
Report to the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Title:	Sustainable School Travel
Committee date:	5 th March 2019 (informal workshop)
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Purpose of Agenda Item

TEC Select Committee in September 2018 asked for a 6-month update of actions to promote sustainable travel to schools. This item is for information only.

Background

In September 2018 Committee asked for an update on activity on sustainable school travel. Areas of concern were:

- The level of resourcing
- Cooperation between all BCC teams with an interest – including the Integrated Transport Service (ITS), Highway Maintenance, Road Safety and the Education Department / Admission Service who are responsible for Home to School Transport Policy

The issues raised by Committee include:

- Acknowledgement of the resource issue within the service, exacerbated at the time by unfilled vacancies.
- Members wanted to ensure that the promotion and profile of school travel planning continues going forward – including Member briefings and Head Teacher liaison.
- Evidence is needed that cost benefit analysis is being used to help inform targeted work/prioritisation of support to schools to promote sustainable school travel.
- Linkages between the Getting to School Strategy with the newly published Highways Development Management Guidance.

- Questions exist about how well the 'Safe Routes to School' process works to ensure walking routes are made safe.
- Members wanted to know that if this work were to be de-prioritised, what would be the reasons and the implications.

Summary

In response the following matters can be clarified:

1. There were low levels of resource at the time of the last committee meeting; We have now filled two vacant posts in this area and are moving in a positive direction, although still fewer than last year's three posts and still below comparator areas such as Hertfordshire. We now have in post a very well qualified School Travel Planning specialist and by end of March will have a permanent Team Leader. Also in the team, two officers look after the County's School Crossing Patrol service.
2. The biggest change since the last committee enquiry is that the Integrated Transport Team have begun a comprehensive review of all transport provision and have established ITS Development Group which reports to the ITS Strategic Group which brings together staff from three directorates in order to consider a number of related transport strategies. Each group meets as a minimum quarterly and reports to Directors.
3. The Council currently provides services within the Home to School Transport Policy which are over and above the statutory obligation to provide free home to school travel assistance. Demand for provision is increasing in line with the population increase. This policy is undergoing review however the revised document now includes reference to the Getting to School Strategy, completed in August 2018, as an integral annex.

Key issues

Members should note:

The Integrated Travel Assistance Programme (ITAP), which determines tens of millions of pounds' worth of expenditure, is subject to its own governance structure and oversight arrangements. The School Travel Plan team, in comparison, are small but essential contributors. The sustainable travel team are now playing an active part, giving strategic support and able to provide transport planning and classroom skills.

The Department for Transport recommends one person per 70 schools to support School Travel Plans, to meet that ratio an extra 2 members of staff are needed. This would also add resilience to the School Crossing Patrol service. With just one School Travel specialist, and given the complex nature of secondary schools, there

is not the capacity to focus on pro-active promotion of sustainable travel to older children; however support will continue to be provided passively.

During the ITAP Commercial Review of Bus Provision, there will need to be sensitive communication with schools. Currently, the emphasis is on supporting this review and providing factual information in complementary areas such as Bikeability. In recognition of the desire of Committee to have a School Promotion Leaflet this will be an early project for the new School Travel Planning Officer, with an aim for the Autumn term.

Committee have asked about the Sustainable Travel Planning Guidance. While this is currently on hold due to competing priorities, publications by others such as Sustrans, Transport for London and other professional institutions have provided very good alternatives. The Development Management Guidance has also recently published and will be used to guide conversations with the new school planning team.

The costs and benefits of improving a walking route versus providing short-distance school buses have been considered. The cost of feasibility studies, as well as school catchment changes and other issues make this challenging. As a result of Committee recommendations the ITAP review will include a commitment for Integrated Transport, School Admissions and TfB to meet as a minimum annually associated with the definition of the school year intake in June.

Mapping analysis will also be used to identify all of the schools in each electoral ward. Their school travel plan status will be recorded and a form of information note prepared for each member (with provision for any Unitary Ward changes). This work should be complete by the Spring Term and begins the process as advised by Committee for Member Briefings.

Resource implications

- The provision of two replacements for vacant posts means that there are no additional costs.
- The proposed low level of spend does mean that the potential benefits are less than the full potential. A 2018 'HEAT' assessment by AECOM identified potential return on investment in cycling and walking to school as around 10 to 1 (compared to HS2 and road projects are typically less than 2 to 1).
- HS2 Ltd. have, at various stages, promised to support affected schools. Mapping suggests that up to 70 schools are within 3km of the route and more are on Construction Routes. Therefore, extra staffing support funded by HS2 Ltd. will be pursued.
- Similarly there could be additional funding available as a result of HIF bids to support Aylesbury Garden Town. Other opportunities, such as linkages to

Heathrow, will also be explored by the new Team Leader when they start in post.

The overall approach is currently compromised by a low level of resource. The potential impacts therefore are likely to include minimal impact on health and the education of children. No overall change will be expected in congestion outside schools but there could be localised benefits when targeted. Support for the ITAP should result in cost saving benefits at least as large as the team staff costs.

Next steps

- The new School Travel Plan officer arrived in post in January 2019
- The Sustainable Team Leader is due to arrive in March 2019
- The Getting to School Strategy refresh is due in August 2019
- The Development Management Guidance is due in Summer 2020, and the school travel section has been noted for special attention in the re-write.
- The ITS Development Group and Strategic Group will continue to operate and report into Directors.