

Living Streets

Policy Briefing on Walking to School



Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.



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Executive Summary

Despite growing awareness over climate change, the negative impacts of excessive car travel and childhood obesity at record levels, it is a depressing fact that the proportion of primary school children walking to school, which has been steadily declining for decades, is now at an all time low so that less than half of children now walk to school¹.

Living Streets believes that the steady decline in the numbers of children walking to school has contributed to the erosion of the streetscape in our cities, towns and villages, making many streets no-go areas for school children and their parents.

Ironically, a significant factor in making the streets around our schools unwelcoming to pedestrians has been the increased traffic generated by parents driving their children to school, with up to a fifth of all car trips during the morning peak being generated by the 'school run'.²

Why it matters

- The decline in walking to school coincides with a dramatic increase in the number of overweight or obese children. The National Child Measurement Programme in England showed that in 2008/9 almost a third of children in Year 6 were overweight or obese³. The Department of Health predicts that if present trends continue, 9 out of 10 children today could grow up with dangerous amounts of fat in their bodies. This can cause diseases like cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease⁴.
- One of the main factors causing this increase is the reduction in physical activity levels in our children, with 72% of our children in England not achieving the government's recommended '60 active minutes' per day⁵.
- For children, being sufficiently active can be achieved by regularly engaging in moderate intensity exercise such as walking or cycling - activities that can be incorporated into everyday life for recreation or transportation⁶.
- Studies also show that increasingly sedentary lifestyles mean that physical fitness levels in our children have been declining by 7-9 per cent a decade⁷.
- The 'school run' is responsible for generating around 2 million tonnes of CO2 per annum⁸.

By contrast, our work running the Walk to School Campaign since 1995 has led us to understand the many benefits that parents, children and teachers get from walking to school including:

- Walking is good for children's health. A fifteen minute walk to school and back each day provides half of the 60 active minutes per day recommended for all children by the Chief Medical Officer. A recent study also shows that '*children who walk rather than use the car tend to be generally more active than other children, and children tend to be more active when they are out of their homes than when they are in them...walking is one of the best forms of physical activity that children can do, and that for some children walking to and from school can consume more calories than the recommended quantity of physical activity and games lessons. Walking has the advantage that it requires no preparation, no special equipment or venues, and no expenditure of money*'⁹.

- Walking is good for parents' health too. Parents who walk with their children benefit from improved circulation, increased mental health and well-being, help with weight loss and an improved immune system¹⁰.
- Parents who walk with their children tell us they value the social time this provides with their children; it provides an opportunity for parents to find out what's going on at school and elsewhere, free from the distractions of everyday life¹¹.
- Teachers report that children who walk to school are frequently more alert, relaxed and ready to start the school day compared to those arriving by car¹².
- Parents can help their children to learn important life skills (such as those related to road safety, active travel and lifestyles) that can help them to gain independence at an earlier age than children who only travel to school by car.
- Walking to school can save the average family £400 per year in motoring costs¹³.
- Walking to school helps children to get to know their neighbourhood and to feel part of their community¹⁴.

We believe that there is now an urgent need for governments to take actions that will reverse the decline in numbers of children who walk to school and ensure that all children who can walk to school do.

Recommendations and policy calls

Our key policy calls are

- Parking and 'drop-off' exclusion zones around schools to encourage more walking and cycling.
- Existing 20mph zones around schools need to be extended so that 20 mph becomes the default speed limit wherever people live, work and play.
- Local Authorities should be given a statutory duty to ensure safer routes to schools are provided for all schools.
- Schools admissions authorities should adopt distance¹ between home and school as the primary tie-breaker criterion for oversubscribed schools. Admissions authorities must ensure that the methodology for calculating distance between home and school takes account of all suitable walking routes including footpaths (whether or not these are adopted by the local authority).
- Active travel advice to be given to children and their parents deemed at risk of obesity, for example under the National Child Measurement Programme in England.
- Clear departmental responsibility for the issue to be set by national governments with remits to deliver sustainable school travel strategies with clear targets to increase numbers of children walking (and cycling) to school.
- Governments to allocate adequate resources to deliver sustainable travel initiatives, including supporting successful walk to school initiatives run by Living Streets and other organisations.
- Government to invest in education work around anti-social pavement behaviour such as pavement parking and pavement cycling alongside enforcement against anti-social behaviour on pavements.

¹ Living Streets' position is that there is no set distance for walking to school or set age for walking independently to school. Parents should assess the risks associated with the school route and their own child's confidence and work with their children to build up their independence and road safety skills while walking to school. Living Streets does believe however, that a 20 minute walk (which is roughly 1 mile) is a reasonable distance for primary age children to walk.

The Social Context

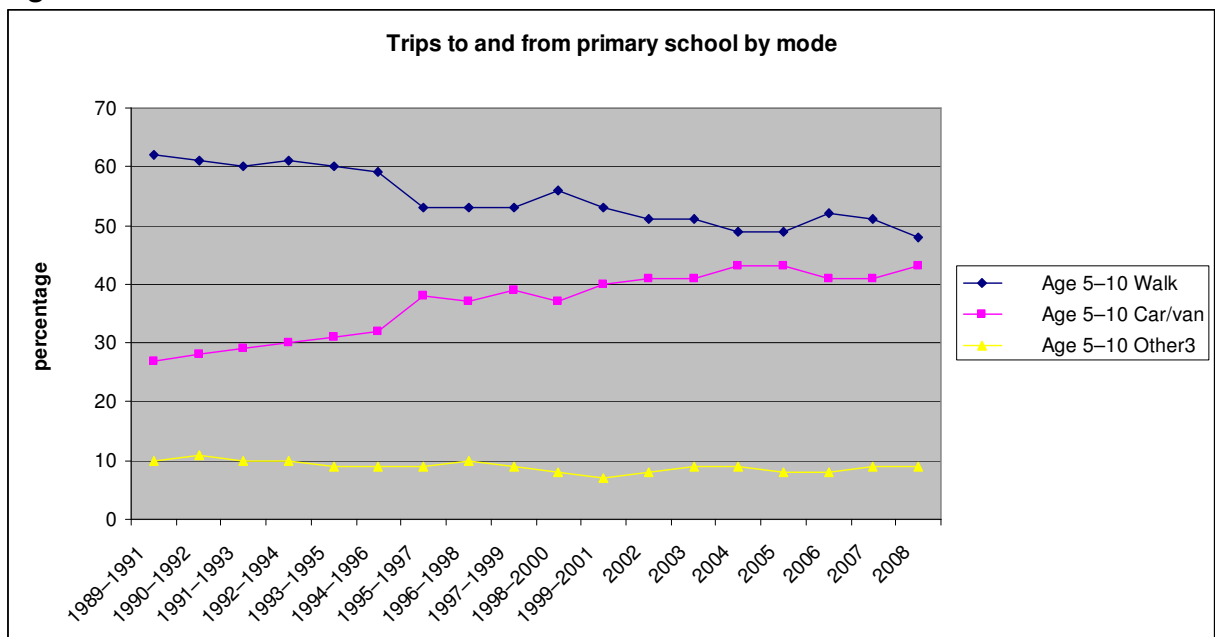
The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'.

Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer 1998-2010



The number of primary school children walking to school has been declining steadily over the last two decades as illustrated by Figure 1 below:

Figure 1



Source: ONS Social Trends¹⁵:

Between 1989 and 2008, walking declined by 14% while trips made by car increased 16%. ('Other' modes of transport are predominantly local and private bus.)

We highlight below some of the social trends that have contributed to the decline in walking to school:

- Car ownership:** As society has continued to become more affluent, there has been a significant increase in car ownership. Between 1989 and 2006, the number of households not owning a car decreased from 35% to 24%, whilst households owning 2 or more cars increased from 21% to 31% and the

proportion of 1 car households has remained stable, at around 45%.¹⁶ By 2008 78% of households had access to at least one car.

- **Women in the workforce:** Another significant social trend has been the increased participation of women in the workplace. In the UK the proportion of women in work rose from 59% in 1980 to 74% in 2009, though almost half of women work part-time.¹⁷
- **Average length of the school journey:** The average length of the school journey in England has increased from 1.3 to 1.6 miles between 1995 and 2008¹⁸. One of the main factors driving this increase is likely to be the expansion of parental choice in schools.
- **Parental fears over child safety.** In 1971, 80% of 7 and 8 year-olds travelled to school without an adult but by 2006 the figure had dropped to 12% of 7 to 10 year-olds¹⁹.

It is clear from the above that there has been a range of factors that have together contributed to the decline of children walking to school, in spite of existing government interventions. It will therefore be necessary to put in place a further series of policies to address these complex underlying issues.

Living Streets' Walk to School Campaign

Living Streets' Walk to School campaign was established in 1994 and is part funded by the Government. It encourages parents, pupils and teachers to make the journey to and from school on foot. The campaign has the support of the majority of local authorities in England, reaching 1.6 million children and their parents and carers every year.

The WoW (Walk Once a Week) scheme recently received funding from the government to expand regionally. WoW rewards children who walk to school at least once a week with collectable monthly pin badges. An external evaluation²⁰ has shown that the walking rate in WoW schools is 10% higher than the national average. For more information visit www.walktoschool.org.uk

We have a strong vision for how we can support more walking among school children. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets to encourage healthy lifestyles through an active approach to travel.

We engage with teachers, pupils and parents through our Community Street Audits, which are an effective way of identifying street improvements which will enable active travel choices for everyone. Many children have also been involved in our mapping projects, where groups of children work with an artist to create neighbourhood maps using their ideas and drawings which also identify recommended walking routes to school. These kinds of projects help to build neighbourhood pride and encourage people to be involved in improving their locality, whilst also making walking the natural choice for short journeys.

For more information visit www.livingstreets.org.uk/expert-help

Government Policy

Issues surrounding walking to school are relevant to three main areas of Government policy: Transport, Health and Education. These are all areas of devolved responsibility in the Nations and Regions, however in some instances there are policy overlaps between England and Wales. The key policies in England, Scotland and Wales are outlined below:

England

Education and Inspections Act 2006 (England and Wales)

An Act of parliament which seeks to ensure that all children get the education they need to enable them to fulfill their potential. The removal of distance as a criterion for pupils' school admission procedure (unless the school is oversubscribed) has led to longer school journeys as choice of school increases. This Act also places a duty on local authorities in England and Wales to promote sustainable travel, through a Sustainable Modes of Travel strategy (SMoTS), which includes information on how the local authority promotes sustainable travel to school. All local authorities were expected to write these strategies by August 2007, with yearly updates. Schools admissions policy is implemented through a statutory Schools Admissions Code. The admissions code states: 'In establishing their oversubscription criteria, admission authorities should take account of the time it will take to travel to school, as well as, the safety of the route, the need to encourage cycling and walking and the availability of public transport ...in establishing their oversubscription criteria.'

School Travel Planning (England only)

School travel planning was set up as part of the Travel to School Initiative (TTSI) in 2004 and is jointly funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Department for Education (DfE). A school travel plan is a set of measures that tackle the impact of, and issues surrounding, the school journey. Although not a legal requirement, schools in England (including independent schools) were expected to have a school travel plan in place by March 2010.

Most local authorities in England have a School Travel Advisor (STA) funded through TTSI, whose role is to oversee school travel planning and general promotion of sustainable travel to school. This initiative has close links with road safety and education, and the promotion of walking schemes such as walking buses or walking incentive schemes, such as Walk once a Week (WoW). Key calendar dates, such as Walk to School Week, often have events organised by STAs to encourage schools' participation.

The long-term future for School Travel Advisers in England is uncertain with no further commitment to funding after 2010/11.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (England and Wales)

This Act relates to the regulation of the development of land in England and Wales. Organisations purchasing land for large scale development are often asked to contribute money to offset the negative impact of the development. Under Section 106A of this Act, this funding is earmarked for local projects, often benefitting schools, such as improved crossing points and infrastructure. This in turn can have a positive impact and increase walking to school.

Active Travel Strategy (England only)

A strategy launched by the Department of Health (DH) in February 2010 with walking 'at its heart'. The Government wants walking (and cycling) to be at the centre of local transport and public health strategy for the next decade. However, the strategy was not accompanied by any new funding to facilitate its delivery.

Walking Bus/Initiative Grant (England and Wales)

In November 2006, the DfT introduced the Walking Bus/Scheme grant, where schools could bid for 3 year's funding to start a walking bus (£1000 a year) or other walking schemes (£500). One in six schools across England and Wales were awarded funding. After the first year, the subsequent payments were reliant on the school showing a reduction in car traffic volumes of up to 5 return journeys per day. This scheme has now closed.

Living Streets' Walk to School Campaign (England, Wales and Scotland)

Living Streets' Walk to School campaign was established in 1994 and is part funded by the Department for Transport and the Department of Health. It encourages parents, pupils and teachers to make the journey to and from school on foot. The campaign has the support of the majority of local authorities in England, reaching 1.3 million children and their parents and carers every year.

The WoW (Walk Once a Week) scheme recently received funding from the government to expand regionally. WoW rewards children who walk to school at least once a week with collectable monthly pin badges. An external evaluation²⁰ has shown that the walking rate in WoW schools is 10% higher than the national average. For more information visit www.walktoschool.org.uk

Sustainable Schools (England only)

The Sustainable Schools framework was launched in 2006 and has 8 Doorways, one of which, Travel & Traffic, links closely with walk to school. All schools should be achieving success in all 8 Doorways and be a Sustainable School by 2020. Sustainable Schools need to be models of sustainable travel, where vehicles are used only when absolutely necessary and where there are exemplary facilities for healthier, less polluting or less dangerous modes of transport.

Healthy Schools (England only)

The Healthy Schools Programme is a joint initiative from the DH and the DfE (formerly known as DCSF) that has been running since 1999. The programme promotes healthy lifestyles and a whole school/whole child approach to health. Walk to School is seen as a valuable way to gain exercise as part of the daily routine and Healthy Schools Coordinators work closely with STAs to promote active travel.

In late 2009, the Healthy Schools enhancement model was launched. It has been designed to help schools develop the wider thinking and planning they will need to achieve better outcomes around health and well-being for children and young people. The model sets out a series of manageable stages to help schools to assess their needs, and to plan, deliver and monitor new health intervention activities over a 2-3 year period. The Healthy Schools enhancement model will provide primary care trusts, local authorities and their schools with additional support to better equip them in providing both universal and targeted health interventions to help address a range of these issues within the school context.

Statutory Distances

Currently Local authorities must provide transport where they consider it necessary to ensure that a child goes to school. If transport is necessary, then it must be provided

free of charge. In most cases, it's up to the local authority to decide what transport is necessary. But children are automatically entitled to free transport if they:

- are between five and 16 years old

And:

- attend the nearest suitable school, and the school is further away than the 'statutory walking distance'

The statutory walking distance is:

- two miles for pupils aged under eight
- three miles for those aged eight and over

Living Streets considers these to be reasonable distances to walk or cycle and opposes any move to shorten or alter the statutory walking distance.

Scotland

Scottish Government policy supports walking to school alongside other active travel modes. Local authorities set out catchment areas for each of their primary schools. Children living within a catchment area are normally provided with a place at the school serving that area. Places at secondary school are also based on catchment areas. However, local authorities also send pupils from particular primary schools to linked secondary schools. Catchment areas can have the effect of reducing the distance children have to travel to their school, making active travel choices more likely.

Sustrans' School Travel Programme in Scotland

Sustrans' School Travel Programme in Scotland is funded by The Scottish Government. Since November 2007, Sustrans Scotland has received more than £8m from the Scottish Government to encourage and enable children to travel to school in ways that benefit their health and the environment.

Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets

Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets provides £9m ring fenced funding to local authorities that can be used for their local priorities to promote walking, cycling or safer streets. The future of this ring fenced budget beyond 2011 is unclear

Travel Plans

75 per cent of all schools are working on a School Travel Plan. Ring fenced funding was provided for School Travel Coordinator posts by Scottish Government but the ring fencing was removed and the £1 million for School Travel Co-ordinator (STC) posts has been rolled-up into the Local Authority block grant since 2008-09. Another key policy is for 20mph zones around all schools- 83% of schools have 20mph zones outside their school gates

Cycling Action Plan Scotland

The Cycling Action Plan for Scotland was published in June 2010 and included a commitment "To encourage participation in and to promote the annual hands up Survey in September, as part of the criteria for Sustrans' safe routes to school funding with the 'Outcome 5: To monitor changes in active travel to school'." ²¹

Wales

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 applies to England and Wales. As in England, schools admissions policy is implemented through a statutory Schools Admissions Code. However, the Welsh code does not require admissions authorities to take

account of distance/time factors in forming their oversubscription criteria. Nevertheless, where admissions authorities choose to use this criterion, then they **‘must** explain clearly how distance from home to the school will be measured including the points at the school and the child’s home from which distance is to be measured.’

In 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government published their Walking and Cycling Action Plan 2009-13. The key objectives of the plan are to:

- *Improve the health and well being of Wales through increased physical activity;*
- *Improve the local environment for walkers and cyclists;*
- *Encourage sustainable travel to combat climate change;*
- *Increase levels of walking and cycling through promotion of facilities; and*
- *Ensure that walking and cycling are prioritised in policies, guidance and funding.*

In relation to walking to school, the action plan sets the following target:

Increase the percentage of children who walk to school to match the UK National Average²².

Wales does not have statutory funding for School Travel Planners and whilst some authorities employ dedicated school travel coordinators, this function is also fulfilled by local authority officers from road safety and highways departments.

The Welsh Assembly Government currently supports a number of related initiatives and organisations. These include:

- **Safe Routes to Communities:** Support for local authorities to develop safe walking and cycling routes and to improve accessibility;
- Trunk road improvement and a transport grant scheme that provides new walking and cycling infrastructure;
- Funding for Sustrans Cymru.



Our Policy

The complex factors that are combining to drive down the numbers of children who walk to school are the same factors that are generally eroding the quality of our local communities, neighbourhoods and environments and threatening the health of our children. We are therefore advocating a range of policy responses at national and local levels. Given the different situations in England, Scotland and Wales there is a need for separate responses from each government.

We set out below a policy framework identifying where these apply to England Scotland and Wales:

Barrier/Issue	Policy Response	Nation(s)/Region(s)
No clear ownership of the issue by a single government department.	Full recognition that this is a cross-cutting issue and establish an inter-departmental group with one department taking the lead. Creation of a sustainable school travel strategy. Pooling of financial and other resources to implement the strategy.	England
Parents fail to understand the full benefits that walking to school can confer on their children. Parents fail to properly understand the risks associated with stranger danger and traffic and consequently adopt risk avoidance behaviour (driving their children to school), rather than risk management (teaching children road safety skills and managing their transition to independence).	A properly funded campaign that focuses on communicating with parents. As well as providing a 'call to action', this needs to provide practical information, help and advice to parents on the relevant issues. This also to include funding for local and national incentives and other schemes that promote walking directly to children.	England, Scotland, Wales
Infrastructure barriers to safe routes to schools and imbalance of resource allocation in favour of motor vehicles over pedestrians.	LAs given statutory duty to ensure safer routes to schools following the Danish model.	England, Scotland, Wales
Increasing distance of journeys to/ from schools in England.	Schools admissions policy should ensure that overwhelming majority of pupils live within walking distance. Admissions authorities should adopt distance between home and school as the primary tie-breaker criterion for oversubscribed schools.	England (DfE)
Danger from speeding traffic	20 mph to be the default speed limit wherever people live, work and play.	England, Scotland, Wales
Too easy for parents to access school by car leading to increased congestion and pollution at the school gates with attendant safety and health impacts.	National governments to introduce guidance to promote car free zones around schools; Local government to introduce car free zones around schools; schools to promote car free culture.	England, Scotland, Wales
Free bus travel for under 16s (in London).	TfL to carry out a full cost-benefit analysis of its free bus travel scheme for under 16s and review this provision in the light of the results. A moratorium should be in place on similar schemes in the interim.	London (TfL/DfT)

Low levels of activity contributing to high childhood obesity.	Active travel advice to be given to children and their parents deemed at risk of obesity for example under the National Child Measurement Programme in England.	England (DH) Scotland, Wales
End of central funding for School Travel Advisers in England. If no replacement funding put in place, there will be a lack of capacity to help schools implement their School Travel Plans effectively.	Funding for a national task force to ensure that the work of STAs is not wasted.	England (DfT)
Sharp spike in KSI statistics around transition from primary to secondary school.	Support and advice to parents to up skill their children with appropriate road safety skills well before the transition period. Additional road safety training for children reaching the end of primary school focused on the transition to potentially longer and more complex journeys to secondary school.	England, Scotland, Wales
Lack of local framework for delivery in Wales.	New National Performance Indicator to measure active travel to school.	Wales
Lack of specific targets in Scotland.	Setting of targets by national/local government on active travel to school.	Scotland
Schools increasingly adopting risk averse policies regarding active travel for example prohibiting cycling, or walking unaccompanied.	Governments to issue schools with good practice guidance on encouraging responsible active travel to school, to include guidelines on the role that parents should be expected to take in relation to ensuring their children can travel to school independently.	England (DfE), Scotland, Wales
A lack of flexi-time or family-friendly working practices.	Government and employers need to work to ensure that flexible and family friendly working practices are in place to help support walking to school.	

Summary of policy calls

Living Streets calls for:

- Parking and ‘drop-off’ exclusion zones around schools to encourage more walking and cycling.
- Existing 20mph zones around schools need to be extended so that 20 mph becomes the default speed limit wherever people live, work and play.
- Local Authorities should be given a statutory duty to ensure safer routes to schools are provided for all schools.
- Schools admissions authorities should adopt distance² between home and school as the primary tie-breaker criterion for oversubscribed schools. Admissions authorities must ensure that the methodology for calculating distance between home and school takes account of all suitable walking routes including footpaths (whether or not these are adopted by the local authority).
- Active travel advice to be given to children and their parents deemed at risk of obesity, for example under the National Child Measurement Programme in England.
- Clear departmental responsibility for the issue to be set by national governments with remits to deliver sustainable school travel strategies with clear targets to increase numbers of children walking (and cycling) to school.
- Governments to allocate adequate resources to deliver sustainable travel initiatives, including supporting successful walk to school initiatives run by Living Streets and other organisations.
- Government to invest in education work around anti-social pavement behaviour such as pavement parking and pavement cycling alongside enforcement against anti-social behaviour on pavements.

Who Agrees?

There is widespread support across national and local governments, as well as health authorities, for the need to reverse the decline in children walking to school. In 2008, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published ‘*NICE public health guidance 8 Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity*’. The guidance included the following recommendations:

Ensure pedestrians, cyclists and users of other modes of transport that involve physical activity are given the highest priority when developing or maintaining streets and roads. (This includes people whose mobility is impaired.) Use one or more of the following methods:

- *Re-allocate road space to support physically active modes of transport (as an example, this could be achieved by widening pavements and introducing cycle lanes)*

² Living Streets’ position is that there is no set distance for walking to school or set age for walking independently to school. Parents should assess the risks associated with the school route and their own child’s confidence and work with their children to build up their independence and road safety skills while walking to school. Living Streets does believe however, that a 20 minute walk (which is roughly 1 mile) is a reasonable distance for primary age children to walk.

- *Restrict motor vehicle access (for example, by closing or narrowing roads to reduce capacity)*
- *Introduce road-user charging schemes*
- *Introduce traffic-calming schemes to restrict vehicle speeds (using signage and changes to highway design)*
- *Create safe routes to schools (for example, by using traffic-calming measures near schools and by creating or improving walking and cycle routes to schools)²³.*

The joint DH and DfT Active Travel Strategy for England equally recognise the importance of increasing the numbers of children walking to school:

Promoting and increasing active and sustainable travel to schools and other educational establishments is a core part of our active travel strategy²⁴.

National Governments in Scotland and Wales have similarly supportive policy statements. However despite this high level of recognition, governments have yet to take decisive action to deal with the issue. As this paper demonstrates there is no single root cause of the decline in children walking to school. Rather, a complex set of factors are creating the problem and consequently a series of 'joined-up' policy responses is required as highlighted in this paper. We believe that such a response is essential to ensure that children, and society as a whole, can enjoy the wide range of benefits that can be achieved from the simple act of walking to school.

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Further Information

Living Streets

The national charity that stands up for pedestrians
<http://www.livingstreets.org.uk>

Walk to School campaign

The national campaign, run by Living Streets
<http://www.walktoschool.org.uk>

Change 4 Life

<http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/Default.aspx>

Sustrans

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk>

Department of Health

<http://www.dh.gov.uk>

Department for Transport

<http://www.dft.gov.uk>

Welsh Assembly Government

<http://www.wales.gov.uk>

Scottish Government

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>