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1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We decided to carry out a review of School Travel in Telford & Wrekin as it is a major issue which affects many people – primarily children and young people and those who accompany them to school, but also other residents of the borough who face increased congestion during school term times and may experience problems with inconsiderate parking if they live near a school site. School travel is also a key element of some of the Council's, and national government's, aims such as reducing childhood obesity through raising activity levels, and reducing the number of cars on the road to reduce CO₂ emissions and benefit the environment.
- 1.2 An average of 36% of children in Telford & Wrekin travel to school by car, either alone or with children from the same household. This is the most convenient choice for many families where parents may travel on to work after dropping the children off at school. There may also be parental concerns about children's safety if walking or cycling to school. As parents have more choice about which school their child can attend, children may not be attending their local school, and parents may feel it is too far to travel by any mode other than car.
- 1.3 However, we know that many schools face problems with congestion at the start and end of the school day, with some parents arriving half an hour or more before the end of school to be able to park close to the gates. This can cause problems for people living near schools. More cars around the school site can also increase the risk of accident to children as they leave school. It is simply not realistic to expect schools to provide enough parking for the number of parents who want to park outside.
- 1.4 The more realistic and sustainable solution is to reduce the number of cars trying to park at the school site. Furthermore, the Council is under a statutory duty to promote sustainable travel for children of compulsory school age and below, and young people of sixth form age. We have therefore focussed our review largely on looking at how the Council promotes sustainable travel, and have not looked for any solutions to the issue of parking around individual school sites.
- 1.5 We have looked at 3 main areas of school travel:
 - The Council's current Education Transport Policy.
 - Increasing active and sustainable travel to school.
 - Potential to implement a yellow school bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin.
- 1.6 We have gathered information for our review in a number of ways, including:
 - Meetings with Council officers
 - Writing to schools and colleges to ask their views, and meeting with 2 schools

- Looking at travel to school data for Telford & Wrekin and other Councils
 - Considering good practice from other Councils
 - Looking at legislation, guidance and Council policies
 - Reviewing some Telford & Wrekin School Travel Plans.
- 1.7 We recognise that there are concerns about moving away from car use for school journeys, including:
- Safety – ‘stranger danger’ and accidents involving vehicles
 - Convenience of the car especially when dropping children off at school on the way to and from work
 - Increased parental choice in which school children attend may increase the distance that children travel, making walking and cycling less appealing and less convenient.
- 1.8 However, there are many reasons to encourage children to walk and cycle to school, or to travel by bus or car sharing. This could reduce congestion on roads around schools and in turn make the roads safer for those walking or cycling as there are fewer vehicles on the road. Schools could become better neighbours with fewer cars trying to park near the school at the start and end of the school day. There would be benefits to the environment of reducing vehicle use, and walking and cycling to school provide an opportunity for children to get some exercise every day amid national increases in childhood obesity. It could also help to develop independent, or semi-independent travel, skills in children for later life. In addition it helps children to develop valuable road safety skills.
- 1.9 Sections 2 – 6 of this report summarise the information that we have gathered as part of our review. We would like to thank all those people who have taken the time to meet with us and send in their views. We have made a number of recommendations in Section 7 of the report which we believe will improve the way the Council delivers and supports school travel initiatives across the borough. These recommendations will be presented to the Council’s Cabinet and for those recommendations that are accepted, we will monitor the progress to implement them.

Councillor Joy Francis
Chairman, Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People

Members of Review Group:

Councillor Joy Francis
Councillor Gill Green
Councillor Karen Tomlinson
Mrs Michelle Sedgebeer – co-opted scrutiny member
Mrs Mel Ward – co-opted scrutiny member

2 – SCHOOL TRAVEL: THE NATIONAL PICTURE

2.1 Legislation

- 2.1.1 There are a number of pieces of legislation that relate to school travel. The main duties that they contain are summarised here.
- 2.1.2 The **1944 Education Act** requires local authorities to provide free transport to pupils on the grounds of distance from the school.
- 2.1.3 The **Education Act 1996** requires local authorities to take certain factors into account when deciding whether or not it is necessary to provide transport for a pupil.
- 2.1.4 The **Education Act 2002** requires local authorities to assist post-16 students with transport costs.
- 2.1.5 The **Education and Inspections Act 2006** brought in a number of duties for local authorities. There is a general duty for local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport for home to school travel, before- and after-school activities, and journeys between schools for educational purposes. Local authorities should also promote transport to support choice and flexibility of educational provision. Children from low income households have further rights to free transport to and from school. The Act also empowers head teachers to address poor behaviour that takes place outside of the school premises.

2.2 Education policies and the impact on school travel

- 2.2.1 The Government's **Extended Schools** programme aims for school sites to provide more services to their local communities. This includes access to childcare 8am – 6pm for all parents of primary aged children, and 8am – 6pm access to a range of services for young people on secondary school sites. The DCSF guidance relating to Extended Schools states that schools, in consultation with the local authority, should consider whether the new requirements need any new transport arrangements e.g. where a service is being provided at a site other than the school. The guidance gives particular consideration to rural areas where children may rely more heavily on transport provided by the local authority to get to and from schools. In these cases, it may be necessary to arrange additional transport for earlier and later times, or to use other available local transport.
- 2.2.2 The national **Building Schools for the Future** programme will improve the fabric of all secondary schools across England by 2020. In Telford & Wrekin, every secondary school in the borough will either be rebuilt or remodelled, with £150million investment from the DCSF. The Council is also using this opportunity to benefit many primary schools.

The purpose of renovating or rebuilding schools is so that they meet the current needs of the population, including the children that will use the schools during the day, and the wider community who should be able to utilise the school facilities for lifelong learning and other activities. It will be important that where schools are being rebuilt and renovated that the current travel needs of the schools are also being taken into account, as these may have changed considerably since the sites were first designed.

- 2.2.3 The **14-19 Diploma** which is being introduced from 2008 offers a mix of classroom learning and hands-on experience. Young people studying for a diploma will spend some time in their school as well as spending time in a work environment appropriate to the diploma subject that they are studying. They may also attend some sessions at another school or college in the local area to benefit from the specialisms of different schools, as not all schools will be able to provide for all diplomas. How young people travel between sites for their diploma will need to be considered as more young people move to this form of qualification.

3 – TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

3.1 The Education Transport Policy

- 3.1.1 Under the legislation outlined in the Section 2.1, the Council has a legal responsibility to provide help with transport to certain pupils. The help that will be provided and the criteria that govern who can receive this help are laid out in the Council's Education Transport Policy. This policy has recently been revised to include the new duties under the Education & Inspections Act 2006.
- 3.1.2 The Policy applies to pupils living in the Telford & Wrekin area, those who are in the care of Telford & Wrekin Council, and pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The Council will only provide transport to and from school at the start and end of the school day and not for travel between schools during the day or to after-school activities or extended schools programmes. Each application for help with transport is considered individually on the circumstances of the pupil, but must comply with the criteria set out in the policy.
- 3.1.3 Under the Education & Inspections Act, the Council is responsible for providing transport to a child's nearest suitable school if that school is further than the statutory walking distance from their home. The Act gives these distances as 2 miles for children under 8 and 3 miles for children over 8. The Council policy is slightly more generous than this, setting statutory walking distances of 2 miles for primary school pupils and 3 miles for secondary school pupils. If there are no places available at the nearest school, the Council will consider requests for help with transport to the nearest alternative school.
- 3.1.4 If a parent prefers to send their child to a school which is not the designated or nearest school for their home address, the parent will be responsible for arranging and paying for their child's transport to that school. The exception to this is where a parent prefers their child to attend a faith school which is not in the catchment area for their home address. They may apply for help with transport on the grounds of faith if they can prove that the school provides education which is significantly different from that provided in other schools and adheres to the parent's religion or belief and the family can verify that they adhere to the faith provided by the school. The head teacher must also be satisfied that the family adheres to the faith.
- 3.1.5 If pupils attending faith schools can be accommodated on transport already provided by the Council at no extra cost, they will be allocated a place on that vehicle. Otherwise, primary pupils receive 2/3 refund of public transport fares or equivalent and secondary pupils will receive a full refund of public transport fares or equivalent. Those attending faith

schools post-16 will make the same contributions as other post-16 students (see 3.1.9).

- 3.1.6 Pupils from low income families who are transferring to secondary school from September 2008 onwards are entitled to help with transport to any one of their three nearest suitable schools, if they live between 2 and 6 miles from these schools. Help with transport will be agreed for one academic year, although the family could make applications for help in future academic years. If the family's financial circumstances change and they are no longer eligible, transport will be withdrawn at the end of the academic year.
- 3.1.7 For all applications for school transport help, the type of help given will depend on the needs of each individual pupil, and will also take into account the best use of resources and sustainability. Help with transport is considered in the following priority order
- 1 – Mileage allowance to parents using their own vehicle
 - 2 – A pass for a public bus service (secondary aged pupils only)
 - 3 – A seat on a school bus contracted by the Council
 - 4 – Individual transport e.g. in a taxi.
- Where a pupil has complex medical needs that could not be met by any of this transport provision, a specialist provider may be used.
- 3.1.8 Pupils who have Special Educational Needs may be given help even if they do not live outside the statutory walking distance from the school they attend, if they would not be able to attend school without this help. Most pupils receiving this help travel to school by mini-bus which allows a number of pupils travelling to the same school to share transport. Where pupils have emotional or behavioural issues which prevent them from being able to travel with other pupils, individual taxis are provided. Independent travel is promoted for those pupils that are able, as this may help them to continue travelling independently in later life.
- 3.1.9 Help with transport to post-16 education is provided on a discretionary basis where it will enable attendance of those students who would otherwise not be able to attend. Applications will be considered from 16-19 year olds living more than 3 miles from the nearest appropriate school or college where they attend a full time course. Usually, students will be issued with a travel pass for public service buses, although alternative arrangements will be made if no suitable service exists. Parents make a termly contribution to the cost of the transport, currently £100. The level of contribution is lower for those on low incomes, currently £58.

3.2 Transport provided by Telford & Wrekin Council

3.2.1 The Transport Contracts team manages and procures transport for education, as well as social care transport and some public transport. Education transport provided during 2007/08 included:

- 1,700 pupils per day in mainstream schools
- 1,200 post-16 pupils per day – the majority to TCAT and New College although an increasing number are travelling to colleges outside of Telford & Wrekin including Walford College, Shrewsbury College and Penkridge.
- 450 pupils with Special Educational Needs
- 60 pupils to 4 Pupil Referral Units.

3.2.2 The table below shows how much the Council spent on school transport provision during 2007/08.

Type	Cost (£)
Primary	436,140
Secondary	474,899
SEN (primary & secondary)	873,006
Denominational (primary)	1,108
Denominational (secondary)	148,647
Pupil Referral Units	135,987
Post-16	110,591
Fleet	826,215
TOTAL	3,006,593

3.2.3 There are some areas where demand for transport may increase, and costs may increase with this demand:

- The number of pupils with complex medical needs increases each year, and these pupils generally need to be provided with specialist transport to be able to access education
- The Education and Inspections Act increases parental choice and may mean more children attend schools further than the statutory walking distance, therefore require transport or help with transport costs
- As the new 14-19 Diplomas roll out across the borough, there is likely to be more travel between schools and colleges during the day.

4 – SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRAVEL

4.1 How do children in Telford & Wrekin travel to school?

- 4.1.1 The Council has a duty under the Education & Inspections Act to promote sustainable travel to school. Sustainable travel is defined in the Act as modes of travel which may improve the physical well-being of those who use them, the environmental well-being of the local area, or both, for example, walking, cycling, car share and public transport. As well as being a legal requirement, sustainable travel fits with a number of the Council’s priorities around improving the environment and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- 4.1.2 Since 2000, the Council has carried out an annual school travel survey of all schools in the borough. From 2007, this information is being gathered as part of the Pupil Level Annual Census (PLASC). On the day of the census, all pupils are asked how they travelled to school that day, usually by show of hands. The data for 2002 – 2008 is shown in the table below.

Telford & Wrekin Travel to School Data

Year	Walk %	Bike %	Bus %	Train %	Taxi %	Car %	Car Share %	Other
2002	48.0	2.0	10.0	0.2	1.1	38.7	Data previously not collected	n/a
2003	46.1	1.5	7.8	0.4	1.3	42.9		
2004	49.2	1.8	8.0	0.2	1.0	39.7		
2005 May	42.9	1.4	11.9	0.2	1.5	37.8	4.3	n/a
2005 Oct.	41.0	2.1	12.5	0.1	2.9	36.6	4.8	n/a
2006	44.1	2.0	12.3	0.2	1.0	35.9	4.6	n/a
2007	47.4	1.5	11.2	0.6	0.4	34.6	3.4	0.9
2008	46.0	1.4	11.5	0.1	1.0	35.8	3.3	0.1

- 4.1.3 We have compared the 2007 Telford & Wrekin data with the data for some Councils in our “nearest neighbour” comparison group – although not the nearest geographically, these are Councils which have a number of characteristics in common with Telford & Wrekin and therefore provide a good base for comparison.
- 4.1.4 The data below is from 2008 School census from the Department for Transport (DfT). The table uses the DfT categories which are walk, cycling, public transport, car, car share and other. The category for cars includes vans and taxis. The category for public transport includes school bus, public bus, trains and trams.

Comparison with other local authority Travel to School Data

	Car %	Car share %	Public Transport %	Walk %	Cycling %	Other %
Peterborough	25.7	1.2	10.2	55.4	10.8	0.4
Warrington	38.7	2.2	14.1	42.4	2.6	0.1
Halton	34.4	3.3	11.8	49.3	1.0	0.3
Derby	23.7	1.2	13.5	58.8	2.4	0.4
Redcar & Cleveland	21.7	1.9	12.3	61.0	2.5	0.7
Swindon	24.1	2.6	9.9	58.3	5.0	0.1
Telford & Wrekin	35.5	2.9	11.4	48.2	1.5	0.5

4.1.5 Telford & Wrekin compares quite well with these authorities, although the figures do indicate that there is potential to improve. Car use in Telford & Wrekin is among the highest, although car share is also more popular here than in these other authorities. Peterborough and Swindon have particularly impressive cycling levels, while Telford & Wrekin is among the lowest. Walking is around average in Telford & Wrekin, although the comparison authorities indicate that this could be improved upon.

4.2 The Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy

4.2.1 The Council has produced a Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy (formerly known as the Sustainable School Travel Strategy) as a requirement of the Education & Inspections Act 2006. The Strategy brings together a number of existing policies and projects relating to school travel and aims to achieve a number of benefits including:

- Educational and health benefits for pupils
- Increasing numbers of pupils making regular sustainable journeys to school
- Reduced congestion at the start and end of the school day
- Improved safety on the home to school journey
- Improved air quality outside local schools
- Improved data collection and analysis
- Development and implementation of a sustainable school travel action plan that links a number of key activities into one document.

4.2.2 There are two key targets in the action plan. Firstly, against a background of predicted population and traffic growth, for there to be no increase in school journeys by car, against a baseline level of 35%,

set in 2005/06. Secondly, for the number of children killed and seriously injured to reduce to no more than 11 each year by 2010.

4.2.3 The detailed action plan in the strategy covers a range of issues integral to encouraging and increasing sustainable school travel, many of which are discussed elsewhere in this report – collection and analysis of data, School Travel Plans, Safer Routes to Schools, road safety education, training and publicity, walking, cycling, bus travel, 14-19 diplomas, extended schools and partnership working. Progress against the action plan is monitored annually and the Strategy is updated to reflect progress.

4.3 School Travel Plans

4.3.1 The national Travelling to School initiative launched in 2003 aimed to reduce car dependency for school journeys as national data had shown a decrease in the proportion of pupils walking to school over the previous decade, and a corresponding increase in the proportion travelling by car. The initiative encourages all schools to develop a School Travel Plan (STP) to identify how the school can reduce car dependency.

4.3.2 Schools which develop a STP that passes the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) quality assessment receive funding for capital work on the school site that was identified in the STP e.g. bike racks or parent waiting shelters. Nursery and primary schools receive £3750, plus £5 per pupil. Secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units receive £5000, plus £5 per pupil. 2010 is the last year that this capital grant will be available as the DCSF expects all schools to have a STP by 2010. Independent schools are not eligible for the grant but are included in the DCSF target.

4.3.3 The Council has a part time School Travel Plan Co-ordinator as part of the Road Safety Team. The post is funded by the DCSF. The School Travel Plan Co-ordinator provides support to schools to complete their Travel Plans and encourage those schools without a STP to develop one. The Road Safety Team support the “soft” measures of STPs such as walking buses and bikeability. They also assess school sites to identify potential solutions to the problems identified in the STP. Where there are no feasible solutions to a problem, the Road Safety Team will work with the school to communicate this to parents. The Road Safety Team’s role therefore is advisory, and the STP is owned and implemented by the school.

4.3.4 There is a STP template which schools complete. This requires information on the way pupils and staff travel to school, the school’s main travel and transport issues, the objectives of the School Travel Plan, and a detailed action plan for each of the objectives. The STP requires some consultation with stakeholders which could include parents, pupils, staff, governors and local residents, to help identify

needs. There is also a section for the school to record when and how the STP will be monitored and reviewed. The STP must be signed off by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, School Council, School Travel Plan Working Group and the School Travel Plan Co-ordinator.

4.3.5 The STP is not a technical document. The schools uses the STP to identify the problems they face and some potential solutions. When the STP is submitted to the School Travel Plan Co-ordinator, the Council officers with technical knowledge will identify appropriate solutions to the problems raised. Often, STPs need to be supported by engineering measures on the road and pavements around the school. These are implemented through Safe Routes to Schools (see 4.5).

4.3.6 The chart below shows the number and percentage of schools in Telford & Wrekin which currently have a STP in place. This has increased significantly in the last few years, as the School Travel Plan Co-ordinator has made a concerted effort to encourage schools to develop their STP.

Type of school	Primary	Secondary	Special	PRU	Nursery	Independent	All
Number of STP	60	13	3	0	1	2	79
Number of schools	61	14	4	4	2	6	91
%	98%	93%	75%	0%	50%	34%	87%

4.3.7 The majority of schools with no STP are Pupil Referral Units and independent schools. PRUs have regularly changing pupil populations who often travel from quite a distance. Many of these pupils may rely on taxis for travel either because of the distance that they travel or their individual needs. For these reasons it can be challenging for PRUs to reduce their reliance on cars and therefore they may be reluctant to engage in the STP process. Independent schools may be reluctant to engage with STPs because they are not eligible for the DCSF funding which other schools receive for adopting a STP.

4.4 Initiatives to encourage sustainable travel

4.4.1 The Road Safety Team encourages and supports schools with a number of initiatives to try to increase the number of pupils using sustainable travel methods to get to school. Some of these are summarised below.

4.4.2 There has been increased interest in walking buses over recent years, where children are accompanied by nominated adults, who may be paid or volunteer, to walk from a designated meeting point to the school. 13 schools in Telford & Wrekin have been granted government funding to set up walking buses. This was one-off funding to be used to pay a responsible adult to accompany the walking bus. Schools

must fund the initiative themselves on an ongoing basis, and some have found that this method of funding makes the walking bus unsustainable. 7 schools will continue to receive funding for year 2 as their scheme has been successful. Unfortunately the other 6 schools will not as they were unable to start a walking bus scheme due to lack of interest from parents.

- 4.4.3 We visited Redhill Primary School which had a walking bus starting in the week of our visit. They had decided from the outset to charge a small fee to parents for using the walking bus as this would help to fund and sustain the initiative, and they had also found with other activities that if a small charge is made, pupils are more likely to commit to turn up than if they are provided for free. Park and Stride schemes have also had some success, particularly at rural schools. Parents park in a designated car park e.g. local shops or pub, and walk the remaining distance with their children. Unfortunately the travel information collected through the school census does not recognise park and strides. Therefore, although they contribute to improving health and reducing congestion, they do not have any impact on our travel data.
- 4.4.4 Schools are encouraged to participate in the national Walk to School weeks in May and October, and the Road Safety Team provides resources to help promote this. Between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of primary schools that participated in Walk to School Week increased from 14% to 94%. The national Walk on Wednesday initiative encourages parents who would normally drive their children to school to walk some or all of the journey, aiming to eliminate cars around the school gate for one day a week.
- 4.4.5 Some primary schools use the Smart CATZ initiative. The school agrees a 'Car-free Active Travel Zone' (CATZ) around the school site, and parents and pupils are encouraged to find active ways of travelling into the zone. Each time they do this, they collect points which can be exchanged for rewards. All of the schools that have participated in SmartCATZ have found that levels of active travel have improved.
- 4.4.6 There is very high demand for cycle training. The Council has a Road Safety Officer responsible for co-ordinating cycle training for schools, and is in the process of appointing a number of cycle trainers. There is some additional cycle training provided by officers in Leisure Services and by the Fire Service. There are no revenue resources for offering cycle training and until recently a small charge was made to schools for delivering training to their pupils. Some schools funded this themselves, while others passed some or all of the cost on to parents.
- 4.4.7 The Council has recently been awarded Department for Transport grant funding to recruit instructors and provide free Level 2 cycle training for 800 pupils by March 2009, which is being offered to all primary schools. While such grant funding could be accessed in future

years, it would only fund additional provision i.e. the Council would have to fund the first 800 places.

- 4.4.8 There is currently no pedestrian training provided by the Council. However, it is an action in the Sustainable School Travel Strategy, as it is equally important for children to be trained to be safe pedestrians as safe cyclists.
- 4.4.9 Some of the examples of initiatives used by other Councils to encourage sustainable travel that we found interesting were:
- Peterborough Council demonstrates the high value they place on School Travel Plans by holding an annual awards ceremony for STPs with categories including Best School Travel Plan, Best School Travel Plan Champion and Best Initiative.
 - Redcar & Cleveland Council promotes pedestrian and cycle training as essential elements of a STP.
 - Swindon Council offers pedestrian training to all primary schools, and Peterborough Council to all Reception children.
 - Peterborough Council offers on-road cycle training to all primary school children aged 10 and over.
 - Shropshire County Council will be providing Walking Bus Co-ordinator meetings each summer term as part of their Sustainable School Travel Strategy.
 - Swindon Council offers all primary schools cycle training free of charge and part funds a Bike It officer to work in 10 primary and secondary schools to promote cycling through a range of activities such as Bike Breakfasts and maintenance workshops. This targeted work has been very successful, with one school having 57% of pupils regularly cycling to school.

4.5 Safe Routes to Schools Project

- 4.5.1 Schools which have a School Travel Plan in place may apply for engineering work around the school site under the Safer Routes to School Project for projects such as making improvements to the footpaths around schools to ensure a safe route for a walking bus, installing zebra crossings, or traffic calming schemes on roads leading up to the school. Work on the school site is not covered by Safer Routes to Schools, as this should be addressed through the School Travel Plan. Through the Local Transport Plan the Council allocates an annual sum in the region of of £180k to fund projects under Safer Routes to Schools.
- 4.5.2 All schools with a School Travel Plan have been invited to submit an application to the Safer Routes to Schools project, explaining the changes the school would like to see. 12 schools have responded to the most recent invitation and have been included in a schedule of works where appropriate. Those schools which are not included might be schools where other work is planned in the near future which would

impact on the school's road safety needs, or where the issue in the application can be dealt with in another way.

- 4.5.3 The amount of funding limits the work that can be carried out. For example, a single puffin crossing costs around £40k. Officers will advise on cost effective ways to achieve the result required by the school to try to maximise the impact of the funding.
- 4.5.4 It is important to note that Safer Routes to Schools is aimed at engineering measures to support active travel, not at increasing facilities for car parking outside schools. It is hoped that modal shift away from cars can be encouraged if the walking and cycling routes to schools are improved. The Police are rolling out their Safer Outside Schools programme of enforcement in priority areas where parking is a concern, and yellow lines outside schools are being reviewed and refreshed as part of this, to try to reduce the number of cars at school entrances.

5 – VIEWS OF SCHOOLS

- 5.1.1 The Road Safety team, Transport Contracts team and other teams work with all schools in the borough on travel and transport issues. We wrote to all school headteachers to ask their views on sustainable travel, potential for a yellow bus scheme and the Council's Education Transport Policy. We had responses from five schools and one Pupil Referral Unit. We were disappointed that more schools did not respond, but note that sometimes people are more likely to respond to a consultation if they have issues or problems to raise, therefore the low response may indicate that on the whole, schools are happy with the work being undertaken. The views that we received from schools are summarised here.
- 5.1.2 The schools that responded all gave examples of initiatives that they had started in their schools to encourage sustainable travel, and ways in which they had tried to tackle the wider problems of parking, safe routes etc. A number voiced frustrations at the amount of time it can take for action to be taken.
- 5.1.3 Two of the schools that responded invited us to visit them to see some of the issues for ourselves – Newdale Primary and Redhill Primary. Both schools had very different issues to discuss particular to their school, which emphasised the point that there is not a "one size fits all" solution to school travel. The meetings with the schools enabled us to discuss more fully some of the issues that were raised in the written responses from other schools. We were particularly concerned about the situation at Newdale which is in a poor location, very difficult for pupils to access other than by car, and the facilities for dropping off by car are very limited. The issues raised by both Newdale and Redhill schools were referred to the Leader of the Council as we were concerned that there would be too great a delay in resolving their issues if we waited until the conclusion of our review. A working group has been established to look at the specific school travel issues of a small number of schools, including Newdale and Redhill.
- 5.1.4 School staff spend a considerable amount of time putting together a School Travel Plan in consultation with parents and pupils, but feel frustrated that there is little support from the Council. Some schools reported that none of the actions outside of their responsibility had been taken. Schools have implemented some successful initiatives and continue to reinforce them with parents, but are held back by a lack of action from the Council.
- 5.1.5 The number of cars around school entrances at start and finish times is a potential danger to children as they walk into school. One school felt this was exacerbated by a lack of child friend signage. Parking restrictions are not always adhered to nor enforced. This can lead to complaints from people living in neighbouring houses.

- 5.1.6 The Newport area has very little provision for cycling in terms of safe routes, with high levels of traffic and lack of safe crossing points on the A518. This prevents children being able to cycle to school safely. Parents are unlikely to allow their children to cycle to school if the routes are not safe, and it limits the effectiveness of schools' efforts to encourage sustainable travel.
- 5.1.7 One school contributed some views regarding taxis provided for pupils with Special Educational Needs. The main issues that they had faced were:
- Taxis can arrive as much as 30 minutes early at the start of the school day so children sit waiting in reception for school to start
 - Drivers also arrive early in the afternoon and the parked vehicles add to congestion around the school site
 - Children do not have the same driver every day. The children travelling are young and vulnerable, and can be misunderstood, so require consistency of care
 - The booking system is somewhat inflexible – 'one taxi, one child' is being over-zealously applied and there are instances of children living in the same area being brought in by two different taxis which is not cost effective.
- 5.1.8 The Pupil Referral Unit that responded has particular transport needs because of the type of pupils that attend. The headteacher had concerns about the size of the carbon footprint the PRU has, but as pupils come to the PRU due to their needs rather than a catchment area, very few are likely to be able to walk or cycle in. However, alternative methods of transport could be considered, if they will meet the needs of the pupils. The majority of the transport used is provided through the Community Volunteer Service (CVS). The support of the Council's Transport Contracts team and the CVS is invaluable and the service they provide is friendly and professional. However, there are some in place, including:
- The chain of communication from school to Contracts team to CVS to drivers is long which prevents last minute cancellations or changes from being dealt with efficiently, hinders feedback and can lead to wasted journeys.
 - Some pupils have particular needs which mean they need to travel alone. However, others are able to share vehicles, but the timetable is not co-ordinated to reduce the number of vehicles needed. Where vehicles are shared the route taken can mean that the first child to be picked up has an overly long journey.
 - Occasionally local taxi companies are used but they often run late which can impact on the learning of pupils, can reduce their time at sessions off site and give a poor punctuality record at work experience placements.
- 5.1.9 Some schools felt there was insufficient communication from the Council. Requests for things such as cycling training, or bids for Safe Routes to Schools were not always acknowledged or responded to. It

was felt that it would be useful if the STP lead within each school had a list of contact names and phone numbers for Council officers so that they were able to more efficiently follow up issues for themselves. It would be helpful if the relevant Council officers were involved in School Travel Plan meetings so that issues can be fully discussed and resolved at the meeting.

5.1.10 There is little opportunity to network with colleagues from other schools. A School Travel Plan conference would be helpful to share ideas and best practice.

5.1.11 School staff suggested the following ideas to assist with the travel plan process:

- A mentor / support network to help schools in developing their plans
- A support pack to all schools giving contact names and numbers to aid better communication
- School Travel Plan conference to share ideas and best practice
- More time to draft STP and consult with Council officers, so that it is based on better knowledge
- More support from the Council, including acknowledgement of information or requests submitted.

5.1.12 We had few comments regarding yellow buses. One school did not think a yellow bus scheme would meet their needs as pupils were dispersed across a large area, and would be subject to overly long journeys. They also said that if there were only one bus at the start and end of the school day, additional curriculum and leisure opportunities for using the bus would be restricted.

6 – YELLOW SCHOOL BUS SCHEMES

6.1 What is a yellow school bus?

- 6.1.1 Yellow school buses are more than just a standard bus painted yellow. The vehicles are specially designed for school use with higher capacity, more safety measures and better disabled access than many school buses. Drivers of yellow school buses also receive additional training specific to the school journey. Yellow bus schemes are tailored to meet the needs of the area that they operate in.
- 6.1.2 The **safety** benefits which tend to reassure parents of travel by yellow school bus include providing a near door to door service, consistency of drivers who are CRB checked and trained to deal with behaviour and other issues, and that travel on public transport has been shown to be nine times safer than using a car. By potentially reducing the number of cars on the roads approaching schools, there may also be improved road safety for those children who walk or cycle to school.
- 6.1.3 The potential benefits to **education** are perceived to be that children are better prepared to start the school day as they arrive at school in a disciplined frame of mind when travelling in on a school bus. Having the same passengers and drivers each day can also give early warning signs of truancy.
- 6.1.4 The benefits to the **environment** lie in the potential reduction of individual cars on the road if children use a school bus. This would reduce exhaust emissions and improve the environment and air quality around schools.
- 6.1.5 Generally, in rural areas yellow buses are aimed at those pupils entitled to free transport to improve the quality of provision. In suburban and urban areas, they have tended to be introduced for both entitled and non-entitled pupils, to improve quality of provision and/or to encourage modal shift away from individual car use.

6.2 Staffordshire County Council

- 6.2.1 To get a better understanding of how a yellow bus scheme works in practice, we visited Staffordshire County Council. They set up a yellow bus scheme in 1998 when the cost of the buses they were contracting for the school run began escalating. They started with 7 buses in 1998 and now operate a fleet of 30. Because of the number of schools in the county, the Council does still have to contract in a large number of buses, but have found that having their own fleet in-house has helped to reduce the charges made by external providers.
- 6.2.2 The council fleet provides for 34 home to school contracts for primary and secondary schools. Any school can hire the buses for extracurricular activities and for transporting pupils during the day to

access education at other schools. In general, more secondary schools tend to use the buses for home to school travel and more primary schools use them for school trips. The amount of use on weekends and after school is increasing. The drivers do not currently work shifts but may start to if 'out of hours' work continues to increase. This does have implications for the working hours of the Fleet Management Team too, who have to be available to resolve any problems with failure of vehicles, driver illness etc.

- 6.2.3 The buses are centrally managed by the Council's Fleet Management Team who have the logistical knowledge to effectively manage the buses and adequate knowledge of legislation and maintenance. As all requests for buses come through the same team, they have an overview of where and when each vehicle is being used and can co-ordinate usage effectively. Even the independent schools in the local authority area tend to use the services of Fleet Management, rather than procure their own transport, as they find it easier to do so.
- 6.2.4 For the home to school contracts, route listings are provided by the Pupil Support Unit. All of the children using the route must have a pass to travel. The buses use the existing public bus stops. Wherever possible, the same driver works on the same route each day which helps to build up a relationship with the pupils on that route. This also helps the driver to manage behaviour and to more easily identify truancy. The drivers have contact numbers for the parents of the children on their route and can contact them if needed, for example, if they do suspect that the child is truanting.
- 6.2.5 The buses are held at a depot where the Fleet Management Team and the Fleet Care service, which maintains the buses, are based. There is one spare vehicle in the fleet, so if more than one bus is out of order on any day, a bus may have to be contracted from a local provider.

6.3 The American Yellow Bus System

- 6.3.1 During the course of this review, we were able to gather information on how a yellow school bus scheme is run in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Children are eligible to use the yellow school bus if they live more than 1.5 miles from school. Buses are used by all age groups, but are split into 3 age groups – up to 11, 11-13 and 14-17. The buses are fully funded by the City Council so there are no additional costs to families. The bus stops are at regular intervals, with more frequent stops for buses carrying younger children.
- 6.3.2 The Education Department owns and maintains the buses, which are kept at a depot near the Council offices. The drivers are directly employed by the City Council. They are trained in Health and Safety, First Aid and in dealing with bullying, although instances of bullying have been rare. Drivers work 3 shifts – morning, lunch time and end of day – so little driver time is wasted when the buses are not in use.

6.3.3 School start and finish times are staggered. Buses cater for home to school transport and also for after-school clubs and for after-school care at day care facilities. The buses are used during the day, on Saturdays and in holidays for a range of activities including school field trips, sports events and summer camps.

6.3.4 American yellow school buses have a STOP arm which extends as children are getting on and off the buses. It is illegal to overtake on either side of a single carriage road when the bus is stopped and carries a driving licence penalty. This law has greatly reduced the number of children injured running out into the road.

6.3.5 The main benefits of the system are:

- Parents only have to get their children to the bus stop and know they will arrive safely at school from there
- Positive impact on attendance, as the school Principal will phone parents to ask why a child was not on the bus
- It demonstrates to residents that their taxes are put towards a valuable service.

6.4 Department for Transport Evaluation

6.4.1 The Department for Transport undertook some research to assess the success of a number of yellow school bus pilots being run in different areas of the UK. The research considered the attitudes of parents and pupils towards the schemes and the vehicles, accessibility and cost. The research found that initial reactions to the yellow bus schemes were largely positive from pupils, schools and parents. There were some initial concerns were around how the scheme would work in practice, for example, timing of buses.

6.4.2 Some of the positive attributes of the schemes that were noted were:

- Pick up close to home and drop off close to school – pupils liked the convenience of this, and parents liked the personal and road safety benefits
- Yellow school buses not being available to the general public reassured parents for safety reasons, and secondary pupils particularly felt it reduced friction between school users and other users
- Operators, schools and pupils welcomed having CCTV on the buses, to reduce vandalism and bullying and help maintain discipline
- Each child had a seat, and no standing was allowed.

6.4.3 Some **negative views** were expressed, including:

- Secondary aged pupils thought that the colour of the buses made them stand out and was embarrassing
- Lack of legroom in many of the vehicles

- Yellow buses were not always decreasing congestion around schools, although this was largely due to schools not having sufficient parking bays or other provision for the buses to stop in.

6.4.4 The yellow buses did increase the number of children travelling to school by bus. There was some evidence that pupils had moved away from car use to buses, which is one of the desired effects of introducing yellow buses. However, there was also evidence of pupils who were using the buses rather than walking or cycling to school, and of car use remaining at the same level as before the yellow bus scheme was in place.

6.4.5 The impact of yellow bus services on other local bus services was different in different areas. In Runnymede, for example, pupils transferring from a local bus to yellow bus resulted in the supported local bus service being removed. However, in Greater Manchester, moving pupils from local bus services was intentional to increase capacity on the local buses for other users. Surrey residents reported that the experience of public transport for local bus users had improved as a result of pupils moving onto yellow school buses.

6.4.6 The research also considered the cost of the yellow buses, from the perspective of users and the local authority. In some areas, parents and users felt £1 per day was about the right amount to charge, but in other areas that was thought too expensive for primary pupils. In two of the case study areas, yellow buses were more expensive than local buses which was a deterrent to using them. There appeared to be little difference in the cost to local authorities of operating a yellow bus compared with a conventional coach providing an equivalent standard of service, although the capacity of yellow buses tends to be slightly higher. There were some increased administrative costs for local authorities and schools in some areas, especially if schools were handling pre-payment for journeys, although users preferred paying on the bus to pre-paying.

6.5 Yellow School Bus Commission Report and Recommendations

6.5.1 The Yellow School Bus Commission, led by David Blunkett, was set up to examine the costs and benefits of a nationwide network of home-to-school transport. The Commission has looked at yellow school bus programmes in the UK and at the successful American model. The Commission has also reviewed previous reports on yellow school buses and consulted with operators, authorities, personnel involved in education and with pupils and parents. The Commission has made a number of conclusions and recommendations in their report of September 2008.

6.5.2 Only 5% of **primary school** pupils travel to school by bus, largely due to safety fears. Significant modal shift could be achieved for this age group with dedicated yellow school bus services for those travelling

further than 1 mile. A cost-benefit analysis showed that there would be substantial benefits to a nationwide rollout of yellow school buses for primary aged pupils including:

- A safe and attractive option for home-to-school travel
- Reduction in local traffic congestion
- Environmental benefits – there would be an estimated 20% reduction in car journeys to primary school, equating to 55,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year
- Improved safety and wellbeing
- Financial benefits to road users – the estimated savings to parents as a whole could be around £362million per year and reduced congestion would save other road users around £88million per year
- Anecdotal evidence from schools shows that children on dedicated school bus services arrive at school more alert and ready to learn

6.5.3 The cost of a nationwide network of yellow school buses for primary aged pupils would be around £460million per year. The Commission envisages that this would be part funded by transfer of existing local authority expenditure on school transport, passenger fare revenue and the additional costs of around £154million per year to be invested by central government.

6.5.4 The best potential solution for **secondary school** pupils is to expand and improve public bus services for school transport, as many of these pupils already use either public buses or dedicated school buses. However, there is a strong argument for dedicated school transport such as yellow school bus services for secondary schools where overcrowding, location or behavioural issues create problems on a public bus service.

6.5.5 A system for secondary school pupils could be achieved at a lower cost to the government of between £50million and £100million per year, and with a more flexible approach supported by incentives to schools and operators, and improved procurement. The benefits of a combined approach to secondary school travel (i.e. development and enhancement of public bus services in addition to some dedicated services to meet specific demands) are estimated at between £91million and £194million per year.

6.5.6 The Commission urges decision makers across the political spectrum and throughout the transport industry to implement their recommendations in partnership. The recommendations include:

- Schools should continue to promote walking and cycling for pupils living within 1 mile from primary school and 2 miles from secondary school
- Yellow school bus services should be offered to all primary school children living more than 1 mile from school. These

buses should have dedicated drivers and a range of other optional elements e.g. CCTV, registers and escorts

- Secondary school bus services should be improved by increasing existing bus provision, raising quality standards, enhancing driver training and using technology to promote good on-board behaviour
- Consider providing yellow school bus services for distances greater than two miles to secondary schools, where there are special circumstances such as poor existing bus services and use, serious challenging behaviour of pupils on the public bus network or the potential to link services with suitable primary school provision
- Undertake a phased and properly coordinated expansion of yellow school bus services for primary age pupils over the next five years, with a final annual investment of £154 million revenue per annum at steady state
- Provide additional funding of up to £100 million for the increased availability and quality of school transport for secondary age pupils. Initially, this will use existing public services where available. Dedicated yellow school buses should be considered where issues of behaviour are particularly acute or the public service cannot cater for the demand
- A financial incentive should be given to schools that stagger their hours. The Commission recommends that with a more flexible approach to existing capital grants, annual revenue funding of up to £10,000 per school should be available via Travel Plans for new primary yellow school bus services
- The rollout of improved school transport should be conducted in parallel with continued (and perhaps expanded) capital funding for initiatives to improve walking and cycling, coupled with targets to maintain and improve share of all sustainable modes.

6.6 Could a Yellow Bus scheme work in Telford & Wrekin?

6.6.1 Introducing a yellow bus scheme could have a number of benefits for the borough, over those currently provided through contracts with local companies. The yellow school buses are fit for purpose and have facilities for disabled users, whereas contract vehicles are often older vehicles and without disabled access. The Council would have complete control of the staff and vehicles. There would be potential to use the buses for other school activities during the day, and also for other activities in the community outside of school use. However, some of the benefits yellow school buses offer are already provided by school buses used in Telford & Wrekin, for example CCTV and dedicated drivers who are CRB checked.

6.6.2 There would be a number of additional responsibilities on the Council if they chose to run a yellow bus scheme. Costs such as repairs, servicing, replacement vehicles in case of breakdown, storage of

vehicles, and fuel are currently covered by the company providing the contract vehicles.

- 6.6.3 School start and finish times are fairly rigid in Telford & Wrekin, which means that all schools require transport at the same times of day. If schools could be encouraged to stagger their start and finish times, this would help with the provision of transport. Anecdotal evidence that the Capital & Facilities team have gathered from secondary schools is that individual school minibuses often lie unused during the school day and it would not, therefore, be cost effective to have a fleet of yellow school buses if they were only to be used for home to school transport. However, schools now have a number of additional travel needs, for example to support extended schools and the 14-19 Diploma, which could potentially be provided for with yellow school buses. Implementing a yellow bus scheme would be costly, including the purchase price of the vehicles, maintenance, storage, drivers and so on. To ensure the greatest cost efficiency, the buses would have to be utilised for more than just the home to school journey.
- 6.6.4 Officers in the Capital & Facilities Team have looked at introducing a yellow bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. The Newport area was identified as a good area to trial a scheme. However, the trial did not take place because the cost of running a trial with a small number of buses was high compared to the estimated low benefits of running a scheme on a small scale. The full benefits of any yellow school bus scheme could only be realised through a more large scale introduction which would have significant cost and policy implications for the Council.
- 6.6.5 Each local authority that has implemented a yellow bus scheme has tailored it to fit their individual needs. Some take full responsibility for the fleet including maintenance, staffing etc while others contract an operator who is responsible for these issues. While we were impressed with the Staffordshire model, we would not recommend replicating it wholesale for Telford & Wrekin. Telford & Wrekin is a smaller and more urban authority and as such a lot of our school pupils live close enough to school to walk or cycle in. We would not want to discourage away from this by introducing a yellow bus scheme, although if children living close enough to school to walk in are choosing to travel by car, it would be preferable to have them use the bus. There may be potential to make a small charge for those pupils who are not entitled to free transport. A yellow school bus scheme could be very effective for the rural areas where pupils have to travel a greater distance, although this would require some detailed work to identify appropriate routes and timings.
- 6.6.6 The Sustainable School Travel Strategy gives a number of potential transport solutions for the needs of Extended Schools, one of which is having yellow buses, or minibuses, based within each school cluster to be owned by the Local Authority but managed by a co-ordinator from

the main school within the cluster. If a yellow bus scheme were to be implemented in Telford & Wrekin, we would strongly recommend that the fleet should be managed by the Council's Transport Contracts team. This team has the necessary logistical knowledge to effectively co-ordinate use of the buses, as well as awareness of legislation and maintenance. We feel that this type of management would be more robust and would result in the vehicles being used more efficiently.

7 – CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Responsibility for school transport is split between the Council's Environment & Regeneration and Children & Young People's portfolios. From our investigation, it appeared that joint working between these two departments has in recent years become much more effective. It is important that close working relationships are maintained, as there are different expertise within each portfolio which are crucial to effective planning and delivery of school travel and transport measures, and we would like to see this continue.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Communication between the two portfolios responsible for School Travel should continue, to ensure co-ordination of effort and maximising the expertise of officers within each portfolio.

- 7.2 It is very encouraging to see that 87% of schools in Telford & Wrekin have a School Travel Plan in place. However, it is important that these are implemented and reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain up to date and a useful tool for the school rather than a one-off exercise to access initial funding. While it is crucial that someone within the school itself leads on the School Travel Plan, it can be difficult for the individuals tasked with this role to maintain momentum and drive forward all of the actions within the plan, as well as getting on with their day job.
- 7.3 There is only one dedicated post for School Travel Plans in the Road Safety Team. With the government setting a target for all schools to have a School Travel Plan by 2010, her primary focus has been on ensuring that all schools have adopted a plan, and this has been very effective, as only a small number of schools currently do not have a School Travel Plan in place.
- 7.4 However, the feedback that we received from schools showed that there is a need for more support in implementing the plans. The lasting impact of School Travel Plans on changing methods of school travel will be greater if schools receive more support to implement the STP. This support should come from within the Council, to provide links to the Council departments that can assist with implementation, and to be able to draw on experiences from other schools. The capacity for the Road Safety Team to provide this additional support is limited, which in turn limits the effectiveness of School Travel Plans on making a real and lasting change to school travel habits.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

An additional post should be added to the Road Safety Team to help support schools to implement and review their School Travel Plans. Consideration should be given to funding this jointly from

the Environment & Regeneration and Children & Young People budgets.

- 7.5 Only 12 out of 91 schools in the borough do not currently have a School Travel Plan. Some of these are traditionally difficult to engage in the School Travel Plan process, such as Pupil Referral Units and independent schools. However, we feel it is important that all schools consider their current travel modes and potential ways to improve, even if this may be limited due to their particular circumstances.
- 7.6 For these schools, there may be a need to provide more tailored encouragement to show some of the benefits that the school could receive. Schools should be assured of the support that they will receive from the Council to implement their plans, and also that the STP is intended to consider and address their individual school travel needs, and they would not be expected to develop sustainable travel more than they could achieve.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Road Safety Team should continue to encourage those few schools without a School Travel Plan to create one, with assurances that they will be well supported to implement the plan with signposting and advice from the Road Safety Team as needed.

- 7.7 Provision of cycle training has been limited. However, there seems to be a high demand from schools and it is often included in School Travel Plans. Swindon and Peterborough Councils demonstrate that an authority like Telford & Wrekin can achieve much higher levels of cycling to school, and cycle training is a large factor in this. It is highly desirable that children cycle to school, for their health, independence and to reduce car use. However, it is crucial that children have adequate cycle training first to ensure that they can travel safely.
- 7.8 There seems to be an expectation that cycle training will be delivered and funded by the Council, despite the Road Safety Team having limited resources to do so. This has resulted in patchy provision. We would like to see cycle training provided at all schools, but this will require some work to identify how it could be funded, as the Council would be unable to stand the full cost of this.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The council should work with stakeholders who contribute towards healthy living to identify funding to make cycle training more sustainable. This could include schools, the Primary Care Trust and Parish and Town Councils.

- 7.9 Schools can apply for engineering works around the school site under the Safer Routes to Schools project. As this work is retrospective, it may not achieve the optimum result for the school. Previously, money has been invested in new build schools to address the routes into the school before the school has opened which can be more effective as the site is more of a blank canvas. Many of the borough's schools are being remodelled or rebuilt as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme and we would like assurances that travel needs will be considered as part of this work.
- 7.10 As a minimum, the walking routes approaching the school should be safe, with adequate pavements and safe crossings. Consideration should also be given to parking for buses. There should be an aim to reduce the number of cars very near to school entrances to improve the safety of those walking onto the school site.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

School travel issues should be considered as part of the design of new build schools or changes to the buildings of existing schools, to ensure that the physical measures around the entrances of schools support their travel needs, including provision of bus lay-bys, safe paths and crossings etc.

- 7.11 We are pleased that out of our consultation with schools a working group has been set up to look at the individual problems experienced at particular schools. We ask that this group reports their findings back to us so that we can monitor progress of the issues raised.
- 7.12 The working groups also addresses strategic issues relating to school travel, but school travel is part of a wider issue of the travel habits of the community as a whole. Without tackling the attitudes towards travel of the wider community, the impact of all the work undertaken to reduce reliance on cars for the school journey will be limited.

RECOMMENDATION 6a:

The working group that has been set up to work with individual schools on their travel needs should report the outcomes of their work to scrutiny.

Recommendation 6b:

The working group should consider inviting a representative from the Community Services portfolio to join the group.

- 7.12 We feel that there is potential for a yellow school bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. Any scheme developed would have to meet the local needs – we would not argue for a fleet of large vehicles such as that used in Staffordshire as this is not necessary to meet the transport needs of our school population, and indeed might discourage some of those who

currently walk or cycle to school. The Yellow School Bus Commission report echoes our findings, to some extent, that yellow school buses can cater for many needs but may not be necessary for all schools.

7.13 We think the areas of greatest potential for a yellow school bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin are:

- Travel from rural communities to primary and secondary schools
- Travel between schools as part of the 14-19 Diploma
- Use by children and young people's groups and other community groups across the borough on evenings and weekends.

7.14 Given the areas where we think the yellow school buses could add value, it seems more likely that a fleet of smaller vehicles might fit the needs of Telford & Wrekin better. We had hoped to be able to include in our review an analysis of the intended pilot scheme in the Newport area, but in the absence of this pilot, we have been unable to evaluate the success of any scheme run in Telford & Wrekin.

7.15 We had also hoped that analysis of the data gathered to inform the choice of where to run the pilot would enable us to make a more detailed recommendation to the Cabinet regarding a yellow bus scheme for Telford & Wrekin. Although we have spoken to officers about the potential to run a yellow bus scheme, we were disappointed that we have not been provided with any detail regarding the work that has already been undertaken to assess the need for a yellow bus scheme. We require a detailed report to enable us to assess some alternative models for a yellow bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. This will also indicate the Council's ability to implement the recommendations in the Yellow School Bus Commission report.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Officers from the Children & Young People and Environment & Regeneration portfolios should undertake more investigation into alternative models for a yellow bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. This should include looking at using minibuses instead of large buses. A detailed report on the options available, including costs and potential usage, should be presented to scrutiny by the end of June 2009 to enable the Commission to make further recommendations to Cabinet.

7.16 As part of this review we noted that expenditure on taxis for education transport is high. We understand that taxis are only used for home to school transport where necessary, for example for those children and young people unable to travel because of a physical disability or behavioural needs. Taxis are also used during the day particularly by special schools to take pupils home when they are playing up. There were strong views from one school and one Pupil Referral Unit that some operational issues were leading to wasted journeys. Officers are

working to reduce these costs for example by electronic tendering to ensure best value and a trial of a framework agreement for the procurement of taxi services. The outcome of this work should be monitored by scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Feedback should be provided to scrutiny on the work that officers are undertaking to reduce the cost of taxis for school transport.

7.1.17 The Education Transport Policy provides assistance with transport to a faith school which is not the nearest or designated school for a child if the family can prove that the child adheres to that faith. Where parents express choice of school for their child on grounds other than faith, or where the family is of a faith not represented by any other borough's schools, they will not receive the same assistance. In this respect, the Education Transport Policy is inequitable and should be reviewed. A number of other Councils have historically provided similar assistance with transport to faith schools but have recently changed their policy, including Cheshire, Norfolk and Hertfordshire.

7.1.18 We would not want to see transport to faith schools stopped, but think that a charge should be made to parents who choose for their child to attend a faith school if they require transport assistance to facilitate their attendance at that school, as is the case for other families where the child does not attend their nearest or designated school. Any changes to the policy should be widely consulted on.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Transport provision for children attending faith schools at their parent's choice should be brought in line with provision given to other parents exercising their choice of school. Where the child lives outside the statutory distance from the school and it is the parent's choice that the child attends, the parents should be responsible for transport provision, unless they are a low income household.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are summarised in the table below. We have assigned a priority level to each of the recommendations, and given an indication of the cost.

It is not possible to provide detailed costings for the recommendations within this report without a considerable amount of additional work being undertaken by both scrutiny members and finance officers. However, the recommendations have been placed into one of three categories as follows:-

- Low cost indicates that the recommendation could be funded from within existing resources, although not necessarily in the current year.
- Medium cost indicates that the recommendation is anticipated to cost up to £10,000 which is not currently budgeted.
- High cost indicates that the recommendation is expected to cost more than £10,000 which is not currently budgeted.

Recommendation	Indication of cost	Priority level
<p>Recommendation 1: Communication between the two portfolios responsible for School Travel should continue, to ensure co-ordination of effort and maximising the expertise of officers within each portfolio.</p>	Low	High
<p>Recommendation 2: An additional post should be added to the Road Safety Team to help support schools to implement and review their School Travel Plans. Consideration should be given to funding this jointly from the Environment & Regeneration and Children & Young People budgets.</p>	High	High
<p>Recommendation 3: The Road Safety Team should continue to encourage those few schools without a School Travel Plan to create one, with assurances that they will be well supported to implement the plan with signposting and advice from the Road Safety Team as needed.</p>	Low	Medium

<p>Recommendation 4: The council should work with stakeholders who contribute towards healthy living to identify funding to make cycle training more sustainable. This could include schools, the Primary Care Trust and Parish and Town Councils.</p>	Low	Medium
<p>Recommendation 5: School travel issues should be considered as part of the design of new build schools or changes to the buildings of existing schools, to ensure that the physical measures around the entrances of schools support their travel needs, including provision of bus lay-bys, safe paths and crossings etc.</p>	Low	Medium
<p>Recommendation 6a: The working group that has been set up to work with individual schools on their travel needs should report the outcomes of their work to the scrutiny.</p>	Low	Low
<p>Recommendation 6b: The working group should consider inviting a representative from the Community Services portfolio to join the group.</p>	Low	Medium
<p>Recommendation 7: Officers from the Children & Young People and Environment & Regeneration portfolios should undertake more investigation into alternative models for a yellow bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. This should include looking at using minibuses instead of large buses. A detailed report on the options available, including costs and potential usage, should be presented to scrutiny by the end of June 2009 to enable the Commission to make further recommendations to Cabinet.</p>	Low	High

<p>Recommendation 8: Feedback should be provided to scrutiny on the work that officers are undertaking to reduce the cost of taxis for school transport.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 9: Transport provision for children attending faith schools at their parent's choice should be brought in line with provision given to other parents exercising their choice of school. Where the child lives outside the statutory distance from the school and it is the parent's choice that the child attends, the parents should be responsible for transport provision, unless they are a low income household.</p>	Low	Low

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- Beryl Mason – Chair of Governors, Newdale Primary School
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- Kathy Swallow – Education Officer: Admissions, TWC
- Mike Moore – Sites & Premises Officer, TWC
- Guy Kershaw – BSF Project Director, TWC
- Damien Madine – Interim Senior School Improvement Manager: Secondary, TWC
- Mal Yale – Capital & Facilities Manager, TWC
- Councillor Miles Hosken – Cabinet Member: Environment, TWC
- Councillor Stephen Burrell – Cabinet Member: Children & Young People, TWC.

We also looked at a range of information including:

- Planning and funding extended schools: a guide for schools, local authorities and their partner organisations, 2006, Department for Children, Schools and Families
- Evaluation of First Yellow School Bus Schemes, 2003, Department for Transport
- Peterborough Interim Sustainable School Travel Strategy
- Swindon Sustainable School Travel Strategy: Progress & Development
- Redcar & Cleveland Access to School: A sustainable modes of travel strategy for Redcar & Cleveland 2007 – 2008
- Shropshire County Council, Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2007 – 2012
- Nottinghamshire County Council, Review of Denominational Home to School Transport
- Shropshire County Council, Home-to-school Transport – report on suitability of yellow school bus scheme for Shropshire, report to Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel, January 2006
- Information gathered at the School Transport Conference 2008.