

# POLICY ESSENTIALS: HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT





# ABOUT

The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 39 county and unitary councils across England. We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of our member councils and their communities to ensure they have a strong voice with national government, and to help deliver positive change for those authorities and the residents they serve.

The CCN aims to articulate the challenges and opportunities of its member councils, alongside their priorities, to the government and other key organisations. This is primarily done through original and impactful research across areas such as adult social care, children's services, housing and planning, and local government finance.

Building on our **Guide to CCN**, our updated series of **Policy Essentials** aims to give county and unitary councillors a short and concise overview of the most important policy issues facing their councils. This includes an overview of the key service responsibilities of councils; why it is a national advocacy priority for CCN; key developments in the national policy landscape; and CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities.


This Policy Essentials is focused on **Home to School Transport**. For more information on our policy work in this area, contact:



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## What role do councils play in Home to School Transport?

Local authorities have a responsibility to provide free-of-charge travel arrangements to facilitate the attendance at school of eligible children resident in their area. Home to school transport is usually considered in two categories – ‘mainstream’ and ‘SEND’.

Eligible children are those who are of compulsory school age, attend their ‘nearest suitable school’, and live more than the specified ‘statutory walking distance’ away (two miles for children under the age of 9, and three miles for children aged 8 or over).

Additional eligibility applies in certain specified circumstances for children and young people with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and those travelling to post-16 education or training.

Councils also have discretionary powers to organise home to school travel for families beyond this eligibility threshold – such as for children from low-income families.

Transport provided may take many forms, including free use of public transport, privately hired buses or taxis, or bursaries for parents to organise their own transport arrangements. Some travel for SEND children may require special arrangements, such as passenger assistants in case of medical emergencies.

Full detail about councils’ responsibilities around home to school transport can be found in the following government documents available online:

- [Travel to school for children of compulsory school age](#)
- [Post-16 transport to education and training](#)



# What are the key issues facing CCN members in Home to School Transport?

- **Home to school transport budgets have increased dramatically over the past decade.** Rising demand and costs have been mostly driven by the exponential rise in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for children with SEND. CCN's most recent report, published in February 2026, demonstrated the scale of the demand and financial challenge.
- **Councils transported an estimated 206,000 children and young people with SEND to school last year – a record high.** If current trends continue, this will rise to 311,000 by 2030/31, an average increase of 17,500 pupils a year. Half of these young people are transported in county and rural areas.
- **As a result, SEND school transport costs are projected to rise from the £2bn that councils spent last year to £3.4bn by 2030/31.** It is a five-fold increase on the £645m they were spending in 2015, the first year that SEND reforms increased eligibility. County areas are at the sharp end of this; representing half of costs.
- Increasingly frequent use of individual taxis, due to the complexity of children's needs, parental expectations, and demand for individual travel arrangements, means individual taxi use to transport children with SEND increased by 36% from 2019 to 2023. **CCN research in 2023 showed that as a result, some 31,500 pupils are using cars and taxis, compared to 31,900 in minibuses. Just 2,200 SEN pupils are transported using traditional buses.**
- **It now costs councils close to £10,000 on average to get SEND pupils to school – and is projected to become more costly in the future.** Last year councils spent £9,481 on average per SEND pupil and this could rise to almost £11,000 per pupil in 2030/31 because of fuel costs, inflation and some pupils travelling in single-occupancy vehicles
- **Rising SEND demand is squeezing transport provision for mainstream pupils.** In 2015, 64% of councils' entire school transport budgets were spent on SEND school transport, and this is projected to rise to 85% by 2030/31. Faced with mounting costs, a recent CCN survey found that three-quarters of councils plan to tighten eligibility for mainstream school transport over the next three years.



## What is the national policy context for Home to School Transport?

- The present legislation governing councils' role in providing home to school travel dates back to the 1940s, a time before the growth of car ownership and mass travel.
- Reform of the SEND system was set out in February 2026 (see *CCN Policy Essentials - SEND*), but no reference has been made so far to how home to school transport will be incorporated into the new system.
- The statutory guidance on home to school transport was last updated in January 2024. CCN liaised closely with the Department for Education to help inform this guidance.
- The most recent local government funding settlement has introduced a new formula for calculating home to school transport funding allocations to local authorities. CCN engaged closely with government at both member and officer level to support this work, reflecting its importance to our member authorities.
- CCN is a member of an inter-authority Home to School Transport Working Group bringing together councils from across the country to lobby on this issue, and maintains regular contact with the Department for Education on the topic.



## What are CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities?

CCN's Business Plan 2026/27 sets out the network's priorities over the coming year. In relation to home to school transport, CCN will continue to highlight the growing financial pressures on councils and advocate for a more sustainable, fit-for-purpose national framework. In particular, we will:

- **Advocate for a financially sustainable home to school transport system**, with a strong focus on tackling rapidly rising SEND-driven demand and costs, and ensuring funding and policy reform reflect pressures in county areas.
- **Align transport reform with SEND system changes**, advocating that improvements to SEND provision (e.g. inclusion and local provision) are used to reduce transport demand and costs.
- **Influence national education policy to address transport pressures**, ensuring responses to the Schools White Paper and wider reforms explicitly reflect the impact on transport responsibilities and funding.
- Highlight the disproportionate burden on CCN member councils – continuing national advocacy to **ensure government recognises cost pressures related to geography, rurality and distance**.
- **Produce evidence and analysis to support reform**, maintaining a strong evidence base on cost drivers and system pressures to influence government decisions.
- **Engage member councils to shape solutions**, gathering insight and best practice to inform CCN's national advocacy and policy proposals.
- **Ensure transport is embedded in wider children's services reform**, positioning home to school transport as a core part of delivering sustainable, integrated children's services rather than a standalone issue.

[Read more about all our advocacy and research in the CCN Business Plan & Work Programme 2026/27.](#)





## Reports

- [How SEND Reform can make services more sustainable \(2026\)](#)
- [ISOS Partnership – From home to the classroom: making school transport services sustainable \(2023\)](#)
- [Home to School Transport – The Challenge in Counties \(2022\)](#)

## Press Releases



- [19 Feb 2026 – Schools White Paper cannot ignore looming £3.4bn SEND transport bill, councils warn](#)
- [21 Nov 2024 – New report spotlights the school transport challenge, and sets out how councils can improve services ahead of national reforms](#)
- [27 March 2024 – Councils call for reform of SEND school transport services, as costs double for local authorities in county areas over the last five years](#)