



66th ROAD SAFETY CONGRESS

Child Casualties: Meeting the Target

12 - 14th MARCH 2001

**Targeting Child Casualties through Community
Based Safer Routes to School Projects**

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Britax
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Integration of travel decisions with road safety, health, transport efficiency, and environmental issues is a key part of developing good practice for integrated transport in Scotland. It is recognised that such integration is best achieved at a local community level where relevant travel and safety issues can be identified and addressed through practical improvements. In recent years, most initiatives to achieve such integration of policy objectives for decisions about school travel have been taken forward under the banner of Safer Routes to School (SRTS). This paper is based upon a review and survey work carried out in 1998 of SRTS initiatives.

Figure 1 shows the approach to the review and survey work. The first stage was to review the context for SRTS in Scotland taking account of the development of integrated approaches to school travel planning around the world. The second stage was to develop a comprehensive picture of all travel to school initiatives which took account of wider economic, environmental and social aims in travel to school planning. The third stage reviewed progress on schemes including detailed case study work to identify the experiences, successes and problems.

2. THE CURRENT SCHOOL TRAVEL CONTEXT

2.1 School Travel

Travel for education purposes accounts for about 10 per cent of all journeys. Enabling safe and efficient choices for journeys to school is therefore an important part of transport planning. Increasing coverage of these issues in the national press also indicates growing public interest in school travel and in particular the social, environmental and health issues arising from current choices.

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In 1997, 575 Scottish school children were reported as being involved in road accidents on the school journey (SSBA 1998) representing about 18 percent of casualties involving children of school age. (This figure is likely to be an underestimate because of reporting practice and the definition of what is a journey to school) Further analysis (Scottish Office 1998) shows that 38 per cent of accidents involving children of age 12 to 15 years are on the school journey suggesting that this group should be a particular target for road safety on the school journey. However primary school children aged 5 to 11 years also deserve attention with 24 per cent of accidents to this group being on the school journey.

The roads adjacent to schools account for many of these casualties and affect children by all the main travel modes. Traffic levels on the roads around schools are often largely associated with school trips and this has wide safety implications increasing the risks to all road users, not just children.

Education authorities have a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make arrangements as necessary for the provision of free transport, or for provision of other transport facilities, or for paying reasonable travel expenses for school pupils belonging to their area and attending their designated school. Authorities generally make such arrangements for pupils who live outwith the statutory walking distance as defined in the Act, but most authorities also provide daily home to school transport for many others who live within the statutory walking distance depending upon local circumstances. For children under the age of 8 years the specified walking distance is more than 2 miles from their zoned school and for children age 8 years and over more than 3 miles.

The majority of statutory school transport involves travel by bus or coach, and sometimes by taxi. However, parents and carers are legally responsible for arranging appropriate school travel arrangements for their children with car travel and walking being the most popular modes.

School crossing patrols make an important contribution to the safety of those travelling to school and are provided by local authorities at the main locations where school children need to cross busy roads. National criteria are defined on where patrols should be provided. In practice most Scottish local authorities provide more patrols than suggested by the criteria in the national guidance.

2.2 The implications of the changing transport policy context

The Government has published a new policy framework for transport in the White Paper “Travel Choices for Scotland” (Scottish Office 1998). This sets out a new integrated approach identifying how transport can help to contribute to a strong economy, a clean environment and an inclusive society.

In the more recent past it has not been common practice to encourage children to walk or cycle to school. There are many reasons for this which have echoes in the wider transport policy debates of the 1970s and 1980s about walking and cycling policy generally. For local authorities, this debate can be illustrated by the extent to which they should and are able to influence travel choices. Some people argued that if people had a car available and chose to use it, including for school journeys, then action by authorities to change these choices would be an infringement of personal freedom. Others highlighted the uncertainty about the legal position of authorities if children were encouraged to walk or cycle and subsequently became road casualties. Even where there were clear and unambiguous benefits from more walking and cycling, the practical realities of promoting successful schemes often proved to be an insurmountable hurdle.

The new policy framework sets out how these problems can be overcome, recognising that individual choice is important but that it is necessary to ensure that solutions are in the overall best interest. Specifically it emphasises the disbenefits of increasing car dependency, and the clear benefits of encouraging more travel by walking and cycling.

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The potential for walking and cycling to play a greater role in school journeys is recognised in the White Paper. However, there are balances between environmental, health, economic and safety objectives which need to be resolved through integrated transport planning. The new policies identify that SRTS schemes as part of school travel plans are practical approaches to ensuring that optimum solutions are achieved.

The White Paper also defines the main principles for putting the new policies into practice. In the context of the school travel decisions these aim to ensure that:

- The practical first choice for school travel is by foot, cycle or by public transport with children gaining a favourable impression of travel by these modes.
- Decisions should be made in partnership. Children and their parents should be able to work with local authorities, schools, transport providers and Government in making safe and efficient school travel decisions.
- Solutions should reflect overall best interests with all children being treated fairly.

The new White Paper brings transport in line with wider developing national and international economic, social and environmental policies. Of particular note are policies for sustainable development under Local Agenda 21 which aim to: integrate sustainability with wider policies, involve local communities and encourage partnership working, and raise awareness through improved education about sustainability issues.

It is within this new policy framework which seeks to develop an integrated transport culture that the role of SRTS initiatives was assessed.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SRTS INITIATIVES

In the 1970s, the concept of SRTS started to emerge. In Europe the best known examples are in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Significant improvements in road safety have been reported and schools and parents appear to be supportive of the approach. Of particular note are the findings from Odense in Denmark where it is estimated that road accidents to children have been reduced by 85 per cent. (Odense 1989). However there are now examples of SRTS in many countries around the world. SRTS practice is now widespread and is now being delivered on a mass scale in some countries (e.g. Booz, Allen & Hamilton 1998).

In the UK, SRTS projects were started in the 1980s. However the focus of these projects was slightly different from the predominantly road safety emphasis of the other European projects. The aims were to encourage more children who were being driven to school to walk or cycle in addition to improving safety for those children who were already walking or cycling. However little practical progress was made with these schemes in the 1980s.

Recent research for DETR (University of Westminster 1998) identified that the national demonstration project organised by Sustrans acted as a key prompt for many schemes in England. This project began in the autumn of 1995 at four schools, and in 1996 a national conference was organised aimed at promoting the concept of SRTS and encouraging new projects to start.

This initiative was mirrored on a smaller scale in Scotland with a conference in 1996 organised by Spokes. In the year following the conference, Spokes reported a significant rise in expenditure by Councils on SRTS in Scotland. (Spokes 1997). Although many SRTS schemes throughout the UK are now being monitored, the UK experience to date appears to suggest that it is difficult to generalise about the effects of SRTS schemes since the approaches taken have been tailored to local circumstances. Nevertheless, individual schemes report that projects have been successful in achieving objectives for improved safety and increased levels of walking and cycling.

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For developing a new integrated transport culture it is perhaps less important whether or not SRTS initiatives have been effective in the past than how they can be made effective in the future. Surveys from the projects which have taken place have shown that there are significant and important concerns about school travel which set out clear challenges:

- Schools are concerned about traffic levels and safety in their vicinity and how they are exacerbated by school trips by car.
- Headteachers would like to see more pupils walking to school.
- Schools are often unable to encourage cycling to school due to traffic danger and lack of storage facilities for bikes.
- Most primary and junior school pupils would rather walk or cycle to school than be taken by car.
- Parents consider that the most important factors which influence their decisions about whether or not to let their children walk or cycle to school are: safe crossings of busy roads, traffic calming on other roads, and co-operation with other parents to ensure that their children do not need to travel alone.

If there are proven approaches to tackle these issues then it is important for future SRTS schemes to adopt them. SRTS schemes can then bring forward programmes which build upon best practice internationally but which can be applied in the local context. SRTS schemes can incorporate a very wide range of initiatives to overcome obstacles to walking and cycling. These can be divided into three categories as shown in table 1 overleaf.

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Objective	Activity
1. Measures which improve safety and accessibility for those who choose to walk and cycle to school	Map based exercise, plotting current and preferred routes to aid safer route choice.
	Engineering measures to improve facilities for walkers and cyclists such as secure cycle parking, land lockers in school
	Installation of new pedestrian crossing facilities, road markings, traffic calming, traffic management changes etc.
	Identification of enforcement measures to improve safety
	New speed cameras, additional parking enforcement etc. Walking buses providing an escort for children.
2. Measures which enhance the personal skills of children to walk or cycle safely to and from school	Pedestrian and cycle skills training on and off road.
	Cycle maintenance training
	Appropriate curricular activities to address specific problems at the school
	Additional curricular activities targeting road safety for which there is a wide selection of material already available for art, language, maths, drama etc.
3. Measures which enhance the willingness of children, parents and schools to participate in and encourage walking and cycling to school	Publicity and encouragement for walking and cycling e.g., Appreciation of wider health benefits for parents/cares and children Circulation of information about the project (e.g. newsletter)
	Community involvement in the promotion and implementation of the project.
	Junior Road Safety Officers where school children are given responsible roles in implementing schemes.
	Campaign targeted at parents/carers who drive children to school.
	Walk/cycle-to-school weeks/days
	Development of an agreed safe routes or safe travel policy for the school within the context of the education department's traffic safety policy
	Pre and post project reports on the local road accident history and Pre and post-project survey of travel modes to and from school

Table 1 - Activities within SRTS schemes

4. ACTIVITY ON SRTS IN SCOTLAND

There are 32 unitary local authorities in Scotland. Each authority has wide ranging powers and responsibilities including local roads, transport planning, road safety, education, and social work. The survey work revealed that:

- Just over half of local authorities have started a SRTS process.
- 89 school projects are underway, and a further 40 are being planned.
- Most projects have started relatively recently.

Most local authorities were unable to provide details of forward plans for expenditure on SRTS since these were not yet finalised at this level of detail. The budgeted capital commitment for 1998/99 was £576,000 across all schemes. Most of this funding was allocated within Roads and Transportation budgets but £95,000 had been successfully bid for from national Scottish Office funds. The authorities which had been successful in obtaining national funding noted that they would not otherwise have been able to proceed with SRTS projects.

It is significant to note that total expenditure levered by the national funding comprises about a third of the Scottish total. In addition, some authorities noted that they did not have SRTS projects because their applications for national funding had not been successful. It is apparent that Scottish Office can influence local authority spending patterns significantly through such funding mechanisms. Without the national support for SRTS in Scotland, levels of activity would have been well below English levels.

Expenditure within transport capital programmes will be essential to implement many important engineering measures within SRTS projects. However, the absence of funding from education budgets suggests that there may be a need for greater knowledge and understanding within local authority Education Departments about these initiatives. Given that the above expenditure on SRTS is only 0.3% of public expenditure on school travel more generally, there may well be scope for a more integrated approach to school travel planning yielding significant investment in SRTS schemes.

£20,000 of the funding was from the Health Service accounting for the 1998/99 expenditure on several projects in Glasgow under a pilot scheme referred to as “Fit for Life”. These trials will soon be completed so there may be scope for more widespread Health Service funding for SRTS initiatives in the future.

Revenue funding is much more difficult to quantify. Many respondents noted that considerable staff time had been invested but were unable to define this more precisely. Part of the reason for this is that as an integrated initiative SRTS was usually pursued as part of some other programme such as road safety planning or Local Agenda 21 initiatives. This inability to quantify resources should not be taken to imply that revenue funding, including staff time, is insignificant.

5. PREPARING AND IMPLEMENTING SRTS PLANS

The research identified that successful implementation of plans demands flexibility. Experience has shown that key parts of even the best researched SRTS plans can encounter unforeseen obstacles or opportunities. A scheme is most likely to be successful if all the key parties involved have a real commitment to its success and to overcome the obstacles which will inevitably arise.

Although improving health was the main aim of Glasgow's Fit for Life project, most respondents overwhelmingly reported that road safety was the main aim. Other aims reflected a wish to reduce traffic volumes.

There were some important differences between the views of elements within SRTS between local authorities which reported that they had active SRTS projects. Those without projects highlighted the more expensive or general activities as the most important, such as pedestrian skills training and wider community involvement. In contrast authorities with projects identified the most important elements as mapping of routes to and from school, and travel surveys.

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These are relatively straightforward, simple and cheap tasks to perform. It is therefore clear that those with experience of projects appreciated that specific targeted activities could achieve the most significant benefits for the least effort. Wider awareness of this message could help to encourage more authorities to promote SRTS initiatives.

Some authorities which did not have any active or planned SRTS projects noted that “many of the items covered..... are addressed by engineering or road safety activities on an *as necessary* basis.” This highlights a very important point about the difference between traditional approaches to transport planning and a more integrated approach. As discussed above, integrated transport planning should involve schools and communities in addition to transport professionals. SRTS projects are a useful mechanism for ensuring that activities genuinely take place on an “as necessary” basis as part of integrated programmes which reflect the aspirations of local people.

The concept of community empowerment can be perceived as a threat to established decision making processes within local authorities. Wider implementation of SRTS will depend upon a better understanding of how these mechanisms can work. These challenges are already being tackled as part of Local Agenda 21 implementation within local authorities where it is recognised that awareness of these issues needs to be raised through education and training. Similar steps to increase awareness needs to be built in at all levels of the implementation of SRTS projects.

Resources, staff or financial, were viewed as the main constraint on SRTS activities. If SRTS activity is to increase, it is clear that the priority given to integrated working on transport will need to increase so that such approaches can command a greater share of scarce resources. With very few projects yet having been fully implemented it is perhaps not surprising that funding decisions tend to support other initiatives with a longer track record of success. However, as awareness of the benefits of SRTS grows, it will be important to ensure that appropriate sustainable funding mechanisms are established. Of particular importance will be the priorities within Education Departments to ensure that SRTS initiatives help to enable local authorities to take a more integrated approach to the planning of all aspects of school travel. Achieving this will rely upon national leadership to encourage good practice.

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The five top concerns of local authorities are compared for authorities with and without active or planned SRTS projects in Table 2. Although only of slight concern overall, it is significant that the main concerns are about making safety worse. This probably reflects traditional views about the safety implications of encouraging walking and cycling, but does also emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach when planning SRTS projects to ensure that problems are avoided.

Average scores for concerns (where a score of 1 is a key concern and a score of 3 indicates no concern)	Councils with projects (Score)	Councils without projects (Score)
Making levels of personal safety worse	1.83	2.11
Making road safety generally worse	1.92	2.00
Making an existing road safety problem worse	2.08	1.90
Making the environment worse around schools	2.50	2.56
Making health and well-being worse	2.58	2.56

Table 2 - Council Concerns about SRTS

SRTS practitioners considered that the main barrier to progress was lack of professional and teaching staff time. However practical problems such as parental car dependency and parental concern about security and personal safety were also cited as major barriers to progress.

More specifically, the main constraints on walking and cycling to school were considered to be: the inconsiderate attitude of those parents who drive children to school; speeding vehicles or other unsafe driving practice; and difficulties for walkers and cyclists crossing busy roads. It is clear that for progress to be made the local community, and particularly parents, must become involved in the process.

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The research identified that across Scotland it is the behaviour of parents and carers that often gives rise to the greatest problems. Circulation of appropriate information is therefore very important to encourage safer behaviour. Of particular benefit will be practical local measures which encourage co-operation between the home and school.

Key messages can be effectively communicated through SRTS programme newsletters. Information for families should focus on:

- Ways for parents and carers to provide increased adult supervision for children walking or cycling to school.
- Parking around the school
- Ways that adults can set a good example for children to follow. Children are very aware of adult road user behaviour so learning from adults must be a key part of education on road safety issues.

Many road safety education resources are in use in the classroom as part of curriculum based learning programmes. These form part of personal and social education and environmental studies. It has been found that SRTS projects help to improve children's understanding of road safety issues within the context of their local environment and are a very useful way to tackle these curriculum issues.

Once a SRTS initiative is established within a school, providing personalised route choice and safety guidance for children can be a very effective way to develop a SRTS culture. All new children enrolling for the school have a SRTS pack given to them explaining the school road safety policy, identifying the recommended approach for travel to school, and an explanation of the importance of safe and healthy school journeys as part of children's education.

For many children, car, bus or taxi are the only practical travel options, but SRTS projects often also need to consider the specific needs of this group. At some schools children are dropped off some distance from the school allowing them to walk for part of their journey and reducing traffic levels near the school. In other cases car sharing schemes and discounted bus fare schemes have been negotiated by schools to reduce the number of car trips and help with individual transport planning..

Police forces review regularly their priorities for targeting unsafe driving and parking, and can take into account the needs of SRTS projects. It has been found that it is usually best to seek a commitment in terms of number of days per year when the area around the school will be targeted. Monitoring reports then confirm the degree to which this level of enforcement has been successful in achieving the desired improvements. This helps to provide the basis for future decisions on Police enforcement priorities.

6. MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS

There was a very broad spectrum of experiences about the management of projects. For example, in some cases the perspective was clearly that of a local community trying to promote the initiative and finding mixed support from professionals within local authorities, Police, and Health Authorities. In other cases, local authorities could be frustrated by local communities and schools which were apparently indifferent to the initiative. Some of the most obvious tensions appear to be between local authority departments. Depending on the type of respondent, perceptions of the lead role differed: 80% of transportation professionals who responded saw themselves in the lead role, but education professionals did not appear to echo this and considered that they were more often in the lead role. This finding provides an interesting pointer. On the schemes that are successfully moving forward, there is a high degree of ownership by those who are involved. Successful community schemes talked of *winning* funding from local and national government. This type of campaign language should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat by professionals.

However, the lack of clarity about who is managing the project can and does lead to some conflict. The mechanisms and extent of joint working varied significantly. Where schools tried to progress schemes alone they found quite soon that success was limited by delays, for example in the implementation of engineering improvements. However, it was identified that there were often difficulties in getting all parties involved at the outset. This was for a number of quite different reasons such as: lack of knowledge by a school based SRTS committee as to who should be involved and how to go about it; and local authority roads and transport departments developing projects too far before approaching schools selected for a project.

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A wide range of successful approaches to SRTS projects was evident emphasising that there is no single model. Nonetheless, in spite of these differences, a number of common threads were evident. The more successful projects have had a champion who has been prepared to tackle obstacles in order to make progress and a willingness to be as objective and constructive as possible about the inevitable frustrations that arise when seeking to make progress with a number of partners.

A general lack of resources was widely reported. SRTS projects require significant amounts of time by everyone involved, especially teachers and Council roads and transport staff. Invariably there are other pressing issues competing for this time and not all parties are able to devote the appropriate time to do justice to a project. Nevertheless, on successful projects, there was considerable enthusiasm and no lack of effort on the part of many involved.

The lack of financial resources, too, was highlighted as a barrier to progress. This refers not just to roads related capital works but also to the purchase of, or in-house development of, educational resources. There were also views expressed that some Education Departments (as opposed to the individual schools) could have done more generally to support projects, particularly with the development of teaching resources.

Although there were some positive statements about future monitoring of projects, only one had a built-in commitment to its long-term sustainability through the production of a five year plan. Partners were often not sure who should be responsible for monitoring progress and reviewing plans. The need to maintain the momentum of a project was also a common thread. If parents and others see slippage from earlier promises of action, interest wanes and this can mean that previous levels of enthusiasm are difficult to regain.

It is clear that two major challenges for the management and implementation of future SRTS projects will be to overcome resourcing constraints and change parental attitudes. For both these aims, it will be essential to improve awareness of what can be achieved. As a result of the research recommendations were made for best practice on SRTS.

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Table 3 summarises the main steps which were recommended for the management of successful projects.

Step
1. Establishing the Corporate Policy Framework
1.1 Project initiator who can be anyone with an interest in school travel to write to potential stakeholders in a SRTS project seeking information on policy and resources.
1.2 Project initiator to collate responses and prepare brief summary paper.
2. Setting up the scheme
2.1 Project initiator to set up a meeting of stakeholders giving about six weeks notice.
2.2 Use meeting of stakeholders to agree membership of School Safety Team (SST) and to appoint a project leader.
2.3 Project leader to arrange first meeting of SST.
2.4 1st meeting of SST to agree initial objectives for school road safety policy and agree survey requirements.
3. Administering the surveys and investigation of local needs
3.1 Project leader to set timescale for preparation of reports on accident survey, travel mode survey, preparation of map of walking and cycling routes, and review of perceived local problems.
3.2 Project leader to collate reports and arrange second meeting of SST.
3.3 Meeting of SST to review survey reports, consider the need for further surveys and investigation work, and review how well existing activity reflects local needs. Once SST is satisfied that the level of information available is sufficient it should agree its key recommendations and commission the preparation of a SRTS plan.
4 Preparation of SRTS plan.
4.1 Project leader to arrange meeting of SST once draft SRTS plan has been completed.
4.2 Meeting of SST to agree plan.
4.3 Project leader to send copies of the agreed plan to all activity leaders and ensure that all required actions are successfully initiated.
5. Monitoring
5.1 Project leader to contact activity leaders shortly after their required actions should have been completed to review progress and any problems.
5.2 Depending on the progress being achieved, the project leader should identify an appropriate time for a meeting of the SST to review whether the scheme objectives are being met.
5.3 Meeting of SST to review scheme and how it can be further developed. Approach will be similar to the above from step 2.4 onwards.

Table 3 – Summary of Key steps in managing a SRTS project

7. CONCLUSIONS

If an integrated transport culture is to be built into the lifestyles of people in Scotland, then managing school travel through SRTS projects can be a key part of this. SRTS projects aim to give a higher priority to travel by walking, cycling and public transport, require solutions to be fair, and aim to ensure that decision making processes involve a cross section of society. They therefore fit well within the context of national and international economic, environmental and social policies.

There are examples of SRTS in many countries around the world. Schemes are tailored to local circumstances so it is difficult to generalise about their impacts. However there is a high level of satisfaction with the approach as a practical way to tackle the significant health, safety and environmental concerns affecting schools.

Overall the Scottish review can conclude that the work undertaken to date on SRTS has been a success. There is a high degree of satisfaction with projects, but this is coupled with a recognition that improvements are necessary in the way that projects are tackled. This suggests that, if projects have already delivered practical improvements, then they have the potential to be even more successful in the future. Future work needs to build on the infrastructure improvements, training and publicity, and mode shifts which have been achieved towards a wider public understanding and community responsibility for nurturing healthier safer children, who think about their travel choices.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figure 1 – Approach to Review

