



To: Transport Planners

From: Adrian Davis

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Subject: School Travel Toolbox: No 14 Children's Voices in School Travel Planning

Top line: If we seriously mean to improve the life conditions for children we must, as a minimum precondition, establish reporting systems in which they are heard themselves as well as reported on by others.¹

There has been a considerable amount of discussion in the past two decades about social exclusion in transport. Yet children have been one of the excluded groups within the general area of transport planning almost since it first developed. Road safety, in the sense that it equates with casualty reduction, has been pursued at the expense of children's use of streets space, access to local facilities, and independent mobility – to make way for motor vehicles. Article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which UK countries are signatories, states that every child has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Children's Commissioners were appointed across the UK between 2001 and 2005. Their duties vary but in general they focus on children's right and protection. For example, in Wales the Commissioner has a responsibility to ensure that children and young people have a voice in their communities, are able to play as full a part as possible in decisions that affect them, and know about their rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, neither the UN Convention nor the duties of individual national Children's Commissioners, provide a means for redress against a local authority or other organisation for not taking children's views into account. Beyond an ethical view in the value of engaging with children and young people there are, however, other reasons why children's participation in School Travel Plans (STPs) is important.

Participation is important generally in democratic processes and for social inclusion. Participation means the direct involvement of children in decision-making about matters that affect their lives, whether individually or collectively.² Children and young people need to feel that they are active citizens with a voice. There can be an intrinsic value too in being asked for their view, a matter of pride and respect, though many make clear that their views should have an impact - a tangible outcome. There are a range of ways in which school travel officers can engage with pupils while continuing to recognise that each school will be different in the way that it may wish to approach school travel work. Some schools may immediately identify ways in which school travel can be integrated into classroom work while for others they may need to be given a range of examples drawn from successful work at other schools appropriate to their location, age of pupils etc... E.g.

- School Councils: decision making input to the development & maintenance of STPs
- Travel surveys, pupils analysis of results and discussion of these
- Curriculum work (e.g. undertaking a module on school travel through Geography).
- Focus group work – often following on from initial travel surveys
- Theatre In Education – as a way to initiate further curriculum work on school travel

¹ Qvortrup, J. 1990 'A voice for children in statistical and social accounting: A plea for children's rights to be heard', in James, A. and Prout, A. (eds) *Constructing and Deconstructing Childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, pp. 78-98, New York: Falmer Press.

² Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A. and Tisdall, K. 2004 Moving the participation agenda forward, *Children and Society*, 18, pp. 77-96