

SEN Home to School Travel & Transport – Update Report

Key Messages

Forum members are asked to note:

- The significant financial and operational pressures facing SEN Home to School Transport.
- The analysis undertaken by the SEN Home to School Transport Group and the measures now being implemented to reduce the forecast overspend.
- That schools have been written to regarding the Council's position on transport provision for pupils on part-time timetables, with implementation of this change planned by Christmas 2025.

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1. SEN Home to School Transport continues to experience unprecedented pressure. The budget for 2025/26 is £20.5m, yet projected spend is £27.5m, creating a forecast overspend of £7m. The main driver of this pressure is the growing use of taxis, which accounts for 60% of spend, alongside the rising number of children and young people requiring transport.
- 1.2. The SEN Home to School Transport Group has been established to address these challenges. The group meets regularly, undertakes detailed data analysis, and drives quick decision-making through daily stand-ups and case audits. Its remit is both operational and strategic: delivering in-year efficiencies while also identifying where longer-term changes to policy or practice are required.

2. Current Challenge

- 2.1. At present, approximately 2,500 children and young people access transport, with demand forecast to rise by a further 150 from September 2025. Of these, 1,165 rely on taxis to reach one of 209 venues across 928 routes. Many of these journeys extend outside city boundaries, which significantly increases both cost and complexity.
- 2.2. Taxi journeys are heavily weighted towards single occupancy. Just 22% of taxi routes are shared, compared with 78% that are solo. Comparison with six other local authorities showed single occupancy taxis ranging from 36% to 57%.

In addition, 63% of journeys require a Passenger Assistant (PA), which increases the average cost by 38%. This combination of factors is driving unsustainable expenditure, highlighting the need for urgent and sustained action.

3. Actions Underway

- 3.1. We are pursuing a broad set of measures to reduce reliance on high-cost transport and to promote sustainable alternatives for eligible pupils. These include:
 - 3.1.1. **Zoom Zero Travel Pass:** supports active travel by providing free travel on public transport from home to school.
 - 3.1.2. **Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs):** initially piloted with 22 families, now scaled to 93 by the end of 2024/25. PTBs are being promoted as the first offer for new applicants, with work underway to extend take-up among existing families.
 - 3.1.3. **Independent Travel Training (ITT):** The Freedom to Travel – Skills for Life programme is being expanded, with a recruitment process underway for 12 Travel Trainers and a manager, supported by a funding bid to SYMCA. The programme initially targets post-16 students, with the aim of extending to younger cohorts.
 - 3.1.4. **Post-16 fees:** consultation is ongoing on increasing the annual contribution for young people using taxi or minibus transport from £540 to £1,000. Even with this increase, families would still receive substantial subsidy.
 - 3.1.5. **Route optimisation:** work is ongoing to reduce solo journeys, maximise in-house fleet usage, and optimise deployment of Passenger Assistants. Schools are being engaged in identifying opportunities for shared travel arrangements.
 - 3.1.6. **Sufficiency planning:** linked to the wider children's transformation programme, this strand seeks to increase the availability of local placements across nursery, school, post-16 and alternative provision, reducing the distances that pupils must travel.

4. Focus on Part-Time Timetables

- 4.1. One of the most significant findings from the analysis is the high number of children – approximately 400 of compulsory school age - on part-time timetables, typically involving later starts or early finishes. This group represents nearly half of all taxi journeys.
- 4.2. National statutory guidance is clear that local authorities are not normally expected to provide separate travel for such arrangements, except in exceptional cases (e.g. medical need). In Sheffield, however, this practice has become widespread. Correcting this anomaly offers a significant opportunity to reduce costs and align local practice with national policy.
- 4.3. A letter has been issued to schools setting out the Council's position, requesting information on pupils with part-time timetables, and explaining how families will be supported through the transition. Implementation will begin in September, with full adoption by Christmas 2025.

5. Recommendations

Forum members are asked to **note**:

- The scale of the challenge, with a projected £7m overspend in 2025/26.
- The range of initiatives being implemented, including PTBs, Independent Travel Training, fee increases, route optimisation, and sufficiency planning.
- That schools have been written to regarding part-time timetables and that implementation of this change will take effect during autumn 2025.