



Drive for better planning on travel to our schools

SHERIE WRIGHT is helping drive the 'walking school bus' concept to the next level.

The Boulcott School mum, who spearheaded the establishment of two walking buses there, has just taken on a new role as school travel planner, sponsored by Greater Wellington Regional Council.

The idea is to build a detailed picture of how pupils get to their local school, then work on safer, more efficient ways. The result could be less congested roads (everyone recognises how travel eases up during the school holidays).

A process already used at St Joseph's School in Upper Hutt (where a massive 76% of pupils are driven each day by their parents to the school gate), and soon to happen at Wilford School, Petone, is to laminate a large map of the neighbourhood. Using Monopoly houses and markers, each child indicates on the map where they live and the route/method they take to school. Patterns, problems and better ways of doing things can become clear, Mrs Wright says. Car pooling opportunities arise. At St Joseph's

one group of four families found they lived right next door to each other, and yet each would take a separate car to school.

Rather than the double-parking congestion of cars pulling up right outside the school, safe drop off zones might be found that give the kids a 10 minute healthy walk to school, but without any major roads to cross. Councils can be tackled to deal with such things as overhanging trees and dangerous dogs on walking routes, or lack of cycling lanes.

In the case of one school she is working with, Mrs Wright intends calling in on a nearby college because a common refrain from the primary school pupils is that they feel intimidated by the older students on the footpaths.

Mrs Wright says Eastern Hutt School has four walking buses, (and sponsored yellow ponchos for when it's raining), Boulcott School has two, Sacred Heart Petone one, and one is starting at Hutt Central School. With summer coming up, she's hoping more schools will take up the option.