A report on school transport provision across the UK 2010-2016

March 2016
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1. Foreword

Earlier this year the Campaign for Better Transport published a report entitled “Buses in Crisis” highlighting the loss of supported local bus services in England and Wales. This report highlights the crisis in school transport.

Young people, particularly 17-20 year olds, are more reliant on buses than any other age group, primarily for access to education, but also to employment/training and social/leisure facilities. More than 90% of all the bus trips made by young people aged up to 16 are for the journey to and from school - and two thirds of all bus trips are accounted for by local authority school transport - the remainder are primarily journeys in urban areas (London and the major conurbations).

School transport is important to the bus industry, but vital to young people. The equivalent of 570 million journeys are made by bus to and from school, 370m of these each year on school transport provided by local authorities.

The picture emerging from this survey is of an increasingly divisive offer for young people. In London travel to any school by public transport is free - supported by TfL. It is no coincidence that a higher proportion of pupils in London travel to school by bus than anywhere else in the UK, except Northern Ireland. It is also the area of the country that has seen the greatest increase in bus travel to school. In the last decade the proportion of pupils travelling to school by bus in London has risen from 21% to 29%.

In contrast, in rural areas of England school transport cuts have hit young people hard. Outside London more than 350,000 young people so far have lost their bus transport since 2008, mainly those attending faith schools, but also pupils with special needs, post 16 students, or those previously receiving transport because of the nature of the route or exceptional circumstance. The equivalent of about 10,000 single decker buses each day in England no longer have any young people travelling on them.

Despite much concern at rising levels of car use for the school journey and recognition of the need to encourage walking and cycling, such cuts are further driving up car use by children. For many young people their journey to school is now long. In rural areas of England pupils travel on average more than 8 miles to a secondary school (compared to under 7 miles a decade ago). For primary age pupils outside towns their average journey is over 3 miles. For these children and young people the only choice will now be the car.

Cuts to school transport services compound the problems for local buses in rural areas - as fewer children travel to school by bus, services will cease to be commercially viable for operators. In addition, the registration of school services for use by the general public can provide vital peak hour bus services for rural areas at minimal additional cost.

The message from London and Northern Ireland is clear - if bus transport is available and affordable young people will use it to travel to school, and they will switch from car to do so. However, the future trends for the rest of the UK suggest continued decline in bus use by young people, limited opportunities, reduced independence and worsening access to education and training.

What is needed is:

- A coherent travel and transport strategy for young people, including travel to school, to college/apprenticeships, work and leisure.
- Updating the school transport legislation with transport to and from school for young people of compulsory school age a statutory duty. The current cut off at 16 is out of date, and it is evident that if transport is not a statutory duty, it will be cut - it requires protection and ring-fenced funding.
- Authorities should be under a duty to assess the need for public & school transport in their area. This should include meaningful consultation and engagement with young people and those most affected by public and school transport service cuts, charges and changes.
- The Total Transport initiative should include training for local authority staff to enable them to plan local bus, school, social care and non emergency health transport coherently and more effectively, supported by meaningful BSOG/grants for combining passenger services.
2. Key findings

- Across the UK nearly 1 million pupils receive school transport from their local authority, equivalent to about 10.3% of the school population, of which about 600,000 live in England - the majority in rural areas.

- About 150,000 children in the UK qualify for free school transport because of their special needs.

- In the UK, school transport provision by local authorities accounts for about £1.4 billion expenditure per year. Overall spend by the public sector on travel to school is estimated to be more than £2 billion p.a.

- Income from charges for transport has been rising in recent years - 70% is from mainstream pupils, but in 2014/15 30% was from pupils with special needs, with total income reaching £45m p.a.

- Nearly 80% of local authorities have reduced their school transport offer and provision since 2010 - All shire authorities, and 90% of unitary authorities in England have cut their school transport provision since 2010.

- This has resulted in 27% fewer pupils receiving school transport since 2008.

- More that 350,000 children have lost school transport entitlement compared to 2008 - almost all of the children who have lost their transport entitlement live in England. This number is expected in increase in the next five years as policy changes continue take effect.

- Post 16 students/pupils attending sixth forms and colleges, and those pupils attending faith schools have been the main losers.

- An estimated 50,000 16-18 year olds in England have lost their transport to sixth form or college since 2008. These transport cuts have coincided with reductions in 16-18 education funding for colleges and sixth forms, and the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance.

- Two thirds of the responding authorities said they no longer provide free transport to post 16 students, many provide no post 16 transport for mainstream pupils.

- Funding cuts remain the main priority and area of concern for transport staff, with local authorities planning on making cuts to special needs provision, including of escorts and increasing charges, to enable them to manage their budgets going forward.

- Overall, the loss of school transport provision between 2008 and 2015 is estimated to have resulted in an additional 100+ million car journeys each year, most at peak times.

- Access to education and support for transport to school is now starkly divided - it remains more generous in Wales, Northern Ireland, and London but the nearly 5 million children who live in rural England are facing high charges and loss of services to get to school and college.
### The state of the nation: school transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School population</th>
<th>% travel to school by bus</th>
<th>Estimated number travel by bus at LA expense</th>
<th>Eligible to school transport</th>
<th>Estimated number who travel by local bus</th>
<th>Do not qualify for school transport</th>
<th>State of bus travel to school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>London</strong></td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14,000 (mainly pupils with special needs)</td>
<td>320,000 - all travel free at TfL expense</td>
<td>London is showing growth in bus use for the school journey over past decade from 21% - 29% of all school journeys. Equivalent to an additional 100,000 pupils travelling by bus. Allows travel to any school/college - coincides with improvement in educational standards and drop in car use for school journey</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metropolitan districts</strong></td>
<td>1.8 million</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>70-75,000 pupils (often those with special needs)</td>
<td>185,000</td>
<td>Some cuts to LA provision, but these areas have good network of public bus services, and all areas offer some concessionary fare scheme to reduce cost of fares. There has been a small increase in proportion of pupils travelling to school by bus from 19%-21% over past decade.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural (shire and unitary authorities)</strong></td>
<td>4.8 million</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Deep cuts to LA provision - esp to denominational and post 16 pupils. Where transport continues to be provided, charges typically are £500-£1,000 p.a. Expected future cuts to special needs transport. Car use is continuing to rise in rural areas for school journeys. <em>Estimated 300,000 young people aged &lt;16 + 50,000 16-18 have lost their school transport since 2008.</em></td>
<td>✗ ✗</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wales</strong></td>
<td>0.5m</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>113,500</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Some cuts to transport but walking distances remain more generous than in England, and charges are lower. The projection is for additional cuts to denominational and post 16 transport.</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>0.7m</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>158,000</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>A mixed picture reported from authorities, with some cuts and others retaining discretionary provision including reduced walking distances.</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ireland</strong></td>
<td>0.3m</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Provision supports wide parental choice of school for secondary age pupils.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Background

Home to school transport

Following the introduction of compulsory post primary school education and the creation of separate secondary schools, it was recognised that free transport would be necessary to ensure pupils would be able to get to school.

Free home to school transport was therefore introduced in the UK from the mid 1940s (initially in England and Wales, and subsequently in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The Education Act 1944 required local authorities in England and Wales to provide free school transport - from reasonably near home to reasonably near school - for those of compulsory school age, who lived more than 2 miles (for under 8s) and 3 miles (for over 8s) from their school. Authorities also have a duty to provide free transport if the walking route is unsafe. This Act (and others since) also gave local authorities wide powers to reduce these distances if they wanted to, or to provide free or subsidised transport to other pupils.

In 2006 the Education and Inspections Act was introduced by the then Labour Government with the aim of promoting school choice in England. It introduced a duty on local authorities in England to provide free school transport to a choice of schools for those in receipt of free school meals or full working tax credit. The act also required authorities to produce sustainable school travel plans and assess transport needs in their areas.

The duties on local authorities vary slightly in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but are based on a similar assumption that children who live over a certain distance from school will need assistance to attend. In Scotland and Wales local authorities have traditionally been more generous, using lower walking distances (for example extending the 2 mile distance to apply to all primary age pupils, not only those aged under 8, and greater support for transport to schools other than the nearest).

School transport is primarily a service for rural children. Of the school population of nearly 8 million in England, approximately 3 million live in London Boroughs or Metropolitan districts, all of which have either free travel schemes for young people or supported concessionary fare schemes offering reduced fares on local buses.

For the nearly five million young people who live outside these areas in rural and small towns/cities across England, the availability of concessionary fare schemes and public transport services are often more limited, and there is often a greater reliance on local authority provision of home to school transport, as distances to school are typically longer than in urban areas.

Who qualifies for free school transport?

England:
Transport to be provided to:
• Pupils living >2 miles (< 8s) and 3 miles (> 8s) for those of compulsory school age attending nearest suitable school
• Or to a choice of nearest 3 + 1 denominational school over 2 miles and up to 6 miles (15 for faith school) for those in receipt of free school meals/full working tax credit
• Pupils unable to walk in safety within the walking distance.

Scotland:
Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requires education authorities to provide transport for those who live over 2 miles (<8s) or 3 miles (>8s) from their nearest school.

Wales:
The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure extended the walking distance to apply the 2-mile distance to all pupils of primary age and 3 miles for secondary school age to 16; this applies to those attending nearest suitable school

Northern Ireland:
Circular 1996/41 requires authorities to provide transport to pupils who live over 2 miles from their nearest primary and 3 miles from their nearest secondary school in that category (integrated, Irish medium, faith or grammar etc).
Although free school transport was introduced in the 1940s to enable rural children to be able to attend secondary education, in more recent years there has been a recognition that bus travel can have a positive impact on reducing peak hour congestion and car use, and has safety benefits as buses/coaches and minibuses have a lower casualty rate per mile or hour travelled than cars.

How school transport is provided

Local authorities can provide school transport to eligible pupils using a variety of modes - most typically they contract with local operators of taxi, private hire, minibus, coach or buses to provide services.

All local authorities in Great Britain are under a duty to coordinate social care, education and local bus transport to achieve value for money. If there is a local bus service that can be used, the expectation is that season tickets should be purchased for use on this rather than utilising a duplicate contracted route. Likewise, if there is a contract provided for school children, it would often be appropriate for this to be registered to become a local bus service and available to the general public.

Recent surveys, however, show that local authorities are making more increased use of closed contracts rather than tickets on local buses. One notable exception to this trend has been in Northern Ireland, where about half of all eligible pupils travel on Ulsterbus local bus services. Many parents in Northern Ireland are keen that their children receive tickets for local bus services rather than have dedicated routes/school buses, as they then have the flexibility to travel until 6.30 pm allowing participation in after school activities. This counters the argument that parents prefer dedicated school buses.

Some local authorities, notable in Scotland and the London Boroughs as well as Northern Ireland, retain their own fleet to provide school services. In all cases whether children are on minibuses or coaches, children are expected to have seat belts and vehicles should display school bus signs.

Methodology

STC has surveyed local authorities since the late 1980s to monitor the extent and costs of school transport provision. The last time authorities were surveyed was 2008, and we were keen to establish how young people’s transport provision has been affected by recent (and on-going) cuts to local authority budgets and austerity.

A SurveyMonkey link was sent in December 2015 to all 207 authorities responsible for the provision of home to school transport in the UK requesting information for 2015, with responses received during January/February 2016.

Responses received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of LAs</th>
<th>Surveys received</th>
<th>% of LAs responding</th>
<th>% of total exp in responding LAs</th>
<th>% of school pop in responding LAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, Nexus the passenger transport authority for the North East also provided a response.

Within England, the 60 responses included six of the London Boroughs, 15 metropolitan Boroughs, 20 shire counties and 19 unitary authorities, providing a range of local authorities from the most urban to deep rural.

The responses represented about 40% of all pupils and all expenditure in the UK, but 100% of pupils/expenditure in Northern Ireland and only 21% of expenditure in Scotland.

The survey requested information about expenditure, numbers of pupils receiving transport and policies. In addition, it also asked some subjective questions. As one respondent noted - the views will be reflective of the department that have completed the form, and the views of Education/Children’s Services may be different from the Transport Unit/ Department, with the commissioning department likely to rate budget cuts more highly than operational issues.

We are grateful to staff in all the authorities that have provided information. A full list of those authorities responding is included at the end of the report.
4. What school transport is costing authorities

Trends in expenditure

Overall, school transport expenditure for each of the constituent countries of the UK is available from financial reports published by the relevant Departments (Department for Education, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) however these do not all provide breakdowns of spend by school sector, nor do they provide information on the level of provision or numbers of pupils qualifying or receiving transport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total expenditure - all authorities (2015)</th>
<th>Expenditure reported from responding authorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>£78,000,000</td>
<td>£78,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>£160,762,000</td>
<td>£33,676,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>£113,229,810</td>
<td>£31,358,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>£1,061,652,000</td>
<td>£408,445,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>£1,413,643,810</td>
<td>£553,481,091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: this £1.4 billion excludes the funding for child concessionary fare schemes in the metropolitan areas, and the TfL scheme for free travel for children in London. It also excludes any direct funding of bus services by colleges and schools, and the £180m 16-18 student bursary funding. These would bring the total to an estimated £2bn

Unit costs

Overall expenditure figures suggest average unit costs of transport in England are about £1,800 per pupil and £1,400-1,500 for the UK, however in the local authorities responding the average cost is £1,361 - equivalent to £3.58p per journey, reflecting the fact that the survey included only six London Boroughs.

For mainstream pupils the average cost is about £1,800 per pupil, equivalent to £2.37 per trip. Unit costs are typically lower in Wales and Northern Ireland - reflecting the lower proportion of pupils with special needs and larger proportion of pupils transported travelling to secondary schools, often on larger vehicles. Costs for transport in the Metropolitan districts are reduced by the fact that many pupils are travelling on concessionary fares, subsidised by the PTE/district councils via other funding streams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Special needs</th>
<th>Ave all pupils - from surveys</th>
<th>Estimated - using national £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>£817</td>
<td>£2,913</td>
<td>£1,383</td>
<td>£1,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>£817</td>
<td>£2,913</td>
<td>£1,383</td>
<td>£1,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>£785</td>
<td>£3,422</td>
<td>£934</td>
<td>£997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>£914</td>
<td>£4,246</td>
<td>£1,633</td>
<td>£1,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>£892</td>
<td>£4,109</td>
<td>£1,361</td>
<td>£1,490</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For pupils with special needs, the average cost is over £4,000 per year - equivalent to nearly £11 per journey. However, these country averages hide wide variations as shown with unit costs rising to nearly £10,000 per pupil in some London Boroughs.
The average unit cost of providing school transport varies widely according to the type of authority, reflecting the level of special needs provision, and other factors such as contract prices. Prices within the Metropolitan areas are lower than comparable authorities due to the concessionary fare schemes in their areas that are available for mainstream pupils - which in effect represent a cross subsidy from passenger transport budgets to school transport.

In the Met districts the average cost for a mainstream child is typically £350 p.a. compared to more typically £800-900 in other authorities in England. The Met districts responding represent a third of all Met districts, and their spend on mainstream transport is approximately £2.5 m p.a. - suggesting a total spend across all Met districts on mainstream transport of about £10 million. If the rate of payment represents about half the cost of transport - this represents a cross subsidy of about £10 m p.a. in these authorities.

Likewise, the average costs of school transport in the London Boroughs only reflect the costs of provision of transport for pupils with special needs, as TfL supports mainstream pupils’ transport

**Income**

Income from school transport provision has been rising in recent years. In 2014/15 it was expected to be £45.268m of which 42% was from mainstream pupils aged 5-16 years, and a further 27% from post 16 mainstream students. There has been a trend in recent years of rising income from pupils with special needs - and in 2014/15 it accounts for £14m.

### Special needs transport

Allocations of expenditure to special needs pupils vary from authority to authority - some depend on the school or unit that the child is attending, others include transport for pupils with special needs who are travelling with their mainstream peers to secondary and primary schools. However, overall it is known that special needs transport has been accounting for a large (and, until recently, a growing) share of overall school transport expenditure.

The section 251 returns to the Department for Education show that special education transport for pre 16s, 16-18s and 19-25s accounts for £630.5m - nearly 60% of all expenditure in England. However, transport for those attending special schools or alternate provision/pupil referral units accounts for £444.2m - 42% of overall expenditure.

The survey responses suggest that special needs transport is now accounting for about 53% of all school transport expenditure in England, and about 42% across the UK, however, it accounts for about a fifth of pupils transported in England and 14% in the UK as a whole. Again the unit costs of this provision shows wide variations across the UK from under £3,000 to over £7,000 per pupil p.a.
5. Who is getting transport?

Current level of provision

Where transport is provided

The local authorities responding account for more than a third of the UK school population.

Overall, the survey results indicate that across the UK about 960,000 pupils are receiving school transport from their local authority, equivalent to about 10.3% of the school population, of which about 600,000 live in England.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total school population (2015)</th>
<th>No of pupils in responding authorities</th>
<th>No of pupils transported in responding authorities</th>
<th>% in receipt of school transport</th>
<th>Est no of pupils in receipt of transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>328,612</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>98,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>679,840</td>
<td>24,349</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>158,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>465,704</td>
<td>33,557</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>113,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>7,840,516</td>
<td>250,798</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>587,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>9,314,672</td>
<td>406,704</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>957,801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of pupils in receipt of transport varies widely across the UK - from under 8% of pupils in England, to 23% in Scotland, 24% in Wales, and nearly 30% in Northern Ireland.

In England, typically only 1.2% of pupils in London Boroughs qualify for transport - reflecting the fact that mainstream pupils qualify for free transport from Transport for London. In the Metropolitan districts few pupils qualify for transport as most live within walking distance - on average only 2.5% receive local authority transport.

In other areas of the country the proportion of pupils qualifying for transport is closely related to population density - with more pupils in sparsely populated areas living beyond walking distance, but also to authorities’ policies such as reducing walking distances, or supporting travel to selective schools or faith schools. For example in Northern Ireland, nearly 30% of pupils qualify for free transport as it is provided over the walking distance to a choice of grammar and faith as well as Integrated and Irish Medium schools.

Who receives transport

The majority of pupils who receive school transport are attending secondary schools - reflecting the longer distances travelled to these schools.

Post 16 pupils/students account for a small minority of pupils transported by the local authorities (less than 10% in England), compared to nearly about a quarter of all students receiving transport in Wales.

Special needs

The proportion of pupils who receive transport because of their special needs is now approximately 21% of pupils transported in England, but about 8% in Scotland and 9% in Wales. In the London Boroughs typically all pupils receiving school transport have special needs, as TfL provides free travel for young people on public transport.

In the shire authorities typically 10-20% of pupils transported are provided with transport because they have special needs, although in the Home Counties this rises to typically a third of all pupils receiving transport. In total it is estimated that 150,000 children in the UK qualify for free school transport because of their special needs.

Special education has seen considerable change in recent years, with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans replacing statements of SEN. Although the overall number of pupils defined as having special educational needs has declined in recent years, the number with a statement (now EHC) have been increasing and account for about 236,000 pupils. This indicates that about half of all pupils with EHCs receive school transport.
6. The impact of austerity

Local authorities have wide discretionary powers to provide free or subsidised school transport to pupils - for example they can reduce the walking distance, or providing transport to pupils under or over compulsory school age, or to attend a choice of schools. However, the trend of reducing use of discretionary powers seen in previous surveys continues. Today more than 80% of authorities (in England it is 85%) no longer provide any reduction to the 2 and 3-mile statutory distances.

The survey shows that many local authorities have made changes to policies and introduced or raised transport charges since 2010 in an effort to manage their budgets.

Overall, nearly 80% of local authorities have reduced their school transport offer since 2010.

However, the picture varies across the UK with all of the Shire authorities, and all but two of the unitary authorities in England already having cut their provision. In Northern Ireland and Scotland the provision remains unchanged (although not all Scottish authorities responded).

The most frequently mentioned change has been to reduce transport to denominational schools (with nearly 60% of authorities saying they had done this since 2010). Only 37% provide any transport for parental choice of school, such as to a denominational school. Limiting transport to the nearest school only has also been undertaken by nearly a quarter of all the authorities responding.

Other cuts

Other ways in which local authorities are trimming or containing costs include:

- Withdrawing transport for pupils in exceptional circumstances (Large rural authority - England)
- Tightening up on post 16 eligibility to be provided only to the nearest sixth form or college (Large rural authority - England)
- Introducing charges for privilege seats (Scottish authority)
- Removing transport for those qualifying on safety of route (Unitary authority)

In addition, authorities are looking to achieve savings from the way they provide transport - with increases in vehicle capacities on routes, and some authorities pulling back more provision to in house services.

“We are now operating at mainstream statutory minimum with charges for denominational and post 16 transport now almost covering gross costs - and will aim to reduce subsidy to zero within the next couple of years”

Shire County - South East England
Who has lost out?

Mainstream pupils in England

It has always been difficult to estimate how many children qualify for school transport, as numbers have to be extrapolated from surveys of local authorities.

In the early 1990s surveys indicated that overall across the UK approximately 1,440,000 young people qualified for transport, of which about 1.1 million were in England. (At this time the UK school population was about 8.5 million)

By 2008, surveys of local authorities suggested that the overall number of pupils receiving school transport had fallen to 1,300,000 (despite the school population rising to more than 9 million), equivalent to about 13% of the UK school population at the time, and a fall in the number of pupils by 140,000.

This drop was also despite the legislation widening entitlement for those in receipt of free school meals or working tax credit, and therefore reflected either a shift towards tighter entitlement policies or fewer pupils living beyond the walking distance. As average distances to school have increased over this period, it is likely that cuts to transport entitlement were a large factor in this. By 2015, the survey suggests that the proportion of pupils receiving transport has again fallen, to about 10.3% of the population, which has remained at about 9.3 million.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993 % in receipt</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 % in receipt</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 % in receipt</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 No in receipt</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>1,440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 No in receipt</td>
<td>977,500</td>
<td>111,000</td>
<td>139,532</td>
<td>91,379</td>
<td>1,320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 No in receipt</td>
<td>587,418</td>
<td>113,523</td>
<td>158,584</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>957,801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note figures for Scotland in 2008 reflect small sample & some figures rounded)

The figures for 2015 show a 27% reduction in the number of pupils receiving school transport - equivalent to more than 350,000 fewer children transported compared to 2008.

Almost all of the children who have lost their transport entitlement live in England.

Even allowing for the growth is bus use in London there are at least 250,000 fewer children travelling each day on school transport, which given their journeys are long are likely to transfer to car. This would be equivalent to more than half a million car journeys a day for 190 days a school year - a total of about 100 million additional car trips a year.

These figures are corroborated by the responses from 11 authorities in England. These eleven authorities provided data in 2008 and again 2015, giving direct comparisons, and include three unitary authorities and seven shire counties.

In 2008, these authorities provided transport to about 115,000 pupils. By 2015 this had dropped to 82,000 - a 27% fall in the number of pupils transported. Over this time the expenditure on school transport by these authorities has remained largely unchanged (£115.9m in 2008 and £115.8m in 2015). These authorities reflect what has been happening across England, with reductions in entitlement for mainstream pupils to contain overall spend. As a result of fewer mainstream children travelling there is a greater focus on special needs and increasing unit costs.

Pupils attending denominational schools

Children who attend faith schools have borne the brunt of recent changes to policies to reduce school transport costs in local authorities. The provision of transport to denominational schools, or for other parental preference, is much more likely to occur in local authorities in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland. More than 70% of English authorities no longer support transport to a choice of school, including faith schools.

Proportion of authorities providing transport to faith schools
Forty-six of the seventy four local authorities responding said that they do not provide transport to denominational schools, and many of the remainder that do, levy a charge. Some authorities reported that they have worked with schools to encourage them to organise transport themselves to offset the loss of local authority provided transport.

Post 16 students

The survey suggests that Post 16 students have also lost transport, or have faced new or increased charges for home to school and home to college transport particularly in English authorities outside the metropolitan areas.

Overall, nearly two thirds of the responding authorities said they no longer provide any free transport to post 16 students, primarily to pupils with special needs.

The support of post 16 transport is more likely to continue outside England, with all those responding in Scotland and Northern Ireland saying provision was still free. However, in Wales the report post 16 charges, at £90 p.a. and £180 p.a. are the lowest levied.

In those authorities who continue to provide transport for post 16 students, the charges range from a standard annual charge of £90 a year to over £1,000 per year. Some authorities vary charges depending on whether a pupil has special needs, is on low income and others make charges based on distance travelled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority type</th>
<th>Level of post 16 charge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>£90 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>£180 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£230 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>70P PER JOURNEY FOR SEN unless low income - equivalent to £266 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£299 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£339 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£360 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>£370 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£370 p.a. for SEN (for 2016/17 will rise to £608 and £304 for low income)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£400 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£410 (2014/15) £418 (2015/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£450 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£495 per year, or £372 for low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£500 - £456 on low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>£500 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>£520 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£520 p.a. 50% reduction on low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£525 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£540 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£540 or £400 for low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>£560 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£600 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£625 standard / £156 low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£660 or £330 for low income families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£695.40 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£735 p.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£875 for 2016/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>£1,173 5+ miles (£765 up to 3 miles, £1,020 3-5 miles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In eleven English (shire and unitary) authorities that provided data on post 16 transport provision in survey responses in 2008 and again in 2015, the number of pupils receiving post 16 transport either free or at a charge in their authorities has dropped by 42% during that time.

This suggests that across England, about 50,000 16-18 year olds have lost their free or no longer pay for local authority transport to travel to school or college since 2008.

This has coincided with a time of cuts to further education college budgets (although student numbers have been rising)\(^6\), and also to the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance for young people, which previously offered direct support to offset the costs of transport. EMA funding was £560 million in 2010/11 but has since dropped to bursaries of £180 million.\(^7\)

**Other ways of managing budgets**

*Promoting travel training and independent travel*

Many local authorities reported investing in travel training to promote more independent travel by young people with special needs, and also to reduce the costs of door-to-door transport provision.

As one Metropolitan district commented - “we are having great success with our independent travel training programme, but our biggest difficulty is trying to meet parental expectation with fewer resources. Parents are reluctant to look at and consider alternatives to dedicated door to door transport, however the remit from DfE is that in line with children and Families Act we should provide a choice.”

*Introducing personalised budgets*

Many English local authorities also reported introducing personalised budgets, with twenty-six saying these had already been introduced, and another nine authorities planning their introduction.

*Promoting sustainable travel*

Given the cuts to school transport, the survey explored whether authorities were investing in promoting walking and cycling. Nearly 90% of local authorities said that their authority was promoting walking and/or cycling to and from school.

Twenty-four authorities said that they had invested more in walking and cycling since 2010, but conversely 13 said they had cut their investment in walking and cycling. Half of respondents said there had been no change.

“We have embedded Personalisation into our SEN home to school support and increased direct payment usage considerably. This has required a change in how the budget is divided up in order to support all service users”.

London Borough

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“introduced Independent Travel Trainers which has resulted in SEN pupils changing their transport assistance type from a shared vehicle to using the public services”

Metropolitan district - Midlands

“Looking at expanding Travel Training, and link it with “Preparation for Adulthood” within schools”

Met district - North West

“Introducing an app for android phones to support independent travel for children and young people with SEND”

Met district - North East England
7. The future challenges for local authorities

What are the main challenges facing local authorities?

Local authorities report that funding cuts remain the main challenge facing school transport in coming years - with almost 60% of authorities citing budget cuts as their main concern.

A rising school population and shortage of school places were more typically ranked as a lower concern - although cited as the main issues of concern in some of the London Boroughs and Metropolitan Districts. Three of the Scottish authorities ranked the lack of operators as their most pressing concern.

When the overall rankings are aggregated, the order of priorities is more evident, with funding cuts, being closely followed by the pressure on authorities to meet greater levels of pupils’ needs, and parental expectations.

However, one transport officer who responded pointed out that the issues facing their department were not necessarily the same as the constraints on the authority's education department, and that if Education colleagues had completed the survey, budget cuts might have been ranked more highly. As many respondents were Transport Managers funding cuts may be underrepresented as an issue in comparison to operational concerns.

What will be local authorities responses to these?

Looking forward, local authorities responding appear to be resigned to continuing to cut and/or charge for SEN and post 16 transport. Nine authorities also reported turning their focus to escort provision, and are expecting to reduce the level and costs of this.

“We have a huge problem recruiting and keeping passenger escorts, which impacts on our ability to provide a daily service…..on a weekly basis we are having to cancel schedules and not providing transport as we do not have passenger assistants to travel”.

Metropolitan Borough

The provision of passenger assistant/escorts is a significant area of expenditure and the impact of the minimum living wage on budgets going forward was of concern. Another authority (rural shire in the South of England) reported renegotiating contracts for escorts to reflect paying only for time worked. Some respondents also raised difficulties recruiting and retaining escorts.
Overall, local authorities’ cuts look to be moving from introducing and/or increasing charges and reductions to the levels of provision of denominational transport and for post 16 mainstream pupils/students, to introducing further cuts for those with special needs.

The impact on young people

It is likely that the full effect of recent policy changes have not yet taken place. Most authorities will implement changes to entitlement policies to take effect from new starters rather than applying to existing arrangements, therefore the full impact of cuts to school transport are likely to take 5-7 years before they become apparent. These will be compounded by further post 16 transport cuts and reductions to the offer for pupils travelling to denominational schools, and increased charges now being approved.

It is expected that other children and young people currently receiving discretionary school transport (such as those moving house in an exam year) are likely to see their transport entitlement removed. Several authorities reported that they have draft policies with legal teams, or are in the process of taking legal advice as to where further cuts can be made.

For post 16 students, the rising charges and lack of transport support are likely to limit choice, and affect staying on and completion rates particularly for those from less affluent homes and in rural areas.

The Association of Colleges reports one in five is considering dropping out, often due to transport problems. “There are human and financial costs every time a young person fails to complete a course or does not achieve a recognised grade”. (LGA) The Local Government Association estimated that underachievement/drop out by this age group already costs the exchequer £814 million a year (2012 figures).

Although the number of pupils affected by planned cuts to special needs transport is likely to be lower - as only about 115,000 pupils in England currently qualify for free transport because of their special needs. About half of pupils with EHCs currently receive transport - and those pupils with EHCs typically have the more severe /higher level of special needs. It is expected that cuts to services for these pupils will have considerable adverse impact on many families.
8. What is needed

A national concessionary fare scheme
The effect of high bus fares for young people has been of concern to many organisations including the Youth Council, the Association of Colleges, pteg etc. The iniquity of a national, funded, concessionary fare scheme offering free travel for elderly yet young people on apprenticeships earning as little as £3.30 per hour paying the full fare, is evident.

There are calls for a national half fare concessionary scheme for young people. Whilst this would be welcome, many children in urban areas, where there is greatest opportunity to use buses, are already provided with free travel or concessionary schemes. It is in rural areas, where cuts to supported local bus services are now compounded by the loss of school transport meaning there are often no services at all, where the focus of concern should now be.

A coherent children’s transport strategy
Transport for young people lacks any coherent policy or strategy in the UK, particularly in England. As a result, transport provision and educational choices are starkly different depending on where a child lives.

Provision and funding is fragmented and young people have borne the brunt of transport cuts across the UK in the past five years, especially in rural England, where access and choice are now increasingly dependent upon private transport.

Despite this, the Government wants participation in education and training, including apprenticeships, to rise for 16-18 year olds, and to reduce NEETs. There remain concerns about the environmental, health, and congestion impact of continuing rises in car use, and the social impact of the loss of rural bus services. School transport services underpin all of these Government objectives and policies - yet receive little attention, insufficient protection and inadequate funding.

There is a need for all relevant Government departments - Education, Transport, DeFRA, as well as DENI in Northern Ireland and the devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland to develop a coherent strategy for promoting children and young people’s access to education and training, and support bus use.

At the local level, the introduction of the Local Offer for pupils with special needs and requirements to publish transport policy statements for post 16 students serve little purpose. Instead, we would support the CFBT’s call for all authorities to be required to conduct effective assessments of the need for public transport in their area, but this should also include school and college transport. It should also include meaningful consultation with young people and those most affected by public and school transport service cuts, charges and changes.

Redefining compulsory school age and protecting statutory school transport
In England, a young person may leave school at 16, but they must remain in full time education in school sixth form or college, start an apprenticeship or traineeship, or work or volunteer (for 20 or more hours per week) while in part time education or training until the age of 18. Despite this, the school transport legislation has not been amended to support these young people.

The evidence is clear, in the absence of ring fenced funding for access to education and training, authorities are being forced to cut transport for young people. If young people in England are obliged to stay in education/training or work, then transport support should enable this.

England has provided low levels of funding/support to school and college transport for many years - allocating typically 2.5% of education spending to it, compared to more than 4% in the USA. Where school transport is well provided, take up is high, car use can be discouraged, and access to education, safety & educational outcomes improved.

Total Transport
The Total Transport pilot fund in England is welcome, strengthening the focus on a cross-sector approach to the delivery of passenger transport services. However, integrating transport services commissioned by central and local government agencies and provided by different operators requires considerable skill, stakeholder engagement and information at the local level, as well as services left to coordinate!

Many authorities have seen staff cuts, and lost key skills in transport planning. Additional funding to provide support and practical training to local authority staff in education and transport department to understand effective coordination of school, social care and supported and commercial local bus services would be beneficial to optimising utilisation of remaining resources.
9. About us

Sian Thornthwaite

Sian has been involved in school transport since the late 1980s when she worked at Northumberland County Council whilst completing her Masters in Transport Engineering and Operations. She was awarded her PhD in 1991 by the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, where her thesis examined school transport in the UK and USA, and was subsequently published as a book for local authorities.

Sian has worked in consultancy for more than twenty-five years, setting up and running successful specialist consultancies, and in senior roles with Steer Davies Gleave and Halcrow. She has led and managed large-scale research projects for the Departments of Education and Transport, including the evaluation of yellow bus pilots in the UK, and post 16 transport initiatives.

Having been an expert witness in the judicial review R v Hereford & Worcester ex parte G, which defined the accepted standard for school transport as “safety and reasonable comfort”, she became increasingly interested in special needs transport and completed a MA in Socio Legal studies at Nottingham Law School. Her work with special schools and local authorities resulted in innovative and successful school travel plans and travel training schemes more than 15 years ago.

In 2000, Sian returned to local government and worked for Derbyshire County Council, on the implementation of its award winning b_line concessionary fare scheme for 70,000+ young people.

Over the past 25 years, Sian has worked in the UK, the USA, EU and Middle East and Asia, with local authorities, governments and agencies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of school transport. She has provided change management support and advice to local authorities resulting in multi million pounds worth of savings, without compromising on quality of provision.

A Sloan Fellow at London Business School, in 2005-6 she completed her Masters in Management, where her research focussed on performance measurement, change management and macroeconomics.

She remains passionate about improving travel and transport for young people and rural transport. In 2013 she was appointed by the Education Minister to chair an independent review of school transport in Northern Ireland. For the past 18 months she has been providing strategic advice and support to Bus Eireann on its €150m school transport service for more than 100,000 children across rural Ireland.

Sian is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport and an active Member of the National Association of Pupil Transportation and the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation in the USA. She remains involved in school transport, special needs transport and child safety in the UK and internationally, and regularly publishes and presents on school transport and children’s travel/safety issues at conferences and workshops around the world.

STC Ltd

STC is a specialist transport and management consultancy, focussed on all aspects of passenger transport - supported local bus, non-emergency health, social care, school and college, special needs, and community transport.

Its work is mainly with local authorities across the UK, but also transport operators, developing transport strategies, assessing needs, working with young people, undertaking consultation, leading large scale reviews and supporting and implementing change.

Recent clients have included

- Abu Dubai Education Council
- Bus Eireann
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Cotswold District Council
- North Wales Transport Partnership
- Passenger Transport Executive Group
- South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH)
- Welsh Local Government Association
- World Bank (China)
10. Respondents

Thanks go to the staff in the following authorities for providing responses to the survey:

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Angus Council
- Argyll and Bute Council
- Bedford Borough Council (UA)
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Blaenau Gwent
- Bury MBC
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- City and County of Swansea
- City Of Bradford MDC
- City of York
- Cumbria County Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Devon County Council
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Dumfries and Galloway
- Durham
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- East Sussex CC
- Education Authority Northern Ireland
- Falkirk Council
- Gwynedd
- Halton Borough Council
- Hampshire
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Herefordshire
- Hertfordshire
- Isle of Anglesey
- Islington
- Kent County Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- London Borough of Harrow
- London Borough of Newham
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- London Borough of Wandsworth
- Middlesbrough Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Newcastle City Council
- Nexus
- Norfolk County Council
- North East Lincolnshire Council
- Northumberland County Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Oldham Council
- Pembrokeshire
- Poole
- Redcar & Cleveland
- Rotherham MBC
- Rutland County Council
- Salford
- Sandwell
- Sheffield
- Shropshire Council
- Solihull MBC
- South Tyneside Council
- Southampton
- Southend Borough Council
- St.Helens Council
- Staffordshire
- Stockport MBC
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Surrey County Council
- Thurrock Council
- Torbay
- Walsall Council
- Waltham Forest
- Warwickshire County Council
- West Berkshire
- Wigan Council
- Wiltshire Council
- Wrexham County Borough Council

11. References

ii Department for Transport National Travel Survey data tables 9908 & 0601
iv DFE (July 2015) SFR 25/2015 Special educational needs in England
vi Association of Colleges (May 2014) College funding and finance.
vii National Audit Office (August 2014) 16-18 year old participation in education and training.
viii Local Government Association (February 2015) Achievement and retention in post 16 education