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WA News Education

WA Primary school students lead the charge as numbers of kids riding or walking to school increases

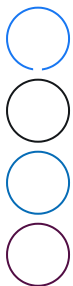


Jessica Evensen The West Australian
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 Studies are showing a decline of children walking to school. Pictured are Hugo (6) and Adeline (4) Bardolf-Smith in Claremont. Credit: Justin Benson-Cooper/The Sunday Times



Primary school students are leading the charge in reviving the trend of walking or riding to school, but experts say better infrastructure is needed to get more kids out of cars.

Active transport – walking, riding or scootering to school – was up 10 per cent in 2024 and by 12 per cent for primary-aged kids, the latest Department of Transport figures show.


A separate department study found up to 40 per cent of children walked to school weekly, with 64 per cent living within 2km of school.

Mt Claremont Primary mother Emma Tomczak and her husband bought their home because of its proximity to public transport and the local school. They often walk or cycle their four-year-old daughter, Maeve, to kindergarten, just 10 minutes way.

“We were first-homebuyers, so we stretched ourselves to get a smaller house in a better area which was more connected to public transport and had parks and everything,” she said.

“We have the farmers markets at Mt Claremont Primary School, so our daughter was already familiar with the route to school because we would walk to the markets on the weekends.



 Pictured are Cameron Tozer (9), Emma Tomczak, Maeve Tomczak (5), Katherine Bardolf-Smith, Hugo Bardolf-Smith (6), Adeline Bardolf-Smith (4), Liv Tozer, Genevieve Tozer (5), Jocelyn Tozer (7) and Nathan Tozer (4) in Claremont. Credit: Justin Benson-Cooper/The Sunday Times

“It was a really easy transition when she started kindy, because she was quite familiar with walking to the markets, so to be like, ‘OK, we’re going to school’, it’s like we’re going to the markets.”

Ms Tomczak said she was looking at organising a walking bus – a communal walk, stopping at houses to “pick up” classmates on the way to school.

“In the 10-minute walk that we take to get to the school, there’s at least 10 other houses on that road,” she said.


“If you had one or two parents doing that commuting, then the rest of the parents get at least 20 minutes or half an hour back in their day, and the kids get to form relationships with kids of other ages, as well as foster some independence themselves.”

Mt Claremont Primary School mother Liv Tozer said she and her kids walked to school rain, hail or shine.

“We ride or walk to school every day, even if it’s raining,” she said. “From day one, we’ve taught them road safety and now to navigate the road safely.

“We go up and down the same road every single day, so hopefully they can do it by themselves one day.”



 Pictured are Genevieve (5) and Cameron (9) Tozer in Claremont. Credit: Justin Benson-Cooper/The Sunday Times

But Kids Research Institute child health analytics head and Curtin University distinguished professor Peter Gething – who led a 2024 research study into the decline of children walking or riding to primary school – said many families were still reliant on cars, and described active transport to and from school as “one of city’s greatest untapped opportunities”.

He said active transport numbers remained low due to a number of factors like time, distance and safety.

“Car ownership has increased significantly; families today are more likely to own two or more motor vehicles than they were in the past,” he told The Sunday Times.

“Simultaneously, we see higher workforce participation from parents, which can create tighter time constraints for drop-offs and pick-ups. In many cases, the distance between home and school has increased, making active travel feel less feasible.”

Professor Gething said school-aged children had shown an interest in cycling, but said barriers like busy roads and poor infrastructure meant numbers were still low.



 Pictured are Cameron Tozer (9), Adeline Bardolf-Smith (4), Hugo Bardolf-Smith (6), Maeve Tomczak (5), Genevieve Tozer (5), Nathan Tozer (4) and Jocelyn Tozer (7) in Claremont. Credit: Justin Benson-Cooper/The Sunday Times

He emphasised the need for high-quality infrastructure like shaded pathways, cycle paths and raised crossings, and said investing in these facilities showed a “visible commitment to our children’s health and the vibrancy of our communities”.

“When we invest in protected cycle lanes and raised crossings, we aren’t just building physical structures; we are creating stress-free corridors,” he said.

The West Australian Local Government Association has since asked the State Government for \$4 million in funding to build better active transport infrastructure, like footpaths and cycle paths.

WALGA president Karen Chappel reiterated the need for safer pedestrian infrastructure around school catchments.

“Footpaths have got to be safe and there’s got to be shared paths,” she said. “There needs to be correct signage (so) everybody clearly understands that this is a cycle way or clearly understands there’s a footpath or crosswalk.”

A DOT spokesperson said the State Government was committed to improving walking and cycling infrastructure, adding it had already invested over \$1.4m into the Connecting Schools Grant, helping 55 schools install bicycle and scooter racks last year.



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