

The importance of children's mobility

Roger Mackett

Centre for Transport Studies

University College London



Children's mobility – what's the issue?

Like adults, children need to be mobile to reach various opportunities in life. But:

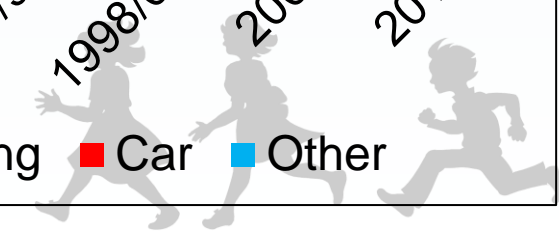
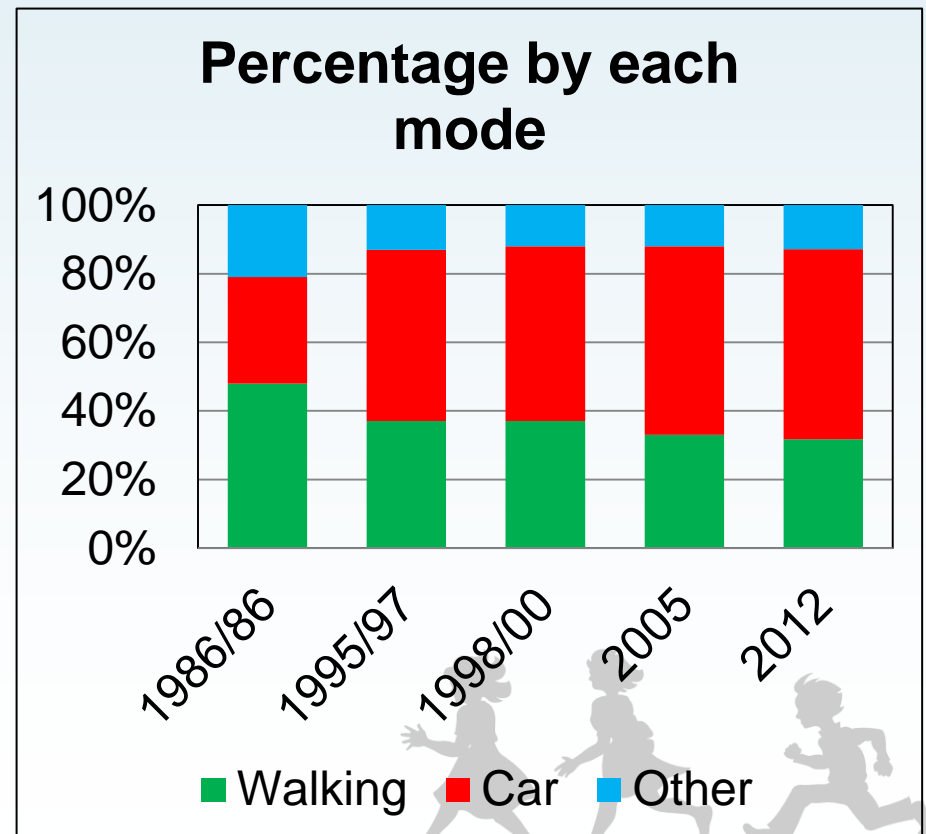
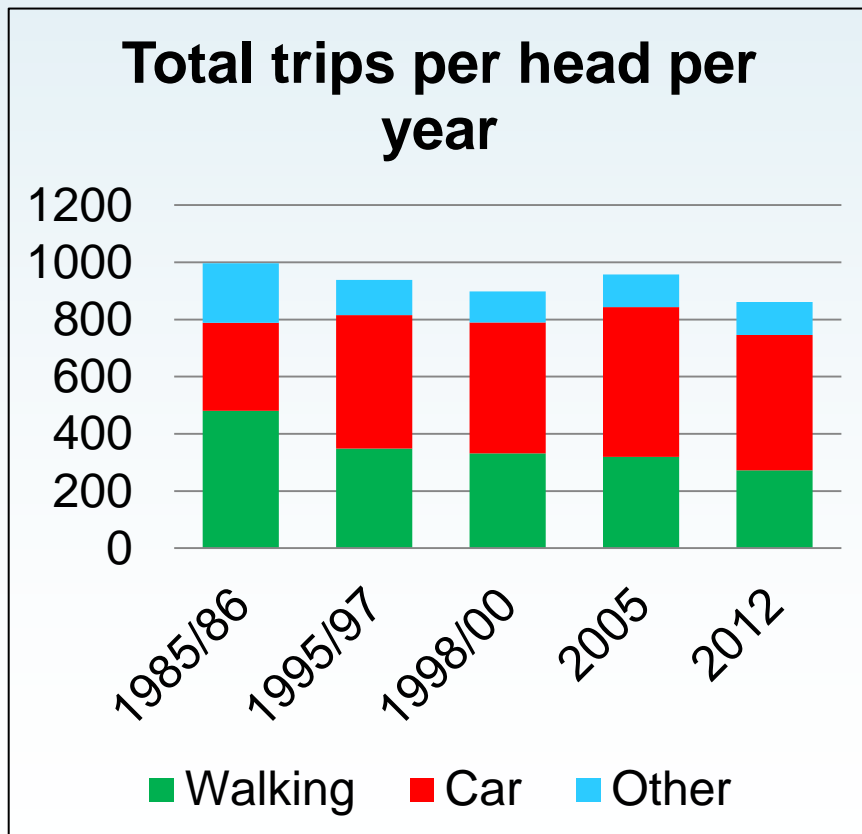
- They are **smaller and weaker** than adults and so cannot walk as far or fast and are more vulnerable to outside forces such as cars and threatening adults
- They are **developing physically and mentally**, so their capabilities change over time. They need to learn how to take decisions
- They do not have **legal autonomy** and are dependent on adults for welfare and protection

Society needs to balance the protection of children against letting them develop the independence that they will need in later life.



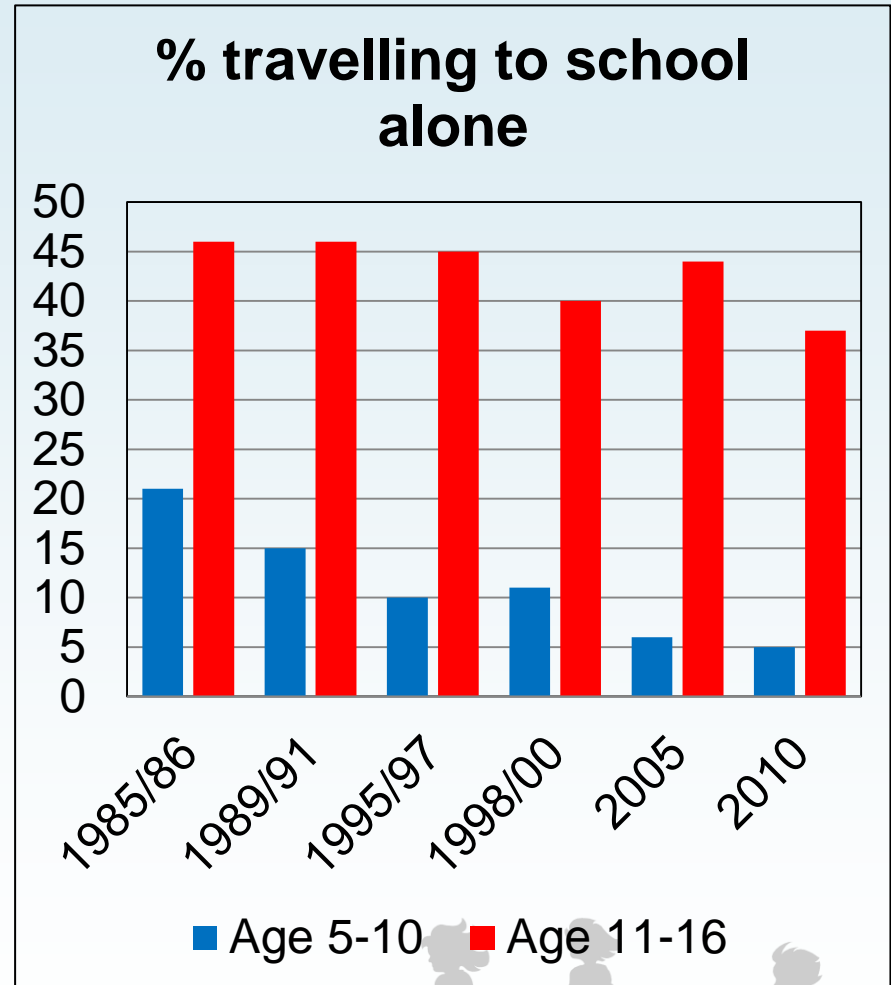
Walking and car use by children under 17 in Great Britain

Children are walking less than they used to, mainly because they are using the car more



Fewer children are going out alone in Britain

- Fewer children are allowed out without an adult than in the past
- The graph shows the decrease in the numbers travelling to school alone
- This may reflect changes in parental attitudes, but also reflects the growth in children's car use



Why does the decline in walking by children matter?

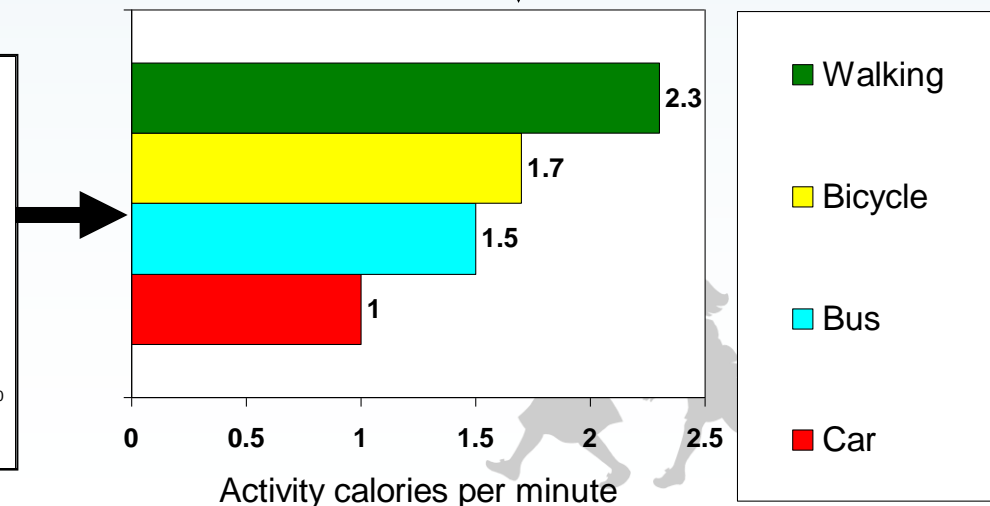
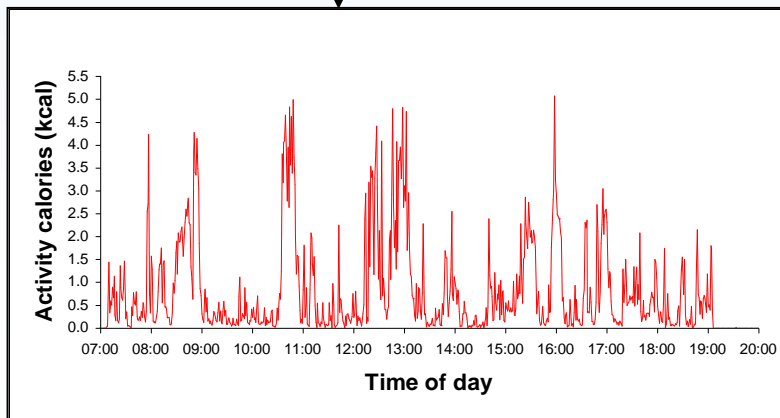
- Reduction in **physical activity** – contributing to various long-term **health** conditions and obesity
- Less opportunity to interact with the **local environment** learning **decision-making skills**
- Less opportunity for **developing social networks**
- There is evidence that physical activity by children can influence **examination performance**
- **But** – there are **risks** (and perceived risks) that may affect parental attitudes and behaviour



Walking is the most active form of travel for children

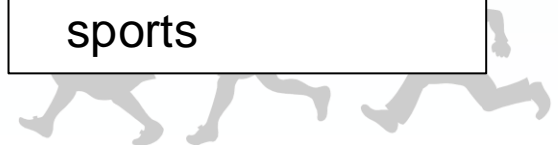
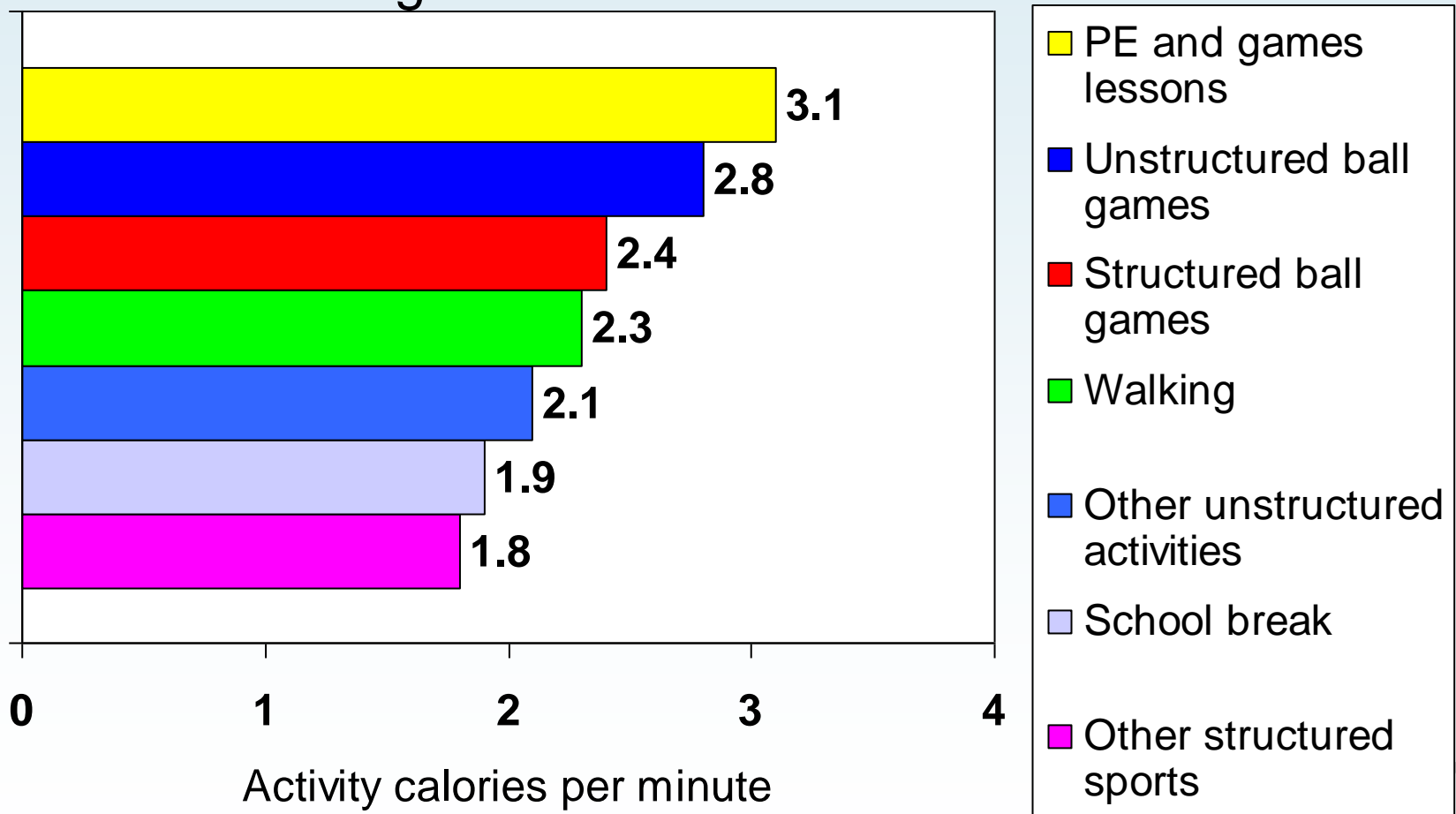


Location		What did you do there?
I began the day at Home <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhere else <input type="checkbox"/> Please say where	I woke up at : : : :	
	I put my sensors on at : : : :	I left at : : : :
Then I went to	I got there at : : : :	
	I travelled by I travelled: <input type="checkbox"/> by myself <input type="checkbox"/> with an adult <input type="checkbox"/> with other children	I left at : : : :
Then I went to	I got there at : : : :	
	I travelled by I travelled: <input type="checkbox"/> by myself <input type="checkbox"/> with an adult <input type="checkbox"/> with other children	I left at : : : :



Walking is one of the best forms of physical activity for children

The most energetic activities for children:



The perceived risks of children's mobility

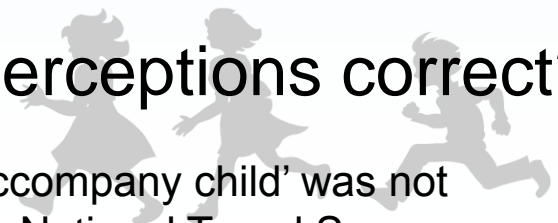
Why parents say they accompany their children aged 7-13 to school in GB (%)

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
Traffic danger	52	49	52	50	44
Fear of assault/molestation	31	29	27	32	29
Convenient to accompany child	..	31	29	32	29
School too far away	44	38	37	32	24
Child might not arrive on time	11	13	12	14	13
Child might get lost	16	14	16	18	12
Fear of bullying	12	11	12	12	8
Other	25	17	17	12	14

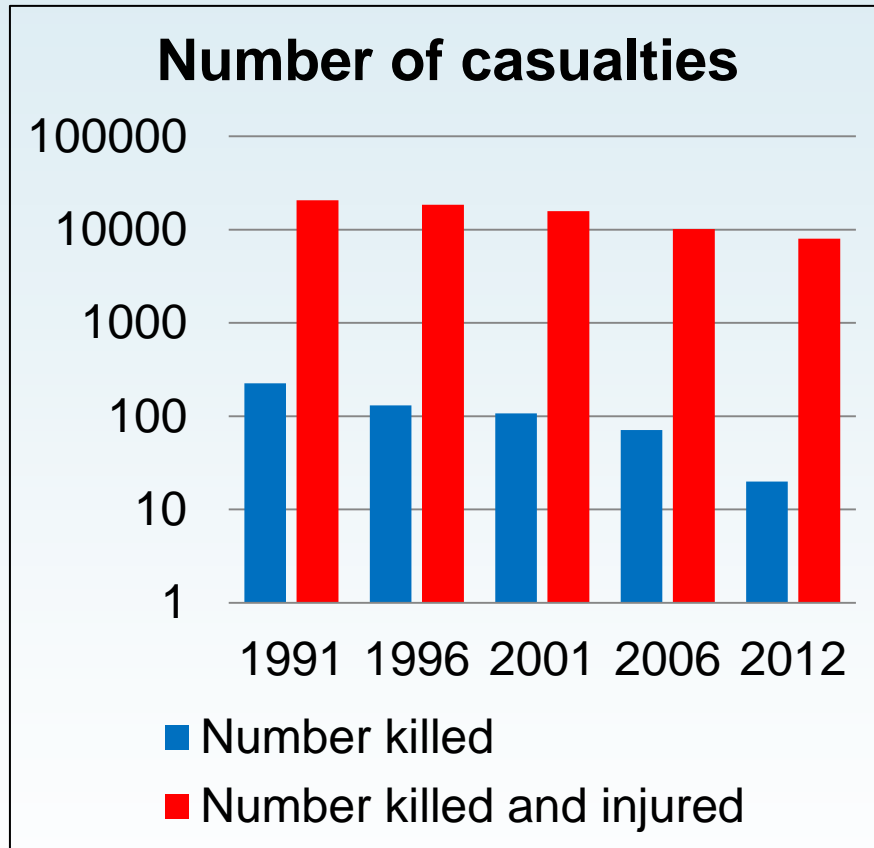
Are these the real reasons, and are the perceptions correct?

Note: Parents could give more than one reason; 'Convenient to accompany child' was not an option before 2005

Source: National Travel Survey



Pedestrian casualties for children under 16 in GB



The risk is decreasing but the volume of traffic is higher than in the past and this may influence perceptions of the risks



Fear of assault/molestation – ‘stranger danger’

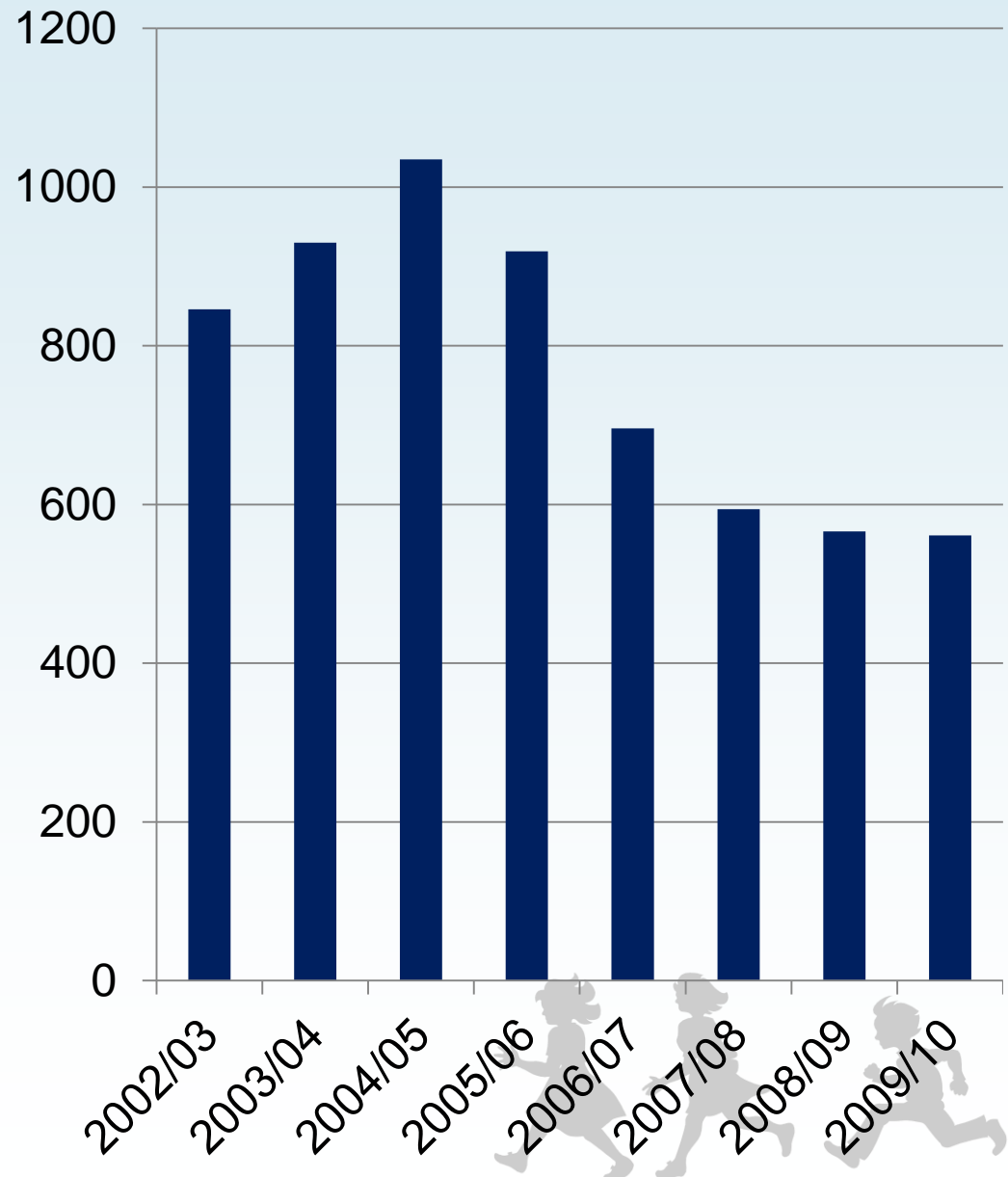
- Disproportionate coverage of cases in the newspapers in Great Britain
- When there is a high profile case it is likely to influence attitudes to letting children out without an adult
- Note – assaults on teenage boys by gangs in are relatively common in large cities in Great Britain



Child abductions in Great Britain

The figures look quite high but:

- The figures include attempts that failed.
- The 2002/03 figures have been analysed in depth: only 68 (9%) were actual abductions by strangers. Of these only 12 had a 'clear sexual motive'.

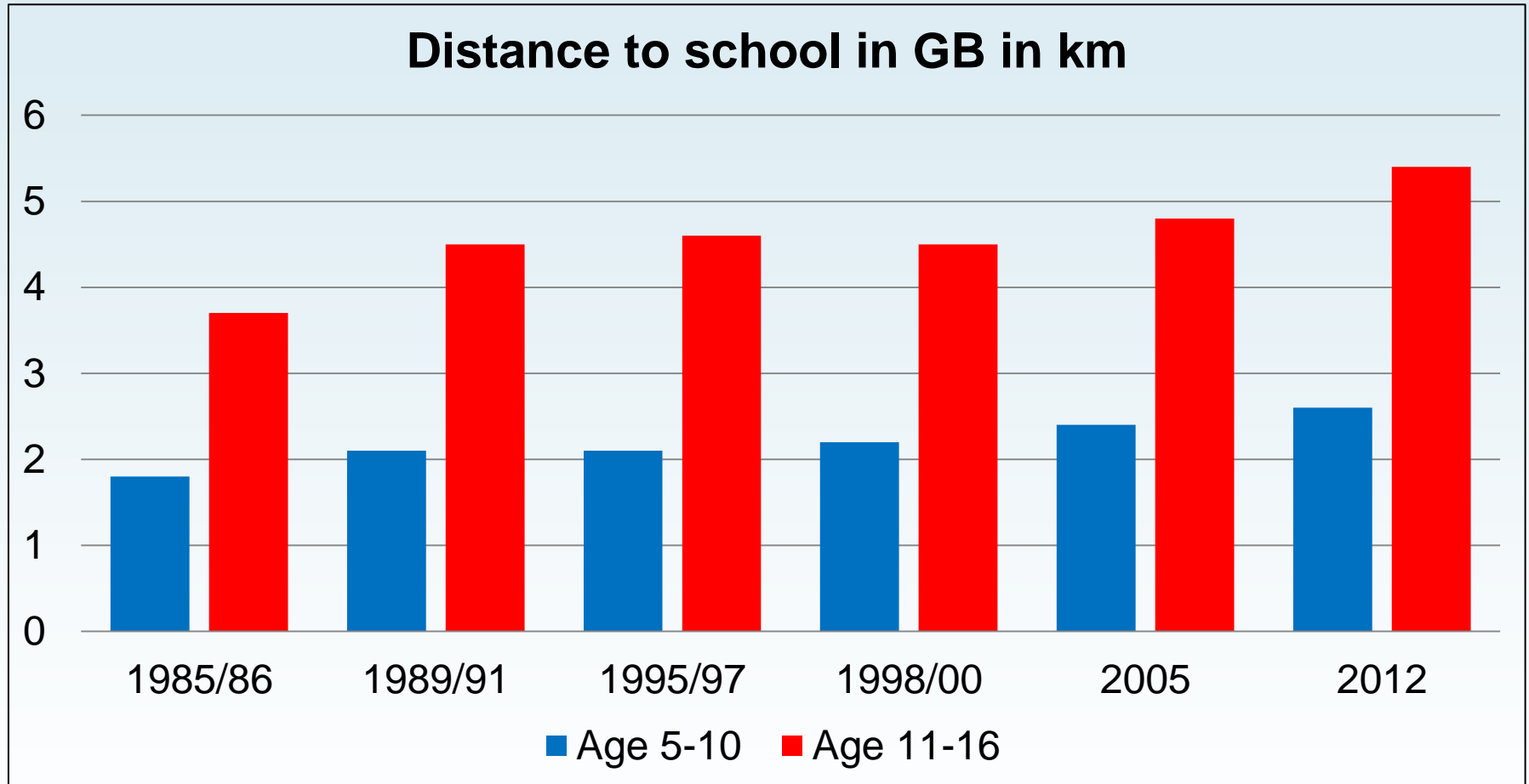


The convenience of the car – how cars are used to take children to or from school in GB

	To school	From school
Part of a journey to or from work	50	35
Combined with another school/nursery trip	8	10
Combined with a trip to or from somewhere else	10	10
School journey sole purpose of trip	32	44
Total	100	100



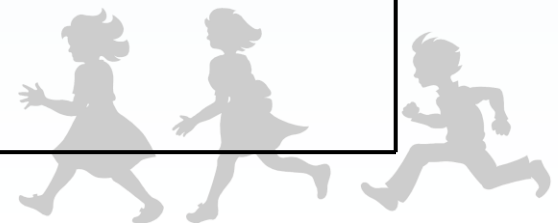
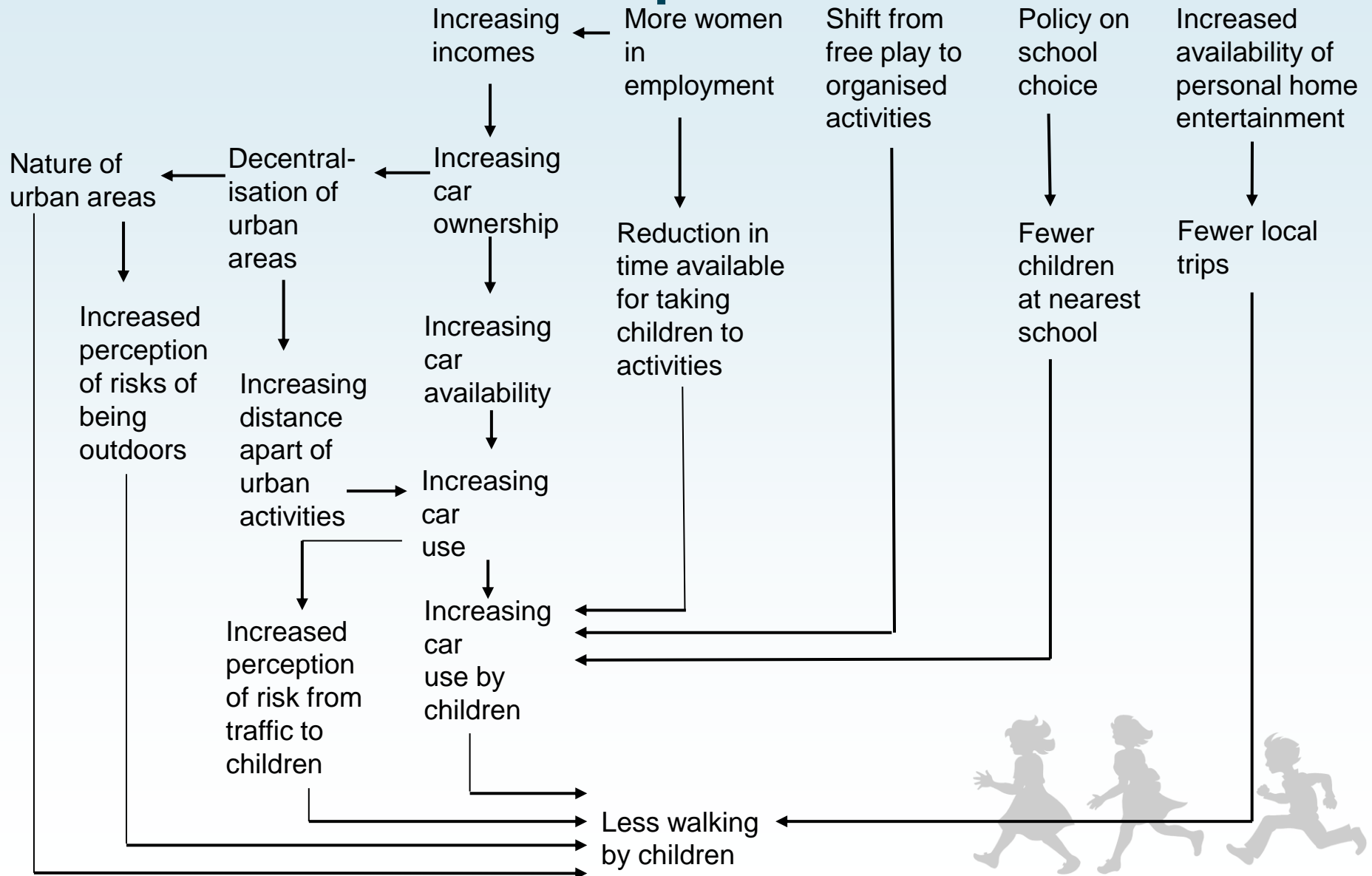
Distances to school are increasing in GB



The growth is related to both policy on school admissions and increasing car use



Modern life – it's complicated



Increasing children's independent mobility (in Great Britain)

- Make the local environment safer for walking, cycling and playing by children
- Introduce initiatives to encourage children to walk more, evaluate the schemes and disseminate the findings
- Increase emphasis on closeness of school to home in the school selection process
- Discourage the use of 'No playing' signs
- Increase awareness of the long-term health implications of inactivity in childhood



Further information

E-mail: r.mackett@ucl.ac.uk

Phone: 020 7679 1554

