

**UTS: CENTRE FOR
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**Evaluation of
Active Transport
Strategies for
Parents and
Children
at Council
Preschools and
Childcare Centres**

Prepared by

*UTS: Centre for
Local Government*

For

SSROC

*UTS: Centre for Local Government
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123
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Evaluation of Active Transport Strategies for Parents and Children at Council Preschools and Childcare Centres

For

*Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) and
Marrickville, Sutherland Shire and Waverley Councils*

Author

Simone Schwarz

UTS: Centre for Local Government University of Technology

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1. Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the *Active Transport Strategies for Parents and Children at Council Preschools and Childcare Centres* project pilot sites, funded from the Local Government and Shires Associations' (LGSA) Healthy Local Government Grants Program, and undertaken over the years 2006/07.

The project goal was to increase physical activity in communities of parents and preschool aged children by supporting the parents to use 'active transport' (pramwalking, walking, cycling with child seats, child cycling / scooting and using public transport) to travel to and from preschools / childcare centres with their children. By increasing physical activity as part of parent's and children's daily lives, the project aimed to contribute to the prevention of chronic disease and overweight and obesity, in both child and adult populations.

There are many other benefits to increasing more active forms of transport, some being traffic reduction, community building as people are more likely to see each other and be able to communicate when taking part in a more active form of transport, and safer streets, as there are more people on the streets. However, these benefits can be seen as a 'by product' of the project, as they were not the main goal, and so are not reported on or evaluated in any way.

The project aimed to explore and understand the reasons for current travel behaviour to and from preschools / childcare centres and the barriers to behavioural change, and therefore the possible opportunities for councils to develop interventions to change transport behaviour to a more 'active' form.

It was felt that if active transport options were introduced to children at this young age, then perhaps they would be continued as the child progressed to school; that the approach fostered and modelled behaviour change at a young age.

While the project goal was to increase physical activity in communities of parents and preschool aged children, it aimed to convert **some** of the trips to childcare, and did not seek to take an either / or approach to transport to childcare ie it was never anticipated that all car trips (or even the majority of car trips) to childcare could be converted to active transport trips. Rather, the project aimed to shift the balance from no active transport trips to include **some** active transport trips, even if this was one trip per month, or even one per year, as in the 'National Walk Safely to School Day'.

Proposed project outputs were to be as follows:

- Pilot active transport projects established in 3 SSROC Council preschools/childcare centres (including implementation and evaluation of tailored strategies) – these are the subject of this evaluation report.

1.1 Executive Summary and recommendations

The *Active Transport Strategies for Parents and Children at Council Preschools and Childcare Centres project* was a pilot project funded from the Local Government and Shires Associations' (LGSA) Healthy Local Government Grants Program. The project was undertaken over eighteen months from early 2006 to mid 2007.

The project's goal was to increase physical activity in the communities of parents and preschool aged children at four council operated childcare centres, by supporting parents to use 'active transport' (pram walking, cycling with child seats, child cycling /scooting and using public transport). By increasing physical activity as part of parent's and children's daily lives, the project aimed to contribute to the prevention of chronic disease and obesity in both child and adult populations.

The project was a partnership between the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC), three of its member councils – Waverley, Sutherland Shire and Marrickville, the Sydney South West Area Health Service (SSWAHS) and two research organizations at the University of Technology, Sydney, namely the Centre for Local Government (CLG) and the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF).

A literature review, undertaken by the ISF, did not locate any references to similar projects where the focus was on the travel of a preschool aged child to and from a childcare centre with their parents.

A parent survey was undertaken at each of the four childcare centres, to ascertain current travel behaviour and the reasons for this behaviour, as well as the parents' physical activity levels and their attitudes towards active transport. The parent survey found that for most parents, travel to childcare and changes to travel and transport are extremely complex as they are not a self-contained journey, for which they can choose a particular mode of travel. This survey helped to inform the range of strategies and interventions implemented at each of the childcare centres, which included:

- The provision of information through various means about active transport and physical activity for health;
- The opportunity for parents to identify barriers to their use of active transport strategies;
- Support and encouragement for parents to develop active transport habits with their children;
- Opportunities to walk to preschool/childcare.

A number of interventions and actions were undertaken at each of the centres, and the success of these activities is both impressive and encouraging. While the impact on active transport from the pilot project has been small in terms of numbers that can be demonstrated to have switched to 'active transport', this can be attributed to the short implementation phase of the project (having lasted less than 4 months), and the complexity of the transport issue.

The project aimed to shift the balance from ‘no active transport’ trips to childcare, to include some ‘active’ transport trips, even if this was one trip per month, or even one per year, as in the ‘National Walk Safely to School Day’, and this has largely been achieved.

One of the key successes of the pilot project was the development of working relationships between centre staff and council project officers with expertise in active transport.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That funding is made available from the Local Government and Shires Associations’ (LGSA) Healthy Local Government Grants Program for a period of at least 2 calendar years to undertake a longer implementation phase and impact evaluation with the participating childcare centres.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That SSROC councils are asked to consider expanding ‘National Walk Safely to School Day’ to preschool aged children in council sponsored centre-based care.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That NSW Health engage parents of preschool aged children through centre based care on nutrition, diet and active transport.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That council officers review the learnings from this pilot project to build relationships and partnerships with centre staff in council operated childcare centres

RECOMMENDATION 5: That council committees such as traffic and transport committees adequately consider the views and input made by the community on pedestrian, cycling issues and road safety issues.

1.2 Background

The Project was a partnership between the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC), three of its member councils – Waverley, Sutherland Shire and Marrickville, the Sydney South West Area Health Service (SSWAHS) and two research organizations at the University of Technology, Sydney, namely the Centre for Local Government (CLG) and the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF). Three councils were chosen within the SSROC region with which to conduct the project. The three councils differ from each other in terms of population density, demography and urban form, access to public transport networks and levels of car ownership. This was intended to allow for a comparison of issues across the different areas.

A project steering group was established, made up of representatives of the project partners, including the three councils selected within the SSROC region.

1.3 Literature review

The first phase of the project entailed a literature review summarising good practice in Australia and overseas.

The literature review did not locate any references to projects undertaken with preschool aged children where the focus was on travel to and from the centre with their parents. From the review of the literature, strategies for active transport overwhelmingly begin in primary school.

The lack of similar or previous projects meant that there were no real precedents on which the SSROC project could draw.

1.4 Selection of childcare centres

Within the three local government areas, the childcare centres chosen for the project largely 'self selected' to be involved as they had an existing interest in the issue and a willingness to be involved. For example, in Marrickville, Globe Preschool staff had recently identified 'active travel' to the preschool as an issue they were interested in working on as part of their broader 'environmental program' for 2006, while in the Sutherland Shire, both Moore Street and Bradman Road Child Care Centres had identified travel and travel safety as important issues for communities of children, parents and staff.

Another consideration in the selection of centres was the difference in the centres themselves. Globe is a preschool, with opening hours from 9am to 3pm, co-located with a primary school (Wilkins Public), whereas the other three centres are long day care centres sited on their own and with opening hours ranging from 7am to 6pm. The ages of children at the centres also varied, with Bronte and Globe having few children under the age of three years, whereas Bradman Road and Moore Street having a significant number of children aged one or two years.

Two centres in the Sutherland Shire expressed an interest in being involved in the project, and it was decided to vary the project and include both centres, as they are so different. Moore Street is a larger centre located close to the Sutherland town centre and close to a bus and train interchange, while Bradman Road is a smaller centre located in the heart of a suburban residential area, with no train service and very limited bus services.

1.5 Parent survey of travel behaviour

In order to design a tailored active transport strategy for each preschool / childcare centre, a 'context study' was undertaken for each of the four childcare centres. This was accompanied by a parent survey, which was developed to ascertain current travel behaviour and the reasons for this behaviour, as well as parents' physical activity levels and their attitudes towards active transport. While a summary of the parent survey appears below, the full results of the context study and parent survey are available in a separate report; *Travel to Childcare. A study of parents' and children's travel to four Sydney child care centres.* (Institute for Sustainable Futures: 2006).

The findings from the parent survey found that for most parents, travel to childcare is not a self-contained journey, for which they can choose a particular mode of travel. Rather it is one part of a larger journey, which is usually made up of several components and must be completed within significant time constraints. The choice of travel mode will be determined by the multiple requirements of that whole journey, not just the part between home and the childcare centre. More often, the choice is determined by time constraints, as like many Sydney parents, the users of these four childcare centres are often from households where both parents are in paid employment, at workplaces some distance from their homes.

Indeed, studying travel to childcare necessarily involves a cohort of parents whose children attend childcare because their parents are in paid employment. These parents are using childcare services precisely as a means of helping them deal with the significant time constraints involved in balancing or ‘juggling’ simultaneous paid work and parenting.

Despite these time constraints, there was evidence that a number of parents who currently drive may at least be willing to *consider* active transport options. At Moore St, Globe and Bronte, the proportion of respondent drivers who indicated that they would consider walking ranged from 31 – 44%. However, these percentages translate into relatively small numbers: 5 at Globe; 4 at Bradman Rd; 12 at Moore St and 14 at Bronte. The survey did show that a proportion of parents see active transport in a positive light, or at least like the *idea* of it.

The results of the parent survey informed to some extent the types of strategies proposed at each of the childcare centres. The results of the parent survey also highlighted many factors that influence active transport not within the control of individual child care centres, nor indeed councils; namely the geographic spread of Sydney, the location of jobs within the city, and the lack of transport alternatives to the car, especially when journeys to work are broken by the need to drop children to child care.

2. Evaluation of active transport strategies

2.1 Evaluation methods and processes

The evaluation is divided into 3 sections; the first is an evaluation of each project objective, with consideration of the strategies and activities conducted to address each objective; the second is an action plan and evaluation of the individual strategies at each child care centre (in table format); and the third is a qualitative assessment of the value of the project by the council officers tasked to work with, devise and implement the strategies at each of the centres. This last section was undertaken via telephone interview of the officers involved.

2.2 Impact Evaluation constraints

Some constraints in the ability to evaluate the project have been identified, which include the project timing.

The project commenced in the 2006 calendar year, and has been implemented into the 2007 calendar year. The timing over two calendar years has meant that the cohort of children and parents has necessarily changed, with some 4 and 5 year olds moving from preschool and childcare to school. The survey respondents' children in this age group made up a large percentage of the survey: 59% at Globe; 33% at Bradman Rd; 31% at Moore St and 44% at Bronte.

Evaluation of the impact of the individual strategies implemented (or planned) at each centre goes beyond the financial and staff resources, and often time limits for this project. Childcare centre staffs are very stretched for time and have no time beyond their face-to-face teaching time. Council officers participating in the project included the project into their existing work programs.

Evaluation has been built into the strategies where possible, but impact evaluation is often long term and again beyond the scope of this project.

3. Evaluation of pilot active transport strategies at four child care centres

3.1 Evaluation by project objectives

Project Objective 1

“Children, parents and staff at the 3 (now 4) sites have improved understanding of importance of physical activity for health, and the role that active transport can play by increasing ‘everyday’ physical activity levels.”

Strategies and activities to address this objective have been implemented at each centre, including:

- The development and distribution to each family of a ‘flyer’ or newsletter. The newsletter outlined the aims of the project and introduced the council officer involved in the project, and foreshadowed the parent survey that would be distributed through the centres. It also outlined that the participating centre and its staff supported the project and gave some active transport strategies for parents and children.
- The distribution of the survey to all parents with a covering sheet about the aims of the project, which outlined that the project focus was on ‘active transport’.
- A survey feedback sheet distributed to all centre parents

The impact of the above strategies on the understanding of parents about the importance of active transport has not been able to be evaluated, due to the timing and implementation of the project over two calendar years and due to the financial constraints of the project.

Additional strategies developed and implemented at specific centres included:

- Preparation and compilation of an Information Kit for parents at both Bradman Rd and Moore St Child Care Centres, including a TAG for each centre (for the full list of inclusions in the Kit, please see the table for Sutherland Shire)
- A ‘Health / Diet / Active Transport Talk’ for the parents of Bradman Rd, Moore St Child Care Centres and Globe Preschool
- ‘Nutrition and exercise information session for parents’ at Bronte Child Care Centre
- Development and distribution of a TAG for Bronte Child Care Centre
- Promotion of a ‘Walk to school day’ for Bronte Child Care Centre
- On site meeting re bicycle and car parking at Globe Preschool
- Meeting with preschool staff about active transport promotional events at Globe Preschool
- Promotion of a ‘Walk to Globe Day’ as part of the ‘National Walk Safely to School Day’

Evaluation of the above strategies is included in the action tables for each centre.

Project objective 2

“Parents at the 3(now 4) sites have an opportunity to identify barriers to their use of active transport strategies, and contribute to strategies to overcome those barriers”

All parents have had the opportunity to identify barriers to their use of active transport through the survey. The total number of families enrolled at the centres was 344, and of those, 129 responded to the survey. This represents 38% of the families enrolled in the centres.

All parents were given the opportunity to be more involved in contributing to strategies to overcome barriers by giving their name and contact details at the end of the survey.

Project objective 3

“Parents at the 3 sites feel supported and encouraged to develop active transport habits with their children”

Parents at the centres were given visible and practical support by both their childcare centres and by council and have been given information about and encouraged to develop active transport through:

- The development and distribution of an ‘Active Transport Strategies for parents and Children Fact Sheet’
- Preparation and compilation of an Information Kit for parents at both Bradman Rd and Moore St Child Care Centres, including a TAG for each centre (for the full list of inclusions in the Kit, please see the table for Sutherland Shire)

- A 'Health / Diet / Active Transport Talk' for the parents of Bradman Rd and Moore St Child Care Centres and Globe Preschool
- 'Nutrition and exercise information session for parents' at Bronte Child Care Centre
- Development and distribution of a TAG for Bronte Child Care Centre
- Promotion of a 'Walk to school day' for Bronte Child Care Centre
- On site meeting re bicycle and car parking at Globe Preschool
- Meeting with preschool staff about active transport promotional events at Globe Preschool
- Promotion of a 'Walk to Globe Day' as part of the 'National Walk Safely to School Day'

As previously noted, impact of the above strategies has not been possible within the scope of the project, so it is not possible to say whether parents feels supported and encouraged to develop active transport habits with their children. However the project has attempted to actively support and encourage parents in many ways as outlined above.

Project objective 4

“An increased number of parents and children travel to/from preschool/childcare using active transport modes”

To date, one 'walk to child care day' has been conducted at Bronte Child Care Centre, with 14 families participating. The success of the activity has prompted the Child Care Centre Director to continue the 'walking days' on a bi-monthly basis, which means that the participation rate may increase as a regular 'walking day' becomes part of the Centre's routine. It is to be hoped that current participants will encourage others and that walking may become a more 'mainstream' part of the centres' culture.

A 'walk to child care day' was also organised for Globe Preschool, with 6 staff, 7 parents and 11 children participating. The success of the day has ensured that the 'walk to school' day will be expanded to other childcare centres within Marrickville in the coming years.

However, an increased number of parents and children travelling regularly to/from preschool or childcare using active transport modes has not been able to be demonstrated, due to the fact that the project commenced in the 2006 calendar year, and has been implemented into the 2007 calendar year. The timing over two calendar years has meant that the cohort of children and parents has necessarily changed, with some 4 and 5 year olds moving from preschool and childcare to school. The survey respondents' children in this age group made up a large percentage of the survey: 59% at Globe; 33% at Bradman Rd; 31% at Moore St and 44% at Bronte.

This has meant that a follow up survey of parents would not be valid, due to the large change in cohort of parents and children.

Project objective 5

“Council staff and preschool/childcare centre staff have the opportunity to work in partnership to promote active transport and develop a range of interventions that can be sustained over time”

One of the key outcomes of the project has been the successful development of working relationships between centre staff and council project officers with expertise in active transport. The enthusiastic involvement and support of the centres and the centre staff has been crucial in the undertaking of this project, and conveys an important ongoing message about active transport to parents and children. It is the ongoing encouragement and support the *centre staff* have provided to parents that has been highlighted as a major factor in encouraging active transport.

Specific strategies, which can demonstrate the success of the partnerships, include:

- A ‘Health / Diet / Active Transport Talk’ for the parents of Bradman Rd and Moore St Child Care Centres and Globe Preschool (held at the centres)
- ‘Nutrition and exercise information session for parents’ at Bronte Child Care Centre (held at the centre)
- Promotion of a ‘Walk to school day’ for Bronte Child Care Centre – this activity was considered so successful that the Centre Director will conduct this event every second month
- On site meeting between council, childcare centre director and parent representatives to discuss bicycle and car parking at Globe Preschool
- Meeting between council and preschool staff about active transport promotional events at Globe Preschool
- Promotion of a council and childcare centre ‘Walk to Globe Day’ as part of the ‘National Walk Safely to School Day’

Some activities have been planned to take place outside of the project timetable, again demonstrating the sustained nature of the interventions:

- 10,000 steps pedometer program to be implemented at all centres during May/ June
- Cycling classes for adults and distribution of cycling maps and puncture repair kits for parents at Bradman Rd and Moore St child care centres
- Regular ‘walk to school day’ for Bronte Child Care Centre on a bi-monthly basis
- Bicycle education session for children and parents planned for Bronte. For children, this will take place during childcare time, for parents it will be outside working hours.

There is also the potential to grow some of these activities such as the ‘walk to school days’ to other childcare centres. Councils can now use the experience

gained in this pilot to consider extending 'walk to school days' to other childcare centres within their municipalities, in particular, council sponsored centres. This is the plan for Marrickville Council for the next 'National Walk Safely to School Day' in 2008.

Project objective 6

“Social and community plans, transport and other relevant plans in the three pilot council areas and SSROC councils address active transport needs of children and parents”

This is a long term objective, as social and community plans are only required under legislation every 5 years. The NSW Department of Local Government last required social and community plans to be submitted by the end of 2004, and many other council plans are developed in a similar timeframe. However, some considerable progress has been made. Marrickville Council had made particularly good progress towards this objective:

- The Marrickville Draft Integrated Transport Plan has included a recommendation on active transport to schools and childcare centres
- The Marrickville State of the Environment Report is considering an indicator that would measure the participation numbers in the 'Walk safely to school day'.
- A set of traffic and access management issues relevant to both the Wilkins Public School and Globe Preschool were discussed and written up and submitted to council. They were considered at Marrickville Council's Traffic Committee on 3 April 2007.
- A presentation on the Active Transport Project by the Area Health Service TravelSmart Co-ordinator and the Globe Preschool Director to Marrickville Council's Transport Committee.
- The Transport Planner from Marrickville council has been involved in the transport planning for a new preschool planned for co-location at Marrickville West Primary School.

Sutherland Shire Council's progress towards this objective included:

- The Sutherland Shire Council Triple Bottom Line Management Plan 2006 – 2009 has included the statement: "walking and cycling has links to increasing transport options" and has one of the key achievements as: "complete strategic linking (through footpath construction) of walking destinations"

It is anticipated that further progress and input into relevant council plans by these councils will occur as a result of this project.

3.2 Action Plans and evaluation of individual strategies

Bradman Rd and Moore St CCC Action Plans

Action (Brief description)	When When did this action occur?	Comment Please describe what you did, how it went, who was involved, how many people participated (where relevant), and any reflections or comments you have – positive or negative). Also note whether you used an evaluation form.	Resources involved Please note the resources involved in carrying out this action – i.e. a <i>rough estimate</i> of time spent, and any contributions from Council, SSROC, or other partners
<p>Development of Transport Access Guide (TAG).</p> <p>Tags were created for Bradman Rd and Moore St childcare centres.</p>	<p>December 2006</p>	<p>The development of the TAG was undertaken in house utilising Council's GIS system. It required the manipulation and incorporation of various data layers that included bus routes, land use, traffic / pedestrian infrastructure etc.</p> <p>The TAG was included in the information kit to parents at the childcare centre (see below)</p>	<p>Required one Council officer to develop the TAG. Time spent – approximately 6 hours in total. Approximately \$300 in printing costs. The TAG was printed in house using colour copier.</p>
<p>Preparation and Compiling of an Information Kit for parents at both Bradman Rd and Moore St</p>	<p>November 2006 to January 2007</p>	<p>An information kit was developed for parents that included the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAG for the childcare centre Bus Time Tables and Routes Gym membership opportunities Invitation to participate in cycling course Cycling information from the Cycling Promotion Fund Information regarding a potential activity/health/diet evening talk. 	<p>One Council Officer</p> <p>Time taken equivalent to 6 days.</p>

		<p>Six (6) gyms in the locality of the childcare centres were contacted and offered the opportunity to include brochures etc in the information kit. Of the gyms contacted, 2 responded both including membership offers/specials. One of the respondents was the Sutherland Shire Council's Leisure Centre.</p> <p>The preparation of the kit requires some lead time and time intensive particularly in relation to the availability of information and brochures, printing and assemblage of material etc. However this is likely to decrease as there is greater certainty and continuity in the program over time.</p> <p>It is intended to evaluate via a survey the effectiveness of the project after the various actions have been undertaken – June – July 2007.</p>	
Health /Diet /Active Transport Talk	27 March and 4 April 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged health and diet consultants to present a talk at the childcare centre. The focus of the talks is to inform and educate parents about the importance of improving and or maintaining their health, increasing their physical activity through walking or cycling and complimenting this with an appropriate diet. The talk centres on the parents being a role model for their children. Despite the advertising etc. which included flyers on the doors and flyers distributed to parents up to 2 weeks before the event (with follow up reminder notices) we only had 3 parents at Bradman Rd and 5 for Moore St. Despite these outcomes thus far, I will be pursuing the pedometer challenge and see if this will help to engage parents and change their behaviour with regard to walking. For 	8 to 9 hours staff time – includes preparation and delivery of flyers, liaising with consultants and childcare centre directors and attending talks. Cost approximate \$300 - \$400 for each childcare centre or \$600 to \$800 in total.

		further comments on this activity, see 3.3 A qualitative assessment of the value of the project by the council officers	
Other Actions are being proposed and are indicated in the Action Plan time line submitted		Advertise and seek interest for cycling classes for adults. Distribute cycling maps and puncture repair kits.	May / June 07 Estimated cost \$100 and 5-6 hours work.
		10,000 steps pedometer program or similar – develop with health consultants and pilot program at the centres. 40 to 50 pedometers will be made available to parents to participate in the program. Success would be measured by parents taking up all pedometers and using over the specified time.	May / June 07 Estimate cost \$400 - \$500

Bronte Child Care Centre Action Plan

Action (Brief description)	When When did this action occur?	Comment Please describe what you did, how it went, who was involved, how many people participated (where relevant), and any reflections or comments you have – positive or negative). Also note whether you used an evaluation form.	Resources involved Please note the resources involved in carrying out this action – i.e. a <i>rough estimate</i> of time spent, and any contributions from Council, SSROC, or other partners
Walk to School Day	20 February 2007	<p>The centre director put a notice in the centre newsletter and a poster on the wall to advise families that the centre would be hosting a walk to school day. Families were encouraged to walk for the event.</p> <p>14 of the 40 families that attended the centre that day used walking as their mode of travel to the centre. Everyone who walked appeared to have enjoyed the walk and arrived looking refreshed. Parents who walked were asked to record this on the sign in sheet. An evaluation form was not used for this activity.</p> <p>This event will be an ongoing event conducted every second month.</p>	Centre staff time was required to develop a poster and newsletter article to advise parents of the event.
Nutrition and exercise information session for parents	27 March 2007	<p>An information session was held for parents to inform them of the nutrition and exercise requirements for children, including incorporating active travel. The nutrition message was combined with the active travel message as a means of increasing parent interest in the session. Free childcare was provided during the session.</p> <p>Only five parents attended but all found the session very useful.</p>	Council paid \$150 for the session to be conducted by a consultant and covered the cost of one staff member to provide childcare while the session was on. Council staff time was required to find a presenter, develop a poster and email session details to parents.

		<p>Survey forms were handed out at the end of the session and the feedback was very good.</p> <p>Greater attendance may have been achieved if the session had been advertised further in advance. Also, it was run at 6pm, and this start time would be reconsidered to suit parents with young children better. This session will probably be repeated, but will include invitations to parents at all Council child care centres.</p>	
Development of a Transport Access Guide (TAG)	Completed April 2007	A Transport Access Guide (TAG) has been developed by Sydney Buses for Bronte Child Care Centre and is being handed out to current and prospective parents. This strategy promotes the message to parents that there are active transport alternatives to driving. The TAG could be evaluated in the future to determine whether it has had an impact on modes of travel to the centre.	Design costs were covered by SSROC. Printing costs were covered by Council. Council staff time was required to liaise with designers and edit content of the TAG.
Centre Walkathon	May 2007	Bronte Child Care Centre incorporated the healthy active lifestyle message into a fundraising event by hosting a Walkathon. The Walkathon is held annually as the centre's major fundraising event.	Centre staff time to organise the event.
10,000 steps pedometer walking program		A healthy walking program is being developed for the centre to encourage parents to walk more. Participating parents will be provided with pedometers to monitor their progress with the results promoted at the centre. The success of the strategy will be determined by the participation rates of parents.	15 pedometers were purchased by SSROC and Council at a cost of \$24 each.
Bicycle education session for children and parents		A bicycle education session for children has been booked for later in the year (in order to spread out the activities associated with the project). A cycling coach has been booked to run the activity. A bicycle session for parents will also be held if there is enough interest from parents.	Cost to Council of bicycle coach..

Globe Preschool Action Plan

Action (Brief description)	When When did this action occur?	Comment Please describe what you did, how it went, who was involved, how many people participated (where relevant), and any reflections or comments you have – positive or negative). Also note whether you used an evaluation form.	Resources involved Please note the resources involved in carrying out this action – i.e. a <i>rough estimate</i> of time spent, and any contributions from Council, SSROC, or other partners
On-site meeting re bicycle and car parking	16 March 2007	Met on site with Globe Director and Wilkins P&C representative to determine a suitable location for a bicycle parking rack. Rack is necessary for both preschool and primary school children's bikes – the latter group attending after school hours care at Globe. Car park safety/design issues were also discussed. Some of these issues are being dealt with as part of the Wilkins TravelSmart project.	About 30min spent on site. Funding source for bike rack not known at this stage, but will be sought in 2007.
Meeting with all preschool staff	27 March 2007	Attended a Globe staff meeting at the preschool. Gave a summary of the findings of the survey and asked for ideas about active travel promotional event(s). Suggestion that we convene a morning Walk to Globe Day on Walk Safely to School Day on 4 May 2007 was well received.	About 30min spent with around 10 Globe preschool staff.
General traffic and access management around primary school and preschool site	3 April 2007	A set of traffic and access management issues were discussed by relevant Council staff and Wilkins P&C reps in late 2006 and early 2007 as part of the TravelSmart primary schools project. These issues, relevant to both the school and the preschool, were written up by the Wilkins P&C and school and submitted to Council. They were considered at Council's Traffic Committee on 3 April 2007. Several of these issues will require further consideration.	Time taken for all participants to carry out on-site meetings, for P&C reps to draft submission and for Council's Traffic Committee to consider this item.

Nutrition/Health/Active Transport information Session	April 2007	An information session was held for parents and preschool staff to inform them of the nutrition and exercise requirements for children, including incorporating active transport. 8 parents and 6 staff attended the session.	
Transport Access Guide (TAG)	May 2007	TAG being prepared for Wilkins site as part of school and preschool transport project.	Mainly SSROC staff time, but input will be required from other project participants,.
Walk to Globe Day event	4 May 2007	Held 'Walk to Globe Day' to coincide with Walk Safely to School Day on 4 May 2007. the Globe event provides an opportunity to capitalise on a well established event in partnership with the school. The Group assembled (teachers, parents and preschool children) at nearby Marrickville Park at 8:30am and walked as a group to the preschool. This was followed by a morning tea meeting with preschool and school parents/carers to discuss transport issues. Council, schools and P&C organised and funded catering, giveaways and water/fruit for participants. Participant numbers were 6 staff, 7 parents and 11 children.	About five hours each of three Council staff's time to organise and participate in the event. P&C, parents/carers and school staff time to organise and participate.
Presentation on project to Council's Transport Committee	17 May 2007	Organised for Area Health Service TravelSmart Co-ordinator and preschool Director to attend and present on the schools and preschool project.	About 2hrs of Council staff time and about 1hr of Area Health Service Staff time.
Final feedback sheet to parents/carers.	June 2007	Final feedback sheet to preschool staff and parents/carers outlining actions undertaken to date and progress of each. Future actions will be identified, which will require ongoing action by all participants.	About 4hrs of Council staff time to develop and distribute feedback sheet.

3.3 *A qualitative assessment of the value of the project by the council officers*

There were varying opinions on the value of the project from the practical aspect of the council officers tasked to work with, devise and implement the strategies at each of the centres.

It was felt that overall, the survey and data collection included in the project was very valuable, as it finally confirmed what had been the ‘gut feeling’ or to date merely anecdotal evidence of the council officers, that is, that the bulk of parents can’t shift their transport to more active modes due to the rigid and severely limited time constraints of working parents. Possibilities for intervention and strategies were more likely if there were ‘stay at home’ or part time working parents. In the words of one officer “there’s not a lot you can do with two parents working”. Due to these constraints, one suggestion was that there might be more opportunities in working with preschools than long day care centres, as the short operating hours of preschools (9am to 3pm) are likely to attract parents who are not in the workforce, or who are working part time.

The disconnect between active transport and health was also seen to be widespread, but perhaps more so where the options for active transport were more limited. In the pilot project, these were the childcare centres located further from the city and viable transport options. This disconnect also seemed to be evident from the nutrition specialists from NSW Health, who focussed exclusively on diet and nutrition, and did not cross reference these talks with physical activity or active transport.

It was felt that it was difficult working with childcare centre parents, who generally felt it was too difficult to walk with young children. It is easier to put children in a car. Parents generally want to ‘do the right thing’, but it was seen as being “just too difficult”.

It was felt that unless the child care centre itself, and its staff took a position on sustainable transport, then the strategies would not have much impact. The childcare centre staff were seen to be crucial in the implementation of any strategies and in the encouragement of parents.

One of the key successes and highlights of the project was the relationships that were established between childcare centre staff and council officers with skills in active transport strategy development. The project has taken advantage of the multi-disciplinary and multi-functional nature of local government; that the breadth of services and programs provided includes childcare and transport planners. The project has effectively built relationships and partnerships across each organization. It has produced awareness and behaviour change across the participating councils, between sections of the same organization which normally would not come into contact with each other. Often, ‘outposts’ of councils, such as childcare centres feel isolated, and projects such as this one make them feel part of the same organization. It also fosters a practical relationship of knowing who to contact if they have a transport issue.

While the impact on active transport options in the short term was seen to be small, the possible multiplier effects for both parents and children was seen to be positive. Some council officers felt that there were opportunities to roll out strategies to other centres in their area, particularly preschools, with the information and experience gained from the current pilot projects.

In Marrickville, it was felt that 'active transport' could be rolled out in the first instance to primary schools, followed by other preschools and child care centres, and lastly to TAFE and high schools. The growth in the 'walk to school days' was already being monitored, and it was felt that this had a big potential to grow within the next 5 to 10 years. Hopefully a positive walking experience will encourage more walking on a regular basis, and not just on 'walk to school days'.

The child care centres in the outer lying suburbs faced bigger transport problems, and longer transport distances and in these centres the disconnect between active transport and exercise was the greatest. Exercise was seen to be completely different and not at all associated with transport. In these centres, parents were more interested in the health issues associated with diet, and lifestyle issues such as spending time with the family. They wanted individual advice on diet and transport was not an issue to be considered. In these cases, it was felt that the project was hard to justify as an 'active transport project', but rather as a health and diet project, in which case it would be hard to justify council being involved in a future project, or a continuation of the activities.

Although the sample size was small from Bradman Rd and Moore St Child Care Centres, and comments made here under by the project officer are generalised and may not be truly representative, it was felt that the project results have raised a number of issues and outcomes that are worth considering or noting:

- The parents that attended the Health/Diet/Active Transport seminars were generally fit and healthy – inactive / overweight parents that may have benefited from the seminar did not attend. This may require longer-term educational strategies to be considered to address behavioural change.
- Despite an emphasis on active transport (i.e substituting car use by walking and cycling etc) in the seminars the main area of interest from parents was diet and what is appropriate for their children / family
- Parents generally appreciated the need to incorporate greater physical mobility in their lives but again this was not a high priority - but this may be due to the health and fitness of parents that attended
- The parents sought information on broader health issues - again more diet focused
- It would appear that transport is only a small component of a much bigger health and lifestyle issue in the eyes of parents with children going to childcare.
- The bigger question then is that in areas such as the Sutherland Shire how do you engage those parents that really need to change what they are doing? I would hazard a guess in saying that the solution to this would appear to be the application of broader health strategies that for example combat the growth in obesity etc in the community. Overcoming the behavioural aspects will rely on a much more intense, large scale, personalised / educational (perhaps even

door to door approach) but resource hungry methodology as used in behavioural change initiatives such as Travel Smart.

- It would be very difficult to justify ongoing funding for this type of project in the future if the health and diet focus and general lack of interest / participation of parents were to be a main outcome of the project (rather than transport change). Without strong transport / modal change outcomes Council would argue that the project is more of a health issue and therefore needs be addressed accordingly. With a strong health rather than transport outcome this type of project would need to be funded and resourced by relevant State Govt Departments of Health. It would be very difficult for Council to justify funding and resourcing a non core activity such as this.

However, this knowledge did result in the council officer providing other materials, more suitable for the particular situation parents faced in terms of becoming active and taking part in exercise, such as the gym membership opportunities, which included membership offers/specials. It is not known how many of these were taken up.

It was also felt that the ‘target group’, being those parents or children who are inactive, or showing signs of obesity, were not necessarily the parents who responded either to the survey or to the strategies themselves.

The project often used (necessarily, due to time and budget constraints) a ‘blanket approach’ to strategies when the individual circumstances of each family are so different, and almost required a tailored approach to increase active transport.

The pilot project found that particularly at one centre, the interlinkages between road safety issues, car parks and drop off zones around childcare centres and active transport and travel modes were an important issue for parents. Traffic and parking around centre based care issues are escalating, and these must be factored into any projects in the future. These issues are also affecting schools, and are broader than the scope of this project, but this pilot project has found that they must be considered in order to make an impact on transport modes. Indeed, the Roads and Traffic Authority have recently introduced more stringent fines and some new traffic rules to address this issue. But further work needs to be undertaken on road safety issues around car parks and drop off zones at centre based care and schools by NSW Health, and the Roads and Traffic Authority and council traffic committees

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The demonstrated successes from such a short pilot project is both impressive and encouraging. The parent surveys informed a range of interventions and strategies implemented at each of the childcare centres. Council and centre staff worked in partnership to tailor strategies to the individual centres and the situations faced by families within those centres. While the impact on active transport from the pilot project has been small in terms of numbers that can be demonstrated at this stage, this is due to the implementation phase of the project having lasted less than 4 months, and due to the fact that the issues around changes in travel and transport are extremely complex.

As the parent survey identified, for most parents, travel to childcare is not a self-contained journey, for which they can choose a particular mode of travel. The choice of travel mode will be determined by multiple requirements of that whole journey, not just the part between home and the childcare centre. Choice is also determined by time constraints and limited transport options, especially in the outer suburbs of Sydney.

The project aimed to shift the balance from no active transport trips to childcare, to include **some** active transport trips, even if this was one trip per month, or even one per year, as in the 'National Walk Safely to School Day'.

All families at all centres have had various forms of information and communication concerning active transport. Of these, 129 families, or 38% of all the families attending the four childcare centres responded to the parent survey, giving parents an opportunity to consider their transport options and alternatives. The long-term impact of this information could best be studied perhaps through a 'phase two' of the pilot project.

The experience, skills and knowledge gained within the participating councils by this pilot project will be transferred to other councils. This will be undertaken through the availability of the various project documents, such as the Literature Review, the parent survey: *Travel to Childcare. A study of parents' and children's travel to four Sydney childcare centres*, through this evaluation report and through the development of a 'council resource', which will summarise the pilot project and provide the resources and case studies for easy replication at other councils.

While recommendations were not originally envisaged as an outcome of the project, the project steering group decided that it would be useful to include these recommendations, so as to clarify the findings of the pilot project.

Long term implementation and evaluation

RECOMMENDATION 1: That funding is made available from the Local Government and Shires Associations' (LGSA) Healthy Local Government Grants Program for a period of at least 2 calendar years to undertake a longer implementation phase and impact evaluation with the participating childcare centres.

The possibility of expansion on the pilot program and the proposed and implemented strategies, or realisation of the impacts is long term, and therefore outside the scope of this short, time limited project.

For real impact evaluation, a long-term study of parents (2 years or longer) and their travel behaviours and changes is required.

Walk to childcare days

RECOMMENDATION 2: That SSROC councils are asked to consider expanding 'National Walk Safely to School Day' to preschool aged children in council sponsored centre-based care.

The 'walk to childcare days' held to date as part of the pilot project have been a success, with this now becoming a bi-monthly event at Bronte Child Care Centre. As 'walk to school days' are already prevalent in the community, the expansion of this event to preschool aged children in centre based care may not be as difficult as expected, and may lead to more regular walking routines.

Nutrition and diet

RECOMMENDATION 3: That NSW Health engage parents of preschool aged children through centre based care on nutrition, diet and active transport.

As part of the pilot project, parents in all four childcare centres requested information on nutrition, diet and health. While information sessions were organised as part of this project, it is outside the usual scope of councils to undertake this type of work, and more appropriately organised by NSW Health, who have nutritionists who could undertake this work.

Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION 4: That council officers review the learnings from this pilot project to build relationships and partnerships with centre staff in council operated childcare centres.

The working relationships and partnerships developed between childcare centre staff and council officers with expertise in active transport have been one of the highlights of the project. It has provided an extra resource for childcare centre staff, and new opportunities to expand active transport to the preschool age centre based sector.

Impact on council decision making processes

The project has started to make an impact on some council plans, policies and reports, and through council decision-making processes such as traffic and transport planning committees. It is important that councils recognise the importance of transport planning, and thinking holistically and strategically about the transport needs of trip destinations such as centre based childcare. Where the views of parents or the community are sought or offered to decision-making committees, it is important that the community or parent groups feel that their input has at least been given some weight and is adequately considered, even if some of their views are not finally adopted.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That council committees such as traffic and transport committees adequately consider the views and input made by the community on pedestrian, cycling issues and road safety issues.

5. Bibliography

University of Technology Sydney Institute for Sustainable Futures, *Active transport strategies for childcare centres. Review of related projects*, June 2006

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