



"Working together. Improving education. Transforming lives."

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT REVIEW

INITIAL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

July 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The process of engaging with stakeholders took place from December 2018 to June 2019 and involved a variety of methods for canvassing the views of stakeholders including an online questionnaire and a number of public engagement events. Over 5,500 responses to the questionnaire were received. This Executive Summary highlights the findings of the stakeholder engagement and these views will be taken into account in the analysis that will be undertaken in assessing a range of future policy options. A full public consultation process will take place prior to any Ministerial decision being taken to make changes to the current policy.

Overwhelmingly responses to the initial engagement phase of the Home to School Transport Policy Review (the Review) demonstrated strong support for the continued provision of home to school transport and little appetite to reduce the level of transport provision currently offered to pupils.

The safety of pupils getting to and from school was identified as the key priority in the development of any future home to school transport policy. There was particularly strong opinion regarding the safety of pupils in rural areas, with support for a policy option that reduced or removed the walking distance criteria for pupils living in rural areas.

General opinion in relation to the walking distance criterion of any future policy was that two miles is too far to ask primary school pupils to walk; it was felt that a 1 mile walking distance is appropriate for primary school pupils. Broad consensus was that 3 miles is too far to expect a post-primary pupil to walk to school and that a 2 mile walking distance is appropriate.

The degree of parental choice that should be facilitated in any future policy was the subject of much debate with three broad opinions expressed: the current policy should not change in terms of how it facilitates parental preference of a suitable school; pupils should only be eligible to their nearest school in category; and there should be a maximum distance to school that will be supported by the home to school transport policy.

Two issues that came up repeatedly across all the forms of engagement was 'empty' seats on buses and home to school transport facilitating attendance at extra-curricular activities. Opinion was strong that if a pupil's usage of a bus pass falls below a certain level, the pass should be removed and re-allocated to another pupil.

There was broad agreement that home to school transport should be available to enable pupils to get home safely from extra-curricular activities.

Across the board there was good support for introducing a small parental contribution in any future new policy if it meant keeping the policy criteria as they are currently or, expanding eligibility.

Background

1. The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for home to school transport policy and legislation; the Education Authority (EA) is responsible for its delivery and administration.
2. In 2017/18 approximately 84,000 pupils were eligible for transport assistance which was 26% of the school population. In the same year, the overall cost of home to school transport provision was in the region of £81m.

Eligibility for Assistance under Current Home to School Transport Policy

3. Circular 1996/41¹ breaks down the provision of transport assistance for qualifying pupils to two criteria: walking distance; and suitable school.
4. The walking distance is set in legislation as being 2 miles for primary school pupils and 3 miles for post-primary. A suitable school is a grant-aided school in any of the following categories:
 - Catholic maintained
 - Controlled or Other Voluntary
 - Grammar (denominational)
 - Irish Medium
 - Integrated
 - Grammar (non-denominational)
5. Therefore a pupil will currently be eligible for transport assistance:
 - (i) if they live beyond the relevant distance criterion and attend a suitable school; and
 - (ii) they have been refused a place in all suitable schools in their chosen school category within 2 miles of their house (3 miles for post-primary).
6. A pupil may also be eligible for transport assistance if they have statement of special educational needs that specifies a special transport need. The policy for such pupils is not included within the Review.

¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/1996-41-home-to-school-transport-updated.pdf>

Home to School Transport Policy Review

7. The Home to School Transport Policy Review (the Review) is one strand of a new Education Transformation Programme that is being led by the Department across a range of different areas of education. The aim of the Transformation Programme is to improve the education system to ensure it is sustainable, effective and efficient and, critically, helps to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people.
8. The current home to school transport policy is being reviewed as it has remained largely unchanged for over 20 years, and in that time there have been significant changes in: the educational landscape; the needs of children and young people; the transport infrastructure; and the number of cars on the road. We have also seen the introduction of a draft Programme for Government (PfG) approach that promotes collaborative working across government departments and agencies and focuses on outcomes for citizens. The changing demographics in Northern Ireland also mean that over the next 7-8 years the number of pupils eligible for transport under the current policy would be likely to increase by around 8%. Therefore delivering the existing policy would be likely to cost an additional £7 million each year.
9. With all these changes we need to make sure we are making the best use of the available resources. The aim of the Review is therefore to examine whether the current policy is fit for purpose and sustainable in the long term.

Methodology – Initial Engagement Phase

10. In order to inform, provide information on a basis that makes no presupposition on the outcomes and to help and guide the early policy development work, a process of early engagement was undertaken with a broad range of stakeholders. This is in addition to the full public consultation process that will be undertaken before any decisions will be taken by Ministers on any potential policy change. There will therefore be further opportunities for stakeholders to offer their views as the Review continues.
11. On 3 December 2018 the Review launched with a period of initial engagement to explore with all interested stakeholders: whether the current home to school transport policy needs to be changed; their thoughts on how the current policy could be improved; and gather their ideas on what any future policy should look

like. To allow as many stakeholders to contribute to the initial engagement process as possible a number of different engagement approaches were adopted:

➤ **Online Questionnaire**

An online questionnaire was delivered via the Department's website. It ran from December 2018 until March 2019. The questionnaire was primarily aimed at members of the public, including both parents and children and young people. There were 5,587 valid responses to the questionnaire, including 1,932 free-text comments.

➤ **Public Engagement Events**

Six public engagement events were hosted over February and March 2019. The aim of which was to give participants the opportunity to explore the issues raised in the questionnaire in more detail and to discuss their ideas and views on the range of policy options that should be considered in the review. Although events were widely publicised in the main regional and local papers, on the Department's website and social media accounts, there was a disappointing attendance with only 20 participants across the six events.

➤ **Facilitated Focus Group Engagement**

As key stakeholders in any potential changes to the home to school transport policy, targeted engagement was taken forward with children, young people and parents:

- Four focus groups were held with parents in March 2019. A total of 39 parents attended; 46% of whom had a child(ren) eligible for transport assistance.
- Between March and June 2019, two workshops and six focus groups were held across the province attended by 123 children and young people (41% of who are currently eligible for transport assistance).

➤ **Other Stakeholder Engagement**

In addition to the public engagement, DE officials have met with officials in Department for Infrastructure (DfI), Department for the Economy (DfE), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Public Health Authority to explore whether a case could be made for increasing access to home to school transport on the basis of its contribution to a broader range of draft Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes for example: reducing air pollution; increasing the use of public transport and reducing traffic congestion.

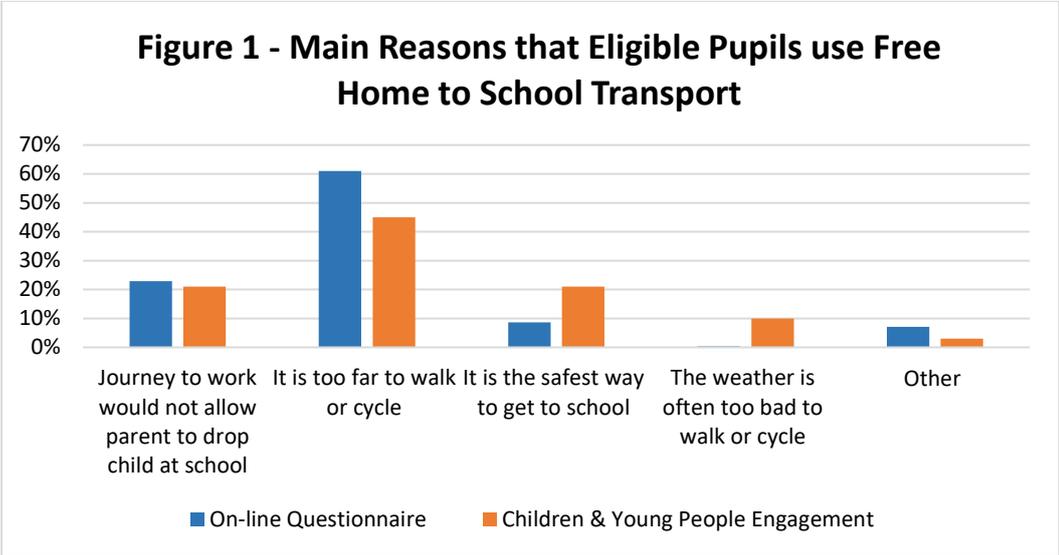
Engagement has taken place with a range of other interested stakeholders including: school principals, political representatives, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People, The Equality Commission, education sectoral bodies, rural and charitable bodies and unions.

Summary of Findings

12. The findings from the responses to the online questionnaire are detailed in paragraphs 15-24 below. This is followed by a summary of the findings from the engagement activity, grouped under the policy themes that emerged, in paragraphs 25-58 (this summary includes the findings from the free-text response element of the online questionnaire).
13. A substantial number of the issues raised at the public, parental and children and young people engagement events were operational issues (e.g. procurement of service providers, overcrowding on buses, bullying, bus routes/times, bus operators, staggered school starting times) and were therefore not directly relevant to the policy review; these will however be passed on to the Education Authority for consideration as the responsible body for the operation of the home to school transport policy.
14. A small number of stakeholders highlighted concerns that changes to the area planning processes and rationalisation of the school estate should be progressed prior to the commencement of this Review in order that the Review can take account of these changes.

Online Questionnaire

- 15. There was some concern over of the wording used in the questionnaire in terms of aspects potentially being prescriptive or seeking to lead respondents in their responses. In line with the Department’s wish to explore all potential policy options, of the 8 questions a number of questions related to possible options that would reduce expenditure on home to school transport while others related to options that would increase the numbers of pupils eligible for home to school transport. A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Annex 1.
- 16. 62% respondents to Question 1 indicated that either they, or their child(ren), were currently eligible for transport assistance. 30% were not eligible and 3% were eligible but do not use the service, the remainder did not know if they were eligible.
- 17. 61% of respondents to Question 2a believed the main reason that eligible pupils use home to school transport is that the distance between their home and school was considered too far to walk or cycle. Figure 1 compares the responses given in the questionnaire responses to the responses received from the children and young people engagement.

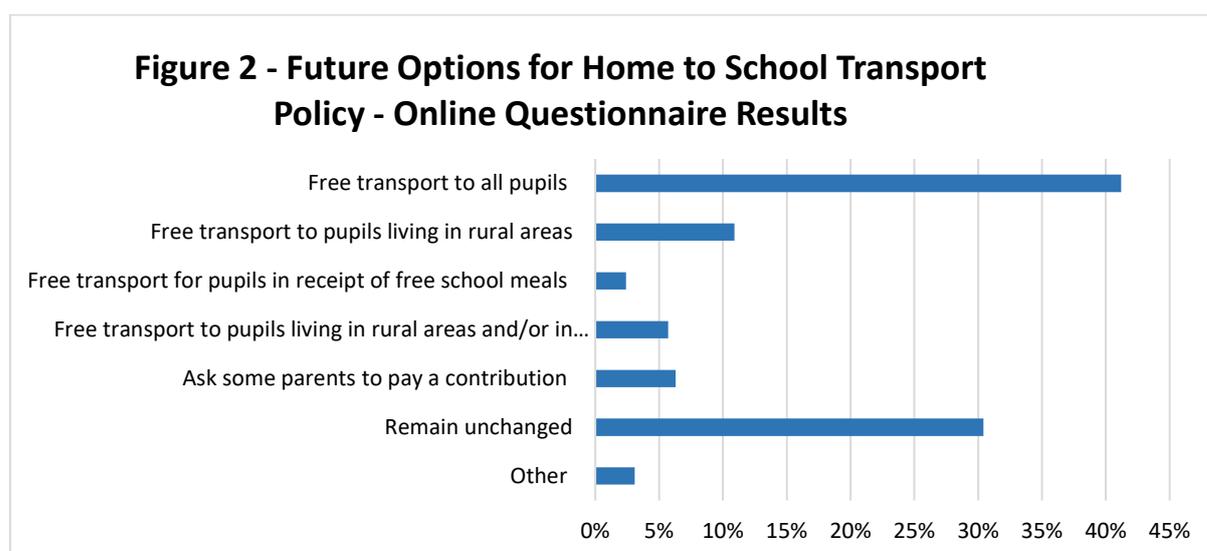


- 18. The most common reasons identified in Question 2b for eligible pupils not using the service were:
 - the drop-off point is not convenient - 16.7%
 - pupil too young to get the bus - 11.7%

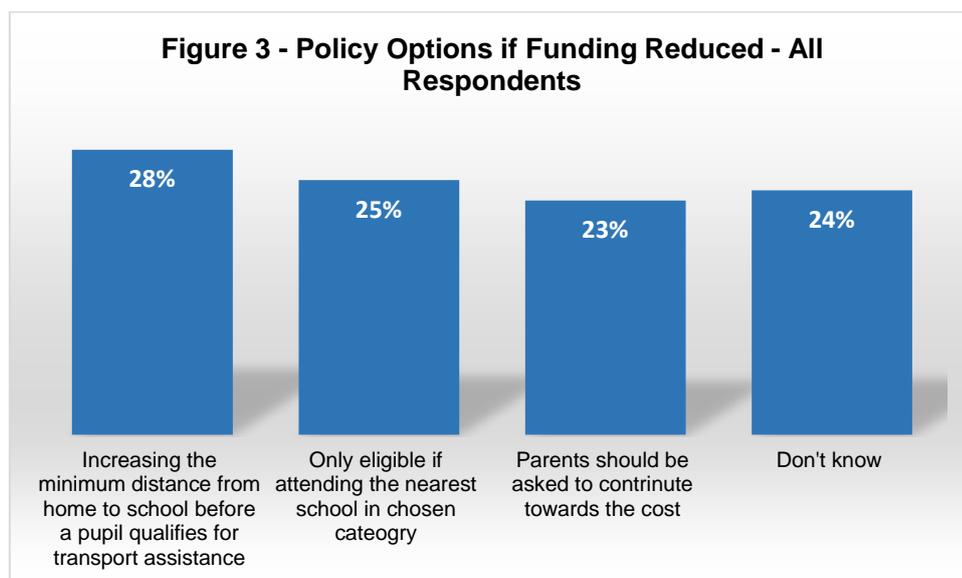
- school is on way to the parent/guardian’s work - 11.3%

32.5% of respondents gave the ‘other’ option as a reason – the free-text responses of these respondents highlighted the routing and timing of bus journeys as the key issues. Discussion with pupils at engagement sessions identified that it was much quicker to get a lift from a parent.

19. Overwhelmingly responses demonstrated strong support for the continued provision of home to school transport. 95% of respondents to Question 3 either agreed or strongly agreed that it was *a useful service that the Northern Ireland Executive should continue to provide*. Free-text responses suggested that removing eligibility for home to school transport, particularly from low income families and those living in rural areas, could potentially have an impact on levels of pupil attendance at school.
20. In Question 4 when asked about a preferred option for a future home to school transport policy responses indicated there is little appetite to reduce the level of transport provision offered to pupils. 41% indicated there preference was to offer free transport to all pupils and 30% were of the opinion that the current policy should remain unchanged (Figure 2). There were 197 free-text comments supporting free school transport for all children and 161 comments suggesting that the current policy should remain unchanged, the most common reasons cited being the importance of supporting parents who worked and pupil attendance.



21. In Question 5 respondents were asked on a scale of one to five (with one being the top priority and five being their lowest priority) which additional benefits they thought should be included within a future policy. Over half of respondents (53%) rated *improving the safety of pupils getting to school* as their top priority. Conversely *improving the economy by reducing congestion and allowing business traffic more freely* only garnered support as a top priority from 8% of respondents; it was listed as the lowest priority by 31%. *Supporting those on low incomes* was recorded as a lowest priority by 27%.
22. In the hypothetical situation outlined in Question 6 that an Education Minister would seek to reduce expenditure on home to school transport, respondents were asked to indicate how they believed this could be best delivered. Respondents did not express a strong preference for any one option, as represented in Figure 3 below. Response was similar in the children and young people engagement with the majority of pupils (32%) selecting the “don’t know” answer to this question.



23. Of the potential options identified for reducing the expenditure as shown above, parents being asked to make a contribution to the costs of transport received more support amongst respondents who were not currently eligible for transport assistance, 36% in contrast to 17% amongst those that are currently eligible. Whilst increasing the walking distance was the preferred option amongst those currently eligible (31%) in comparison to 21% of those not eligible.

24. The response to Question 7 whether funding should be diverted from other public services to expand the provision of home to school transport, there was a broadly equal split of 39% in favour and 40% against.

Other Engagement Activity Findings

25. Across all engagement activity, there was broad recognition that the current home to school policy is a valuable service and it should therefore remain unchanged or, the eligibility criteria amended to expand provision.
26. The broad policy themes identified in the engagement process are documented below.

Increasing Access to Home to School Transport

27. There was some support, from both the public engagement sessions and the facilitated engagement with parents and children and young people, for a policy that allowed children and young people to travel anywhere in Northern Ireland free of charge (similar to the Senior SmartPass). The general consensus was however that funding for this should not come from the Education budget.
28. Children and young people from the workshops felt strongly that free transport for children and young people would have a positive impact on the economy in areas such as: peace building, combatting isolation and obesity as it was felt that more opportunities would be available to access leisure activities, education and employment.
29. With regard to the home to school transport policy 68% of these children and young people felt that all pupils should have access to free home to school transport, which is significantly higher to the 41% finding from the online questionnaire. At the six focus groups with children and young people 38% felt that all children should be able to get free home to school transport regardless of where they live or household income. There were 165 questionnaire comments which strongly indicated a preference that all pupils should receive free home to school transport.
30. The broad opinion of those children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds contrasted with the views of those children and young people who are not from ethnic minority backgrounds. They overwhelmingly did not agree

that free home to school transport should be available for all pupils. They felt that children should be walking or cycling to school when the distance from school allowed; it was mentioned that there was an important social aspect to the time you would spend with friends when walking to school.

31. There was strong opinion during the public engagement sessions, and also during discussion with rural groups as to the dangers to children and young people walking in rural areas, often with no street lighting, footpaths and with 60 miles per hour speed-limits on some rural roads. Many believed this should result in free home to school transport being made available to all pupils living in a rural areas. 89% of the children and young people who attended the focus groups felt that children in rural areas should get free school transport. It was also echoed in the free-text responses to the questionnaire where there were approximately 300 comments with concerns over pupil safety on rural roads.

Reduce Eligibility for Home to School Transport

32. There was very limited support for reducing access to home to school transport although there was a recognition of the funding pressures that the education system is under and that this could bring benefits in terms of pupils taking active journeys to school such as walking or cycling.

Home to School Transport in Rural Areas

33. There was strong opinion in the public engagement sessions and discussions with rural groups that any reduction in the provision of home to school transport would impact more on rural than urban communities. This was also echoed in 154 free-text comments in the online questionnaire regarding the school bus service being vital for pupils living in rural areas. It was raised that:
 - Home to school transport is vital in rural areas to facilitate access to education, particularly for those from low-income backgrounds and those at post-primary level;
 - The provision of home to school transport supports working parents in rural communities where they may have a long commute to work;
 - The retention of a school bus service can be crucial in determining whether a public bus service in the area is sustainable and the removal of

the school bus route could therefore have a significant impact on the wider rural community; and

- Car usage has increased in rural areas in recent decades which has had a negative impact on the safety of pupils walking to, or standing at, bus pick up points.

34. A number of respondents believe that there should be separate eligibility criteria for pupils living in rural and urban areas e.g. the 2/3 mile walking distance should be reduced or removed in rural areas.

Pupil Safety

35. Similarly to the online questionnaire findings, the engagement activity identified that safety should be the key priority in the development of any future home to school transport policy. Parents' concerns focussed on road safety issues such as busy roads, speeding drivers, congestion at school gates and children walking or waiting for buses on roads with no footpaths or street lighting.
36. Children and young people were primarily more concerned about personal safety issues. Some felt scared walking to and from school or waiting at bus stops in the dark or having to walk through what they perceived to be 'hostile' areas in their school uniforms. Some pupils also raised that they would be keen to cycle to school but that it was not safe to do so due to the lack of cycle lanes or having to wear a restrictive school uniform.

Walking Distance

37. Opinion was strong across all stakeholders that two miles is too far to ask very young primary school pupils to walk. It was felt that, whilst pupils in years 5-7 should be able to walk further than those of younger primary school age, a 1 mile walking distance is appropriate for primary school pupils.
38. With post-primary pupils the walking distance brought broad consensus that 3 miles is too far to expect a post-primary pupil to walk to school. Pupils were concerned that whilst three miles might be an appropriate distance to ask a post primary pupil to walk, it is not possible due to the amount of books and equipment that they now have to carry. School life has changed and developed over the last twenty years: many pupils no longer have access to lockers and

have to carry all the books they need to and from school each day; and pupils have much more access to activities either during or after school hours such as music and sport and have a lot of equipment to carry. The amount a pupil has to carry was also the main reason put forward by pupils who have bus passes but often do not use them. Parents at the public engagement events also echoed the view that the amount pupils have to carry as the reason why they drive their children to and from school instead of them walking or taking the bus.

39. Tiredness and sleep was a major talking point spanning all the children and young people engagement conducted. Pupils felt that walking to and from school three miles would mean they would have to get up too early which would have the knock on effect that they would be too tired to learn when they got to school. Equally, they would be too tired when they walked home to be able to do their homework. It was felt that a reduced walking distance of 2 miles is more appropriate for post-primary school pupils.

Categories of School

40. The current home to school transport policy supports parental preference of school by making one of the eligibility criteria a 'suitable school'; this being one of the six categories of school outlined in paragraph 4. It also does so by not restricting eligibility to the nearest school in category. The degree of parental choice was the subject of debate across the range of engagement activities, with three broad opinions expressed:
 - the current policy should not change in terms of how it facilitates parental preference of suitable school;
 - pupils should only be eligible to their nearest school in category; and
 - there should be a maximum distance to school that will be supported by the home to school transport policy.
41. Comments from parents, school principals and free-text response in the online questionnaire demonstrate a strong desire that the current range of school categories should continue as per the current policy i.e. that eligible pupils should not be restricted to only receiving transport to their nearest school in their chosen category (approximately 70% of the free-text comments on the range of school categories within the home to school transport policy). Many felt this enables parents to choose the most suitable education option for their children. Many parents expressed concern that restricting transport assistance to the

nearest school in a given category could potentially mean that pupils are 'forced' to go to a school that does not meet their individual needs – there were 99 free-text comments in the online questionnaire on this issue.

42. The current levels of support for parental choice of school offered in the current policy was suggested as the reason behind the high levels of pupil eligibility. There was therefore some support at the engagement sessions for a future policy where pupils are only eligible to receive transport assistance to their nearest school in category (approximately 30% of free-text comments re parental choice also supported this as a policy option). These individuals felt that this option would support local schools. They also felt that if a parent didn't want their child to go to the nearest suitable school in their chosen category, it was still open to them to send their child to a more distant school, but it should be for the parents to fund transport to this school. The counter argument put forward to this by some respondents was that such a policy option could be unfair to lower-income families, as higher-income families would have a greater 'choice' of which school to send their children to as they could potentially afford to pay for transport to a wider range of schools.
43. It was also suggested that there should be a maximum distance a pupil is allowed to travel to a suitable school with a number of responses suggesting that this should be around 30 miles.
44. There was also discussion amongst some stakeholders surrounding a reduction in the number of school categories (the suggestion was four: Irish Medium; Integrated; maintained/denominational grammar; and controlled/non-denominational grammar), although it was recognised that this would require a major change in the current education system and that the home to school transport review was not the mechanism to drive such a change.
45. Some also raised that it was discriminatory that the choice of a 'suitable school' did not extend to single-sex schools. This issue was raised in all six of the focus group sessions with children and young people who felt very strongly that the choice of going to a single-sex or co-educational school should be taken into account when determining eligibility for transport assistance.

Parents Contributing to the Costs of Transport

46. There was broad support from a range of stakeholders for charging a small parental contribution if it meant keeping the policy as it is currently or, expanding eligibility. There was recognition that the introduction of a charge could also potentially encourage the use of bus passes by infrequent users. Many believed that lower income families and pupils with special educational needs should be exempt from such a charge.
47. Parents stressed however that a contribution should be accompanied by more flexibility in relation to bus pick up points, routes and times of bus services.
48. It was felt that the size of the contribution should take into consideration: number of children of school age in the household; family income; and parental work commitments. It was also suggested that the level of contribution should be 'banded' according to the distance travelled.
49. Those not in favour of a parental contribution argued that the administration of such a system could potentially be expensive and that it could potentially lead to social disadvantage and limit the choice of schools for some pupils.

Usage of Buses Passes

50. Two themes emerged around the usage of bus passes:
 - "Use it or lose it"; and
 - Transport facilitating attendance in extra-curricular activities.
51. An issue that came up repeatedly across all the forms of engagement was the issue of 'empty' seats on buses i.e. eligible pupils who apply for and receive transport assistance, but rarely/never use it. Opinion was that there should be a '*Use it, or lose it*' policy. Opinion was strong that if a pupil's usage fell below a certain level, the pass should be removed and re-allocated to another pupil as a concessionary seat. The reasons provided across the various engagement events for pupils not using passes were: times of buses i.e. the bus has the pupil in school too early or gets them home too late; a parent was driving past school on the way to work; inclement weather; the amount a pupil has to carry; safety; and pupils having access to their own vehicle.

52. The current policy supports the transportation of pupils based upon the usual school opening hours. A broad range of stakeholders felt that home to school transport should support extra-curricular activities as they are an extension of learning and therefore part of the school day, particularly as pupils represent their school when participating in activities such as sport, music, drama and speech. There was broad agreement that home to school transport should be available to enable pupils to get home safely from extra-curricular activities.

Low Income Households

53. Parents that attended the facilitated workshops were very clear that any future policy should not be means-tested. It was felt that transport assistance should be available to those 'most in need' with working parents being as much in need of the assistance as low-income families, with being able to get their children to school safely. Personal circumstances and means-testing received 306 comments in the online questionnaire with roughly 80% against a policy that introduced means-testing as it was felt that this would penalise working parents.
54. In contrast to the views expressed by parents at the facilitated workshops, 90% of the children and young people at the six facilitated workshops were of the opinion that pupils from low income families should be supported and receive free home to school transport. Concern was expressed by the pupils that children from low-income households could potentially miss out on education and the impact of this on the rest of their life.

Wider Public Benefits

55. Legislation currently defines the purpose of home to school transport to be to facilitate the attendance of pupils at grant-aided schools. However, the policy could also potentially have other wider benefits. Stakeholders were asked to prioritise what other benefits should be targeted by a future policy.
56. The top three priorities identified were:
- Improving the safety of pupils getting to school;
 - Protecting the environment; and
 - Supporting low income families.

57. The priorities for benefits identified in the focus groups with parents and with children and young people compared against the findings of the online questionnaire are represented in the Table 2 below.

Table 1 – Comparison of Priorities for Benefits amongst Stakeholders

Rank	Parents	Children & Young People	Online Questionnaire
1	Improving the safety of pupils getting to school	Improving the safety of pupils getting to school	Improving the safety of pupils getting to school
2	Improving health by encouraging walking & cycling to school	Supporting those on low incomes	Protecting the environment
3	Protecting the environment	Protecting the environment	Supporting those on low incomes
4	Improving the economy by reducing congestion and allowing business traffic to move more freely	Improving health by encouraging walking & cycling to school	Improving health by encouraging walking & cycling to school
5	Supporting those on low incomes	Improving the economy by reducing congestion and allowing business traffic to move more freely	Improving the economy by reducing congestion and allowing business traffic to move more freely

58. Improving the safety of pupils getting to school was listed as the top priority across all engagement conducted. There were also in the region of 300 free-text comments in the online questionnaire in relation to safety, notably in relation to the safety of roads in rural areas and the amount a pupil has to carry. A low priority across-the-board was improving the economy by reducing traffic congestion and allowing business traffic to move more freely.

Engagement with Other Government Departments

59. Following the meetings with officials in DfI, DAERA and PHA, there has been broad agreement that the implications of a revised home to school transport policy will impact a number of non-educational areas of public life including areas such as the impact of vehicle emission on levels of air pollution, the impact on

wider public transport services and levels of traffic congestion and how that effects the wider economy.

60. These discussions are continuing and will allow a better understanding of the wider costs and benefits to society of any change to the current home to school transport policy.

Way Forward

61. The Review Team will now analyse in detail all the evidence that has been gathered during the initial engagement phase and develop a broad range of policy options. The relevant equality and impact assessments will also be completed. Prior to any Ministerial decision being taken to revise the policy, it is planned that potential policy options will be subject to a full public consultation process.



Review of Home to School Transport Policy

Background

The Department of Education has recently embarked on a review of the current home to school transport policy. The review will consider a range of options to ensure a future home to school transport policy is fit for purpose and sustainable over the long term. The review is part of a wider transformation programme within the Department.

It is important to make clear that the review of the home to school transport policy is not about cutting the costs and depending on the nature of any revised policy, it is possible there would be no reduction in overall expenditure or the number of pupils in receipt of home to school transport.

The current home to school transport policy circular was issued in 1996 and has remained broadly unchanged. The Department of Education currently funds daily transport assistance in the region of over 84,000 pupils at an annual cost of approximately £81 million per year.

The Department is now commencing an engagement process to work with all stakeholders including parents, children and young people. As the Department has not yet developed a definitive list of potential options to be considered in the review, we are asking you to help us to identify potential options for a future policy.

This is only the beginning of the process and there will be further opportunities to give your views, including a full public consultation process once a new draft policy has been designed. A new draft home to school transport policy will also be subject to equality impact and rural needs impact assessments.

It is also important to highlight that any changes to the current policy will NOT affect pupils with a statement of need that identifies a special transport need.

It will be for a Minister and the Executive to decide on any changes to the current policy and due to the nature of the transport policy it is unlikely that any revised policy would take effect before September 2021 at the earliest.

To begin the process, we are asking for your thoughts by looking at two videos on the DE Website:

1. A short video message from the Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education explaining why we are reviewing the home to school transport policy.
2. A brief animated film that explains how it is currently decided if a pupil is eligible for home to school transport or not.

You are then asked to complete a questionnaire online.

The questionnaire will be available for completion until the end of March 2019. Although responses are only able to be submitted online, if this causes you any difficulties please contact us either via email at hometoschooltransport@education-ni.gov.uk or by telephone on 028 9127 9887.

Questionnaire

Question 1

Is/are any of your child(ren) currently eligible for free home to school transport?

Please select one option

a. Yes – my child(ren) is/are eligible for home to school transport and use the service	
b. Yes – my child(ren) is/are eligible for home to school transport but do not use the service	
c. No	
d. Don't know	

If you answered option (a) then please complete Question 2a.

If you answered option (b) then please go to Question 2b.

If you answered option (c) or option (d) please go to Question 3.

Question 2a

What is the main reason that your child(ren) uses free home to school transport?

Please select one option

My journey to work would not allow me to drop them at school myself	
It is too far for them to walk or cycle	
I believe it is one of the safest ways to get to school	
The weather is often too bad to walk or cycle	
Other, please describe	

Question 2b

If your child(ren) is/are eligible for free home to school transport but do not use it please select the reason(s) why from the list below?

Please tick all that apply

I feel my child is too young to get the bus	
The drop off point is not convenient	
I believe it is safer to drive my child to school	
The weather is often too bad	
It is just as easy to drive my child to school	
The school is on my way to work	
My child(ren) do not want to use the bus	
Other, please describe	

Question 3

Home to School Transport is provided free of charge in the region of over 84,000 pupils in Northern Ireland. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Home to school transport is a useful service that the Northern Ireland Executive should continue to provide."

Please select one option

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

Question 4

Do you think a future home to school transport policy should:

Please select one option

Offer free transport to all pupils	
Only offer free transport to pupils living in rural areas	
Only offer free transport to pupils in receipt of free school meals	
Only offer free transport to pupils living in rural areas and/or in receipt of free school meals	
Ask some parents to pay a contribution to the costs of their child(ren)'s home to school transport	
Remain unchanged	
Other, please describe	

Question 5

The main reason that home to school transport is provided is to support pupils to get to school who otherwise might not be able to get there. The policy could also have other benefits, some of which are listed below.

On a scale of one to five with one being your top priority and five your lowest priority, please prioritise which benefits you think should be included within a future policy.

Protecting the environment by reducing the number of cars on the road	
Improving pupil health by encouraging walking and cycling to school	
Improving the safety of pupils getting to school	
Supporting those on low incomes	
Improving the economy by reducing congestion and allowing business traffic to move more freely	

Question 6

If a future Minister for Education decided that some of the funding for home to school transport should be used to increase funding for schools, which of the following options do you think would be better?

Please select one option

The number of pupils receiving free transport should be reduced by increasing the minimum distance from home to school before a pupil qualifies for transport assistance	
The number of pupils receiving free transport should be reduced by providing free transport only to the nearest school within your chosen category	
Some parents should be asked to contribute towards the cost	
Don't know	

Question 7

Do you believe funding should be diverted from other public services to provide free home to school transport to more school pupils?

Please select one option

Yes	
No	
Don't know	