



Travel to School in California:

Key Findings from the National Household Travel Survey

Travel behavior in California

- Californians walk 10-25 percent more than the national average
- Twenty-six to thirty-one percent of children walk or bicycle to school, more than twice the national average
- Children that walk to school make twice as many walking trips for all purposes than children that travel to school by other means
- Nearly two-thirds of school aged children in California live within two miles of their school, but of those children, a greater percentage are driven and fewer ride a school bus than the national average
- Socioeconomic disparities reflect stark differences in travel to school patterns – African-American and Latino children, and children from lower-income households, are more likely to walk or bicycle to school

California Travel is Unique

New data from the 2009 National Household Travel Survey - California add-on questionnaire (CA-NHTS) demonstrates that travel in California is different from travel trends nationally. Californians walk and bicycle at higher rates than the rest of the country, and Californians between 5 and 15 years of age walk more than any other age category. **This data indicates that state-level transportation policy decisions should be based on California-specific data and not on national trends.**

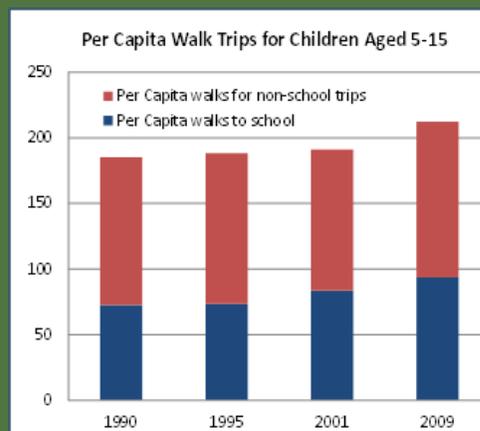
Travel to School Trends Statewide

Nearly one-third of school-aged children in California walk or bicycle to school, more than twice the national average. Since 1999, the first year of the state-funded Safe Routes to School program, children aged 5-15 have increased their average annual walk trips by 10 percent. Children who walk to school make more than twice as many walk trips overall than children who do not walk to school. For children who walk to school, trips to school account for 44 percent of their total annual walking trips. This trend illustrates the important role walking to school plays as a component of children's daily activity¹. Walking to school anchors daily walking; over time populations with high rates of children walking to school also have higher per-child walking rates.

Data Highlights

Walking and bicycling constitutes 15 percent of travel trips statewide; up to 18 percent assuming all transit trips include a walk or bicycle trip.

School-aged children walk for 19 percent of all trips and increased their walking trips 10 percent from 1999 to 2009.



Twenty-six to thirty-one percent of children walk or bicycle to school.

Data Highlights

Sixty-two percent of school-aged children live within two miles of their school, and 42 percent live within one mile of school.

Of children living within two miles of school, 51 percent are driven to school in a private vehicle, 39 percent walk or bicycle, and two percent travel via transit.

Only 13 percent of students in California ride a school bus compared to 37 percent nationally.



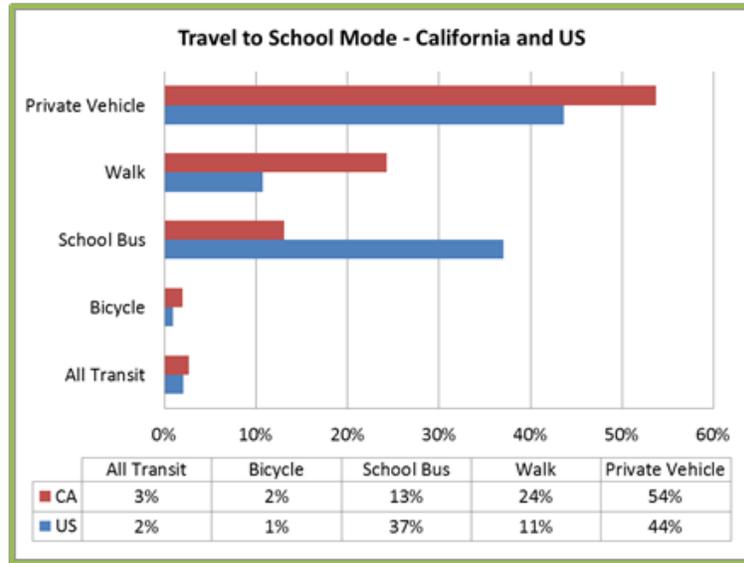
For households earning \$80,000 or more, 65 percent drive children to school versus 31 percent with children that walk or bicycle.

For households earning \$25,000 or less, 36 percent drive children to school versus 47 percent with children that walk or bicycle.

Forty-five percent of African-American and Hispanic/Latino students walk or bicycle to school, compared to 30 percent of White or Asian students.



Children in California have the advantage of greater proximity to school, with nearly two-thirds of school-aged children living two miles or less from school, assumed to be a reasonable walking or bicycling distance. Of those children that live within two miles of school, 39 percent walk or bicycle, but more than half are driven to school in a private vehicle. Those children represent a significant population with the potential to walk or bicycle to school given a safe option and targeted Safe Routes to School initiatives.



The rate of students in California that ride a school bus is approximately one-third of the rate of students that are bussed nationally. **Students need a safe alternative when they do not have the option to ride a school bus, including walking, bicycling, or an accessible transit route. Policymakers must pay close attention to the provision of safe alternatives for these students.**

Demographics Influencing Travel to School

Twenty-one percent of California households have a child aged 5-15, with socioeconomic disparities that influence travel to school behavior. Among high-earning households, significantly more children are driven to school and fewer children walk or bicycle than in lower-income households. African-American and Hispanic/Latino students are much more likely to walk or bicycle to school compared to their White or Asian counterparts, who are much more likely to be driven to school. Hispanic/Latino students make up 57 percent of students that live within two miles of their school and are more likely to ride a school bus than other students. African-American students ride transit to school most often. **Lower-income communities and communities with higher African-American and Latino populations already have high rates of walking and bicycling to school but are also at higher risk of unsafe traffic conditions and issues of personal safety, requiring prioritization by policymakers to address this social inequity.**

Safety Concerns

Parents that did not allow their children to walk or bicycle to school indicated that their primary concerns were speed and volume of traffic along the route. These concerns are warranted in many regions of the state. Statewide, 27 percent of all victims aged 5-15 of traffic fatalities and serious injuries are pedestrians and bicyclists – nearly twice the national average².

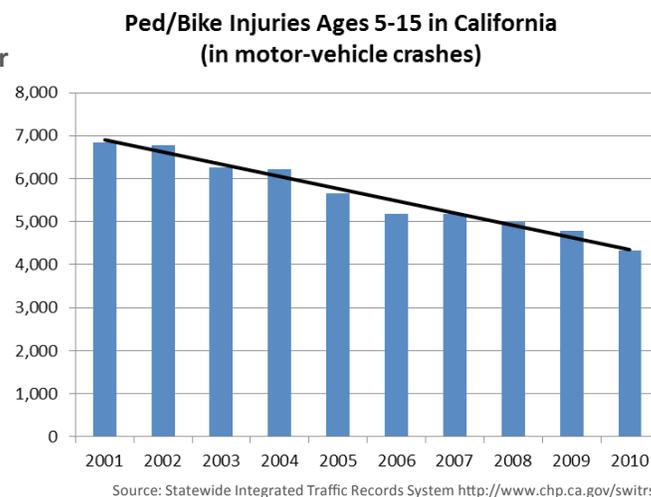
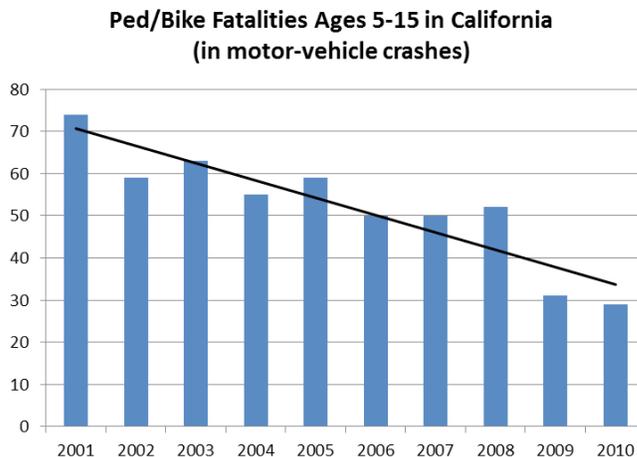
While there is still room for improvement, traffic safety issues for children are being effectively addressed with Safe Routes to School, a tool to help communities focus limited resources on traffic safety around schools where children spend a lot of time. **California’s consistent leadership in support for Safe Routes to School with over a decade of dedicated funding has resulted in a steady decline in auto collision-related fatalities and serious injuries to children walking and bicycling (see graphs), but the risk is still unacceptably high.**

What This Means for California Transportation Policy in 2013

Travel data from the CA-NHTS and safety data from the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System helps transportation policymakers and stakeholders to better understand how investment in Safe Routes to School will continue to improve safety and increase rates of walking and bicycling to school for youth and their families. Policymakers, planners, and community groups want to increase the number of children that walk and bicycle to school for a number of important reasons:

- To alleviate congestion and improve safety during drop-off/pick-up times to save lives and prevent injuries
- To provide daily physical activity that children might otherwise not engage in; daily physical activity has been shown to improve academic performance³
- To reduce fuel use and harmful emissions by vehicles around schools
- To save money for the state of California by reducing traffic injuries and fatalities
- To increase the sense of community and livability in a neighborhood

As California implements the federal transportation legislation Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), the state proposes to streamline active transportation and Safe Routes to School funding. The proposal strives to effectively address statewide priorities for safety, public health, school transportation, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. In a recent study, Maizlish et al estimate that high levels of active transportation could reduce greenhouse gas emissions up to 14.5 percent and could lead to up to 13 percent fewer premature deaths per year and 15 percent fewer years of life lost from cardiovascular disease and diabetes⁴.





The Safe Routes to School National Partnership along with other active transportation, health, and equity partners urge the Governor, the Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency and the California Legislature to fund the proposed Active Transportation Program at a level consistent with prior year funding of initially at least \$147 million per year. This account should be supplemented in the future with funds from cap and trade auction proceeds. In addition, the structure of the Safe Routes to School Program should be given special consideration in order to keep the program managed by Caltrans, to maintain the infrastructure and non-infrastructure components of the program, and to continue to prioritize lower-income communities and schools. A minimum guarantee of funding for the Safe Routes to School Program of \$48 million/year

initially (current levels) should be set aside within the new account to sustain this successful program with an important and unique audience: schools, parents and children.

The Safe Routes to School Program provides unique benefits to children and schools, as well as the community at large, through improvements to infrastructure such as sidewalks, pathways, bike lanes, and safer street crossings as well as non-infrastructure education, enforcement and encouragement activities. As the data contained in this report illustrates, in only 10 years, Safe Routes to School has realized significant benefits to safety and mode shift for children in the state, prioritizing social equity in the grant process. With only one in four Safe Routes to School grant applications funded per project cycle, the need for program funds is still great, especially in lower-income communities which have the greatest traffic safety risks and high numbers of children already walking and bicycling. With a focused Active Transportation Program as a mechanism for additional future revenue, California could make significant strides toward meeting statewide safety, health, and emissions targets by providing greater access for all Californians to walk or bicycle.

The Safe Routes to School Program provides safe, healthy, sustainable, and economical transportation solutions in California's communities and encourages children, parents, and all Californians to walk and bicycle at even greater levels.

How to Find Out More

- Read the full study: "Travel to School in California: Findings from the California - National Household Travel Survey," December 2012 (<http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/travel-to-school-in-california-final.pdf>), Prepared by Nancy McGuckin, Travel Behavior Analyst <http://www.travelbehavior.us/>, funded by Active Living Research (<http://activelivingresearch.org/>)
- Contact - Jeanie Ward Waller, California Advocacy Organizer, Safe Routes to School National Partnership jeanie@saferoutespartnership.org
- Visit the Safe Routes to School National Partnership website - <http://saferoutespartnership.org/>

References

1. "The Relationship Between Active Travel to School and Health-Related Fitness in Children and Adolescents", David R Lubans, Colin A Boreham, Paul Kelly and Charlie E Foster at: <http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/8/1/5>
2. Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) <http://www.chp.ca.gov/switrs/>
3. "Physical education, school physical activity, school sports and academic performance", by Trudeau, F. and Shephard, R., at: <http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/5/1/10>
4. Maizlish NA, Woodcock JD, Co S, Ostro B, Fairley D, Fanai A. Health Co-Benefits and Transportation-Related Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the Bay Area - Technical Report. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Public Health; Available at: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CCDPHP/Documents/ITHIM_Technical_Report11-21-11.pdf. November 21, 2011.