

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Metrolinx Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area School Travel Household Attitudinal Study Report

February 12, 2010

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Executive Summary

Metrolinx’s *Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area School Travel Household Attitudinal Study* is the first in-depth study of household mode choices and attitudes in regards to elementary school travel in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

Harris/Decima Inc conducted 1,001 telephone interviews in fall 2009 with randomly dialed GTHA households, including an oversampling of Hamilton and Peel residents in order to study regional differences.

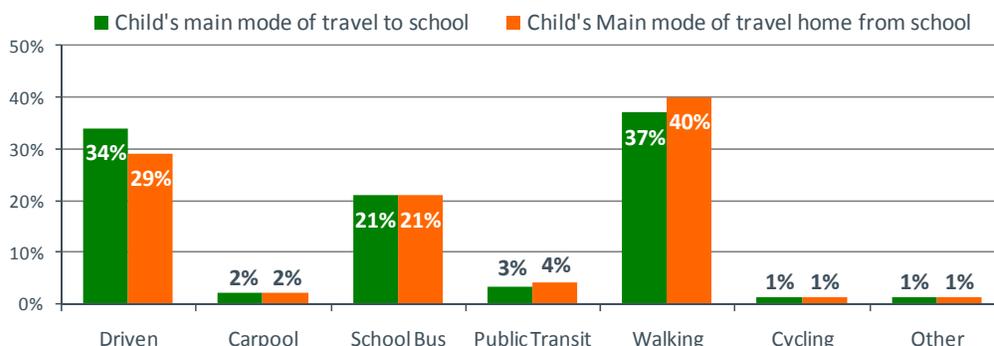
Survey respondents were parents and legal guardians with at least one child attending elementary school (junior kindergarten through grade 8).

The survey focused on the respondent’s eldest child attending elementary school. This section presents key findings of the study.

Profile of GTHA School Travel

Based on parent responses, elementary school students are primarily travelling to and from school by **foot, automobile and school bus**. For travel *to school*, 37% of children walk, 34% are driven, and 21% ride the school bus. For travel *home from school*, 40% of children walk, 29% are driven, and 21% ride the school bus. A small percentage of elementary school students travels to or from school by bike, carpool or public transit.

Nine percent (9%) of students travel differently on their trip to school versus home from school, with the most common combination being driven *to school* and walking home.



Q1E. How does your child usually travel to school? (Base: All respondents; N=1,001)
 Q1F. How does your child usually travel home from school? (Base: All respondents; N=1,001)

The average trip is 11.6 minutes *to school* and 12.4 minutes *home from school*. Thirty-three percent (33%) of parents stated that they live *less than one kilometre* from their child’s school, while 27% of parents stated that they live *between one and two kilometres* away, and 32% stated that they live *further than two kilometres* away.

The factors which have the most significant correlation with usual method of school travel are the child's elementary school *grade* and the *distance* between home and school. Seventy-six percent (76%) of elementary school students living *within one kilometre* of their school usually walk to school, and 78% walk home from school, while 41% of those living *more than one kilometre* away are driven to school, and 36% are driven home. Overall, students in grades seven and eight have a lower rate of being driven than those in lower grades.

The City of Toronto is the only region with a travel profile that is significantly different from other regions. The areas within the rest of the GTHA, including the City of Hamilton and the Region of Peel, have effectively identical school travel profiles. Public transit is rarely used for elementary school travel outside of the City of Toronto, while the rate of travel by school bus is lower in the City of Toronto, particularly among children attending grades 7 and 8.

Main Reason for Usual Mode of School Travel

Reasons for choosing a mode of school travel vary significantly based on the mode chosen. Parents whose child is *driven* to school are most likely to say that they have *concerns about other modes* of school travel (e.g. safety) while those whose child rides the *school bus* are most likely to say that they *do not have any other travel options* available to them. For active methods, nearly three quarters of parents whose child *walks or bikes* to or from school said that this method is *preferred* by them and/or their child.

Considering Alternative School Travel Options

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of overall parents surveyed say that they live close enough to their child's school that they could reasonably walk to school, and 60% say they live close enough that their child could reasonably bike to school. Within the City of Toronto, 26% of parents say that school bus service is available to their child, and 48% of parents say that public transit is available and reasonably convenient for their child's use for school travel. Parents report the opposite case in the rest of the GTHA, with 45% saying that school bus service is available, and 27% saying that public transit is available and reasonably convenient for their child's use for school travel.

Parents' comfort with their child travelling to or from school without adult accompaniment is contingent upon the mode of travel used and the child's age, with comfort levels increasing with the child's age (or grade). Only 11% of parents would be comfortable with their child walking, and 10% with cycling, without an adult when the child is in *grades 3-4*. Fifty-six percent (56%) of parents would be comfortable with their child walking and 49% with cycling to school without an adult when the child reaches *grades 7-8*. In terms of their child taking transit without adult accompaniment, parents' comfort increased after grade 6; however, outside of the City of Toronto, only 10% of parents said they would be comfortable with their child riding public transit without adult accompaniment at any age, compared to 22% within the City of Toronto.

Parental comfort with their child participating in a carpool for school travel increases steadily from 44% for children in kindergarten to 66% for children in grades 7 and 8.

School Travel Perceptions and Attitudes

Fifty-six percent (56%) of parents who say that they *live close enough for their child to reasonably walk or bike to school* agreed that (a) there are safe bike routes or paths in their neighbourhood, and (b) that people drive safely enough in their neighbourhood.

Nearly four-fifths (79%) of parents say they have *discussed how to walk or bike safely to school* with their child, including nearly every parent who said they would be comfortable letting their child walk or bike to school without adult accompaniment. Ninety-one percent (91%) of parents with a child in grades 7 or 8 have had such a discussion, compared with 79% with a child in grades 1 through 6, and 64% with a child in kindergarten.

Nearly two-thirds (62%) of parents whose child is driven to or home from school would be interested in a *list of nearby parents who would like to carpool*. Seventy-five percent (75%) of parents who drive their child in a dedicated trip (i.e. school trip is not part of a commute to work or other destination) would be interested in such a list.

Two-thirds (68%) of parents agree that it is important that their child *gets exercise during school travel*, and nine-tenths (88%) of parents agree that it is important that their child travel to school in an *environment-friendly way*.

Two-fifths (42%) of parents whose child is usually driven to or home from school say they would be interested in considering alternatives to their usual mode of travel, while one-quarter (24%) of parents whose child rides the school bus were interested in alternative modes of school travel.

When parents were asked about the school travel mode they used *when they were in elementary school*, a correlation was found between the parent's reported mode of school travel and the mode of school travel that their child currently uses. A significant proportion of **parents whose child currently walks or cycles to school say that they walked or cycled when they were in elementary school (42%), and the same is seen in the case of those whose child is driven to school (55%)**.

Awareness of School Travel Programs in the Area

One parent in nine (11%) said they are aware of a program in their area designed to promote walking, biking or carpooling for school travel (without prompting). Many of these parents were unclear about what program they had heard of, with nearly a third saying 'don't know' and another one in ten could not provide the name of the program, just the focus (e.g. walking).

When prompted, the most recognized program was *International Walk to School Day or Month*, which one third of parents (31%) said they had heard of.

Carpool Zone was recognized by 22% of parents, while *Walking or Cycling School Bus* and *CAN-BIKE* were each recognized by 11% of parents.

Awareness of Travel Infrastructure and Programs at Schools

When asked about whether specific school travel infrastructure is available at their child's school, parents most commonly indicated that *sidewalks leading to the school entrance* are present (88% of parents). The second most commonly indicated by parents is a *student drop off area for automobiles* (79% of parents). Crossing guards and marked crossings (67% of parents), and bicycle parking (57% of parents) were also indicated by many to be available at their child's school.

Parents were also asked about whether school travel programs/services are offered by their child's school. Parents most commonly indicated that *education, special events or programs for walking safety* (30% of parents) and *cycling safety* (29% of parents). Fifteen percent (15%) of parents said that *maps of the best or safest routes to school* are offered and 6% said that carpool matching is offered at their child's school.

Opportunities for Encouraging Sustainable School Travel

Three main markets of parents have been identified for school travel education, awareness and behaviour change, as outlined below:

- **Parents whose child does not usually use a physically active mode of travel (i.e. they are driven, carpool, use school bus, or use public transit), yet consider active travel to be convenient and appealing, and live close enough that their child could reasonably walk or bike to school.** Thirty-six percent (36%) of parents who fit this profile *somewhat or strongly agree* that they are interested in considering alternatives to the way their child currently travels.
- **Parents whose child is driven to school, yet who indicated that having their child ride the school bus or public transit would be convenient and appealing, and have indicated that such a service is available to their child.** Eighty-nine percent (89%) of parents who fit this profile indicated that it is important to them that their child travels in an environment-friendly way.
- Parents whose child is driven to school, yet who indicated that carpooling is appealing and convenient, and who are comfortable with allowing their child travel to school in a carpool. Of this group, 93% of parents said their child would be *interested* in travelling in a carpool, and 52% of parents said they would be *interested in considering alternatives* to the way that their child currently travels. Eighty-two percent (82%) indicated that a list of nearby parents who would like to carpool would be useful to them, and 53% said their household schedule would not interfere with carpooling.