

The Future of Home to School Transport - update

Date of meeting 22 August 2025

Date of report 13 August 2025

Report by Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery

1. Object of report

To update the Committee on SPT's review of Home to School Transport (HTS) being conducted in partnership with our Constituent Councils.

2. Background to report

Further to previous reports to Committee including most recently on 24 August 2024¹, SPT has been taking forward a review of HTS. This reflects the challenges faced by the sector which include: changes to walking distance eligibility criteria; land use impacts including changes to school estate; the impact of Under 22 Concessionary passes; inflationary pressures; driver shortages; reduced government support for bus and coach; and concerns over the ongoing viability of bus, coach and taxi operators in the HTS market.

Reflecting these challenges and as reported, SPT commissioned consultants to undertake a study to review and consider options related to mainstream HTS provision in Strathclyde. As part of the study, an option generation process identified a long list of options for review and SPT has been working with our Local Authority partners to consider which options merit further consideration.

To support this process, SPT undertook a series of one-to-one interviews with Local Authority staff whose remit includes HTS transport and followed this up with a questionnaire survey (see Appendix 1). The interviews and follow up questionnaires reflected the options generated in the study. All 11 Local Authorities for whom SPT acts as agent to procure school transport participated in the interviews with 10 completing the follow up questionnaires at the time of writing noted in Appendix 1.

SPT manages around 1,100 HTS contracts, ensuring c. 36,000 primary and secondary pupils get to school and home again, completing around 72,000 journeys per day. The projected cost of HTS provision in 2025/2026 is c. £47 million, an increase of over £20 million since 2019/2020. Included for reference in Appendix 2 is a breakdown of total costs by Local Authority 2019/2020 to 2025/2026.

3. Outline of proposals

The key findings of the analysis of Home to School questionnaire responses are summarised below:

¹ www.spt.co.uk/media/1mlh1zus/ops230824_agenda7.pdf

Walking Distances – Councils were asked if they had any plans to review Home to School Transport eligibility criteria, including walking distances.

- The key role of Home to School Transport in supporting access to education was highlighted by Councils, alongside important considerations around eligibility and cost.
- Given ongoing budget challenges, some Councils indicated they may review eligibility criteria in the longer term (should there be political support to do so) but highlighted that any changes would require much further consideration, given the sensitivities involved.
- It was highlighted that a number of councils responding have already moved towards the statutory minimum walking distance requirements, either in full or in part (e.g. ERC, SAC, and SLC).
- **Action: SPT will continue dialogue with our partner Councils on their respective HTS policies.**

Active Travel – Councils were asked if they have School Travel Plans and similar initiatives in place to support active travel to school by pupils, parents, and staff.

- The majority of Councils advised they have Active Travel Plans in place although these do not cover all schools specifically. Where there are plans in place, a number of Councils indicated these require to be updated.
- In the medium to longer term, six Councils (EAC, EDC, ERC, GCC, NAC and SAC) indicated they would be reviewing their Active Travel Plans with a further three Councils doing so in the longer term.
- **Action: SPT will engage with our Partner Councils to promote uptake and refresh of School Travel Plans as appropriate. Local Authorities can utilise the SPT People & Place Programme to support development or review of plans.**

Under 22s Free Bus Travel – Councils were asked how they currently promote use of the Under 22 Free Bus Scheme and what barriers exist to its promotion and use.

- All ten Councils responding advised they have taken steps to promote the use of the Under 22 Bus Scheme among pupils.
- However, a number of Councils (EAC, ERC, IC, GCC, NAC, RC, and SLC) advised that a lack of local bus services, or scheduled service timetables that do not align with the school day, presented a barrier to use.
- **Action; SPT to consider challenges and opportunities faced by U22 scheme / bus service availability / access to education, as part of the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS) development and delivery, subject to approvals.**

Driver Recruitment - Councils were asked what action they currently take to promote bus driver recruitment and training.

- No Councils currently provide direct financial support to promote bus driver recruitment e.g. PCV funding or training.
- Councils indicated they would be supportive of national or regional initiatives to promote recruitment.
- Several Councils suggested Scottish Government funding would be important to promote driver recruitment.
- **Action: SPT to write to Scottish Government to seek increased support for PCV training.**

Anti-Social Behaviour – Councils were asked if they had or were considering measures to address anti-social behaviour on Home to School Transport including making provision of CCTV a part of School Contracts.

- There was a mixed picture on the introduction of CCTV on School Transport.
- Almost half of Councils reported no significant anti-social behaviour on school transport and a similar number advising they have no plans to make CCTV a contractual requirement.
- However, for the few Councils where there is CCTV provision in place, Councils advised this was helpful in reducing incidence of anti-social behaviour.
- Concerns were raised by some Councils about the potential cost implications of building CCTV into school contracts and also in relation to compliance with GDPR.
- **Action: SPT will engage with our partner Councils and operators to explore opportunities to promote roll out of CCTV as appropriate.**

Contractual Requirements - Councils were asked about any plans to review contract requirements to reduce costs including capping contract costs, increasing length of contracts, penalties for discrepancies in drop off times, changes to vehicle specifications and revising best value tenders.

- The majority of Councils did not plan to introduce such changes.
- Concern was raised over the potentially negative impact these might have on encouraging tenders, although several Councils indicated they would be happy to discuss potential changes in discussion with and following advice from SPT.
- Almost half of Councils noted that the majority of school contracts currently operate a longer-term duration (3 years +).
- One Council (GCC) indicated it would consider requiring electric / low emission vehicles as part of its tender specification in the medium-term.
- **Action: SPT will undertake dialogue with our partner Councils and operators to further explore opportunities to reduce costs and promote low emission vehicles**

Land Use Planning – Councils were asked how Home to School Transport requirements are considered as part of the planning process including site appraisal, developer guidance and developer contributions.

- All Councils noted that work is currently underway to refresh their respective Local Development Plans and that school transport forms part of the consideration of Plans. Several Councils did make reference to formalised assessment criteria for future school estate provision.
- From the responses received Councils did not appear to be any specific school transport related developer contribution policies in place, although this can be covered by other policies such as Placemaking & Design.
- **Action: SPT is continuing engagement with our partner Councils as they refresh their respective Local Development Plans.**

Potential Efficiencies – Councils were asked for their views on consideration being given to any changes in Home to School requirements and specifications to maximise operator efficiency including modification of school start / finish times to enable earlier / later drop off to enhance the use of technology for scheduling / routing of Home to School Transport.

- A substantial majority of Councils had no plans to consider changes to school start / finish times for mainstream school transport.

- However, there was interest in working with SPT to explore the use of new technology such as AI to help drive savings in administration of Home to School contracts including through the use of efficient routing/capacity planning.
- **Action: SPT to explore and consider technologies that may assist in the planning, scheduling, and efficient delivery of Home to School Transport services in partnership with Councils.**

Emissions Reporting – Councils were asked whether they currently capture Home to School Transport emissions from school transport as part of their Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) obligations. Councils were also asked what views / plans they had to help reduce emissions from Home to School Transport including through any changes to Home to School contracts.

- From the responses received, emissions from Home to School Transport do not appear to have been specifically included in Councils' current PBCCD (Public Bodies Climate Change Duties) reporting other than for identifiably council owned fleet vehicles that deliver ASN transport.
- There was limited response to the question on plans to reduce emissions although one Council commented that many of their Home to School contracts could be served through use of EVs thus contributing to a reduced carbon footprint.
- However, it was noted that requiring EV Buses as part of School contract specifications could limit the number of operators submitting tenders for contracts, drive up costs and may not be appropriate in more rural settings.
- **Action: SPT will continue dialogue with our partner Councils to promote reduced emissions and recording**

In terms of next steps, SPT will continue to work with our Local Authority partners and the Scottish Government on the actions set out above

4. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the findings of the recent HTS engagement exercise undertaken with our Local Authority partners.

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In line with the Regional Transport Strategy. Delivery of school transport supports RTS outcomes OBJ1: To improve accessibility, affordability, availability, and safety of the transport system and OBJ2: To reduce carbon emissions</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None directly. The fragility of the Home to School Transport market remains an ongoing risk to delivering services effectively and efficiently</i>

Climate Change, Adaptation &
Carbon consequences

School transport has a positive benefit through reducing the need for journeys by less sustainable modes.

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APPENDIX 1

Councils responding to SPT's Home to School Transport Questionnaire:

- East Dunbartonshire
- East Ayrshire
- East Renfrewshire
- Glasgow City
- Inverclyde
- North Ayrshire
- Renfrewshire
- South Ayrshire
- South Lanarkshire
- West Dunbartonshire

APPENDIX 2

Mainstream Home to School Transport – Costs by Local Authority 2019/2020 to 2025/2026

Local Authority	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026 Budget Costs
East Ayrshire	£3,714,978	£3,755,016	£4,288,261	£4,425,070	£4,505,274	£4,954,491	£4,598,768
East Dunbartonshire	£1,755,163	£1,657,212	£1,899,448	£2,040,194	£2,490,851	£2,801,111	£3,098,030
East Renfrewshire	£1,048,305	£1,026,459	£1,187,304	£1,417,200	£1,507,493	£1,640,435	£1,762,370
Glasgow	£1,711,116	£1,660,557	£1,820,137	£2,498,158	£2,542,097	£2,841,390	£2,958,969
Inverclyde	£2,141,514	£1,613,593	£1,589,183	£1,875,242	£2,083,036	£2,119,828	£2,308,184
North Ayrshire	£2,124,912	£2,027,563	£2,192,117	£2,309,488	£2,412,318	£2,746,291	£3,109,061
North Lanarkshire	£5,965,140	£5,384,917	£6,550,092	£8,992,453	£9,935,915	£9,114,761	£8,822,411
Renfrewshire	£2,465,983	£2,419,215	£2,670,090	£3,063,616	£3,069,268	£3,718,037	£4,327,688
South Ayrshire	£2,201,647	£2,134,622	£2,365,574	£2,656,355	£2,791,516	£3,024,194	£3,212,436
South Lanarkshire	£5,636,432	£5,619,227	£6,128,415	£8,670,238	£10,372,935	£11,286,049	£11,762,827
West Dunbartonshire	£704,376	£633,102	£719,092	£784,446	£796,013	£770,985	£819,637
Total	£29,469,567	£27,931,482	£31,409,714	£38,732,460	£42,506,718	£45,017,573	£46,780,381