THE AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL TRAVEL SURVEY 2025

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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

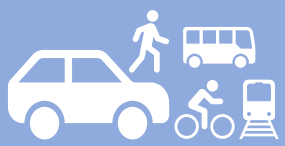
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents the results of the Australian School Travel Survey 2025, a national survey of 4968 families containing data on school and extra-curricular travel for 7880 children in Australia.

The report first presents attribute data on families and progresses to analyse children's school travel behaviour, covering some of the common determinants of mode share such as distance and school sector. In a particularly novel contribution, the report then details children's participation in out of school activities such as organised sport, tutoring and dance lessons, including mode of access to these activities. The report concludes with some possible avenues for future analyses.

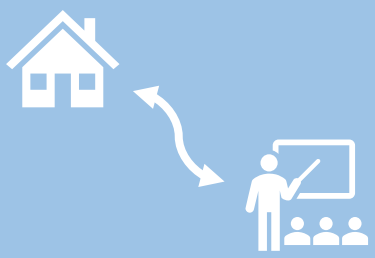
THE AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL TRAVEL SURVEY 2025

Fast Facts



Most kids start the day in a car...

School travel is dominated by cars (61%), followed by walking and cycling (21%), public modes (10%) and designated school buses (8%).



Distance matters

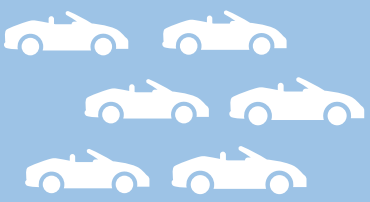
While most children who live within 1km of school use active modes (59%), nearly 40% of children living within 1 km travel by car.

The sector effect

Public enrolments outside of the local catchment (14% of students) travel furthest – 78% live >3km from home. They are also the most car dependent (69%).

Kids transport doesn't end at 3pm

Most children participate in extracurricular activities—70% on weekdays and 57% on weekends. 7.4% of students engage in >4 activities during the week.



Out of school travel is car-dependent

Out-of-school activity travel is overwhelmingly car-dependent—over 80% of trips on weekdays and weekends.

THE DATA

This report presents the results of the Australian School Travel Survey 2025, a national survey of 4968 families containing data on school and extra-curricular travel for 7880 children in Australia.

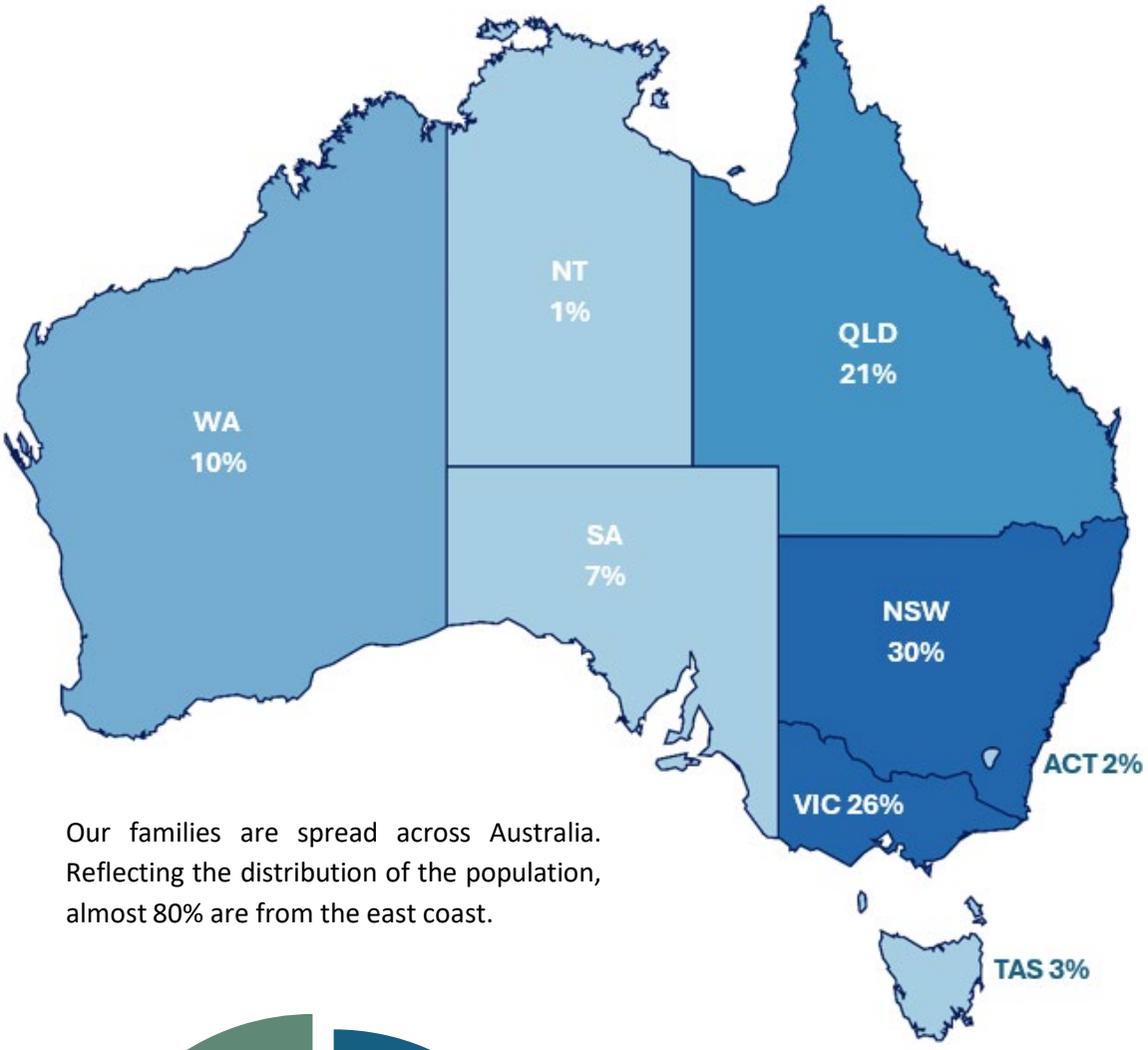
The survey focused on school travel patterns and travel for extracurricular activities such as soccer training, swimming lessons, maths tutoring and dance.

The data relies on parental accounts of travel behaviour over a specific week and participation in extra-curricular activities over a specific school term. It captures detailed information on school and home location, travel mode to and from school, and distance between home and school. Data was also collected on each child's independent mobility license – ie. the permissions given to children to travel without adult supervision, as well as socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the household.

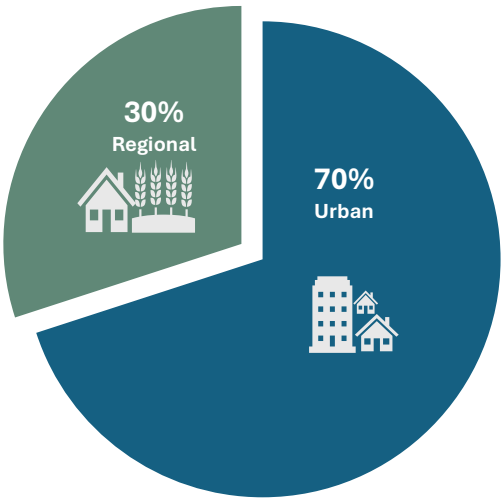
A professional panel company was used. This ensures the sample is representative of the Australian population based on household income and distribution across urban and regional areas.

THE FAMILIES

4968 families participated in ASTS 2025. As much as possible our families are representative of the general Australian population based on income, household size and location.



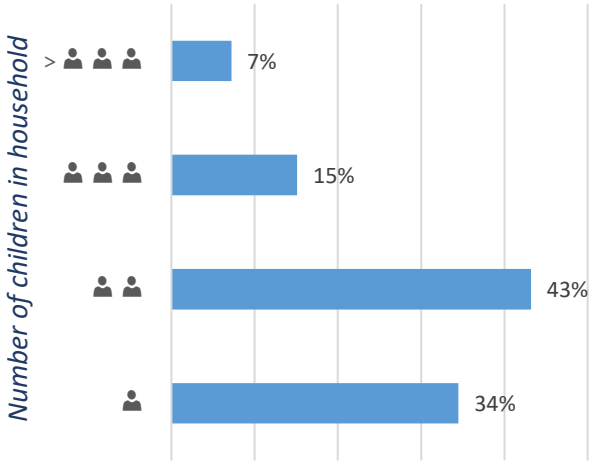
Our families are spread across Australia. Reflecting the distribution of the population, almost 80% are from the east coast.

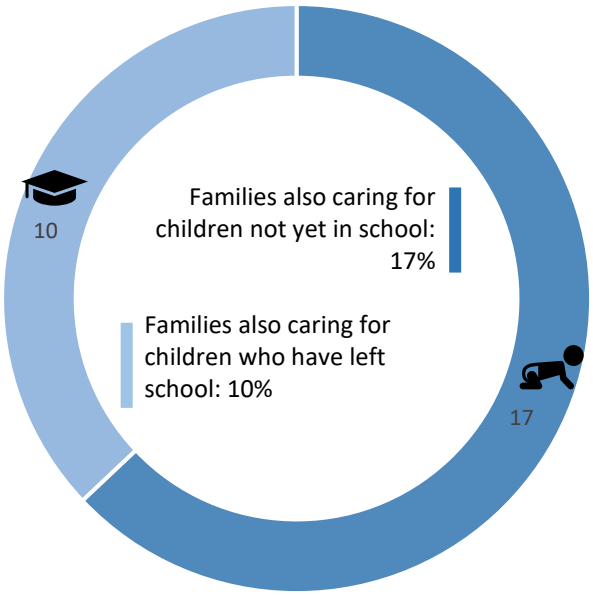


We aimed to included families in regional areas, with 30% of our families living in places outside of our major cities. Australia's housing affordability crises is prompting more and more families to make a sea or tree-change, and we wanted to capture what is happening in those rapidly growing contexts.

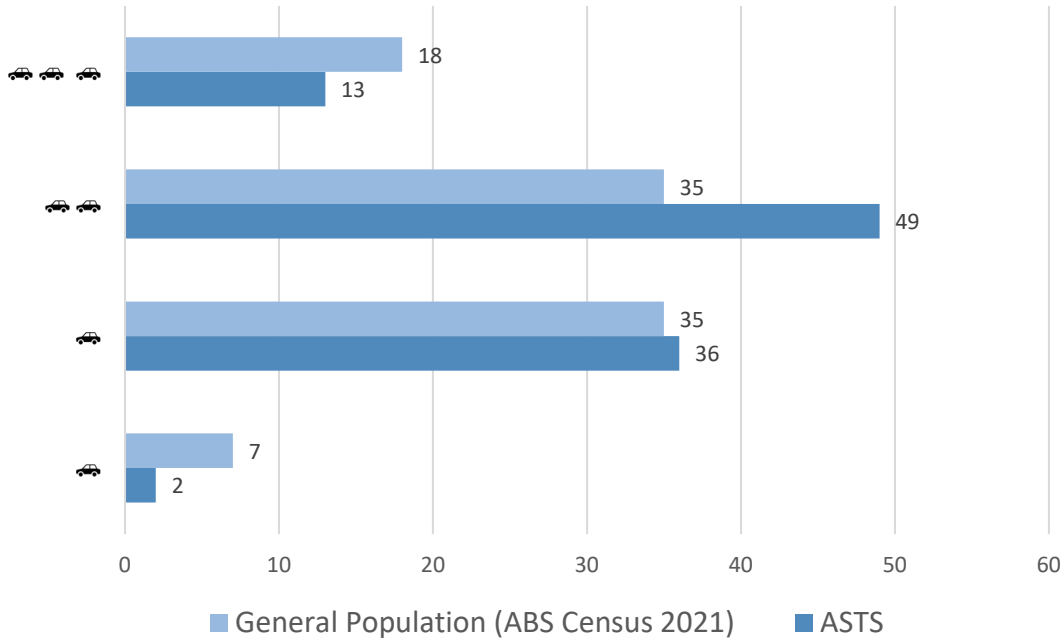
THE FAMILIES

Most families (43%) had 2 children in the household. Reflecting trends towards smaller family sizes, over one third of households (34%) had only one child.





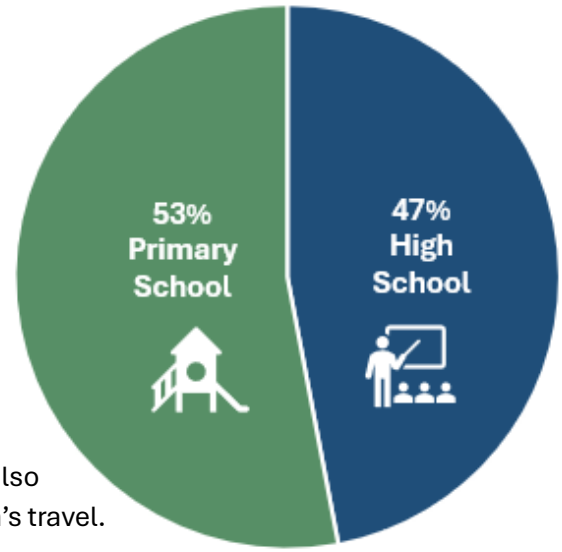
Many families (17%) were also caring for younger children not yet at school, and 1 in 10 families were also caring for (/living with) children who had left school.



Almost half of the families surveyed owned or had access to 2 cars. Confirming understandings of the link between car use and parenting, this is more than the Australian average (35%). Similarly, only 2% of families surveyed did not have access to a car, well below the Australian average (7%).

THE CHILDREN – STAGE AND SECTOR

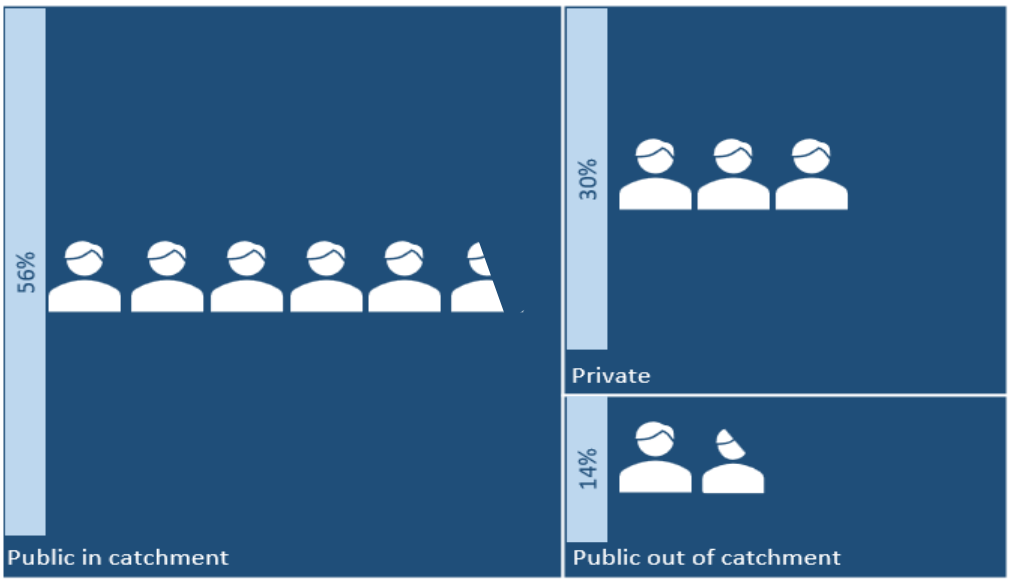
The ASTS 2025 records data for 7880 children of school age, 53% in Primary School (aged ~4-12) and 47% in High School (aged ~>13).



Reflecting marked shifts in the spatial distribution and governance of schools across multiple context, we were also interested in school selection as a determinant of children's travel.

While most students (56%) were enrolled in their local public school, reflecting Australia's reputation as having the most children enrolled outside of the public system in the OECD, private schools represent 30% of students. Interestingly, and increasing relevant for understandings of school travel, 14% of students are enrolled in public schools outside of their local catchment, suggesting a notable proportion of families are seeking alternatives beyond their designated zone, likely driven by factors such as school reputation, program availability, or family circumstances.

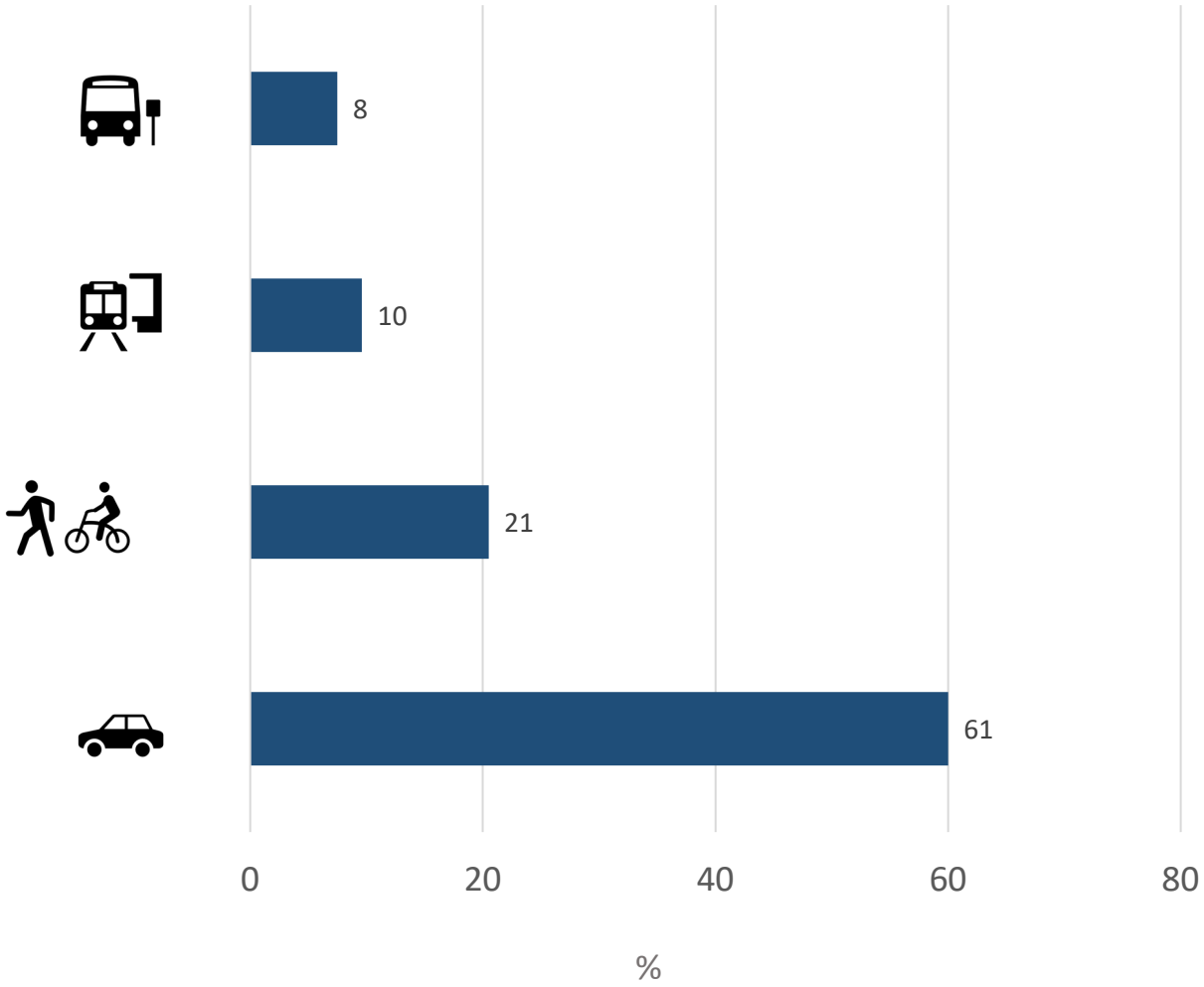
What type of school is your child enrolled in?
Is this the school in the catchment where they live?



SCHOOL TRAVEL

The data on school travel modes generally reveals a strong reliance on private cars for the school journey, which account for **61%** of all trips. Active transport options - walking and cycling represent **21%**, well behind trends in less car-oriented contexts such as Denmark and Germany. Public transport plays a relatively minor role, with **10%** of trips by public buses/trains/light rail etc. A sizeable but still relatively minor **8%** of children use a dedicated school bus for school travel

Last week, how did this child get [to] [from] school each day?



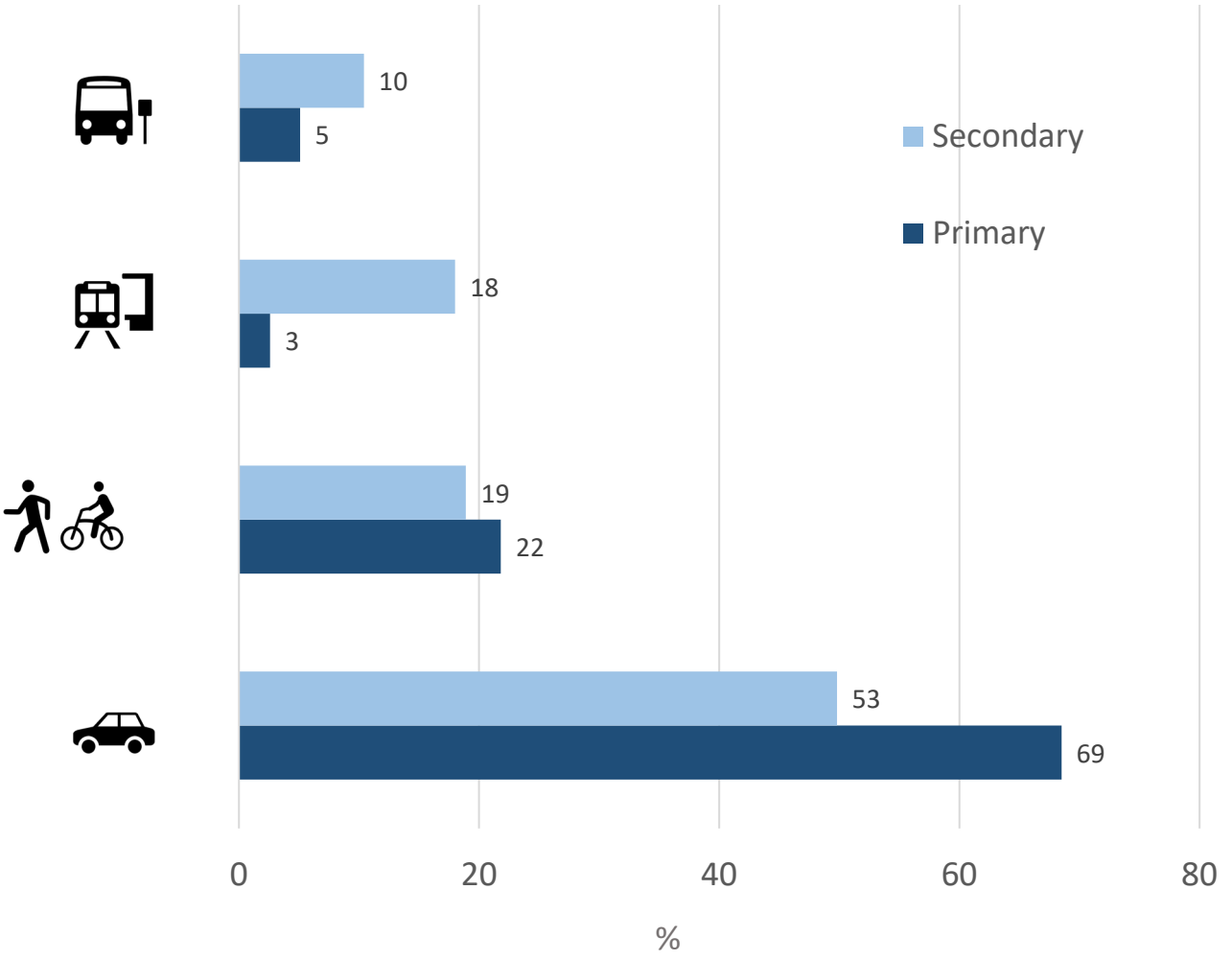
SCHOOL TRAVEL - STAGE

The ASTS 2025 records data for 7880 children of school age, 53% in Primary School (aged ~4-12) and 47% in High School (aged ~>13).

When broken down by school stage, car travel continues to dominate, but the reliance is much stronger among primary students **(69%)** compared to secondary students **(50%).**

Active travel modes—walking and cycling—are again the second most common, accounting for **22%** of trips for primary students and **19%** for secondary students. Public transport plays a more significant role for secondary students, with **18%** using public transport compared to just **3%** of primary students, and **10%** using designated school buses compared to **5%** of primary students.

These patterns suggest that younger children are far more car-dependent, yet also more likely to use active modes for school travel. Older students diversify their travel modes, particularly through greater use of public transport.

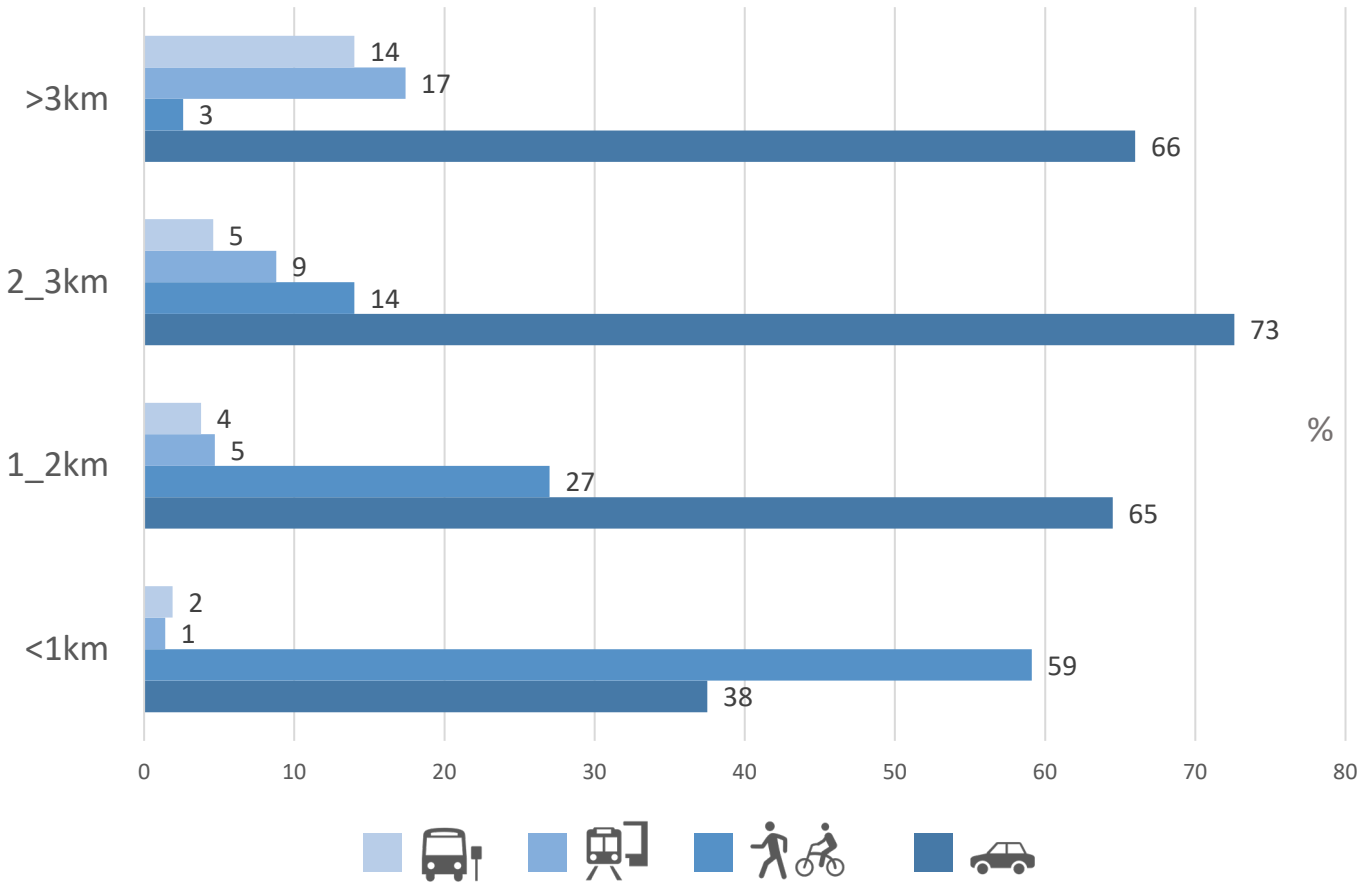


SCHOOL TRAVEL – DISTANCE BY MODE

The ASTS asked parents to estimate the distance between home and school using the options <1km, 1-2km and 2-3km and >3km.

Distance between home and the school gate is the most important determinant of the way children will travel to and from school..

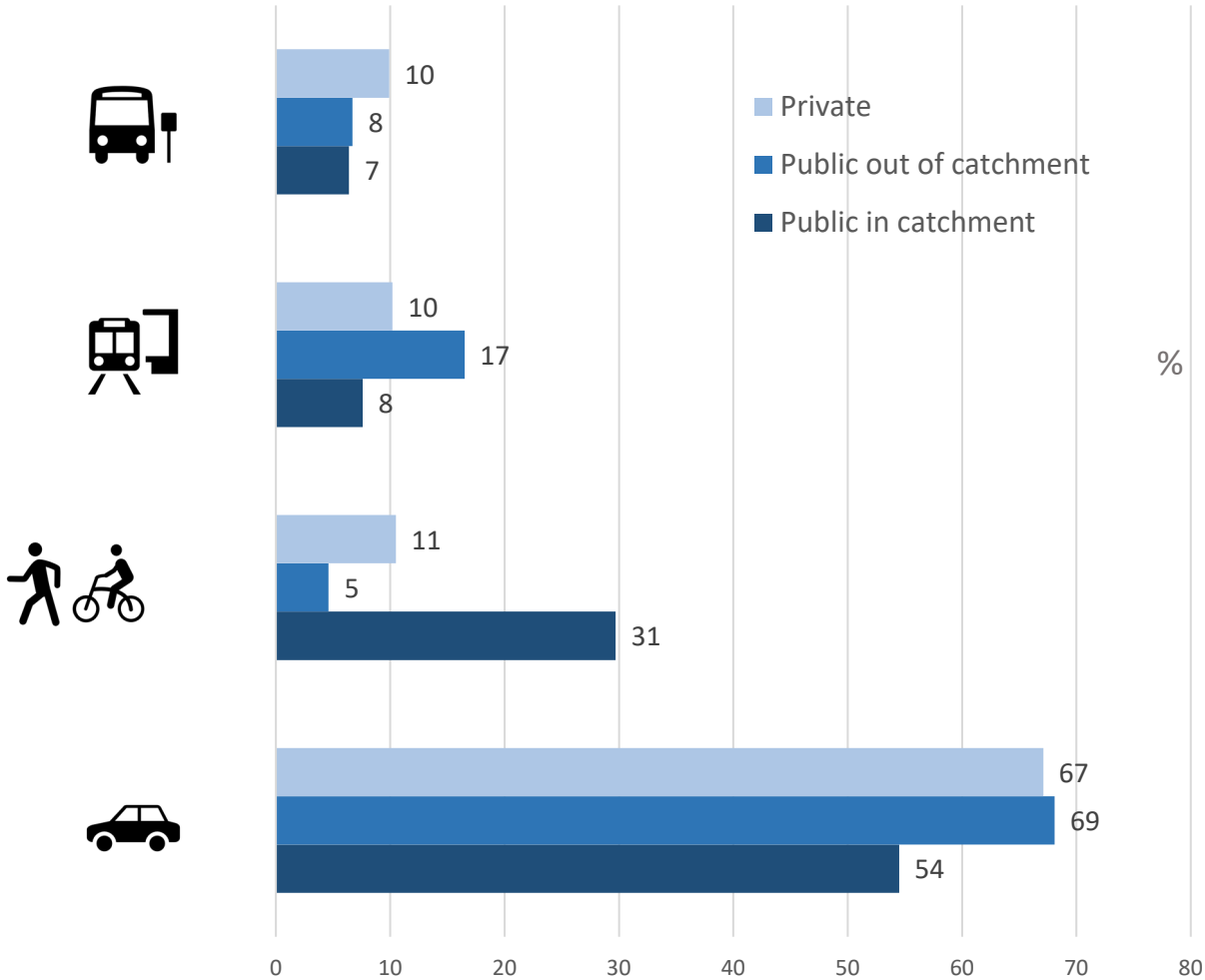
Our data show a clear relationship between distance to school and travel mode choice. For trips <1km, active travel dominates **(59%)**. Of interest to those seeking to encourage active transport for school trips, however, is that almost 4 in 10 children who live <1km from school travel by car **(38%).** As distance increases, car use rises sharply, peaking at **72.6% for 2–3 km trips**, before slightly declining to **66% beyond 3 km**, to be replaced by public modes. Public transport and school bus use remain minimal at short distances but increase significantly for longer trips: public transport reaches **17.4%** and school bus **14%** for trips over 3 km. As expected, active travel declines steeply with distance - less than 3 in 100 children living 3km from school walk or ride for the school journey.



SCHOOL TRAVEL – SCHOOL SECTOR

When broken down by school sector, the data highlights stark differences in school travel modes.

Car travel dominates across all groups, but is most pronounced for public schools out of catchment **(69%)** and private schools **(67%)**, compared to **54%** for public schools in catchment. Active transport shows the reverse pattern: **31%** of students attending public schools in catchment walk or cycle, while only **11%** of private school students and **5%** of out-of-catchment public school students do so. Public transport use is highest among out-of-catchment public school students **(17%)**, reflecting perhaps a complex interplay between school location and socio-economic status with greater travel distances. School bus use remains low across all sectors, but is highest for private school students – potentially reflecting the practice of school transport provision in some private schools. These findings suggest that proximity strongly influences mode choice, with local public schools enabling active travel, while private and out-of-catchment enrolments are associated with car use and increased reliance on public transport.

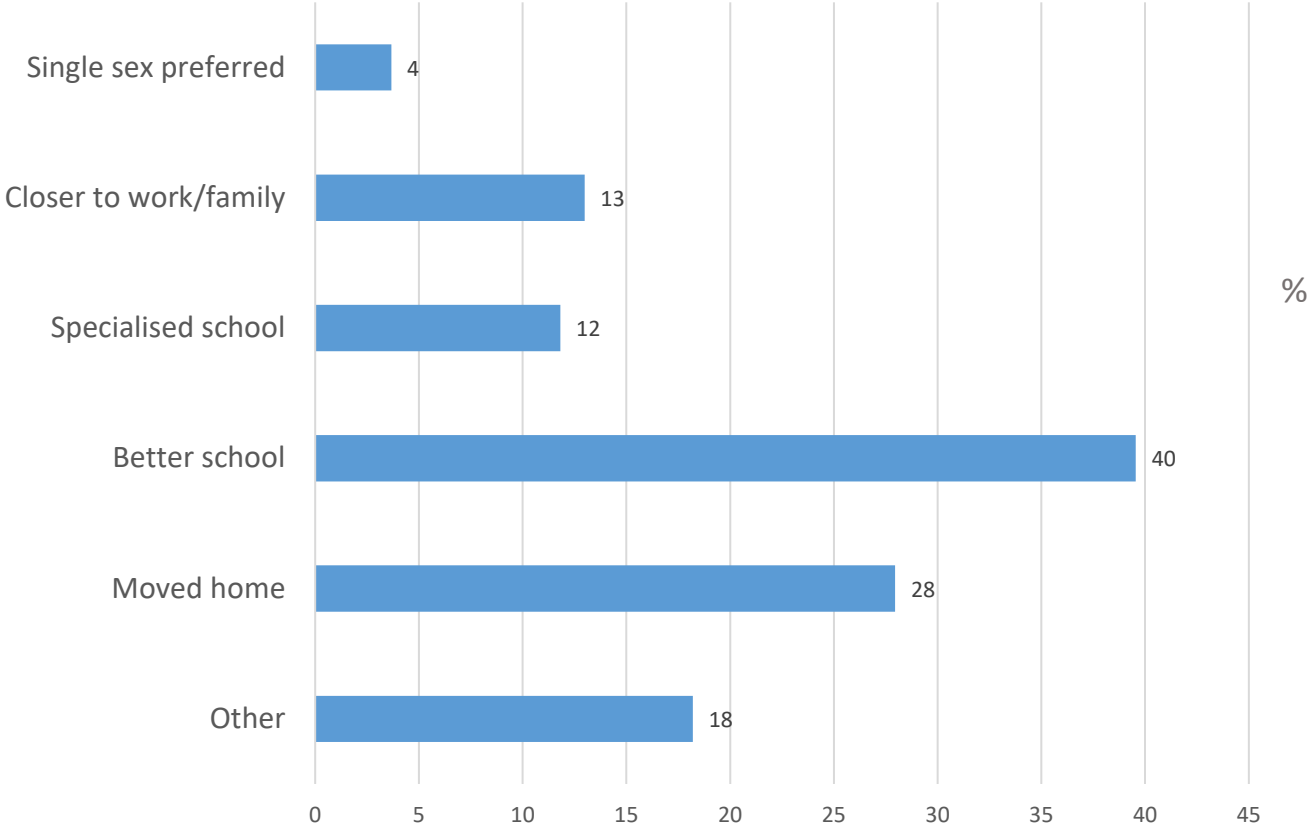


SECTOR CHOICE – WHY ENROL OUT OF CATCHMENT?

Children enrolled in public schools outside of their local catchment are the most car-dependent by sector. With a 69% mode share by car and just 1 in 10 children accessing school actively, the trend in Australia to seek enrolment beyond the local area is having an undeniable impact on our transport system. We were therefore interested in why parents enrolled their children in out of area schools and asked the question:

Why is this child enrolled in a school outside of the catchment area where they live?

The data shows that the most common reason for out-of-area enrolment in public schools is the pursuit of a better or higher-ranked school **(40%)**, reflecting growing perceptions of disparity in the quality of education offered across different public institutions and increasing parental concern about school reputation and associated educational outcomes. The second most cited reason, moving home **(28%)**, indicates that many families remain enrolled in a previously local school after relocating, a pattern likely linked to housing market dynamics such as increased renting, mobility for cheaper housing, and overall residential instability. Other reasons, including specialised schools **(12%)**, proximity to work or family **(13%)**, and preference for single-sex schools **(3.7%)**, highlight diverse priorities among families. Responses categorised as "Other" (**18%**) largely mirror these themes but with more specific detail, such as enrolling siblings in the same school or choosing schools known for strengths in particular subjects like drama or sport.



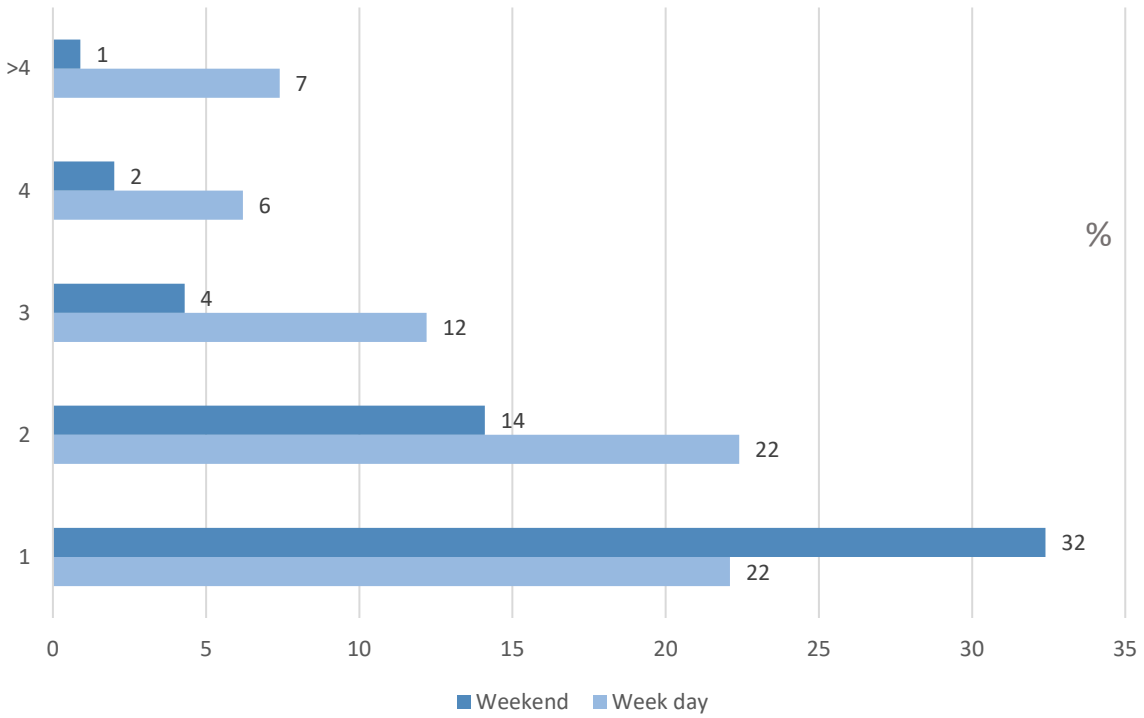
NUMBER OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES PER WEEK

One of the novel contributions of ASTS is the data on children's participation in extra-curricular activities outside of school grounds both during the school week and on the weekend.

This term, how often does this child do organised activities out of school (such as sport, music lessons, volunteering or tutoring) [during the week] [on the weekend]?

Children's extra curricular participation varies between weekdays and weekends but shows consistent trends across primary (aged ~5-12) and secondary (aged ~13-18) school levels. During the week, over two-thirds (70%) of students engage in at least one scheduled activity away from school grounds, with most doing one or two activities. Participation declines beyond two activities, with only 12.2% doing three and 6.2% doing four, though a notable 7.4% overall engage in more than four activities, particularly secondary students (8.8%).

On weekends, participation is lower but still significant, with 57% of children involved in scheduled activities. Most do just one activity (34.7%), slightly higher among primary students (36.8%) than secondary students (32.4%). A very small proportion (1.5%) participates in more than four weekend activities, with primary students (2.1%) more likely than secondary students (0.9%) to have highly scheduled weekends.



MODE OF ACCESS TO EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVTIES

Travel for children's participation in extra curricular activities is overwhelmingly car-dependent on both weekdays and weekends, though the degree of reliance varies slightly. During the week, cars account for 81.5% of all trips, with primary school students showing stronger dependence (86.7%) than secondary students (74.8%). Active modes play a smaller role: walking represents 11.1% overall, slightly higher among secondary students (13.4%) than primary (9.4%), while cycling remains minimal at 3% overall, ranging from 1.9% for primary to 4.4% for secondary students. Public transport use is limited at 4.4%.

	Weekday %			Weekend %		
	All	Primary	Secondary	All	Primary	Secondary
	81.5	86.7	74.8	86.4	87.9	84.6
	3	1.9	4.4	2.7	2.3	3.3
	11.1	9.4	13.4	7.8	7.9	7.6
	4.4	2	7.4	3.1	1.9	4.6

FUTURE ANALYSIS

The ASTS is a powerful dataset containing information on the home and school locations of children across Australia. The project team can conduct bespoke analyses on request, taking data from specific populations to examine the key determinants of school travel, as well as travel to and participation in extra-curricular activities. Listed below are several opportunities. Please contact the team to discuss ways we might work together.

MAPPING ACTIVE TRAVEL GAPS AND POTENTIAL

Purpose: Powerful information to assist identification of neighbourhoods where active school access is feasible but underused.

Analysis: Map distances between home/school, compare actual mode with feasible distance thresholds (e.g. <1 km = walkable, <3 km = bikeable).

Outcome: A map highlighting "latent potential" areas where many children are driven short distances for school travel.

Helpful for: *Government Agencies* targeting investment in crossings and school travel planning. *Advocates* needing evidence for "SafeSchools" campaigns.

FUTURE ANALYSIS

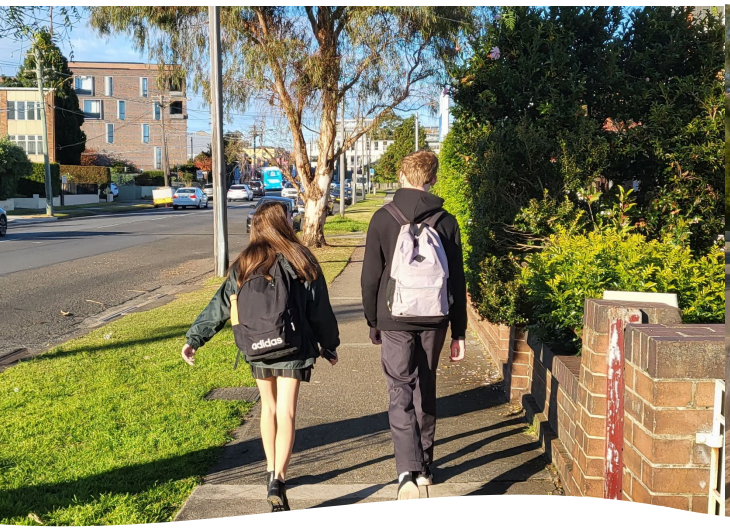
SOCIO-SPATIAL EQUITY IN CHILDREN'S MOBILITY

Purpose: Examine how inequalities in infrastructure provision and design impact how children travel to school.

Analysis: Compare mode share by socio-economic index, urban/rural, and infrastructure design (e.g. provision of crossings, footpaths and speed limits).

Outcome: A map identifying areas where children rely heavily on car travel due to lack of safe or accessible alternatives.

Helpful for: *Government:* Equity-focused transport and land-use planning; resource allocation for underserved areas. *Advocacy:* Highlight mobility inequities affecting children in outer suburbs or regional towns.



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FUTURE ANALYSIS

TRAVEL BURDEN AND FAMILY LOGISTICS

Purpose: Quantify how much time, distance, and car travel parents spend supporting children's education and activities.

Analysis: Estimate trip chaining (home → school → work → extracurricular) and total household travel effort.

Outcome: Ability to estimate the various costs associated with children's travel including emissions, time cost and monetary cost.

Helpful for: *Government:* Inform time-use and productivity policy. *Advocacy:* Promote localised, community based after-school options.

FUTURE ANALYSIS

SAFETY AND RISK EXPOSURE ANALYSIS

Purpose: Identify routes or areas where children's travel intersects with high-risk traffic conditions.

Analysis: Overlay travel paths with road crash data, speed limits, and traffic volumes.

Outcome: Identification of clusters of car-dominated school zones and unsafe walking/cycling corridors.

Helpful for: *Government:* Prioritise safe infrastructure upgrades near schools and playgrounds. *Advocacy:* Support "Vision Zero" and school zone safety campaigns with spatial evidence.

FUTURE ANALYSIS

IMPACT OF LOCAL AMENITIES AND SCHOOL CATCHMENTS

Purpose: Explore how proximity to schools, playgrounds, and recreation facilities shapes children's travel behaviour.

Analysis: Relate travel modes (out of school activities) and distances (home-school) to land-use mix, school catchment boundaries, and density of extracurricular venues.

Outcome: A model of how localised options might reduce travel distances and increase active mode share.

Helpful for: *Government:* Inform planning of schools and activity centres to support 15-minute neighbourhoods. *Advocacy:* Advocate for local infrastructure, mixed uses and active travel friendly school catchments.

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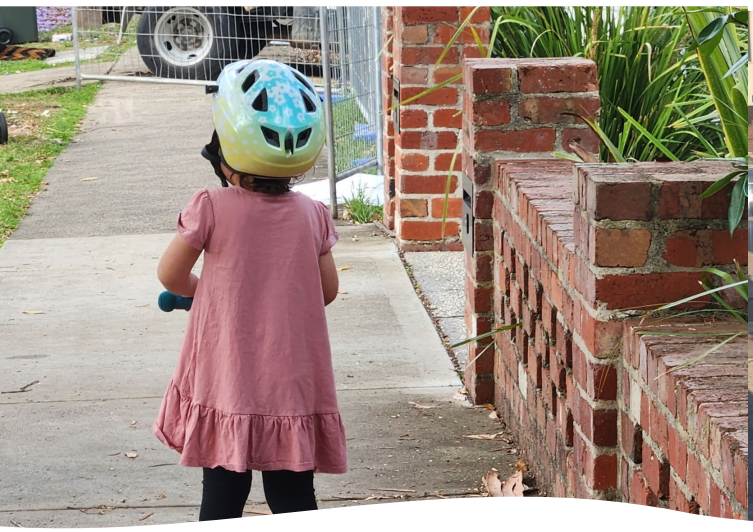

AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL TRAVEL SURVEY – QUESTION BANK

Section 1: Screening

Are you over the age of 18 and a carer of children currently attending school?

Section 2: Household status

Who do you currently live with most of the time (tick all that apply)?

How many children not yet attending school do you care for (full-time or part-time)?

How many children currently attending primary or high school do you care for?

How many children no longer attending school do you live with (full-time or part-time)?

Section 3: Child/Children (repeat for up to four oldest children currently enrolled in school)

As of today, how old is the child?

In 2024, what school year is the child in?

For subsequent children: Does this child go to the same school as child 1?

What type of school is the child enrolled in (Public/Private/Catholic/Other)?

Is the child enrolled in the school in the catchment area/zone where they live?

If outside the catchment/enrolment zone, why?

Does the child live in the same place as child 1?

What is the suburb/town where the child usually lives when under your care?

What is the name of the street and the nearest cross street where the child usually?

What is the name of the child's school?

Approximately how far is it between where the child currently lives and their school?

How long, in minutes, would it take you as an adult to walk this distance?

Section 4: Travel to and from school (last week)

Each morning (Mon–Fri), how did the child get to school? (e.g., by car; walked; cycled; scootered/skateboarded; designated school bus; public transport; other; absent)

Each morning (Mon–Fri), who went with the child to school? (e.g., on their own; mum; dad; siblings/friends; other relative; other adult)

Each afternoon (Mon–Fri), how did the child leave school? (same mode list as above)

Each afternoon (Mon–Fri), who went with the child from school? (same list as above)

AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL TRAVEL SURVEY – QUESTION BANK

Section 5: Out-of-school organised activities (this term)

During the week: how often does the child do organised activities (e.g., sport, music lessons)?

During the week: how do they normally access these activities?

During the week: how often do they travel to these activities on their own?

On the weekend: how often does the child do organised activities?

On the weekend: how do they normally access these activities?

On the weekend: how often do they travel to these activities on their own?

Section 6: Independent mobility permissions

Is the child ever allowed to cross busy roads alone (unaccompanied by an adult)?

Is the child ever allowed to travel on public transport alone (not including a school bus)?

Is the child ever allowed to travel on their own to places other than school?

Is the child ever allowed to travel home from school alone?

Is the child ever allowed to go out alone after dark?

Section 7: Open-ended

Was last week a normal week for you and your family?

Can you tell us what was unusual (e.g., school camps, children unwell, work commitments)?

In your own words, why do your kids travel to school the way they do?

Do you have any thoughts on children's participation in out-of-school activities? Is it important?

If there’s anything you could change about how your children travel to school, what would it be?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Section 8: About you (parent demographics)

What is your gender?

What languages are regularly spoken in your home?

What is your country of birth?

How many years have you lived in Australia?

How many cars are owned by the usual members of your household?

How many usual members of your household hold a driver's licence?

How old are you?

Which best describes you (employment/study status)?

What is your total household income before tax?

Acknowledgements
We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all survey participants and the support of the University of Sydney Robinson Fellowship program which funded this research.

The original team consulted to develop the survey used in this report were:

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Laya Hossein-Rashidi, The University of NSW
Emily Moylan, The University of Sydney
Alexa Delbosc, Monash University
Hulya Gilbert, The University of NSW

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Ethical Statement
This research was conducted in accordance with Human Research Ethics Committee guidelines (Approval Number: 2015/HE00030). All participants provided informed consent, and data is anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

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