

Home to school transport

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report summarises LGA work on home-to-school transport as part of the post lockdown return to school process and highlights areas of interest that fall into this Board's remit.

Recommendations

That the Board notes the report, including LGA action and Government support.

That members share any insights and information on experiences from their own areas.

Action

Board feedback is used to shape the LGA's lobbying work

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Home to School transport

Background Home to school transport

LGA work on this issue

1. The LGA has been involved in discussions on home-to-school transport through spring and summer via discussions with council chief executives and both DfT and DfE, through regular recovery focused meetings which have also involved council representatives and home-to-school operators. The LGA has consistently made it clear that returning all children to school under the initial lockdown social distancing requirements would involve significant logistical and financial difficulties for councils
2. From an early stage we have urged the Government for the need to urgently plan for the full reopening of schools in September. The LGA and individual councils have consistently raised issues regarding local transport capacity and supply side constraints in some areas and particular issues around SEND (Special Educational Needs) transport
3. Despite our calls for urgent action it took the Government substantial time to secure additional funding to support home to school travel and also to publish the relevant [guidance](#), which eventually came out on the 11th August, after schools had broken up, causing issues for councils and schools in planning for the autumn.
4. In addition to the guidance, the Department for Transport also produced a Travel Demand Management (TDM) [Toolkit](#) which sets out a framework for Combined and Local Transport Authorities (LTA) in England to develop and implement effective TDM plans. The purpose of a TDM plan is to help councils influence the travel behaviours of all transport users in order to address gaps in capacity due to social distancing and related Covid-19 measures.
5. We continue to monitor the roll out of home to school transport as schools have now re-opened. This is a live issue – at the time of writing this report it was only the first full week back for most schools in England. So far, no significant issues have been reported to us by councils and the new arrangements appear to be working well.

Safety in the COVID guidance

6. Local authorities will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport on dedicated school or college transport. However, the full opening for schools' guidance also sets out that distancing should still be put in place within vehicles wherever possible
7. In particular:

- 7.1. social distancing should be maximised within vehicles wherever it is possible, between individuals or 'bubbles'
- 7.2. it is very important to maximise the ventilation of fresh air (from outside the vehicle) on dedicated school and college transport, particularly through opening windows and ceiling vents
8. It is now the law that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on public transport. This law does not apply to dedicated school transport. However, it is recommended that local authorities advise people aged 11 and over to wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary school or college from the start of the autumn term. This does not apply to those who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport.
9. Home to school provision should take the following steps to prevent outbreaks:
 - 9.1. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell
 - 9.2. Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual
 - 9.3. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach
 - 9.4. Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach
 - 9.5. Minimising contact and mixing
 - 9.6. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is not normally needed on home to school transport
10. By PPE, the guidance means equipment such as fluid-resistant surgical face masks, disposable gloves, disposable plastic aprons and eye protection such as a face visor or goggles. Not face coverings, advice on which is set out above.

Funding

11. Following our calls for further financial support local transport authorities will receive more than £40 million funding for the autumn term to support additional home-to-school transportation costs. This funding will help them create extra capacity and allow hundreds of thousands more students to use alternatives to public transport, while social distancing measures remain in place. Councils were allocated funding based on the number of children and young people they have in their area, and how far they need to travel. The money is available for spending on pupils travelling to education and training, and anyone supervising or escorting students to education provision. The Government have committed to review further arrangements in the future should it be

necessary. Councils should have received their allocation to provide extra capacity for the autumn term.

12. As home-to-school services will not have to adhere to the same social distancing requirements as services for the public the need for additional capacity is not as great as initially feared it may be. Councils have been urged to continuously re-assess their need for home to school transport as the school term progresses. We will continue to monitor the situation and if the initial allocation proves inadequate, we will work with councils and the Government to ensure the full costs of the new arrangements are reflected in future grants.

Rural areas

13. The guidance published by the DfT acknowledges that many school journeys especially in remote or rural locations will be further than two miles and therefore it is inevitable that some kind of provision will have to be made. The Children and Young Peoples Board has done considerable work in this area and the difficulty rural authorities face in providing this service has been examined.
14. The COVID pandemic is likely to exacerbate some of the underlying issues in the provision of home-to-school transport. As rural areas have further distances for journeys and settlement patterns are less dense there are additional costs associated with the need to provide home to school transport. The additional costs associated with extra provision to meet COVID requirements are likely to also be greater for the same reasons.
15. Rural councils will also be procuring into smaller and less diverse transport provider markets and so it may also be difficult for them to procure additional capacity. These issues with rural provision are well understood nationally and we will continue to ensure they are reflected in discussions about ongoing support for this service.
16. The People and Places Board has also asked about the impact on carbon emissions. It is worth noting that the new guidance and existing practise has always had a presumption in favour of encouraging children to travel to school via active means. Many home-to-school journeys will be less than two miles and therefore not eligible for free school transport, where this is the case councils have always encouraged pupils to walk, cycle or use some other active means. This is the best means of decarbonising short journeys.
17. For longer journeys it is worth noting that by providing a collectivised service by coach or by bus home-to-school transport is already making a contribution to decarbonisation. Using a bus, even a diesel powered one, at maximum capacity is likely to result in a carbon saving when compared to making the same number of trips by car.

18. In the long term in order to meet our carbon zero targets as a country we will need to transition the home to school fleet towards ULEV vehicles. At the moment there are a number of challenges in delivering this change. Firstly, electrification options work best for smaller vehicles. There are some electric double decker buses currently on the market however these tend to have higher upfront costs than conventional vehicles. There are also associated upgrade costs for operators' depots to ensure they have sufficient charging capacity to fully charge their vehicles. Whilst a commercial case can be made with cheaper overall lifetime costs it is currently a finely balanced case, with a large capital outlay leading to a long-term revenue saving.
19. Many of the providers in the transport industry are facing an uncertain future in light of the COVID pandemic and so will need to take decisions about their programmes of capital renewal. Over time as more ULEV vehicles work their way into the vehicle fleet the capital costs will reduce. However, given the life of a commercial bus or coach is typically around 15 years this is likely to be a slow process.
20. The Government is providing grants to the bus sector to purchase ULEV vehicles and this is likely to speed the transition. There are also other potential technologies like hydrogen in development that could offer a different model of operation. These grants and other emerging technologies have not yet reached sufficient scale to ensure widespread adoption in the near future, but they are important to catalyse the industry's transition.
21. It is important to note that these are not reasons to excuse or exempt home to school providers from the decarbonisation agenda. They are merely offered so Board members can understand why this industry may not decarbonise at the same speed as other types of transport and logistics where the commercial case is more straightforward. In order to reach our net zero targets all sectors of the transport industry will have to invest in new engine technologies and operate in different and more efficient ways.

Implications for Wales

22. This policy is a devolved area

Financial Implications

23. None