

# Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel

## Active Travel and Schools (CoHSAT project 2019-20) -summary of findings

### Set up tasks

CoHSAT worked with Oxford Friends of the Earth for this project. A questionnaire was sent in May 2019 to all schools in Oxfordshire. This was prepared by a volunteer, Henry Moggridge, and distributed through Oxfordshire County Council's email distribution channels with the help of Richard Kuziara. The purpose of the survey was to gain as much information as possible about current and recent activities in schools focussed on improving air quality around schools and with promoting active travel to school. This information was then analysed to identify best practice and successful initiatives, so that these could be disseminated to other schools. The first stage of dissemination was at a workshop on National Clean Air Day in June 2019, to which all schools were invited.

### Project delivery tasks

The workshop was held on National Clean Air Day, on 20 June 2019 at County Hall. This was attended by about 35 people, including a few representatives from schools. Others included councillors, school governors and local government officers. There were presentations from two schools from the survey, which stood out as exemplars of good practice, one primary and one secondary.



Figure 1: Delegates at the Active Travel and Schools workshop, held at County Hall on 20 June 2019.

Lynn Knapp, head of Windmill Primary School gave an inspiring presentation on the many initiatives her school has undertaken and demonstrated measurable impacts in terms of improved pupil health and more active travel to school. Simon Banks representing Cherwell School explained how the school had succeeded in achieving a very high rate of cycling to school, the keys to success being safe school cycle parking and relatively safe cycle routes to the school. Other speakers were Henry Moggridge on the survey results; Pedro Abreu on the City Council's anti-idling and Schools Tackling Oxford's Air Pollution (STOP) campaigns; Richard Kuziara on the County Council's Walk to School (WOW) and Park and Stride initiatives; Laura Jones, a parent at Botley School on the pollution problems caused by the A34; and finally, Jake Backus of OxAir explained the pollution monitoring work he is doing.

### Conclusions from survey and workshop

In terms of methodology, it appears that conducting a survey via email yields a very poor response rate from schools, even when routed through the official county council channels. There were just 18 useful responses, which was probably owing to the already very demanding requirements schools face in delivering the curriculum and keeping abreast of other regulations. However, despite this shortcoming the survey together with the workshop did reveal some useful results.

Local council and other initiatives appeared to be the key to getting schools involved. The two schemes cited most were the WOW Walk to School initiative and the Eco-Schools Network. It therefore seemed prudent to build on what is already successful by continuing to support the City and County Councils initiatives and to establish closer links with the Eco-Schools network.

School related congestion on roads is the major problem to be addressed. However different types of schools face differing challenges in terms of pollution and transport plans. The problem is more acute in state primaries than in secondaries, since in the latter children are more likely to travel independently on foot, bike or by bus. The safety and pollution problems caused at drop off and pick up times should be

simpler to address in urban schools, where distances tend to be shorter with walking a more realistic alternative. Rural primaries identify the problem of working parents dropping off children and then driving considerable distance to their work - this seems more intractable.

Support from local organisations was cited by several schools in the survey and it seems likely that greater success is achieved when there is a core of local activists and good supporting organisational structures. Given the wide distribution of the respondents to our survey, there is potential for building on these seeds of activity in different parts of the county. There are several initiatives operating in the county, involving schools that did not respond to our survey. These include actions by schools in Henley organised through Greener Henley and similar actions in Wallingford schools. Building on these examples of good practice probably requires making personal contact with key movers in each area.

In order to encourage more activity in schools it was decided to build up a bigger data base of personal contacts in schools (teachers, governors, concerned councillors, members of local green organisations etc) and through these to push for schools to take up the initiatives on offer across the county. A letter to about 55 such contacts was sent out in November/December 2019, calling on schools to update their school travel plans and providing a web link to the relevant programmes and resources available. Running alongside this, OxFoE in partnership with Oxford City Council launched a banner design competition in January 2020, for City primary schools to promote healthy streets and active travel. Jacky has also been involved in preliminary meetings at three primary schools in Oxford, organised by Richard Kuziara to assess the possibility of setting up School Streets.

Henry Moggridge, the volunteer resigned in June and despite wide advertising this position was unfilled until late December, when Jenny Ekelund took on the role. She is working with Jacky on the second survey due to go out at the end of February to all state schools in the county via the county council's system again. This is being focussed more specifically on problems related to children being driven to school. In addition to asking what actions schools have already engaged in, the emphasis is on highlighting what can be done through participation in the various schemes on offer, and asks respondents to indicate which of these they are interested in. An online platform for schools to share experience is one of the options. In order to improve the response rate, follow up emails will be sent to all the school contacts on the data base.

Until the results of the second survey are analysed, measurement of the impact of the project is limited. One positive impact to date is that as a direct response to the workshop on the 20 June 2019, Oxfordshire County Council has announced more spending on air quality around schools and several schools have applied to be involved in the School Streets. The Oxford Mail newspaper reported on this on 9 January 2020. However, two major obstacles to progress in the short term are apparent: firstly, the challenge of changing driver behaviour without recourse to any method of enforcement; and secondly, the lack of suitable infrastructure for safe cycling and walking. Addressing these will involve longer term structural changes.

## About CoHSAT

The Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel (CoHSAT) is a group of voluntary and campaigning organisations working across Oxfordshire to create attractive, accessible and people-friendly streets. We will do this by encouraging efficient, active, low carbon and sustainable travel, which will reduce traffic, air pollution and noise, and enable healthy and thriving communities. For further information on these five investigations and other CoHSAT activities, see <http://www.cohsat.org.uk> or email us at [CoHSATOxon@gmail.com](mailto:CoHSATOxon@gmail.com).

