

Summary:

Children's journey to school.

A questionnaire survey on travel behaviour and traffic safety among children

The current report describes a questionnaire survey on children's journey to school. The survey is carried out on commission of the Public Road Authorities in Norway, and functions as a before study for a series of campaigns aimed at decreasing car dependency for children on their school journeys.

All in all 6900 primary school pupils (6, 8 and 12 years old) from a representative sample of schools from all of Norway answered the questionnaire. Data were gathered both in February and May 2002. The children filled in the questionnaire at home, in cooperation with their parents.

Travel mode to school

The results of the study show that many parents drive their children to school even at fairly short distances, especially the younger children. As many as 26 percent of the children are driven to school in private car even when travel distance is as low as 0,5 to 1 kilometre. A problem with the high degree of car use is that children are made passive and are not given the possibility of gaining important motor and orientational skills. 40 percent of all the children in the survey are taken to school, either by car or by public transport. On the other hand, most of the children (47 percent) do actually travel to school by foot, a figure that is only surpassed by the UK in our international comparison of journey to school studies.

For the older pupils, but not for the 6 year olds, travel mode varies quite a bit with time of year. The amount of 12 year olds going to school by foot or bicycle is reduced from 75 percent in summer to 60 percent in winter.

The children's experience of the journey to school

When asked about how they ideally would travel to school, the children's favourite travel mode was walking to school with other children.

The children and their parents were also asked about their experience of the journey to school. While most of the children experience their journey to school as being safe, their parents are a bit more worried, 55 percent are slightly or highly worried about their children being involved in a traffic accident.

Reasons for driving to school

When asked about the reasons for being driven to school children of different ages gave different answers. All in all, the children cited lack of time and riding with someone going the same way as important reasons. The older children answered bad weather to a larger extent than the younger children who answered unsafe roads as a reason for driving.

A multivariate logistic regression analysis shows that background variables such as distance to school, time of year and car ownership all play an important role in predicting whether children are taken to school by car. Parents who drive to work are twice as likely to also drive their children to school than parents who do not drive to work. Interestingly enough, two of the “softer“ variables in the analysis feeling of safety and children’s own attitudes also contribute significantly to explaining why children are driven to school. Children who feel that the road is unsafe, or who display positive attitudes to cars are more likely to being driven than other children.