

SCHOOL TRANSPORT

January 1999

1998

Home to school transport received considerable attention during 1998. The Government's long awaited *Integrated Transport White Paper - A New Deal* was published in July. This document recognised the role of the school journey in contributing to congestion, and the Government has recently established an inter-departmental School transport advisory group to examine school transport provision.

Despite the widely recognised need to encourage the use of public transport to reduce car use for the school journey, the results of this year's annual survey show that local education authorities are facing continued financial pressures on home to school transport budgets.

As a result, local education authorities are continuing to tighten entitlement criteria, introducing and increasing charges, and revising policies as well as reviewing the cost effectiveness of existing provision.

KEY FINDINGS

Entitlement policies

- Scotland is still the most generous area regarding entitlement and use of reductions to the walking distances.
- Most authorities are now charging for concessionary places - with charges rising in 1997/8.
- Most authorities now only provide post 16 transport free of charge for SEN pupils. Only two Shire authorities reported providing free post 16 transport for mainstream pupils.

Expenditure

- Expenditure on home to school transport is continuing to rise - and the vast majority of LEAs report financial pressures.
- Unit costs have risen by more than inflation - typically 13% overall, and even faster for special needs.
- Average unit costs are now more than £500 per annum.
- Unit costs for special education transport are now more than £1800 per annum.
- Expenditure on special transport now stands at 38% of all home to school expenditure but accounts for only 10% of pupils transported.

Income

- Forty authorities reported some income from charging. The majority of the income is from secondary and post 16 provision in the Shires, but in total this represented only £6.9 million.

How children are travelling

- The pattern of provision remains largely unchanged with local buses used in urban areas and contracted usually used in rural authorities.
- With the exception of Northern Ireland, LEA vehicles continue to account for a small proportion of journeys.

Contracting

- Few authorities have open ended contracts - a three year maximum is typical. For contracts awarded by telephone obtaining three quotes is standard practice.
- Fifty one authorities said that contracts are awarded on the basis of price - for twenty two authorities this was the *only* criterion. However, many authorities do report taking into account factors such as reliability, performance and quality.
- Route reviews are widely undertaken on an annual basis - only 6% of authorities said that they had no regular programme to review routes.
- Rising contract prices, the shortage of drivers/escorts and accessible vehicles were the most frequently cited problems for authorities.
- More than 80% of authorities said they had financial pressures. These were being addressed in a wide range of ways, most commonly by tightening entitlement and introducing/increasing charges.

RESPONSE RATES

In July 1998 questionnaires were sent to all local education authorities in the UK. A total of eighty six authorities responded. Overall the responses accounted for more than £341 million school transport expenditure, and represented over 661,000 pupils transported. The latest available expenditure figures published by HMSO show home to school transport expenditure at £506 million per annum for the UK, as such the survey represents about 67% of national expenditure. We would like to express out appreciation to the following authorities:

Aberdeenshire
Anglesey
Angus
Barking & Dagenham, London Borough of
Barnet, London Borough of
Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Belfast, Education & Library Board
Birmingham
Bridgend
Bristol, City of
Cambridgeshire
Cardiff
Cheshire
Clackmannanshire
Corporation of London
Cornwall
Coventry
Derbyshire
Devon
Doncaster
Dorset
East Renfrewshire
Essex
Gloucestershire
Guernsey
Halton
Hampshire
Hartlepool
Hereford & Worcestershire
Islington, London Borough of
Kirklees
Knowsley
Leicester, City of
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester
Medway
Midlothian
Monmouthshire
Moray
North Eastern, Ed & Library Board
Neath Port Talbot

Newport
Norfolk
North East Lincolnshire
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Oldham
Orkney
Oxfordshire
Pembrokeshire
Perth & Kinross
Poole
Portsmouth
Powys
Redcar & Cleveland
Rhondda Cynon Taff
Rotherham
Sandwell
Scottish Borders
Shetland
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Eastern Education & Library Board
Southern Education & Library Board
Southwark, London Borough of
Staffordshire
Stirling
Stockton on Tees
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Swansea
Torfean
Tower Hamlets, London Borough of
Walsall
Warwickshire
West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian
Western, Education & Library Board
Wigan
Wiltshire

POLICIES

Walking distances

Almost half of the authorities responding said that they continue to make some reduction to the statutory walking distances (of three miles for pupils over eight years and two miles for younger pupils) although two thirds of the Shires reported using the statutory distances. (The higher proportion saying they reduce the walking distance compared with last year reflects the larger number of Scottish authorities responding). As in previous years the Scottish authorities continue to be amongst the most generous in terms of entitlement criteria, with walking distances as low as one mile in four Scottish authorities.

Of those authorities that do make a reduction to the statutory walking distances the most usual is to extend the two mile limit to apply to all primary age pupils. (Twenty one of the eighty six responding authorities adopt such a policy).

Several of the new Welsh unitary authorities reduce the distances to 1.5 miles for primary and two miles for secondary reflecting Gwent's previous policy. These are the most generous policies outside Scotland.

Concessionary charges

Authorities (with the exception of those in Scotland) are permitted to make a charge for spare seats available on school transport. As in previous years none of the Scottish or Northern Ireland authorities have introduced concessionary charges. The vast majority of shire/unitary authorities continue to charge.

Overall 52% of authorities charge for concessionary places and more than 60% of those who are permitted to charge do so. Charges currently range from £30-100 per term.

	NA	No	Yes
LBs/Mets	4	14	4
NI	0	5	0
Scotland	0	13	0
Shires	0	4	24
Unitaries	0	0	9
Wales	0	1	8
UK	4	37	45

Post 16 provision

Overall 48% of authorities said that they provide free post 16 transport. However, only two of these forty one authorities were Shire counties. Free post 16 transport is still more likely to be provided in Northern Ireland, Scotland, the Welsh unitary authorities and urban areas. In the Shire authorities post 16 transport is typically only provided to those with SEN or in receipt of Income Support. The amount charged for post 16 transport range from £39 per term to more than £100 per term.

Mode % of journeys

	Contract	Local bus	Mileage	LEA	Rail	Other
Mets/London Boroughs	34	59	<1	5	1	<1
Unitaries	45	47	2	4	2	<1
Shires	71	25	1	<1	1	<1
Scotland	69	26	<1	3	1	<1
Wales	85	13	<1	<1	<1	2
Northern Ireland	7	60	2	28	1	2
UK	57	34	1	6	1	<1

INCOME & EXPENDITURE

Overall in the UK home to school transport costs Local education authorities £506 million per annum. Nationally approximately 38% of home to school transport expenditure is accounted for by special education transport - although this varies widely by area. This suggests approximately £200 million per annum is being spent on SEN transport. Yet this sector accounts for only 10% of the pupils transported.

	Exp £m	%
Primary	43.1	14
Secondary	120.7	39
FE	26.2	8
Special	117.6	38
Other	4.4	1
Total	312.0	100

In total, forty authorities reported income totaling £6.9 million, the majority of this (£3.8 million) from FE students and £2.4 million from secondary pupils. The vast majority of this income is accounted by the Shire authorities (£6.1 million). (NB in Scotland a charge cannot be levied for concessionary places).

UNIT COSTS

Average unit costs (per pupil transported) for home to school transport vary widely between areas.

Overall in the UK, 1997-1998 costs have increased by 13% - higher than the rate of inflation (from £458 per pupil per annum to £517 per annum).

The increase in costs has been more marked in the Shire authorities where prices have increased from approximately £466 per annum to more than £542 - an increase of 16%.

Average unit cost	1998 £ p.a.
Mets & LBs	721
Northern Ireland	381
Scotland	515
Shires	542
Unitaries	599
Wales	392
All authorities	517

Special education transport costs have also risen this year. Overall special education transport is costing authorities £1801 per pupil compared with £1511 last year - an increase of 19%. In the Shire authorities the increase was more than 20% on the previous year.

SEN transport - unit costs	1998
Mets & London Boroughs	1732
Northern Ireland	1471
Scotland	2184
Shire	1903
Unitaries	1413
Wales	1821
All authorities	1801

WHO GETS TRANSPORT?

In total the authorities responding transport 661,000 pupils/students of which 494,447 were reported as being entitled on the basis of statutory requirement.

	Transported	Entitled
Primary	96,657	73,760
Secondary	376,428	270,914
Special	63,962	51,619
FE	82,790	46,346
Other	7,333	6,647
Total	627,170	449,286

* Excludes authorities who could not provide a break down of cost.

Overall, 10% of those transported have special needs. Three quarters of those transported are attending primary or secondary schools.

MODE USED

How children travel to school continues to vary widely by area. As shown in the table above, LEA vehicles continue to be widely used in Northern Ireland, but account for fewer than 5% of journeys in other areas. Contracted provision is the main mode in rural authorities, and accounts for 57% in the UK overall. This pattern of provision remains similar to previous years.

CONTRACTING

Contract length

The term for home to school transport contracts varies widely between authority areas. Twenty seven authorities – almost a third of those responding – said that their maximum was three years for all contracts. A further third of the authorities cited a maximum of five years. Ten authorities have a maximum of four years and four authorities have annual contracts.

Eight authorities (9%) distinguished between shorter contracts for smaller vehicles – typically one to two year and three to five year contracts for PSV vehicles.

Route reviews

Authorities reported routinely reviewing transport arrangements. Forty eight (56%) said that they reviewed routes annually. Only five authorities (6%) said that they did not undertake reviews on a regular basis.

Telephone quotes

Three quotes is standard practice for local authorities securing contracts by telephone. Sixty eight authorities (more than 75%) said that they sought three quotes when awarding contracts by phone.

Value assessment

Price is the most frequently used basis for the award of home to school transport contracts. Fifty one authorities cited price/lowest cost as the basis for awarding contracts. Twenty two authorities said this was the only criterion. Only five authorities award on the basis of factors *other* than price only.

However, most said that they also took into account reliability, performance and quality. One authority requested quotes on the basis of the route being registered and unregistered as a local bus service.

Three authorities awarded with reference to national benchmarks, and one authority reported having a grading scheme for operators.

Main issues

Overall eighty six authorities cited two hundred and eighty one issues. The most common issue facing authorities is the lack of accessible vehicles accounting for more than a quarter of the responses. Rising contract prices comes a close second cited by sixty four authorities (75% of responding authorities).

Issues	% of responses
Rising prices	22
Lack of accessible vehicles	27
Lack of escorts	12
Lack of drivers	10
Lack of competition	9
Lack of specific vehicle types	7
Poor quality vehicles	7

Financial pressures

Only ten authorities (12%) said that they were not facing financial pressures. The ways in which these are being addressed differ widely. The most commonly cited way of addressing financial concerns was through reviews of policy – particularly tightening up on the entitlement to receive special education transport. Reviews of entitlement policies were cited by thirty eight authorities (43% of respondents), and four authorities said that they were tightening up on the assessment of entitlement within the existing policy.

Nineteen authorities said that they were addressing financial pressures by introducing or increasing charges for concessionary and/or post 16 transport provision.

Seven authorities were looking to staff cuts / administrative improvements to make savings and eight authorities were undertaking route reviews. Three authorities said that they were moving towards greater use of their own fleet to address rising costs.

How addressed	No of responses
Reviewing entitlement criteria	38
Introducing / increasing charges	19
Route reviews / improving loadings	8
Staff cuts / administrative improvements	7
Greater monitoring to ensure value for money	4
Tighter enforcement of existing entitlement criteria	4
Greater use of own fleet	3

Five authorities cited other ways of addressing financial pressures including seeking additional finance and ceasing to provide transport to swimming.

OUR NEWS:

The 19 May 1999 is the date for our next annual **school journeys conference** organised in conjunction with PTRC. This year's conference will be held at the Grosvenor Hotel, London. Confirmed speakers include Charles Clarke, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DfEE; Robert Missen, DG VII European Commission; Ann Mortlock, Oxfordshire County Council; Campbell McKee, MD for Unwins and Jim Hall, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, Washington DC. We hope that you will be able to join us in May for this event. For further information please call Jo on 01372 747001.

Staff:

We have two new full time staff – Jo Miller and Polly Beer. Elaine McKaveney has also joined us part time, whilst continuing to work part time for Hampshire County Council.