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# Characteristics of the escort education journey

Mark Dickson

Transport Statistics Personal Travel Division: DETR

## Key findings

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- At the peak school travel time of 08.50am in term time, 18 per cent of cars on urban roads are taking children to school. Taking the term time rush hour as a whole, the school run represents 9 per cent of traffic.
- Children are more likely to walk home from school than walk to school – 57 per cent compared to 53 per cent for primary school children, and 44 per cent compared to 41 per cent for secondary school children.
- One in eight primary aged children who walk to school on their own, compared to nearly half of secondary aged children.
- Taking children to school accounts for 3 per cent of journeys by men and 7 per cent of journeys by women. For women in their 30s, this increased to about one trip in six.
- 56 per cent of trips to take children to school are by car, and 41 per cent on foot.
- About one in five 'school run' trips in the morning made by car drivers were followed by a work trip.



## Introduction

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The purpose of this report is to investigate journeys that are made taking children to school. The main source used is the *National Travel Survey* (NTS) in which such journeys are known as 'escort education' journeys. Although these journeys are only a small percentage of all journeys, there has been increasing interest in how children travel to school, and who takes them. There has also been concern about traffic congestion around schools at peak times. Another worry is that the decline in children's activity, particularly in walking or cycling to school, could have long term detrimental effects on their health.<sup>1</sup>

These and other concerns have led to the founding of the School Travel Advisory Group (STAG) in December 1998. The aims of this group are to raise the profile of school travel and to identify and disseminate best practices to help:

'to reduce car use and improve children's safety on the journey to and from school throughout the United Kingdom with a view to reduce car dependency now and in the future, and improve children's immediate and long term health, enriching the curriculum and improving safety and quality of life for everyone.'

At the peak school travel time of 08.50am in term time, 18 per cent of cars on urban roads are taking children to school. Taking the term time rush hour as a whole, the school run represents 9 per cent of traffic (*Table F.1*).

It is believed that when individuals record their journey purpose, it may not always

Table F.1 Car traffic in progress related to escort education purpose: 1989/91 to 1996/98

	Percentage		
	1989/91	1992/94	1996/98
0800 to 0859 hours in urban areas during term-time	7	9	9
Peak traffic time (0835) in urban areas during term-time	8	10	13
Peak percentage (0850) in urban areas during term-time	14	15	18

be recorded consistently. The NTS definition of a journey is a one-way course of travel having a single main purpose. Minor subsidiary purposes, such as buying a newspaper on the way to work are ignored. The recording of a trip dropping a child at school on the way to work is less clear.

A journey involving a parent dropping their child off at school on their way to work may be recorded by some people as just one journey – with the purpose as going to work. This could also be recorded as two separate journeys, one journey from home to school with the purpose escort education, and the second journey from school to work, with the purpose going to work. If there is no deviation from the route to work, and the work trip would have been made by car even if the escort journey were not made, it is perhaps not surprising that the escort part might not be considered by respondents to be a separate trip. These journeys are investigated in more detail below.

## How children travel to and from school

Primary school children are more likely to walk to and from school than secondary children (*Table F.2*). Children of all ages are more likely to walk home from school than walk to school – 57 per cent compared to 53 per cent for primary school children, and 44 per cent compared to 41 per cent for secondary school children. Looking at the equivalent figures of those who travelled by car, it is likely that these extra children who walk home from school had been driven to school in the morning. A similar pattern was evident in 1985/86, although the proportion of children being driven by car was lower.

For car journeys to school in 1996/98, over three-quarters of primary school children were accompanied by more than one person, although this could be with

Table F.2 Journeys to and from school by mode and age group: 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Percentage			
	Age 5–10		Age 11–16	
	To school	From school	To school	From school
<b>1985/86</b>				
Walk	63	67	46	49
Bicycle	1	1	6	6
Car	26	22	13	9
Bus	9	9	32	34
Other	2	2	2	2
All modes	100	100	100	100
<b>1996/98</b>				
Walk	53	57	41	44
Bicycle	-	-	2	2
Car	38	35	23	18
Bus	7	7	32	32
Other	2	1	3	3
All modes	100	100	100	100

other children as well as adults (*Table F.3*). The proportion for secondary school children is slightly less, but it does suggest that a large amount of car sharing takes place on journeys to school. One in eight primary aged children walked on their own, compared to nearly half of secondary aged children.

**Table F.3 Journeys to school by number of people in party: 1996/98**

Number in party	Percentage			
	Age 5–10		Age 11–16	
	Car	Walk	Car	Walk
One	–	13	–	49
Two	22	25	36	25
Three or more	78	61	64	26
Total	100	100	100	100

## Trends in escort education trips

Over all ages, 5 per cent of journeys were for ‘escort education’ purposes in 1996/98, with 50 trips made per person per year for this purpose on average (*Table F.4*). This is an increase of more than a half since 1985/86, and the total distance travelled for escort education purposes has more than doubled in this period – in 1996/98 people travelled 95 miles per person per year on average. The average length of an escort education journey in 1996/98 was 1.9 miles. This has increased by 35 per cent since 1985/86, more than the average increase of 23 per cent for all journeys.

**Table F.4 Trends in escort education journeys: 1985/86 and 1996/98**

	Journeys/miles/percentage					
	No. of journeys per person per year		Distance travelled per person per year		Average journey length	
	1985/86	1996/98	1985/86	1996/98	1985/86	1996/98
Escort education	32	50	45	95	1.4	1.9
All journeys	1,024	1,051	5,317	6,728	5.2	6.4
Escort education as a percentage of all journeys	3.2	4.8	0.9	1.4	–	–

## Characteristics of escort education trips

In 1996/98, escort education accounted for 3 per cent of journeys by men and 7 per cent of journeys by women. For women in their 30s, about one trip in six (16 per cent) was for this purpose (*Table F.5* and *Chart F.1*).

*Tables F.4 and F.5* present average figures over all age groups. However, children

**Table F.5 Escort education as a percentage of all journeys by age and sex: 1996/98**

	Percentage		
	Male	Female	All people
All ages	3	7	5
Under 17	6	6	6
17–20	–	–	–
21–29	1	9	5
30–39	2	16	10
40–49	3	7	5
50–59	1	1	1
60–69	1	1	1
70 and over	1	1	1

Chart F.1 Escort education as a percentage of all journeys by age and sex: 1996/98

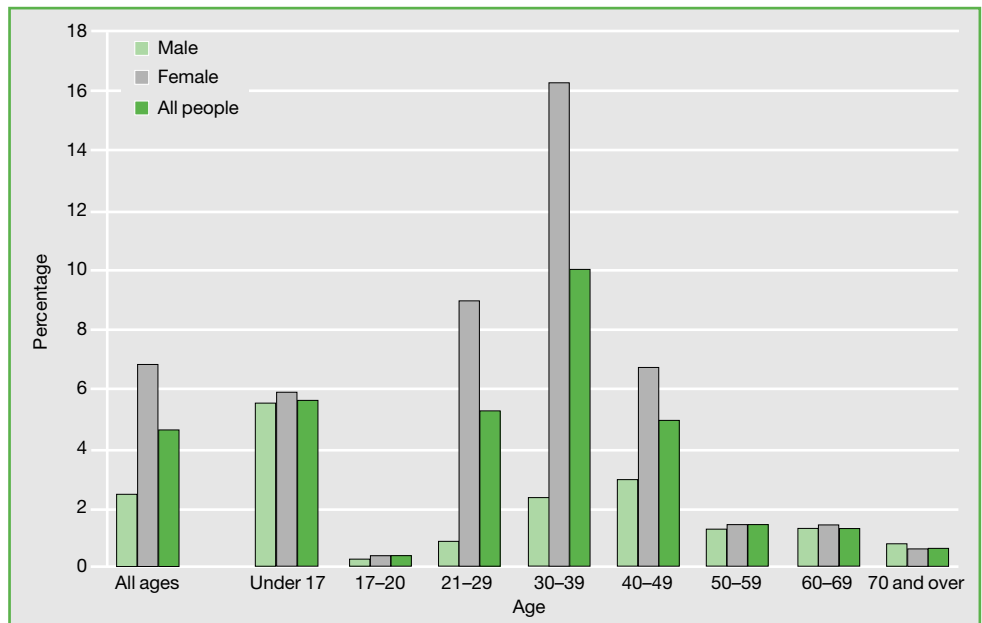
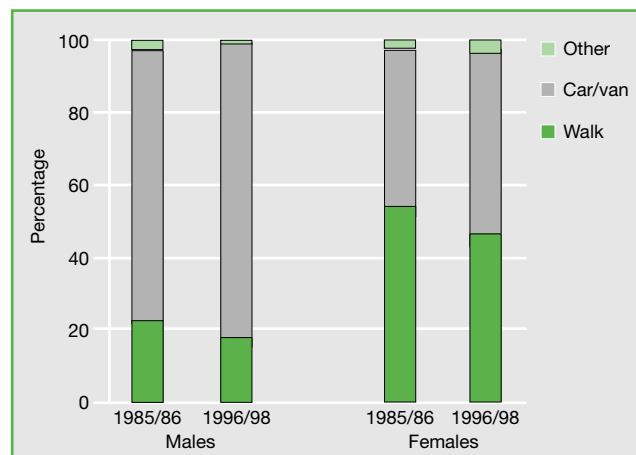


Table F.6 Escort education journeys by mode and sex: age 17 and over 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Percentage/journeys							
	1985/86				1996/98			
	Male	Female	Total	Sample size	Male	Female	Total	Sample size
Walk	23	55	49	1,571	18	46	41	1,725
Car/van	75	43	48	1,549	80	50	56	2,340
Other	2	3	2	78	2	4	3	134
All modes	100	100	100	3,198	100	100	100	4,199

Note: Only escort education journeys made on a weekday, in term-time and between 6am and 10am are included.

Chart F.2 Escort education journeys by mode and sex: age 17 and above: 1985/86 and 1996/98



making escort education journeys are simply accompanying a parent taking an older child to school. In the following tables, only escort education trips made by adults (age 17 and over) are considered, made on weekdays during term time.

In 1985/86, roughly the same percentages of escort education journeys were made on foot and by car. In 1996/98 the use of the car for this purpose increased to 56 per cent, compared to 41 per cent on foot. Men were much more likely to use the car than women – four fifths of escort education trips by men were made by car, but only half of those made by women (Table F.6 and Chart F.2).

Table F.7 Escort education journeys by mode, distance and time: age 17 and above 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Percentage/miles/minutes					
	Under 1 mile	1 to under 2 miles	2 miles and over	All distances	Average journey length	Average time taken
<b>1985/86</b>						
Walk	77	21	2	49	0.4	10.5
Car/ van	21	76	95	48	2.3	9.5
Other	2	3	3	2	1.6	18.3
All modes	100	100	100	100	1.4	10.2
<b>1996/98</b>						
Walk	74	17	1	41	0.4	11.2
Car/ van	25	79	92	56	2.4	10.4
Other	1	4	7	3	2.0	21.6
All modes	100	100	100	100	1.5	11.1

See footnote on Table 6

Not surprisingly, the longer distance escort education journeys were mainly made by car (*Table F.7*). In 1996/98, 92 per cent of journeys 2 miles and over were made by car, but also a quarter of journeys under 1 mile. The average length of an escort education journey made by an adult was 1.5 miles, an increase of 9 per cent since 1985/86. Walk trips averaged 0.4 miles and car trips 2.4 miles.

The average time taken for an escort education journey in 1996/98 was 11 minutes, a slight increase from 1985/86. Car trips took the least amount of time but only one minute less than a walk trip on average (10 minutes), while journeys made by other modes (mostly bus) took 22 minutes on average.

Escort education journeys made by adults, from a household without a car, were mostly made on foot (83 per cent of journeys) (*Table F.8* and *Chart F.3*). These individuals were also more likely to use other non-car modes of transport, mostly bus. Four out of five households with access to two or more cars used a car for escort education purposes, and just over half of households with one car.

Escort education journeys are less likely to be made on foot in less populated areas (*Table F.9*). In 1996/98, almost a quarter of journeys in rural areas were made on foot, with car being the dominant mode. People from London were less likely to use the car than in any other area, just half of all escort education journeys.

Chart F.3 Escort education journeys by car ownership and mode of travel: age 17 and above 1996/98

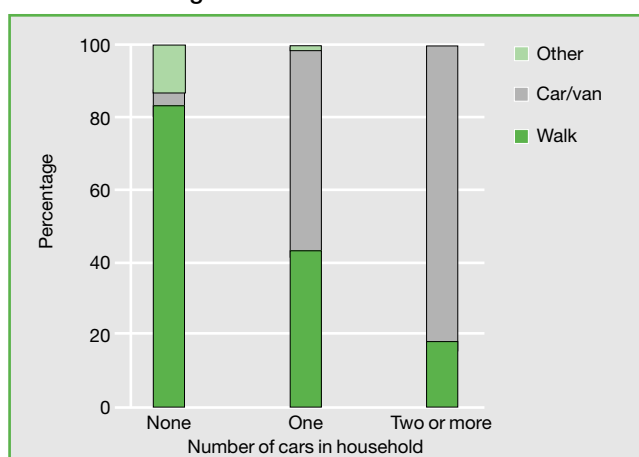


Table F.8 Escort education journeys by car ownership and mode of travel: age 17 and above 1996/98

	Percentage		
	Number of household cars		
	None	One	Two or more
Walk	83	43	18
Car/ van	3	55	81
Other	13	1	–
All modes	100	100	100

See footnote on Table 6

Table F.9 Escort education journeys by type of area lived in and mode of travel: age 17 and above 1996/98

							Percentage
	London boroughs	Metropolitan built-up areas	Other urban over 250k	Other urban over 25k to 250k	Small urban 3k to 25k	Rural	All areas
Walk	42	40	47	42	46	23	41
Car/van	50	57	51	56	52	74	56
Other	8	4	2	2	2	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

See footnote on Table 6

## The next journey

To see whether journeys are being recorded as expected it is useful to consider the purpose of the next journey made after escort education. In 1996/98, about one in five escort education trips made by car drivers were followed by a trip to work or business. This appears to be low in comparison with other research findings. One particular survey, which was administered through schools in the suburbs of Leeds, found that as many as 60 per cent of drivers continued on to work after dropping their child at school<sup>2</sup>. Another study in the district of Wycombe in Buckinghamshire discovered this proportion to be 40 per cent for secondary school children<sup>3</sup>.

The NTS does not record the age of the child being escorted, but 28 per cent of journeys to school from households with the youngest child aged between 13 and 15 were followed by a trip to work.

The purpose of the next journey after an escort education trip differs depending on the mode used. 80 per cent of escort education journeys made on foot were followed by a trip home, but only 56 per cent of car journeys. A work or a business trip followed only one in 20 journeys on foot. (Table F.10)

To find out if there has been any extra ‘hidden’ escort education journeys, raw

Table F.10 Purpose of next journey after escort education: age 17 and above 1996/98

	a) Recorded originally as escort education			b) Total including extras found		
	Car driver	On foot	All modes	Car driver	On foot	All modes
Work or business	394	90	545	437	90	588
Home	1,195	1,292	2,611	1,195	1,292	2,611
Other	538	242	857	570	246	893
Total	2,127	1,624	4,013	2,202	1,628	4,092
	Percentage			Percentage		
	Car driver	On foot	All modes	Car driver	On foot	All modes
Work or business	18.5	5.5	13.6	19.8	5.5	14.4
Home	56.2	79.6	65.1	54.3	79.4	63.8
Other	25.3	14.9	21.4	25.9	15.1	21.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

See footnote on Table 6

journey data from all household members were inspected. An extract of raw data from households with at least one child was made. This included details of every journey made by a household member, starting between 6am and 10am on weekdays during term time.

Each child journey to school was checked to see if there was a corresponding journey made by an adult. If there was a corresponding journey, the purpose of the journey of the adult was noted to see whether it was already recorded as escort education. If not, certain criteria were used to decide whether it matched a child's school journey. These factors were the start time of the journey, the number of people in the party and the mode of travel. If all these were exactly the same for the adult and the child, then the adult's journey was considered to be a 'hidden' escort education journey.

After close examination of the data only 79 'hidden' journeys were found where the purpose of the journey was not recorded as escort education. Out of these 79, 43 were recorded as journeys to work, all by car. 36 (32 by car, and 4 on foot) were to other non-home destinations.

There were fewer hidden journeys than originally expected, but there are still enough of these journeys recorded in a different way to make some difference to the overall results. (Table F.10) 75 out of the 79 'hidden' journeys were made by car, the other 4 were made on foot. This suggests it is mainly the car drivers who, when dropping off their children at school, consider this as merely part of another journey i.e. not a separate trip.

In Table F.10, the total journeys in section b) include the 79 extra journeys not originally recorded as escort education. These extra journeys increase the proportion of car escort education journeys, which continue to work from 18.5 per cent to 20 per cent. This is still below the level reported in other studies. This could be because these studies were not typical of escort education journeys as a whole in Great Britain, or possibly because parents were reluctant to admit that they were making a special trip.

## Conclusion

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This brief study shows that there has not been a large degree of under recording of escort education journeys in the NTS. The majority of escort education trips have been recorded as separate journeys, and not as part of another trip. It is therefore not necessary to change the way that these trips are recorded, or make any other changes to the National Travel Survey in view of this study.

### Technical note

- Details of the *National Travel Survey* are included in the Technical notes to article 2: 'Travel characteristics of older people'.
- An escort journey is defined as a journey when a person has no purpose of his or her own other than to escort or accompany another person. Pre-school children accompanying a parent and older children to school are also making an 'escort education' journey but, for clarity, analyses in this article are mostly confined to those aged 17 and over.

## References

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1. Woodroffe, C; Roberts, I; and DiGuseppi, C: *The school run: blessing or blight?* (1998) Institute of Child Health.

2. Bradshaw, R: *Why do parents drive their children to school?* (1995) Traffic engineering and control.
3. Dix, M, and Read P: *School traffic and traffic congestion* (1993) PTRC Conference proceedings.