

KEEP THE CHILDREN WALKING: ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL IN TIRANA, ALBANIA

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This paper examines how characteristics of the physical and socio-economic environment influence children's school travel mode in Tirana, the capital of Albania. A survey of approximately 500 students aged 11 to 13, revealed that an overwhelming majority walk to school, while bicycling and bus use are minimal. Students who walk to school often do so as part of a larger group of schoolmates, attend schools that are located relatively near their house, are faced with relatively few major road crossings during their journey, and belong to families that are less likely to own a car. Children who are driven to school (only 13.5% of our sample) usually have higher-income families and live farther from the school. Although Tirana's high residential density has some environmental drawbacks, we deem it positive in that its result is that most students live very close to their schools and in close proximity to classmates walking to school. The fine-grained pattern of the urban public school network contributes to the short distances between schools and homes. We provide a number of recommendations for the promotion of walking in home-school trips, as well as for the future physical development of the city and the school network. In view of the fact that the proportion of schoolchildren who walk to school in Tirana is substantially higher than in Western countries, our recommendations aim at maintaining current shares of walking in the face of growing incomes and car ownership rates. The same goals and policies that we recommend may be applicable to school travel planning in other developing cities of similar size.