

Home to School Transport: Survey of Local Authority Spend 2015/16

1. Local authorities hold the statutory responsibility for providing home to school transport for eligible students of statutory school age, those aged five to 16. During 2015/16, local authorities spent approximately £1 billion transporting children to educational settings.
2. The current requirements in the statutory guidance on home to school transport are unsustainable, some would say anachronistic. ADCS members report that the demand for home to school transport is increasing as the number of pupils grow and the location of new schools does not necessarily reflect local needs.
3. Local authorities play a crucial and unique role as the shaper of places, taking a strategic position within the system as champions of children, young people and their parents. This involves shaping and supporting the diverse schools system to ensure the educational needs of all learners are met, while retaining specific responsibilities to ensure more vulnerable children, including those with SEND receive the support they need to reach their full potential.
4. Given this changing context and the very different financial environment in which local authorities operate, ADCS members would argue it is now time to review local authority duties in relation to home to school transport. A review must consider the current universal offer to all those meeting a distance criteria. ADCS members would urge a greater targeting of the criteria to ensure limited resources are used to support those pupils who would otherwise not be able to travel to school. Consideration should also be given to the ways in which an ever increasing school-led system can better support the transport needs of students by potentially devolving this responsibility to schools themselves, particularly given the sparsity factor within the current school funding formula and its proposed retention in the new National Funding Formula.
5. The responsibility for provision of home to school transport for students with SEND should remain with the local authority so the needs of these students can be considered holistically as part of the education, health and care plan process. DfE should, however, attempt to unpick the double-funding by different parts of the state with regard to those pupils who receive home to school transport from the local authority yet also received the higher rate of disability living allowance to aid their day to day mobility.
6. In October 2016, ADCS contacted all DCSs to request information on home to school transport spend in 2015/16. 112 local authorities (LAs) responded and below is a brief analysis of the data received.

7. The total amount of spend on home to school transport across the 112 LAs was £737,138,048 of which £473,066,351 (64%) was for SEND transport. The breakdown of figures based on type of LA is as follows:

	SEND spend	SEND as a % of total spend	Total spend
London Boroughs*	£88,045,265	98%	£89,885,892
Core Cities	£32,179,000	85%	£38,073,000
Unitary Councils	£157,149,894	67%	£235,788,697
County Councils	£195,692,192	52%	£373,390,459
Total	£473,066,351	64%	£737,138,048

* children under the age of 11 living in the London Boroughs are eligible for free travel on public transport. Young people aged between 11 and 16 are eligible for free travel on buses and trams and reduced rates on all other public transport. This may account for the very low level of non-SEND transport spend as those who are able to use public transport are doing so free of charge or at a reduced rate.

8. The minimum, maximum and average total spend based on type of LA is as follows:

	Minimum total spend	Average total spend	Maximum total spend
London Boroughs	£2,357,387	£4,280,281	£7,731,000
Core Cities	£2,900,000	£6,345,500	£12,030,000
Unitary Councils**	£959,323	£3,684,198	£13,691,884
County Councils	£10,904,000	£17,780,498	£34,762,000

** This excludes Isle of Scilly which is an outlier (£40K total spend)

9. The minimum, maximum and average SEND spend based on type of LA is as follows:

	Minimum SEN spend	Average SEND spend	Maximum SEND spend
London Boroughs	£2,304,000	£4,192,632	£7,731,000
Core Cities	£2,850,000	£5,363,167	£8,580,000
Unitary Councils**	£485,000	£2,455,467	£7,073,521
County Councils	£4,619,156	£9,318,676	£25,234,000

**This excludes Isle of Scilly which is an outlier (£0 total SEND spend)

10. If the average spend for each type of authority is used as a proxy measure for those LAs which did not respond to the data request, approximate national costs can be calculated:

Approximate total spend 2015/16	£968,718,528
Of which the following is spent on SEND transport	£626,547,765
SEND as a percentage of total spend	65%

11. As part of the data request, LAs were asked to indicate the key issues which are driving demand and costs at a local level. A number of key themes have been identified from the responses:

- LAs are transporting an **increasing number of children with SEND** (partly because of the SEND reforms and the extension of support to young people aged up to 25), many of whom have highly complex needs (health and behaviour) so require individual transport, escorts and specialist vehicles.
- There is a **shortage of local mainstream school places and specialist educational provision** and as a result, LAs are required to transport children to educational facilities out of area. In addition, a lack of local foster care capacity is resulting in an increased number of out of area placements which require transport to school.
- The **geographical nature** of some LAs means that a significant number of children live outside of the 'statutory' walking distance. This is coupled with a lack of public transport so LAs must provide other, more costly forms of transport.

A number of other issues were highlighted including:

- Differences in **start and finish times** for post-16 provision results in transport being designed around individual timetables, this is not cost effective. Similarly, where siblings attend different schools with the same start and finish times, parents are unable to transport both children and so look to the LA for transport support.
- The **lack of capacity in the transport market** is driving up costs – a lack of providers and therefore competition, a lack of specialist vehicles and an increased focus on quality.