

Proposed Guidance on Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance

Sustrans submission to Welsh Government consultation into Learner Travel Guidance

April 2014

Summary

Sustrans Cymru welcomes the opportunity to input to this consultation on travel to school. We have focussed our response on two areas. The first of these is to highlight the issues with the definition of “safety” within the guidance, in particular in relation to walking. There is a fundamental risk that we deter young people from walking to school, an activity that is good for children for both their health and development through gaining independence.

With the Welsh Government having passed the Active Travel Act in 2013, we would welcome the introduction of cycling into the guidance and in particular the impact new routes could have on minimum distances for providing free bus travel.

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

Learner Travel Operational Guidance

Question 1: Which aspects of the Learner Travel Operational Guidance need to be explained more clearly, and why?

There are several references to “safe” and “safety” throughout the Guidance, and Sustrans is concerned that local authorities, education consortia and schools may not be clear on what the Welsh Government guidance means by this term, in particular in relation to available walking routes.

Sustrans has responded to the Welsh Government consultation on the Risk Assessment on Walked Routes to School¹ and have raised concerns that certain risks could be overplayed in the guidance (e.g. stranger danger and lighting), whereas it is issues relating to the quality of the built environment (e.g. continuous routes), the speed of traffic and anti-social motoring (e.g. parking on pavements) are the main concerns raised by children themselves.

¹ Sustrans Cymru response to Welsh Government consultation on Risk Assessment of Walked Routes to School
<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/2014-02%20Risk%20Assessment%20of%20Walked%20Routes%20to%20School%281%29.pdf>

We note that in the Welsh Government response to this consultation that there is a clear focus on providing safe routes and tackling traffic issues, and feel these are the key areas to take forward.

Question 4: Should any other areas/provisions be included in the guidance? If yes, please state.

The guidance specifically references walking to school, both through a specific section on available walking routes, but also through defining the threshold below which free motorised transport (mainly buses) must be provided as a 'walking distance'.

There is little mention of cycling throughout the guidance document. Now that the Welsh Government has introduced world first Active Travel Act, Sustrans would recommend that cycling and potential cycling distances be included within the guidance.

As new cycling routes to schools are delivered as part of the Act – and thanks to funding such as the Safe Routes in Communities fund – more children will have the opportunity to cycle to school. In particular it may enable some children to travel under their own steam for distances further than two miles.

We would welcome the inclusion of cycling within the Learner Travel Operational Guidance, including guidance on how the development of networks under the Active Travel Act could impact on the minimum distances required for free bus travel, depending on the development of the network and taking local circumstances into account.

Question 6: Would it be a good idea to bring together all areas of learner travel policy into the Learner Travel Operational Guidance?

Sustrans believes that having clear and concise guidance held together in one document will aid local authorities, education consortia and schools in understanding the duties placed on them to provide transport to school.

We would welcome any moves that make it the guidance more user-friendly and accessible to those who need to deliver on the ground.

Contact Details

Sustrans Cymru
123 Bute Street
Cardiff
CF10 5AE
sustranscymru@sustrans.org.uk
029 2065 0602

Head Office
Sustrans
2 Cathedral Square
College Green
Bristol
BS1 5DD

Tel: 0117 926 8893
Email: policysubmissions@sustrans.org.uk

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