

Consultation on proposed changes to the home to school transport policy for statutory school age pupils

18 October 2010 – 26 January 2011

We want to hear your views

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Children, Schools and Families
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Foreword

From Richard Thake, Executive Member for Education & Skills
and Stuart Pile, Executive Member for Highways & Transport

The very considerable pressure on public spending will affect all public services including those delivered by the county council for the foreseeable future. Hertfordshire County Council is looking at every aspect of its work and how this can be delivered more efficiently and effectively.

The need to reduce the £25 million annual school transport budget has been the major motivation behind a radical re-think to the county's approach in deciding whether it can continue to offer transport to school and college, over and above the legal entitlement. For many years, Hertfordshire County Council has gone above and beyond its legal duty in providing free or subsidised school transport but we now need to re-examine this in the light of the current acute financial situation.

We are always impressed by the huge contributions school communities have made to the sustainability agenda in Hertfordshire, 90% of schools have school travel plans and 52% of pupils usually walk or cycle to school.

So, as well as helping to save money, we want to stimulate a debate about how schools and parents can use their local knowledge to create travel and transport solutions that meet their particular needs.

Certain groups of children and young people have a right to free transport which is protected by law and these groups will remain unaffected by the review. We have already consulted young people about the SaverCard Concessionary Scheme and this has helped to inform our proposal

to maintain the SaverCard. The views of children and young people will also be taken into account in this consultation.

Given that the county council is planning to introduce a statutory only policy, we are asking you for your views on the proposals so we can ensure we have all available information before making a final decision.



County Councillor Richard Thake



County Councillor Stuart Pile

Please note: All financial references relate to the 2009/10 financial year throughout this document.



Introduction

This is a public consultation about the future Home to School Transport Policy for statutory school age pupils, (currently aged up to 16 years). The consultation period runs from 18 October 2010 to 26 January 2011.

The following table summarises the proposals for statutory school age pupils:

Proposal 1	It is proposed that the county council adopts a policy for free home to school transport based only on statutory entitlement* with effect from 1 September 2012.
Proposal 2	It is proposed that concessions for faith transport and all other discretionary transport would discontinue with effect from 1 September 2012. Other changes relating to eligibility and arrangements for free transport are also proposed.
Proposal 3	<p>It is proposed to rationalise the School Bus Network to become a closed network which is unavailable to the public, and self financing with effect from September 2012. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The reduction of Education 'E' and 800 Routes** as a result of applying a policy of providing transport only to those pupils for whom the county council has a statutory duty to provide transport.• The introduction of charging for places on transport at full cost recovery (see page 8) phased in over two years for pupils for whom the county council does not have a statutory duty to provide transport.• Schools or local communities managing their own home to school transport arrangements directly, for pupils for whom the county council does not have a duty to provide transport.
Proposal 4	It is proposed to retain the SaverCard concessionary scheme for use on the public bus network, and introduce an annual minimum charge of £20 per year for those of statutory school age applying for a card for use with effect from September 2012.

Certain groups of children and young people have a right to free transport (see page 5) which is protected by law and these groups will remain unaffected.

Please note this consultation does not relate to the transport policy for 16-19 year olds and those with learning difficulties and disabilities aged 19-24. There is a separate policy for that age group and a separate consultation on that policy will commence later in the year.

How to let us have your feedback to the consultation:

This public consultation is the opportunity for you to let us know of any issues or other options, as well as giving your views on the proposals in this document. We will be publicising the consultation to children and young people through www.channelmogo.org

You can let us know your views by:

- Completing the online form on our website at www.hertsdirect.org/csfc consultations
- If you do not have access to the internet you can return a paper copy of the response form available at local libraries or by calling 01438 737350. Paper copies to be returned to Hertfordshire County Council, Transport Review - Postal Point CHO 135. Room 124a, County Hall, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8DF
- Participating in a focus group to discuss aspects of the proposals (see below for more information).

If you need help to understand this information, please contact the customer service centre on 01438 737350. An interpreting service is available for those who need it.

Please ensure that your response is received by the end of the consultation period which closes at midnight on 26 January 2011.

Focus Group Events:

There will be five focus group events held across Hertfordshire, to discuss aspects of the proposals including:

- Increasing parental confidence in home to school transport arrangements for children with special educational needs and disability.
- How to promote sustainability in the school and local community.
- Local solutions, working with partners and self financing a school transport network.

Also, at these events, there will be an opportunity to participate in a general question and answer session about all of the proposals contained within this consultation. Focus group events will take place as follows:

Date and time	Venue
Thursday 2 December 2010 7pm - 9pm	St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Royal Avenue, Waltham Cross EN8 7EN
Thursday 9 December 2010 7pm - 9pm	Bushey Meads School, Coldharbour Lane, Bushey WD23 4PA
Tuesday 14 December 2010 7pm - 9pm	Oak Room, Hertfordshire Development Centre, Robertson House, Six Hills Way, Stevenage , SG1 2FQ
Thursday 20 January 2011 7pm - 9pm	Hertfordshire County Council, The Restaurant, Apsley Two, Brindley Way, Hemel Hempstead , HP3 9BF
Wednesday, 26 January 2011 7pm - 9pm	Hatfield Oak Hotel, Roehyde Way, Hatfield , AL10 9AF

There will be a maximum of 60 places at each event. If you wish to attend one of above focus groups you will need to register a place by calling 01438 737350. If you have any special requirements in order to attend these focus groups, please let us know when you are registering your interest for a place. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. If you are unable to attend one of these events you can let us have your views by completing the online form at www.hertsdirect.org/csfc consultations.

The booking line will be open Monday to Friday, 8 am to 8 pm, and Saturday, 9 am to 4 pm. Please note that this is a booking line only and you will be unable to discuss any other matters relating to the review.

How will the decision be taken and when?

The consultation ends on 26 January 2011. A report will be made to the various panels when they meet on 8 February 2011. Panels are made up of elected members of the council. They will make a recommendation to Cabinet, the county council's decision making body, which meets on 21 March 2011. Cabinet will determine the future school transport policy. This timetable is summarised below:

Process	Date
Public Consultation	18 October 2010 – 26 January 2011
Highways & Transport Panel consider consultation proposals	9 November 2010
Education & Skills Panel consider consultation proposals	10 November 2010
Highways & Transport Panel and Education & Skills Panel consider responses and make recommendations to Cabinet	8 February 2011
Cabinet determine future school transport policy	21 March 2011

Updates, frequently asked questions and the outcome of the review and consultation will be publicised through your school and available on www.hertsdirect.org/schooltransport

When would any new policy take effect?

Any changes would take effect from September 2012 for all pupils, with the exception of the Transport Policy for School and College Students aged 16-19, where changes may be sooner. A separate consultation on this will take place later in this academic year.

The future School Bus Network

In light of the response from this consultation to Proposal 3, a further consultation about the school bus network may take place between April and June 2011. This would allow for comments on any proposed changes to specific school bus routes and to ensure that parents and pupils understand the full implications arising from any changes in policy and provision before expressing preferences for school admissions in September 2012.

Background

The county council is required to provide home to school transport by the law for certain groups of pupils. As well as this, there are a number of other discretionary arrangements that are currently funded by the county council for pupils who do not have a statutory entitlement to school transport. These have been established over a number of years and have traditionally been provided for pupils to access schools further away than their nearest schools.

The pressure to reduce public spending requires the county council to review every aspect of its work and how this can be delivered more efficiently and effectively. The council must prioritise spending to ensure funding is targeted at those in greatest need, balanced against the council's commitment to continue to promote parental preference for school admissions.

The county council spends in the region of £25 million on home to school transport per year. This includes £9.2 million on mainstream pupils and £13.4 million on pupils with special educational needs and disability. £2.8 million is spent on the provision of '800 Routes' and the SaverCard Concessionary scheme. The county council subsidises discretionary transport and travel by approximately £800 per pupil per annum.

The current school bus network comprises of dedicated coaches (Education ‘E’ Routes) and public access buses (‘800 Routes’) which are provided by the county council.

Substantial savings in the region of £5 million to £6 million could be made by introducing a policy which limits eligibility for free home to school transport to those pupils qualifying under the statutory entitlement (See below).

The aim for the proposed new home to school transport policy:

- Meet the statutory requirement for school transport, focussing on Hertfordshire residents, and where applicable meeting individual needs.
- Promote discretionary transport arrangements which are self financing.
- Ensure the policy is transparent and fair and promotes fair access to educational opportunity.
- Wherever possible support schools and residents to develop their own transport arrangements locally.
- Continue to promote parental preference for school admissions.
- Encourage all pupils to become independent, self reliant travellers and support children and young people with special educational needs and disability, to enable them, where appropriate, to develop skills so they can live more independent lives. This aim supports the council’s proposals for ‘Developing Special Provision Locally’.
- To continue to promote sustainability, families will be given better information to enable them to make choices in their travel arrangements.
- Help families find affordable solutions that support the reduction of CO2 emissions.

Who is entitled under the law to free home to school transport?

The county council has a statutory duty to provide school transport for certain categories of compulsory school age pupils (which includes low income families); this is known as “statutory entitlement”.

Age	Statutory Entitlement
Pupils up to the age of 8 (year 3)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school* if it is more than 2 miles walking distance** from home.
Pupils between the ages of 8 and 16 (years 4 to 11)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school* if it is more than 3 miles walking distance** from home.
Pupils from low income families*** aged between 8 and 11 (years 4 to 6)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school* if it is more than 2 miles walking distance** from home.
Pupils from low income families*** aged between 11 and 16 (years 7 to 11)	Free transport to one of the three nearest qualifying schools* if it is between 2 and 6 miles away, or the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent/carers, religion or belief. It must be more than 2 miles by the shortest available walking route** and not more than 15 miles away.
Pupils with Special Educational Needs or disability or mobility problems	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school*, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance** from school and where due to their special needs or disability or mobility problems they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.

Age	Statutory Entitlement
Pupils living within the statutory walking distance but who are unable to walk in safety to school because of the nature of the route	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school*, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance** from school and where, due to the nature of the route, they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.

Please refer to the glossary for definitions of *Qualifying school, ** Walking distance and *** Families with a low income.

The council is not consulting on these arrangements. They will continue to be funded as long as there remains a statutory requirement to provide school transport for pupils in these categories.

The consultation proposals

Proposal 1: Adoption of a policy for free home to school transport based on statutory entitlement only.

It is proposed to:

1.1	Introduce a statutory only policy and stop funding for all discretionary home to school transport arrangements from 1 September 2012 for existing and new pupils. (See page 5 to see who would qualify for free transport under a statutory only policy).
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Proposal 2: Discontinue concessions for faith transport and any other discretionary transport. Introduce other changes relating to eligibility and arrangements for free transport.

It is proposed to:

2.1	End all current discretionary free transport to faith schools, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop funding transport to faith schools, where the majority of demand is from children who do not have a statutory entitlement to transport. • Discontinue the phasing out arrangement relating to siblings agreed in July 2006. • Stop free transport for children up to the age of 11, attending faith primary schools, where they qualify for free school meals.
2.2	Introduce for new applicants, eligibility for transport based on distance from home to the nearest qualifying school, regardless of whether the school is in Hertfordshire or outside the county boundary.
2.3	Introduce for new applicants, eligibility for transport based on distance from home to the nearest qualifying school, regardless of whether the school is in a two or three tier area of education.
2.4	Introduce for new applicants, eligibility for transport based on distance from home to the nearest qualifying school, regardless of whether the school is a faith school.
2.5	Reassess walking routes on safety grounds from 1 April 2011, and where applicable undertake minor works to make them safe. The reassessment would be undertaken using 'Safer routes to school – a protocol for the assessment of the safety of proposed home to school routes'. Where routes have become safe due to improvements, entitlement to transport would be ended for those currently receiving free transport.

2.6	<p>a) End free assisted places. (See page 10 Criteria for current Assisted Transport). or b) Stop any offer for free assisted places for new applicants, but continue to include those pupils who already benefit from free assisted places within the published criteria for Assisted Transport, subject to there being spare seats available.</p>
2.7	<p>Provide transport only in exceptional circumstances to the existing school, where pupils move to a new address in Hertfordshire and attend a Hertfordshire school. Eligibility for transport would only be considered for those in years 10 or 11 who have completed at least one term in year 10 at their existing school. This would apply only to pupils living further from their existing school than the statutory walking distances.</p>
2.8	<p>In the case of Children Looked After by the county council (who legally have priority for admission to all schools) assess them against the statutory published school transport policy. Those with any exceptional needs would be considered on an individual basis.</p>
2.9	<p>Where a disability prevents a parent/carer from accompanying their child to school, consider the child's needs on an individual basis. Where eligible, free home to school transport would be provided irrespective of distance. This would be for both short and long term arrangements, but would be subject to the child attending their nearest qualifying school.</p>
2.10	<p>Assess the entitlement of children with special educational needs and disabilities or mobility difficulties against the statutory home to school transport policy except where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs ("the Statement") expressly states that transport should be provided regardless of distance • the only school named in Part four of the Statement is more than the statutory walking distance <p>For others with special educational needs, mobility difficulties or disability (including temporary medical conditions) entitlement to transport will be considered on an individual basis and regularly reviewed following an assessment of the child's ability to walk to school, having regard to the child's special educational needs, disability and/or mobility problems where relevant, and taking into an account any exceptional circumstances.</p>
2.11	<p>Introduce common pick up points and drop off points for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, where it is deemed to be reasonable and safe to do so.</p>
2.12	<p>Introduce independent travel training for individual pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs where appropriate, to support and encourage pupils to become self reliant travellers, at the right time and to foster independence as they reach adulthood.</p> <p>Once pupils have successfully completed their training, it is proposed that they would no longer have an entitlement to personalised transport, e.g. a taxi.</p>
2.13	<p>Consider transport arrangements to alternative destinations at the end of the school day only where it supports the need for the child to attend respite care (short breaks) and there is no additional cost to transport the child to the alternative destination.</p>

2.14	<p>Extend the current training provided to passenger assistants to include supporting difficult behaviour needs.</p> <p>Passenger assistants would continue to be provided in the following circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On all primary school runs organised by the county council; 2. To Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) Schools and Schools for Physically Impaired both on buses and taxis 3. Larger vehicles travelling to Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) schools and Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) schools. <p>In other circumstances, individual cases would be assessed according to their individual needs.</p>																								
2.15	<p>Introduce the following criteria where pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs require a residential placement following assessment. For Termly Boarders: The county council will provide assistance for travel to and from home to residential school at the beginning and end of each term and half term. For 52 week residential placements: The county council will provide assistance for travel to and from home to residential school for eight visits throughout the year.</p>																								
2.16	<p>Offer a mileage allowance to parents/carers of pupils with special educational needs and disability who are entitled to transport, and are able in certain circumstances to provide transport in their own specialist vehicles.</p>																								
2.17	<p>Where appropriate, offer parents of children with special educational needs and disability who are entitled to transport the choice of an escort to walk pupils a short distance to school.</p>																								
2.18	<p>Offer parents a standard mileage allowance, where appropriate, in lieu of transport arrangements for pupils entitled to transport.</p>																								
2.19	<p>Offer a bike and cycling package (helmet/luggage carrier etc) in lieu of transport arrangements to eligible pupils who have a statutory entitlement to school transport. This would be subject to the outcome of a pilot.</p>																								
2.20	<p>Introduce full cost recovery charging for the sale of all spare seats on routes running to schools for pupils not eligible for free transport. These charges would be introduced over a two year period.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Miles from home to school</th> <th>Current charge per annum</th> <th>Proposed charges for 2012/13 academic year</th> <th>Indicative monthly charge for 2012/13 academic year</th> <th>Proposed charges for 2013/14 academic year</th> <th>Indicative monthly charge for 2013/14 academic year</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Under 3 miles</td> <td>£426</td> <td>£588</td> <td>£49.00</td> <td>£750</td> <td>£62.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3-4.99 miles</td> <td>£588</td> <td>£794</td> <td>£66.50</td> <td>£1,000</td> <td>£83.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 miles and over</td> <td>£744</td> <td>£947</td> <td>£79.00</td> <td>£1,150</td> <td>£96.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Miles from home to school	Current charge per annum	Proposed charges for 2012/13 academic year	Indicative monthly charge for 2012/13 academic year	Proposed charges for 2013/14 academic year	Indicative monthly charge for 2013/14 academic year	Under 3 miles	£426	£588	£49.00	£750	£62.50	3-4.99 miles	£588	£794	£66.50	£1,000	£83.50	5 miles and over	£744	£947	£79.00	£1,150	£96.00
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Proposal 3: Rationalisation of the future School Bus Network to become unavailable to the public and self-financing.

Views are sought on the following aspects, in order to inform any future consultation about the School Bus Network.

3.1	<p>Views are sought from parents, schools and local communities on the opportunity for schools and local communities to manage local home to school transport arrangements directly, by entering into their own contracts with bus operators.</p> <p>This would provide greater flexibility to the school or community and could include schools working collaboratively together. Capacity building to be provided by the county council, to support such a change in strategy.</p>
3.2	<p>Currently the county council provides transport through the use of '800 Routes'/'E Routes' for those pupils who do not have a statutory entitlement to school transport. Views are sought on whether the county council should continue to provide such routes where they are commercially viable, but at the full cost recovery rate as shown in Section 2.20 above.</p>
3.3	<p>If the county council were to organise a cost neutral discretionary school transport bus network, views are sought on whether individual schools/communities would be willing to underwrite any gap in funding.</p>

Proposal 4: Retention of the SaverCard Concessionary Scheme for use on public buses with an introduction of a minimum charge of £20 per year.

It is proposed to:

4.1	<p>Introduce annual minimum charging of £20 per year for statutory age pupils. This charge to be introduced for new applicants, for cards to be used with effect from 1 September 2012. The current charge is a single cost of £10 which covers Hertfordshire students of 11-15 years of age. (There will be a separate proposal for charging for 16-19 year olds included in a separate 16-19 transport consultation).</p>
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Further Information

For further information, including frequently asked questions and regular updates on the review please visit www.hertsdirect.org/schooltransport

If you are a parent or carer and feel you will be affected by the proposed changes you may wish to contact your child's school to look at their School Travel Plan. Travel Plans include activities the school has identified to support healthy and sustainable transport options, road safety and improvements to the environment on and around the school site. They can also address new issues through initiatives such as car sharing, cycle training, walking buses and park and stride schemes.

Glossary

Assisted Places

Assisted places are the spare seats currently available on Education 'E' Routes. These places are allocated according to published criteria, and there is a set scale of charges. There are two Assisted Places Schemes in operation currently, one for mainstream schools, where the number of Assisted seats is limited by spare capacity, and the other, which is to faith schools, where the capacity is not limited, but is according to demand, and where a route is already running.

The published criteria is as follows:

1. Pupils who have already had an assisted place.
2. Brothers and sisters of children who are entitled to free home to school transport.
3. Brothers and sisters of children who already have an assisted place.
4. Children whose parents are claiming one of the following:
 - a) Income Support or Income-Based Job Seekers Allowance;
 - b) Child Tax Credit (income less than £16,040 and not receiving Working Tax Credit);
 - c) Child Tax Credit (payable at a rate higher than the family element ie more than £547.50 or £1,095 if you also have a child under one year old);
 - d) Working Tax Credit;
 - e) Housing Benefit;
 - f) Council Tax Benefit (not including single adult rebate); or
 - g) Pension Credit.
5. Children from areas where there are no public transport services.
6. Seats are offered according to age; with the oldest first.

If you fall into Category 4 (Low Income), you do not pay for the seat.

Concessionary SaverCard Scheme

The current concessionary SaverCard scheme allows pupils and students to travel for half price on any bus in Hertfordshire. This is for those aged 11 to 18 and in full time education.

Developing Special Provision Locally

A project to ensure that the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and

disability (SEND) are well met in Hertfordshire, as near home as possible.

Education 'E' Route

Education 'E' Routes are the vehicles which the county council provide for children who have a statutory entitlement to free home to school transport.

Families with a low income

Families with a low income are currently defined as those children entitled to free school meals or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit. There is currently additional Government funding to meet the cost of transport for these children.

800 Route

The county council has over a number of years funded extra peak hour public transport routes to schools, namely the 800 series, to help reduce peak hour travel and its environmental impact, as well as encouraging young people to travel sustainably.

Qualifying school

A qualifying school is defined as a community, foundation or voluntary school; community or foundation special school, approved non-maintained special school, pupil referral unit, or a city technology college, a city college for the technology of the arts or an Academy with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and any special educational needs that the child may have.

Walking distance

Walking distance is defined as either two miles (if the child is under eight years old), or three miles (if the child is eight years old or older). This is measured by the "nearest available route". The route is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk with reasonable safety. In the case of families with a low income (as defined above), distances beyond two miles are measured using the Integrated Transport Network (ITN). This is an Ordnance Survey dataset containing details of the transport network. This topological network represents driveable roads and vehicle ferries (not international routes) within Great Britain.

We want to hear your views
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