

The safest way to walk to school

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The Walk this Way app advises on the safest way for children to walk or cycle to school. Credit: iStock

With seventy per cent of kids travelling to school by car, compared to 25 per cent in the 1970s, traffic congestion around schools has increased, raising concerns about safety.

In an effort to encourage parents and kids to walk or bike to school and to reduce [childhood obesity](#), Melbourne researchers have developed an app that parents can use to determine the safest route for their children to get to school.

Researchers at the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC), in partnership with [population health](#) professionals at Alfred Health, have developed Walk this Way, an app which can advise parents of the safest way for their child to walk to school, in the hope that parents will encourage their children to do so.

In 2008, the MUARC researchers developed a star-rating system that highlights the safest pedestrian route available. The Walk this Way app – which uses Google maps to record crossing locations – has recently been trialled across four Victorian primary schools.

Users are provided with an immediate star rating for a crossing location based on information they

submit regarding speed limit, crossing facilities, number of traffic directions, traffic volume and the number of lanes.

MUARC researcher Dr David Logan, who was part of the team that developed the app, said Walk this Way was designed for parents and schools to identify the best [walking](#) routes to school for children, but is also generally applicable to all people and settings.

"In its current form, the model can be used to assign star ratings to each of the road crossing points along a proposed or existing walking route in order to identify crossing points with a low star rating that should receive priority attention," Dr Logan said.

"This information can be used to guide the responsible agencies in identifying opportunities for raising safety to levels that are acceptable or to find a different route. The goal should be to have all crossing points achieving four or five stars."

The pilot study of four Victorian primary schools found participants had a general tendency to perceive crossings as being safer than what was predicted by the star-rating tool.

The majority of [parents](#) also reported the availability of safety information calculated by the star-rating tool would have an influence on their decision regarding their child walking to [school](#), although there were other important key issues highlighted in terms of their decision making process.

The Walk this Way can be used on an iPhone, iPad or iPod touch and is free to download from the [Apple app store](#).

Provided by Monash University

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