



Consultation response

To: House of Commons Transport Select Committee inquiry into school travel

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) in England which between them serve more than eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, though this response does not represent their views. The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all.

2. Background

- 2.1 The provision of good quality schools transport brings wider benefits, including:

- Congestion reduction - on the road and at the school gate;
- Allowing parents (particularly women) to take up employment opportunities that might otherwise be compromised by their need to be available for the 'school run';
- Reducing the numbers of traffic accidents involving children at the school gates;
- Reducing emissions from vehicles that would otherwise be transporting children to and from school;
- Promoting bus travel to the public transport passengers of the future;
- Encouraging children to be healthy through active transport choices;
- Building greater independence and social responsibility through active travel choices.

- 2.2 The key issues to be addressed in the area of home to school transport are:

- Funding for school transport on an appropriate scale, particularly in rural areas where distances are greater;
- The effect of allowing educational choice – as children will not always attend the nearest school with consequent implications for school transport provision and traffic congestion;
- The importance of encouraging walking and cycling access to schools, including through school travel plans and the design of new school facilities;
- The traditional reliance of school transport providers on ageing vehicles which do not encourage parental confidence in the safety of the service;
- Anti-social behaviour issues relating to school bus services.

3. Legislative context and PTE responsibilities

- 3.1 While transport to ensure children can get to school is the responsibility of local education authorities (LEAs), most PTEs act as agents for their LEAs to secure bus services on their behalf, using both the mainstream network and through provision of specific schools services. In this way, PTEs are procuring and promoting school travel to an estimated 250,000 pupils (or approximately 14 per cent of all 5 to 16 year olds in English PTE areas) in 36 English local authorities. In England, almost a quarter of pupils travelling to school by bus are using dedicated school transport - especially those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). However, given the better availability and take-up of local bus services in PTE areas, the proportion of local authority organised 'free' school transport in PTE areas is often lower than elsewhere in England.

3.2 Generally, children of primary school age living more than two miles from the nearest appropriate school, and secondary school children living more than three miles from the nearest appropriate school, qualify for free school travel. At the discretion of the LEA, these entitlements are sometimes interpreted more generously (often to meet denominational preferences), and have also been recently extended for less well-off pupils by the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*. The Act introduced two new duties for LEAs:

- to publish a Sustainable Travel Strategy for all education travel, aiming to reduce negative impacts – the strategy should link to the Local Transport Plan;
- extended free school transport rights for pupils from less well-off families – to their nearest school if more than two miles from home (to one of their three nearest schools for secondary pupils).

3.3 The urban character of the much of the areas served by PTE areas, means that school pupils are more likely to live within two or three miles of their school. Government analysis has shown that extended free transport rights are expected to be taken up by less than 20,000 pupils across all PTE areas (assuming school places are available for them to take advantage of the new transport opportunities), at an eventual additional cost of roughly £15 million. The cost of securing bus services in general continues to rise: according to ATCO's annual survey, in 2006/07 the average cost of re-tendered local bus services was 4.9 per cent higher than the contracts they replaced.

3.4 However, despite legal responsibilities resting with LEAs, PTEs are the strategic body responsible for authority for local transport in their areas, and have acted in a number of ways to improve the quality, attractiveness and safety of school transport and also reduce the problems caused by 'the school run'. Some of these interventions are set out in section 5 onwards.

4. Future development of school transport policy

4.1 We support the current arrangements whereby LEAs are responsible for home-to-school travel (particularly for children travelling longer distances). However, In 2006 school travel accounted for 18 per cent of car trips by residents of urban areas during term time and PTEs believe there is much to be gained from stronger integration between planning for child travel (including the home-to-school trip) and the planning and delivery of wider local transport strategies and policies. This may be more easily delivered through the proposals contained in the Local Transport Bill, which envisages the creation of Integrated Transport Authorities, with enhanced powers and responsibilities. Wider PTA (and in future) ITA objectives for reducing car use for the journey to school should be bolstered by Education Act requirements for local authorities to develop linked Sustainable Travel Strategies for all education trips. Such a strategy, including the development and application of School Travel Plans (which should be in place at all schools by 2010), should bring significant benefits including contributing to wider objectives for reducing traffic congestion.

4.2 As part of this approach there is considerable potential to further increase the proportion of children travelling to school on foot or by bike. This will bring with it wider health and social benefits, as well as reducing the cost of school transport. For example, Merseytravel has adopted a new School Transport Policy which gives highest priority to walking and cycling access, followed by conventional bus services then dedicated school buses, and with the private car at the bottom of the hierarchy.

4.3 There is a need to ensure that policies that encourage travel to school by the most sustainable and appropriate mode, are reflected in Local Area Agreements, and in the redesign and rebuilding of schools – especially through the ‘Building Schools for the Future’ programme.

5. Reduced fares for school travel

5.1 All PTEs provide convenient and/or discounted ticketing for school aged children which reduces the financial burden on parents and families. Overall PTEs spend about £40 million annually, subsidising the costs of child travel.

5.2 For example:

- In West Yorkshire, Metro offers a ‘School Plus MetroCard’ (which is subject to concessionary travel provisions), providing reduced price bus travel for full time students aged under 18 years;
- Nexus operates a concessionary scheme for children aged 5 -16 with fares fixed at £0.40 on weekdays until 1900 - there are also pre-pay offers;
- South Yorkshire PTE offer a similar scheme with a 40p fare;
- GMPTE offer a fixed 70p fare concession for under-16s;
- Merseytravel offer a range of discount term-time passes;
- Centro offers half-fare peak travel to under-19 year olds in full-time education – coupled with commercial off-peak discounts.

5.3 In London, the benefits of concessionary fares for children have been taken further – with a policy of free child travel introduced.

5.4 As recommended in the Committee’s recent report, ‘*Ticketing and Concessionary Travel on Public Transport*’, there is also more that the Government could do to play its full part on the costs of bus travel for children. The progressive extension of the nationally funded concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled people has brought massive benefits for older and disabled people. Meanwhile Child fares have traditionally been pegged to adult fares, which have risen far faster than general inflation. This has major implications for low income families in particular. In setting minimum national standards for concessionary travel, we would suggest that changes to Government policies on child fares should be considered with the aim of achieving an affordable maximum fare in the short-term, and free travel for the journey to and from school in the longer term. This should be complemented by measures to combat overcrowding and to encourage more children to walk or cycle to school.

6. School travel planning

6.1 PTEs work in partnership with LEAs and local authorities to promote school travel plans and smart transport choices.

6.2 For example, Centro’s Sustainable Travel team produce guides on school travel plans and school-specific documents, which outline travel problems and objectives, and a series of practical measures to encourage staff, visitors and pupils to reduce their car use and switch to more environmentally friendly modes - including walking and cycling.

Centro also produce regular 'Break Free' newsletters on School Travel Plan issues, and other advice and guidance (on all modes) on 'letzgogreen.org'.

- 6.3 In Merseyside, the innovative Merseybike scheme is rolling out cycle training for children. There are also 'Walk to School' and 'Bike to School' weeks which are gaining in popularity year-on-year. Analysis in 2007 revealed that car use fell by 2.4% among School Travel Plan schools against a 5% increase in non-engaged schools.

7. 'Yellow Bus' schemes

- 7.1 Some PTEs have been pioneers of 'yellow school bus' schemes. The largest is In West Yorkshire, where Metro has a 150 vehicle 'My bus' scheme providing dedicated home-to-school transport for over 9,000 pupils at 132 schools. 'My bus' drivers are specially trained and have a list of all the pupils registered to travel on their bus, so they know whom to expect at each stop along the specially devised route. If a child will not be travelling due to sickness or holiday, parents are asked to telephone the dedicated 'My bus' hotline. Each pupil is allocated their own high-backed padded seat with seatbelt. Each bus has a radio/CD player and on-board CCTV and is driven by a dedicated driver. Highways improvements are also made around schools when needed, to allow buses to get as close as possible.
- 7.2 'My bus' began as a pilot scheme in 2002, which showed that school gate congestion was reduced by attracting significant numbers of pupils – many of whom had previously travelled to and from school by car – to the scheme. The modal shift from car by primary school users from the scheme's inception to 2008 is 64 per cent. Modal shift from car by high school users is lower at fifteen per cent (although demand for yellow bus services currently outstrips supply). Children at schools with 'My bus' services have shown a higher increase in educational attainment than the county average.
- 7.3 GMPTE operates a similar scheme which provided nearly 20,000 school trips in 2007, taking pupils to and from 22 schools, on a fleet of 36 buses. Anti-social behaviour on journeys to and from schools has dropped by around three quarters since the scheme was introduced in 2004. Teachers have also noted that attendance levels have improved since the scheme began.

8. Improving the safety and security of school transport

- 8.1 Supporting a Friendly Environment' (SAFE) has been used successfully in a number of PTEs after being developed by South Yorkshire PTE (where all South Yorkshire Secondary schools are now signed up). SAFE promotes and maintains personal safety on all forms of public transport with home to school transport a particular priority. SAFE operates as a partnership between the local PTE, the schools, the police and the local bus operators.
- 8.2 To receive the SAFEMark Award, a school must draw up and implement appropriate policies and activities, with an agreed timetable of actions – monitored by SAFE co-ordinators.
- 8.3 Through SAFEMark, PTEs consult with individual schools and their pupils to identify transport problems. A plan can then be drawn up which addresses specific issues, and helps the school meet the criteria for a SAFEMark Award. In turn, the school may capitalise on its Award – using it in publicity to attract students to their school.

- 8.4 A comprehensive Student Planner is signed annually by all pupils and their parents, and sets out the expected behaviour of pupils when travelling to and from school.

For example, the planner states that at the end of the day pupils are expected to:

- leave the school in a quiet and orderly manner, keeping to pathways;
- cross all roads at safe points;
- go home – not to hang about shops or similar gathering points;
- if going into shops, to behave in a sensible and polite way and to be courteous to shopkeepers;
- at the bus stops – to form an orderly queue, stand back for passengers getting on or off the bus, keep to the footpath, get on the bus in an orderly way and not to push;
- on the buses - to sit in their seat, behave sensibly, be polite and helpful to the public and to the bus driver, and respect the bus company's property.

9. Special needs transport

- 9.1 As well as addressing the needs of mainstream pupils, PTEs play a crucial role in providing transport to students with special needs. 'My bus' in West Yorkshire, for example, runs three yellow bus services to two special educational needs schools, serving 60 students.
- 9.2 In the West Midlands, Centro supports West Midlands Special Needs Transport (WMSNT). This scheme, one of the largest and oldest in Europe, provides 'Ring and Ride' flexible transport services for those who find conventional buses difficult to use – mainly the elderly and disabled. It now also provides travel to and from school for some SEN pupils. 118 vehicles are now used for school and non-emergency health trips. Centro also offer 'travel training' to SEN pupils to enable them to use mainstream public transport. To achieve this a guide and resource pack for special schools has been produced. Pupils practice reading bus timetables and using journey planners, road safety issues on the way to the bus stop or rail station, boarding /alighting safely, and how to understand and buy tickets.

10. Working with schools

- 10.1 PTEs also support pupils in the classroom by helping schools to incorporate school travel into their curriculum as widely as possible. Merseytravel has developed a range of education packs which are fully consistent with the National Curriculum. These include a 'Here to There' pack for pupils with special needs; as well as packs for infant schools to learn what public transport is; right through to materials for secondary school students studying geography and the environment. The packs are developed by an educational consultant and draft kits are then taken by Merseytravel to clusters of 20 to 30 teachers for analysis and evaluation. The packs are then trialled by two schools per District for one year before they are distributed free of charge throughout the county.
- 10.2 For younger children, GMPTE has produced 'dingding.org.uk', a free educational website that uses public transport themes to explore a diverse range of subject areas. Helping older pupils towards trouble-free journeys to school by public transport was behind the GMPTE guide 'Using buses, trains and trams to get to school'. It is distributed to 26,000 students each year before they begin secondary school. The guide builds confidence on how to read timetables, plan journeys and buy tickets (GMPTE

help by taking a mobile 'travel shop' into schools), and the guide also gives advice on issues like vandalism like safety.

- 10.3 Centro runs school workshops for Year Six pupils on use of public transport as they prepare for the transition to secondary schools, and have been working in partnership with the Police and Birmingham Community Safety Partnership to roll out a bus monitor scheme which focuses on promoting responsible behaviour, with pupils acting as 'eyes and ears', but not directly tackling incidents.

11. Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

- 11.1 PTEs also work with schools to educate children about safety and appropriate behaviour, when travelling on public transport, both to and from school, and more generally.
- 11.2 Recognising that children make more than two million passenger journeys on the Tyne & Wear Metro each year – 5.5% of all trips – Nexus has designed and implemented a safety training programme for the more than four hundred schools in the region. In 2004/05 alone, 12,329 children received a visit from the Nexus team. Hot spot schools are identified, along with issues that might be particular to that area. Nexus then targets the schools with 'Crucial Crew' visits (comprising representatives from the PTE plus each of the emergency services), one off special events, a teaching zone web site and an interactive DVD about safety on the Metro.
- 11.3 The 'Crucial Crew' model has also been rolled out in Greater Manchester and Merseyside, promoting safer travel to school, by all modes. In Merseyside, 'Your Choice' conferences and theatre in education projects address safety and vandalism issues for more problematic schools. Merseytravel also run 'Safe-aways', another programme designed to help children travel more safely, through school excursions making use of different modes of travel, including the Mersey ferries.
- 11.4 Centro works in partnership with West Midlands Police on 'Operation Safer Travel' to support a dedicated team of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who travel on problem routes to prevent and detect problem activity. Recognising the fact that children travelling to school are often the victims of offences (as well as potential perpetrators) Operation Safer Travel places an emphasis on visiting schools to give a safer travel message to pupils. During September 2007, Operation Jevonta was conducted, to target the seasonal rise in robbery that traditionally accompanies the end of the school summer holidays. Incidents were reduced by 35 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year.