



FHWA NHTS

BRIEF

About the NHTS

Conducted periodically since 1969 by the Federal Highway Administration, the NHTS collects travel data from a sample of U.S. households. The information is used to understand trends in the Nation's trip-making and miles of travel by mode, purpose, and time-of-day for use in policy, planning, and safety.

Data are collected for household members for each day of the year, yielding a rich demographic profile linked to daily travel and vehicle characteristics.

For more information:

<http://nhts.ornl.gov>



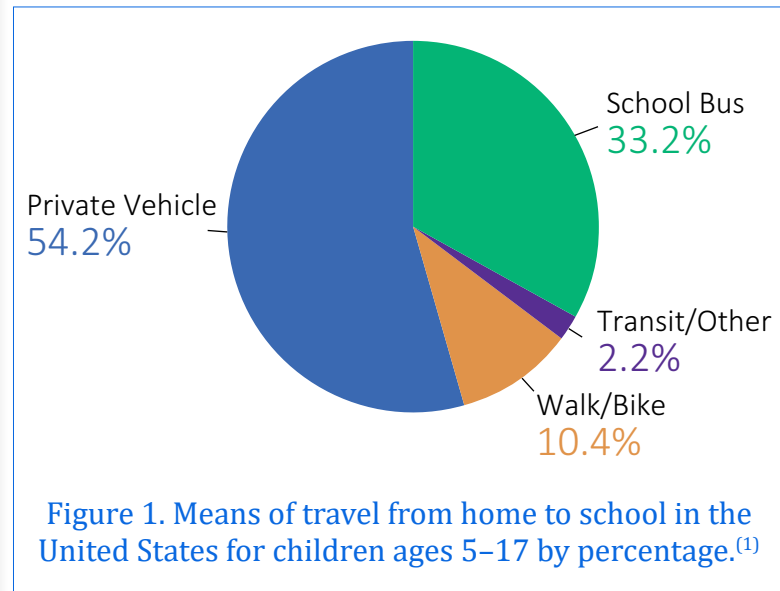
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

CHILDREN'S TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

2017 National Household Travel Survey

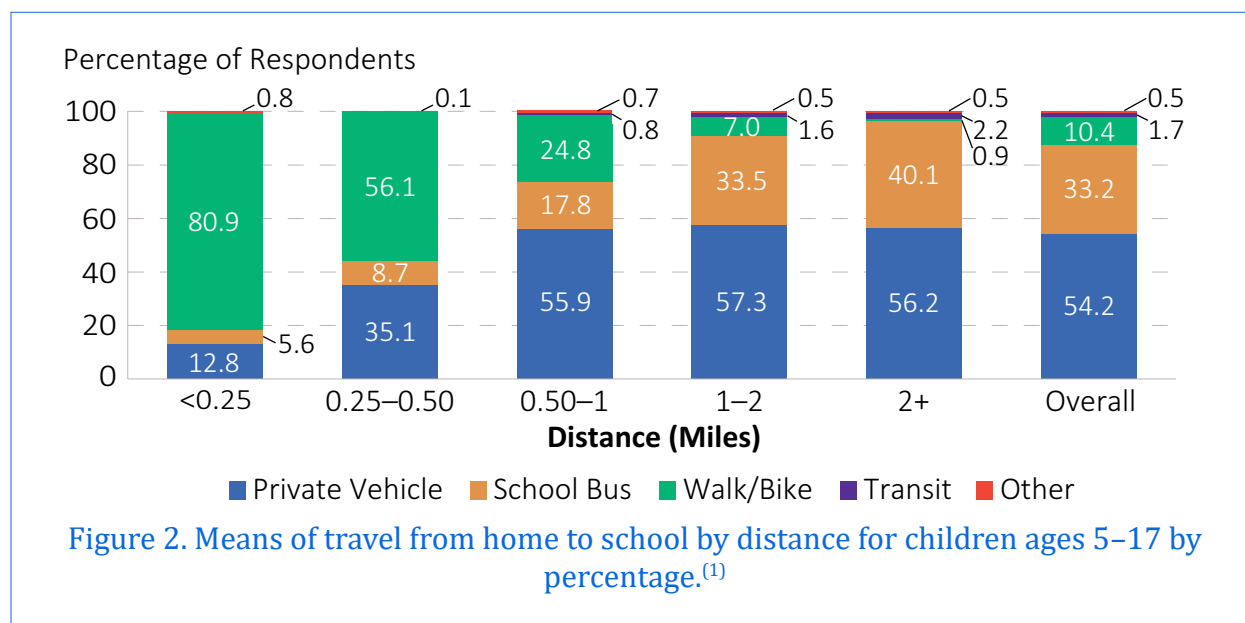
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The purpose of this brief is to explore how children (ages 5–17) travel to school in the United States. The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) obtains data on children's usual travel to school in support of policies and plans to encourage more children to walk and bike to school as well as to help local planners make those trips safer. According to the 2017 NHTS, the most recent in the series, over 50 million children traveled to school—54.2% were usually driven in a private vehicle, 33.2% took a school bus, and 10.4% walked, as shown in figure 1.⁽¹⁾



The way that children travel to school varies considerably depending on the distance between their homes and schools (see figure 2). For example, according to 2017 NHTS data, 80.9% of children who live very close to school (i.e., a quarter mile or less) walk

on a usual school day. On the other hand, less than 1% of children who live 2 miles or more away from school walk on a typical day.⁽¹⁾



There is some day-to-day variation in the way children travel to school. The 2017 NHTS asked about each child’s usual method used to travel to school and obtained details about all household members’ travel on a single reporting day. As shown in table 1, children who usually arrived at school in a private vehicle were most likely to do so on their travel day. Specifically, 96.1% of children who were usually driven to school reported being driven to school on their assigned travel day. In addition, 89.4% of children who usually took the school bus did so on their travel day, along with 88.6% of children who usually walked or biked. For transit users, 82.8% of children who usually used transit to get to school did so on the travel day.

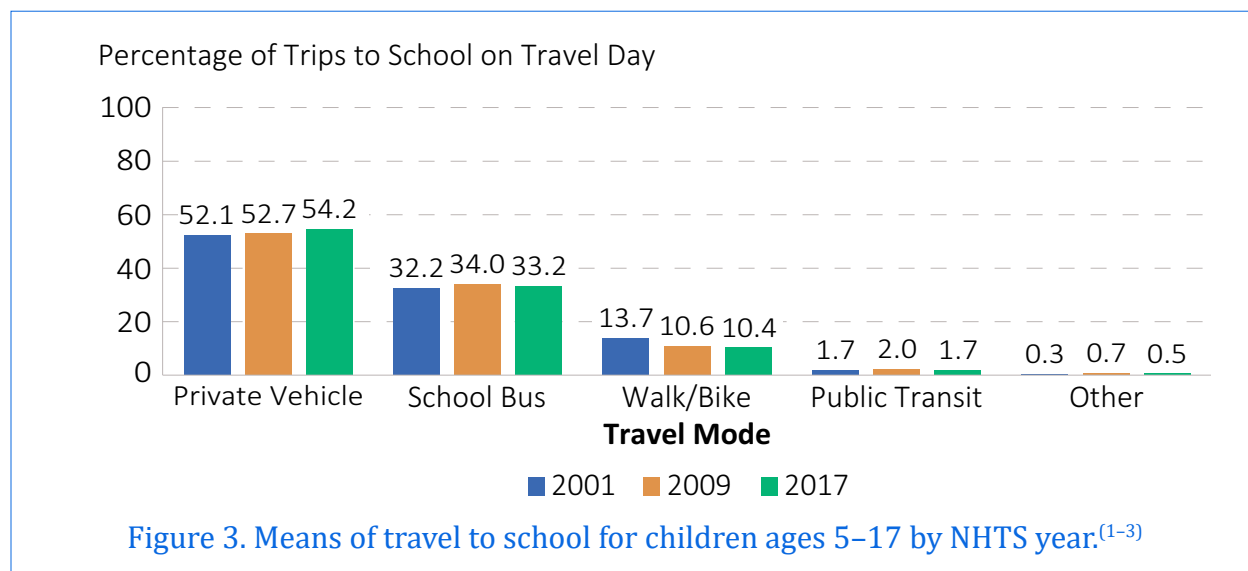
According to the NHTS data series (i.e., 2017, 2009, and 2001), for the Nation as a whole, the ways in which children travel to school has not changed much in the last decade or two,

Table 1. Usual versus actual mode of transportation from home to school for children ages 5–17 by percentage.⁽¹⁾

Usual Means of Travel to School	Private Vehicle	School Bus	Walk/Bike	Transit
Private vehicle	96.1%	2.4%	1.4%	0.1%
School bus	8.4%	89.4%	2.0%	0.2%
Walk/bike	8.9%	2.1%	88.6%	0.5%
Transit	3.8%	4.9%	8.4%	82.8%

Note: Bold numbers represent the percentage of children who used the usual mode on their travel day.

although there is a lot of geographic variability.⁽¹⁻³⁾ But, overall, the means of travel to school according to the 2017 was about the same (within the margin of error at 10% confidence) as the previous two surveys (2001 and 2009). Figure 3 shows that since 2001, the NHTS estimated that over half of trips to school on the travel day have been in private vehicles, about one-third have been in school buses, and about one-tenth have been by walking and/or biking.



In sum, travel to school by children ages 5–17 as captured in the NHTS largely took place in private vehicles, although those living within 0.5 mile of school were much more likely to walk or bike to school. The way children travel to school has remained consistent over time; there was little day-to-day variation from how children usually traveled to school and what was reported on the actual travel day.

References

1. Federal Highway Administration. (2017). *2017 National Household Travel Survey*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, DC. Available online: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>.
2. Federal Highway Administration. (2009). *2009 National Household Travel Survey*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, DC. Available online: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>.
3. Federal Highway Administration. (2001). *2001 National Household Travel Survey*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, DC. Available online: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>.

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