

Summary

Measures for children's independent mobility and activity

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Authors: Sunniva Meyer, Marika Kolbenstvedt, Ingunn Opheim Ellis
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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, TØI has investigated existing measures that can give children increased independent and active mobility, as well as provided input for possible new measures. Many municipalities have done a lot to improve the infrastructure and secure the traffic routes for children and youngsters, which are prerequisites for independent mobility. Barriers that can hinder the implementation of measures, especially in less central municipalities, are lack of capacity, competence and financial resources. Measures that can strengthen children's independent mobility are expanded use of Heart Zones, increased cycling training, a public transport service adapted to children and youngsters and the location of leisure activities in places accessible to them. There is a need for clearer requirements, guidelines and guidance from central authorities on the size of, and acceptable distances to, good and varied outdoor areas for children, explicit prioritization of vulnerable road users locally over through traffic and other car traffic. Authorities should invest in child studies that can supplement travel surveys, secure the interests of children and be linked to the municipalities' planning tools.

The Institute of Transport Economics (TØI) was engaged by The Ministry of Transport (SD) to conduct a survey of measures that can help ensure active and independent mobility among children. The report is based on the goal of providing better mobility for children in The Children's Transport Plan (BTP), included in the Norwegian National Transport Plan 2022-2033:

*«To make it easier, safer and more attractive to move on foot or by bicycle, to and from leisure activities, school or daily chores. Good activity habits are established early and we take them with us all our lives. »
(SD 2021)*

In this project we have:

- 1) Mapped existing measures and pilot schemes that can contribute to providing for children's increased independent mobility in different parts of the country.
- 2) Assessed positive and negative effects of various measures.
- 3) Mapped barriers that prevent the implementation of planned measures.
- 4) Outlined input to possible measures that can contribute to achieving the goals in the Children's Transport Plan in terms of increased independent mobility and activity.

To shed light on these topics, we have used several methods. We have conducted a limited literature and document study, a survey aimed at municipal employees and other relevant professionals, who provided information from 52 municipalities. All the counties in Norway are represented by one or more municipalities. In addition, we have conducted workshops, qualitative interviews and informal focus groups with children.

A lot of good work is done in the municipalities

Most municipalities that participated in the survey have implemented a number of measures to improve the infrastructure and secure the traffic routes for children and young people, which is the very prerequisite for independent mobility. These measures mainly have positive effects, in that they make it better for all vulnerable road users, contribute to more children walking and cycling, fewer children being driven, and provide increased security for parents. The fact that more people walk and cycle is also positive for public health. In addition, the measures contribute to fewer accidents, less local pollution, as well as giving children and young people good habits for the future.

Few participants point to negative effects of the measures. The negative effects are more specific to each individual measure than the positive effects; for example, signal regulation in intersections can provide increased security, but also increased waiting time for pedestrians and cyclists, and fewer parking spaces may provide fewer opportunities for drop zones.

In more than half of the municipalities, requirements are set for the location, size and placement of outdoor whereabouts and green areas for children and youngsters for use in zoning plans. This applies to a greater extent to central than less central municipalities. Most municipalities have also implemented measures to ensure that there are areas children and youngsters like and need, by upgrading or creating new playgrounds, developing recreation areas, bathing areas, toboggan runs and such.

Challenges and barriers

The results from the survey reveal several challenges and barriers that prevent the municipalities from implementing planned measures. The most common barriers are lack of resources in the form of lack of finances, lack of capacity, and lack of competence in the municipality. Less central municipalities experience more barriers and obstacles to implementing planned measures than central municipalities, and they experience a greater lack of capacity and competence.

In addition, there is a challenge with strong national and regional authorities that contribute to national and regional considerations being given priority over local considerations. This applies, for example, when prioritizing through traffic rather than facilitating local vulnerable road users. Local politicians can prioritize growth at the expense of areas for children's free activity and development. Strong interest groups profiting financially from building densely also contribute to this tendency.

Measures to achieve BTP's goal of increased independent mobility and activity

We specify a number of measures we recommend that the authorities introduce: measures that strengthen children's independent mobility, measures and requirements to secure areas for activity and free unfoldment and measures to overcome barriers to introducing other measures.

Children's independent mobility

Measures that strengthen children's independent mobility include:

- 1) Safe traffic for vulnerable road users. Here we especially recommend expanding the use of Heart Zones and thinking about traffic safety in all municipal projects that involve digging.
- 2) Prioritize vulnerable road users over car traffic through stricter speed limits and toll payments for national roads that burden the local environment.
- 3) Facilitate children's cycling through opportunities to borrow bicycles and offer local bicycle repair and bicycle training.
- 4) Make it more attractive for children to walk by creating playgrounds and other outdoor areas suitable for school children on the way to school, and/or using children's feet/painting fun colors on asphalt, to encourage the children to walk the "right" way.
- 5) Improving public transport with routes where children need and want to travel, more frequent departures, departures a larger part of the day, school bus passes that can be used in leisure time and cheaper ticket prices.
- 6) Create a public transport service specifically adapted to children and youngsters, for example a door-to-door mobility service for young people. Such a transport service can also be adapted to younger children who will not be allowed by their parents to travel alone by regular public transport.
- 7) Ensures that children have access to places for self-directed activity in all planning processes, This includes municipal area plans that set requirements for safe access roads for children to the places they use, mobility analyzes for children and youngsters, and location planning for leisure activities for children and youngsters, enabling them to get to them on their own.

Areas for activity and free unfoldment

Measures and requirements to secure areas for free activity and development include:

- 1) Clearer requirements and guidelines from central authorities on size and distances to good and varied outdoor areas for children.
- 2) Municipalities should regulate existing free areas for children early so that they are secured, include requirements for order of completion of areas for children and youngsters in zoning plans, and involve children and youngsters and their representatives/spokespersons early in regulatory issues.
- 3) Strengthen the competence of the municipalities regarding children's rights to green and other outdoor areas.
- 4) Strengthen objections to developments by making visible the areas that children use, strengthen competence among various public authorities on the follow-up of zoning plans, and strengthen knowledge of children's rights among interest groups.
- 5) Ensure good and varied outdoor areas that are not fully booked by organized activities.

Overcome barriers

Relevant measures to overcome barriers are:

- 1) Higher prioritization of children's mobility through explicit prioritization of local vulnerable road users over through traffic and other car traffic.
- 2) Stricter requirements and guidance from central authorities to the municipalities with regard to prioritizing the mobility of children and youngsters and access to areas for free activity and development.
- 3) Need for a contact person in the county who both responds to the municipalities' inquiries about measures for children and youngsters on county roads, and can provide guidance to the municipalities.
- 4) Strengthen the role of children and youngsters' spokesperson in planning, for example through earmarked funding for this role.
- 5) Utilize knowledge better through both the development of digital tools for processing data on children's needs and wishes and guidance to the municipalities on how they can include children's needs in the municipalities' planning work.
- 6) Raise the topic higher on the agenda, including information campaigns aimed at children, parents, politicians at all levels and other strong spokespersons (celebrities, bloggers, influencers et cetera).

Separate children's studies to supplement the children's travel survey

Separate child sections in The National Travel Survey (RVU) are important to study developments in children's travel habits and activity patterns, and to get the parents' assessments of children's transport options. But children and youngsters may have different opinions than their parents, and other measures are required to bring out their views. We therefore recommend that the authorities expand the focus on child studies to supplement the children's travel survey, such as Kids' Tracks (Barnetråkk). By doing so, better systems should be developed for connecting Kids' Tracks data to municipal planning tools. Further developing Kids' Tracks is too resource-demanding for smaller municipalities, and national authorities should therefore develop a uniform system that all municipalities can utilize.