

Executive Summary

The Travelling to School Initiative

The Travelling to School Initiative (TTSI) is a joint undertaking by the Department for Transport (DfT) and the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), which comprises a series of measures to increase the use of healthy and sustainable modes of transport and reduce congestion in relation to pupils' travel to and from schools in England.

The Initiative was announced in September 2003 and aims to tackle a number of trends towards greater car dependency observed in school travel in recent years. A key focus has been on working with schools to develop School Travel Plans (STPs) supported by the appointment of School Travel Advisers (STAs), Regional School Travel Advisers (RSTAs) and Regional School Travel Curriculum Advisers (RSTCAs) and a range of capital grants for on-site and off-site facilities in and around schools. The intention was that all schools in England, including independent schools, should have an active School Travel Plan (STP) in place by the end of March 2010.

The programme has been led by a TTSI Project Board comprising officers from the DCSF and the DfT who provide direction, guidance and support to practitioners. It has been complemented by a number of separately funded and delivered initiatives to promote walking and cycling for school journeys. These included the 'Walking to School Initiative Grant Scheme' and a number of initiatives to increase cycling promoted by Cycling England.

The DfT completed an initial evaluation of the TTSI in 2005 after the first year of the programme to assess whether there was evidence of a modal shift away from car use. Limitations with the available data at the time, however, meant that it was not possible to draw conclusions about the national impact of the programme and a further evaluation toward the end of the programme was recommended.

This study

This evaluation draws on a range of new and existing data sources, to examine issues of process (how the TTSI has been implemented in practice) and impact (the extent to which the intended outcomes of the TTSI have been achieved). These quantitative and qualitative sources of evidence include the annual School Census, an online School Survey, School Travel Adviser Survey, workshops with key stakeholders, and in-depth case studies of schools exhibiting good practice in terms of process and outcomes.

This approach allows the research to identify a range of view points and alternative explanations, and 'weight' the evidence available; whilst also recognising the limitations associated with the various data sources in terms of sample sizes, positive reporting bias, and the extent to which the School Census data can be used to assess travel behaviour change associated with the TTSI programme.

Key achievements of the TTSI programme

The main achievements of the TTSI can be described as follows:

Inputs - The Government has provided extensive capital and revenue funding to support the TTSI. By March 2010 this included approximately £120 million of capital investment to local authorities and schools to help implement STPs, and £35 million of revenue funding, principally for TTSI staffing roles.

Outputs – This has funded approximately 250 STAs (including 68 in London Boroughs), 11 RSTAs, and two RSTCAs; and resulted in 81% of schools in England (primary, secondary, special and independent) having an STP in place by March 2009. In addition, a range of minor capital improvements such as cycle parking, storage facilities and local safety equipment have been delivered.

Outcomes – Evidence from a subset of the School Census data for the period 2006/07 to 2008/09, for example identifies small decreases in the proportion of pupils travelling to school by car, an increase in car share activity and small, but statistically significant, increases in walking and cycling. It is not possible, however, to attribute these changes directly to the TTSI: a comparison of data for schools with and without a STP suggests that **STPs have not had a significant impact on average mode share figures, at an aggregate level, to date**. It should be noted however, that the School Census may under-estimate the effect of the TTSI on travel behaviour, and further analysis of the data in 2010/11 may identify a more significant change in average mode share following STP implementation. Evidence from other sources, such as the School Survey, stakeholder workshops and case studies, provides a more positive picture with respondents perceiving that STPs may support substantial mode shift in certain circumstances.

Six key research questions were set by the DfT and DCSF at the outset of the study. The study findings relating to these key research questions are presented below:

1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the TTSI?

The main strengths of the TTSI can be described as follows:

- the availability of **capital and revenue funding** to support the TTSI providing a powerful motivator and important factor for the development of STPs;
- the enthusiasm and commitment of **School Travel Advisers** to engage with schools and wider partners, without which many schools would not have been aware of the TTSI or motivated to develop or implement STPs;
- **wider benefits** beyond the immediate observed small changes in travel behaviour, such as awareness of health benefits associated with physical activity, awareness of environmental issues, stronger relationships between schools, local authorities and the police, increased community cohesion, improved pupil behaviour and ownership of travel to school issues by schools.

In addition, the TTSI has resulted in supporting processes (outside of the formal TTSI) relating to implementation and monitoring, including:

- **local authority accreditation and reward schemes**, which have encouraged schools to produce high quality plans and encouraged a long term commitment to sustainable travel; and
- **the inclusion of a question on the mode of transport used by pupils to travel to school in the annual School Census. Despite various limitations** this is becoming increasingly useful in monitoring school-related travel behaviour change, quantifying and demonstrating the benefits of investment in school travel initiatives, and informing future spending decisions.

The main weaknesses of the TTSI are as follows:

- **STP coverage**, with the target of 100% of all schools having a STP in place by March 2010 unlikely to have been achieved;
- **variable amount of STA contact with schools**, reflecting differences in workload, with many schools wishing to see more visits than actually undertaken. This may have been because some schools were more reluctant to take ownership of the STP development process and related issues;
- **the need for additional training** in ensuring all STAs have the necessary skills and up-to-date knowledge;
- **continued parental concerns about road safety issues** with evidence that STPs have been only partially effective at addressing these and therefore allowing their children to walk or cycle to school.

2) Has the TTSI helped tackle childhood obesity and reduce carbon emissions?

The TTSI has been effective in increasing awareness of childhood obesity issues amongst pupils, parents and teachers, based on evidence from the stakeholder workshops and over two-thirds of respondents to the School Survey agreeing STPs help raise awareness of the health benefits of active travel.

Evidence from the case studies shows that some schools have achieved substantial increases in walking levels and the workshops provided further examples of increased walking; however there is no significant difference in the change in the average proportion of pupils walking or cycling at STP and non-STP school based on data from the School Census. This suggests that some pupils will have benefited from health improvements, however, the actual impact on obesity levels will depend on whether or not those most 'at risk' have changed their behaviour, the frequency with which they are now walking to school, and the length of the journey, among other factors.

Evidence from a subset of the School Census data shows that there has been a small but significant decrease in car use (excluding car share) across all schools. Again, there is no significant difference in the average results for STP and non-STP schools, so this change cannot be linked to the TTSI programme, although evidence from the case studies shows that some schools have achieved substantial decreases in car use and workshop participants report examples of reduced congestion at the school gate. This suggests that some reduction in carbon emissions is likely to have occurred as a result of the TTSI programme, but this is likely to be very small in the context of overall emissions associated with the 'school run'.

The TTSI has been effective in increasing awareness of environmental issues amongst pupils, parents and teachers. This may have an impact on how pupils and parents use the car for other non-school trips, and may also influence future travel behaviour patterns.

3) Has value for money been achieved by the TTSI to date?

As noted, the Government has provided extensive capital and revenue funding to support the TTSI. By March 2010 this included approximately £120 million of capital investment to local authorities and schools to help implement STPs, and £35 million of revenue funding, principally for TTSI staffing roles.

Estimating the benefits associated with the TTSI is difficult. There are particular challenges associated with estimating health benefits in children and calculating decongestion benefits (due to uncertainty about the length of time over which travel behaviour change is sustained and the importance of taking account of traffic conditions in the vicinity of individual schools).

This evaluation has attempted to estimate an indicative range of partial Benefit Cost Ratios (BCRs), using a methodology following an approach outlined in DfT's Transport Appraisal Guidance and based on a subset of the School Census. These are based primarily on estimated decongestion and carbon benefits only (excluding health and wider social benefits) and BCR values range quite significantly from less than 0.1 for the least optimistic combination of assumptions to 1.2 for the most optimistic combination. They represent 'poor' to 'low' value for money using DfT Guidance.

The results suggest that, when considering the benefits of reducing car traffic only, the benefits of the TTSI programme cover their implementation costs to central Government *if* the programme is assumed to be responsible for a high proportion of the behavioural change observed, the changes are sustained for a number of years and a relatively high proportion of traffic reduction occurs on congested urban roads.

These BCRs exclude the important effect of improving the health of school children and potentially their parents. Quantification of these benefits, if possible, would add substantially to each BCR.

4) Will schools be able to maintain active school travel plans without the funding and support provided by the STAs?

In our view, many schools will not have the motivation, skills or capacity needed to maintain and implement their STP without the funding and support provided by the STAs (or an equivalent individual); unless there is a specific requirement by central or local Government for them to do so.

The availability of funding has been a powerful motivator and an important factor for the development of STPs. In addition, more than nine out of ten respondents to the School Survey state that they may or will require support from a STA in future (three fifths state that they will require support and a further third may 'possibly' require such support).

It is anticipated that, in the absence of the funding and support provided by STAs, schools which choose to continue to maintain their STPs are likely to be those who recognise the potential benefits of addressing travel to school issues, those experiencing specific travel problems, those active on other initiatives such as 'Healthy Schools' and 'Eco-School', those in a local authority with an effective accreditation / reward scheme; and those requiring a STP in order to secure planning permission.

It is anticipated that primary schools are likely to be more likely to continue to maintain their STP than secondary and special¹ schools, based on their willingness to engage in the process to date.

5) Does evidence support the ongoing role of STAs & RSTAs?

The role of a STA as an information provider, a motivator and supportive figure, and as a source of innovative ideas is seen by schools as being beneficial during both the development and implementation of STPs; and schools report that this has improved the quality of their STPs.

In addition, their role in encouraging regular reviews and updates of STPs has been important for on-going engagement with pupils and delivering travel behaviour change. They have also developed a relationship between schools and the local authority which has resulted in more informed decision-making. Furthermore they have raised the profile of school travel issues within local authorities and ensured that greater consideration has been given to these issues by those departments responsible for transport, environment, education and health.

This suggests that there is a case for the ongoing role of STAs, however, this role will need to adapt to a new environment where most schools have STPs. This will require a greater focus on reviewing STPs, administering local authority incentive and reward schemes, helping to incorporate transport issues into the school curriculum, liaising with MIS officers to improve the robustness of School Census data, and maximising mode shift where there is greatest potential.

¹ Schools for pupils with special educational needs.

The case for an on-going RSTA role funded by central Government is less clear from the evidence collated for this evaluation. However, the role of RSTAs in providing STAs with a greater level of guidance and support than would otherwise be possible, raising the profile of the TTSI, and overseeing the STP review role of STAs, is recognised. In addition, officers from the Government Offices report that RSTAs have played a useful role in terms of raising the profile of the TTSI (and of sustainable transport to school more widely), and have ensured that there has been more joint working across regions on transport, environment, and health issues related to school travel.

Going forward, some on-going (higher level) support role is likely to remain important in terms of retaining momentum on the TTSI, and without the input from the RSTAs the TTSI Project Board would have to identify alternative resources.

6) What decisions does the evidence support for the future of the TTSI?

The issues presented in the report suggest the following decisions regarding the future of TTSI:

i) Should TTSI continue, either in its current or an adapted form?

The evidence suggests that the programme should be continued, but will need to be adapted to a new environment where most schools have STPs. Decisions will also need to reflect the current climate of constraints on public sector funding and the relationship between central and local Government.

The TTSI Project Board should be retained, but develop a stronger role in sharing best practice. The STA role should also be retained, but requires adaptation as set out above; it may be more appropriate for the role to become a local authority, rather than a Government-sponsored, responsibility.

The case for an on-going RSTA role funded by central Government is less clear from the evidence collated for this evaluation; although RSTAs are acknowledged as having played a useful role in terms of raising the profile of the TTSI and of sustainable transport to school more widely, and encouraging joint working between relevant bodies across regions. Going forward, some on-going (higher level) support role is likely to remain important in terms of retaining momentum on the TTSI, and without the input from the RSTAs the TTSI Project Board would have to identify alternative resources.

Assuming the TTSI continues, funding will need to be identified for the period beyond March 2011, either from central Government or, more likely, from local authorities themselves.

ii) If the TTSI is to continue, what decisions should be made regarding future funding?

Decisions about funding beyond March 2011 need to reflect evidence on the value for money provided by the outcomes of the TTSI to date, which at present are inconclusive; the current climate relating to public spending; and the relationship between central and local Government. Further evidence is required on the health benefits of increased walking and cycling for children, as well as the length of time over which travel behaviour is sustained.

iii) What needs to be done to secure better outcomes for school travel at an aggregate level?

Areas to focus on include:

- updated **STP Guidance** to focus attention on maximising mode shift;
- **accreditation / reward schemes** to encourage schools to implement and develop high quality and effective STPs, recognising the positive impact local authority-based schemes have had to date;
- addressing **parental concerns regarding road safety** to ensure the potential benefits associated with the implementation of on and off-site infrastructure are realised;
- developing a greater understanding on where there is greatest potential for influencing travel behaviour, to enable scarce **resource to be prioritised effectively**; and
- **sharing of best practice** amongst schools and local authorities in terms of engaging with pupils and parents, influencing attitudes and travel behaviour, and benefiting from lessons learnt in general.

iv) How can future outcomes be monitored?

There is a need for further consideration regarding the collection of travel to school data through the School Census, including how partial changes in travel behaviour can be monitored effectively. In addition, further evidence is required on the health benefits of increased walking and cycling for children, as well as the length of time over which travel behaviour is sustained. Further research is also required to understand the long term impacts of STPs on travel behaviour.