

# **Sustainable School Travel in Buckinghamshire**

A Report of the Transport, Environment, Economy and  
Communities Select Committee

Inquiry Support: Member Services Team  
Lead Officer: Kama Wager, Committee & Governance Adviser



# Sustainable school travel in Buckinghamshire



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# From the Inquiry Chairman

“On behalf of the inquiry team, I would like to pass on our huge thanks to all those people who gave up their valuable time to come and talk to us or complete our survey. Their contributions have allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the successful work that takes place across the schools within our county and to understand the challenges.

The inquiry team was impressed to learn that Buckinghamshire is nationally recognised for its innovative solutions to promoting sustainable travel for the school journey and reducing the use of cars. The dedication of those schools who actively work to reduce car journeys and the Council’s School Travel Planning Officer was inspiring.


It is only through the willingness of officers, schools and other stakeholders to share best practice and identify solutions to barriers that we can strive to encourage other schools, parents and children to adopt healthy travel choices for the school journey and for that we are very grateful.”

David Carroll – Chairman – TEC Select Committee



# Inquiry Team

The Inquiry was conducted by the following Members of the Select Committee:

- Mr David Carroll (Chairman)
  - Mrs Lesley Clarke OBE
  - Mrs Avril Davies
  - Mr Phil Gomm
  - Mrs Angela Macpherson
  - Mr Brian Roberts
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# Inquiry Purpose

The purpose of the Inquiry was to look in detail at school travel planning & sustainable school travel activity and:


- How it can reduce problems around schools caused by travelling to school by car
- The challenges around encouraging people to use other modes of transport
- Planning for the future and the impact of growth in Buckinghamshire

# Inquiry Scope

Agreed at TEC Select Committee, 17 January 2017

<https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/documents/s92350/Report%20for%20Draft%20Inquiry%20proposed%20Scope.pdf>

# Out of scope:

- Home to school transport (except in relation to the issues)
  - An analysis of individual school/community issues
  - Enforcement measures
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# Methodology

Evidence was gathered through:

- Desktop research
- Survey via LAFS (142 responses)
- Survey to schools via Liaison group/school Bulletin (22 responses)
- An all-day evidence gathering session with internal officers and national experts
- A stakeholder roundtable discussion with 24 external stakeholders
- Survey for Junior Road Safety Officers

Detail provided in Appendices 1 & 2



# Background: National Context

Government's Travel to School Initiative in 2004:

- Aim for 100% schools developing a travel plan by 2010
- Funding provided for Regional Advisors, LA School Travel Advisors
- A one off Capital Grant payment for schools that developed a travel plan (average £5k for Primary schools; £10k for Secondary schools).

Statutory duty since 2006 for Local Authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport for the school journey

Following the General Election in 2010, Government withdrew the final year of Capital Grant funding.


No monetary incentive currently for schools to develop and deliver School Travel Plans.





# Background: National Context (2)

YET, there is recognition of the benefits of active travel in national public health policy, with:


- 3 NICE Public Health guidelines promoting active travel
  - Department for Transport guidance
  - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and
  - Public Health England evidence briefings around the benefits of active travel:
    - Obesity & the environment (Nov 2013), and
    - Working together to promote active travel: a briefing for Local Authorities (May 2016)
- 

# Background: Local Context

## Success

- ✓ Buckinghamshire seen as best practice nationally in relation to its school travel planning work and other sustainable school travel initiatives.
- ✓ Buckinghamshire has 70 schools with national Modeshift Stars accreditation for their School Travel Plans - by comparison the next highest local authority has 44 schools.
- ✓ Innovative projects such as Go for Gold sustainable travel incentive scheme and the Parent Parking Promise replicated by other authorities
- ✓ 162 schools engaged in active sustainable school travel work
- ✓ Car use for school travel has kept at 30% over last 5 years.

## Challenges

- ✗ 101 schools currently disengaged – not recognising a school role or responsibility for promotion of active travel.
  - ✗ Parental choice may mean the car is the only viable option
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# Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Focus
1	<p>That the Council clarifies its future approach to sustainable school travel work by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1a Undertaking a return on investment analysis of sustainable school travel work to assess the wider benefits of investing in this area;</li><li>1b Following the analysis, the Council publishing its vision for sustainable school travel work</li><li>1c Adequately resourcing the achievement of its vision, including longer term contracts for officers and an increase in budget</li></ul>
2	<p>That the Council develops and adopts a policy which clarifies its position on encouraging sustainable travel and the mitigation of transport impacts in relation to the expansion of current and development of new schools.</p>

# Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Focus
3	That the Council adopts an holistic approach to the planning of new and expanding schools, including factoring infrastructure provision and mitigation measures to reduce car use in costings
4	<p>That the Council addresses 'unsafe routes' to school for example through the Integrated Transport project, to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="533 743 1750 905">4a Prioritisation for regular/appropriate maintenance of routes to school where vegetation overgrowth jeopardises safety of the route.</li><li data-bbox="533 915 1792 1015">4b An equal focus on the assessment of primary schools routes.</li><li data-bbox="533 1029 1765 1190">4c A return on investment analysis for routes where the assessment's recommendation is for 'engineering' options to deliver a safe route to school</li></ul>

# Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Focus
5	<p>That the Council develops and delivers a publicity campaign aimed at all schools, stakeholders and Parent and Parent Teacher Associations to highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The role and responsibility of schools in promoting active travel for the school journey;</li><li>• The wider value and benefits to schools of active travel planning work e.g. higher educational attainment, links to other curriculum areas, Ofsted and health benefits; and</li><li>• The resources available to schools on <a href="http://schooltravelplanning.com">schooltravelplanning.com</a> and the value of the annual conference.</li></ul>
6	<p>That the Council raises the profile of sustainable travel planning amongst schools by ensuring STP activity is included regularly on the agenda of the Head Teacher Liaison Group, BASH and any other school liaison meetings.</p>

# Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Focus
7	<p>That a Member briefing session is held on the Member advocacy role in working with schools on School Travel Plans and promoting sustainable travel for the school journey. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information on the self help toolkits for schools and how they can be used;</li><li>• How the Council can help support schools;</li><li>• Providing the tools and information to deal with complaints and challenges;</li><li>• How Members can help schools address issues and identify solutions in their community leader role.</li></ul>

# The Council's Approach: Wider Benefits

From discussions with Public Health we learned that:

1. Inactive children become inactive adults. Investment in walking and cycling can benefit the individual and the wider community. If every local authority reduced inactivity levels by 1% for five-years, local taxpayers would be saved £44 per household.
2. The school commute can build activity into daily life that physical activity for school pupils helps:
  - Alertness and concentration for all and improve learning for children with learning difficulties
  - Achievement at GCSE - active young people have 10-20% better results
3. Physical inactivity costs Buckinghamshire an estimated £84.5m per year. Currently 32% of boys and 48% of girls aged 5-15 are inactive; only 14.1% of 15 year olds achieving the recommended level of daily activity.
4. Addressing inactivity is a key priority in the Health & Wellbeing Strategy and the Bucks Physical Activity Strategy.

We consider that the wider benefits of sustainable travel should not be underestimated


# The Council's Approach: Current Resource

Through discussions with the Transport Strategy Officers, we learned that:

- The Council has reduced its resource on School Travel Planning work from 13 officers pre 2009 to one officer currently (budget for School Travel Planning of £7,000 per annum).
- The dramatic reduction is a reflection of government support and local financial pressures.
- The Council is no longer has the capacity to proactively work with the 101 disengaged schools.

It is evident that the support, advice and guidance of the Council's officer has been instrumental in engaging and supporting schools to deliver this work.

We were disappointed to hear that the officer has now left the organisation and that, despite the importance of relationship building, the post is being offered only as a 6-month contract.






# The Council's Approach: Current Resource (2)

We heard that the major challenge in engaging schools is that not all view School Travel Planning (STP) work as their responsibility or priority.

Head teachers and STP staff within engaged schools told us that their success had been due to the high profile that school itself placed on school travel work.

We recognise it is crucial that someone/people within the school lead(s) on the STP and that it can be difficult for individuals tasked with this role drive forward actions alongside a day job.

We learned that due to capacity and budget the Council's work was currently limited to facilitation and working with schools already engaged.



# The Council's Approach: Planning Schools

We looked at the planning for new and extended schools in relation to school travel planning. The schools commissioner told us:


- A condition for schools to have a School Travel Plan (STP) was often imposed on planning applications, and
- That schools commonly breach the STP condition, highlighted through the issues experienced recently in Berryfields, Aylesbury.

STPs should be implemented and reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain a useful tool for the school rather than an exercise to gain planning permission.

The Council relies on the School Travel Planning officer to work with schools to ensure they deliver and maintain their STP once the school is occupied.

Feedback from schools was that the support from the Council was important in working with schools to implement their plans.

We heard that there is currently not enough resource in the team to undertake this work.




# The Council's Approach: The Growth Agenda

We were very impressed to find that in Buckinghamshire:

- We lead the way nationally in its school travel planning and sustainable travel planning work with schools
- Almost 2/3rds of schools have an active STP and/or actively promote sustainable school travel through initiatives and campaigns to reduce car use.
- Car use for the school journey has been maintained at 30 % over the last 5 years.

However, we believe that inadequate resource for this work may prove short-sighted given the County's growth, growing number of school places, and the significant added benefits to individual health, the NHS, the environment, the transport system and the economy as a whole.

We consider it an opportune time for the Council to consider the wider value of sustainable school travel work, to clarify its role in relation to future work in this area, and to consider the capacity needed to deliver.



# The Council's Approach: Recommendation 1

## Recommendation 1

That the Council clarifies its future approach to sustainable school travel work by:

- 1a Undertaking a return on investment analysis of sustainable school travel work to assess the wider benefits of investing in this area;
- 1b Following the analysis, the Council publishing its vision for sustainable school travel work
- 1c Adequately resourcing the achievement of its vision, including longer term contracts for officers and an increase in budget

# Co-ordination: Business Units


We spoke to officers from across the organisation to understand how the different Business Units contribute to the work of school travel planning.

Although school travel planning work currently sits and is funded in the Transport Strategy Team, its remit crosses over a number of the Council's portfolio areas (highways, school commissioning, health, infrastructure etc.)

All the officers we spoke to highlighted the complexity of the planning system and reflected on the challenges of joint working, with each Business Unit having its own statutory obligations, separate budgets, capacity and budget constraints.

We were told services worked well together in some areas, e.g. development projects and resolving local school issues, but that there can be a lack of co-ordination between Education and Highways on planning schools/school extensions.

Defining and applying the Council's position on sustainable travel work in relation to the development of new schools and the extension of expanding schools could improve efficiency of the system.




# Co-ordination: Designing for Sustainable Travel

The national experts from the Transport for London Behaviour Change Unit and Modeshift explained that designing travel solutions when planning schools makes it easier to encourage parents to not travel by car.

We heard about the challenges of identification, funding and implementation of adequate infrastructure for new and expanding schools.

The Council's Highways Development Manager told us that infrastructure provision is currently not factored in when costing a school, but that funding from developers could be better identified if the definition of a "serviced school" for new school builds included infrastructure requirements.

We believe that the Council has an opportunity to ensure that going forward school travel related issues can be designed out and/or mitigated in the early planning stages.



# Co-ordination: Recommendations 2 and 3

## Recommendation 2

That the Council develops and adopts a policy which clarifies its position on encouraging sustainable travel and the mitigation of transport impacts in relation to the expansion of current and development of new schools.

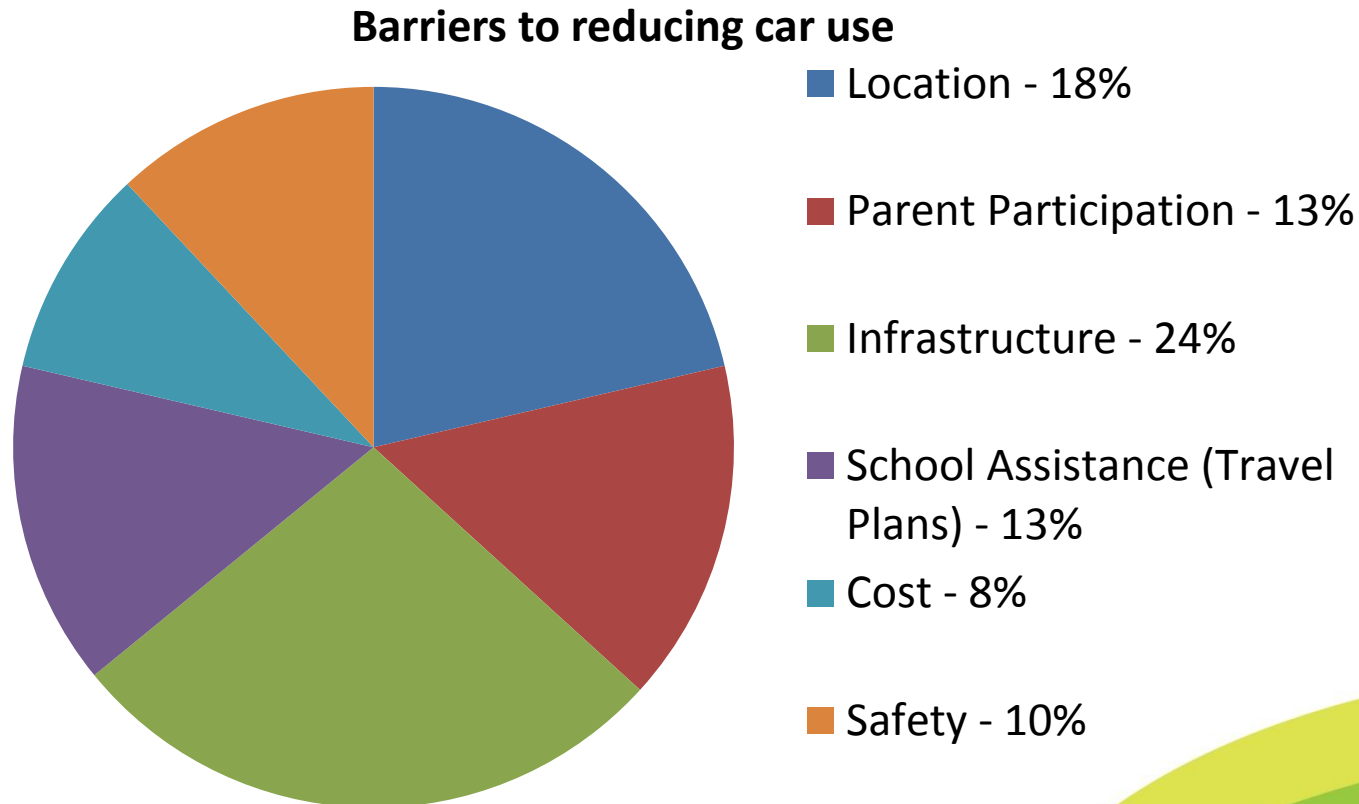
## Recommendation 3

That the Council adopts an holistic approach to the planning of new and expanding schools, including factoring infrastructure provision and mitigation measures to reduce car use in costings.

# Reducing Car Use: Barriers

School Admissions officers and schools told us that the lack of appropriate/safe infrastructure (walking/cycling routes) was a major barrier to increasing sustainable travel choices and reducing car use.

This was backed up by respondents to our survey distributed via Local Area Forums (Appendix 2):





# Reducing Car Use: Unsafe Routes


We learned that pupils who attend their nearest school are provided with free home to school transport where the distance is less than the statutory walking distance AND where the route is deemed to be 'unsafe'. Where there is no bus route, the Council pays for a taxi.

We heard that a number of routes are unsafe due to encroaching vegetation.

We were told that the Council used to prioritise routes used by Crocodile Walking Buses, ensuring they remained clear of vegetation. We believe that the Council should reprioritise this vegetation clearance.

We recognise that with the devolution to Parish Councils, it is not always easy to identify who is responsible for vegetation clearance but for a relatively low cost of clearance, there are savings to be made in the cost of transport.

Where possible, other measures such as the installation of a crossings or pedestrian refuges should be considered, to improve activity and to make savings in the longer term.




# Reducing Car Use: Assessing Routes

We found two issues in relation to assessing the safety of routes to school:

- **Cost:** where a parent deems a route to the nearest school as unsafe, a site visit is undertaken to determine the safety of the walking route. This costs the Council approximately £500 per assessment
- **Focus:** currently safety assessments are focussed on secondary schools. We heard that behaviour change is most effective with primary school aged children so we consider that the assessment of primary school routes should be an equally important part of the work.
- **Mitigation:** when routes to schools are not assessed, for example where information on likely routes of pupils to new or expanding schools is not available or provided, there is a risk that potential mitigation opportunities can be missed.

We understand that the Integrated Transport project is reviewing the whole home to school transport system and welcome consideration of our recommendation in this area.



# Reducing Car Use: Recommendation 4

## Recommendation 4

That the Council addresses 'unsafe routes' to school for example through the Integrated Transport project, to ensure:

- 4a Prioritisation for regular/appropriate maintenance of routes to school where vegetation overgrowth jeopardises safety of the route.
- 4b An equal focus on the assessment of primary schools routes.
- 4c A return on investment analysis for routes where the assessment's recommendation is for 'engineering' options to deliver a safe route to school

# School Engagement

Schools who attended our stakeholder discussion told us:

- It is the school's responsibility to promote healthy and sustainable travel for the school journey and to make efforts to engage with the community to address issues such as parking
- They see the links to other areas of the curriculum associated with STP and other sustainable travel work.
- Successful STP work has a high profile within the school, support of parent governors, the head teacher and a lead person who takes ownership of the work – which may be a teacher, teaching assistant, parent governor, or volunteer.
- There would be value in including STP work in the Healthy Schools initiative

We learned that, often with support of the Council, schools can and do successfully deliver sustainable school travel activity within their schools.

See Appendix 3 for Modeshift Awards and link to case studies



# School Engagement (2)

We were told by officers, the Transport for London and Modeshift witnesses and schools themselves that engaging schools is one of the most significant challenges to affecting wider behaviour change.


The Council runs an annual conference which:

- Provides the opportunity to share best practice and network
- Schools found a valuable way of sharing ideas and building motivations
- Could encourage self-support work between schools in future.

We were shown an excellent self help website created by the Council with toolkits and other resources for schools to use:

[www.schooltravelplanning.com](http://www.schooltravelplanning.com)

We understand the capacity challenge but believe that better use could be made of existing channels to publicise the benefits of sustainable travel to schools.



# School Engagement: Recommendations 5 & 6

## Recommendation 5

That the Council develops and delivers a publicity campaign aimed at all schools, stakeholders and Parent and Parent Teacher Associations to highlight:

- The role and responsibility of schools in promoting active travel for the school journey;
- The wider value and benefits to schools of active travel planning work e.g. higher educational attainment, links to other curriculum areas, Ofsted and health benefits; and
- The resources available to schools on [schooltravelplanning.com](http://schooltravelplanning.com) and the value of the annual conference.

## Recommendation 6

That the Council raises the profile of sustainable travel planning amongst schools by ensuring STP activity is included regularly on the agenda of the Head Teacher Liaison Group, BASH and any other school liaison meetings.

# The Member Role


We recognise that many local Members receive complaints about issues such as parking, congestion and safety surrounding schools.

Schools told us that the support and commitment of their local Member(s) had helped identify and deliver solutions and work with the wider community.

We heard that a Chesham school had successfully addressed issues of school crossings through the help of the local Member and their work on stakeholder engagement.

We also learned that the Elected Member role in Local Area Forums has been beneficial in resolving issues for schools.

In their community leader role, Elected Members are perfectly placed to work with local schools on travel issues, helping to find solutions by signposting to the online toolkits and engaging with key stakeholders in the community.



# The Member Role: Recommendation 7

## Recommendation 7


That a Member briefing session is held on the Member advocacy role in working with schools on School Travel Plans and promoting sustainable travel for the school journey. This should include:

- Information on the self help toolkits for schools and how they can be used;
- How the Council can help support schools;
- Providing the tools and information to deal with complaints and challenges;
- How Members can help schools address issues and identify solutions in their community leader role.



# Other Findings

During its evidence gathering, we identified the following as issues which, although not in scope, are issues that we would like to highlight. There are no specific recommendations but the Committee will use the findings to inform potential future Committee work items:

- **Home to School transport:** Raised in a number of responses to the survey and by Members, Home to School transport (and the increasing costs) was highlighted as an area which has a clear impact on car use. We heard that the Council is exploring alternative options through the integrated transport programme. The Committee intends to monitor this programme of work within its future work programme.
  - **Data on mode of travel:** We were disappointed to find that the mode of travel question was removed from the school census in 2011. The data would have been invaluable to the Council to help target work with schools. The Council has a voluntary “hands up” survey for schools and we suggest that schools could be more widely encouraged to complete this to aid planning.
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# Appendix 1: Detail of Evidence Gathering

## Day 1: Scene setting

- Transport Strategy/School Travel Planning Officers
- TfB Road Safety
- School Commissioning
- Highways Development Management
- Client Transport and Public Transport Managers
- Head of Highways Infrastructure
- Ross Butcher, Transport for London, Behaviour Change Unit
- James Hardie, Modeshift STARS Project Officer

## Day 2: Stakeholder roundtable discussion

24 external attendees including:

- School head teachers/STP lead staff/volunteers
  - Area Managers
  - Police
  - Fire Service
  - Public Health
- 


# Appendix 2: Public Engagement Results

The Inquiry Group thanks all schools, parents, residents and pupils who responded to the Inquiry's call for evidence.

## Junior Road Safety Officers

The Inquiry is grateful for the Junior Road Safety Officers who submitted evidence. Thank you to:

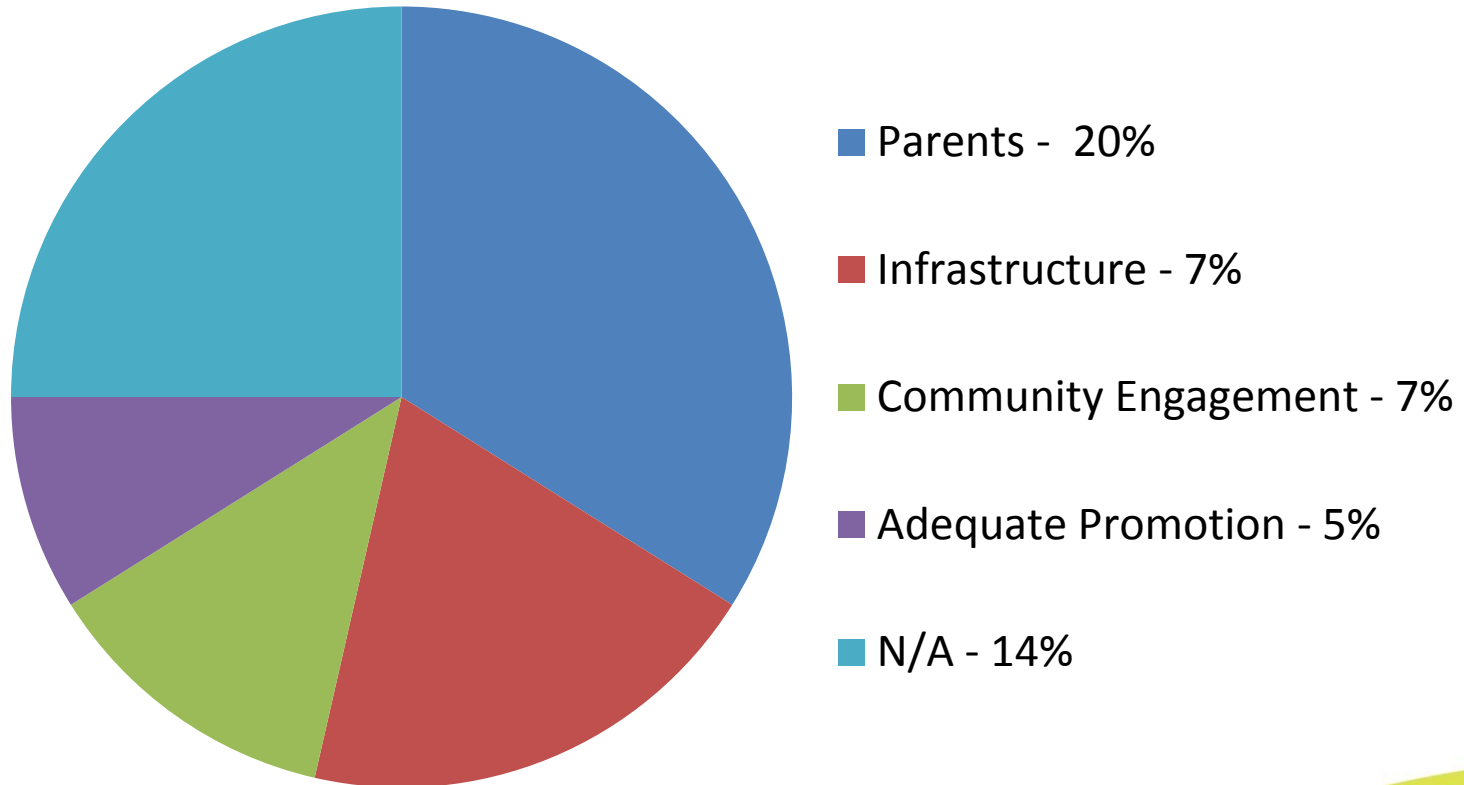
Alexandra Horwood and Katie Wilkinson from High March School  
Molly and Henry from Elangeni School, and  
The pupils of Roundwood Primary, who sent a fantastic video clip



# Appendix 2: Public Engagement Results

Responses to public survey:

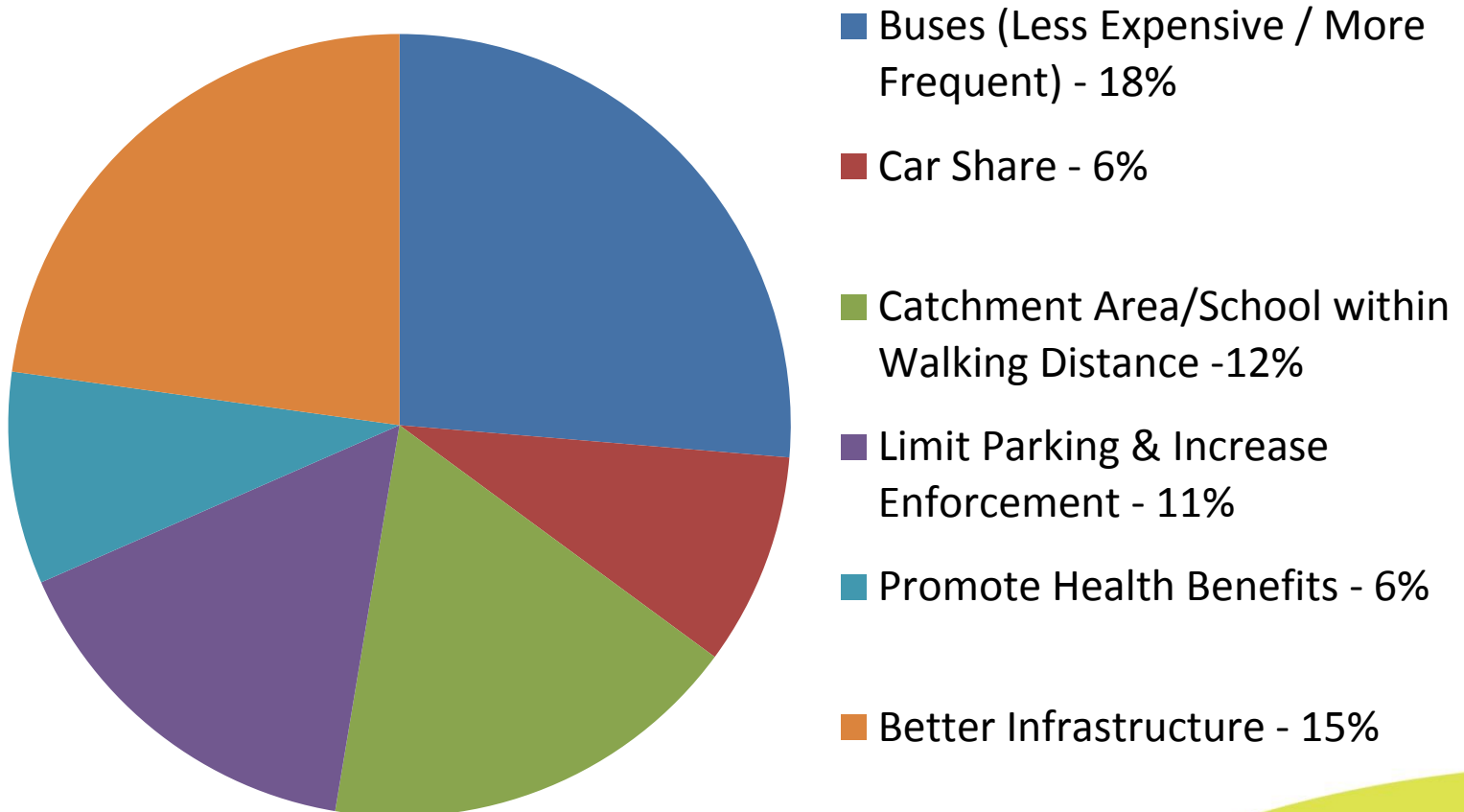
## Key Factors to success of initiatives to reduce car use



# Appendix 2: Public Engagement Results

Responses to public survey:

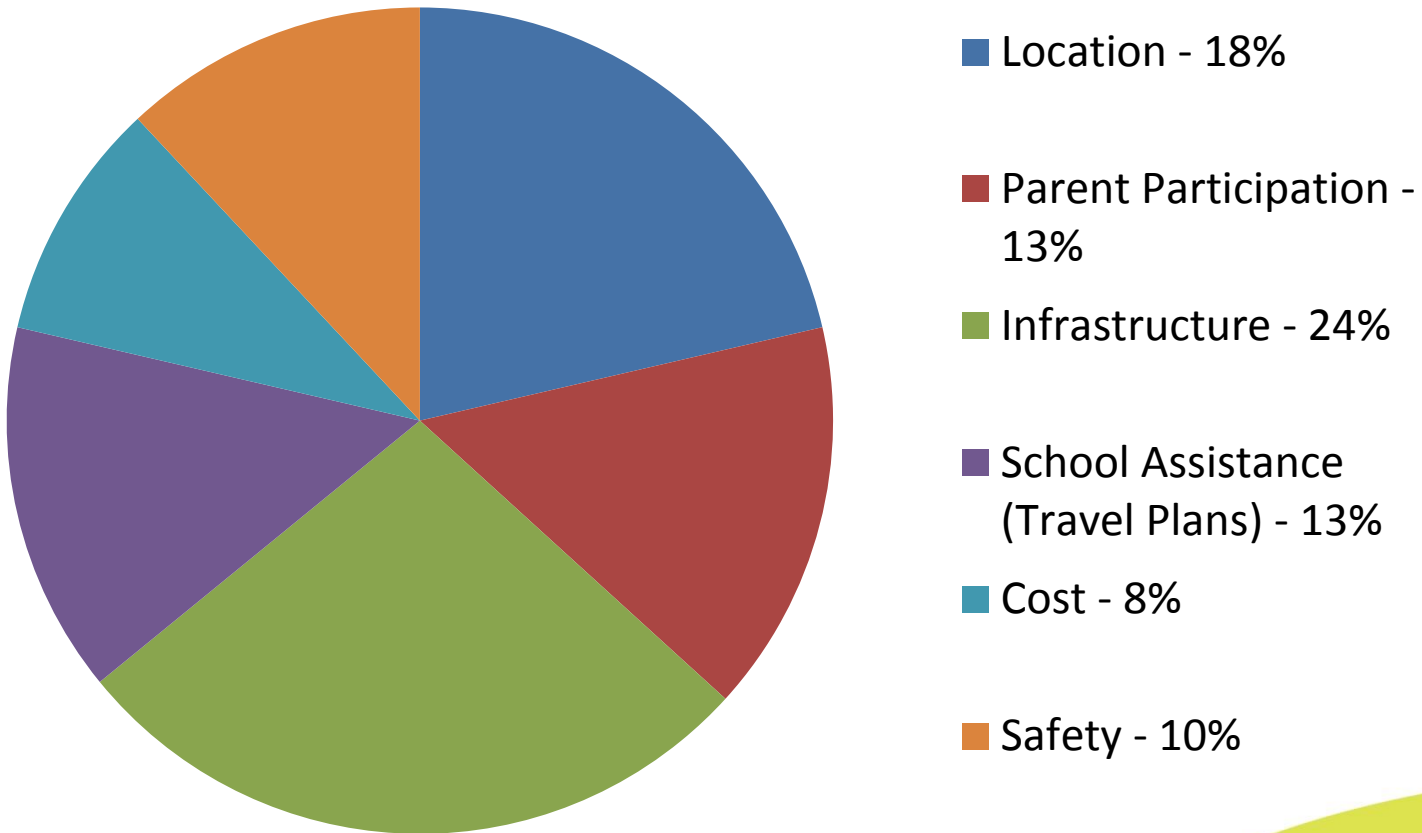
## Opportunities for reducing car use



# Appendix 2: Public Engagement Results

Responses to public survey:

## Barriers/limitations to reducing car use



# Appendix 3: Modeshift Awards

**National Sustainable Travel Awards** (for education providers, businesses and communities)

## **2014**

Contribution to sustainable travel – Individual – *Kim Key, Cheddington*  
Award for sustainable travel – Community - *Beaconsfield Cycle Project*  
(initiated by High March School working group, engaged whole community)

## **2015**

Contribution to sustainable Travel – Team – *Bus Behaviour Project, Bucks Fire & Rescue* (BF&R worked with Cottesloe School to develop project to improve behaviour and safety on buses, offered to all Secondary schools, currently working on project for Primary)

## **2016**

Contribution to National School Travel Awards – *Nicky Batkin, BCC Officer*



# Appendix 3: Modeshift Awards

## **Modeshift STARS – National School Travel Awards** for schools

### **2013**

STARS School of the Region – *Cheddington Combined*

### **2014**

STARS School of the Region– *Long Crendon*

### **2015**

STARS Regional Award for promoting walking – *The Downley School*

STARS Regional Award for promoting road safety – *Stoke Mandeville Combined*

### **2016**

STARS School of the Region– *Wendover Junior* (due to attend an Awards event at Houses of Parliament in April 2017)

STARS Regional Award for walking – *Wendover Junior*

STARS Regional Award for effective partnerships – *Haddenham Junior*

STARS Regional Award for reducing car use – *Farnham Common Infant*

STARS Regional Award for promoting road safety – *Longwick CofE Combined*

Link to STARS Case Studies for Schools of the Region

<https://www.modeshiftstars.org/caseStudies.php>