

Home to School Transport November 2006 – Summary of Comments

- 1. Journey times for children going to mainstream primary schools should be no more than 45 minutes. This is because children usually go to their nearest school.**

A majority of respondents agreed (87%). Most respondents indicated that a travel time of 20-40 minutes was most appropriate in an urban area like Kingston. There was recognition that children attending their nearest school supports the development of good community relationships, and is safer for those who travel alone. Several commented that very often the nearest school is over subscribed and parents are forced to go further a field, and that school reputation and reports are more important than proximity to home. There should be additional allowance for children going to a mainstream school to access SEN provision.

- 2. Journey times for pupils going to mainstream secondary schools should be no more than 75 minutes. This is because young people do not always attend their nearest school.**

A majority of respondents agreed (74%). Many respondents indicated that this was excessive, and that for the secondary phase 30-45 minutes was most appropriate. Several respondents noted the impact of longer journey times on time for homework, relaxation and adequate sleep. One respondent noted that there appear to be fewer secondary schools to choose from, that if the school was chosen then they must foot the bill, but if not chosen then travel cost should be provided. One indicated "Secondary school choice is slightly more important than primary so distance is understandable but not in the Kingston borough". There was recognition that such decisions are ultimately a matter of parental choice.

- 3. Only pupils with journeys that are scheduled to take more than 75 minutes by bus will be able to ask for a travelcard (i.e. can use trains as well).**

Responses were balanced with a slight majority in disagreement (52%). There was recognition that a 75 minute journey would be likely to require several modes of transport and pupils should be able to travel to school in the most efficient and quickest way. Several indicated that a shorter travel time (45 mins) would be better, and were surprised that any parent would send their child on a journey of more than 75 minutes to school.

Several respondents proposed that all children and students should be able to travel on public transport free, which would help cut down congestion on the roads. One respondent indicated that Travelcards should be available to low income families regardless of how long the journey takes.

Several respondents suggested these journeys should only be funded when there has been no choice of a school closer to home, since for Kingston residents "nowhere takes over 75 mins so no one should be entitled.". One noted the entitlement should depend on their choice of school, and that if the closest school was not chosen the parent should pay for travel.

4. Journey times for children with special educational needs should be no more than 75 minutes for pupils travelling in borough. This is because schools may be further away.

A majority of respondents agreed (83%). Several indicated that journey times ought not to be more than 75 mins, but that children with SEN should be going to school that will suit their needs best, not according to a maximum journey time. Children may have to travel some distance to access appropriate education when they have special needs

Others though the threshold within the borough should be between 45 - 60 mins. "75 mins travel twice a day is too long for many special needs children. There should be less time as special needs children tend not to travel well." Several emphasised that quality of lifestyle and reducing stress on parents and children should be a priority. One noted that schools should get more money to accommodate 'special needs' including travel.

Others commented:

- Only if the family have suitable transport of their own
- Children with special needs have no understanding of school journey times
- It's up to the parents to look for a good school
- If only we had enough facilities! There are not as many schools for children with special needs as mainstream schools

5. To make sure everyone is treated fairly, the most efficient routes and pick up times will be used by the free transport buses for children with special educational needs.

There was strong agreement (93%), some suggesting this was obvious, that no one could disagree, others that this should apply to all children, including those without SEN. One mentioned that Year 7 student travelling alone long distances (especially girls) are vulnerable, and "remember Milly Dowling". One agreed, but with an allowance made for certain family circumstances like pick up times for siblings or extenuating medical circumstances.

One suggested the free timetable should be made available to those who need it, not those who live near a route. Others suggested these children should be picked up from their home, or that travel support be more available to those not near public transport links.

6. Pupils going to a religious school will use buses if their scheduled journey is under 75 minutes. Pupils with journeys scheduled to take over 75 minutes by bus will be able to ask for a travelcard (i.e. can use trains as well).

A majority of respondents agreed (67%). Many thought 60 mins a more reasonable threshold. One respondent thought the issue would only affect a small number of children as the majority of families could find a belief school within 75 mins of home school in every area, but another that this was an issue because of the fewer faith schools in the area.

Many responded that all pupils should be treated the same regardless of their religious beliefs, and believed it discriminatory against community schools to offer free school buses to religious schools. "Religious teachings should not become a priority over the stress levels of

the children.”. There was strong recognition of parental preference (and subsequent responsibility for travel costs).

7. Pupils who move family home while in years 6,10 and 11 and who wish to stay at the same school can ask for a travelcard if the scheduled journey is over 75 minutes.

A majority of respondents agreed (72%). There was general recognition of the importance that children in these years are disrupted as little as possible, that friendships at that age are very important to the pupil, and Years 10 and 11 especially are critical years and to be uprooted would be unfair. Respondents agreed for years 10/11 but Yr6 child should move school in preparation for going to secondary school in new area and assumed a child in yr6 would move to a local school for yr7 anyway. One respondent thought parents should avoid moving, and that if the Council is re-homing them they must automatically foot the bill for the travel. “These ages are critical and home move can cause unnecessary stress for the pupils.”

Several respondents thought that 30-60 minutes ought to be the threshold. Others reiterated (in line with earlier comments) that travelcards should be available to all children.

8. More information on home to school transport will be put in the school admissions booklet

Almost all respondents agreed (91%), several indicating that information at time of choosing secondary school would be helpful, and that it would be useful to be kept informed. By contrast one thought more information “might confuse the issue” and one had no knowledge of what is there at present.

General Comments

This is a very difficult questionnaire and very difficult to answer. I am sure the free transport will do their best for the children who need to use the buses to get to all the schools.

It seems fair (5)

As a non-driver and living on the Kingsnympton Park Estate I find the journey to Latchmere School very frustrating. My son is 5 years old and asthmatic, doesn't walk terribly fast and a bus journey entails taking two buses, 85 & 371. I'm sure that free travel to school for pupils would benefit the parents immensely and may even allow them time to go to work part-time at least (7)

There must be big problems with getting our kids to school then. Additional transport facilities will not solve truancy problems! Free transport for under 18's and home to school and back for any SEN's! (13)

As a teacher I feel very strongly about this. I teach a lot of very tired children that have long journeys to and from school. This is not a good foundation for a good education and good health (18)

I'm still a little confused. It would have been useful to put it into context by setting out what the differences are from the current policy (22)

All 45 min journey times should be 40 mins and 75 mins should be 60 mins. Please make sure the Government spends less on military and more on education (26)

Very good and considerate scheme (27)

Couldn't find out what the current practice is. The weblink gave me access to SEN policy but not general policy (29)

All children should be treated equally. They have the choice of sending them to a local school. If they choose to send them to a school further away then they should have no different exceptions than local children using local schools. Children going to special education schools is different and different exceptions should apply (30)

I personally don't feel that religion or beliefs should have privileges (32)

I think as a parent with a child (girl) starting secondary school next year it does worry me that she'll be put in a school that requires a long journey (34)

I think the education system would be significantly improved if the large majority of children attended (good) schools near to where they lived. This would encourage development of good community links and relationships. Children should not be spending two and a half hours on a daily commute to school. I had to commute that for work I would move (35)

The measures don't go very far to reduce car use to and from school. Some people use the car when the journey is a 10 minute walk (39)

A child's education in this economic climate is paramount. The stress and worry of allowing your child to go unaccompanied to school (secondary age) has a profound effect on a parent's choice. I, myself, have opted for the nearest one for primarily safety reasons and importantly it was not my daughter's choice which could lead to problems later on as she is not particularly 'au fait' with our decision (42)

Please address walking to school policies (44)

Generally I think 75 mins and 45 mins are too long for an urban area like this and journey times of this length would adversely affect the quality of life of the children involved (49)

I don't know about travelcards but no child should travel over say 45 mins to school. A good local secondary school desperately needed in North Kingston Choice is appalling (57)

Anything which helps children get to school without causing problems to their journey i.e. allowing travelcards as necessary should be promoted in order to encourage every child's education (58)

I think this is an excellent step for everyone especially parents and pupils. As a foreigner I really appreciate this proposal for giving a chance to foreigners to have access to their preferred school especially when it comes to religious reasons. It's excellent (59)

I think buses taking up to 75 mins is a long time, but if parents have special requests i.e. religious/special needs then these schools may be further away (64)

All children should be entitled to free transport either paid for by the Council or just allowed by transport providers (68)