

*Exploring Adolescent Walking  
School Bus Graduates' Attitudes  
and Practices regarding Walking  
and Driving*

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## Context - Auckland 4<sup>th</sup> = Mercer Qual of Living Survey



- But ...a highly auto-dominant city
- 40% traffic education-related (ARTA, 2007)
- Children .. *'bubble-wrap generation'...*  
*'pampered prisoners'*



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## The walking school bus intervention



**Smiling Faces, Happy Feet**

**WALKING SCHOOL BUS**

Buses begin at:



www.SafeRoutesPortland.org

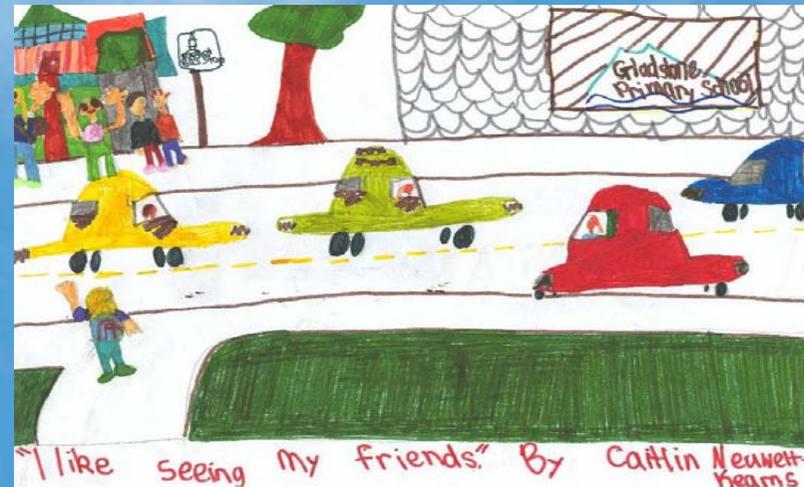
## The walking school bus

- Groups of primary school children walking to & from school under adult supervision
- a set route ('stops' where 'passengers' may embark/disembark)
- adults guiding the bus maintaining discipline & being alert for potential hazards



## The net effect....

- *By offering a safe & reliable alternative to car travel, the WSB can (re)legitimate & endorse walking by children (& others)*



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# Walking School Buses in Auckland, 10 years on....

- Q: Are WSBs a sustainable contribution to neighbourhood health & wellbeing?
- A: Yes, sustainable in terms of endurance of the intervention, but what of behavioural change?

Funded by:



## Key question:

- Is some acculturated 'residue' of WSB experience discernable among teenage 'graduates' ?



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## Underlying contention: Young people need a voice in travel research!

- They are often not taken seriously because they are: ...
- *Part of a larger unit* (subsumption)
- *Perceived as unsophisticated, thus poor 'respondents'* (inadequacy)
- *Who we all once were* (presumption)
- *Without political clout*  
(to be seen, not heard)



## Method

- Ethics approval
- Recruitment via assistance of past parent coordinators who contacted known ex-WSB participants
- Those indicating interest & obtaining parental consent had contact details passed onto the researcher.
- Mutually agreeable time & place for an interview arranged.



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## Method

- Most interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis (4 conducted in pairs - as friends or siblings)
- Schedule of 20 questions was loosely followed
- Interviews – c. 20 minutes in duration (audio-taped)
- Majority (14) took place in family homes. Others in cafes(2), friends houses (2), parental workplaces (2).

## Sample

- 9 boys & 11 girls
- Mt Eden,  
Westmere &  
Rothsay Bay  
– (all Decile 10)
- Average age:  
13.9 years  
(range: 12 – 16)



## Analysis

- Audiotapes transcribed (200 pages of data).
- Participants given pseudonyms to protect identities
- Two researchers independently closely read the narratives - identifying emergent themes.
- Through triangulation, agreement reached on the main themes

## FINDINGS

- Indicative narratives illustrating emergent themes....



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# 1. Parental influence on walking attitudes & behaviour

- *“before I thought it was kind of un-cool to walk with my parents, they’d walk with me, but WSB gave us an opportunity to walk with our friends when we weren’t really old enough to walk by ourselves...in a safe environment”. (Ben)*



## 2. WSBs as enhancing development of independence

- *"I think cos we started when we were, like, quite young I think there will always be ... underlying habits of walking. It um enables you to become more independent...and when you're older it sort of leads you onto different things so the people that get driven everywhere when they're younger that's something that they just think is normal"* (Kelly)



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### 3. 'Graduation' inevitable

- *it was too slow...yea they'd have to wait for like 10 minutes at every road and stuff (Charles)*
- *It was alright when you were younger but then when you...started getting to like Year 5 and 6 it like was embarrassing (Andrea)*
- *I remember one time I got called to the principal's office...um cos like we were, me and my friend we were in front of the leaders...yea I was told off for that... I was pretty...pretty scared (Matthew)*



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## 4. Walking behaviour persists

- *"...it kind of just makes you feel good like if you're first thing in the morning walking to school you just wake up and stuff...cause you've kind of been out in the fresh air and you've had a little like stretch of your legs and you haven't just got straight out of bed and got in the car and to the front of school and so..."(Joanna)*



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## 5. Parentals give 'license' to walk

- *"it's like now like after school I just like say, I'll just text my mum or like walk off to like a park or something". (Charles)*



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- *“I don't think my parents would let me walk anywhere if I didn't...have a phone 'cos they like to know where I am” . (& I can) “pretend you're on the phone...(if) you see a dodgy person walking past” (Elizabeth)*



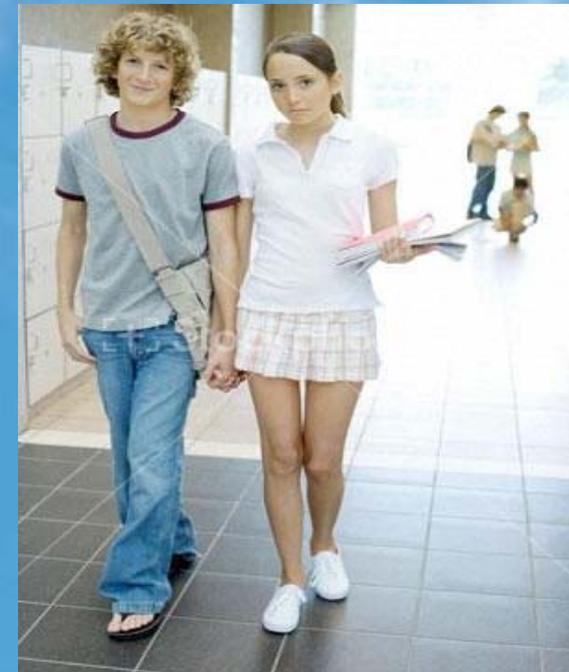
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## 6. Walking allows unstructured space & time between home and school

- *“yea I think we just needed a new motive to walk” (Anna)*
- *“... like when I was walking with some friends we'd take like 45 minutes to walk like 2 kms” (Charles)*



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## (the spaces between home & school are..)

- Characterised by youth-centred social relations & a sense of place characterised by comfort rather than constraint  
(*'Cool Places'* Skelton & Valentine's 1998)



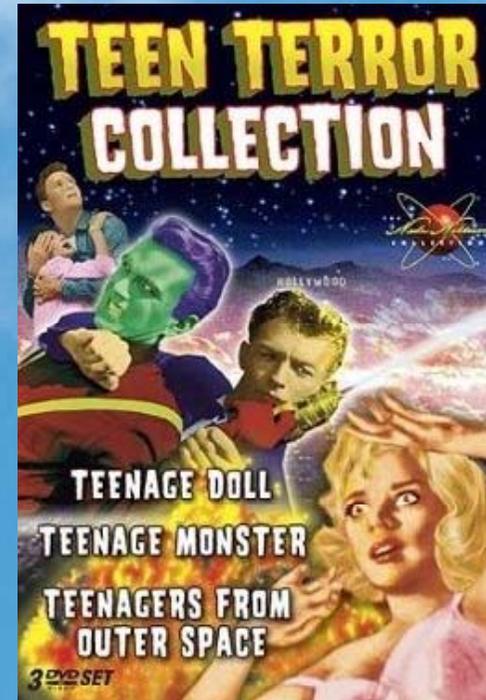
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## A link to findings from another recent study

- “Anywhere you can talk about how you feel is better, then you can relax” (Melissa)
- Coleman et al (2010)  
*Young people’s experiences of sexual health messages.* NZ Geographer



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## 7. Driving aspirations

- *“I don't really have any interest in driving ...I don't want all that responsibility but I guess um when I'm maybe like 17 I'll get my license”  
(Anna)*



## Conclusion

Some looked back disdainfully on disciplinary aspects

- Growing desire for independence -- often found expression in cycling...



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- ...then was replaced by a return to walking at high school (allows time & space – alone or with friends – away from parental surveillance).
- Could this be 'marketed'?
- Importance of parents resisting unnecessary chauffeuring beyond primary school



## Where are the dollars & sense?

- Parental licence for adolescents to walk saves dollars in petrol, roads-maintenance & carbon footprint & makes sense for physical activity, social relationships, & environmental awareness
- Investment in walking with the young pays dividends in later willingness/ commitment to walk & postponement of urban driving among the young

## Conclusion

Limitations – no 'control' group..but..

*We take young people's talk seriously*

Most identified ways WSBs had influenced their current willingness to walk or reluctance to rush into driving.



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## Walking is built on willingness & good design!

A need to offer adolescents freedom to express the traces of internalised childhood walking practice...& advocate facilitative urban design .



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