benefit their health and mental wellbeing;
- Hundreds of schools have been found to be on or near illegally polluted roads, which can impact children's health, and many face road safety fears from traffic;
- Air pollution levels can be 9-12 times higher inside a car than outside;
- Transport is now the biggest source of emissions damaging our climate, mostly from cars and vans, and reducing private car use is increasingly recognised as vital to decarbonising;
- Many families depend on public, community and shared transport, alongside walking and cycling, for their mobility. A third of adults don't have personal access to a car.

The group is underlining that, as we recover and build back from Covid-19, we are at a critical juncture with transport and travel, with a chance to reprioritise, putting communities and families, health and wellbeing, and our environment at the forefront. They propose this needs to include:

- Government and authorities giving clear priority to active travel alongside public, shared and community transport as the modes of the future, including for the school run, as suggested in the Department for Transport's recent [Decarbonising Transport](#) report, with its aspiration to make 'public transport and active travel... the natural first choice for our daily activities';
- Continuing and redoubling the efforts underway across Britain to develop space and facilities for walking and cycling,^[1] and ensuring these improvements are well-connected with public, community and shared transport, schools and local facilities, to lock-in long term benefits for all;
- Empowering communities to address barriers to sustainable and inclusive travel, enabling local areas to create joined-up networks that work for everyone and provide a natural, sustainable, community-minded alternative to driving.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users, said: "Encouraging pupils to use sustainable methods of transport will improve their health and wellbeing, and reduce congestion and pollution for everyone. Bus and coach operators have been working tirelessly to ensure their vehicles are safe to use so it's time to get back on board."

Jools Townsend, chief executive, Community Rail Network, said: "Enabling all children to get to school through sustainable, healthy means couldn't be more important, for the sake of our children's wellbeing and future, our communities and our climate. We and our members work hard within communities to enable children, young people and families to access sustainable travel by rail, so we see the difference it makes. We're pleased to be working with partners and government to develop sustainable travel for all as part of a green, inclusive recovery."

Jenni Wiggle, Interim Chief Executive, Living Streets said: "Not only will walking, cycling or scooting to school help children and their families stay fit and healthy, it will also prevent roads from becoming gridlocked as journey numbers increase. Walking to school is a positive thing many of us can do to ensure

roads around schools aren't overwhelmed with cars and air pollution, protecting the one in five people in the UK who currently lives with a lung condition. Local authorities should be doing all that is in their power to introduce measures such as School Streets, 20mph limits and behaviour change schemes, to make it easier for families to choose cleaner ways to travel."

Xavier Brice, CEO for Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, which works with local authorities to implement school streets, where streets are open to families walking and cycling and closed to cars, said: "As we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis, it's vital that as many pupils as possible are able to walk and cycle to school through the creation of dedicated routes, and removing cars from around the school gates. We are therefore calling on local authorities across the UK to work with schools and families to make active travel the safest and most appealing option for everyone."

Bill Freeman, Chief Executive of the Community Transport Association, said: "With schools opening up after five months, an opportunity exists to make long-lasting and sustainable change in how children access home to school transport. Community Transport continues to play an important role in ensuring children and young people travel in a sustainable way. Alongside our members we are committed to reducing congestion, lowering emissions and helping people build better communities."

Darren Shirley, Chief Executive of Campaign for Better Transport, said: "Public and school transport, walking and cycling, with the right support, can enable children to travel sustainably and prevent a harmful rise in air pollution around schools, which nobody wants. The Government and local authorities should act quickly, together with schools, to address any issues preventing a sustainable return to education."

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