



**Merseytravel**

**Journey to School Policy**

<b>Document Title</b>	Journey to School Policy
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<b>Document Version</b>	v2
<b>Approved By</b>	General Purposes Committee April 2013
<b>Created Date</b>	February 2013
<b>Renewal Date</b>	As Required

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## **Journey to School Policy**

**This policy will come into force on 1 April 2013 and will continue until superseded. It will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated as necessary.**

### **Aims of Policy**

The aims of this journey to school policy are to support Merseytravel's wider aims, in relation to the way that it supports access to primary and secondary education.

The overall objective of this policy is:

"To consider sustainable access to primary and secondary education, promoting the health and wider environmental benefits of walking and cycling, alongside securing value for money for the Authority's investment in supported bus services."

Whilst acknowledging that there are numerous ways in which children can travel to school, this policy advocates a hierarchical approach. Whilst the policy prioritises walking or cycling for health and wellbeing purposes, there is clearly an accepted requirement for children to use motorised transport when travelling longer distances to school. There may also be other extenuating factors contributing towards choice of mode. Acknowledging these issues, this policy is designed to make sure that, when we provide transport for local children, we:-

- support interventions in line with the Merseyside Local Transport Plan;
- make best use of resources available;
- ensure consistent and effective methods for considering requests for bus services;
- ensure that value for money is a key consideration;
- make sure we comply with our legal requirements;
- ensure that our services are customer-centric eg ensure that we work with schools and local education authorities to try to improve the way we plan and provide bus services on routes which serve schools; and
- think long term; by fostering a sense of respect for public transport, and the way in which it is used, coupled with making the bus journey an acceptable experience for children, they are more likely to continue to use public transport into adulthood.

### **Hierarchy of Transport Modes**

**This policy advocates a hierarchy of transport modes by which schoolchildren can travel to and from school and between sites and facilities. This hierarchy seeks to promote the most sustainable modes of transport, in preference to less sustainable modes.**

Walking and cycling to school are considered the best options for schoolchildren. In addition to the health benefits of walking and cycling, which can help to combat the increase in childhood obesity, research suggests that even moderate levels of exercise improve children's concentration, and boost academic achievement.

Encouraging children to make use of the mainstream bus network ensures the best use of Merseytravel's resources. For example, utilising existing supported bus services increases the revenue on such services, and thereby the value of the investment in them.

Where it is neither possible nor practical for children to travel to school by mainstream public transport (eg the remoteness of the school from main areas of population), the option of a "school bus service"<sup>1</sup> should be examined.

The car should ideally be a last resort for trips to school, as an alternative is often available. School Travel Plans (STPs) have a key role to play in highlighting the options that are available for children to get to and from school and so address the concerns that lead some parents to drive their children to and from school. If the car is the only option available, consideration could be given to parking some way from the school, leaving the child within a safe walkable distance, or car-sharing.

In short, the following "hierarchy", or ranking, illustrates the preferred means of travelling to school:-

Walking  
Cycling  
Regular buses and trains  
School services  
Park and Stride  
Cars

### **School Travel Plans**

**Merseytravel considers that all schools should have a School Travel Plan (STP), which fully assess and reflect the transport needs of the school, in terms of the provision of walking, cycling and bus services.**

**STPs are designed to reduce the use of cars for the school run and usually include an assessment of the available transport to a particular school, including walking, cycling and public transport. They set out an**

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<sup>1</sup> These education-related supported bus services are commonly known as "school buses", but this is in fact misleading and causes confusion for the service users, and indeed the schools they serve. The buses are general "local services" as defined by legislation, available for use by any member of the public, and subject to the timetables specified, and fares tariff defined, by Merseytravel.

**action plan, comprising a series of specific initiatives, with associated targets, that aim to change the way that pupils get to school.**

They can sign-post the most suitable public transport options, and provide information on the different ticket type and fare options which are available. They facilitate partnership working with schools, local councils and local education authorities, to share resources and economise on effort.

Merseytravel recognises that the vast majority of schools now have an STP, but also that they are only of benefit if they are “living” plans; the schools must engage in continuous, active delivery of their core aims and objectives.

### **Communication**

**Where Merseytravel provides a supported bus service to a school, it expects to be consulted by the school on proposed changes to operational arrangements, such as location or opening hours. This should be 12 months prior to any change being implemented, with Merseytravel reserving the right to review, and possibly withdraw the service. Even with the appropriate notice given, there is no guarantee that Merseytravel will be able to provide a service, due to the constantly changing and competing demands placed upon the supported bus services budget.**

**Merseytravel will work with any school to assess a requirement for a supported service. The responsibility lies with the school to provide suitable evidence, but again, no guarantees can be made.**

By virtue of the Transport Act 1968, it is “the duty of the Executive to secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the Authority considers it appropriate, for meeting *any* public transport requirements within the ITA area, which in the Authority’s view would not otherwise be met.”

Merseytravel therefore has no legal duty to provide school transport services, but recognises the social, economic and environmental advantages of providing supported bus services, including schools services, where the commercial sector is unable or unwilling to do so. It relies upon firm evidence to justify a new service.

To help provide this evidence, there needs to be effective communication between the school and Merseytravel. In deciding whether or not to fund a new service, consideration is given to the potential for reducing the number of car trips made, to encourage walking, cycling and the use of mainstream public transport, in preference to a supported bus service.

Evidence offered through a current STP, will also be used to inform any request. Where available, schools should provide pupil postcode data to assist in the assessment of whether services are appropriate, and if so, where they should operate.

School buses will be reviewed as part of the regular contract review process and Merseytravel reserves the right to withdraw or change any existing service each year. It is acknowledged that schools sometimes need to alter opening times, which will affect the times the children need to arrive and leave. That said it is important that such changes are communicated to all parties as soon as possible, to allow the services to be specified as efficiently as possible, to meet the operational requirements of the school.

### **Land-Use Planning**

**Where schools are being consolidated or relocated, Merseytravel would anticipate that Local Education Authorities – working with their Local Planning and Local Highway Authority colleagues, will look to secure the selection of the most appropriate sites, in terms of their highway and public transport network accessibility, and to consult with Merseytravel during the planning process.**

**Well-connected sites that readily facilitate walking, cycling and the use of mainstream public transport services should be the preferred choice.**

**The use of accessibility mapping techniques (eg “Accession”) will be encouraged in the selection of sites and Merseytravel will continue to assist LEAs as required with this process. A STP should be prepared as part of the planning application for the new build/redevelopment of the school.**

The policy supports the principle of accessibility planning, whereby transport implications and solutions are integrated with the wider decision making processes. Decisions taken by LEAs on the location of schools and can put pressure on Merseytravel to provide additional school bus services. Merseytravel would request that the LEA/School select the most appropriate sites to which children can safely walk, cycle and use extant mainstream public transport. Similarly, Merseytravel will expect STPs to be produced as part of the planning application for a new or relocated school.

### **Behaviour**

**Anti-social behaviour, fare evasion and similar abuse are not tolerated across the public transport network and more specifically, on the supported bus network. Appropriate action is taken against anyone identified as being involved, or causing this to occur. Where schools have been shown not to work with Merseytravel to combat anti-social behaviour on a service, Merseytravel will reconsider its provision. This may result in the loss of the supported service in question.**

The contracts already in place reflect this and the approach being adopted across Merseytravel supports this. Merseytravel stipulate the use of CCTV on board buses to enable action to be taken against anti-social behaviour, criminality and fare evasion.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### School

This policy is aimed at establishments providing compulsory education.

### Local Transport Plan (LTP)

The Merseyside LTP provides the framework for the policies and plans that guide the delivery of transport in Merseyside. The third LTP for Merseyside became active from 1 April 2011. For 2012/13, Merseyside was allocated £12m to support its implementation. The LTP sets out the plans in the short term to 2015. It also has a longer term strategy to 2024 to improve transport. Its vision is:

*'A city region committed to a low carbon future, which has a transport network and mobility culture that positively contributes to a thriving economy and the health and wellbeing of its citizens and where sustainable travel is the option of choice.'*

### School Bus

Merseytravel funds a substantial number of contracts covering in excess of 400 journeys to schools each day – each subject to individually tendered contracts. These education-related supported bus services are commonly referred to as “school buses” or “school service”, but it is accepted that this is misleading. The services remain subject to The Executive’s terms and conditions of contract for all supported bus services. All such services are reviewed on an annual basis, using the defined Supported Service Procurement and Provision criteria, which they must satisfy to justify continued operation. The buses are general “local services” as defined by legislation, available for use by any member of the public, and subject to the timetables specified, and fares tariff defined, by the Executive.

### Accession

Accession has been developed according to the Department for Transport's specifications it is designed to fully address all aspects of travel time and cost mapping, using digital road networks, public transport timetable data and flexible, on-demand transport. It is able to deliver key performance indicators through the analysis of any geo-demographic data using travel time, cost or distance.

### Evaluation

The evaluation of the policy will be undertaken on a continuous basis by the School Transport Member Officer Working Group and in line with Merseytravel’s Evaluation Policy.

## Responsibility

The Journey to School Strategy sets out the actions required for delivering this policy across the organisation and monitoring its implementation. The Head of Policy and LTP Development will remain the responsible officer for this policy, and will undertake periodic reviews.