

Access to Education Action Plan

“A Catalyst for Change”

The Regional Transport Strategy for the west
of Scotland 2007-2021

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Purpose

This Access to Education Action Plan is one of a series of action plans developed as part of the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), which was approved by Scottish Ministers in June 2008. This action plan sets out the key issues, objectives and recommendations for transport access to education in the SPT area. It summarises work undertaken in analysing the issues and challenges for accessing education, and is intended to set out a clear programme of action to take forward improvements to transport access to education.

The development of a programme to implement the recommendations in the Plan will be subject to agreement between SPT and its member Councils. This action plan does not commit SPT or its member Councils to specific actions or expenditure. The development of an agreed implementation plan will allow each Council to proceed according to its own priorities and at its own chosen speed on agreed items without compunction.

Issues, Constraints and Opportunities

The following issues, constraints and opportunities were identified following analysis by SPT and consultation with SPT member councils and stakeholders as part of the RTS development process.

- **Range of transport providers**
There is a wide range of transport providers ranging from conventional public transport, through various types of specific contracted transport, including taxi provision as well as private car.
- **Diversity of the region**
The SPT region covers a mix of rural and urban areas, with different needs and opportunities for accessing education. The Isle of Arran, Argyll and the Lomond area and much of rural Ayrshire present unique challenges for SPT.
- **Variety of users**
Whilst primarily relating to school aged pupils and students, the variety of users requiring access to all forms of education is much wider. Mobility, capacity to travel independently, opportunity to use private transport and preference for different modes varies widely among users.
- **Social exclusion**
Access to education is fundamental in facilitating social inclusion and in equipping people with the necessary skills for them to play an active role in the economy. SPT's Regional Transport Strategy acknowledges this key relationship and identifies the need for it to be explored further. As such, this Access to Education Action Plan has been developed.

- **Variations in population**
The number of people wishing to access education will necessarily vary with population trends. This will require to be monitored in order to identify areas of need and target gaps.
- **Cross boundary requirements**
Certain issues, such as placement requests, are in some cases, geographically wider than the SPT area or cross boundaries within the SPT area. Sharing of information and co-ordination between authority areas will be required.
- **Environment**
Improved transport access needs to be balanced with the environmental impacts of more travel.
- **Data**
There are around 766 primary schools and 147 secondary schools in the SPT area. Around 49,000 pupils a day are carried on school transport services provided by SPT. The cost of providing these services amounts to around £26 million a year.
- **Future changes in provision of education**
The action plan needs to be flexible to take account of future changes in demand for and provision of primary, secondary and tertiary provision.
- **Availability and quality of bus services and facilities**
The frequency and capacity of local bus services is an issue, as well as transport infrastructure adjacent to places of education. Dedicated school transport is provided where conventional public transport cannot provide adequate service level or capacity.
- **Staff travel**
Consideration of staff travel is also an issue.
- **The school run**
Travel to and from school has a significant impact upon transport networks especially in relation to traffic generated by “the school run”. There has been a general decline in the number of pupils walking to school with an associated rise in those travelling by car. This trend exacerbates congestion on the local network during the school run period.
- **Colleges and Universities**
There are 28 colleges and universities, spread over 42 campuses, in the SPT area. A significant number of people attend colleges and universities and will have a far more diverse travel pattern than either primary or secondary school pupils.

- **Partnership working**
There is a need to support and endorse a long-term commitment to collaborative working and to identify efficiencies through joint working. In particular, the role of Community Planning will be pivotal in taking forward future measures to encourage modal shift, reduce congestion and improve pupils' safety.
- **Transport co-ordination**
The Scottish Government has produced guidance on the development of Safer Routes to Schools schemes and initially funded School Travel Coordinator posts in Councils to promote active travel amongst school children and increase the proportion of travel to school by means other than car. It no longer provides funding for these posts which is now at the discretion of individual local authorities. School Travel Coordinators are involved in the development of School Travel Plans to help facilitate active and sustainable travel.
- **Safety**
There are a number of obstacles to increased public transport use in accessing education, for example, perceived safety issues such as the fear of crime, safety of pupils waiting for school buses, and concerns about exposure to anti-social behaviour on public transport.
- **Integration of transport and land use planning**
There is a need to better integrate transport and land-use planning. In future greater consideration should be given to the location of new education facilities to minimise dependency on access by private car.

Objectives

Taking into consideration synergies with the objectives of the RTS, a set of objectives for the Access to Education Action Plan has been developed. These are to:

- Reduce the occurrence of the school run and encourage a modal shift to alternative modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport.
- Reduce the real and perceived barriers to walking, cycling and using public transport for journeys to and from school.
- Increase the attractiveness, reliability and quality of school transport provision.
- Improve accessibility by sustainable modes to further/higher education facilities whilst seeking to ensure that services are affordable and meet the needs of users.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will be developed in partnership with member councils and key stakeholders.

Access to Primary/Secondary Education

Partnership Working

Establish a Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the action plan.

School Travel

Build on the close working relationship between SPT and Councils resulting from SPT arranging transport for pupils entitled to free school transport to encourage sustainable travel for all pupils.

Accessibility Analysis

Identify and prioritise problem areas or social groups that currently have difficulties accessing a particular school.

Funding and Operation of School Transport

When the availability of funding permits, incrementally introduce and enforce more stringent and rigorous school bus service standards to enhance the quality of buses making them a more attractive alternative for travel to school.

School Travel Information Website

Develop a website that details all the schools in the SPT area along with details of the transport links to them.

Parking Exclusion Zones

Consider the appropriateness of introducing more strictly enforced zones around schools where parking is prohibited, to encourage modal shift, reduce congestion and improve pupils' safety. Responsibility for parking enforcement measures rests with individual local authorities and it will be for each to determine the nature of any proposals on an individual basis.

Personalised Travel Planning

Promote Personalised Travel Planning by working closely with parents and children to assess their existing travel patterns to school and identify how these could be made more sustainable by providing information about alternative options.

Pick Up Drop Off (PUDO)

The PUDO assessment methodology has been found to be very effective in assessing the safety of pick up and drop off points for children. This will be rolled out across the SPT area to help ensure that the environment around schools is safe and free from hazards.

School Travel Plan Guidance

Guidance on School Travel Plans is required to provide more direction for schools or groups of parents/guardians involved in School Travel Plan preparation.

Anti-social Behaviour Guidance

Prepare guidance on addressing anti-social behaviour problems associated with school travel that draws on best practice and provides a consistent approach to the issue.

Travel Awareness Campaigns

Have a targeted campaign for people who currently drive their children to school and identify alternative modes of transport to encourage modal shift and a reduction in people undertaking the school run.

Land-use Planning

Integration with land-use planning is essential to ensure that transport and accessibility issues are considered from the outset. This can help to mitigate the occurrence of problems in the future and to ensure that unsustainable travel patterns do not become entrenched, and more difficult to address.

Public Transport Demonstration Days

Dependent on available funding, work with bus operators and Council Education Departments to arrange for school-children to experience public transport services to highlight the benefits offered by using alternative modes of travel.

Environmental Awareness Activities

In-class activities that raise awareness of the environmental impacts of daily travel patterns may encourage children to travel to school by alternative modes. This would involve taking a typical journey to school and calculating some basic data about the carbon produced, illustrating the variations between modes and the impact cars have in comparison to other modes.

Access to Further/Higher Education

Accessibility Analysis

As for schools, an accessibility analysis should also be undertaken for colleges and universities.

Personalised Travel Planning

Working closely with students who usually travel to college or university by car, to promote travel by alternative modes and encourage changes to their travel behaviour.

Integrated Ticketing and Student Travel

The development and introduction of a “smart” ticketing solution providing simplicity of use and full integration between transport modes and looking

towards discounting opportunities, could provide significant benefits in making public transport more accessible and affordable for students, a group who are highly dependent upon it but often experience considerable barriers, especially in terms of cost, convenience and flexibility.

Inter-campus Travel

There are already some dedicated services for inter-campus travel although these tend to be provided by the institution and restricted to use by students alone. In some instances, it is possible that these are serving routes that may be of interest to people who are not students and where no viable alternative provision is made and could have potential as public transport routes.

Consultation Forum

There may be benefits in establishing more formalised arrangements for partnership working and sharing knowledge.

Student and Staff Car Sharing Database

Car sharing databases are well established as a mechanism to reduce single occupancy car trips. The development of a car sharing database aimed at students and staff who attend the same institution or another one in the vicinity could improve accessibility for those without access to a car and minimise the environmental and congestion impacts of the journey.

Land-use Planning

Improved engagement with the land use planning process to ensure that the transport and accessibility issues of proposed new further/higher education facilities are considered from the outset of the planning process.

Student Surveys

There is a lack of data about existing student travel patterns and the problems they face. Educational institutions should undertake travel surveys of their students to provide more data on these issues to ensure complete coverage across the SPT area.

Pool Bikes

Concern regarding bikes being vandalised or stolen is one of the issues that discourages students from cycling. The introduction of a pool bike scheme could help to eradicate this problem in that dedicated facilities for picking up and dropping off bikes would be provided at key locations across the campus.

Transport Services

- Achieve a better understanding of the way in which existing public transport information services are currently used, identify and implement measures to improve information provision.
- Explore ways of meeting the transport needs of service users through better integration of the commercial and the education/social remits of transport providers.

- Take steps to prove the benefits and encourage the use of vehicles that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) for transporting people to education facilities.

Accessibility Planning

- Undertake a planning audit of existing service locations and current travel patterns at both the local and regional level, including consideration of socio-demographic factors that may contribute to these travel patterns (for example, health needs of different groups within the population).
- Develop an index of communities experiencing relative isolation from education services and carry out an analysis of community profiles and alternatives for improving access to education facilities.

Target

Work in partnership with member Councils to develop a programme for the implementation of the Access to Education Action Plan by end of March 2010 subject to agreed priorities and funding availability.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the agreed programme will be incorporated within SPT's Business Plan monitoring process.

Further Information

Related reports are available on our website www.spt.co.uk and further information is available from rts@spt.co.uk or by contacting:

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