



# National Travel Survey 2014: Travel to school

The National Travel Survey is the Department for Transport's key source of data for understanding school travel patterns. This factsheet summarises the latest results about how children travel to school based on data for England up to 2014.

## Mode of travel

Most common modes of travel to school



Walk



Car



Bus

5-10 years

46%

46%

5%

11-16 years

38%

23%

29%

## Trends

Since 2003...



for **primary school children**, the share of car has slightly increased and the share of walking has decreased.

... mode share has remained broadly stable for **secondary school children**.

## Average length and time

Average length and time of trips to school



Primary  
school children

13  
minutes

1.6  
miles



Secondary  
school children

25  
minutes

3.4  
miles

to travel to school on average in 2014

## Mode choice by distance

For very short trips (under one mile)...

... **walking** is the main mode of transport for primary and secondary school children.



For longer trips (2 miles and more)...



...**car** is the dominant mode for **primary** school children



...**bus** becomes the most common mode for **secondary** school children

## Taking children to school



88%

of children  
aged 7 to 10

are usually accompanied to school  
by an adult.

31%

of children  
aged 11 to 13

For children aged 7 to 10, the main reason cited by parents is **traffic danger**



For children aged 11 to 13, the two main reasons are that **it is convenient** and that the **school is too far away**



Trips to escort to school are more likely to be made by **women** aged **30 to 49**.

This factsheet summarises findings from the [National Travel Survey \(NTS\) 2014](#) on travel to and from school, including key summary information about the modes of transport used to travel to school and how this varies by age, distance and type of residence.



### Definitions

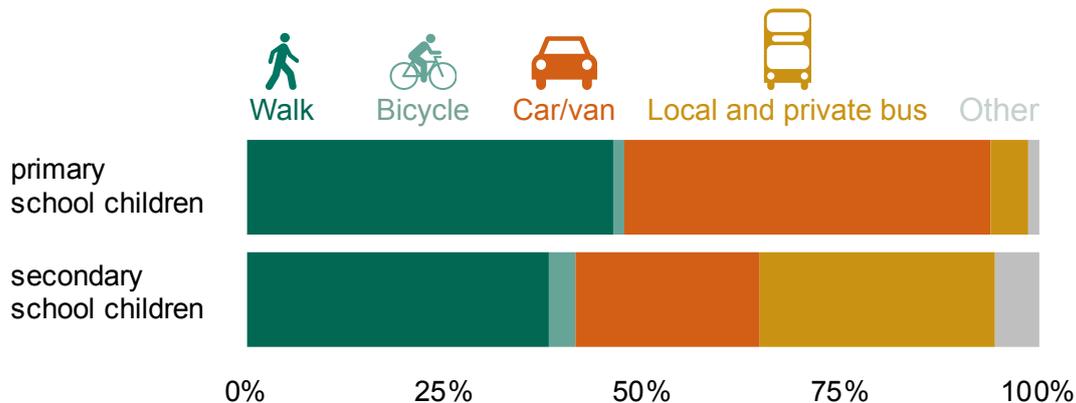
In the NTS, a **trip** is defined as a one-way course of travel with a single main purpose. A **trip to school** is defined as a trip made by children aged between 5 and 16, where the main purpose is education, excluding trips over 50 miles. For the purpose of this factsheet, **primary school children** refers to children aged 5 to 10 years old, and **secondary school children** refers to children aged 11 to 16 years old. **Escort education** trips are those made to accompany a child to school.



### How do children get to school?

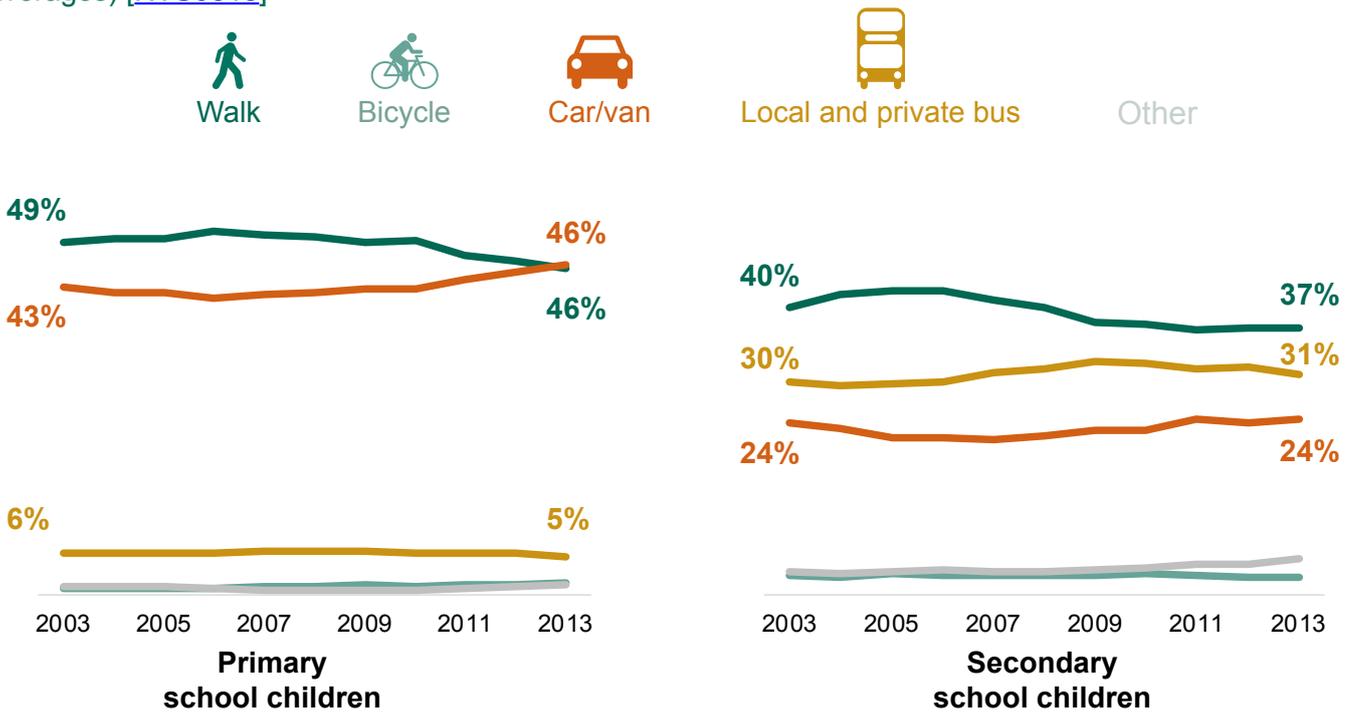
**Mode choice:** The choice of mode used to travel to school varies with the age of the child. For primary school children (aged 5 to 10), car and walking are the two most common modes of travel to school with a similar share of 46% of all trips. Walking remains the most common mode of travel to school for secondary children (aged 11 to 16 years), but is followed by local and private bus (together 29% of all trips), whereas the car accounts for a smaller share (23%). This mode share is affected by the distance travelled, as older children travel further to school on average.

Mode share of trips to and from school: England, 2014 [\[NTS0613\]](#)



**Recent trends:** The mode share of travel to school has seen little variation since 2003. The most notable change is that for primary school children, the share of car has slightly increased (from 43% of all trips to 46%) at the expense of walking (which fell from 49% to 46%). The share of the main transport modes of secondary children (walking, bus and car) has remained broadly stable since 2003. [Note that these figures are based on averages over three years of data to smooth annual fluctuations]

Trends in mode share of trips to and from school by age of child: England, 2003 to 2013 (3-year rolling averages) [[NTS0613](#)]



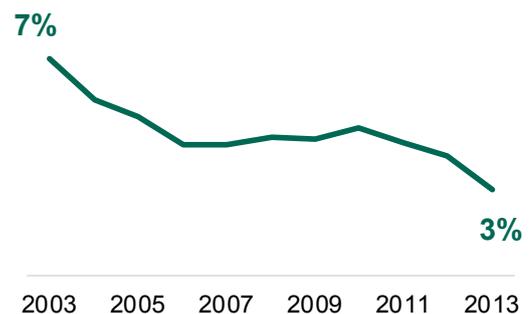
**Longer term trends:** The proportion of trips to school made by walking has fallen over the last 40 years; in 1975/76, an estimated 64% of all trips to school [within Great Britain] were made by walking – 74% for primary age pupils and 53% for those of secondary age. Over the same period, the proportion of trips by car has increased – in 1975/76, 15% of trips by primary age children and 7% of trips by secondary age children were made by car or van.

The falling trend in walking trips is likely to reflect both increasing household car availability, and increasing length of trips to school. In 1975/76, 67% of trips by primary school age children were less than 1 mile compared to 47% in 2014, with the equivalent figures for secondary school age being 35% in 1975/76 and 23% in 2014.

**Travelling to school alone:** The proportion of children who travel to school alone, all modes considered, also strongly varies with age.

Proportion of primary school children who travel to school alone: England, 2003 to 2013 (3-year rolling average) [[NTS0613](#)]

While the proportion of secondary children who travel to school alone has remained broadly stable since 2003 (at 41% in 2013), the proportion of primary children do so is much lower (3% in 2013) and has decreased in the last decade.

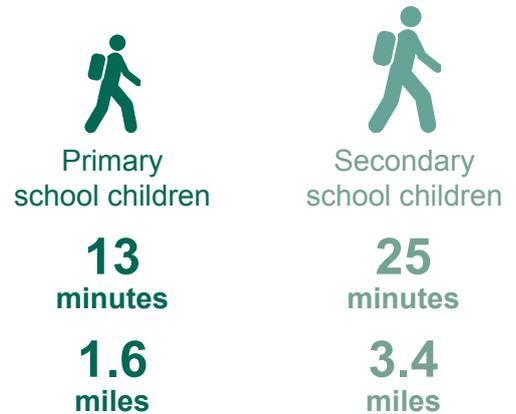




## Time and distance of trips to school

The average length of a trip to school has slightly increased for all children: from 1.2 miles in 1995/97 to 1.6 miles in 2014 for primary school children, and from 2.9 miles in 1995/97 to 3.4 miles in 2014 for secondary school children.

Average time spent travelling to school has remained remarkably stable for both age groups, around 13 minutes per trip for primary school children and 25 minutes for secondary school children. Secondary school children travel consistently further and longer to go to school than primary school children, which is probably because there are far fewer secondary schools.



...to travel to school on average in 2014

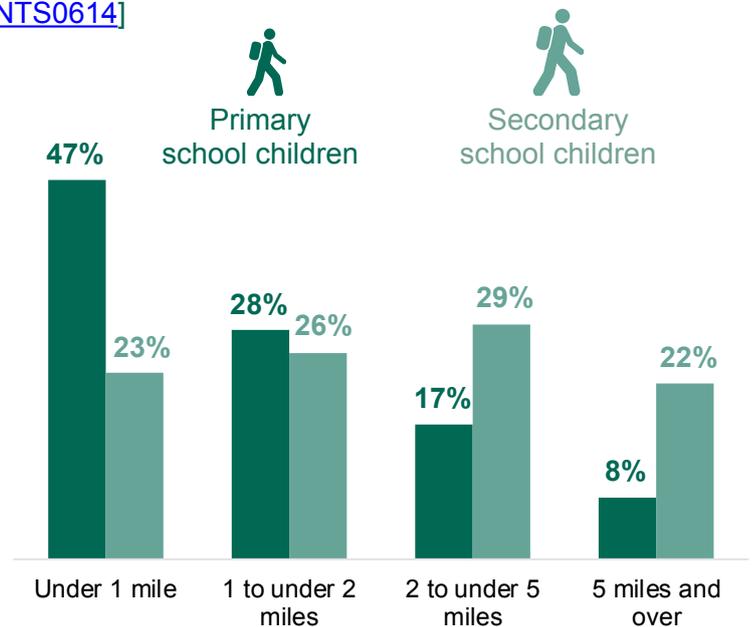


## Travel to school by distance

### Trips to school by distance:

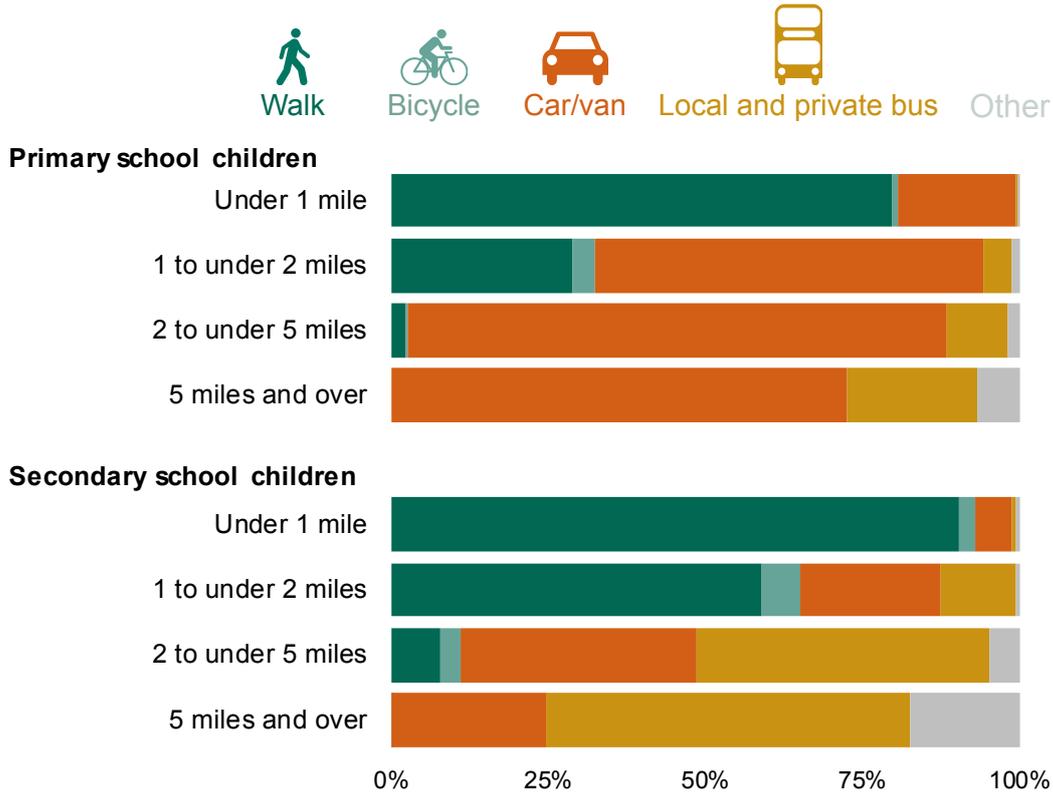
Primary school children do more very short trips to school than secondary school children. Indeed, 76% of trips to school made by primary school children are under 2 miles, compared to 49% of trips to school made by secondary school children. For secondary school children, trips to school are more likely to be between 2 and 5 miles (29%). These differences in trip length are likely to affect the choice of mode of travel to school for the different age groups.

Proportion of trips to school by trip distance: England, 2014 [\[NTS0614\]](#)



**Mode choice by distance:** The mode used to travel to school varies according to the length of the trip to school. For both age groups, walking is the dominant mode for short distances (80% and 90% of trips under one mile for primary school children and secondary school children respectively). While car largely dominates longer trips to school for primary school children, accounting for 73% of trips of 5 miles or over, bus becomes the more common mode of travel to school for secondary school children (58% of trips of 5 miles or over).

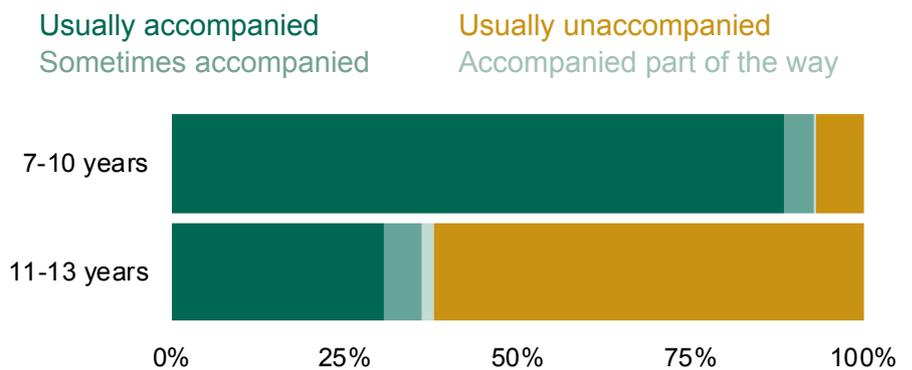
Mode share of trips to and from school by length of trip: England, 2014 [NTS0614]



## How many children are accompanied to school and why?

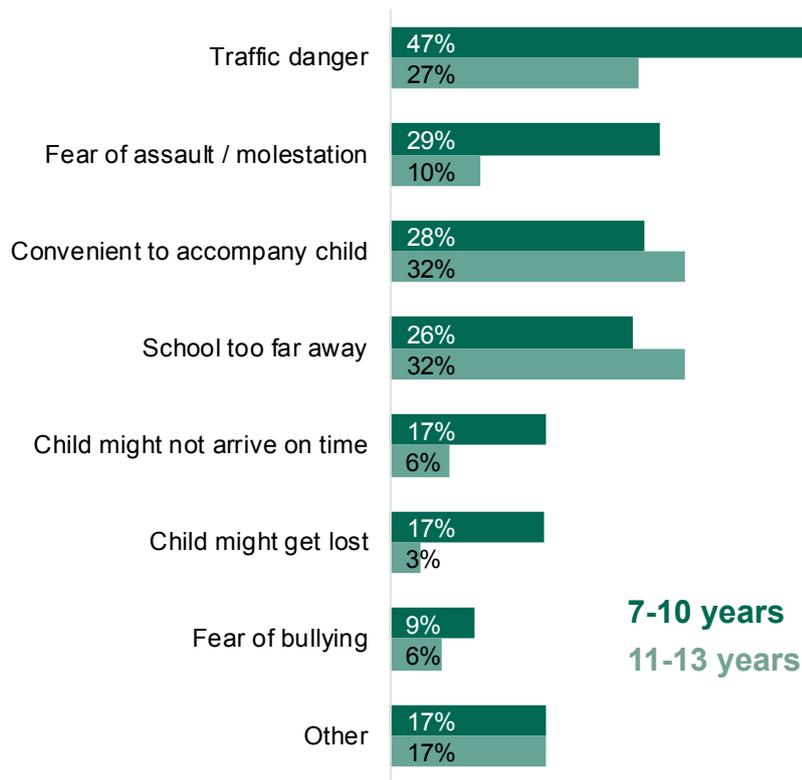
**Being accompanied by an adult:** According to their parents, while 88% of children aged 7 to 10 were usually accompanied to school by an adult in 2013, this proportion drops to 31% for children aged 11 to 13. This proportion has slightly increased for the younger children while it has remained stable for older children since 2005.

Whether children are accompanied to school by an adult: England, 2013 [NTS0616]



**Reasons for being accompanied:** For the younger children (7 to 10 years old), the main reasons for accompanying their children cited by parents were traffic danger (47%) and fear of assault (29%). For older children (11 to 13 years old), reasons most commonly cited were that it is convenient to accompany the child, and that the school is too far away, both reasons being cited by about a third of parents whose children are accompanied to school by an adult.

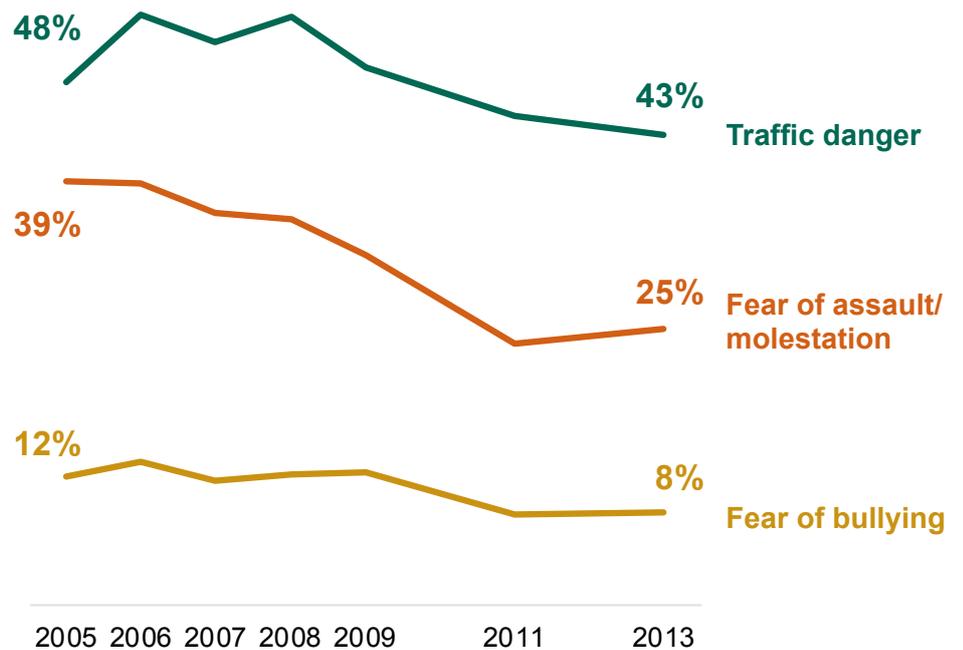
Reasons cited for children to be accompanied to school by an adult: England, 2013 [\[NTS0616\]](#)



Percentages sum to more than 100 as more than one reason may be given.

**Trends:** The reasons for accompanying children to school cited by parents which have shown a slight decrease since 2005 are traffic danger, fear of assault and fear of bullying. These reasons all relate to parental perception of safety. The other reasons for children to be accompanied by an adult have stayed broadly stable during the same period (change of less than 3 percentage points).

Trends in a selection of reasons cited for children (aged 7 to 13) to be accompanied to school by an adult: England, 2005 to 2013 [\[NTS0616\]](#)

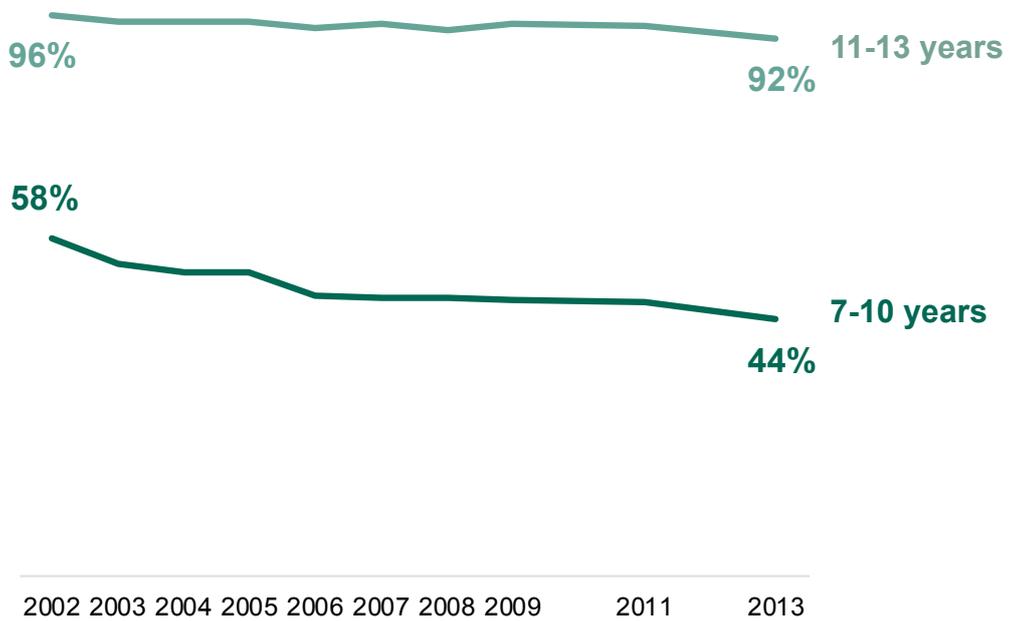


Percentages sum to more than 100 as more than one reason may be given.

**Crossing roads alone:**

If safety reasons seem to have become less of a concern for parents when it comes to accompanying children to school, the trend is reversed when it comes to crossing roads alone: children, especially younger ones (7-10 years), have become less likely to be allowed to cross roads alone than in 2002, and even when they are allowed to do so, it is more and more likely to be for minor roads only.

Trends in the proportion of children allowed to cross roads alone, either always or sometimes: England, 2002 to 2013 [NTS0618]

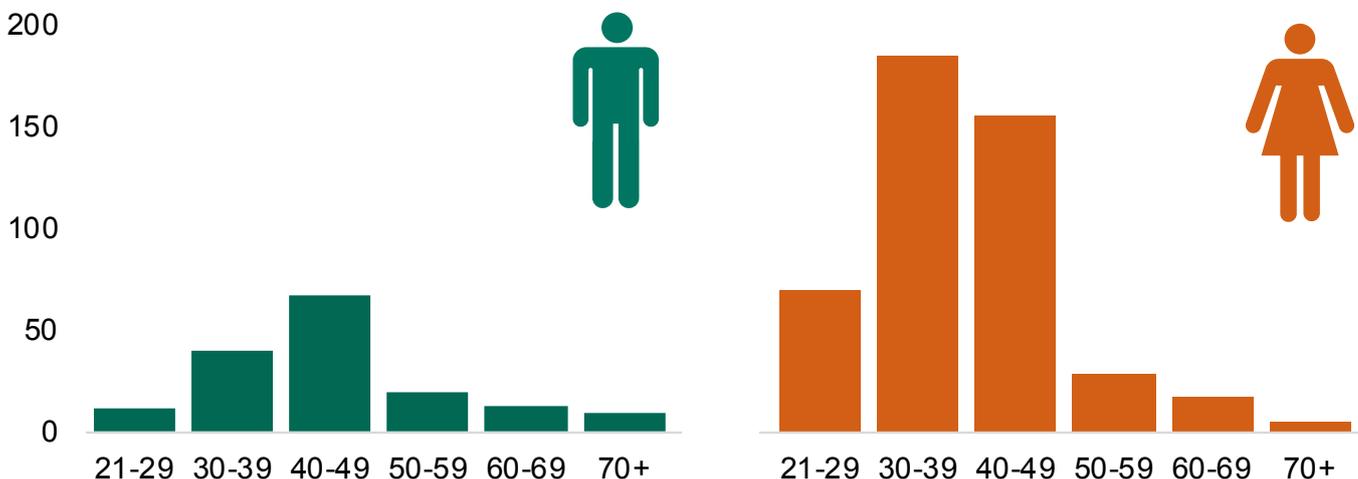


**Who takes children to school?**

**Escort education:** Women make more trips taking children to school than men on average, with the highest number of trips to escort someone for education purposes (which is mostly taking children to school) being made by women aged between 30 and 49.

Note that the figures shown in the chart are averages over all adults in all households; those in households with children make many more escort education trips per year on average.

Escort education trips per person per year by sex and age group: England, 2014 [NTS0611]

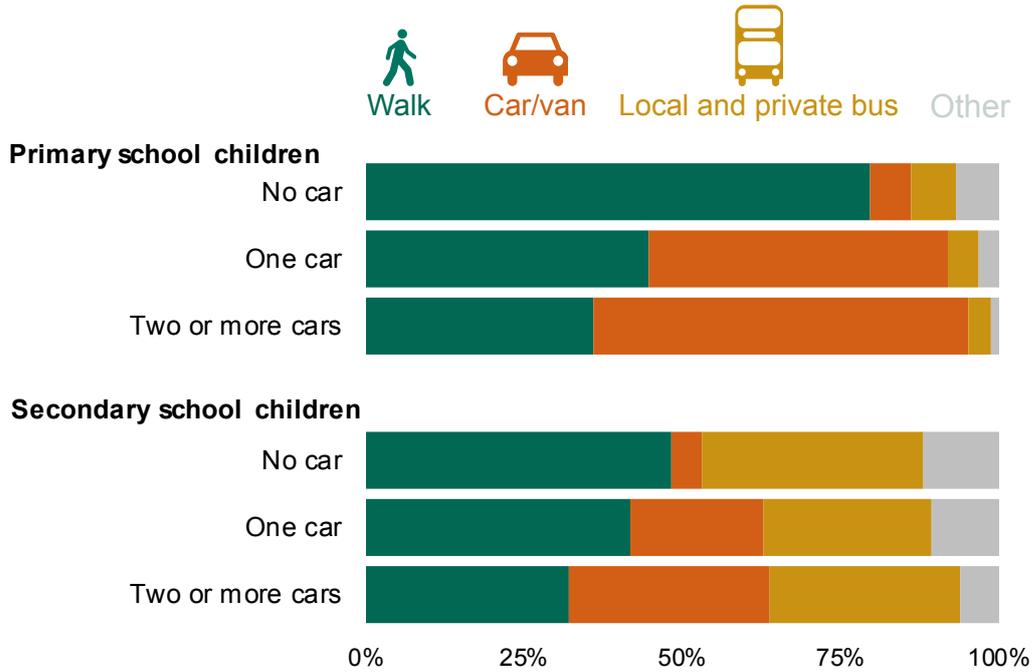




## Travel to school by car availability

**Mode share:** For children in households without cars, walking to school is more common, particularly for primary school ages. Bus also accounts for a greater share of trips to school in households without cars, most notably for secondary school children.

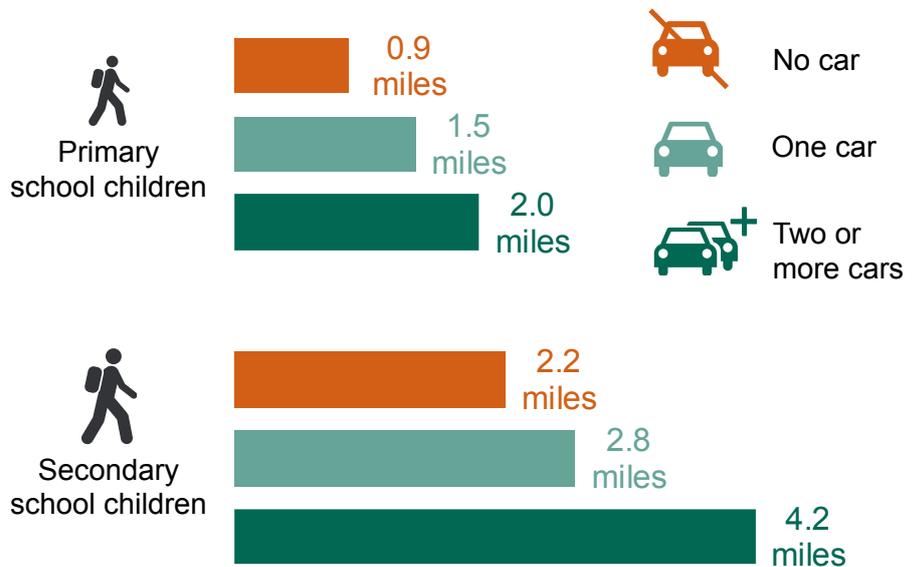
Mode share of trips to and from school by household car availability: England, 2014



**Distance travelled:** Children living in households with a car travel further to school on average than those in no-car households.

Considering just trips under 2 miles, 85% of primary school children walk to school, compared with 55% of those in households with a car. However, at secondary school ages, the equivalent figures are more similar: 71% of children in no-car households and 74% in households with at least one car walk to school.

Average length of trips to school by number of cars in household: England, 2014



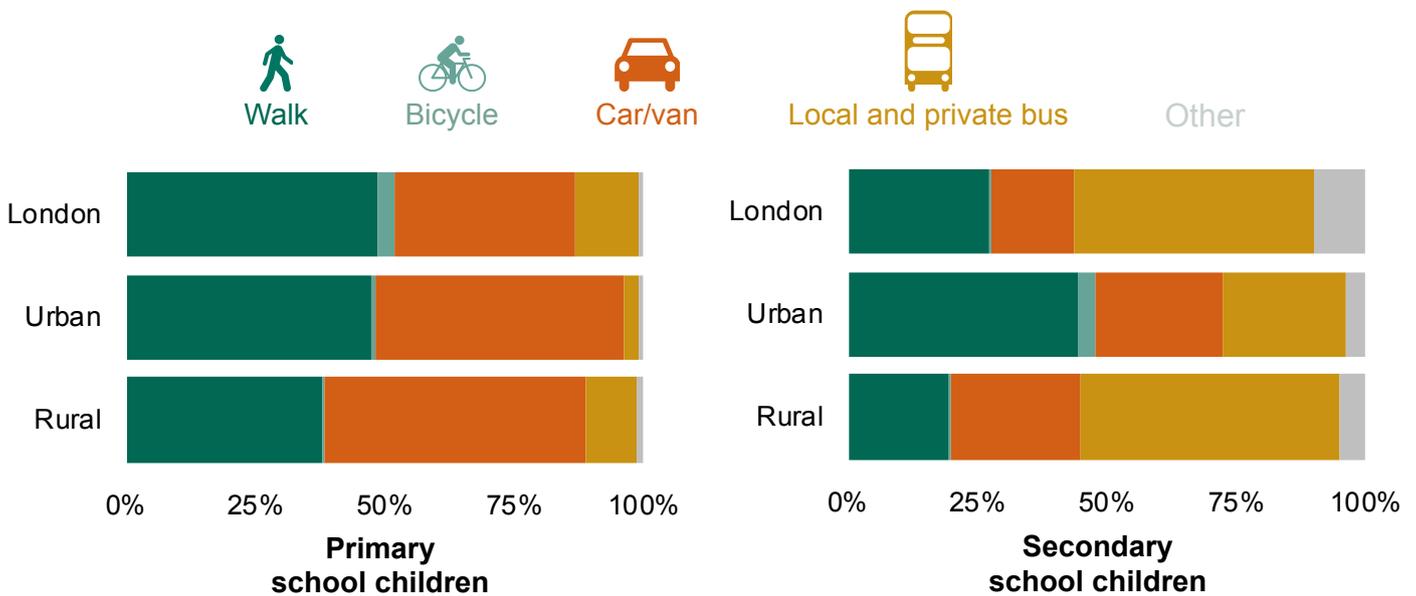


## Travel to school by type of residence

**Mode choice:** Type of residence is an important factor behind the mode choice for travel to school. At primary school age, trips by pupils who live in London or urban areas are more likely to be made walking. Car accounts for half of trips to school made by primary school children living in rural areas.

Secondary school children show a different pattern. While secondary pupils living in urban areas outside London are more likely to walk (45% of trips), pupils living in London and rural areas are more likely to travel to school by bus. For secondary pupils in London the vast majority of these trips are made by local bus, while in rural areas private bus also accounts for a notable share (20% of all trips to school).

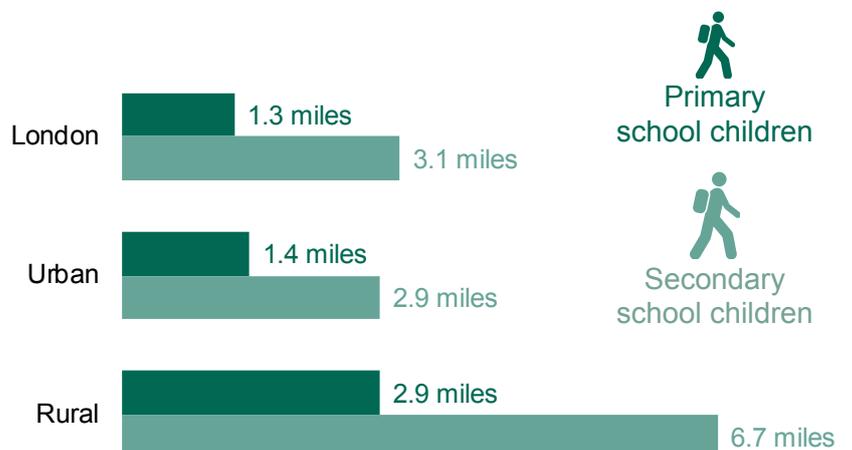
Mode share of trips to school by type of residence: England, 2013/14 [\[NTS9908\]](#)



**Distance travelled:** Children living in rural areas travel further to go to school for both primary and secondary pupils, but there is a bigger gap between rural and urban areas for secondary school children.

A trip to school is on average twice as long for a secondary pupil living in a rural area compared to secondary pupils living in urban areas or London.

Average length of trips to school by type of residence: England, 2013/14 [\[NTS9908\]](#)





## Background and references

### The National Travel Survey

The National Travel Survey is the Department for Transport's key source of data on personal travel behaviours since 1965. Data is collected from around 16,000 individuals each year through a face-to-face interview and a 7-day travel diary. The survey covers residents of England of all ages, which makes it a powerful tool to understand topics like travel to school.

### Tables and raw data

Statistics from this factsheets mainly refer to published tables:

- ▶ [NTS0613](#): mode share of trips to and from school by age of child, average length of a trip to school and percentage of children travelling to school alone
- ▶ [NTS0614](#): mode share of trips to and from school by length of trip
- ▶ [NTS0616](#): whether children are accompanied to school by an adult and the reasons
- ▶ [NTS0618](#): whether children are allowed to cross the roads alone
- ▶ [NTS9908](#): mode of travel to school and average length of trips to school by region and type of residence (urban/rural)

### Further references

More details about travel behaviours of English residents can be found in the 2014 National Travel Survey publication: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/457752/nts2014-01.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/457752/nts2014-01.pdf)

More factsheets on specific topics from the National Travel Survey can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nts-factsheets>

### Contact us

For any questions or queries in relation to this factsheet, please contact the National Travel Survey team:

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