

Report of the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning

Travel to School - plans for each school to make daily journeys safer, increase active travel, reduce congestion and air pollution around school sites.

Summary

1. This report presents background information on home to school travel planning in York. It sets out the policy background for home to school travel and presents the current approach and resources provided for this function in York. It then lays out the options available to local authorities and asks Members for their views on the extent to which the various instruments available should be used in York.

Background and opportunity

2. York's new Local Transport Strategy (LTS) supports moves to improve travel to school for those using sustainable modes of transport. This is desirable for a whole series of wider policy objectives, including:
 - Increasing actual and perceived safety by reducing vehicle movements around schools
 - Improving air quality and reducing pollution around schools
 - Increasing physical activity amongst young people and reducing levels of childhood obesity
 - Reducing carbon emissions by reducing car use
 - Reducing congestion at school start/ end times¹
 - Encouraging the independence of young people

¹ Around 20% of traffic in the AM Peak hour is estimated to come from school traffic – which is one reason why congestion is usually significantly lower during the school holidays.

3. There are also time, and money, savings available to parents and carers if children are able to travel independently to and from school and do not require set down and pick up².
4. The new LTS recognises this situation in a number of its policies, including:
 - **Policy 2.2** – Create a priority walking, and wheeling network, jointly with partners including the disabled community, walking and environmental groups, developers and employers. This network will offer safe, high quality continuous routes to the city centre, all district and village centres, schools, colleges, healthcare facilities, shops and places of employment. We envisage this network will, once complete, cover the whole city to provide a joined-up network.
 - **Policy 3.8** – Our approach to transport planning for the future will use the ‘Decide and Provide’ approach which decides on a preferred future, assessing what travel needs that will generate and providing a development path best suited to achieving this. This is to mitigate against development which increases vehicle traffic in York.
 - **Policy 6.4** – To make travel safer for pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists, adopt 20mph as the default speed limit for all roads through residential areas (including new developments), within the city centre, near schools, in villages and at retail areas and parks.
 - **Policy 6.5** – Maintain our highway assets (including walking, wheeling and cycling routes) in line with the priorities outlined in the York transport hierarchy and with the aim of managing risk, minimising disruption and delay, and increasing the reliability of the network.
 - **Policy 7.1** – Encourage walking, wheeling and cycling to school and work by working with schools, developers and employers, helping to create travel plans, improving way-finding, and considering measures such as school streets and ‘park and stride’. We will develop case studies to show how many people can easily live less car dependent lives – often reducing their

² Potentially there will be households in York who feel they need to own a car, or a second car, because they require it for the journey to school, and can be freed from the cost of this by home to school transport on foot, cycle or by bus which allows pupils to travel independently.

expenditure on transport and living more active lives in the process.

5. More generally, a policy to increase sustainable transport use on the journey to school assists delivery of Policy Focus Area 3 “Shape Healthy Places” and Policy Focus Area 7 “Reduce car dependency”.
6. The policy of “school streets” also performed well in the prioritised LTS Implementation Plan adopted by CYC Executive earlier this month. This Implementation Plan identified that this policy supported 6 of York’s 10 Policy Focus Areas, presented good value for money³, and had no significant obstacles to implementation. It was therefore selected as one of the interventions in the “Expand Existing Programme” prioritisation category.
7. As such, it can be concluded that increasing sustainable travel to school is extremely well aligned with York’s transport policy objectives and, because transport policies are aligned with the wider Council Plan EACH priorities, it is aligned with the Council’s wider objective set for York.

The nature of travel to and from school

8. Like many aspects of transport, travel to and from school is “messy”. There is no one “journey to school” and the journey to school changes as pupils progress through the education system and nearly all the streets in York will be used for a journey to school by somebody. Although there is always a danger of generalising, many – though by no means all – primary pupils will live relatively close to their school. Journeys to secondary school are often longer, and those pupils in 16-18 education may have not just journeys to their school or college, but also a need to travel to work placements or evening classes as part of their education – so can have quite complex travel patterns. For parents and carers the priority is simply to get pupils to school safely.

³ On the basis of appraisals of similar schemes elsewhere, every £1 spent on school travel planning could be expected to realise £2.90 of social benefits. This places it within the DfT’s “High” value for money category for transport investment.

9. The ability of pupils to travel independently changes as their education progresses – very few pupils in Key Stage 1⁴ will travel independently to school (and many schools have safeguarding policies which require pupils to be collected by a parent or carer up until a certain age in any case). By the age of 16-18 pupils are highly likely to be travelling independently, including a proportion who will drive themselves to school and college. In the upper age group, pupils will also often be combining their education with other activities such as part time work or higher-level participation in sports and arts activities, such as participation in music, which themselves have educational value.
10. This has the implication that different interventions are effective at different education stages.
11. Of course, the choice of mode for the journey to school is also influenced by many other factors – how far do pupils travel between their home and school? Is highway infrastructure available to let those journeys be made safely by active modes⁵? Are bus services available and affordable? In some cases pupils are entitled to assistance with home to school transport, often school buses but sometimes taxis, cycle allowances or fuel payments to parents – as set out in York’s “Home to School Transport Policy⁶”. In some cases, the trip to school can be easily trip chained with a parent or carer’s commute or other trip making; in others the choice of mode for the trip to school – often on a day-to-day basis - may be dictated by the need to care for pre-school-age children and the general level of unpredictability of life in meeting the needs of very small children.
12. This level of changeability obviously means that some groups of school children are more able to travel sustainably than others. Local authorities wishing to influence the trip to school need to consider where their actions can make the greatest contribution towards meeting

⁴ Aged 7 or less

⁵ A particular issue in villages and rural areas. In York around one-third of the population live outside the A64/ A1237 ring roads, but there are no secondary schools outside the A64/ A1237 and some substantial villages are located some distance from the nearest school (e.g. Strensall, Wigginton, Copmanthorpe).

their objectives – and consider that they have an enabling role in regards travel to and from school.

Policies and Initiatives

13. There are many ingredients to provision of effective support for sustainable travel to school. There are many exemplar authorities from which York can seek inspiration, but common ingredients of an effective policy to enable sustainable travel to school should include:
- Infrastructure:
 - A network of safe routes to school. This should include pedestrian crossings, on-road segregated cycle routes⁷, footways (including alongside rural roads), bus stops and shelters
 - “Safe” infrastructure around schools, including school streets and people streets, where motor vehicles are excluded at certain times of day
 - Secure cycle parking at the school itself
 - Revenue interventions:
 - Effective bus services connecting schools with the areas where pupils live (particularly important for Key Stage 3 and above)
 - Cycle training/ road safety training/ school crossing patrols
 - Information about how to travel to and from school safely by sustainable transport (walk/ cycle routes and bus services)
 - Support for sustainable travel programmes not just from transport teams, but also teachers and school leaders
14. There is also a role for voluntary involvement – for example arrangements for “walking buses” or group cycling to school. This is often led by parents and carers.
15. CYC’s Education Department is already working with pupils, providing training to help those who can use buses instead of taxis to do so – and this had been effective in changing how some pupils travel.

⁶ <https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/7944/transport-to-school-or-college-policy-2024-25>

⁷ LTN 1/20 (the DfT guidance for cycle infrastructure design) suggests that cycling infrastructure should be designed so that it can be safely used by a 12 year old cyclist.

16. However, an effective working relationship between the council and schools is very important. The move towards academisation has reduced the direct linkage between schools and local authorities – but this is not necessarily a barrier to effective partnership working, and examples exist of good partnership working between local authorities and academy trusts – and indeed also independent schools.
17. Data collection is very important and in many places seen as best practice exemplars local authorities collect data about travel to school to set a baseline and targets and evaluate their approach, assess the effect of different interventions and calibrate potential new approaches to transport between home and school.
18. Consequently, we can conclude that travel from home to school is a specialised transport network, in that:
- There is a multiplicity of travel demands – in particular where trips start and end
 - It takes place mostly at set times – ie between 0830 and 0900 AM and 3:15 to 3:45 PM, with limited activity outside these times.
 - Choice of mode is influenced by many factors, some in control of the local authority (e.g. provision of safe, well-lit footways/ cycleways), some in control of the school (e.g. cycle parking), some in the control of third parties (e.g. bus services) and also some random factors (extra-curricular activities, pre-school children etc)
 - There are many examples of best practice, although they require resource to be allocated to delivery, and effective partnership working if they are to be effective.

The position in York presently

19. York has:
- 51 primary schools
 - 10 state secondary schools
 - 2 higher education colleges
 - 3 independent schools
 - 3 special education needs schools

20. In York, schools have always been seen as an important group to engage about travel because:
- Children need special help in learning to be independent, safe and responsible. There is usually a general will in the public to nurture and protect children, and therefore to support schemes that we do.
 - Children, especially primary school age, are often keen to participate in activities about travel and the environment. Good habits can start at this age too.
 - Schools provide a lot of opportunities for engagement, including assemblies, classrooms and the playground. And sometimes a teacher is willing to be a contact for arranging activities and generally taking action, ideally through a School Travel Plan.
 - Schools often have issues with parent parking and driving during the school run – especially at the school gates. Schools need help with this. Often the start of interaction with schools is around concerns about unsafe parking/ set down/ pick up of pupils - rather than a desire to improve sustainable transport to schools in its own right
21. Education Services and Highways and Transport both play a role in defining travel to school policy. The following teams provide travel engagement services at schools:
- **Education** – set home to school transport policies for pupils with an entitlement and administer the home to school transport scheme, including letting contracts to bus and taxi providers
 - **Road Safety Team** – have council staff that carry out Bikeability cycle training and pedestrian training for school children. They also oversee the School Crossing Patrol staff.
 - **iTravel Team** – encourage schools to write travel plans and initiate schemes that encourage more sustainable travel.
 - **Parking Services** – can send officers to patrol schools during the school run to fine parents that park incorrectly and generally discourage it.

iTravel Team – then and now

22. Whereas the Road Safety Team and Parking Services have been able to continue their services despite funding pressures, the iTravel Team have had to significantly change what they do – in response to reductions in the Department for Transport grants which have historically supported this activity⁸. In particular carrying out activities that use less funding and less staff time.

Until 2021

23. Through revenue grants such as the Access Fund and the early version of the Capability Fund, we had funding to carry out the following.

- A travel planning officer dedicated to schools was available to advise schools about parent parking/driving issues. She would help schools write travel plans and would also attend assemblies to engage with children about travelling sustainably. She left in June 2021 and wasn't replaced, because of lack of funding for the post after grant reductions.
- Sustrans were employed to carry out engagement activities at schools that encourage active travel. A dedicated Sustrans officer would work alongside the I-travel officer, identifying which schools to target and discuss their needs. This commission also ended in July 2021 because of a lack of funding to continue the activity.
- The CYC officer carried out the following activities:
 - i. two Walk to School Weeks per year in May and October. The latter had schools competing for the Jack Archer prize to see who could have the highest levels of active travel.
 - ii. involved York in the Schools Yorkshire Tour (a cycling pass-the-baton format); Clean Air Day and Sustrans Big Pedal.
 - iii. purchased free-standing cartoon characters/signs to be placed outside schools encouraging good parking

⁸ School travel planning is a discretionary activity for local transport authorities. Grants available have reduced – in 2010/11 funding of around £1m pa was available for funding itravel's activities, including school travel planning and cycle training. In the current financial year itravel has received no funding for school travel planning, although cycle training funding has continued, albeit funded in a different way.

- iv. procured the production of a cartoon video⁹ about considerate parking near schools.

Now – 2024

24. Revenue funding for active travel engagement reduced dramatically following the end of the historic Local Sustainable Transport Fund awards. The Capability Fund remained, but was reworked by Active Travel England to mainly focus on planning and building good infrastructure, and has been used to support production of York's new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Consequently, iTravel is currently only able to resource minimal active travel engagement work with schools. Current funding sources for iTravel include the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Section 106 funds relating to new residential developments – neither of which can be used for generalised school work because of the conditions placed upon them by funding providers. There has also been a notable shift in how busy and therefore unavailable schools are post-covid, which has naturally effected their participation rates in home to school travel initiatives.
25. Until 2021 there were 7 staff in the iTravel Team, plus a single secondee from Sustrans who worked exclusively on school travel planning. Now there are 4, one of whom is recently in post to help deliver bus promotion through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).
26. Despite the reduced levels of capacity there remain opportunities for promoting sustainable travel to school. In particular, government is introducing national schemes that councils can tap into, often for free (see 1 and 2 below).
 - 1) **Active Travel Ambassadors (Modeshift)** – currently Applefield and St Peter's School are taking part in this national scheme where secondary children are trained and encouraged to identify ways to increase sustainable travel, present those ideas and gain some funding to implement their ideas. Applefields have just won the Modeshift STARS Regional SEND School of the Year 2024/25 for the second year running. Other schools were invited but didn't wish to participate in the scheme

⁹ This campaign won an award

- 2) **WOW (Living Streets)** – what used to stand for Walk Once a Week, is now a general scheme (national) where primary children record their travel mode each day and are rewarded with badges and other encouragements for travelling actively. An online rewards campaign. We are hoping a few York schools will sign up as it starts here this school year. So far only two have shown interest.
- 3) **Modeshift STARS** – whereas WOW is about rewarding children, this is a national system for schools to record what their School Travel Plan activity is and be rewarded. Various levels of achievement mean different ratings. We weren't using this back in 2021 but decided to use Public Health funding to register again in October 2024 and tentatively encourage schools to sign up.
- 4) **Walk to School Week** – we have continued Walk to School Week in October each year.

Onwards to new policies

27. York's new LTS clearly greenlights an increase in sustainable school travel activity. Funding permitting, the council can restart areas of activity previously undertaken by itravel which have lapsed in the last 3 years as support funding was lost, there are exemplars of good practice which York can learn from as it develops new approaches, and DfT and others are providing useful guidance which can be accessed at no charge. The LTS Implementation Plan, adopted at Executive on 14th November, set out a range of capital projects for which funds will be sought – including enhancing pavement maintenance, pilot schemes to promote sustainable transport on radial routes and in districts and villages – these will be crucial enablers of sustainable travel to school because they will upgrade sustainable transport routes and improve perceived and real safety.
28. Additionally, in the last fortnight¹⁰ City of York Council has been informed that it will gain the powers to enforce “Moving Traffic Offences”. This will be key to introducing some of the principal measures which can be used to reduce vehicle movements around schools at school start/ end time – such as School Streets – although it

¹⁰ We were notified on November 11th by DfT that we would, assuming they are passed in Parliament, receive the powers to enforce moving traffic offences from December 7th.

should be pointed out that some types of school street do not require these powers to be enacted.

29. Despite these positive developments, the funding situation around transport schemes and initiatives remains unclear. School travel planning is a revenue funded activity and, as set out above, reductions in both local authority Establishment funding and DfT revenue grants have induced reductions in school travel planning activity. Although the indications from the DfT around funding are more positive now than they have been for some time, actual funding settlements are yet to materialise – although we may expect news before the start of the next financial year in April. Potentially the Mayor is also a source of funding and, if the measures set out in their most recent brochure¹¹ are adopted, capacity and expertise.
30. Given the above, a potential future programme can be set out to be explored by Scrutiny and could be enacted in whole or part in the event that support funding materialises.

Potential Future Programme

31. As set out earlier, an effective programme will comprise action by CYC Transport, Education, school leaders and third parties such as bus companies. It will comprise both capital infrastructure measures and revenue interventions, such as improvements to information. It should also recognise the differences in home to school travel between different educational establishments and the Key Stages in education. There is obviously a key difference – at primary level the focus needs to be on promoting sustainable accompanied travel between home and school, whilst at secondary level a greater priority can be placed on independent travel between home and school/ college.
32. A first stage should be **data collection**, which would enable the council to assess the current position and set targets for the future strategy. This would involve restarting initiatives which have lapsed, such as:

¹¹ The brochure advocates, amongst other things, appointment of an Active Travel Commissioner who could provide a lead on active travel on the journey to school. Different approaches to bus service provision (for instance franchising) will also influence the journey between home and school.

- The “school census”, which collected information about how pupils travelled to school and from where
- Audits of school facilities, such as provision of secure cycle parking and availability of bus services – which may be either standard publicly available buses or dedicated school buses. This information can be combined with that collected in York’s LCWIP to identify walking and cycle routes which could be developed to enable active travel to and from school – and also where there are gaps in provision

33. **Promotion:** we can continue to promote sustainable transport, using the mechanisms set out above. Greater spend would allow greater promotion, and there is a clear role for school leaders to promote sustainable travel for the journey to and from school if they can be engaged to do so. We can work with school leaders to ensure material is effectively produced and distributed. Some material could encourage volunteer activity, such as walking buses, which can be particularly effective at primary level.

34. Funding/ resources permitting, we can develop maps and other material to highlight active travel routes to schools and bus services. An early priority would be to produce information for York’s 10 state secondary schools and two colleges – as the 12 information packs produced would reach approximately 15,000 pupils¹². Consideration could also be given to producing similar material for out of area schools which are attended by large numbers of pupils from York (for example, Tadcaster Grammar School). Schools and pupils could potentially be involved in producing some elements of the material and its production could be an important part of the engagement strategy for the programme.

35. **School Streets:** we can consider enacting School Street schemes to reduce vehicle traffic around schools at school start/ end times. Measures typically involve signing, lining, parking restrictions, bollards and potentially use of barriers or CCTV enforcement to remove vehicles at school start/ end time. Speed reduction measures such as speed humps, planters and gateway treatments can also potentially be

¹² Reaching a similar number of primary school children would require preparation of 51 packs

used – although schemes must obviously be matched to available funding. A small programme already exists in York, but funding could potentially be found to expand this (either new funding or existing funding moved from other areas). Members are asked to consider whether they wish to prioritise School Streets to a greater extent than previously – accepting that this may reduce funds available for some other areas of transport activity.

36. **Provision inside schools:** we can work with schools to develop their provision for sustainable transport if they are willing partners. This could include encouraging a school to provide secure cycle parking and assisting with provision/ promotion of bus services. Increased academisation of schools means that the direct link between the council and schools has often been severed – but there can often be a willingness to work with the council on such measures. Obviously, capital measures would need to be funded – although there may be sources of funds which are not simply reliant on local authority grant funding. This would need to be explored on a case by case basis.
37. **On highway capital schemes:** more substantial capital works could be taken forward to improve walking and cycling routes – prioritised where they are used by large numbers of schoolchildren. York's LCWIP can be used to identify the routes where improvements would assist most pupils and there are a range of possible interventions which would need to be scaled to funding available – or additional funding sought. The principal interventions include:
- Improved road crossings for pedestrians
 - Improvements to pavements – to make it easier to walk and wheel¹³ near schools
 - Segregated cycle lanes – on roads used by many school age cyclists
 - Speed reductions on roads around schools (there are already speed reductions near many schools, but the programme could be widened – for example to radial routes used by large numbers of school children)

¹³ Scooters used by young children can be particularly sensitive to poor and uneven pavements

38. Obviously, on highway works come with a variety of costs and programmes have to be scaled to whatever funding is available or can be sought. Some programmes can be very costly indeed (£10m+) if large scale highways works are required. Previously funding has often come from one-off contests (for example, the Tadcaster Road “Transforming Cities” funding, or funding provided by Active Travel England for the Riverside Routes). Members are asked whether they wish the council’s bid focus for on-highway capital works to be on schemes which support travel to and from school as a priority (it is identified as one of the prioritisation factors in York’s emerging LCWIP).

Consultation

39. This paper is offered up for discussion and has not been consulted upon. Although the “Our Big Transport Conversation” consultation spoke to school pupils at several education stages, very few people under 18 responded to the online questionnaire. Adult respondents supported the notion that children should walk/ cycle to school by a large majority.

Options

40. Members are asked to consider the approaches put forward in this paper. Whilst the ingredients of a potential strategy are set out, it should be noted that revenue and capital funding could only be made available for it by reducing activity in other areas – Members are asked for their views on the priority they wish to see placed on travel planning for schools.

Council Plan

41. Increased school travel planning activity, and capital schemes to enable sustainable travel to school, is aligned with the EACH priorities of the Council Plan – positioning transport as a key enabler of wider equalities, affordability, climate and health objectives. This is recognised in the recent Implementation Plan which emphasises the importance of working across the Council – for example, working with Public Health to fund and deliver transport schemes which assist in meeting health objectives.

Implications

42. In the absence of greater funding from outside the Council, a significant increase in school travel planning would imply reductions in revenue and capital funding for other areas of council activity. To some extent this can be considered within the ongoing work programme to reorientate the Transport and Highways' work programme to the reflect York's new Local Transport Strategy. It should be pointed out, however, that a really intensive programme of school travel planning would imply a step change in the resources required for delivery. This would, of course, need to be taken to a formal Decision before enactment.

Risk Management

43. The information in this paper is presented to Scrutiny to allow Members to discuss the contents and feed their views back to officers, as such it does in itself generate a risk. However, if, following discussion of this paper, a Strategy was devised, that would need to be subjected to a full risk assessment before it can be enacted.

Recommendations

44. There is no direct recommendation of this report – Members are asked to consider the potential measures set out in this report and feed their views back to officers.

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Report
Approved

Date 18/11/24

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All *tick*

For further information please contact the author of the report

