
School Travel Plans Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Committee

27 July 2010

School Travel Plans Scoping Report

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents information on the current arrangements for school travel planning in York, and asks Members to agree a remit for this review together with a workplan for carrying out the review.

Background

2. In March 2010, Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC) received a referral from the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee in response to a scrutiny topic registered by Cllr Alexander – see Annex A. They raised concerns regarding the extent of the proposed topic and suggested that the topic should be more clearly defined and concentrated around the Safe Routes to School Programme and School Travel Plans (STP). As a result, they requested that SMC establish a cross-cutting ad-hoc scrutiny committee to look at all the relevant issues.
3. SMC considered a presentation that had previously been given to the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and officers presented information on the work currently taking place with schools to address some of the ongoing issues which in turn, provided a possible focus for this review:

Funding

- Funding of the School Travel Co-ordinator Post after April 2011

Review of Travel Plans

- What factors make a successful School Travel Plan, what difference do School Travel Plans make & how could this influence LTP3?
- How often are School Travel Plans reviewed/renewed and is there a policy around this?
- Best Practice (are there any outstandingly good School Travel Plans & how can the successful factors within them be shared)?
- How can the profile of School Travel Plans be raised?

Health /Air Quality

- How can an increased use of School Travel Plans improve health benefits and impact upon air quality across the city?

Parking, Congestion & Safety

- How can this be improved near schools, specifically within designated School Safety Zones?
4. SMC agreed that a crosscutting ad-hoc scrutiny committee should be established to carry out the review, made up of members from the following Overview & Scrutiny Committees:
- Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 - Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 - Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 - Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee
5. SMC recognised that once established, its first task would be to receive an information report highlighting the current situation in regard to school travel plans (both the national context and in York), in order to identify and agree a remit with objectives for the review.

Background to School Travel Plans

6. Over the last 20 years the proportion of children being driven to school has been gradually increasing with commensurate impacts on congestion, pollution, health and impacts on the wider environment.
7. It was against this back drop that in 2003 the government of the day stated that *“We want local education and transport authorities to develop a joint strategic approach to school travel issues and to reduce car dependency for journeys to school in their area. School travel plans will be the key strategies for achieving this and we want authorities to work with schools or groups of schools to develop plans to meet local circumstances. Our objective is that all schools should have active travel plans before the end of the decade.”*¹
8. **What is a Travel Plan?**
An STP is a written document that outlines a series of practical steps for improving children’s safety on the journey to and from school and for reducing car use while increasing active travel to school, particularly walking and cycling. The whole community should be involved in its writing - parents, pupils and staff are surveyed and asked about their journey to school in order to identify if there are any aspects of the journey where children (and adults) feel unsafe and which may present a barrier to walking or cycling. Without the support of the Head Teacher and staff, any travel plan is likely to be ineffective.
9. **Statutory Duties**
Local authorities have certain statutory duties relating to sustainable travel to school. The Education and Inspections Bill 2006 placed a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school. The key responsibilities placed on local authorities by the Bill are summarised in Annex B.

¹ (p48, Traveling to School – A good practice guide, 2003)

10. The same Bill places a responsibility on Local Authorities to include 'Mode of Travel to school' in the school census as this is a mandatory indicator in Local Transport Plans. All schools with an approved travel plan are required to submit their mode of travel data for all their pupils. The data is collected in the Autumn term and submitted with the January Census data. In York this data is used to monitor existing travel patterns and help identify schools with a potential to reduce car usage.
11. The Education (School Information) (England) Regulations 2002, amended with effect from 1st June 2007, requires local authorities to publish their Sustainable Mode of Transport Strategy (SMoTS) on their website by 31st August each year. This is available on the CYC website.
12. As part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review the Government published a set of 198 National Indicators (NI's) that underpin the new performance framework. The NI's which school travel plans support to a greater or lesser degree are listed in Annex C.
13. **Why target the journey to school?**
Nationally, some 20% of the peak time traffic comes from the school run. In York some 30% of primary school children are driven to school. This has obvious impacts on congestion, carbon emissions and air quality within the City as a whole and the safety of roads around school entrances. Locally this has an impact on journey times within the City such as on bus route timetables. For example, bus route No 10 from Stamford Bridge allows 1 hr 26 mins in term time but only 1 hr 3 mins during school holidays (between 0730 and 1000), that is an extra bus on the road to maintain a half hourly schedule. During school holidays, traffic volumes are noticeably lower.
14. At the same time as car use for school journeys has been increasing, obesity rates amongst the population, and notably amongst school children have also been increasing. While there may not be direct links between the two, tackling the school run and encouraging children to travel actively to school rather than by car can help with improving the overall health of children and the families that travel with them on the school journey.
15. **Role of School Travel Plan Coordinator**
A School Travel Plan Coordinator (STPC) works with schools to identify the main school travel related issues arising from the consultation process. The STPC supports the school in establishing an STP working group comprising representatives from the school community. The STPC provides advice and guidance to the working group with the aim of drawing up an action plan that identifies solutions to the key issues. The STPC will support schools in analysis of the travel to school data so that realistic mode of travel targets accompany the action plan.
16. While some issues will be unique to a particular school, some issues will be common to many. The STPC works with Engineering Consultancy to develop 'Safe Routes to School' schemes which help improve conditions on the main

walking and cycling routes to school. The appropriate solutions are identified and a plan of action is agreed. The schemes may be as simple as the need to cut back vegetation to improve visibility. Alternatively improvements to footways, provision of crossing facilities or traffic calming to improve road safety may be implemented. In some cases, new or improved cycle routes are developed such as that along Beckfield Lane, or outside Haxby Road school where measures were taken to prevent drivers driving in the cycle lane to avoid the speed cushions. The extent of the scheme generally depends on the number of pupils, where they live, and the number (and cause) of accidents as well as the speed and volume of the traffic on the surrounding road network.

17. The STPC also acts as a key link between schools and various Council departments. This role is likely to be more important if there is an increase in the number of 'Academy' schools where the level of contact between the Council and schools could be reduced. Links are also built with other teams to support the travel planning process e.g. with the Planning and School Transport/Education Access teams as well as Parking Services and Road Safety, to ensure new school developments have an STP in line with the planning requirements.
18. **School Initiatives**
The STPC works to demonstrate how sustainable and active travel to school relates to the delivery of a number of initiatives that schools are involved with such as the 'Healthy Schools' agenda, specifically tackling childhood (and family) obesity); the 'Sustainable Schools' agenda and a number of other initiatives as follows:
19. **Healthy Schools** –In York, over 80% of schools have now achieved 'Healthy School' status. To gain that award schools must satisfy a huge range of criteria, including having an up to date school travel plan. When a school is under review for the Award, the Healthy Schools coordinator will advise if they think the school's travel plan needs updating. Collaborative working means that schools needing their travel plans updating are identified and supported in a timely manner.
20. **Contribution to Childhood Health and Obesity Levels** – In York, health, and in particular obesity, has been targeted in its Local Area Agreement as an area for action. In particular, NI 56 targets children in year 6, with some 15% of York 10/11yr old children currently classed as obese. The same document highlights that adults over 16 years old should be taking 30 minutes exercise 5 times weekly and that children should be taking at least 60 minutes moderate activity each day.
21. Many parents of primary school age accompany their children to school. A not insignificant number will drive their children to school thinking that it is quicker when often it is just as quick to walk or cycle without the added inconvenience of finding a parking spot. The easiest way of getting exercise is widely recognised as by building it into the daily routine. By walking or cycling with their children to school, the accompanying adults will be able get some or even all of their daily recommended exercise from the journey to school. In addition children will be getting some of their 60 minutes activity time, again as part of their daily routine. When children were surveyed for the 2009 school census, we found that many of the primary school children who are driven to school would actually prefer to walk

or cycle. It tends to be the common assumption that those who travel actively are fitter, healthier and leaner than those who travel by mechanised transport. A survey of a number of scientific journeys showed that:

- Children who cycled were fitter than those who walked or went by car or bus;
- Car users were the least fit, less than bus users;
- Children who travel actively to school
 - Had higher weekly levels of activity than those who did not
 - Were more likely to be active in other aspects of their lives
 - May have a lower BMI

22. **Sustainable Schools** - A Sustainable School is one that puts sustainability at the heart of the school culture. As outlined in the DCSF's 'Sustainable Schools Initiative; there are eight 'doorways' which allow schools to take an holistic approach to minimising their carbon emissions and reducing their environmental impact. These doorways look at such topics as waste, energy and water, and travel and traffic. Health is taken seriously and pupils encouraged to travel in a sustainable manner to school. Therefore for a school to be a Sustainable School, it should have a recent and active school travel plan.

Key Drivers in York

23. City of York Council (CYC) has set a target to reduce carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. As the 'school run' contributes 20% of the vehicles on the road during term time, it is clear that by encouraging more walking and cycling to school, active travel to school can play an important part in reducing carbon emissions through transport and contribute to a low carbon lifestyle.
24. At present some 30% of primary school children and 6.2% of secondary school pupils in York are driven to school. In a recent LTP2 interim report, CYC stated it would like the proportion of primary and secondary school children travelling to school by car reduced from a total of 18.6% of all children in 2008 to 15% by March 2011 and cycling rates increased from 6.9% to 13.4%. The cycle city target is to increase cycling rates to 15%. Walking rates are to stay broadly the same.
25. New development in schools often impacts on the number of vehicles visiting a school. Such is the priority that York gives to encouraging sustainable travel to school, if there is a likelihood that any proposed development will impact on vehicle movements, schools will usually have to have an effective STP in place, as one of the planning conditions, within a set period following the opening of the school. This policy has been effective in encouraging schools to write a new travel plan or review existing plans.
26. The Council looks for ways to encourage schools to develop active and sustainable travel initiatives. The initiatives that appear to prove most successful at encouraging sustainable travel to school are those in which the children themselves are motivated to take part. Those initiatives currently underway across the city are detailed in Annex D.

Monitoring/Reviewing STPs

27. In August 2007 the Department for Transport issued an updated Advice Note giving information on a newly developed national minimum standard as a means of ensuring as far as possible, that the content and quality of an STP is such that it should ensure longevity, encourage ownership by the school, assist with the delivery of each of its specified objectives and targets, and generally be as effective as possible in bringing about long term change. In addition to the National Healthy Schools Standard criteria and other developments, the Advice Note also took into account changing government policies and priorities, including 'Every Child Matters', Extended Schools, the 14-19 Agenda, and the requirements of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. From September 2007 the criteria by which an STP was considered was made considerably more rigorous, requiring partnership working and ensuring long term sustainability of the travel plan.
28. In York, some 53 schools (69.7%) of York's 76 maintained and Independent schools had delivered travel plans to the old standard and that since 2007, 19 schools (25%) have delivered to the new standards. Taking into account the fact that travel plans tend to have a life of around 3 – 4 years, this means that the pre 2007 travel plans are now in need of updating.
29. An STP needs to have been reviewed in the last 3-years to meet the requirements of the Healthy Schools annual review. At present the effectiveness of York's STPs are monitored through the annual census. Until March 2010, the focus had been on encouraging schools without a travel plan to write one. As York has only 1 FTE this has left little opportunity for more formal reviews of travel plans other than for planning purposes or at the school's request. For a period spanning 2006 – Jan 2008 the role was either staffed by 0.5 FTE or not at all.
30. Of the 8 schools who completed their first travel plan in 2009, the 2010 Annual Census showed that 5 schools had increases in walking of between 3% and 9% and decreases in car use between 2% and 5%, and one school showed a very slight shift to sustainable travel. Two schools showed increases in car use of around 2%, one of which has re-engaged to actively promote sustainable travel in the autumn. The statistics must, however be placed within the context of the varying school sizes such that for a school of 120 children, a shift of 2% accounts for 2-3 children.
31. As of 2010, 95% of York schools have travel plans with the few remaining schools expected to deliver by March 2011. For this reason, it is difficult at this stage to determine the specific impact school travel plans (in isolation from other measures) have had on encouraging a shift to sustainable modes. What is clear, however, is that the travel planning process is one which must be revisited on a regular basis to allow schools to adapt to the changing environment in which they function.

School Travel – the next steps?

32. The coordination of school provision is once more, being re-evaluated. It is currently unclear as to the extent to which local authorities will have responsibility for engagement with the schools in the area. It is clear, however, that parents will still take their children to school and that the local authority will remain the body responsible for the smooth operation of the public highway, ultimately for the provision of public transport and for ensuring that air quality standards are monitored and work is carried out to ensure that they improve.
33. **Local Transport Plan**
In common with all other local authorities, City of York is proceeding with the design of its third local transport plan to be implemented from April 2011. The plan is intended to shape transport policy for the next twenty years with an action plan which will set specific, deliverable, objectives for 2011-2014/16. All current indications suggest that this delivery will be within the context of a greatly reduced Capital budget, meaning there will be reduced funding for infrastructural schemes.
34. All of the problems facing our schools and communities: congestion, parking, obesity, etc, will still need to be addressed. 'Influencing Travel Behaviour' is likely to be high up the government's agenda as it looks for low cost schemes and initiatives demonstrating value for money.
35. Currently this Council has STPCs but at a time when resources become increasingly scarce, perhaps the role of this post should be widened to work with schools within the context of the wider community, for instance working with local businesses to understand how parents can walk their children to school then continue to walk, cycle or take the bus to their place of work.
36. **The Environment**
If the Council is committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 as per the pledge made in its Carbon Action Plan, it is difficult to see how this will be achieved without the necessary partnerships with schools and businesses required to influence travel behaviour. The STPCs have developed good working relationships with schools across the city and are now assisting schools to implement their action plans contained within the travel plans to ensure that they do engender lasting change.
37. **Finance**
Since 2004 the Government has financed the initiative to deliver school travel plans in all of the nation's schools, and a target was set for all Local Authorities that 100% of schools should have an STP by March 2010. It is worth noting the onus has been on Local Authorities to deliver and promote school travel plans, not the schools themselves which is why some schools still do not have a travel plan. In York this money has funded one full time equivalent member of staff (usually, as at present, two members of staff on a job-share basis). For 2010/11, the area based grant was reduced by 25%.
38. Government funding will continue until March 2011 and for 2011/12 the Council currently has no indication as to whether central government will continue to fund

this area of work. Therefore, as part of this review Members may wish to identify alternative ways of supporting schools with travel planning should the funding currently available be withdrawn in future years.

Future Priorities

39. In order to appreciate the work required to continue supporting schools with travel planning, the future priorities for York's STPCs are outlined below:
- Working with the few schools still without a School Travel Plan (STP).
 - Refreshing plans at schools with an STP; particularly those that were written pre-2007 and show no evidence of review in the last 3 years.
 - Assisting schools and engineering colleagues to identify and implement appropriate traffic engineering measures – e.g. pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, safe routes to schools, cycle and mini-scooter parking.
 - Encouraging the few remaining secondary schools who are not currently doing so to introduce Bikeability Levels 2-3 – the modern cycle proficiency course.
 - Encouraging all schools to:
 - i) promote and monitor the uptake of Bikeability Levels 1-3 and pedestrian training with the aim of increasing the numbers of students receiving all levels of road safety training.
 - ii) conduct a monthly/bi-monthly cycle count
 - iii) introduce cycle and walking initiatives such as 'Bike It' and 'Walk Once a Week'.
 - Working with all schools to help them to:
 - i) complete the relevant aspects of the January School census more accurately i.e. Actual Mode of travel to school (MOT) data collection.
 - ii) conduct a bi-annually collection of preferred MOT. This is a requirement of a travel plan review.
 - iii) widen the scope of their plans to ensure that they:
 - address all pupil needs i.e. journeys to/from school at normal start/finish times; journeys to attend pre and after school events and journeys during the school day to attend activities at other locations;
 - Include journeys made by teachers and other staff during the school day, including their commute to work. This will bring the scope of travel plans in line with the expectations of the planning system (PPG 13 Transport and Sustainability)
 - Publishing STPs on school websites to allow parents and staff to better engage with the travel planning process and to increase awareness of sustainable modes of travel.
 - Undertaking focussed work with parents and school staff.
 - Investigating the feasibility of integrating school travel planning with workplace and area based travel planning.
 - Identifying further opportunities to share good practice and provide targeted specialist support.
 - Analysing the data alongside our Local Authority Management Information Services officer to improve the quality and evidence the case for funding further work.

40. This work will involve working with others both inside and outside the authority, to strengthen current partnerships and to develop new strategic alliances.

Consultation

41. In carrying out this review, Members may choose to consult with Council officers – in particular the Transport Planning Unit, as well as with schools and parents.

Suggested Remit & Objectives For This Review

42. In support of the ongoing work being carried out by STPCs, the suggested aim of this review could be:

‘To identify an integrated approach to travel plan development that recognises the relationships between active travel and health, sustainability (particularly air quality and climate change issues) and traffic congestion and community cohesion.’

43. The objectives for this review could focus on:

- Understanding what works in York and the challenges, in order to identify how the Council can do school travel planning better
- Identifying the best way to support schools with travel planning (either through the role of STPCs (subject to available funding being provided/identified) or providing support to schools through an alternative mechanism
- Identifying the key messages for all travel planning in York

Options

44. Having considered the information contained within this report and its annexes, Members may choose to:
- amend and/or agree the suggested aim and objectives for this review as detailed in paragraphs 41-42 above or;
 - identify and agree an alternative aim and set of objectives

Implications

45. There are no known Legal, Financial, HR, Equalities or Other implications associated with the recommendation in this report.

Corporate Strategy

46. A review of this topic would support a number of the themes within the Council’s Corporate Strategy e.g. that the Council will make York a Healthy and more Sustainable City.

Risk Management

47. There are no known risks associated with the recommendation in this report.

Recommendations

48. Having considered the information within this report and its annexes, Members are asked to agree the following for this review:

- an aim and objectives
- a number of meeting dates
- a workplan

Reason: To ensure compliance with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

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Scoping Report Approved



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Specialist Implications Officer(s) N/A

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes

Annex A – Topic Registration Form

Annex B – The Education and Inspections Bill 2006 – Key Points

Annex C – List of National Indicators supported by School Travel Plans

Annex D – York Schools Current Sustainable Travel Initiatives