



## **U.S. TRAVEL DATA SHOW DECLINE IN WALKING AND BICYCLING TO SCHOOL HAS STABILIZED**

### **Safe Routes to School Programs Encourage Active, Safe Trips to School**

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. and BOULDER, Colo. (April 8, 2010) — First lady Michelle Obama has issued a nationwide challenge to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation. Walking and bicycling to school are great steps families can take to get America’s kids moving, and new national data show how much work remains to get children out of the car and on to their feet or bikes.

New national travel data show that the decline in rates of walking and bicycling to school has stabilized. However, children are still overwhelmingly arriving at school in their parents’ cars, a significant reversal from four decades ago.

According to the 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) effort to collect data on travel by the American public, 13 percent of children five to 14 years old usually walked or biked to school compared with 48 percent of students in 1969. Conversely, 12 percent of children arrived at school by private automobile in 1969, and, by 2009, this number increased to 44 percent. Rates of school bus ridership to school over this same 40-year span showed the least change, increasing from 38 to 40 percent. ([Figure 1](#))

While long-term trends demonstrate a decline in walking and bicycling to school, preliminary analysis of 2009 NHTS travel diary data reveals the percent of five through 14-year olds walking and bicycling to school in the U.S. has remained stable at about 12 percent over the last 15 years. ([Figure 2](#)) This is hopeful news for Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs – sustained efforts by parents, schools, community leaders and local, state, and federal governments to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school.

“There is a real opportunity to change the car culture and make school campuses less congested if more of the parents who are driving shorter distances let their children walk or bike to school, and those who driving further distances let their children ride school buses,” said Lauren Marchetti, director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School. “Encouraging this type of change in families’ school transportation habits, a goal of the Safe Routes to School program, helps communities reestablish school campuses as the safe, healthy, student-focused learning environment they are intended to be.”

When measuring trips to school of one mile or less, a distance considered easily walkable and bikable for most students, 38 percent of five to 14-year old students reported usually walking and bicycling to school in 2009, compared to 88 percent of students in 1969. The percent of children who live within a mile of school decreased by 10 percentage points, from 41% in 1969 to 31% today. ([Figure 3](#)) This population living in relative close proximity to school represents an area of potential growth of the SRTS program.

“These new data show that we still have a lot of work ahead to get more children walking and bicycling to school. There is so much momentum across the country to get children more physically active and healthy. We must ensure that Congress provides additional funding so that more schools can benefit from Safe Routes to School funds to make the necessary safety improvements,” noted Deb Hubsmith, director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. “In addition, we must work together with school systems to site schools near the children they serve, so that distance will no longer be such a barrier to making the active choice for the trip to school.”



Safe Routes to School is a program funded by the federal government which is sustained through efforts by parents, schools, community leaders and local and state governments. These programs evaluate conditions around schools, build infrastructure and conduct activities that work to improve safety and accessibility, thereby reducing traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. As a result, these programs help make bicycling and walking to school safer and more appealing transportation choices thus encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership worked with Noreen McDonald, a leading researcher in the field of school travel at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on this preliminary analysis of the 2009 NHTS. Released in January 2010, the 2009 NHTS updates information gathered in the 2001 NHTS and in prior Nationwide Personal Transportation Surveys (NPTS) conducted in 1969, 1977, 1983, 1990, and 1995.

### **About the National Household Travel Survey**

The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) is a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) effort sponsored by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to collect data on both long-distance and local travel by the American public. The joint survey gathers trip-related data such as mode of transportation, duration, distance and purpose of trip. It also gathers demographic, geographic, and economic data for analysis purposes. Policy makers, state DOTs, metropolitan planning organizations, industry professionals, and academic researchers use the data to gauge the extent and patterns of travel, to plan new investments, and to better understand the implications for the nation's transportation infrastructure. <http://nhts.ornl.gov/index.shtml>.

### **About the National Center for Safe Routes to School**

Established in May 2006 through funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, the National Center for Safe Routes to School assists communities in enabling and encouraging children to safely walk and bicycle to school. The Center strives to equip Safe Routes to School programs with the knowledge and technical information to implement safe and successful strategies. The National Center for Safe Routes to School is maintained by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more information, visit [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org).

### **About the Safe Routes to School National Partnership**

Launched in August 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of hundreds of organizations, government agencies and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding, and provide educational materials to agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Partnership's mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States. For more information, visit <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/>.

###

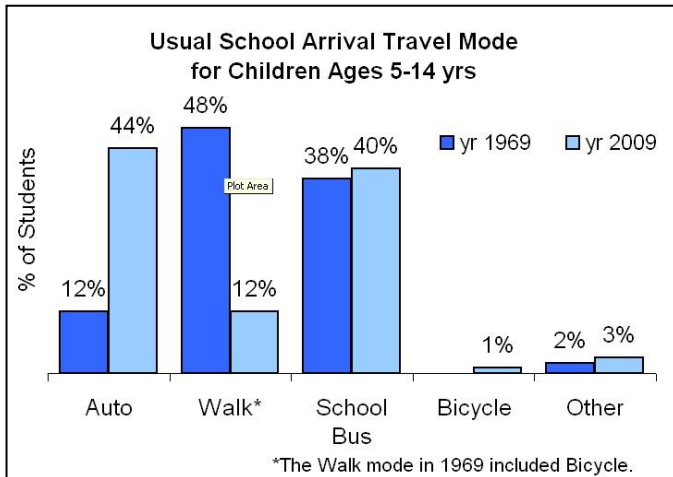
### **Media contacts**

Caroline Dickson  
Communications and Marketing Manager  
National Center for Safe Routes to School  
(919) 962-5835  
[dickson@hsrc.unc.edu](mailto:dickson@hsrc.unc.edu)

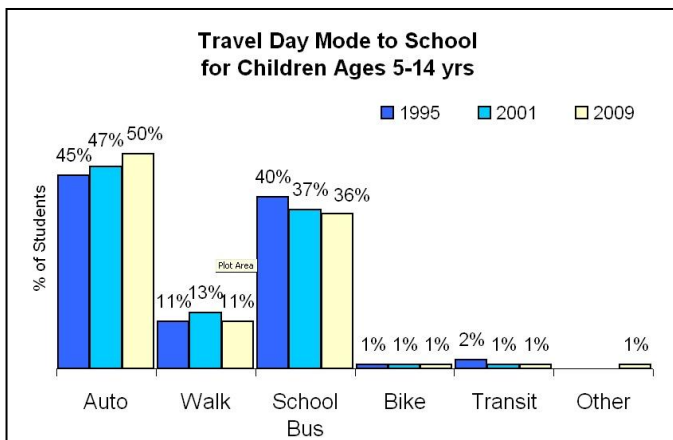
Margo Pedroso  
Deputy Director  
Safe Routes to School National Partnership  
(301) 292-1043  
[margo@saferoutespartnership.org](mailto:margo@saferoutespartnership.org)



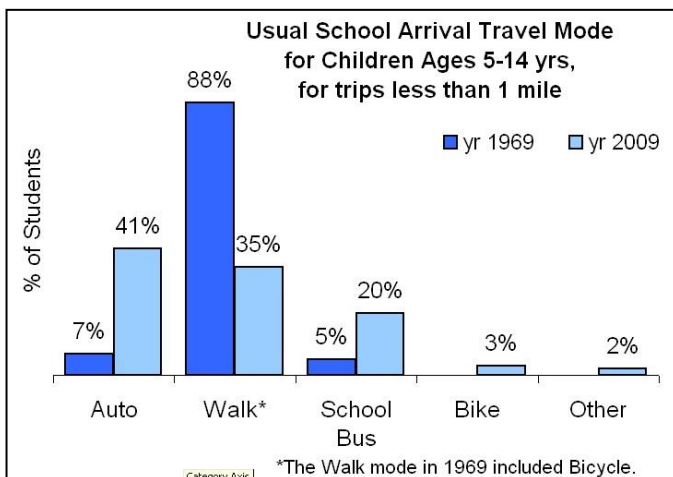
**Charts created by the National Center for Safe Routes to School based on National Household Travel Survey Data:**



**Figure 1.** Thirteen percent of children five to 14 years old usually walked or biked to school compared with 48 percent of students in 1969. Conversely, 12 percent of children arrived at school by private automobile in 1969, and by 2009, this number increased to 44 percent. Rates of school bus ridership to school over this same 40-year span showed the least change, increasing from 38 to 40 percent.



**Figure 2.** Preliminary analysis of 2009 NHTS travel diary data reveal the percent of five through 14-year olds walking and bicycling to school in the U.S. has remained stable at about 12 percent over the last 15 years.



**Figure 3.** When measuring trips to school of one mile or less, a distance considered easily walkable and bikable for most students, 38 percent of five to 14-year old students reported usually walking and bicycling to school in 2009, compared to 88 percent of students in 1969. The percent of children who live within a mile of school decreased by 10 percentage points, from 41% in 1969 to 31% today.