

# Stop Driving – Measures to reduce parental driving to sports activities

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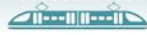
The purpose of the project has been to gain knowledge about what can explain parental driving for children's (6-12 years) sports activities and what measures can be effective to reduce parental driving. Bærum municipality has been used as a study area. Based on qualitative and quantitative data, we find three main explanations for parental driving: structural limitations (poor time, long distances, unsafe walking and cycling conditions), good access to a car, and that many parents want to spend time with their child. Three measures were developed and tested in the project: An awareness campaign for increased cycling, relocation of sports activities to school after ordinary school time and ski bus, i.e. a bus scheme for cross-country training where parents could also ride to and from training. Only the ski bus had a clear effect on parental driving. The relocation measure had only a partial effect because the after school training sessions organized by the sports teams did not necessarily replace training sessions in the afternoons/evenings. The cycling campaign reduced parental riding by up to 10 percent among participants during the campaign period compared to the control group.

## Background and purpose

Car use among children and young people in Norway is high, especially when travelling to various sports activities. The purpose of this project has been twofold: 1) Gain more knowledge about transport to children's organized sports activities and what can explain parental driving to such activities, and 2) Develop, test and evaluate the effect of measures to reduce parental driving to children's sports activities. The project is limited to sports activities as previous research has shown that car use for such leisure activities is high. In addition, the project is limited to children aged 6-12 years because car use in this age group is particularly high.

## Method

The project is based on a number of data sources: qualitative interviews with representatives from sports teams, qualitative interviews with parents of children who are active in sports teams, a survey among 416 parents, workshops to develop measures to be tested in the



project, and a pre- and post-survey among participants and a control group (questionnaire) to evaluate one of the measures quantitatively.

## Children's organized sports life, travel habits and estimation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

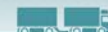
On average, children (6-12 years) in Bærum municipality participate 3 times in sports activities every week. About 60 per cent of the trips to such activities are carried out by car (mainly driven by the child's own parents). In addition, there are trips to tournaments, competitions and other gatherings, which are also largely done by private car. In other words, sports activities generate a lot of driving in the municipality.

Parental driving (i.e. where the child's own parents or guardians drive) actually increases slightly with age, when we compare children of 6-7 years with children of 8-12 years. The two most important reasons for this are probably that 1) younger children make greater use of activity transport (i.e. organized transport through the sports clubs) that pick up / bring children to and possibly from activity) and 2) that younger children have a shorter distance to exercise and therefore walk or cycle more.

In total, driving to organized sports amounts to 20.5 km per person in a week. Estimates indicate that parental driving to sports activities in Bærum municipality amounts to 10.77 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per week.

## Barriers to reducing parental driving

Children's sports activities and parental driving control the organization of everyday life for families with children to a large extent. Many parents we interviewed experience challenges in getting everyday logistics to go up when there is a lot of driving, and many are therefore positive to reducing parental driving. Qualitative interviews with parents and representatives from sports clubs in the municipality reveal a number of barriers to children using other modes of transport than cars for sports activities. Distance from home to the place where the sports activity is located is cited as one of the main barriers to not walking or cycling. Perceived insecurity due to lack of infrastructure (road safety) is also a barrier to cycling. The fact that walking, cycling and public transport take longer than driving is another important barrier. In a hectic everyday life, parents prioritize driving to make time for all the chores during the day. These are also barriers found in previous research on the use of means of transport during school trips. We also find that having to transport (heavy) equipment (i.e. skis or skates) forces many people to choose the car. Winter with snow, ice, cold and darkness is also an important reason to choose a car over walking or cycling. The fact that it is too demanding to organize carpooling between parents is another reason why many choose to drive themselves. Public transport in Bærum is to a greater extent adapted to business trips into Oslo than local travel. In our interviews, we also find a number of barriers to the use of public transport – in addition to the fact that it is more time-consuming than driving. The interviews show that public transport is not adapted to the children's needs: i) Long distance to stops, both at home and during activity, ii) Complicated travel due to changes, often at large and confusing public transport hubs iii) Uncertainty related to delays and possibly cancelled buses. However, the qualitative interviews show that there are strong driving forces for using a car, and not just barriers associated with other modes of transport: parents drive their child to the activity because they want to spend time with the child in the car and be present at the training sessions. In addition, coaches often want parents to be present at training sessions to help out.



## Subjective justifications for parental driving and factors affecting parental driving

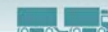
In the survey, parents were asked about reasons for driving a car for their children's sports activities. The main reasons are related to the fact that it is too far to walk or cycle (distance), that it is the fastest and easiest mode of transport (time) and that public transport is too complicated and the child is too young to take public transport (poor public transport). Reasons related to wanting to be present/spend time with the child, having equipment to carry and road safety weighing somewhat less. Nevertheless, 56 percent of parents fully or partially agree with the statement that "I think it is important to be present at the training sessions so that I can spend more time with my child", indicating that this is a major impetus for driving. However, the qualitative interviews reveal important differences between broad teams sport and specialized teams sports in transport challenges. Broad teams have a relatively large number of participants in different sports, while specialized teams sports are characterized by fewer members in one or a couple of sports. While the broad teams have a local catchment area – often defined by primary school districts, the specialized teams have to a greater extent members from all over Bærum municipality. Thus, for participants in the broad teams, the distances to the training site are generally shorter than for participants in the specialized teams. Participants in specialized teams therefore become more dependent on cars or public transport. In addition, participation in the specialized teams more often also requires more equipment that must be brought back and forth between home and training (e.g. hockey, alpine skiing).

A multivariate analysis shows that it is only the number of cars in the household and the number of kilometers between the dwelling and the training site that have independent and strong effects on whether or not the child chooses to drive when other conditions have been controlled for (age, education, income, number of children in the household, relevant public transport, perceived insecurity for walking/cycling, desire to be present at trainings).

## Explanations of parental driving

Both the qualitative and quantitative analyses suggest that contextual conditions in time and space are the most important explanations for whether or not parents choose to drive their children to organized sports (they drive because they "have to"). Too long distances and poorly adapted public transport services in a busy everyday life make the car the most efficient means of transport. Another important explanation seems to be access to cars (they drive because they "can"). The survey shows that the probability of driving increases with the number of cars in the household. As the qualitative interviews show, having only one car in the household requires much more planning within a family than if you have several cars, and the requirement for planning increases with the number of children in the household. A third explanation is related to the fact that parents want to participate in training sessions (they drive because they "want to"), both because they get time with the child in the car and because they can then participate in training sessions to spend more time with the child, especially parents of younger children. However, the qualitative interviews show that the desire to spend time with the child is also important for older children when it comes to driving to matches and cups.

The great impetus for driving one's child is a major dilemma when developing measures to reduce parental driving, even if parents' desire to participate decreases somewhat with age. Measures should be developed so that parents have the opportunity to participate when their child travels to training by means of transport other than cars – while these measures must also overcome barriers related to distance and time. The interventions that are developed must also take into account the age of the children.



## Assessments of existing measures

Today, there are two measures that are quite widespread in Bærum municipality to reduce parental driving: One is activity transport that is often organized via the sports club, the other is carpooling that is often initiated by the parents themselves. Activity transport is a popular measure. 18 per cent of our survey respondents state that sometimes their children use it. Almost all of those who use this offer from time to time state that they are satisfied with the measure. The survey shows that it is primarily the younger children (6-8 years) who use activity transport. Half of those who make use of the offer are only picked up at school, and have to get home from training on their own, while 40 per cent are both picked up at school and driven home after training. In the qualitative interviews, it emerged that there is a desire for the offer to be extended to also apply later in the day and thus also include pick-up from home by driving to training (and back again to home after training). One suggestion is to have a fixed collection point for pick-up/drop-off of children, e.g. at school, which is often within walking distance of the home, so that activity transport does not have to drive through all households. In the survey, 43 per cent state that they would stop parental driving if the child received an offer of activity transport.

Carpooling is also a popular measure. 43 per cent state that they use such a solution to/from training today from time to time. In practice, however, few make use of such a solution. Only 11 and 14 per cent respectively state that their children were accompanied by others than their own parents to and from training last time. However, the proportion is probably slightly higher because those who state that they drove their own child may also have brought other people's children in the car. Only a fifth of those who use carpooling say that it is organized on a fixed basis for all or part of the season. The rest plan carpooling more ad hoc. Both the qualitative interviews and the survey indicate that there are two main reasons why carpooling is not used more often: It requires too much planning (which makes it easier just to use your own car) and you do not know the other parents well enough. The qualitative interviews therefore suggest that carpooling should have been organized to a greater extent on the part of the sports team. Another measure that can have an effect on parental driving is to move the training sessions closer to where the children live. 42 per cent respond that they would stop parental driving if this were carried out.

## Varying effect of interventions

We have implemented three measures to reduce parental driving: Relocation of training activities to school, bus transport for cross-country training, and an awareness campaign to get more people to cycle to training. All measures were implemented between August 2021 and May 2022. The effects of the various interventions vary, and the variation is partly related to the type of intervention. Bus transport for cross-country training has an effect on driving among those who use it. Everyone we interviewed said they would drive a car if they didn't have this offer. At the same time, it is a challenge to get the children to use the bus: some chose not to use it at all, others signed up but only used the bus for certain trainings. Training at school has a slightly weaker effect. This measure has the potential to reduce parental driving if it leads to children attending fewer workouts in the afternoon and evening – exercise that they would normally be driven to. In the interviews, we find that some children use school training as a substitute for other training, while others participate in school training in addition to the regular training later in the day. Thus, we can conclude that the measure only has a partial effect on parental driving. The cycling campaign, which was mainly an awareness campaign, had less effect on transport habits and parental driving than the other two measures. Some of those we interviewed said that they cycle a lot to exercise anyway, and that such an awareness campaign has little impact. At the same time, we find that the amount



of parental driving has decreased somewhat after the campaign period, when compared with the control group that has not participated in the campaign. However, this is the short-term effect of the measure, measured just after the campaign period. We can assume that this effect will diminish over time if the campaign is not repeated.

It is a challenge that the measures that have the greatest effect are also expensive to implement. The SFO training has been financed with NOK 150 000 to each of the sports teams that have participated, while the ski bus initiative is financed with NOK 200 000 per season. Both initiatives have received funding through this research project. Participants have not had to pay to participate. When we ask the interviewees about payment fees, all respondents say that they are not interested in paying to use these offers. This indicates that such measures are dependent on external funding to be implemented.