

The Scottish Out of School Care Network

SOSCN Response to Scottish Executive Consultation on Scotland's Transport Strategy

Introduction

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) is the national organisation promoting the development of good quality, accessible and affordable, care, play and out of school hours learning services for children of school age in Scotland.

The work of SOSCN is underpinned by a firm commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child, especially Article 31, the Right to Play.

SOSCN is pleased to be in a position to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation on a National Transport Strategy.

Response to consultation on Transport Strategy for Scotland

General Observations

Our attention was drawn to the consultation on the National Transport Strategy by one of our local authority contacts. The point was made to us that there seemed to be very little mention of the particular issues facing children and young people in relation to transport.

The consultation document has a whole section on the needs of elderly people and people with a disability, but there is no similar section on the needs of children and young people. The document does not sufficiently clearly acknowledge that children, particularly young children, may not have the same range of choices as adults.

There should be more explicit recognition in the National Transport Strategy, of the need to ensure access for all young people to appropriate leisure and cultural activities. In particular, children with Additional Support Needs or disabilities, and their families, may find lack of transport a barrier to access to activities and social interaction. There should also be recognition of the transport needs of children whose parents are affected by illness or disability and children from low income families, particularly those in rural areas.

In the section of the document on Responsibilities of Key Parties, there is no mention of school transport although it is a statutory duty on local authorities in respect of some pupils. The legislation and procurement arrangements, associated with school transport, are thought to lead to lack of flexibility in some local authority areas in the provision of transport for children at the end of the school day.

SOSCN has received submissions from Out of School Care providers which demonstrate the lack of flexibility in the provision of transport. It is of particular concern to us that we have received evidence from Capability Scotland of a lack of flexibility in the provision of transport for children with Additional Support Needs which means that children are not able to attend appropriate Out of School Care services.

We believe there is an urgent need to look at how the Childcare Strategy links with the provision of school transport, and other aspects of local transport provision. However, in the section of the document on key policy linkages, there is no mention of the Childcare Strategy.

Response to consultation questions

SOSCN is only in a position to respond to a number of the consultation questions.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 1.

Are: facilitate economic growth; promote accessibility; promote choice and raise awareness of the need for change; promote modal shift; promote new technologies and cleaner fuels; manage demand; reduce the need for travel; and promote road safety the right goals for transport in Scotland?

SOSCN supports these goals and considers that measures to improve accessibility in its broadest sense and public transport in particular are the most significant for children and young people.

To achieve these goals, measures to ensure access for all children to leisure activities and social interaction will be required. Current legislation, and other Scottish Executive strategies for the provision of services for children, including Education and the Childcare Strategy, must be considered in the Transport Strategy.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 2.

Do consultees consider that the aim, vision and objectives need to be amended, for example to reflect Scottish Ministers' expectation to see Health Improvement at the heart of Scottish Executive policy?

Measures to support access to public transport are also likely to involve children and young people in walking more, and relying less on being given lifts from door to door by car. This should contribute to their physical activity.

The health of young people is also likely to be improved by ensuring access to appropriate leisure activities, including sports and other physical activities, and day care services which meet the requirements of the National Care Standards.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 3.

Are there areas of work in relation to local/regional transport that would merit the national dissemination of best practice examples? If so, what are they and who would be best placed to lead this?

As services for children and young people outwith school hours are not statutory, there is wide variation in the extent to which suitable transport for young people to gain access to these services is available in different parts of Scotland.

SOSCN would be interested in considering, with relevant contacts in local authorities and the Scottish Executive, how far our Childcare Strategy Seminars might be used to share examples of good practice in the provision of transport to and from out school care. In our experience, Childcare Partnerships do not always have a say in how school transport is organised, and how arrangements can be made to help children and young people access out of school care, including, for example, wrap around care for children attending half day pre school education.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 5.

Do we have the balance of investment between spending on new and existing infrastructure and other non-infrastructure activities and between different modes of transport right? If not, how should it change over time?

Children and young people would be likely to benefit by a shift of resources towards the provision of more flexible, free access to public transport, beyond the current free transport to and from school. Any additional resources would have considerable benefits to children and families, particularly the most disadvantaged. The Transport, Schools and Early Education and Childcare Divisions of the Executive should consider jointly and urgently, whether there is anything that can be done to shift investment towards transport in a way which will benefit children and families.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 6.

To what extent should transport spending be targeted specifically at areas with significant potential for regeneration? How should transport spending be balanced between regeneration areas and other key areas, such as rural Scotland?

Children, young people and their families living in rural areas are at a considerable disadvantage with regard to transport. Their needs should be given much greater priority.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 13.

What, if anything, should the NTS be saying about skills, bearing in mind the leading role that the Sector Skills Councils have in reducing skills gaps and shortages in the public and private sectors and the role Transport Scotland has in promulgating good practice across the industry? Is it right to integrate skills issues into the NTS?

Accessible, affordable, quality childcare is fundamental to allowing parents to enter the labour market, to use the skills they have and to gain new ones. Access to childcare services for many families depends on public transport.

SOSCN is also aware of the difficulties created for parents and families in urban areas where buses which are easily accessible to pushchairs are not always available.

In rural areas many parents have no access to childcare, and childcare workers find it expensive and difficult to travel to work. Recruitment to work in childcare is a serious problem for rural areas and, as childcare staff are low paid, lack of public transport is likely to be an issue.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 17.

Is accessibility planning something that should be considered for local or regional transport strategies in Scotland? If so, should it be compulsory, or (as at present), one of a suite of possible approaches?

Accessibility planning should be required. The only other alternative would seem to be for the strengthened legislation on equalities to be used to challenge lack of services. This is likely to be less satisfactory and put the whole burden on individuals, and on the organisations which might advocate on their behalf.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 18.

How can we improve the accessibility of public transport to disabled people? For example, how far should concessions be extended for disabled people?

SOSCN welcomes the proposed national concessionary fare scheme for younger people which will be of considerable benefit, where there are appropriate services, for those children and young people able to travel on their own.

We look forward to seeing the research on improving transport for disabled people and hope that this includes children and young people with disabilities. Capability Scotland has provided us with information which demonstrates that children with Additional Support Needs are unable to attend appropriate Out of School Care services because of a lack of appropriate transport.

SOSCN believes that there is a need to look at the variations in practice in different local authority areas, in relation to the provision of transport for children and young people with additional support needs, to allow them to go to Out of School Care. SOSCN is well placed to undertake some work to gain more information when time and resources permit.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 20.

What more could be done through transport means to tackle social exclusion in rural areas?

SOSCN welcomes the recognition that young people face particular difficulties in rural areas because of lack of public transport.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 23.

Are there any specific areas or events in Scotland where transport particularly well or particularly poorly supports access to cultural opportunities? Are there any specific societal groups disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing cultural activities because of transport issues?

Children and young people in rural areas lack opportunities to access cultural and leisure activities because of lack of public transport.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 28.

We want to promote walking and cycling as healthy, sustainable ways to travel – what more should be done in this regard?

School Travel Co-coordinators in local authorities should work with the local Childcare Partnerships and Out of School Care Groups.

The figure quoted that 95% of schools are within a mile of the National Cycle Network is relatively meaningless. The safety, and suitability for cycling, of the last mile is likely to be of more relevance to most children and young people attending school.

It would also be useful to look at the percentage of children who, in any case, live within a mile of their school.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 31.

Is there a need for change in how the bus industry operates, or are the current arrangements working? If so, what should this change be?

There is a concern that local authorities may be tied into particular contracts, for the provision of school transport, which are difficult and costly to vary when the needs of individual children change. This may be why local authorities find it difficult to provide transport flexibly enough to allow children to attend out of school care services, and other forms of childcare or after school activities. As we have found, these difficulties affect some children with additional support needs. This is a considerable concern which does not seem to be addressed through competitive tendering.

CONSULTATION QUESTION 51.

What more, if anything, needs to be done to ensure that transport considerations are taken into account in the location decision, for example of health services and schools?

When considering measures to reduce the need for travel, increasingly it will also be relevant to consider the location of childcare services. The Scottish

Executive encourages the establishment of Out of School Care services within school buildings, but this is not always possible. Fire Safety requirements and competing uses of school accommodation are frequently barriers to the use of schools by Out of School Clubs. SOSCN is aware of a small number of examples of new build schools which have dedicated space for Out of School Care, but not all do.

Conclusion

The above responses to a number of the questions in the consultation document on the National Transport Strategy, have given a welcome opportunity for SOSCN to give feedback to the Executive on a range of concerns about transport which are frequently raised with us. SOSCN welcomes the opportunity to feed in comments and would be happy to give any further explanations or clarifications.

Janet Law
National Policy Officer

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