

Transport Consultation - Executive Summary

- Over 2,200 children young people and adults in total participated in the consultation with over 400 adults, children and young people participating in direct face-to-face meetings.
- The consultation sought views on a number of proposed changes to providing funding for the transport for children and young people to their place of education; statutory as well as discretionary.
- Views were, nevertheless specifically sought where the funding is currently discretionary. These areas are: transport to faith schools; post 16 transport to mainstream schools/colleges; post 16 transport for students with SEN (a statement of special educational need) and transport to not the nearest school.
- The consultation used a wide range of different engagement processes including: an online survey, a children's survey; a focus groups for SEN pupils and their parents and school staff; several Q&A sessions open to all interested parties; an email address to submit comments and recommendations; a specific session with the Leeds Youth Council and an OBA (outcome based accountability) event.
- In addition a petition was received from a faith group containing 1,460 signatures of residents, students and workers. This was formally acknowledged in writing to the sender with the proposal that the content would be taken into account in the overall analysis of the consultation. The petition was as follows *"to retain free transport to/from home and school for children attending their nearest faith school on the basis of their denomination or faith.*
- Of the 1,601 adult survey responses:
 - 80% **agreed or strongly agreed** that post 16 discretionary transport for SEN should continue, and 8% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that this funding should continue
 - 70% **agreed or strongly agreed** that post 16 discretionary transport to mainstream schools and colleges should continue to be funded, and 19% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that this funding should continue
 - 67% **agreed or strongly agreed** that funding of transport to faith schools should continue, and 25% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that this funding should continue
 - 64% **agreed or strongly agreed** that the council should continue to fund discretionary travel to a school which is not the nearest appropriate school, and 18% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that this funding should continue.
- Of the 26% respondents that stated that they would **not** be affected at all by any of the proposed transport changes:
 - 73% **agreed or strongly agreed** that post 16 discretionary transport for SEN should continue to be funded, and 13% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that that this funding should continue
 - 51% **agreed or strongly agreed** that post 16 discretionary transport to mainstream schools and colleges should continue to be funded, and 36% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that that this funding should continue
 - 35% **agreed or strongly agreed** that funding of transport to faith schools should continue, and 54% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that this funding should continue.

- 49% **agreed or strongly agreed** that discretionary transport to a school which is not the nearest should continue to be funded and 32% **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that that this funding should continue
- When comparing the 'not affected' group to the whole survey cohort the only statement which showed similar levels of support across both groups was the continuation of post 16 SEN (a difference of less than 10% between the two groups). In both groups the continuation of SEN provision was the most commonly supported option.
- Support for continuation of transport provision to faith schools differed most between the two groups with 32% less support for this to continue from the 'not affected' group compared to the whole cohort.
- Support for the continuation of post 16 transport to mainstream provision was supported less by the 'not affected' group compared to the whole cohort (19% difference).
- Support for the continuation of transport to not the nearest provision was supported less by the 'not affected' group compared to the whole cohort (15% difference).
- The most favoured options to provide transport for 5-16 year olds with SEN were: 'where absolutely necessary provide taxi/place or minibus for all journeys between home and school', followed by 'provide independent travel training', and the least favoured option was 'parents make their own arrangements'.
- Children and young people participating in the SEN focus groups felt that changes to their transport provision would have the following impacts:
 - no longer able to attend provision
 - it would affect their independence
 - they would feel less safe and
 - it would make transport more complicated
- Responses to the children's survey mirrored the concerns mentioned in the SEN focus groups but also highlighted that children were concerned about financial implications, lack of closer appropriate schools and safety of public transport.
- Consultation respondents felt that the proposed changes would have the following impacts:
 - pressure on family finance;
 - difficulties around working patterns and childcare
 - impact on the safety
 - independence and wellbeing of children (e.g. stress of more complicated journey, potential move of school, parental concern about safety)
 - cause attendance issues
 - lead to increased cars on the road
 - impact on admission processes and
 - not help us achieved the ambition of being a child friendly city
- The most common first choice of services that should continue were transport to faith schools (42%) and post 16 transport for SEN (32%). The response that was most commonly ranked lowest (i.e. least preferred option) was to stop providing any of the discretionary transport services that have been considered by this consultation.
- Across all consultation approaches respondents were asked to provide recommendations on how these services could be improved. Common responses included:
 - do not change current funding arrangements
 - make processes/transport more cost efficient

- introduce some level of charging – possible means testing or subsidising based on income
- review all other possible transport options (including bus passes) that could be provided
- cut others services across the council to enable funding for these transport services to continue
- any changes should be phased
- current service could be offered to parents at cost price
- provide reduced cost public transport for children
- Recommendations that were unique to the SEN focus groups included:
 - need for familiarity in set routes and consistent support
 - involvement in Independent Travel Training (ITT) scheme assessment and training from year 9
 - better assessments to identify and review suitable transport options
 - better disability awareness and training for bus drivers, commercial and private, and more consultation with young people directly to inform any changes.

Summary of concerns consistently expressed throughout the consultation

	Concern expressed	Impact	Response/mitigation
1	<p>Pressure on family finance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some respondents felt that it was unreasonable to expect parents to pay for transport now that the children were in their preferred school. • Others felt strongly that if changes were necessary these should be phased in so that those currently in receipt of support could finish their schooling at the school of their original preference. • Others felt equally strongly that they were being discriminated against on the basis of their faith or their child's learning need (special need), especially if they had more than one child attending the particular school, and so felt the funding should remain as it is. • Some respondents also felt that the estimated savings were not real as they did not take into account other hidden cost factors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendation to phase the changes in over a period of time will allow families to plan for any future additional expense. • The proposed phasing period would also enable bus operators to take full account of the impact of the changes and thereby mitigate any additional costs to families and the authority. • The full cost of the transport will also be mitigated in the future by automatic free access to a half-fare pass during the transition from primary to high school. The cost of this pass is currently £2 per child on application plus the cost of purchasing passport photographs. • Metro have started issuing the Young Person's Photocard as a smartcard as the next step in the roll-out of smartcard ticketing. This card provides the young person with an entitlement to travel at half fare on bus services and to purchase SchoolPlus weekly and monthly discounted tickets. The card is now issued free to new applicants. Future developments will include smart versions of weekly and monthly tickets and the ability to use the card to pay for individual journeys. • Metro and Leeds City Council are working towards an automatic issue of Photocards to students entering year 7 from September 2014 onwards at no charge to the student.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In total (when all eligible children access the pass) it would represent a total one-off saving, <u>directly by parents</u>, in the region of £500k. • Metro also issue a Scholar's PhotoCard to 16 to 18 year old students in full-time education, This card provides the young person with an entitlement to travel at half fare on bus services and to purchase SchoolPlus weekly and monthly discounted tickets. • Metro are rolling out the integrated transport "M Card" smartcard and, from September 2014 will be issuing all Scholars cards as M Cards. The cards will assist post 16 students get the best deal for their journey to college. • Metro are planning, resources permitting, to provide an introductory offer of free journeys to incentivise young person's travel on smart ScholarCards at the start of the 2014/15 academic year. • Officers from the respective Authorities are also collaborating to exploit opportunities to integrate Breeze and other cards issued to customers by the Council with the emerging transport smartcard being developed by Metro. • It is acknowledged that there may be unintended consequences and short-term costs of withdrawing funding, but these risks have been identified and will be actively managed and mitigated during the proposed two year phasing period across all areas of current

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			<p>discretionary funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new policy will still contain the option to award fully subsidised transport to a non-qualifying school on a discretionary basis. This will be at the discretion of an appeal panel on the grounds of exceptional hardship or other relevant factors such as avoiding the risk of a child becoming looked after.
2	<p>Difficulties with working patterns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many parents both work and so transporting their children to school, sometimes more than one school at the same time, can be difficult. For others they could do so but would need to negotiate (if possible) a permanent change in working pattern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The intention is to keep the current arrangements in place (for mainstream school and college) for those who are currently in the system, including those who will start school or college in September 2013, until September 2015. Thus the authority will continue to support families with discretionary transport for up to a further 2 years. If any changes to existing arrangements and routes are necessary during this period these will be undertaken in close liaison with the schools or colleges affected in order to mitigate the impact. This will allow parents the time to plan any changes. The intention is also to develop new routes in partnership in order to improve the overall offer. Parents will be informed of the new policy as part of the school admissions process, and so those who express a preference for a school that is not the nearest will be aware that from September 2014 they will be fully responsible for the transport costs, unless their child qualifies on the grounds of qualifying low income.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is a continuing demand for travel routes Metro is committed to ensuring bus routes are maintained in the future even if this is on a parent-to-pay basis.
3	Difficulties with childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents said that they would experience difficulty getting children to different schools or looking after pre-school children if transport was not available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As indicated above, there is no intention to remove any of the current bus services where there is a continuing demand. • However, it is important to note that parents have the primary responsibility to ensure that appropriate and safe arrangements are in place to look after their pre-school children, and to ensure their older children get to school safely and on time. • It may be that in some instances parents will be able to access support with child care based on qualifying income.
4	Impact on the safety of the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This concern was largely connected to the perceived potential that direct bus routes could be withdrawn, if they became uneconomical, resulting in current direct routes not being available. • Children may then have to take longer routes on regular service routes. If this was so there was also a perceived increase in risk from other bus users especially for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no intention in the short term to change any of the current arrangements. • The full impact of the changes will be known when the first cohort of parents make their preferences from 2014/15 onwards based on the knowledge that they will be responsible from that point to cover the full cost of transport. • This will mean that the bus operators will have sufficient time to adjust their operation thus mitigating the overall impact. • Any route changes required in the future will be properly

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		the younger age groups when moving from the junior schools.	planned and have a sufficient lead in time to enable full consideration of the implications of any unidentified risks.
5	Independence and well-being of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents expressed concern about the stress of their children potentially undertaking more complicated journeys; potential move of school if cost was an issue and general parental concern about safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no intention in the immediate to medium term to substantially the network. If future changes are necessary these will be undertaken in liaison with parents and schools It is acknowledged that cost may become an issue for new cohorts starting school in September 2014 when the phasing commences
6	Impact on attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A change in policy may have an effect on one of Leeds' corporate priorities, namely reducing the number of young people NEET (not in education employment or training). It may also have a marginal impact on attendance of children arriving late at school or college. Some parents felt that in some instances there would be a greater temptation on the part of older children to miss school if they were changing buses rather than travelling direct on one bus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many children currently travel independently and safely on regular service buses and get to school on time. During the same period attendance levels have improved whilst use of regular bus services to travel has either been maintained at the current level or increased. This suggests that the reasons for previous poor attendance were much more complex and largely unrelated to the type of transport used. There is little evidence, therefore, to sustain the view that travelling by bus will in itself have an impact on levels of attendance. The skills learned, and the benefits of providing greater levels of independence and freedom, are things that young people consistently tell us that they value.

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7	<p>Increased traffic on the roads</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents may choose to transport their children to school if bus routes are withdrawn on the dual, or separate, grounds of safety and cost. • Some of these routes are already heavily congested and in some instances parking near the school is extremely limited. • It is possible that the withdrawal of free travel in some areas of the city could have the effect of rendering some current bus routes not economically viable leading the operator to withdraw the route. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a clear area of concern and one shared by the authority. The Council already has in place a Sustainable Education Travel Strategy (SETS). The services and assistance provided in the existing Children’s Services Transport Policy are designed to respect and complement the measures detailed in SETS. This relationship will need to be maintained in any future transport policy. • The plan to ensure, wherever possible, that ‘socially necessary’ routes are maintained, and to review the proposed withdrawal of any routes on commercial grounds jointly with Metro in advance, should provide reassurance that all mitigating factors will be taken into account in advance. • The real impact of any changes will only be revealed over time when parents and children start to make real choices about whether they can afford to pay for transport that was previously provided free of charge and how to make the respective journeys. • The estimated cost of immediate implementation without phasing has been put at approximately £1.1m. This is a high estimate based on the fact that the impact is really not fully known at this stage. • If changes were phased in over a period of time it would allow the authority to work with our strategic partner (Metro) to mitigate the impact so that this cost is fully absorbed by the bus operators.

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8	Impact on admissions to local schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If parents, who can currently preference a faith or not the nearest school, are required to pay for the transport costs they may choose to preference a nearest school on the basis of affordability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is acknowledged that in some areas of the city there are pressures on the availability of school places and any changes along the lines proposed, depending on the numbers, may simply serve to increase that pressure. • The reality of this as a risk, however, will not be tested until any changes are implemented. The proposal to phase the changes in over a period of 2 years will allow the admissions team to assess the impact and demand for places in the more local schools. • A comprehensive analysis has been undertaken of the schools that may be affected by an increase in parents identifying their local school as a first preference. The proposed phasing will enable the admissions team to monitor the impact over time and take the appropriate action.
9	Reducing eligibility is not child friendly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing access to subsidised transport is contrary to Leeds' goal of becoming a Child Friendly City. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This concern is understood; the authority can see that the changes seem contrary to contributing to the goal of Leeds becoming the first Child Friendly City in the UK. It is believed, however, that making the proposed changes now will make the overall transport offer more sustainable over the longer term. • Leeds cannot afford to continue to pay for services that are currently completely uncontrollable and unsustainable. • The current policy is out of date and reflects a period when funding for such services was manageable and affordable

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			<p>without having an impact elsewhere. This is no longer the case.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the current eligibility criteria are not changed, in order to make the offer more equitable, there is little chance of using what funding the authority has available to make services more child and young person friendly and universally affordable and fair to all. • Whilst funding is focused on smaller specific groups it leaves it open to challenge from other groups who do not benefit, especially if it is not means tested or based on assessed need. • As part of Metro's on-going commitment to supporting Leeds' ambition to become a Child Friendly City all children, as they make the transition from primary to high school will, from September 2014, automatically receive free of charge a half-fare concessionary fare pass. This will enable half-fare bus travel across the whole of West Yorkshire. This is a major step forward by our strategic partner in making transport more accessible and affordable.
Young people's specific concerns			
10	No longer able to attend provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have told us that they want to be able to attend the course most suited to meet their learning needs and style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From September 2013 no child or young person in years 7 to 11 (mainstream) and up to 19 with SEN will be affected by the proposed changes for up to 2 years. This gives young people starting Years 7 and 12 in September 2014 the opportunity to plan for any additional costs at the end

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			<p>of the phasing period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The free half-fare pass will reduce the impact of this additional cost if the college course is the preferred route rather than a more local offer. • The Leeds College Principals have committed themselves to working in partnership with the authority to mitigate the impact of the changes • The new 'smartcard' technology will enable Metro to identify actual travel patterns and target improvements accordingly. The authority will also work to extend the current offer over time for use on local trains. • The authority will continue to work with the colleges and Metro to ensure that young people are able to choose a suitable learning offer on the basis of what meets their need rather than on the basis of affordability.
11	It would affect their independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people value the freedom afforded by the current arrangements. • Some are concerned that it will force them into choices they wouldn't otherwise make or that finances will mean they need to get support from parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is acknowledged that children and young people enjoy and appreciate the freedom currently provided by the zero cost associated with travelling to school or college, which the current policy affords them. • Very few other comparable local authorities provide subsidised travel to this extent with most limiting it to a concessionary amount and just to the place of learning. The proposed arrangement will enable the young person to travel anywhere in West Yorkshire by bus for educational, social and leisure purposes.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authority's continuing support for the concessionary fare system, therefore, and the proposed improvements, will ensure young people are able to continue to access their preferred learning option at an affordable level with a view to making further improvements as the technology improves.
12	They would feel less safe and it would make transport more complicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some young people feel that their safety may be compromised. Others say that their journey to school and/or college could become very difficult if current routes are withdrawn and they have to travel by regular service routes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authority is working directly with Metro and the bus operators to ensure that, as part of our joint agreement with them all services, operators and drivers take the safeguarding of children and young people seriously, not just the ones commissioned to provide bespoke services for children. Training programmes address this specifically for employees working routinely with children and young people; especially those with SEN. Wherever possible the authority will work directly with Metro in order to influence operators to provide direct routes where the demand clearly demonstrates there is a commercial case. If a route is deemed socially necessary the authority will use its influence to maintain the route based on a clear impact assessment.

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	Concerns unique to students with special educational needs (SEN)		
13	Need for familiarity in set routes and consistent support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the specific needs of some children and young people with SEN they need consistency and a familiar pattern of delivery. • There is a concern that future changes in routes will upset children as they will lose familiar buses and drivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This need is very well understood and is why any long term changes will be kept to a minimum until the full impact of the Children and Families Bill is known. • In the short term the major change that will be made is that parents will be asked to make a contribution to the running of services that will continue to be provided • Any changes in future delivery method will be fully shared and planned with a good lead in time. This will ensure children and parents feel safe, well informed and confident that their needs will be met. • New ways of delivering post 16 SEN transport are continually being explored in order to both maximise efficiencies and provide better quality and more consistent delivery.
14	More involvement in the Independent Travel Training (ITT) scheme assessment and training from year 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current service sometimes starts to help children too late. They need a longer time to get used to travelling more independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is already planned; the current team will be doubled in size during this financial year (13/14) to focus on a reassessment of the transport needs of all children with a statement in receipt of supported travel. • This will also include reassessment of statutory pupils so that we can be sure the most appropriate type of support is currently being offered; where appropriate they will be assessed for ITT as soon as possible to give a better lead in time to independence

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service will also be expanded, as appropriate, to support looked after children and in helping students to make a smoother transition from primary to high school
15	Better assessments needed to identify and review suitable transport options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This needs to fit the individual as not all children can cope with independent travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See also Concern 14
16	Better disability awareness and training needed for bus drivers commercial and private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some regular service drivers treat young people with SEN as though they can cope as well as mainstream children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See also concerns 12 & 13.
17	More consultation needed directly with young people to inform any changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people often feel that the consultation is meaningless as the decision has already been made They would like to be involved sooner in the process so that they can share their views and truly influence the outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would be welcomed. A session was held with the Leeds Youth Council as part of the consultation. An offer to provide an update on any changes has been taken up and will be organised as soon as the decision on the future make up of services has been made. This will enable them to influence how the changes are implemented. The Leeds members of the national youth parliament have also requested a meeting.