

Financial Support for 16-19 year olds in Education or Training ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

Summary

- Take into account the broader picture of bus cuts and reduced local authority support for youth bus travel when considering central government provision for 16-19 year olds in education.
- Help schools and colleges by providing adequate funds and guidance to meet student transport needs.
- Consider what more the Department of Education could be doing to address the issue of transport and access to further education.
- Give greater weight to young people's views and conduct surveys and research into young people and bus use to inform your decision.
- Ensure greater communication and cooperation between national government, local government, commercial operators and education providers when it comes to home to college transport.
- Encourage post 16 bus patronage now and cultivate better bus provision for the future.

Introduction

The consultation deals with the technical details of the proposed scheme. However our submission raises broader issues relating to public transport, and specifically buses. We ask that you recognise that the new arrangements for financial support for 16-19 year olds in education will operate in a changed landscape of public bus support and provision.

Context

The situation for young people using buses is getting worse. Research by the Association of Colleges has shown that 72% of students take a bus to college, the average home to college journey is 9 miles, and 94% of colleges believe that the abolition of EMA will affect student's ability to travel to and from college¹. The factors that impact on the ability for young people to travel to post 16 education include;

- The available public transport network
- The cost of fares
- The local authority policy on support for post 16 education transport
- Local authority youth bus pass schemes
- The Education Maintenance Allowance

¹ Association of Colleges http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc_news_releases.cfm/id/ED65A52E-08B6-498C-BFD30BFD2844E0B7/page/3

This year the bus network is retracting as subsidies are withdrawn, fares could rise as much as 8% in real terms², and local authority support for post 16 transport costs and youth concessionary bus travel will almost certainly be less generous in many areas³.

Local authorities do not have to publish their policy on post 16 education transport support until the end of May. However we have already identified a number of authorities proposing cuts or reduced provision. The areas affected could include Somerset, Cheshire East, County Durham, Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Lincolnshire, Devon, West Sussex, Northamptonshire and Norfolk. Moreover, council funded concessionary fare schemes have also been retracted in Suffolk and the Isle of White and will become more expensive in Kent, South Yorkshire and Manchester. We are concerned that this is an early indication of a trend that is likely to get worse.

Although post 16 students will feel the effects of all these separate funding cuts this year, little has been done by decision makers to assess the combined impact. We have grave concerns that these changes could seriously reduce the ability of students to access post 16 education.

Researching, listening and assessing impacts

Young people's views need to be given the weight they deserve and consultations should actively engage the age bracket involved. Research into the value of bus provision for post 16 education should be available to inform decisions. Impact assessments must measure the combined effect of changes that will affect young people's ability to take the bus to access further education.

For example, our research has shown that evening and weekend services are often the first to lose local authority subsidy because it is assumed that these are less essential for passengers getting to work or education. However these cuts can really impact 16-19 year old students who are taking vocational courses, evening courses and those on work experience placements. Further, young bus users supporting themselves by working outside of college hours could also be disadvantaged.

Joined up thinking

Greater communication, cooperation and joined up thinking between departments and service providers could offer solutions in a challenging situation. The Department for Education, the Department for Transport, local transport authorities, education providers and commercial operators all have a role to play. In addition community transport schemes and car share schemes may become more important into the future.

Instead of reflecting the responsibility back on to local authorities we ask the Department for Education to take an active interest in these issues because the ultimate impact will be on students accessing education. For example we would like to see more done to pool budgets and resources at a national and local level to help minimise costs for maximum outcomes.

When distributing the new funds the Department for Education needs to recognise the importance of buses as the main mode of transport for post 16 students. It is not only important to provide schools and colleges with adequate funds but also to publish guidance and offer support relating to transport provision. For example we suggest that the Department of Education encourage local authorities to develop more integrated contracts with commercial bus operators.

² Mike Cooper, Arriva, giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmtran/uc750-ii/uc75001.htm>

³ Our Bus Cuts Watch crowd sourcing project is accessible in the form of an interactive, on line bus cuts map
<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/save-our-buses/map>.

Cultivating good transport habits

A sustainable future means greener and busier buses and by encouraging bus use in this age bracket the Department of Education can help to cultivate good transport habits in the future generation.

Increased bus patronage means a more commercial bus network, a decreased need for public subsidies and better chance of lower fares. Innovative marketing and promotion of bus services in communities, schools and colleges is a key part of the process. Conversely, limiting support for 16-19 year olds to use the bus is a move in the wrong direction, and sends a message that car travel is the only real path to independence.

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Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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