

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date: **29 June 2004**

Title of Report: **Home to school transport – Draft School Transport Bill**

By: **Director of Education and Libraries
Director of Transport and Environment**

Purpose of Report: **To advise the Cabinet of the content of the draft School Transport Bill and propose a response to the new legislation**

Recommendation: The Cabinet is recommended to:

- i) note the content of the report; and**
 - ii) agree that the County Council does not apply to be a pilot authority but prioritises the development of individual school travel plans as the most effective way of reducing traffic related to home to school journeys**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There would only be cost implications if the County Council applied to be a pilot authority.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The new draft School Transport Bill was published on 8 March 2004 and is expected to come into force in 2005. Home to school transport legislation has remained substantially unchanged for 60 years and there have been concerns about the unfairness of current arrangements – children living beyond the statutory distances are entitled to free transport whilst parents have to make the arrangements and meet any costs involved for children living just under the statutory distance. However, the primary aim of the legislation is to reduce the use of the car in relation to the home to school journey. The changes proposed in the Bill are supported by the Local Government Association. Currently the Bill is subject to discussion and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is consulting on the proposals. A questionnaire has been circulated by the DfES with the closing date for responses being 25 June. Attached as Annex 1 is a copy of the initial response sent by East Sussex, with the proviso that further comments may be submitted following discussion by the Cabinet.

2.2 The Bill will enable Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to apply to pilot changes to the transport arrangements in the area (or a group of LEAs could apply to be a pilot). Pilots have to be agreed by the Secretary of State who will agree between 6 and 12 in England (covering up to 20 LEAs). The key feature of a bid will be to show how the use of the car on school runs will be reduced. The most recent statistics show that now 39% of primary school children and 18% of secondary pupils are driven to school in cars. This is a rise from 22% and 10% in 1985. At the same time the numbers walking have dropped from 67% to 54% (primary) and from 52% to 40% (secondary). Not only does this give rise to issues of congestion on roads but also links to health issues, eg obesity.

2.3 A draft application form has been circulated although formal bids will not be sought until the legislation is in place. The closing date for applications is likely to be July 2005 with decisions being made in September or October 2005. The DfES hopes that schemes might start in 2006 but in reality schemes are unlikely to start before 2007 because of the admissions timetable. Schemes will be evaluated towards the end of 2010 with the potential for a decision on changing national legislation in 2011 and implementation in 2012.

2.4 Applications are complex. In addition to covering the travel needs of all pupils in the area it is also necessary to show:

- Aims and objectives – including how car usage will be reduced
- Targets

- Educational benefits for pupils (including disadvantaged groups)
- Benefits for the wider community
- Evaluation strategy
- Financial details and charging arrangements
- Confidence that charging will not lead to an increase in car usage
- Partners involved

2.5 Before applications are made there must be full consultation on the detailed proposals across the area involving parents, prospective parents, operators, governors and anyone else with an interest. This will involve extensive work with no guarantee of being chosen as a pilot authority. Charging parents whose children currently receive free transport (the legislation states that children in receipt of free school meals cannot be charged) is regarded as a key part of a pilot scheme with the income generated being used to make provision for children currently not entitled to free transport. However, charging parents is not likely to be welcomed by those who are currently entitled to free transport and there is no guarantee that these children will continue to use buses, giving rise to the potential for more parents to drive children to schools.

2.6 The resources used in relation to school transport will, in effect, be ring fenced and not available for other purposes than those defined in the plan. Most free transport is to secondary schools although most car usage for the school journey relates to primary schools. If 4,000 secondary pupils (the current number of pupils receiving free transport in East Sussex) were charged 75p per day (there has been some research indicating parents will pay that) an income of about £570,000 would be generated. At £150 per day it would be possible to fund an extra 20 vehicles (subject to availability) or alternatively reduce fares on buses to encourage use of public services rather than use the car. Extra staff would, however, need to be employed to administer any pilot scheme e.g. to collect money.

2.7 Currently, activity to reduce the use of cars for the school journey in East Sussex focuses on School Travel Plans (STPs). STPs also address the issue of congestion at the school gate or roads around the school. Schools are encouraged to develop STPs and the County Council employs a STP co-ordinator who has an 0.5 assistant funded by PSA agreement supporting schools in developing their STPs. Currently about 30 schools either have STPs or are developing STPs. The DfES/Department for Transport has provided additional grant for the next two years to expand the work on STPs. Two additional School Travel Advisers are to be employed and priority will be given to surveying the situation at schools where there are currently no STPs. There is no local statistical information about the situation in East Sussex schools in terms of car usage for the school run and obtaining this information is critical to prioritising work on future STPs. The DfES has set a target of all schools having STPs by 2010.

2.8 Schools with STPs are entitled to additional capital funding through DfES grant to support their STPs. A primary school will receive about £5,000 and a secondary school £10,000. The expanded STP team will also advise schools on the use of the resources. Typical measures include cycle storage, lockers, improved pedestrian access or safety improvements. The expectation is that the resources will be used within the school premises. The new Local Transport Plan (LTP) will make reference to STPs and the expanded STP team will be closely involved with the drafting of the LTP as it relates to Safer Routes to Schools linked to reducing the use of the car on home to school journeys.

3. Environmental Issues

3.1 A successful pilot scheme will result in a reduction in the use of cars thus reducing congestion on roads, improving air quality and the health of children.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1 The need to reduce the use of cars for the school run is recognised. At the moment it is not judged that involvement in the national pilot scheme is the best way to take forward work in this area, but that more will be achieved through prioritising work on school travel plans with an aim of meeting the national target of all schools having a STP by 2010.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

School Travel Schemes – Draft Bill and prospectus
Travelling to School; an action plan
Travelling to school: a good practice guide

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