



National School Travel Data Collection Pilot

Key Findings Report

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Green 
Communities
CANADA

Prepared for

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Appendix A

CHATR Lab Data Summary Report - Mode share at school district / division and provincial levels

i. Acknowledgments

Land Acknowledgment

We would like to begin by acknowledging the many treaty and traditional territories of Indigenous Nations throughout Canada. We are grateful for the continued work of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who are the original caretakers of the Land and Waters. In our work as environmental leaders, we have a responsibility to respect Indigenous perspectives and elevate Indigenous voices.

National School Travel Data Collection Pilot

Project Team

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Project Partners



Green Communities Canada (GCC) – Based in Peterborough, ON, GCC has been leading a community-based climate action movement since 1995, working together with non-profit organizations from across the country to advance transformative, equitable, and lasting change. The organization’s mission is to connect community-based climate action groups through a national network, sharing resources, co-creating innovative programs, and elevating collective impact. GCC’s work is rooted in an environmental justice framework, recognizing that the climate crisis is also a crisis of inequity and disparity.



Urban Systems Ltd. – Urban Systems is an employee owned and operated Canadian company that was founded in Kamloops, BC, in 1975. It started with a focus on providing engineering and planning services to municipalities and regional districts, but over the years has diversified its portfolio, incorporating environmental planning, land development, active transportation (including active school travel), and public consultation into its services. They are committed to addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, urbanization, and social equity by collaborating with various stakeholders to create innovative solutions for sustainable urban development.

Research Partner



CHATR Lab - The Cities, Health & Active Transportation Research (CHATR) Lab at Simon Fraser University studies how community and urban design influence population health, mobility, safety, and social connection, collaborating with communities to generate evidence that informs practice, policy, and programs. Led by Dr. Meghan Winters in SFU’s Faculty of Health Sciences, the lab focuses on active transportation, healthy built environments, and road safety for people of all ages and abilities.

Financial Support



This pilot was conducted with funding provided by the Government of Canada’s Active Transportation Fund, distributed by Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada.

ii. Executive Summary

In 2023, Green Communities Canada led the National School Travel Data Collection Pilot (the pilot). The rationale for the pilot was to address the absence of comprehensive, nation-wide data on school travel modes. Without this data, community partners and government leaders may struggle to address barriers to active school travel, which is key to supporting a sustained shift in travel modes – reducing the proportion of students being driven to school and increasing how many are walking or wheeling. This shift is critical in addressing the negative health and environmental burdens associated with car travel that have a disproportionate impact on children today, as well as future generations.

Accordingly, the pilot aimed to establish a baseline for school travel modes across Canada and to explore the feasibility of large-scale school data collection initiatives. This involved collecting mode share data in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, using a combination of hands-up surveys and household travel surveys.

Key Findings

The pilot yielded several key findings that provide insight into school travel patterns and barriers in Canada.

Travel Mode Baseline

Based on results from the hands-up surveys, **a significant portion of students still rely on car travel to get to school**, while active modes remain less prevalent. Travel by active modes across all schools was 22 per cent in BC and 32.5 per cent in Ontario. Travel by car across all schools was 61.9 per cent in BC and 37.7 per cent in Ontario. Travel by public transport or school bus across all schools was 16.1 per cent in BC and 29.8 per cent in Ontario.

Barriers to Active Travel

The household travel surveys found that several barriers to active school travel contribute to their lower rates of use. The top four factors influencing transportation mode choice for the eldest child in a family are: **distance to school, age, schedule, and convenience**. The top factors that would influence families to choose to walk, bike or roll to school are: living closer to the school, others to travel with, a more comfortable route, a more flexible work schedule for parents and caregivers, protected bike lanes, reduced vehicle speed limits, and traffic calming.

Recommendations for Future Initiatives

The pilot resulted in several lessons learned and key overarching recommendations for future student travel data collection initiatives:

- **Government Leadership:** Large-scale data collection initiatives related to student travel should be led by government bodies.
- **Alignment with other Data Collection:** Governments should find alignment with other data collection initiatives—whether they be in classrooms, take-home surveys for parents and caregivers, or population-wide surveying.
- **Collection at Regular Intervals:** Data collection efforts should take place at a consistent interval.
- **Public Reporting on Findings:** Governments should publish their research findings in a timely and accessible manner.
- **Link to Mode Share Targets:** Governments should embed mode share targets for student transportation into relevant strategies and actively monitor progress to continuously improve the effectiveness of interventions.

Call to Action

Individuals and organizations seeking to ignite change in this realm should consider the methods used, lessons learned, and recommendations made in this report. They should be used to help guide their own data collection efforts and/or direct their advocacy requests to governments to lead these types of initiatives.

1. Background

Active School Travel Initiatives in Canada

First introduced in Canada by concerned parents in the 1990s, Active School Travel (AST) programming spread across Ontario and other provinces by the early 2000s. The movement was initially inspired by initiatives in the United Kingdom to combat traffic congestion and address safety issues around schools.

GCC has worked in the realm of AST for over two decades, including leading the Ontario Active School Travel program from 2017-2022 and delivering School Travel Planning (STP) programming in Toronto since 2016. The organization describes STP's goals as follows:



STP is a proven cost-effective way to address car culture and get more kids walking, cycling, scootering, or skateboarding to and from school. When effectively coordinated and implemented, the model results in positive travel behaviour changes with health, safety, environmental, and economic benefits for the whole community.

A key component of the STP process is assessing conditions at each school by collecting data, such as a Student Travel Survey, Family Travel Survey, and Neighbourhood Walkabout, as well as measuring implementation progress. These processes are critical in both understanding existing conditions as well as measuring the impact and efficacy of the various interventions at and around schools.

Rationale

Over the past few decades of AST initiatives in Canada, practitioners have regularly been challenged by the lack of large-scale data on how students are travelling to and from school. This absence of current, readily available data can hamper efforts to advocate for built environment, programming, and policy improvements, as the scale of the problem is often not fully understood. While local and, occasionally, regional data has been produced and shared, there remains a significant gap of comprehensive, nation-wide data on school travel mode share.

To begin addressing this gap, GCC collaborated with Urban Systems to develop the **Best Practices in School Data Collection in Canada** report that was released in the spring of 2023. This report explored data collection methods previously used, shared best practices identified by practitioner interviews, and recommended approaches for future school travel data collection initiatives. Key recommendations from this study included:

- Implementing standardized data collection methods for collecting school travel data across Canada to ensure consistency and reliability.
- Building strong partnerships between schools, municipalities, and organizations to facilitate data collection and program implementation.
- Securing funding and resources to support ongoing data collection and supportive initiatives.
- Conducting province-wide and national-level research to continuously monitor and improve school travel patterns.

Equipped with the findings from this report, GCC submitted grant applications to the Government of Canada's **Active Transportation Fund** and was granted funding to deliver these pilots in Ontario and British Columbia (BC). This presented an exciting opportunity to trial established best practices in student travel data collection within some of Canada's largest jurisdictions.



2. Methodology

Objectives

The pilot drew inspiration from the project rationale to identify the following key objectives:

- **Fill Data Gap** - To provide comprehensive data on how children travel to school, helping practitioners to better understand transportation behaviors, identify barriers, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Refine Data Collection Methods** - To test existing best practices for student travel data collection, and share applicable lessons learned for refinement.
- **Assess the Scalability** - To assess the feasibility of and make recommendations for future longitudinal national data collection initiatives.

Methods

Using findings from the [**Best Practices in School Data Collection in Canada**](#) report and drawing on the experience of the project partners, the team sought to utilize many of the approaches, tools, and resources previously employed in prior data collection processes across the country. By weighing best practices, as well as project budget and timelines, the decision was made to leverage a combination of hands-up surveys (also known as student travel surveys) in classrooms using the web-based application [**BikeWalkRoll**](#) and an online family travel survey for parents and caregivers (also known as a household travel survey).

Approach

The pilot was carried out in five phases, each involving specific activities to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis:

Phase 1: Planning and Preparation

Steering Committee Formation: Representatives from several provincial, regional, and municipal organizations were invited to participate in a Project Steering Committee to provide both subject matter expertise as well as local and regional knowledge to guide the pilot. Members attended four meetings and communicated regularly with the project team to help inform the approach, materials, outreach strategy, survey questions, and metrics.

The Steering Committee included representatives from the following organizations:

- **Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI)** (BC)
- **TransLink** (BC)
- **Capital Regional District (CRD)** (BC)
- **Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA)** (ON)
- **Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region (STSWR)** (ON)
- **Niagara Region Public Health** (ON)
- **City of Mississauga** (ON)
- **Cities, Health, and Active Transportation Research Lab (CHATR Lab)** (BC)
- **Canadian Automobile Association (CAA)** (National)

Outreach Strategy Development: The Outreach Strategy began with identifying target audiences and the tactics required to reach them. The key audiences identified included:

1. **School Division Representatives** - Divisional (e.g., School Boards, Districts, and/or Consortia) representatives (e.g., Superintendents, Trustees, etc.) are important decision makers in determining support for the pilot and have direct contact with schools.

2. **Administrators and Teachers** – School administrators (e.g., Principals, Vice-Principals) are important decision makers in determining a school’s participation, while teachers are typically the primary data collectors.
3. **Parents, Caregivers, and Students** – Parents and caregivers are to be informed (and could potentially remove consent) for their child(ren) to participate in the hands-up surveys. They are also the target respondents for the family travel survey. Students are key participants in the hands-up surveys—usually administered by their teacher or other designated data collectors.
4. **Local, Regional, and Provincial Governments** – Governmental staff and decision makers (e.g., Elected Officials, Staff, etc.) can be important supporters and promoters of the initiative, as they also benefit from this data to better inform their transportation planning and policies.
5. **Agencies and Partners** – Organizational partners (e.g., public health units, academics, and road safety agencies, etc.) can be important supporters and promoters of the initiative, as they also benefit from this data in their work.

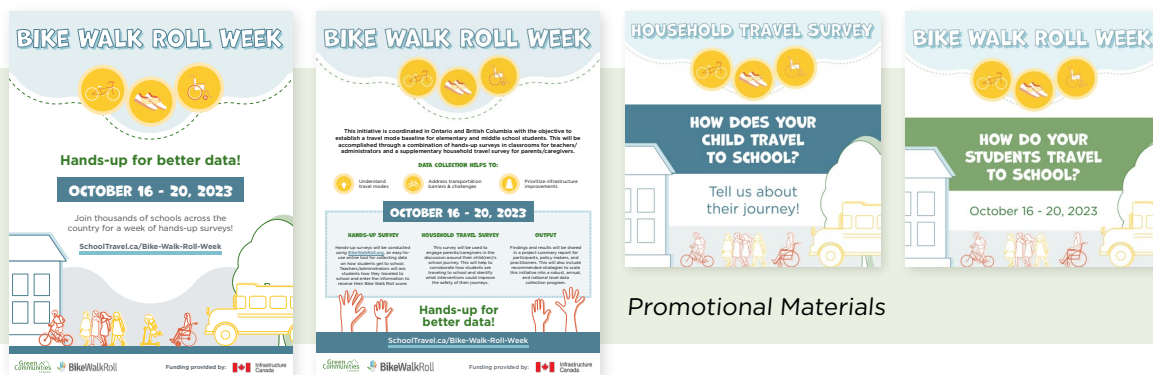
The Outreach Strategy also identified promotional and educational materials, distribution channels, and timelines to advance the overall objectives of the pilot.

Data Collection Design: Hands-up surveys were used to collect data on student travel modes, while family travel surveys were designed to collect data on barriers to AST as well as identify specific concerns.

Ethics Approvals: The CHATR Lab, based out of Simon Fraser University, sought research ethics approval from the University to participate in this pilot, and were informed that it was unnecessary given their level of involvement, as well as the lack of personal information or identifiers being collected through hands-up surveys. While formal ethics approvals were not needed, the project team still developed a comprehensive “Research Ethics Letter” to demonstrate due diligence in terms of data being collected, data storage practices, and the anonymity of users.

Phase 2: Outreach and Engagement

Material Design: Promotional and educational content targeted key audiences with event posters, graphics, action/information graphics, participation graphics, and survey graphics. The materials used the tagline “hands-up for better data” and incorporated visual elements related to travel modes, hands-up in classrooms, and other school-related illustrations.



Promotional Materials

Event Poster

Project Overview

Web Hosting: The following webpages and blog were used to promote the project and provide updates:

- [SchoolTravel.ca/Bike Walk Roll Week](https://SchoolTravel.ca/Bike-Walk-Roll-Week) - the main project page which held all information and resources.
- [GreenCommunitiesCanada.org/School Travel Data Collection](https://GreenCommunitiesCanada.org/School-Travel-Data-Collection) - held project content and links to SchoolTravel.ca page.
- [GreenCommunitiesCanada.org/Piloting National-School Travel Data Collection](https://GreenCommunitiesCanada.org/Piloting-National-School-Travel-Data-Collection) - promotional blog about project.

Social Media: Promotion on social media commenced one month prior to Bike Walk Roll Week to encourage participation and continued throughout the month of October. The following social media accounts and platforms were used:

- Green Communities Canada ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter \(X\)](#), and [LinkedIn](#))
- Ontario Active School Travel ([Twitter \(X\)](#))
- Active School Travel Canada ([Twitter \(X\)](#))
- BikeWalkRoll ([Twitter \(X\)](#))
- Urban Systems ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#))

Organizational Outreach: School divisions, municipalities, public health units, and community organizations were informed of the pilot to gather support and help raise awareness. Introductory emails, along with relevant follow-ups and reminders, were sent to key contacts:

- In Ontario, all 66 school boards, 4 provincial school-based associations, and 32 key partners across multiple sectors were contacted to support the campaign.
- In BC, all 60 school districts, 122 local governments and nations, and 18 key partners were contacted to support the campaign.

Training: “How-To” materials were provided for teachers and survey administrators to ensure consistent and accurate data collection at all participating schools and school jurisdictions.

Media: A press release was shared with relevant outlets in hopes of capturing widespread media attention. Prior to this, press releases from both Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada ([Ontario](#) and [BC](#)) and GCC were distributed to announce the awarded funding.

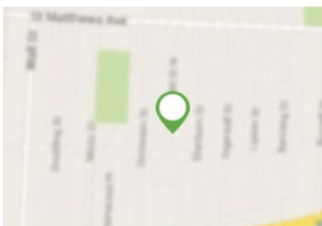
Phase 3: Data Collection

Hands-Up Surveys: Hands-up travel mode share surveys were conducted in classrooms during *Bike Walk Roll Week* from October 16-20, 2023. These surveys asked students how they traveled to school that day, with instructions to raise their hands to the corresponding travel mode. Mode options in the BikeWalkRoll application are as follows: *Bike, Walk, Roll, School Bus, Bus, and Car.*

How did you get to school today?

Our 30 second surveys help understand how students travel to school.

Here's how it works



1 - Find your school on the map above
Don't see it? [Add a school](#)



2 - Do a 30 second survey
It couldn't be simpler. [Learn about surveys](#)



3 - See your BikeWalkRoll score
[Learn how the score works](#)

Family Travel Surveys: Online surveys were collected from families throughout the month of October to understand broader travel patterns and preferences. They collected more detailed data than the hands-up surveys, including:

- Number of children living in the household under the age of 12
- Grade of the eldest or only child
- Gender of the eldest or only child
- Most frequently used mode of travel to school in past week
- Duration of commute to school
- Who accompanies the eldest or only child on the journey to school
- Factors influencing the travel mode of the eldest or only child
- Factors influencing the likelihood of walking/biking to school

Phase 4: Data Analysis

Data Compilation: The CHATR lab compiled and “cleaned” the collected data to identify and correct any errors, as well as ensure accuracy and completeness.

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed to identify trends, barriers, and opportunities to increase AST mode share.

Data Summary Reporting: The CHATR Lab prepared a data summary report that summarized the findings and insights from the data collected.

Phase 5: Reporting and Dissemination

Public Dissemination: The final report and data findings were published through the GCC website, accompanied by a summary blog, social media posts, and a public webinar.

3. Key Findings

61 schools in BC and Ontario were engaged through the pilot, returning a total of **697 hands-up surveys**. These surveys represent data on the travel modes of **8,517 students**.

In Ontario, 54 schools returned hands-up surveys, compared to 7 schools in BC. The final sample size for morning travel to school in Ontario comprised **682 surveys** (representing **7,685 students**), compared to **15 surveys** in BC, representing **832 students**.

In addition to the hands-up surveys conducted, **235 family travel surveys** were completed, including **74 in BC and 161 in Ontario**.

Results from the two provinces provide some useful insights into current trends and the barriers and opportunities for future mode shift to walking, biking, and rolling to school.

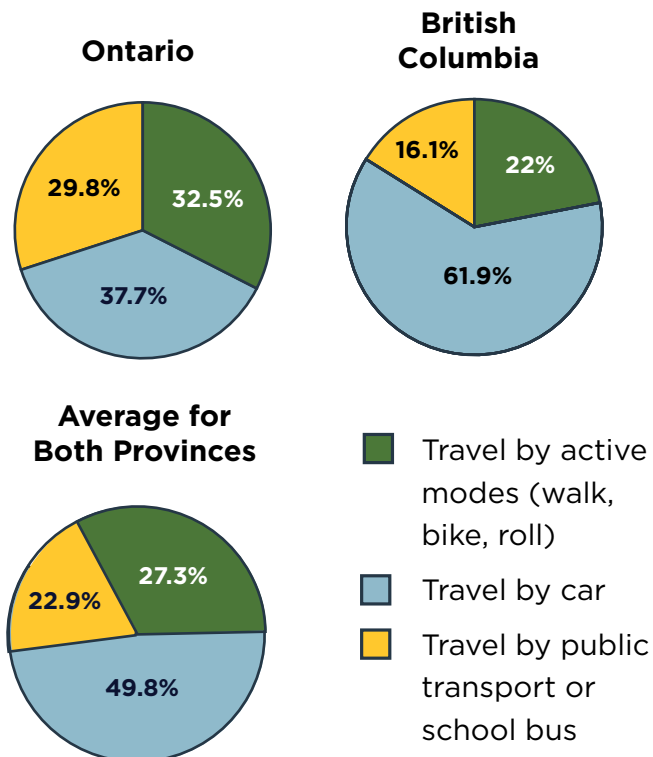
However, the Data Summary Report urges caution when interpreting and applying the data from a relatively limited sample size of 8,517 students at 61 schools.

Mode Share Differences

Provincial Level

While the school travel mode share captured in the hands-up survey results varied by school and division, there were notable differences in the overall mode share between BC and Ontario.

In both BC and Ontario, the highest mode share travelling to school in the morning was by car.



School Level

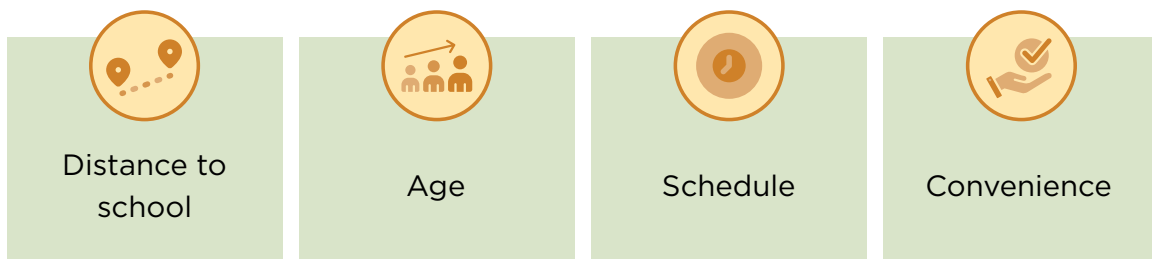
The highest rate of travel by active modes in a BC school district was **38.2 per cent**, while the lowest active transportation mode share at a school in BC was **0.9 per cent**.

The highest rate of travel by active modes in an Ontario school board was **77.7 per cent**, while the lowest active transportation mode share at a school was **0.4 per cent**.

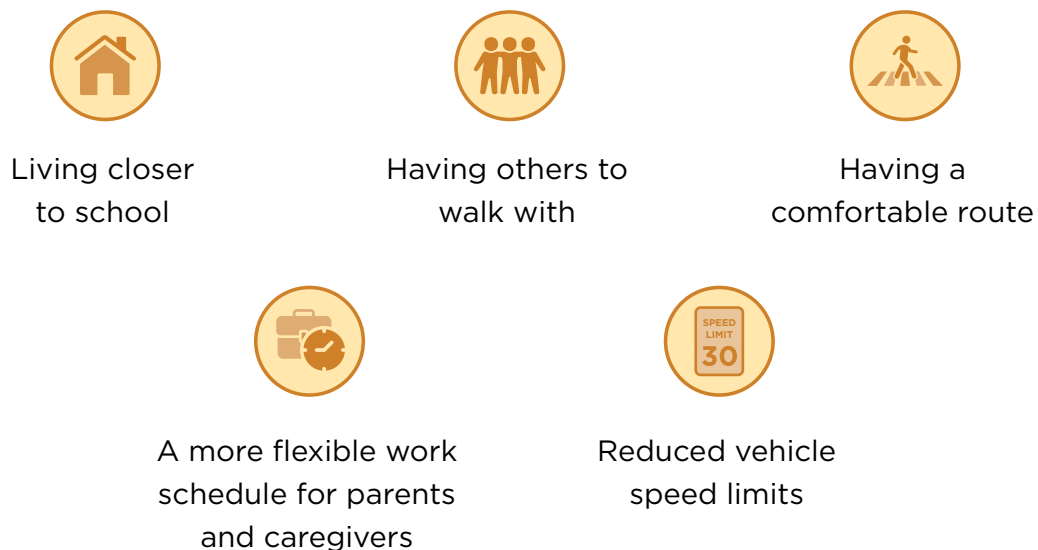
These results reflect the very wide range of transportation mode share results within each province and may potentially reflect errors in data input at the school level.

Factors Affecting School Travel Mode

The top factors influencing transportation mode choice for the eldest child in family travel survey respondents were:



The top factors that would influence those not currently walking to school to choose to walk to school instead were:



The factors influencing whether respondents biked or rolled to school were very similar to those related to walking to school and were consistent between both BC and Ontario respondents. With only slight variations in priority, the top factors that would enable biking or rolling travel to school were the same in both provinces:



Protected bike lanes



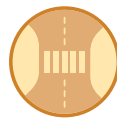
Being closer to school



Having other people to bike or roll with



Reduced vehicle speed limit



Traffic calming



More comfortable routes

In both BC and Ontario:

- The top 2 factors influencing overall travel mode to school were **distance** and **age**.
- The top 2 factors influencing walking to school were **if the school were closer** and **having others to walk with**.
- The top 2 factors influencing biking/rolling to school **were protected bike lanes** and **if the school were closer**.

4. Lessons Learned

The project team carried out the pilot based on established best practices in student travel data collection, within the prescribed time and budget constraints. While there are successes to celebrate, there are also many lessons learned that can help inform future data collection initiatives across the country. The following lessons learned share decision-making factors, reflections, and suggestions for carrying out similar data collection efforts—to be applied as time and resources allow.

Name

Lesson #1: Choose a name that is fun and inclusive, but also mode neutral

The hands-up survey component of the project was titled Bike Walk Roll Week to align with the web-based platform used for data collection—**BikeWalkRoll.org**. However, this name was often perceived as being an encouragement event (such as International Walk to School Month or Bike to School Week) that promotes the use of active travel, which created confusion on the intent of the pilot.

Collaboration

Lesson #2: Directly engage school-based actors for feedback

The project team assembled a Steering Committee early in the project, with wide-ranging representation (governments, consortia, public health, researchers, non-profits, etc.) from both participating provinces. The committee members were recruited primarily through existing contacts and referrals. Despite the diversity of organizations, there was a lack of representatives from key audiences such as teachers, principals, superintendents, school trustees, parents, and caregivers. Including these groups in the Steering Committee could have helped to directly inform the methodologies.

Lesson #3: Provide meaningful opportunities for input and actionable ways to support

Steering Committee members provided valuable input during meetings and reviewed key outputs throughout the planning process. Many members also helped to champion the initiative locally and amplified promotional materials to relevant contacts. However, some members and other collaborators understandably had other school-travel related priorities that they needed to direct their attention to, and as such were unable to fully support the pilot to the extent they had intended.

Scheduling

Lesson #4: Consult early with school-based actors to identify preferred dates

The pilot was originally planned to occur in spring 2023, however, there were conflicting local encouragement events (e.g., Bike to School Week, GoByBike Week) and other data collection efforts that caused concern. Based on these conflicts as well as delays in funding announcements, the pilot was deferred to the fall. Several weeks between mid-September to mid-November were identified as potential alternatives, balancing influencing factors such as seasonal weather, school capacity, holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving, Halloween), professional development days, and encouragement events (e.g., International Walk to School Day, International Walk to School Month, Fall GoByBike Week). The Steering Committee voted on the week that had the lowest numbers of potential conflicts; however, this process made it clear that there is no “perfect” week for data collection in schools across multiple provinces.

Materials

Lesson #5: Focus on fewer materials with higher impact

Promotional materials were developed for distribution by the project team and partners, and materials celebrating the school’s participation were also made available. Social media graphics emphasized different elements of the initiative to sustain a months-long public awareness campaign across multiple distribution channels. While the materials were generally well-received, the project team could have produced less promotional materials and spent more resources developing instructional videos and leveraging user-generated content to increase engagement.

Training

Lesson #6: Provide targeted and ongoing training to data collectors

Training materials were developed for teachers to provide straightforward steps for completing the hands-up surveys, in addition to the frequently asked questions, supports, tests, and more that are available on the BikeWalkRoll platform. While these materials were created and made available on relevant website pages, teachers are very busy and may not have had time to reference these documents. On the other hand, the training materials may have been oversimplified, not conveying the necessary information to ensure the data was collected consistently and with academic rigor. For example, clearer instructions were needed for the following:

- To specify if the data is being collected by grade or for the entire school. If by grade, how to log split-grade classrooms, and if by school, to document the total number of students to determine response rates.
- The eligibility criteria for participants (i.e., only those children attending elementary or middle schools, not pre-school aged respondents).
- To specify that the surveys are focused on travel to school, to prevent confusion about the modes used for other trips.
- To clarify mode share categories for mixed-mode journeys and other modes that are not clearly defined under the available categories (e.g., wheelchair, carpool, etc.).

Furthermore, the communities with highest levels of participation in the pilot were those with well-established data collection programs where the data collectors have been trained over years and/or external partners provided in-school data collection supports.

Outreach

Lesson #7: Connect directly with school-based actors

The project team delivered a wide-reaching outreach campaign, utilizing blogs, newsletters, direct emails, social media ads, social media posts, and media engagement. The newsletters and direct emails were able to connect with key partners that helped to champion the initiative locally, while social media ads targeted at parents and caregivers resulted in a respectable response rate for the household travel survey. However, it is very difficult to directly reach contacts at the school level, no matter the amount of targeted outreach efforts.

Lesson #8: Develop a compelling narrative to engage media

Efforts were also made to gain coverage by the media to support broader public awareness. While there may be numerous reasons for a lack of media pick-up, the need to develop an engaging “hook” may be a key factor.

Ethics

Lesson #9: Complete applicable research ethics applications to include more school districts

When conducting outreach to school districts, the project team identified a challenge in gaining permission from school districts for their schools to participate in the pilot. Several districts conveyed that they would not participate in the pilot unless their research application process was followed. In response, the project team provided a “Research Ethics Letter” and answered questions, clarifying that no sensitive or identifiable student data was being collected. The detailed research protocols outlined in the letter helped to address concerns about student safety and privacy for a number of these districts. However, several districts would not make any exceptions to this requirement. Including more school districts in these types of large-scale data collection initiatives would require significant resources to allow a non-profit organization to complete the unique research applications.

Methods

Hands-Up Survey

The Hands-Up Surveys were conducted using BikeWalkRoll, as it is a well-established school travel data collection tool that could be shared widely, and the data was readily available to participating schools.

Lesson #10: Invest in technical support for online tools

The project team collaborated with the platform owners to upgrade the system in advance of Bike Walk Roll Week, and to provide technical support, as required. Fortunately, the system ran very smoothly for participating schools, and there were only small instances of duplicate school names and a school division firewall. The former was easily addressed, and the latter was provided with comparable worksheets to conduct the surveys.

Lesson #11: Collect mode shares to and from school

The Hands-Up Surveys focused exclusively on the journey TO school, to help simplify and reduce time spent on the data collection efforts led by teachers. However, previous data collection initiatives have demonstrated differences in mode share between morning and afternoon travel, so not asking about the FROM school may be missing half the story.

Lesson #12: Provide clear guidance on mode categories

The BikeWalkRoll platform provides six mode share categories. While these categories help keep the questioning straightforward for teachers and students, they can also fail to capture the complexity of students' journeys and/or not align with common local categorizations. For example, students may have mixed journeys that include multiple modes (e.g., walking to the bus stop, walking to a friend's house to carpool) that are not being sufficiently captured. Local partners may also categorize certain modes differently than BikeWalkRoll, such as a wheelchair being categorized as walking, rather than rolling. Additionally, certain distinctions are not being made, such as riding in an electric vehicle or cycling as a passenger (e.g., in a cargo bike, bike seat, etc.).

Lesson #13: Set a manageable and uniform survey timeframe

During Bike Walk Roll Week, schools and classrooms were encouraged and incentivized to complete the hands-up survey every day for five days—the more surveys, the more prize draw entries. Few participants completed a survey every day of the week, with many participants only completing one day of data collection. While flexibility with schools is important, it is difficult to sustain enthusiasm over a week and to compare data points with drastically different time frames.

Family Travel Survey

The Family Travel Survey was administered using the online platform of Survey Monkey. The survey was designed to be anonymous (respondents could voluntarily provide an email address to be entered into the prize draw) and applicable to parents and caregivers across the country, with additional questions being posed to those in BC and Ontario (respondents could voluntarily provide the first 3 digits of their postal code).

Lesson #14: Use anti-spambot measures in public surveys

The survey was shared widely online, was anonymous, and provided gift card incentives—unfortunately, these conditions made it a target of spam bots. When this was identified, the project team made some questions “required” to support later data cleaning but was unable to make further changes or implement anti-spam bot mechanisms at that time. There were an estimated 1,000+ fake survey responses, and these were largely identified by the responses to the open-ended questions. Validating responses required considerable resources and may have resulted in the accidental removal of valid survey responses.

Lesson #15: Require general location data

The project team had included an “optional” question about postal codes in the survey, due to concerns for reduced respondent anonymity. Despite it being an optional question, many respondents offered this information willingly. However, to better understand how the surveys corresponded to where respondents lived (i.e., rural vs. urban areas), removing the optional nature of the question and requiring this information be entered in the survey would produce more context-relevant findings and connect more readily to the hands-up survey data.

Lesson #16: Plan more processing time for open-ended questions

The project team had included several open-ended questions in the survey, which gave respondents the opportunity to provide detailed answers related to barriers, motivators, and other factors of their child’s school journey. While these extensive answers provided valuable context and rich insights, they did require a significant amount of additional time to process and analyze.



5. Recommendations

Based on the key findings and lessons learned from the pilot, there are several overarching recommendations that emerged. These recommendations provide guidance on the who, what, when, and how, to help ensure the scalability and long-term success of future student travel data collection initiatives in Canada.

Recommendation #1: Government Leadership

The project team was comprised of an environmental non-profit and a transportation planning consultancy—both of which are well known and respected in their fields—still encountered challenges gaining institutional support at the school level. The positionality of the project team organizations also led to a perception of bias associated with the goals of these organizations, such as reducing emissions and supporting increased rates of AST. Furthermore, there were extensive challenges associated with research applications at school districts, which can often be a requirement for any external researchers.

Accordingly, **we recommend that future large-scale data collection initiatives related to student travel be led by government bodies**, as there runs less risk of perception bias around organizational goals. This would, ideally, be delivered at the provincial level, with overall strategic alignment between the provinces and territories through federal involvement.

If fully government-led research is not feasible or desired, other jurisdictions have designated an external body or organization to be an “Official Statistics Provider”, establishing credibility and increasing access as a designated non-government body. As another example, in 2016, Manitoba’s Minister of Education sent a letter encouraging all schools in the province to participate in a count of school travel modes. As a result of this official invitation to participate, over 300 schools and 45,000 students took part in the survey, providing a statistically significant response rate.

Examples

- [Hands-Up Scotland Survey](#)

Recommendation #2: Alignment with Other Data Collection Initiatives

In situations where other local school travel data collection initiatives were taking place or had recently taken place, the project team encountered scheduling challenges as well as overall concerns of survey fatigue and confusion due to repeat surveying.

To address this, **we recommend that government’s find alignment with other data collection initiatives, whether they be in classrooms, take-home surveys for parents and caregivers, or population-wide surveys.** For example, the Census of Population Survey led by Statistics Canada asks respondents about how they get to work through specific questions about their main mode of commuting. A comparable question (or set of questions) could be included that collects data about children’s travel to and from school, as well as capture modes for discretionary travel to destinations beyond work and school.

Examples

- [Transportation Tomorrow Survey](#)
- [Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study](#)

Recommendation #3: Collection at Regular Intervals

Best practice from prior school travel data collection initiatives indicate that student travel data should be collected twice a year, ideally in the spring and fall. However, this level of frequency (especially if aiming for a week of hands-up surveys each time period) can be very resource intensive.

To balance quality data collection with available resources, **we recommend data collection efforts take place at consistent intervals—frequent enough to capture the regular turnover in student grades, but infrequent enough to manage survey fatigue.** Some jurisdictions have opted to complete an annual survey, providing year over year comparisons, whereas other large-scale public surveys are conducted every five years.

Examples

- [School Travel Planning](#) by Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region
- [School Travel Planning](#) by Green Communities Canada
- [Active School Travel Program](#) by City of Nanaimo

Recommendation #4: Public Reporting on Findings

Findings from the pilot were published through the applicable channels of the project partners. While this approach has considerable reach with existing audiences, it is difficult to make this information easily accessible to both the public and as well as those who participated.

We recommend that the governments showing leadership on data collection publish their findings in a timely and accessible manner. This may be accomplished by publishing relevant reports on websites, synthesizing the results into infographics to improve readability and accessibility, and partnering with non-governmental organizations to support broader distribution, particularly to marginalized groups that may not typically be included in knowledge dissemination initiatives.

Examples

- [Walk Pedal Ride Infographic](#)
- [Participation's Annual Children and Youth Report Card](#)
- [School Active Transportation in Canadian Children and Youth](#)

Recommendation #5: Link to Mode Share Targets

In carrying out this pilot, the project team knew how valuable the findings would be in terms of gaining a better understanding of how children are traveling to school, as well as what factors are shaping those mode choices. However, if the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of student travel is not explicitly linked to targets (e.g., emissions reductions, physical activity, mode shares, etc.) and supportive interventions, then the data collected is not being used to its fullest potential.

Accordingly, **we recommend that governments embed mode share targets for student transportation into relevant strategies and actively monitor progress to continuously evaluate and improve the effectiveness of various interventions.**

Example

- **National Active Transportation Strategy**

6. Conclusion

It is imperative that governments and community partners work together to reverse the car-dominant school travel patterns identified in this pilot. Without a coordinated effort to shift travel modes in communities across the country, future generations will directly bear the negative consequences upon their health, environment, and social well-being.

Work towards this important objective should include setting ambitious mode share targets, actively measuring progress towards them through school-based data collection, and using those findings to continuously address barriers to active journeys to school.

The project team hopes that those seeking to ignite change in the realm of school travel will consider the lessons learned and recommendations made in this report to help guide their own data collection efforts, as well as effectively direct their own advocacy to governments to lead this essential work.

We have asked **kids to raise their hands for better data**. Now, it's time for the **adults to put their hands in to help**.



Appendix A

CHATR Lab Data Summary Report

Mode share at school district/division and provincial levels

This appendix includes an excerpt from the 2023 Data Analysis Report prepared by the CHATR Lab at Simon Fraser University. This excerpt shares survey recruitment and response profiles, provincial/district mode share results from hands-up surveys, and household-level factors associated with mode choice.

We include this material with attribution to the CHATR Lab as it complements the key findings in the main body of this report, providing methodological transparency and jurisdiction-specific detail. The excerpt is used for contextual insight, and readers should interpret the below tables and figures alongside the limitations acknowledged on page 13 of this report – caution should be used when interpreting and applying the data from a relatively limited sample size. The figures in this appendix should be considered as a technical companion to the high-level recommendations in this report.

Mode share at school district/division and provincial levels

In this section, we present findings for classroom-based student travel surveys. We first describe the analytic sample (at 2 levels: province and SD) before presenting student travel mode share (at 2 levels: province and SD).

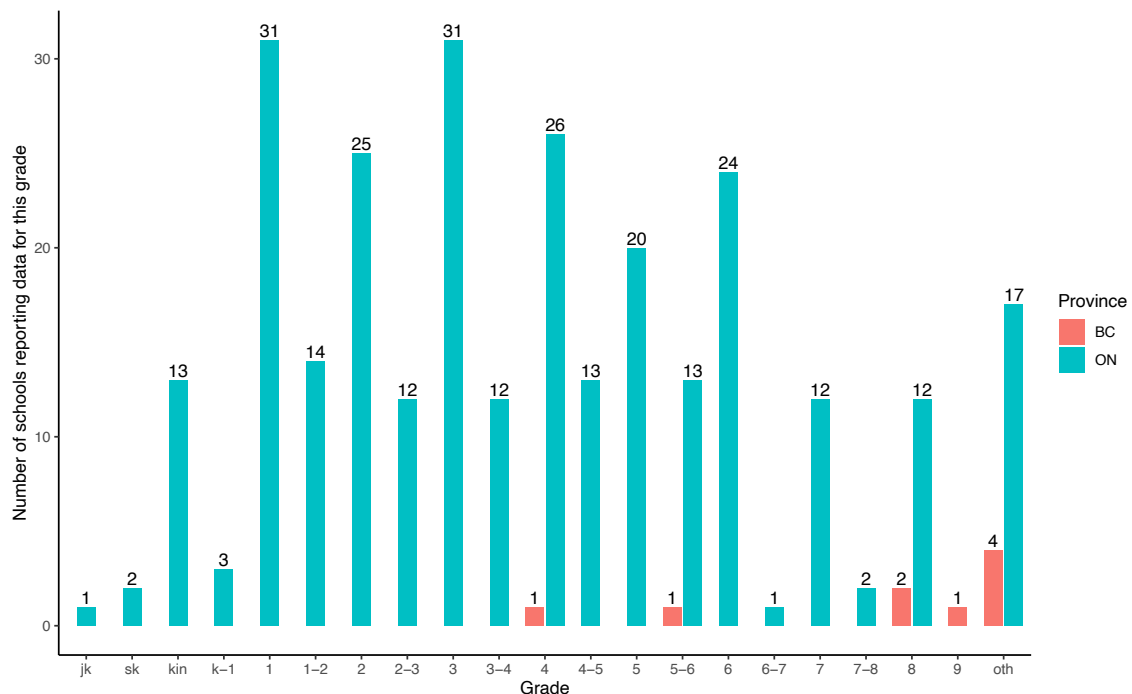
Sample characteristics, by province

Table 3 describes the number of students participating in classroom travel surveys. Monday was the most popular day for data collection. Figure 1 shows that participating Ontario schools were most likely to collect travel data for grades 1, 2, 3 or 4 (compared to younger students, or students in grades 7 or 8).

Table 3: Participating schools and students for classroom student travel surveys

Province	N participating schools	N participating students	Day of week	N participating students on day
BC	7	832	Monday	618
			Tuesday	419
			Wednesday	415
			Thursday	456
ON	54	7,685	Monday	4239
			Tuesday	3752
			Wednesday	3907
			Thursday	4042
			Friday	3892

Figure 1: Grade represented in classroom travel surveys



Sample characteristics, by school district/division

Table 4 describes the number of surveys returned by schools at the SD level, the number of schools returning surveys within each SD, the number of grades (as classroom-level data was not available) participating in classroom student travel data collection within each SD, the number of distinct weekdays (i.e., Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday) data were collected, and the children surveyed within each SD. Waterloo Catholic and Waterloo Region District School Boards returned the greatest number of surveys. Note that a detailed breakdown of surveys returned by school is in Appendix A.

Table 4: characteristics of classroom student travel data, grouped at the SD level

School district/division	Number surveys returned (morning, to school)	Number schools returning surveys	Number grades/split grades represented	Number weekdays returned surveys (of 5)	Children surveyed
Abbotsford (SD34)	1	1	1	1	19
Cariboo-Chilcotin (School District 27)	1	1	1	1	221
Catholic Independent School Diocese of Prince George	4	1	1	4	196
Greater Victoria School District No. 61	5	1	2	4	180
Kootenay-Columbia - School District #20	2	1	2	1	48
North Vancouver School District	1	1	1	1	19
School District 81	1	1	1	1	148
District School Board Ontario North East	34	2	7	5	108
Halton Catholic District School Board	2	1	1	2	18
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board	2	1	1	2	186
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board	1	1	1	1	282
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board	52	6	11	5	323
Near North District School Board (1055)	63	4	14	5	785
Near North District School Board (1214)	9	1	6	1	135
Niagara Catholic District School Board	10	1	3	5	76
Peel District School Board	58	1	8	4	163

School district/division	Number surveys returned (morning, to school)	Number schools returning surveys	Number grades/split grades represented	Number weekdays returned surveys (of 5)	Children surveyed
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board	46	4	10	5	530
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board	2	1	1	2	180
Toronto District School Board	4	1	1	4	173
Waterloo Catholic District School Board	130	9	17	5	1,502
Waterloo Region District School Board	263	19	16	5	2,796
Wellington Catholic District School Board	2	1	1	2	24
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board	4	1	1	4	404

Mode share

Figure 2 shows mode share by province. The inner ring of the figure aggregates the six categories of mode share into three: active travel (walk, bike, roll), bus (public transit/bus, school bus), and car. At the provincial level, the highest mode share travelling to school in the morning was by car. In BC, mode share by car, active travel, and bus was 61.9%, 22.0%, and 16.1% respectively. In Ontario, mode share by car, active travel, and bus was 37.7%, 32.5%, and 29.8% respectively. **Given the small number of schools and school districts represented (especially in BC), pilot findings should be treated cautiously.**

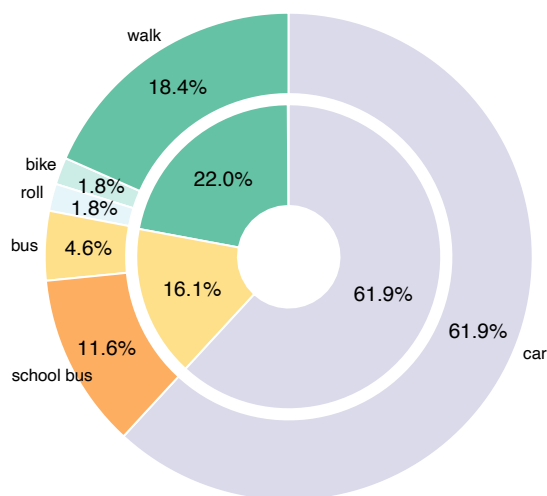
Table 5 shows all (walk, bike, roll, public transit/bus, school bus, car) mode share by SD, while Figure 3 shows the aggregated categories (active travel, bus, car) by SD. Travel mode share varied by school district. This is to be expected, due to urban-rural differences between school districts. For example, in BC, SDs in rural areas had higher school bus mode shares. Given the small number of schools represented within each SD, pilot findings should be treated cautiously.

We also compiled student travel mode share for each school, in Appendix E.

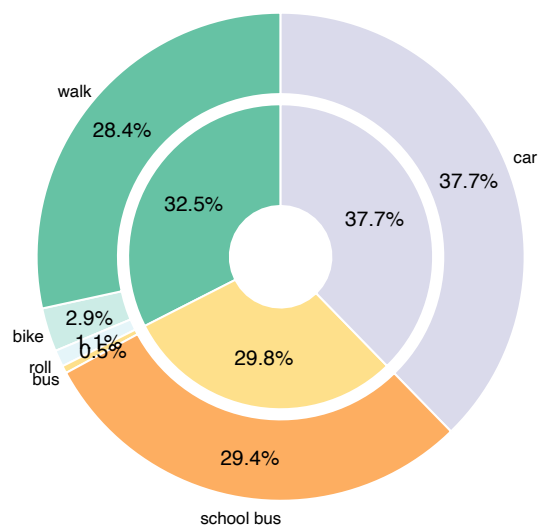
By province

Figure 2: classroom student travel mode share, by province

BC



ON



Green = active travel, yellow = bus; grey = motor vehicle.

By school district/division

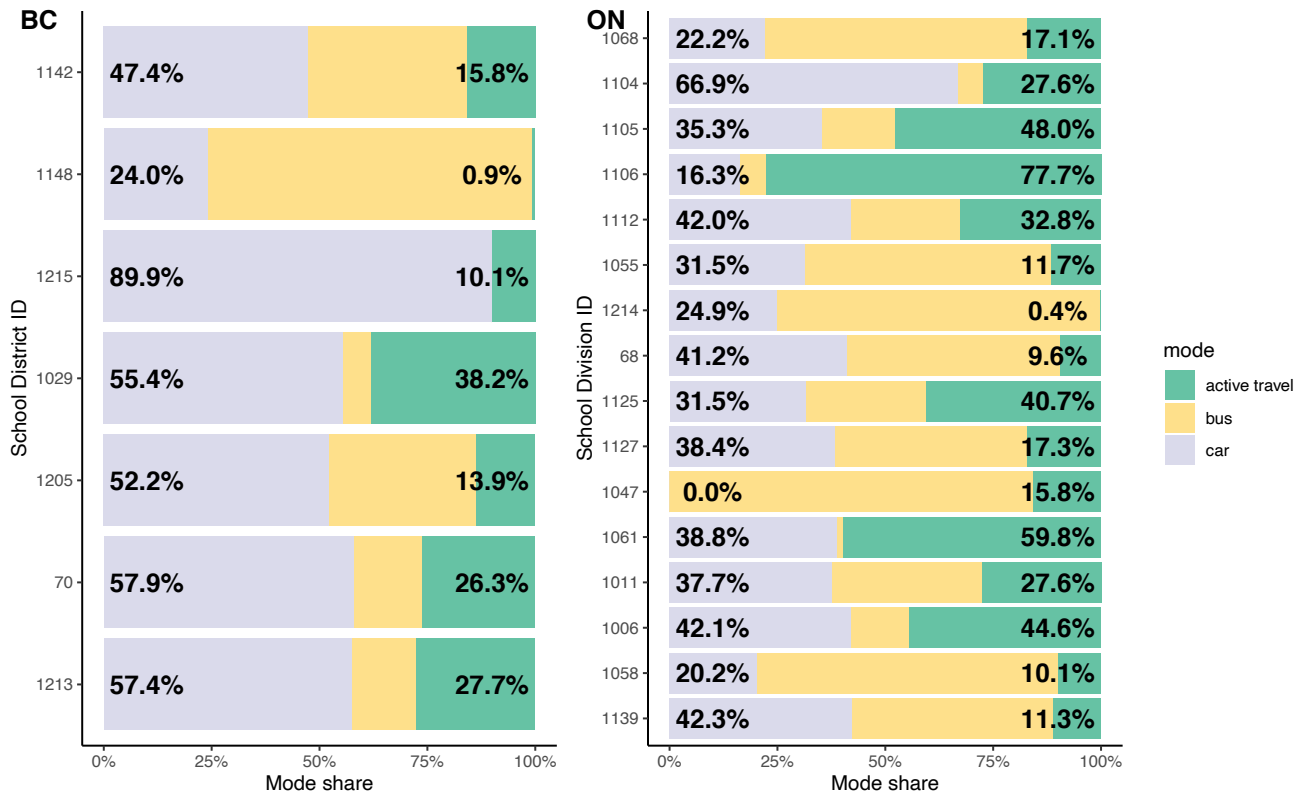
Table 5: mode share by SD

School district/division	District/division ID	Mode share*, %					
		Active travel			Bus	Car	
		Walk	Bike	Roll	Bus	Schoolbus	Car
Abbotsford (SD34)	1142	15.8	0.0	0.0	10.5	26.3	47.4
Cariboo-Chilcotin (School District 27)	1148	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	75.1	24.0
Catholic Independent School Diocese of Prince George	1215	9.9	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	89.9
Greater Victoria School District No. 61	1029	29.9	3.9	4.4	6.3	0.0	55.4
Kootenay-Columbia - School District #20	1205	13.9	0.0	0.0	5.2	28.8	52.2
North Vancouver School District	70	21.1	0.0	5.3	15.8	0.0	57.9
School District 81	1213	20.9	6.8	0.0	0.0	14.9	57.4
District School Board Ontario North East	1068	14.9	1.8	0.4	1.7	59.0	22.2

School district/division	District/division ID	Mode share*, %					
		Active travel			Bus		Car
		Walk	Bike	Roll	Bus	Schoolbus	Car
Halton Catholic District School Board	1104	16.7	8.2	2.6	0.0	5.6	66.9
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board	1105	48.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	35.3
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board	1106	75.9	0.4	1.4	0.0	6.0	16.3
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board	1112	29.7	1.9	1.2	0.2	25.0	42.0
Near North District School Board	1055	8.6	2.5	0.5	0.6	56.2	31.5
Near North District School Board	1214	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	74.7	24.9
Niagara Catholic District School Board	68	7.7	2.0	0.0	0.0	49.2	41.2
Peel District School Board	1125	35.5	2.6	2.5	1.8	26.0	31.5
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board	1127	12.7	3.6	1.0	0.5	43.8	38.4
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board	1047	15.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	84.2	0.0
Toronto District School Board	1061	58.8	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.7	38.8
Waterloo Catholic District School Board	1011	21.6	4.8	1.2	0.5	34.2	37.7
Waterloo Region District School Board	1006	40.9	2.6	1.1	0.0	13.3	42.1
Wellington Catholic District School Board	1058	1.9	4.1	4.1	0.0	69.6	20.2
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board	1139	7.5	3.2	0.6	0.0	46.4	42.3

*Mode share calculated as mean mode share across all schools in district/division.

Figure 3: Aggregated mode share by SD, based on classroom student travel surveys



Objective 3: factors affecting school travel mode

In this section, we present findings for household travel surveys. We first describe the analytic sample (province level) before summarizing factors affecting school travel mode (at 2 levels: province and SD).

Sample characteristics

Table 6 describes number of children living in respondent households, as well as characteristics for the eldest child under age 12 (grade, gender, usual mode to school in past week, duration of commute to school). We also summarized respondents' forward sortation areas (Appendix C). In household travel surveys, respondents were asked who usually accompanied the eldest child to school, and could choose up to three options. Figure 4 shows that in both BC and ON, parents and siblings were most likely to accompany the child.

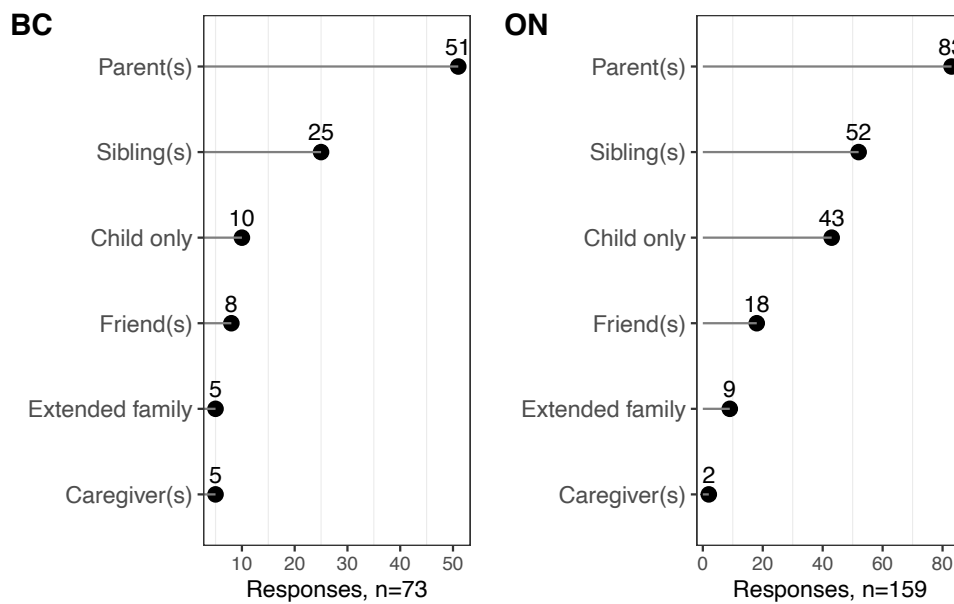
Table 6: Characteristics of Household Travel Survey respondents, BC and ON

Characteristic	British Columbia, N = 73 ¹	Ontario, N = 161 ¹
Number of children under age 12		
1	37 (51%)	79 (49%)
2	29 (40%)	57 (35%)
3	5 (6.8%)	17 (11%)
4 or more	2 (2.7%)	8 (5.0%)
Grade of eldest child		
Not yet enrolled	1 (1.4%)	2 (1.2%)
Pre-School	2 (2.7%)	4 (2.5%)
Kindergarten	14 (19%)	30 (19%)
Grade 1	2 (2.7%)	15 (9.3%)
Grade 2	10 (14%)	12 (7.5%)
Grade 3	4 (5.5%)	16 (9.9%)
Grade 4	12 (16%)	16 (9.9%)
Grade 5	8 (11%)	18 (11%)
Grade 6	10 (14%)	19 (12%)
Grade 7	5 (6.8%)	17 (11%)
Grade 8	5 (6.8%)	12 (7.5%)
Gender of eldest child		
Boy	36 (49%)	77 (48%)
Girl	37 (51%)	80 (50%)
Non-binary	0 (0%)	3 (1.9%)
Prefer not to share	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)
Usual mode to school in past week		
Car (just my family)	27 (37%)	29 (18%)
Carpool (two or more families sharing)	3 (4.1%)	2 (1.2%)
School Bus	12 (16%)	49 (30%)
Public Transit	3 (4.1%)	12 (7.5%)
Walk	20 (27%)	52 (32%)
Cycle	4 (5.5%)	10 (6.2%)

Characteristic	British Columbia, N = 73 ¹	Ontario, N = 161 ¹
Roll (wheelchair, scooter, skateboard, rollerblades, etc.)	4 (5.5%)	4 (2.5%)
Other	0 (0%)	3 (1.9%)
Duration of commute to school		
5 minutes or less	10 (14%)	23 (14%)
6-9 minutes	20 (27%)	42 (26%)
10-14 minutes	20 (27%)	37 (23%)
15-19 minutes	12 (16%)	25 (16%)
20-29 minutes	7 (9.6%)	18 (11%)
30-39 minutes	4 (5.5%)	11 (6.8%)
40-49 minutes	0 (0%)	4 (2.5%)
50 minutes or more	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)

¹n (%)

Figure 4: Who accompanies eldest child on journey to school, BC and ON



Factors affecting school travel mode

In household travel surveys, respondents were asked to identify factors influencing the usual mode of travel to school, and could choose up to three options. Figure 5 shows that in both BC and ON, the top influencing factors for usual mode were distance and age. Respondents were also asked to identify up to three factors influencing the likelihood of walking to school. Figure 6 shows that in both provinces, the top influencing factors for walking were if the school were closer and having others to walk with. Respondents were similarly asked to identify up to three factors influencing the likelihood of biking/rolling to school. Figure 7 shows that in both provinces, the top factors for biking/rolling were protected bike lanes and if the school were closer. In household surveys, respondents could also provide additional information about factors affecting school travel modes in open-ended text boxes. Appendix B lists all open-ended responses to these questions.

By province

Figure 5: Factors influencing travel mode of eldest child, BC and ON

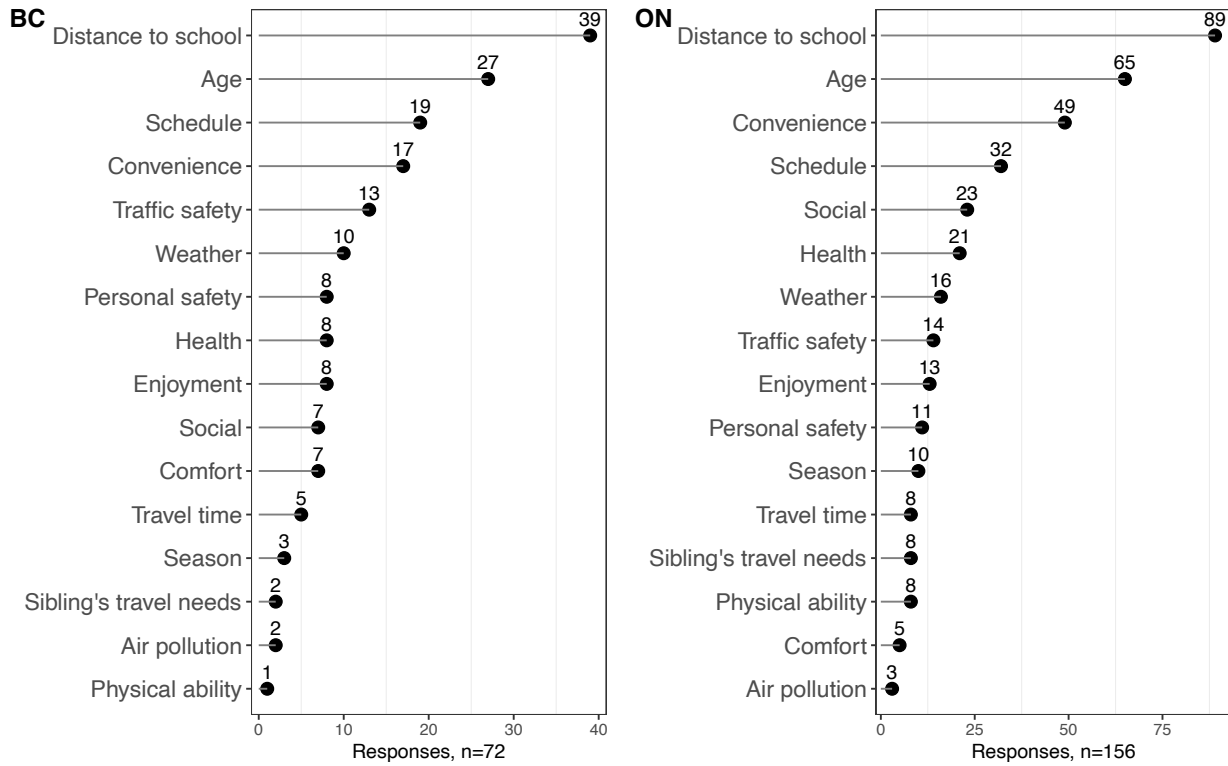


Figure 6: Factors influencing walking to school, BC and ON, amongst those not currently walking to school

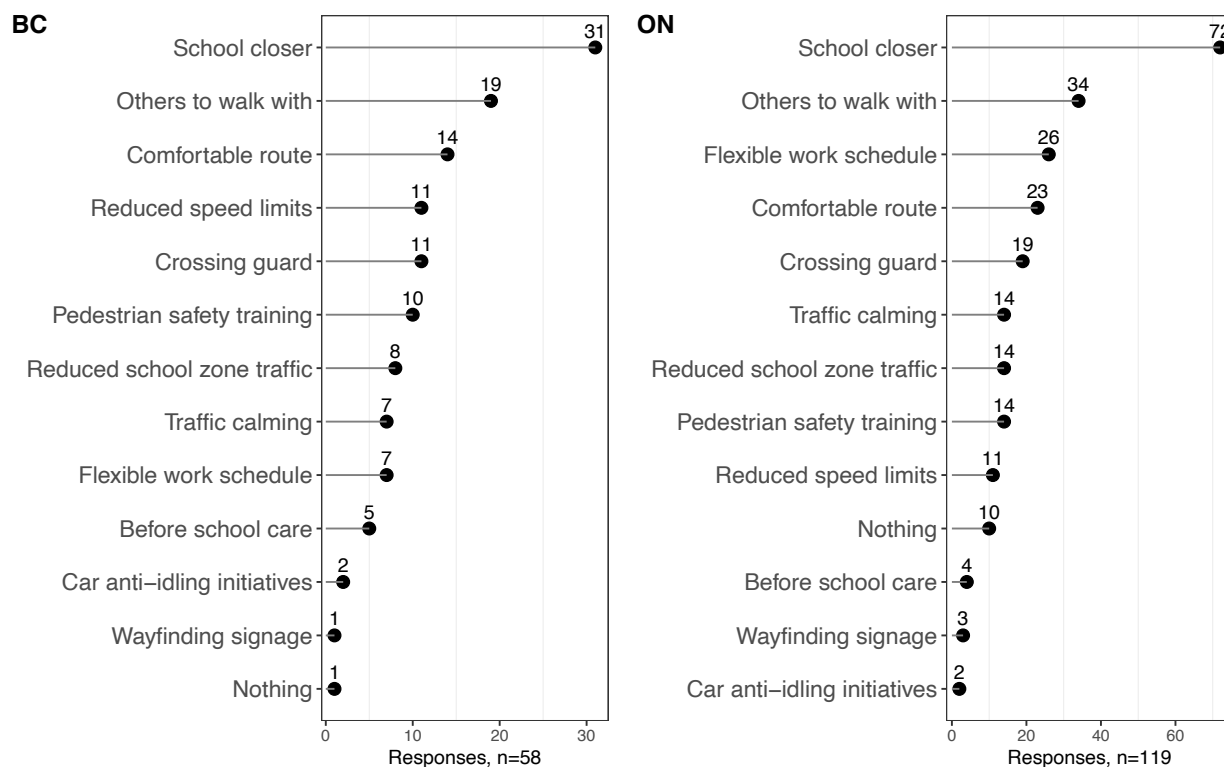
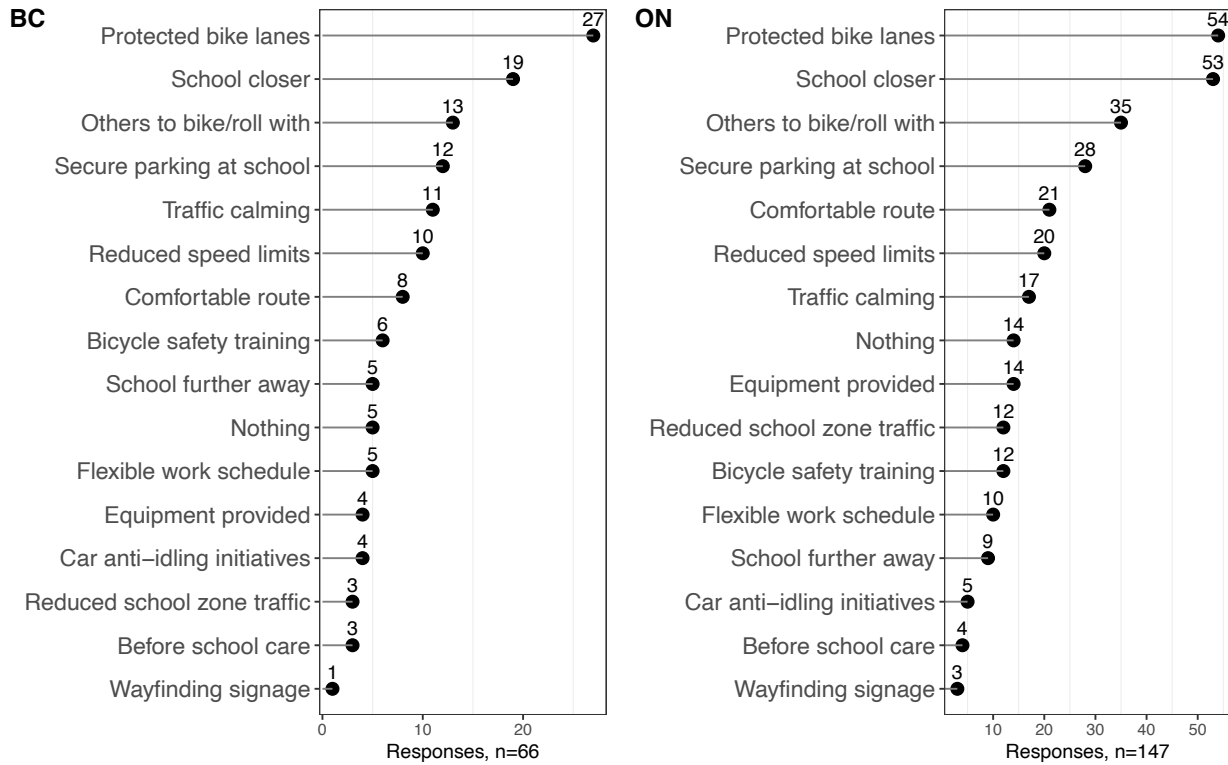


Figure 7: Factors influencing biking or rolling to school, BC and ON, amongst those not currently biking or rolling to school



By school district/division

We aggregated household survey data by SD to examine data pertaining to travel mode (usual mode to school, top 3 factors influencing usual travel mode, likelihood of walking, and likelihood of biking/rolling). However, when aggregated like this, the majority of SD groups had fewer than 5 household surveys. Table 7 summarizes household travel survey data pertaining to travel mode from 12 SDs with five or more surveys. The full table consisting of 73 SDs is found in Appendix D.

Table 7: Household Travel Survey, usual mode to school and factors affecting school travel, responses by SD (SDs with 5+ responses)

Province	School district/division	Number surveys received	Usual mode to school		Top three influencing factors		
			Usual mode to school (top 3)	Number of households choosing this mode	Usual travel mode	Likelihood of walking	Likelihood of biking or rolling
British Columbia	36 Surrey	8	Car (just my family)	3	Distance to school	School closer	School closer
			Walk	2	Age	Before school care	Before school care
			Carpool (two or more families sharing)	1	Schedule	Flexible work schedule	Protected bike lanes
39 Vancouver	6	6	Walk	3	Age	Pedestrian safety training	Secure parking at school
			Car (just my family)	1	Distance to school	Reduced speed limits	Protected bike lanes
			Carpool (two or more families sharing)	1	Schedule	Flexible work schedule	Flexible work schedule
61 Greater Victoria	6	6	Car (just my family)	3	Distance to school	School closer	Protected bike lanes
			Walk	3	Schedule	Comfortable route	School closer
68 Nanaimo Ladysmith	15	15	Car (just my family)	11	Distance to school	School closer	Protected bike lanes
			Walk	4	Age	Others to walk with	Traffic calming

Province	School district/division	Number surveys received	Usual mode to school		Top three influencing factors		
			Usual mode to school (top 3)	Number of households choosing this mode	Usual travel mode	Likelihood of walking	Likelihood of biking or rolling
Ontario	Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario	6	School Bus	3	Age	School closer	School closer
			Car (just my family)	1	Convenience	Crossing guard	Comfortable route
			Public Transit	1	Distance to school	Before school care	Others to bike/roll with
	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board	9	Car (just my family)	3	Age	Pedestrian safety training	Protected bike lanes
			Cycle	3	Convenience	Others to walk with	Reduced school zone traffic
			School Bus	2	Distance to school	Reduced school zone traffic	Reduced speed limits
	Thames Valley District School Board	11	School Bus	4	Distance to school	School closer	School closer
			Walk	4	Physical ability	Crossing guard	Protected bike lanes
			Other (please specify)	2	Age	Others to walk with	Others to bike/roll with
	Toronto Catholic District School Board	6	School Bus	2	Distance to school	School closer	Protected bike lanes
			Walk	2	Traffic safety	Comfortable route	School closer
			Car (just my family)	1	Age	Crossing guard	Others to bike/roll with
Toronto District School Board	22	Walk	12	Distance to school	School closer	Secure parking at school	
		Car (just my family)	3	Age	Others to walk with	Protected bike lanes	
		Roll (wheelchair, scooter, skateboard, rollerblades, etc.)	2	Convenience	Flexible work schedule	School closer	
		9	Walk	4	Distance to school	School closer	School closer

Province	School district/division	Number surveys received	Usual mode to school		Top three influencing factors		
			Usual mode to school (top 3)	Number of households choosing this mode	Usual travel mode	Likelihood of walking	Likelihood of biking or rolling
Upper Grand District School Board			Cycle	2	Age	Others to walk with	Others to bike/roll with
			School Bus	2	Physical ability	Before school care	Protected bike lanes
			Walk	3	Age	School closer	School closer
Waterloo Region District School Board		6	School Bus	2	Schedule	Others to walk with	Comfortable route
			Public Transit	1	Convenience	Comfortable route	School further away
York Region District School Board		9	Walk	4	Age	Flexible work schedule	Nothing
			Car (just my family)	3	Distance to school	School closer	Before school care
			Roll (wheelchair, scooter, skateboard, rollerblades, etc.)	1	Convenience	Comfortable route	School closer



National School Travel
Data Collection Pilot

February 2026