



# Planning safer routes to school

## ► Getting kids out of cars and back on their feet

BY SIMON EDWARDS

EVEN THE Hutt Central School new entrant pupils could see the pattern emerging.

Hutt City Council's school travel planner Sherie Wright had invited them to use a sticker to indicate on a map where they lived and what form of transport they mostly used to get to school: red if they were dropped off by private car; yellow if they used public transport; green if they walked; blue if they cycled.

By a huge majority, most of the stickers that dotted the map were red. And some of those red stickers were at addresses barely a couple of blocks away from the school's gates.

The school travel planning exercise, which is also supported by the Greater Wellington Regional Council, is all about getting the school community to think about transport options, and how things

might work better in terms of parents' and pupils' time, safety, exercise for pupils in an era of increasing obesity; and environmental and traffic considerations (i.e. reducing congestion and our carbon footprint).

Hutt Central School principal Tony Horsfall backs the initiative. He can see that most of the school's 280 pupils are dropped off/picked up by car. He frets that ever-increasing levels of traffic along busy Railway Avenue is predicted to double from its present 14,000 vehicles per day when the Dowse Interchange comes on stream. There have been near misses as pupils cross the road. Some parents double park and u-turn on a corner with poor lines of sight at the 8.30-9am and 3-3.15pm crunch times.

As he sees it, the more pupils who come to and from school on

foot or cycle - so long as safety is maintained - the better.

For Sherie, a former 'walking school bus co-ordinator' at Boulcott School, this is the second school at which she's embarked on formulating a comprehensive Travel Plan. Over a 12 month period at Wilford School in Petone, teachers, pupils and parents embraced a better way of doing things. Final figures are still being collated, but Sherie understands there has been a 50-60% increase in the number of Wilford pupils walking or cycling regularly to school. Four walking school buses now run (this involves children walking in groups to each other's front gates on a set route to pick up the next 'passenger'), often with a rostered parent leader. At Wilford, some older students have been taking on the bus leader role.



► **TRAVEL QUESTIONS:** "That's where I live," Lincoln Amaru shows a reporter. Lincoln and Year 1 and 2 classmates (from left) Raquiel Te Kawa, Georgia Coster, Zara Henley, Cameron van Soest and Jayden King helped plot school travel patterns last week in an exercise to encourage more pupils to walk and cycle. Co-ordinator Sherie Wright says an interesting spin-off is that the surprising number of young pupils who can't recite their home address can be encouraged to try to remember it. That's important if they ever have to call '111' for an emergency service, as Naenae youngsters Cuilen and Taine Eade did recently - saving the life of their heart attack victim mum, Kendall.



## Hutt News

Tuesday 8/4/2008

Page: 12

Section: General News

Region: Wellington Circulation: 41,888

Type: Suburban

Size: 462.86 sq.cms.

Published: -T-----



Once Sherie has a thorough understanding of a school's transport situation (how kids travel, what reasons underly the patterns, where the risks are) she calls together parents and other interested representatives such as engineers, the police, council staff, etc., and options for improvement are debated.

At Wilford, for example, dissatisfaction was expressed with road markings and crossings both in the immediate school vicinity and on busy Cuba St. They were dealt with. And with greater interest in pupils cycling to school, a police representative is soon to work with classes on cycling safety.

In Sherie's experience, most parents choose to drop off their kids by car because they worry about the youngsters' safety (never mind the illegal and dangerous parking outside the schools they sometimes indulge in when space and time is short!). But she admits that laziness and failure to think about other options are also factors.

When parents are shown on the map that many of them are making the same trip to and from school from the same streets at the same times, "it can be an eye opener". Car pooling becomes a realistic option. And when it's pointed out that their turn to lead a walking bus might only come around one day a week, or one week a month, suddenly that seems much easier than getting the car out every day, and being stuck to that 8.30am/3pm regimen. More than a few adults discover they quite enjoy the morning or afternoon stroll with their youngsters, and the chance to mingle with other families.

Now that the Hutt Central children have put their 'stickers' on the neighbourhood map, the chart will be hung up prominently at the school as Sherie once again embarks on trying to change people's way of thinking and acting.