

Lee Waters AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Deputy Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

14 Mawrth 2024

Dear Jayne,

Further to our response to the Committee's letter on Learner Travel in December 2023, please find attached the Learner Travel Recommendations Report for you to share with the committee.

This Report sets out a series of recommendations to help improve the consistency, quality and safety of learner travel provision across Wales, following an internal analysis and evaluation exercise undertaken between January – September 2023.

We believe the recommendations set out in Report will provide a renewed focus on how we approach the journey to school; to look afresh at the responsibility on us all – children, young people, parents and carers, schools, FE institutions, local authorities and us as Ministers – and the collective role we play in ensuring that our learners develop the skills and confidence to travel to their place of learning in a safe, sustainable and affordable way.

The report recommends a comprehensive update to the statutory guidance documents which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in learner travel. The guidance will be enhanced to provide a framework for delivering a socially just, environmentally and financially sustainable school travel offer that is learner-focussed and highlights best practice from Wales, and beyond.

By taking forward the Report's recommendations we have an opportunity to ensure that our commitments and policy aspirations on active travel, public transport networks – both bus and rail, alongside our ambitious targets on modal shift can be aligned and integrated in to the learner travel agenda.

By working with in partnership with key delivery partners to redefine, refresh and restructure our learner travel frameworks and infrastructure we believe that together we can foster a socially, environmentally and sustainably culture of responsible travel to school.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Lee.Waters@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lee.Waters@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Lee Waters AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Deputy Minister for Climate Change

Learner Travel in Wales
Analysis and Evaluation - Recommendations Report
December 2023

Background

1. Following the review undertaken in 2021 a further internal analysis and evaluation exercise to consider the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure has been undertaken by officials between February -September 2023.
2. This exercise collated information from survey responses from 14 out of the 22 local authorities and 8 FE colleges; officials reviewed evidence submitted for the 2021 review. We also met with representatives from the offices of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Welsh Language Commissioner, local authority Directors of Education and Transport officials, and representatives from Church in Wales and the Catholic Church. The analysis and evaluation exercise also considered Senedd debates, oral and written questions and Committee reports; it reviewed all correspondence, including petitions, received since the previous review was undertaken as well as considering over 80 UK, and international research papers looking at innovative school transport provision.
3. Additionally, Young Wales¹ undertook a consultation exercise with children and young people across Wales to ascertain their views on the All-Wales Travel Behaviour Code enabling around 70 learners from 6 schools to provide invaluable comment and insight in to their experiences of travelling to school.
4. Officials engaged with the Welsh Youth Parliament's work on Sustainable Travel that was taking place at the same time of the review. The recommendations in this paper have taken into consideration the findings and recommendations of the WYP report, *Sustainable Ways*.

Key findings and recommendations

5. This analysis and evaluation exercise has concluded that given the fundamental reform that Welsh Government are planning for the structure of the bus industry, and with the Welsh Government facing significant challenges around budget pressures there should be no immediate amendment to the legislation which underpins Learner Travel in Wales². Costs for local authorities' current statutory responsibilities have increased significantly due to a range of issues including increased fuel prices, driver shortages and operator availability and therefore any changes would require significant Welsh Government investment that, currently, can not be afforded.

¹ Young Wales is a Children in Wales initiative that amplifies and supports the voices of children and young people across Wales to be heard, listened to and have influence in decisions that affect their lives; underpinned by the UNCRC and the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards.

² Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008

6. The analysis and evaluation exercise makes a number of recommendations that provides the framework to improving the consistency, quality and safety of learner travel provision across Wales and will help to address a number of the issues raised by key stakeholders and delivery partners.

Recommendation 1 - Update Learner Travel: Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance document to align with legislative changes; promote and strengthen collective responsibility across local government, schools, parents and learners; and improve consistency of delivery across Wales

7. The review concludes that immediate work should start on updating the statutory guidance documents which support the operational delivery of travel and transport arrangements for our learners across Wales, namely the Learner Travel: Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (2014), and the All Wales Travel Behaviour Code (2018).
8. The guidance documents should be updated to align with legislative changes that have taken place since their respective publication dates and to align with the transport hierarchy as set out in Llwybr Newydd, and Welsh Government's aspirations around Net Zero.
9. The update to the guidance documents will help address many of the issues raised in the previous review³ (which are all still relevant) and reiterated in the findings of this current review. This will include updating and clearly defining roles and responsibilities for all involved in school travel, to support a more consistent approach to learner travel provision across Wales. The guidance will be developed to provide a framework for delivering a socially just, environmentally and financially sustainable school travel offer that is learner-focussed and highlights best practice from Wales, and beyond.

Recommendation 2 – Commission a piece of work to update the All-Wales Travel Behaviour Code, resources for schools and update to accompanying statutory guidance

10. As part of this analysis and evaluation exercise, Young Wales hosted workshops with 69 children from 6 schools across Wales. This consultation exercise provided invaluable insights into the thoughts and feelings of children and young people about travelling to school and how the All-Wales Travel Behaviour Code can be updated to be more relevant, accessible and embedded within the school lives of children and young people. The consultation highlighted the need to raise the profile of this important document and associated resources; only 2 out of the 69 children had heard of the Code. The children and young people suggested some innovative solutions to improve this and to ensure that travel and transport to school is embedded within the school community.

³ [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure \(2008\) review 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

11. It is therefore recommended that the budget allocated for the Learner Travel Measure Review is used to support a programme of work to cocreate with children and young people a refocussed Travel Behaviour Code to embed a sense of ownership and responsibility within schools and communities to ensure the key messages reflect the feedback from the early consultation exercise and the opportunities presented by the transport hierarchy.
12. As part of this work-stream transport and education officials will explore options to work with active travel and education delivery partners to codesign curriculum and communication resource packages for use by schools, governing bodies, local authorities and bus operators to support consistent implementation and delivery of the Code across Wales and ensuring relevance to all modes of transportation.
13. Additionally officials will work with children, young people, local authorities, schools and other key stakeholders to ensure that the accompanying statutory guidance is updated to clearly define roles, responsibilities and ensure children and young people know where and how they can inform, influence and access support on all school travel issues.

Recommendation 3 – Promote best practice, resources and further collaboration across local authorities

14. The review highlighted some excellent practice that is taking place across Wales to diversify the range of travel options for children and young people, promoting the use of more tailored, flexible and innovative solutions to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport.
15. The review concludes that using the well-established networks such as ATCO, WLGA and Transport for Wales platforms, more can be done to share some of this best practice and some of the excellent resources developed.
16. For example, Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) offer Personal Travel Budgets (PTB) to some families and have developed best practice policies and templates to support their use. PTBs allow parents/ carers to make their own flexible travel arrangements to school/ college rather than travelling on a vehicle provided by the local authority. PTBs are calculated based on the distance between home and school/ college for the exact number of days the child attends school and takes account of a child's current travel requirement. If the local authority calculates that a PTB would be more cost effective than them directly contracting the transport provision, a PTB is provided to parents/ guardians of children who are eligible for transport to school. Promotion of carefully agreed PTBs to attract take up could contribute to modest but important financial savings and contribute to the development of independence and in many cases promote the better interaction of parent and school at daily drop and pick up, and provide opportunities for LAs and families to consider alternative solutions away from expensive door to door transport. The policies and templates developed by MCC have been shared with

some local authorities for them to consider implementing the policy but there is no formal, consistent mechanism to ensure such resources, and lessons learned, can be captured and disseminated across the authorities.

17. The review concludes that officials should work with delivery partners to identify a suitable coherent and consistent governance structure and platform to promote such initiatives and support the sharing of best practice resources, as well as best practice transport/ travel contracts and resources for local authorities, schools and colleges.

Recommendation 4 – Explore options to develop a match-funded grant programme to seed-fund independent travel training

18. Initiatives such as the use of independent travel training to ensure that all our young people have the skills to use public transport confidently and independently giving them skills for life should be promoted and supported further by the Welsh Government.

19. In Cardiff independent travel training was initially seed funded by Welsh Government and WLGA in 2008/09. The Council has developed the programme over the past decade to become a self-funding service that provides suitable individuals with 1-2-1, and group training to be able to use the public transport network to access their places of learning and also provides them with the lifelong skill opening up more social and long term employment opportunities. By developing the service in-house the Council has been able to tailor and adapt the intervention whilst developing local expertise that could and should be exemplified. Local authority colleagues in Rhondda Cynon Taff and Neath Port Talbot have also recognised the benefits of such a programme and although they are currently in much earlier stages of development they are working closely with colleagues in Cardiff to learn from their experience.

20. The review concludes that this type of invest to save model used to deploy Independent Travel Training should be promoted to local authorities and if appropriate funding can be sourced a match-funding grant scheme should be accessible to support local authorities to develop and support such a programme if the required transport infrastructure allows; or encourage alternative solutions which maximise Welsh Government's current investment in Road Safety programmes across the local authorities.

Recommendation 5 – Increase opportunities for active travel and use of public transport network

21. In line with the Welsh Government's transport hierarchy set out in Llwybr Newydd, this evaluation and analysis exercise recommends that Welsh Government, local authorities, Transport for Wales and other delivery partners maximise the opportunities for our learners to active travel or use public transport to access their place of learning.

22. The Welsh Government is due to procure a new Active Journeys programme and continues to fund Eco Schools; programmes such as these provide an opportunity to ensure schools, learners and communities receive tailored support, resources and training required to provide the governance and environmental infrastructure to encourage more active journeys and use of public transport to schools and colleges. Officials will continue to work cross-governmentally to maximise the opportunities presented by such interventions.
23. To increase use of public transport, our learners require access to a good public transport network. Monmouthshire County Council have undertaken an extensive exercise, working closely with local bus operators to amend timetables to be able to increase the number of young people travelling on public transport routes to their places of learning – increasing skills, and confidence of the young people whilst securing routes for wider members of the community.
24. The implementation of a franchised network provides the opportunity to ensure that schools and colleges are taken in to consideration when planning regional bus networks. It is therefore recommended that as part of the preparatory work for the implementation of the Bus Bill, Transport for Wales ensure that the network development work that they are undertaking includes our learning establishments, schools and FE colleges as well as universities. This will maximise opportunities of a franchised network to encourage more children and young people to use our public transport networks.
25. The review also highlighted opportunities for increased use of the rail network to support children and young people access their place of learning. The review identified an area in Flintshire where, with some collaborative working between Transport for Wales, local authority transport and active travel teams supported by Welsh Government, rail links could potentially be opened up for school children, as well as the broader community. Whilst developing the skills of our future generations to be safe, confident and capable individuals who see public transport as the key to accessing the services they require, identifying and implementing changes such as this could save the local authority significant resources,. It is therefore recommended that Transport for Wales work in partnership with Flintshire to explore the barriers and opportunities to develop this rail link for use by learners. This case study could be used as a pilot project for how opportunities in local authorities could be identified and lessons learned for maximising all our public transport links.

Recommendations

26. The recommendations have been developed to align with current legislative commitments and financial constraints. The actions set out will be overseen by a cross-departmental working group to ensure full engagement with the range of policy colleagues with an interest in this cross portfolio issue including transport, education, Welsh language, health and rural affairs.

27. Successful delivery of change will be dependent on a collaborative effort including, local authorities, schools, bus and rail operators, Transport for Wales, families and children and young people themselves. It is fundamental that all these partners work together to provide the framework and support to ensure that our learners understand their rights, as well as their responsibilities to develop the skills and confidence to get to school safely and sustainably. The cross departmental group will therefore develop an appropriate governance structure and timetable for delivery to fulfil these next steps.

- Recommendation 1: Update Learner Travel: Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance document to align with legislative changes; promote and strengthen collective responsibility across local government, schools, parents and learners; and improve consistency of delivery across Wales
- Recommendation 2: Commission a piece of work to update the All-Wales Travel Behaviour Code, resources for schools and update to accompanying statutory guidance
- Recommendation 3: Promote best practice, resources and collaboration across local authorities
- Recommendation 4: Explore options to develop a match-funded grant programme to seed-fund independent travel training
- Recommendation 5: Increase opportunities for active travel and use of public transport network