

Summary:

Increasing active transport among children – what effects do campaigns have?

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Increased walking and cycling to school is a goal for transport-, health and environmental policy in many countries. Physical activity is good for children's development, health and learning. Local and national authorities and organisations have conducted many campaigns to increase the share of active transport to and from school. However, the national goal of 80% walking or cycling to school has not been obtained. The Public Roads Administration therefore wanted a review of the effects of campaigns. This report has gone through material from school travel campaigns that have, at least to some extent, been evaluated. A main impression is the striking absence of systematic evaluations of this rather comprehensive activity. It seems that campaigns in this area function best when they are linked to physical measures, the schools get resources and they are repeated. Campaigns for active school transport often have many participants, they can establish local engagement, set focus on the problem and contribute to adjustments for walking and cycling – activities that can pave the way for long term effects in favour of better health and environment.

From safe road to school to active and secure transport

The first large national Norwegian campaign related to children's travel to school *Action School Road* started in 1979, the International Children's Year. In the 1970ies, children played in the streets, sat unbelted in cars, and from 60 to 100 children were killed in traffic every year. The campaign registered 32 000 dangerous spots on Norwegian school roads, established awareness of the problem and contributed to reaching the goal of reducing children's traffic accidents. The campaign also established the first national travel survey for children, one necessary basis for evaluating effects.

Today many dangerous places have been repaired, the law prescribes seat belts, children spend their day in nursery schools and are less exposed in traffic. And parents drive their children to school and other activities. The challenge today is thus that children are physically inactive and in many cases overweight. Norway has set the following goals for children: 1) At least 60 minutes of physical activity each day and 2) 80% of children should walk or cycle to school. The goal for school campaigns is changed from safe to active and safe roads to school.

Active transport is important for health and environment

There is solid documentation for the positive effects of physical activity. It has also been shown that daily active transport can contribute to the desired level of activity and its effects. For children it is important to manage things like transport by themselves. In addition, walking and biking is good for the environment and climate. Since many basic attitudes and values are developed in childhood, it might be more probable that grownups will cycle if they got used to cycling as a child.

Children’s travel pattern has changed. The main change is that fewer children use active transport while the share of children driven to school increases. The share of passive transport has increased from 3% in 1979 to 22% in 2011, cf. figure S1. The share is larger for smaller children and increases with distance to school and the number of safety challenges on the road to school (number of necessary crossings, share of the road without pavement, speed along the road).

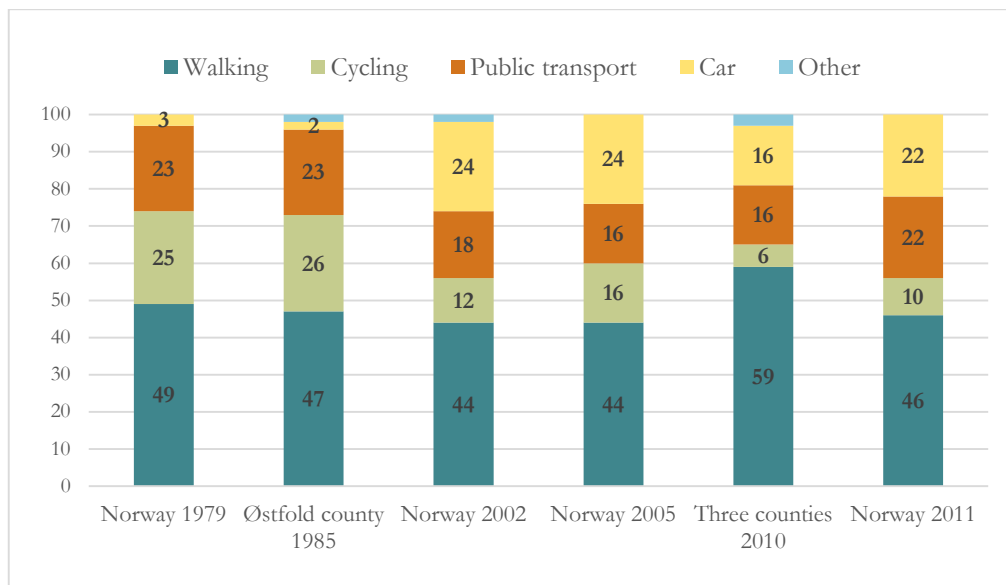


Figure S1: Travel mode to school from 1979 to 2011. Norwegian primary school children. Percent.

Characteristics of campaigns giving effects

This report has gone through material from school travel campaigns that have, at least to some extent, been evaluated. A main impression is the striking absence of systematic evaluations of this rather comprehensive activity. The effects which are most widely reported is the number of participants and various stakeholders’ impressions of the process. We know less about the long term effects on the share of active transport to school.

It is demanding to change people’s behaviour and to motivate for a policy that can pave the way for children’s safe and active transport, but it is possible. Campaigns can furnish society with knowledge about children’s daily life as a basis for infrastructure measures and other improvements of school roads and local environment.

Some lessons from earlier campaigns are that:

- Behavioural changes are easier to achieve if one connects “soft” and “hard” measures, i.e. campaigns with physical improvements.
- Such couplings are easier to achieve if the campaign activity is an integrated part of transport plan, mobility- or health strategy.
- Couplings between nationally initiated programs with resources and local agents, arenas and activities seem to function well.
- Communicative activities start before infrastructure measures and continue over time. Especially so when changes can be perceived as negative, like parking and speed restrictions near the school.
- One succeed in developing a collective identity (Little City is the cycling city of Norway, New School is the climate school of our community).
- Presenting the results of the campaign (distance cycled, amount CO₂ saved etc.) continuously can increase engagement and the probability for success.
- Public space is creatively used for communication to establish consciousness of the campaigns’ theme and purpose.
- A long term perspective where the campaign is repeated annually, increases the chances for success and make it easier to keep the yearly goals, ambitions and expectations on a realistic level.

In addition, campaigns have a value as a positive element in schools’ daily life.

Campaigns must be coupled to other actions

Studies of campaigns both for environment and safety show that a crucial precondition for success is that the campaign is combined with supplementary measures and that the stakeholders involved work well together at all levels. Figure 2 gives a picture of stakeholders and activities that must play together to get effects.

It is necessary to engage *politicians and authorities* in order to establish ownership to the campaign and the results. Without this it is difficult to ensure resources for the preparatory work, for the implementation of the campaign and for the concrete improvements of the school road that may be necessary.

Campaigns seem to have the largest effects when *the teachers* have been active in relation to parents and pupils, and where the headmaster has been an active stimulator in relation to the teachers. *The schools* must thus get resources to carry through the additional activities the actual campaign demands. That could be certain campaign facilitators to do the job, instruct the children etc. Other measures are to ensure that the teachers are compensated in some sense. Both *environmental, health and sports organisations* are potential collaborators.

The role of the *parents*, being the children’s most important role models, must not be underestimated. It is necessary to increase the parents’ understanding of how important it is that they walk and bike together with the children, i.e. that they leave the car. Strict time schedules and unsafe school roads are the most common reasons for driving children to school. Other reasons can be that they will be sure to get children to school in time, that their children really get to the school and to avoid

bullying on the way to school. The parents’ report anxiety for children independent of what kind of traffic environment the children have. Thus several things must be done:

- Map dangerous spots on the school road and make them safer
- Find measures which can give the parents time to accompany the children walking and biking to school
- Find arrangements for the school day and need for material that makes it unnecessary to for the children to carry everything every day
- Develop public arrangements that can function as “walking buses” at places where these do no function
- Investigate what other reasons parents give for driving the children, and find measures to respond to these arguments.
- Also argue with the advantages following children have for the parent’s own health.

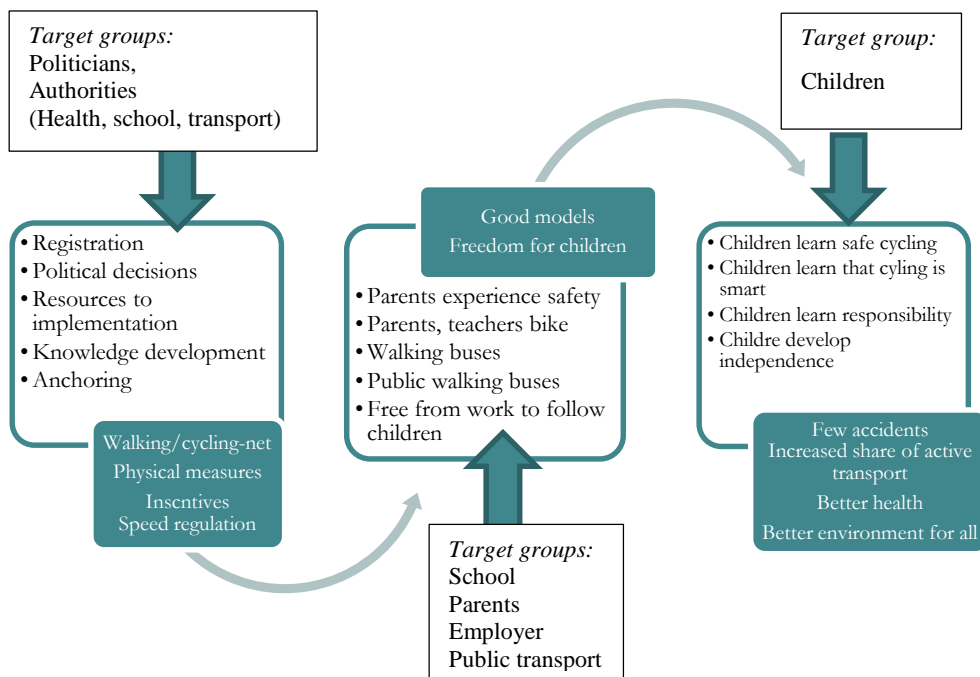


Figure S2: Connections between factors of importance for safe and active transport to school – a model of activities, effects and relevant target groups.

Campaigns must be evaluated

In relation to the large effort society puts into campaigns for increasing the share of children that walk and cycle to school, few systematic evaluations of effects on travel behaviour, health and safety have been made. One cannot expect schools to have resources for this in addition to the campaign activity.

Since we know little about the effects of different types of campaigns national support should be given for evaluations, cf. the Norwegian pilot program for public transport and the Danish program for cycling pilots. For projects supported by these programs, evaluation was a requirement and support was not paid out until evaluations were made. A common standard for evaluation makes it possible to collect data from different pilots in a common national database and to evaluate effects of different types of activities.