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Empowering communities and neighbourhoods

Making Children-Friendly Streets

Lessons learnt from Bradford District's School Street Schemes



Evidence summary n.1
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<https://www.phiuk.org/healthy-urban-places>

Background

People-friendly streets connect places and support safer, more active, and healthier travel. They also offer greener, more sociable spaces that enhance wellbeing. In contrast, most streets outside schools are congested with traffic at drop-off and pick-up times, leading to pollution, unsafe conditions, and an environment that does not encourage active travel for families.

Bradford Council is exploring ways to make journeys to school safer, healthier, and more enjoyable for children and families. One such initiative is to introduce a School Street scheme. This restricts vehicle access near to schools for ~30-40 minutes, at times linked to the start and end of the school day, using a Traffic Regulation Order. Exemptions are in place for residents, emergency services, and blue badge holders.

Evaluation Design

- As the Council's research partner, Born in Bradford worked with schools to evaluate the impact of 3 School Street schemes launched in 2023.
- Pupils (aged 8-11) in 3 School Street schools and 4 comparator schools completed a bespoke survey at baseline, 4-6 weeks and at one year after the School Streets scheme were introduced.

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Key findings



Half of journeys to school are < 5 minutes, one third of these are in cars



Children are happier when they have safe roads, good pavements, and engaging surroundings



Children like that School Street schemes elicits a sense of solidarity and community cohesion, a finding not reported before



Children's reported active travel decreased in School Street schools; the schools had above average active travel levels and further research is required on School Street schemes in schools with lower rates of active travel



It is important to ask children about their perceptions as these can differ from adults

Recommendations to improve children's journeys to schools

1

Improve traffic safety, pavements, and things to see and do near schools to support child wellbeing

2

Encourage frequent active travel to school and ensure good air quality to support children's enjoyment of their trip to school

3

School Street schemes serve varied purposes so decision-makers should define clear aims, base eligibility on need as well as feasibility, and ensure community engagement and support

4

Where School Street schemes aren't feasible, alternative measures (e.g. traffic calming, walking and cycling infrastructure) and interventions (e.g. cycle training, park and stride) should be provided to promote active travel, wellbeing, and safety; these can also complement School Street schemes

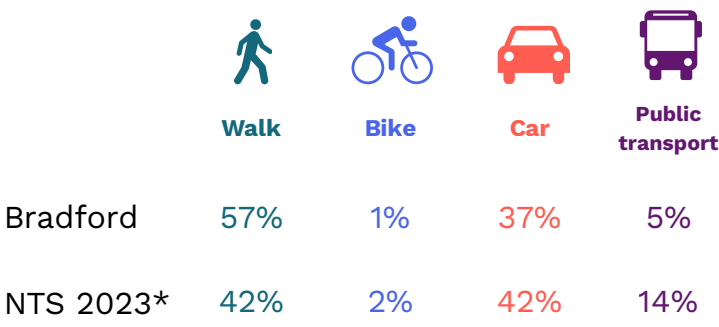
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Listen to children's ideas to make streets nicer (e.g. more play places, greenery) and easier to actively travel (e.g. fewer parked cars, less traffic, active travel infrastructure)

How Bradford Children Travel to School

Modes of travel to school

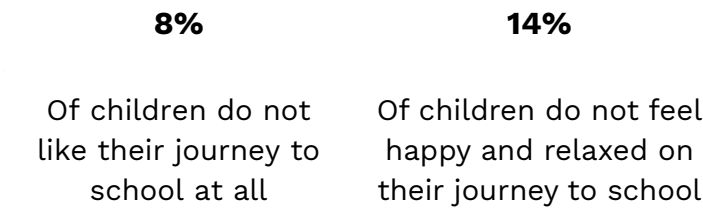
Most common modes of travel to school



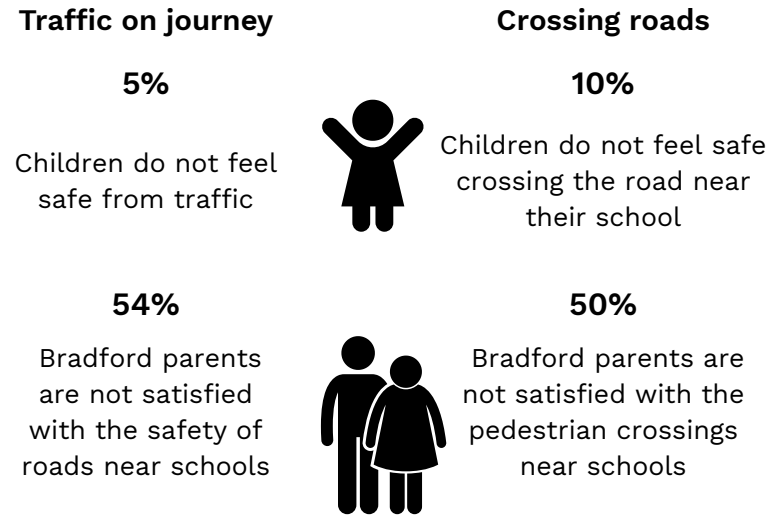
Taking children to school



Perception of journey to school



Perception of school road safety



Highlights

May-July 2023, 997 children & 124 parents/carers in 7 Bradford schools completed bespoke surveys about their school journey & views.



Journey time to school:

- Most journeys (48%) are less than 5 minutes; one third of these short journeys are in cars
- 64% of journeys less than 5 mins are on foot
- 54% of children who do not travel actively to school 3+ days, would like to travel actively

Effect of School Streets Schemes on Bradford Children

Methods - A Natural Experimental Evaluation

In 2023, 3 schools across Bradford district launched pilot School Street schemes. Children in the School Street scheme schools and 4 comparator schools took part in an evaluation of the schemes by completing surveys during class time. Surveys were completed before the scheme (May 2023), 4-6 weeks later (October 2023) and one year later (May 2024).

The evaluation had two main questions:

- 1) Do School Street schemes affect active travel, satisfaction with the school street perceptions of safety crossing the school street?
- 2) How are School Street schemes perceived more broadly by children?



Results - Self-Reported Active Travel Compared to comparator schools:

- Active travel (walk, bike) on the day of the survey was lower 4-6 weeks and one year after the scheme launched.
- The number of children who actively travelled 3+ days/week to school did not change.
- On average, children completed one less active travel trip per week one year later.

Notes of caution:

- Small study.
- A high baseline level of active travel means limited scope for further improvement.
- Potential displacement of traffic congestion to surrounding areas may make active travel less attractive.
- A potential change in transport patterns due to post-COVID-19 normalisation.
- The evaluation was not sensitive to small changes in active travel on part of the journey (e.g. walking instead of driving on the School Street).

Results - Safety

Children were asked, “Do you feel safe crossing the roads outside the school? (not very safe vs. safe or very safe)”

Compared to comparator schools, there was no difference in perceptions at either time point.

Qualitative findings suggested that understanding children’s perceptions of safety is complex, as a common theme that emerged was that children liked the feelings of safety with fewer cars that School Street schemes bring about.



“

Yay no more disturbing cars in my way!!!!!! I can finally cross the road and be safe!

- Year 6 Pupil



Practice Point:

Make sure volunteers know that children respond positively to their presence!

Results - Wellbeing

Children were asked “Do you like the road outside your school? (not at all vs. a little or a lot)”. Compared to comparator schools, there was no difference in perceptions at either time point.

Note of caution:

- Children may have interpreted the question literally, as the physical road. However, our qualitative findings suggested that children did not see the School Streets scheme as changes to the physical road but rather the people volunteering to close the roads.

Qualitative research found that children liked the sense of solidarity and community cohesion that School Street schemes elicit. This is the first time this has been reported in a School Streets evaluation. This was supported by anecdotal evidence from schools.

“

The School is trying to keep us safe and that they care about us...

- Year 6 Pupil

“

It's much calmer and more pleasant.

- Teacher

Other Key Findings from the School Streets Evaluation

1. Motor Traffic reduced

Traffic was counted 4-6 weeks after the School Streets schemes launched:

- Schools 1 and 2 had a 60–90% reduction
- School 3 had a 94–95% reduction

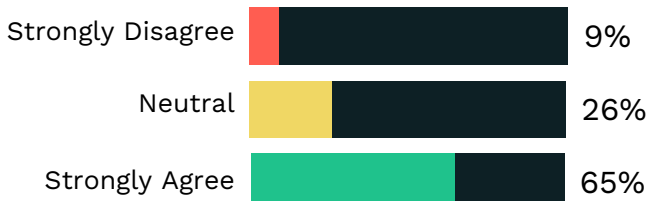
2. Most children and parents like the scheme

Children like the scheme



45 children did not know

Parents like the scheme



"I don't have to worry about my children getting hit by a car anymore on that bit of school" - Parent

Reflections on the School Streets Schemes

1. To maximise impact, School Streets should be complemented by other schemes

- Single-component interventions such as traffic restrictions imposed on short lengths of road without complementary interventions (e.g. walking school bus, park and stride scheme, cycle loan scheme, improved infrastructure) do little to challenge the root causes of car travel and are less likely to succeed than multi-level approaches.

“

Because it takes up space from when I need to go through that exact road, its blocked so it is very annoying

- Year 5 Pupil

2. It was not possible to introduce daily traffic restrictions on the busiest routes or where lengthy diversions would be required

- Schemes are generally introduced at lower trafficked sites or cul de sacs which may already naturally encourage higher levels of active travel and mean that opportunities to further improve levels of walking, wheeling, or cycling are more limited. All three intervention schools had above-average active travel levels, possibly relating to the active-travel-promoting characteristics of their built environments, meaning that opportunities to further improve levels of walking, wheeling or cycling were more limited. Alternative approaches to improve active travel need to be considered for schools where School Streets are not feasible.

3. Variation in implementation can affect impact

- Difficulties implementing School Streets due to a lack of enforcement and motorist compliance are well-documented nationally and were reported locally.
- Successful School Street schemes rely on community engagement and involvement.

“

As soon as the school staff aren't manning the street, the cars park wherever they like

- Parent

Promoting Children's Happiness on the School Route

The way children experience their surroundings impacts their wellbeing and happiness

Looking at how children experience the built environment on their journey between their home and the school gate, three features were consistently shown to be important for wellbeing, feeling:



**Safe from traffic
on their trip**



**That pavements were in
good condition on their
trip**



**That there were things
to see and do near
school**

Frequent active travel to school and **good air quality** were associated with children liking their trip to school but not associated with feeling happy and relaxed on the journey or generally happy.

Children's ideas to make streets nicer

One in five children think there are not many nice things to see and do around their school. We asked children **what would make the area around your school nicer**.

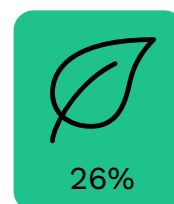
The top 4 suggestions are shown.

The remaining suggestions related to:

- feeling safer (5%),
- reduced traffic and pollution (4%),
- food outlets and shops (3%),
- scenic enhancements like 'beautiful views', fountains, and less buildings (2%),
- other (1%),
- community venues to visit (1%),
- and resting places or benches (1%).



Play places
(e.g., equipment,
pitches, 'fun
stuff')



More greenery
(e.g., trees,
flowers, wildlife,
gardens)



Cleaner
environment
- less rubbish

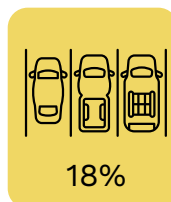


More and better
quality walkways,
cycle lanes,
crossings, less
parking

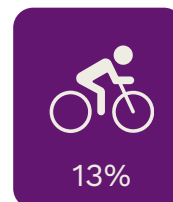
Children's ideas to make it easier to walk or cycle to school

54% of children who do not walk, cycle or scoot to school say that they would like to. We asked children who do not walk or cycle 3+ days/week **what would make it easier to walk or cycle to school.**

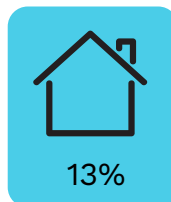
The top 4 suggestions are shown. The remaining suggestions related to feeling safer (10%), having companionship on the journey (6%), having more designated crossings or lollipop people (6%), other (5%), and cleaner streets (4%).



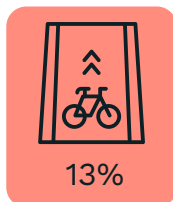
18%
Fewer parked cars, less traffic and slower traffic speed



13%
Access to bikes and infrastructure (e.g. parking, training)



13%
Living closer to school



13%
More, and better quality, walkways and cycle lanes

Other Schemes in Bradford also support healthier more people-friendly streets and places

To introduce a School Street, a site needs to be assessed against eligibility criteria which limits the number of sites where a scheme is possible. There are other council schemes and interventions which support reductions in traffic and air pollution near to schools and contribute towards making streets across Bradford more people-friendly.

1) Clean Air Schools Programme



Bradford's CASP is funded by the Clean Air Zone. Grant funding has been allocated to schools to improve air quality within the school environment. CASP also provides lessons plans, resources and sessions on the impact air pollution has on the health and the environment.



2) Road Safety & Bikeability

The council's Road Safety team delivers Road Safety education, training and publicity across the district with the aim of preventing road casualties. They also offer Bikeability 'cycle' training.



3) Play Streets

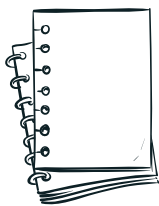
A Play Street is a road that has been temporarily closed to through traffic to create space for children to play out.



4) Engine idling & awareness raising

Neighbourhood Wardens carry out engagement and awareness across Bradford District, raising public awareness of the health issues linked to engine idling which is an enforceable offence.

Further information



More details on the evidence presented here can be found in the following papers:

- [Children's happiness and the school route \(2025\).](#)
- [The effect of a School Streets intervention \(2025\).](#)



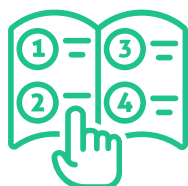
Bradford School Streets:

- [Bradford School Streets Website](#)



For a more complete list of Bradford's people-friendly street schemes and interventions:

- [What else is being done to improve air quality?](#)



Guidance on how to set up and manage a School Streets scheme:

- [School Streets: how to set up and manage a scheme](#)

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Healthy Urban Places, a programme hosted by Born in Bradford, is working with communities and local partners to better understand how local urban places impact health and what improvements could achieve the best outcomes. Our approach focuses on generating this understanding with people in a way which can influence policy and practice to make our urban places healthier for everyone.

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