

School Travel – The National and Local Picture

Introduction

Nationally, more than one in four trips to school are now made by car. Car use has risen rapidly, and has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. In urban areas in term time, around one in five cars at 8.50am are taking children to school. One out of every four cars on the road in the morning rush hour in York is on the school run.

Many schools struggle with traffic congestion at their gates. Children arriving by car miss out on valuable opportunities to learn road safety life skills in addition to getting some physical activity. The lack of physical activity is contributing to a growth in childhood obesity and longer term health problems.

Accident Statistics

As pedestrians, children are safer than they were 15 years ago, but they are still more at risk on UK roads than in many other European countries, including the Netherlands, France and Germany. Experience of walking and cycling develops critical road safety skills. Although York's road safety record for the school journey compares favourably with national figures, 'School Travel Plans' and 'Safer Routes to School' projects can address both real and perceived safety fears and make the journey for vulnerable road users a more pleasurable and active experience.

The Main Aims of York's School Travel Strategy

- 'Car dependency - To address the national trend towards greater car dependency on the school run'.
- 'Safer and Healthier Travel to School – To promote safer, more environmentally sustainable and healthier ways of getting to school, with particular emphasis on walking and cycling'.

Objectives :

- Increase awareness of the negative effects of increasing car use amongst school communities, particularly parents, guardians and children.
- Increase levels of walking, cycling and public transport use on journeys to school.
- Support the promotion of healthy lifestyles by encouraging more walking and cycling to school.
- Increase opportunities for children to travel independently.
- Reduce traffic, congestion and pollution associated with the school run.
- Reduce casualty accidents and threats to personal safety on school journeys.

School Travel Plans

In the last six years many local authorities, including York have worked with schools to make the journey safer and encourage healthier and more sustainable travel through the introduction of 'School Travel Plans'. By March 2007, over 70% of schools in York had a travel plan. The national and local target is to achieve 100% by the year 2010.

The number of schools in York comprises:

- 54 primary schools (infant, Junior and primary)
- 11 secondary
- 4 Special school

Of the primary schools, 41 have completed School Travel Plans, and 8 have been completed at secondary schools. Examples include:

- **Archbishop of York Junior School** – walking increased from 40% in 1999 to 60% by 2004. Car use fell from 50% to 33%. Several initiatives helped. There was no cycling allowed on the school journey in 1999 but by 2006, 5% of children cycled. Park and Stride sites and a walking bus was set up. New cycle parking shelters were funded through the 'Safer Routes to School' programme. In addition, an old bus lay-by was removed and replaced with a new footway which was constructed in 2006.
- **Badger Hill Primary School** - cycling up from 3% in 1999 to 11% by 2004.
- **Joseph Rowntree School** – cycling up from 13% in 1999 to 20% by 2004.
- **Park Grove Primary School** – copy of school travel plan attached at Annex D

Examples of Initiatives Introduced:

- Walking buses
- 'Park and Stride' schemes
- Promotion of Walk to School week and Bike Week
- Cycle training offered to all schools
- Pedestrian training offered to all schools

DfES School Travel Plan Capital Grants (2004/5 to 2007/8)

Every LEA maintained school with a signed off adopted travel plan meeting minimum standards has been awarded a DfES capital grant to improve travel facilities on the school site. This is typically £5,000 for a primary school and £10,000 for a secondary (allocations based on pupil numbers). A further £1,000 was made available to every primary school to help with setting up a walking bus. Those already with a walking bus also benefited from this grant.

Our support package to schools

We help with co-ordinating travel surveys and survey analysis, provide a School Travel Plan template and support drafting a plan. This can lead to postcode mapping of where pupils live and for related curriculum activities, classroom based activities and assemblies and identification of suitable resources and links with Road Safety Officers for educational inputs. It can, through the 'Safer Routes to School' programme involve the design and implementation of highways and infrastructure measures through direct liaison with Engineering Consultancy.

Sustaining school travel work

We endeavour to help schools sustain the school travel plan over time. We provide ongoing telephone support and periodically return to schools to refresh initiatives and make adjustments to any that are no longer working. We also introduce fresh ideas to prevent initiatives in established travel plans from becoming stale.

Partnership Working

We aim to be proactive in developing good communication links between our Transportation Group and other directorate in order to raise the profile of school travel work across the authority and seek opportunities for a joined up approach.

In addition to immediate colleagues in Transport Planning and Road safety we communicate with Network Management, Highways Development Control, LEAs

capital strategy and improvements to school facilities (Property Services), Curriculum Advisers, notably Geography/ESD, PSHE/Citizenship

The Future

In future, priorities for investment, particularly for 'Safer Routes to School' projects, will place more emphasis on 'active' school travel plans.