

# Norfolk Sustainable School Travel Strategy

## Executive Summary

Free school transport is provided by Norfolk County Council for 15% of the total school population. It is provided for children who are eligible according to the Council's Home to School and College Transport Policy, which reflects national legislation. For the remaining 85% of school children it is the parents' responsibility to ensure their child attends school and to determine how they will make the journey to and from school.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 placed a duty on Local Authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport and to publish a Sustainable School Travel Strategy (SSTS). This should set out a vision, objectives and work programme for improving sustainable travel options, which will also provide a source of information to parents about the travel options available to them when choosing a school for their child.

This strategy describes how we will ensure that the journey to school promotes positive behaviours, supports healthy and active lifestyles and does not become a barrier to taking up education opportunities. It aims to address a range of issues identified from analysis of school travel patterns, including:

- Children living within 2-3 miles of their school may not have an available walking route for them to use
- A third of children do not attend their local or catchment school and transport availability is not considered by all parents when making this choice
- There are low levels of cycling to school, but potential to increase this
- There is a high incidence of children travelling to school by car, which can cause congestion and safety problems outside the school gates
- All schools have a travel plan, but many are no longer active and need refreshing

### Norfolk's School Travel Vision

To enable every child to fulfil their educational potential by ensuring they're able to get to school or college in a **safe and sustainable** manner.

We will achieve this through:

- The provision of safe and accessible transport to school age children who live more than the statutory agreed distance from their nearest catchment or nearest appropriate school
- Provision of support to post 16 students
- The provision of infrastructure to enable children and their families to walk or cycle to school
- Strategic support to the local bus network, including working with bus operators to secure travel discounts for students
- Working with schools and communities to enhance safety for children travelling to school independently
- Securing funding through the planning process to promote sustainable and healthy travel options

Our priorities for the next three years are to make more walking and cycling routes available to school children, work with schools to promote take up of the cycle allowance, and to move students onto regular local bus and train services where this is appropriate rather than transporting them on dedicated school services.

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## Introduction and context

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 placed a duty on Local Authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport and to publish a Sustainable School Travel Strategy (SSTS). This should set out a vision, objectives and work programme for improving accessibility to schools, which will provide a source of information to parents about the travel options available to them.

Norfolk's ambition is for there to be, as a minimum, a **good school for every Norfolk learner**. This is because a child or young person in Norfolk is entitled to be educated in a school that is at least good and we expect that our schools will be as good as and then better than schools in any other part of England. We recognise that enabling children to fulfil their educational potential is not just about how good the school is, but about their whole community, school and family environment that surrounds it. Their **journey to school** is part of this. There is also overriding evidence that children who are active are better learners and therefore an active journey to school will add to the child's ability to learn and engage in their education.

Free school transport is provided by Norfolk County Council for 15% of the total school population. It is provided for children who are eligible according to the Council's policy, which reflects national legislation. The general policy is to provide free school transport to children who are attending their nearest catchment or nearest appropriate school who live more than 2 miles away (if they are aged under 8) or more than 3 miles away if they are older. This costs the Council £25m per year. The remaining 85% of school children make their own way to school.

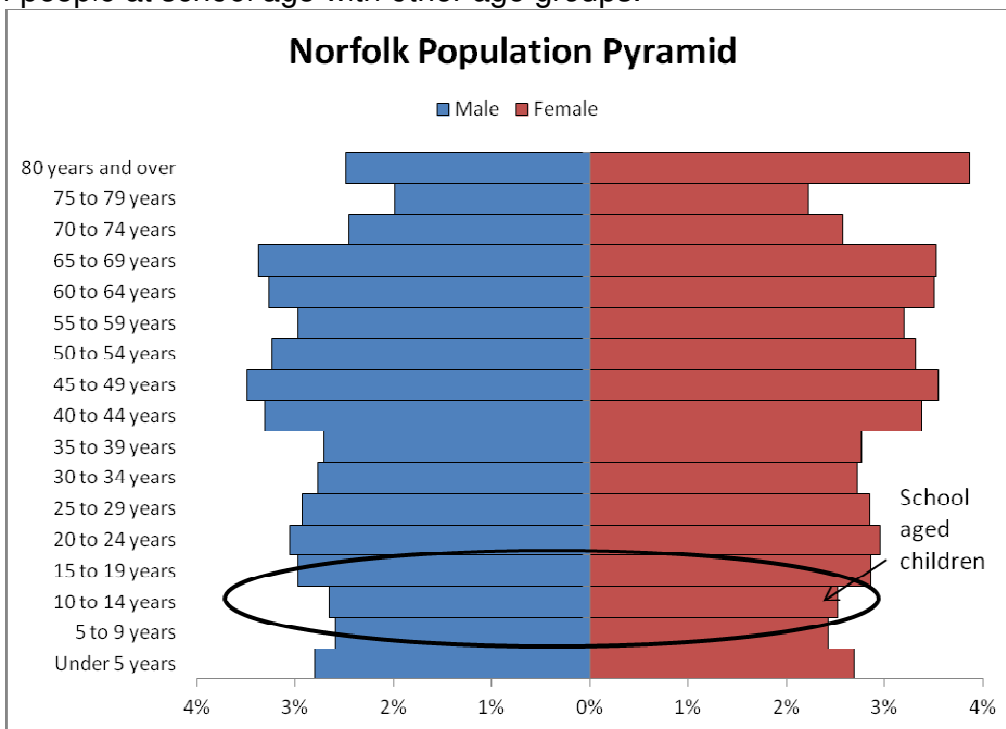
This strategy sets out how we will ensure that each child's journey to school promotes positive behaviours, supports healthy and active lifestyles and does not become a barrier to taking up education opportunities. It dovetails with other strategies and projects including the Local Transport Plan, Children's Services Improvement Plan and delivery of smartcards. This strategy replaces the previous version published in 2007.

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## About the journey to school in Norfolk

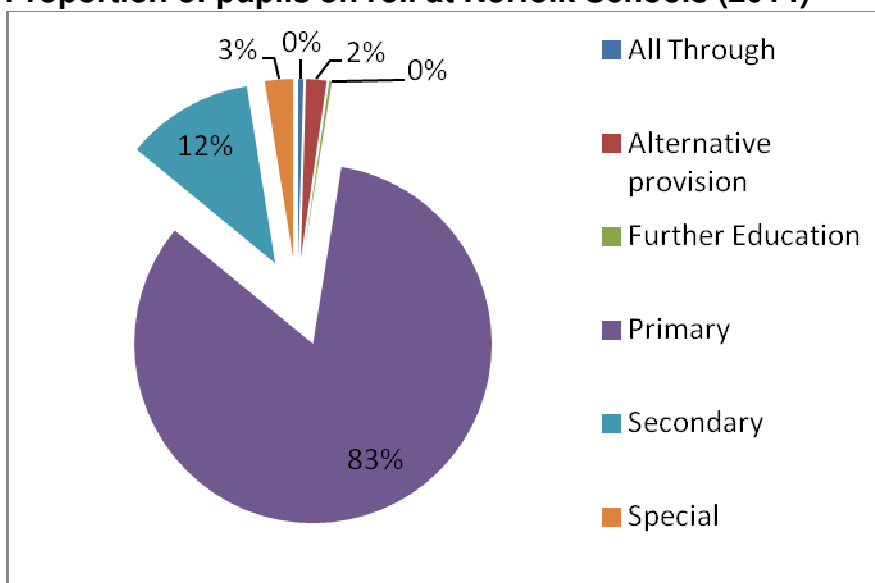
### Pupils in Norfolk

According to 2012 mid-year population estimates from the Office of National Statistics there are 108,242 children in Norfolk of mainstream school age, plus an additional 30,365 children aged 17-19 who could attend further education. The population pyramid below compares the proportion of people at school age with other age groups.



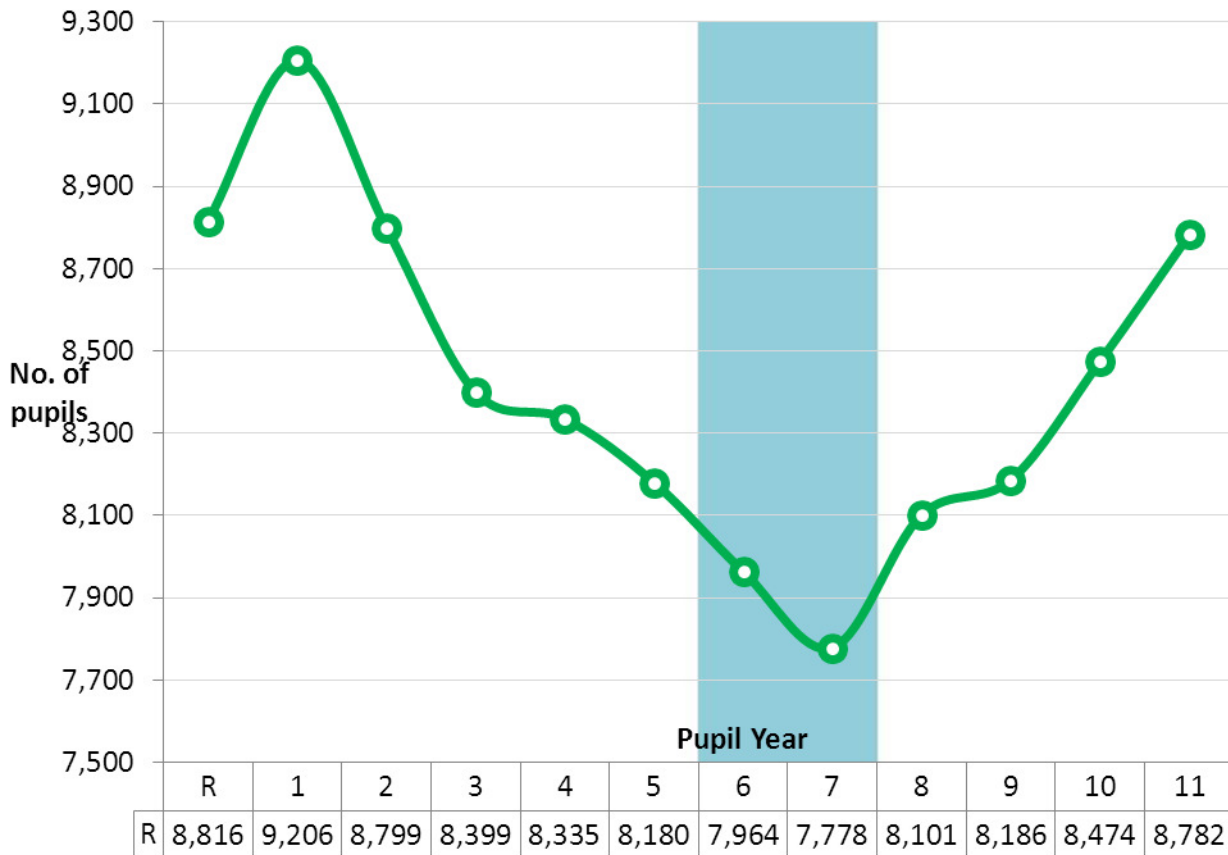
There are currently 434 schools in Norfolk, the majority of which are primary schools. The graph below shows the number of pupils we have on roll attending schools from reception year to year 11, based on their age. There is a slight dip in pupil numbers in years 6 and 7.

### Proportion of pupils on roll at Norfolk Schools (2014)



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Number of pupils on roll (September 2013)



## Mode of travel to school

Patterns of school travel are complex with issues often unique to an individual school and according to local circumstances, including location, catchment area, attractiveness of the school and demographics. Therefore it is important to consider the need and patterns of each school on an individual level. Every school in Norfolk has a travel plan. These are working documents developed and owned by the school aiming to reduce congestion at the school gates, encourage more sustainable forms of travel on the school journey, promote healthier lifestyles and enable the school to access funding for capital projects on school grounds. Schools continue to engage with their travel plan, and there is a statutory requirement for schools that are expanding or undergoing development works to have one.

Between 2009 and 2011 a question was included on the Annual School Census about how pupils travelled to school. An analysis of this for Norfolk is included below. As the data is no longer collected a more recent Norfolk-wide view is not possible. However travel choice data may still be collected by schools on an individual basis as part of their travel plans.

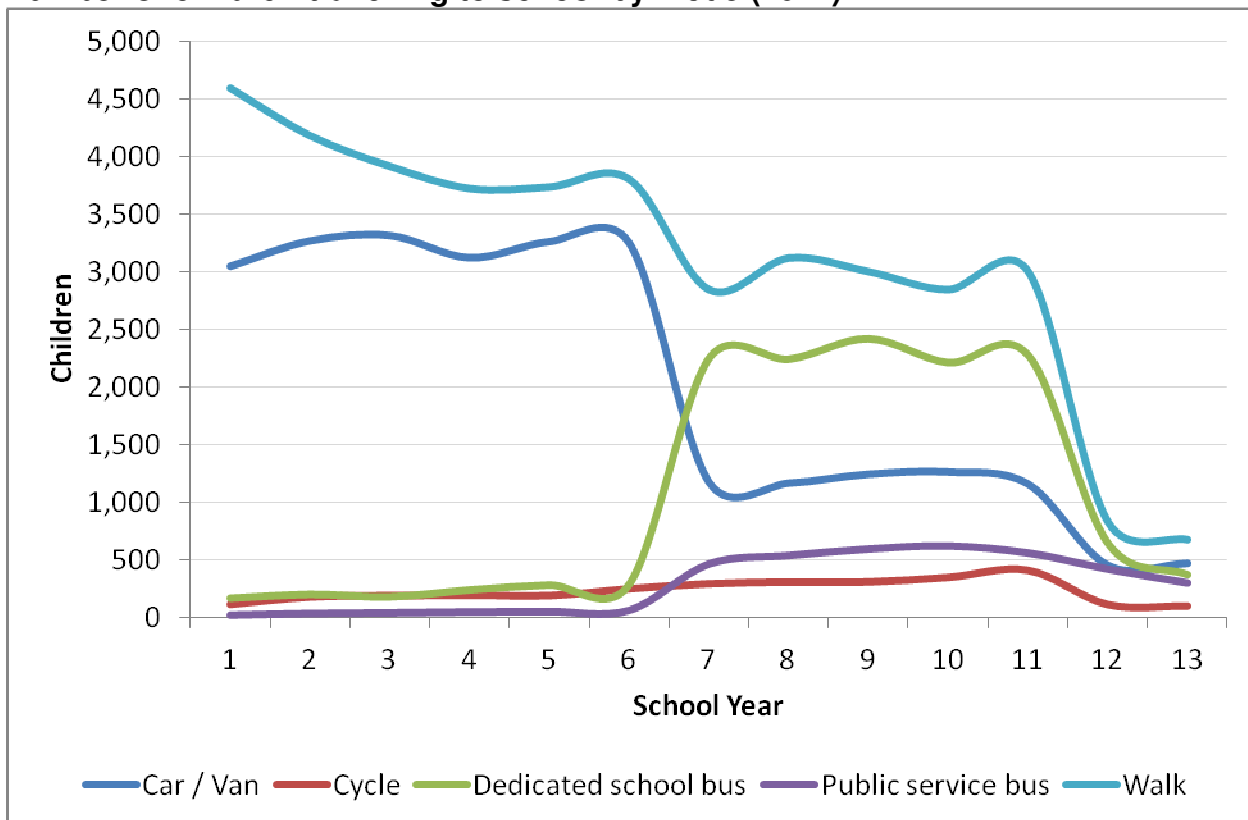
Walking is the most prominent mode of travel to school (45% of children), followed by car (29%) and dedicated school bus (13%). Over the three years data was collected the proportion of children walking to school across all ages increased by 2.51 percentage points, equivalent to around 2,500 more children walking to school. Other modes remained fairly constant.

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Mode Of Travel from January School Census	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)
Car / Van	28.89	28.73	29.04
Car Share (with a child / children from a different household)	2.46	2.13	1.80
Cycle	3.66	3.57	3.02
Dedicated school bus	12.80	13.28	13.34
Public service bus	4.76	4.78	4.71
Taxi	1.45	1.38	1.25
Train	0.25	0.21	0.20
Walk	42.71	44.97	45.22

The graph below highlights changes in travel mode by school year, with clear differences observed when children start high school and enter year 7. At this point there is an increase in the number of children using dedicated and public service buses, and a reduction in car travel and walking. This is because there are fewer high schools and they tend to be located further away from where people live, which means more pupils qualify for free school transport.

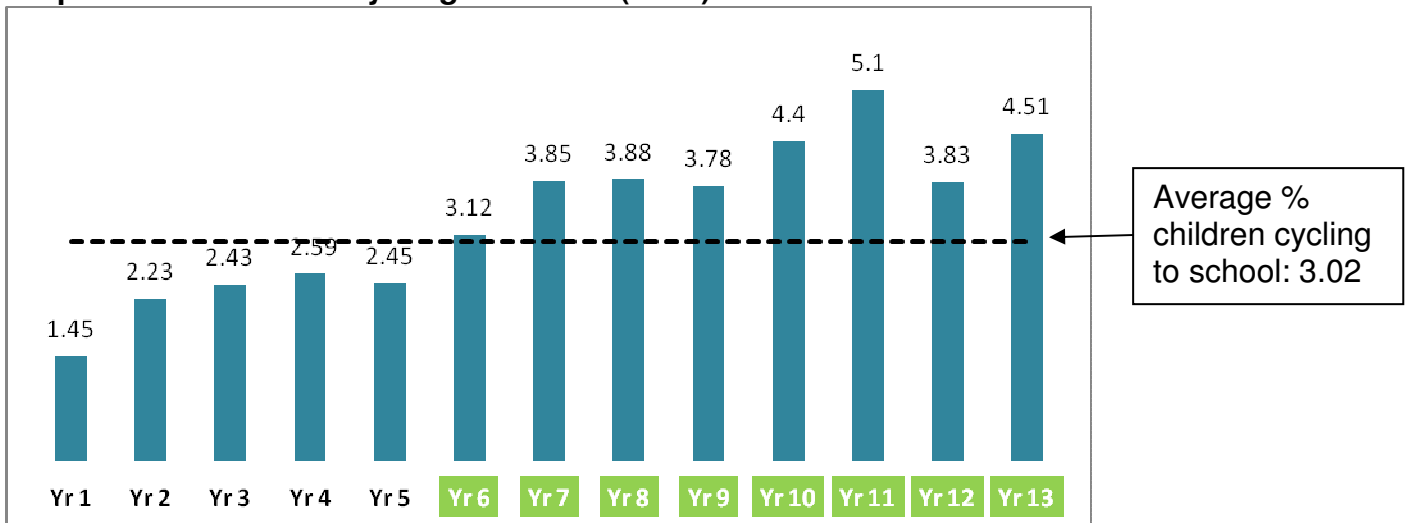
**Number of children travelling to school by mode (2011)**



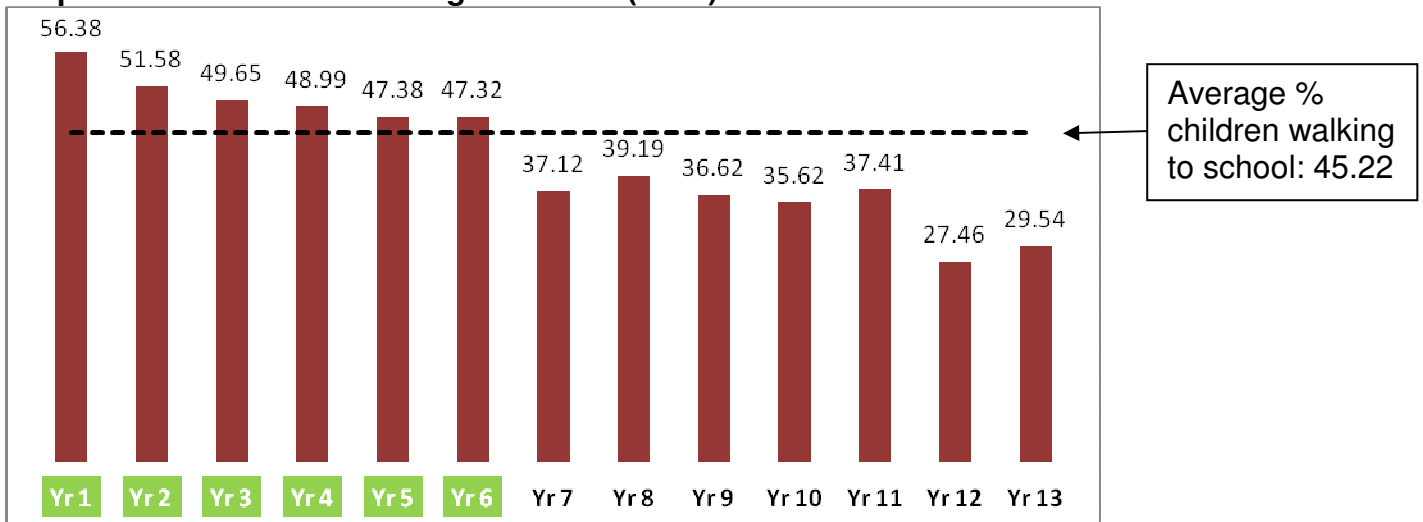
The charts below compare the proportion of children cycling and walking to school with the average across all years. They show that children in year 11 are significantly more likely than other age groups to cycle to school, and that primary aged children are most likely to walk.

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**Proportion of children cycling to school (2011)**



**Proportion of children walking to school (2011)**



## Provision of free school transport

We currently (April 2014) provide **free transport to 15%** of children who are of mainstream school age, around 16,000 students. They travel on either dedicated school vehicles (82%), which may include bus or taxi, or public bus and train services (18%).

Children who do not qualify for free school transport are required to travel to school independently or under the supervision of their parents. Around a third of school children do not qualify because they attend a school of their choice rather than their local or catchment school. Transport availability is not considered by all parents when making this choice.

Around 15% of children qualify for free transport because although they live within the statutory minimum distance of school there isn't an available walking route for them to use.

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## Key issues to address

Based on the analysis above the following key issues have been identified that we want to address with this strategy.

- Children living within 2-3 miles of their school may not have an available walking route for them to use
- A third of children do not attend their local or catchment school and transport availability is not considered by all parents when making this choice
- There are low levels of cycling to school, but potential to increase this
- There is a high incidence of children travelling to school by car, which can cause congestion and safety problems outside the school gates
- All schools have a travel plan, but many are no longer active and need refreshing

## Vision

Norfolk's overarching transport vision is set out in Connecting Norfolk – the county's Local Transport Plan. This is to achieve a transport system that allows residents and visitors a range of low carbon options to meet their transport needs and attracts and retains business investment in the county.

Our vision for school transport is to enable every child to fulfil their educational potential by ensuring they're able to get to school or college in an **independent, safe and sustainable** manner.

We will achieve this through:

- The provision of safe and accessible transport to school age children who live more than the statutory agreed distance from their nearest catchment or nearest appropriate school
- Provision of support to post 16 students
- The provision of infrastructure to enable children and their families to walk or cycle to school
- Strategic support to the local bus network, including working with bus operators to secure travel discounts for students
- Working with schools and communities to enhance safety for children travelling to school independently
- Securing funding through the planning process to promote sustainable and healthy travel options

## Provision of free transport to school age children

The County Council's general policy for school travel is to provide free home to school transport for eligible children of statutory school age (5 to 16 years) and eligible children aged 4 if they will be 5 before 31 August of that school year.

Free transport is provided for children of statutory school age who attend the nearest catchment school or nearest appropriate school for their age and educational needs, provided they meet the distance and age criteria. The specific details are set out in our Home to School and College Transport Policy, which is available here: <http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/view/NCC111273>

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The Council supports cycling to school as a healthy and green alternative to motorised vehicle travel and a cycling allowance of £200 per year is available for any pupil or student who is eligible. We will promote this to students eligible for free school transport. In particular we will target secondary school students who live between 2 and 3.5 miles from school and where we know there are good cycle facilities in place and opportunity to remove dedicated school bus services. We may work with schools and provide additional support for students who choose to do this. Studies show that encouraging students to cycle will provide both them and their families with health benefits – as children are more likely to encourage their parents to cycle too. It may also save the Council money if a significant number of students decide to take the cycle allowance as it allows us to alter or reduce the number of school travel services. **This is a priority during 2014-17.**

A number of successful initiatives have been delivered in Norfolk schools to influence mode of travel and encourage sustainable transport. Project Bob, run by ActivatingCIC in Great Yarmouth, identified that although 90% of children and 80% of their parents own a bike, around 70% fail to regularly cycle because of a perceived fear of traffic safety, a broken bike or concerns about their fitness levels. The project engaged with pupils at 8 primary schools achieving an average 11% cycling to school.

## Support to Post 16 students

Transport is a key consideration for students aged 15-16 when choosing an establishment for further education. Our aim will be to ensure students fully understand the travel options available to them prior to making a decision. We understand that cost is an important factor, so we currently provide a subsidised travel scheme for students aged 16-19 to travel on local bus, train or education specific services. All schools with a sixth form, and further education colleges, are accessible via a network of core transport routes. Students will receive support when they travel on these routes – they can live anywhere in the county and attend any establishment and still receive financial support if they can get themselves to a point on a core route that serves their chosen establishment. The core routes, and other bus services linking with education establishments, can be viewed using an interactive map on our website. We will look to further promote this and ensure a link is provided on the Connexions website.

We understand the cost of travel can be a barrier for some students, which is why we provide the travel scheme. However we are currently reviewing the level of subsidy provided as part of our scheme and this may reduce in 2016/17. In some cases local bus and train operators are able to offer greater discounts for students if they deal with them directly. We will encourage students to check this, and provide information about travel discounts operators offer on our website. Any travel passes obtained from the operator are also likely to offer greater travel flexibility, enabling students to travel at times outside of their usual journey to school or college.

## Provision of infrastructure

Our priority is to provide sustainable travel options for people's regular journeys, including the journey to school and college. We will look to provide safe, accessible and well maintained walking and cycling networks to encourage active travel on short journeys. We already have



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some 4,500km of footway and 113km of cycleway across the county, but it's important that these are linked together to create viable routes for people.

We currently provide free school transport to around 2,500 children who live closer to their school than the eligible distance, but for whom a walking or cycling route has been assessed as being unavailable. This may be because the road is narrow, there is no verge to walk on or high levels of traffic. We will target investment to create or upgrade footways and cycleways so that we can provide more routes that are available for children when travelling to and from school. **This is a priority during 2014-17.**

This will enable more children to travel independently and in an active way to school, promoting healthy lifestyles. In doing this we will work with local schools and parents to support changes in transport provision this may result in. This may involve facilitating walking initiatives that provide parents with confidence their child will be safe when travelling to school independently.

Our annual Highways Capital Programme sets out how we will allocate funding for maintaining and improving transport infrastructure in Norfolk in accordance with our transport strategies and Transport Asset Management Plan. Improvements to walking and cycling routes that link with schools and colleges will be included in this programme of works.

## Strategic support to the local bus network

The County Council plays a key role in enabling accessibility for residents and visitors by supporting the local bus network. We provide funding for over 140 bus services, publicise the network, and work with operators to influence service availability and make it easier for people to connect between different bus services.

Our analysis shows that a significant number of children travel on local bus services, rather than school specific buses, to get to school. This includes both primary and secondary age children, but is especially common among college students – there are around 100 bus services going to further education establishments that are part of the local bus network. This provides a number of benefits – firstly it can offer students greater flexibility over when they travel and secondly it helps maintain accessibility for rural communities who otherwise may be without a bus service. Our strategy is to continue to **move students onto regular local bus services where this is appropriate.**

In 2012 young people in Norfolk told us through the 'Make Your Mark' ballot that transport was a key concern for them. Follow up work we have undertaken with the Norfolk Youth Parliament tells us that the key things that matter to young people in relation to transport include:

- Price
- Flexibility of travel options
- Journey experience, including how to find out about travel options and interaction with the driver

We have worked with bus operators to address these key concerns and continue to do so.

As set out above we provide a subsidised travel scheme for Post 16 students to get to school or college, and the main bus operators provide up to a 30% discount on fares for young people

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aged 16-19. These discounted fares were introduced as part of Norwich's Better Bus Area project in 2012.

In April 2014 we launched the 'holdall' smartcard, technology that will help revolutionise the way people pay for their public transport journeys. It will act as a place to keep money or credit to redeem against travel. Initially holdall can be used on the Norwich Park & Ride service, but it will soon be possible to pay for journeys with other bus operators. We will work with operators to ensure that 16-19 discounted fares are available on holdall.

We plan to issue all students eligible for school transport with a holdall rather than a paper pass. This will be phased in from September 2014. It will have significant benefits as passes will not need to be replaced annually and students will have the opportunity to load credit that can be used to travel outside of the journey-to-school, providing them with greater journey flexibility. We hope this will encourage more young people to use the bus.

## Enhancing safety for children travelling to school

We want to ensure that all children are safe when they travel to and from school whether this is on the school bus, walking or cycling. We know that safety can be a key concern for parents, and in some cases a perceived lack of safety can be a barrier to children travelling independently or choosing sustainable travel modes.

### Walking or cycling to school

There are around 110 school crossing patrols in Norfolk that help children walking to school to cross the road safely. Most of these are on a direct route to a primary school. We use nationally recommended criteria for determining whether a school crossing patrol is warranted. We take into consideration the number of children crossing, the road layout and speed of vehicles, traffic volumes and other safety measures, like signs and speed humps that are available. In some cases signage or other traffic calming measures are more appropriate for slowing traffic speeds and/or encouraging safer walking routes around schools.

We also work with schools to provide a range of initiatives that teaches safer travel practices to children, but also aim to make sustainable travel fun. At present this includes:

- The Step On it Scheme for young pedestrians
- Level 1 cycling training for cyclists aged 7+ years to practise the basics of balance, control, signalling and observation in a safe off-road setting
- Level 2 cycling training for students aged 9+ to begin learning techniques and strategies so they can interact safely with other public road users when cycling
- The Dims presentation teaching children that they must always wear their seat belt when travelling in a vehicle
- Red Lights, Green Lights, a fun and competitive game show which deals with issues around safe independent travel in the transition to secondary school
- The Grim Reaper designed for children aged 11-13 again to help with the transition from primary to secondary school

In addition we will continue to deliver our **Travel Independence Training across the Nation** (TITAN) initiative which encourages young people to become safe independent travellers. The

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initiative specifically works with children who might find it more difficult to travel independently, because for example they have a learning difficulty. The course can be started at any age and practical skills include road safety, stranger danger, reading a timetable and simple map reading. We will continue to adapt the initiative to meet the needs of our young people – it was recently expanded to include train travel, resulting in a short video filmed at Norwich Rail Station.

## On the bus

Ensuring that children are safe whilst on the bus to school is a key priority. Our framework agreement for buying transport ensures that only operators who meet our minimum standards for safeguarding are used for school journeys, and all drivers will have been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service. We recently published a short safeguarding leaflet for transport drivers and passenger assistants, providing them with information on how to protect children and spot someone who may be at risk. We take action immediately if safeguarding issues or inappropriate behaviour is detected on any school transport and will remove operators from school services should they breach our conditions.

We think it's important that parents are fully aware of what they can expect from their children's transport to school, so we will also develop and send a short leaflet to them. This will enable parents to identify if transport operators or drivers are acting appropriately.

We know that parents can become concerned if the school bus is delayed and their child does not return home at the time expected. Our Travel Information Strategy sets out how we will inform parents when this happens. We are aiming to become more proactive and consistent in our messaging and will develop an automated messaging system that parents can opt-in to.

CCTV is now in operation on many school transport vehicles and we require drivers of children with special needs and all passenger assistants to have 'emergency aid' training.

## Behaviour whilst travelling to school

It is expected that all young people will behave in an appropriate manner when travelling to and from school. The Department for Education expects each school to promote appropriate standards of behaviour on the school journey through rewarding positive behaviour and using sanctions to address poor behaviour, however it is also a key responsibility of parents to ensure good behaviour. If appropriate, Headteachers can take action to address unacceptable behaviour even when this takes place outside the school premises and when pupils are not under the legal control of the school, including if this unacceptable behaviour happens on the journey to and from school.

Whilst on school transport we expect young people to comply with instructions from vehicle drivers or passenger assistants, particularly in the event of a breakdown or road incidence. Non-compliance with instructions will be regarded as unacceptable behaviour.

Any repeated unacceptable behaviour or single incident of dangerous behaviour may result in a temporary withdrawal of transport arrangements, for up to two months, during which time it will be the responsibility of parents / carers to ensure that their children access their place of learning.

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## Securing funding through the planning process

As the highway authority we have a role in the planning process as a statutory consultee, providing advice to the planning authority on all new development proposals. Where relevant and proportionate to the development we will aim to secure measures that will improve walking, cycling and public transport links to schools. As we are not able to influence when development comes forward, it is not possible to plan to make improvements through this process, however we will take opportunities when they arise. In particular we will look for opportunities to connect new developments to existing walking and cycling networks and complete missing links in existing infrastructure.

Statutory travel plans are required for larger new developments, including schools, residential and business development. These can be a useful tool for influencing people's travel habits as they provide targeted initiatives to encourage people to switch to more sustainable transport options. We will provide support and guidance to ensure these effectively promote walking, cycling and public transport options to school and college. We will provide clearer messages around the health benefits of active travel, and tailoring messages to specific population groups to take account of their priorities and specific barriers they face.

We will influence developers to contribute towards area or community wide travel plans where significant development comes forward in a particular location. We have just negotiated an area wide travel plan for Thetford. An area based plan provides the opportunity to influence the whole community – including existing residents, and by doing so has the opportunity to deliver greater modal shift.

We will expand our in-house residential travel planning advice and provide travel planning on behalf of developers.

## Conclusion

Focus of this Sustainable School Travel Strategy is to ensure that the journey to school promotes positive behaviours, supports healthy and active lifestyles and does not become a barrier to taking up education opportunities. It does this by putting measures in place to enable all children to get to school in a safe and sustainable manner.

The strategy focuses on:

- Providing safe and accessible transport to pupils in receipt of free school travel
- Providing support to post 16 students
- Providing infrastructure to enable children and their families to walk or cycle to school
- Supporting the local bus network, including working with bus operators to secure travel discounts for students
- Working with schools and communities to enhance safety for children travelling to school independently
- Securing funding through the planning process to promote sustainable and healthy travel options

We will work closely with schools and colleges, parents, transport operators and other stakeholders to deliver the strategy and achieve the priorities.

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Performance will be monitored using key performance indicators. It will be reported to the Environment, Development and Transport Committee and Children's Services Committee using regular reporting channels.