

Learner Travel / Home to School Transport petitions

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 24 Tachwedd 2025
Petitions Committee | 24 November 2025

Reference: SR25/12595-1

This briefing aims to inform Members for their consideration of two petitions for discussion at this meeting:

- P-06-1533 Review and update Provisions 2-10 of The Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008.
- P-06-1555: To review all guidance on Home to School Transport for all of Wales. Free access to an education

Petition Number: P-06-1533

Petition title: Review and update Provisions 2-10 of The Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008.

Text of petition: We, the undersigned, request the Welsh Government to review and update provisions 2-10 of the Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008. Namely, local authorities' duty to assess learner travel needs and transport arrangements, including travel limits. Post-16 and nursery education travel. Equality in travel arrangements and promotion of the Welsh Language.

In 2021, Welsh ministers committed to reviewing the Measure, highlighting the issues; however, it remains unchanged.

This request follows sustained concerns from members of the public and independent bodies, including the Children's Commissioner for Wales,



surrounding child welfare, such as safety, impact on mental well-being, education, and children's physical health.

In 2021, Welsh ministers noted issues with the current Measure, some of which extended beyond the scope of current legislation, saying a do-nothing approach was inappropriate. It concluded that interim work justified a comprehensive review of the Measure, preventing “further inequality, inconsistency in provision and further outdated codes and guidance”. However, members stated there was no time within the administration to begin a formal process to change the Measure before the pre-election period started, so it remains unchanged.

Petition Number: P-06-1555

Petition title: To review all guidance on Home to School Transport for all of Wales. Free access to an education

Text of petition: All Children attending an education should be able to attend a school or college without any struggle. Our streets are no longer safe to walk on their own, especially those who are under 19 years of age.

With NO direct transport for an education for those who even HAVE to attend until their last day in year 11. These students struggle through underlying illness, hidden illness, or even undiagnosed. The students who live in poverty and struggle to even travel on a public bus.

The years leading up to GCSE or A-LEVEL are the critical time of an education. Students should NOT be fighting to gain an education. This should be made easy. A year 8 student tested his journey by foot from home to school one way. This was a total of 1hr and 10mins. He has no underlying illnesses and plays sport after school. Carrying 6kg in his backpack and coat. After this journey he complained of sore feet, his shoulders hurt and felt exhausted. This is before a 6 hour day in cool dry weather conditions.

There is no storage for spare clothes or even a dry room to dry clothes.

Absenteeism is going to rise.

More cars will be on our roads leading to emissions increasing. Statistics for a child killed in a serious accident will rise.

Please review this legislation for the children to have an easier way of accessing and education or even before a child is serious hurt.

A child's voice needs to be heard. They are our priority are they yours

1. The two petitions

These two petitions essentially call for the same thing – a review and changes to the legal framework for local authorities’ provision of school and college transport. One focuses on the legislation itself – the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 – and uses the term ‘Learner Travel’. The other focuses on the statutory guidance issued under the Measure and uses the term ‘Home to School Transport’. The two terms are generally interchangeable, although ‘Learner Travel’ is the legal term.

2. Background

Legislation relating to home to school transport / learner travel is set out in the [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure 2008](#). The Welsh Government also published [Learner Travel Operational Guidance](#) in 2014.

The Learner Travel Measure sets out that local authorities **must** provide free transport to pupils of compulsory school age if they:

- live further than the statutory ‘walking distance’ from the school (this is 2 miles for primary schools and 3 miles for secondary schools); and
- attend their ‘nearest suitable school’.

The [Operational Guidance](#) states that local authorities need to consider the suitability of the school when deciding if the placement is appropriate for the learner. Deciding which school is the learner’s ‘nearest’ is a matter for the local authority to determine in accordance with their own learner travel and education policy.

One of the petitions specifies sections 2 to 10 of the Learner Travel Measure as needing reviewing and updating. These sections set out a range of duties and provide powers to local authorities.

- Section 2 requires local authorities to assess the travel needs of learners in primary, secondary or further education or training.
- Section 3 requires local authorities to make transport arrangements and provide free transport for eligible learners of compulsory school age if:
 - they live beyond the statutory walking distance from their nearest, suitable school (2 miles or more for primary schools and 3 miles or more for secondary school pupils (aged 11–16)); or

- there are no suitable walking routes.
- Section 4 requires local authorities to make other travel arrangements for example where learners have specific needs arising from a learning difficulty or a disability.
- Section 5 clarifies the limits of the duties under sections 3 and 4. For example, authorities are not required to provide arrangements if suitable education is available closer to home.
- Section 6 provides local authorities with discretionary powers to provide travel arrangements even when not required by law. Local authorities **may** use their discretionary powers to provide transport for learners who are not of compulsory school age or learners who are not attending their nearest, suitable school where it is a Welsh medium school or a faith school.
- Section 7 allows for local authorities to provide travel arrangements for learners aged 16 and over in further education or training, although this is not a statutory duty.
- Section 8 allows for local authorities to make travel arrangements to and from nursery education at their discretion.
- Section 9 sets out that travel arrangements must not favour certain types of education or training and must not discriminate between types of education or training.
- Section 10 requires local authorities to promote access to education and training through the medium of Welsh, including considering travel arrangements that support this aim.

3. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government began a review of learner travel arrangements in 2019, initially to consider issues around transport for post-16 learners. Progress was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and in 2020, the Welsh Government widened the scope of the review to consider the 4-16 age group, as well as the mileage thresholds for free transport eligibility.

On the publication of the One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket: Planning Buses as a Public Service for Wales White Paper (March 2022), the then Deputy

Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, said the Welsh Government would take forward a wider programme of work that would consider a complete revision of the Learner Travel Measure.

At the same time, the Welsh Government also published the review originally announced in 2019. Among other things, the review found there was a need to update the operational guidance to ensure greater consistency. The review found there are wider issues beyond those covered by the current legislation including transport for older learners with Additional Learning Needs and for those in further education colleges. The review was completed shortly before the last Senedd election in 2021 and published in March 2022. It stated that although there were issues with the Measure, there was not enough time within the Fifth Senedd to begin a formal process to change the it.

The Welsh Government has highlighted that home to school transport accounts for a quarter of all local authority direct spending (i.e. not including delegated school budgets) on education. This is £207 million of £770 million in 2025-26.

An internal analysis and evaluation of learner travel was undertaken by Welsh Government officials during 2023. It said, given the planned reforms for the structure of the bus industry and significant challenges around budget pressures there should be no immediate amendment to the learner travel legislation.

One of the review's recommendations was to update the 2014 Operational Guidance. The Welsh Government is consulting on revised guidance between 11 June and 28 November 2025. Although the law underpinning learner travel has not changed, the guidance reflects changes to other legislation since the current guidance was published in 2014. The consultation document states that the aim of updating guidance is so that it:

- aligns with and amplifies legislative developments that have taken place since the guidance was originally published;
- provides clarity on transport provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN);
- strengthens guidance on Section 10 (promoting access to Welsh medium education) and Section 11 (promoting sustainable travel) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure; and
- reflects some of the good practice that has been identified across Wales.

In May 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales held a summit bringing together representative bodies to discuss the challenges and practical solutions for improving learner travel. A report of the summit has been published and this set out a number of on-going workstreams.

4. Children's Commissioner for Wales

Issues relating to learner travel have been raised by many including parents, children and young people, and bodies who support them. Successive Children's Commissioners have raised concerns for many years. These have included the length of walking distances and the suitability of walking routes. Although local authorities have to assess the safety of walking routes to schools, there is no duty to assess the safety of the routes that learners have to walk to catch school transport. The current Children's Commissioner, Rocio Cifuentes, has also expressed concern about the lack of school or college transport for post-16 learners and issues around transport for those with additional learning needs.

In her response to the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Recommendations report, the Children's Commissioner said the review of the Measure was:

...totally inadequate, falling short of signalling any meaningful change to current guidance or legislation, and meaningful changes to children's experiences.

Learner travel again features in the Children's Commissioner's annual report for 2024/25.

5. Welsh Parliament action

5.1. Plenary debate

There was a debate in Plenary on 25 March 2025 regarding Learner Travel. Senedd Research published an article ahead of that debate.

5.2. Children, Young People and Education Committee

The issue of learner travel has arisen in a number of inquiries undertaken by the Children Young People and Education Committee:

Pupil Absence (November 2022) – the Committee heard that the cost of travel to and from school and its associated impact on school attendance. The Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should ensure that decisions on

learner travel are driven by the individual and specific needs of children and young people. The Welsh Government responded that it was looking at how they could take forward a wider programme of work to improve operator provision, and to better align transport with other wider policy aims, such as Welsh medium provision, support ALN pupils and consider provision to Further Education establishments.

Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? (July 2024) - The Committee heard that learner travel challenges are greater for learners with ALN, and disabled and neurodiverse children and young people, with their ability to fully engage in all that schools can offer restricted by learner travel. The Committee also heard that the current guidance is applied inconsistently by different local authorities. The Committee noted its disappointment that the Learner Travel review (2024) was not more bold in terms of looking at more systematic change to the legislation underpinning learner travel. The Committee recommended that the Welsh Government prioritises the review and issuing of new statutory learner travel guidance. The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation, confirming a review of the guidance was underway.

Routes into post-16 education and training (2025) – the Committee heard from a number of stakeholders that the cost and availability of learner transport to post-16 options impacted on learner choice. Its report was published on 12 November.

5.3. Petitions Committee

The Petitions Committee has considered two petitions in the Sixth Senedd in relation to home to school transport, in addition to the two referred to in this briefing.

P-06-1343 Provide free public transport for all secondary school pupils (2023). This called for all learners in secondary schools to have free public transport to their catchment area secondary school. The Committee noted that work was ongoing and that the Bus Services (Wales) Bill would be passing through the Senedd. As significant work had been done on the issue, Members agreed that there was little more they could do and to close the petition on 4 November 2024.

P-06-1264 For school transport guaranteed for all comprehensive children (2022). The Committee noted that the issues covered by the Petition related to funding and was the responsibility of schools and local government to work together on safe routes to school. Members noted that significant activity had taken place in relation to learner travel since the petition was first considered in April 2022. The

Committee noted that work on bus transport for under 18s was ongoing and that the Bus Services (Wales) Bill would be passing through the Senedd and agreed to close the Petition on 2 November 2024.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.