

Home to School Transport in North Yorkshire

School Transport Action Group (S.T.A.G) Update

Briefing for parish councils and community groups – March 2026

Current Context

Part One: 18 months on

Much has happened since the Home to School Policy changes came in to force on 1st September 2024:

Extraordinary Meeting – A last ditch attempt by Opposition Party leaders to get the policy overturned in May 2025 were voted down by the Conservative controlling group. The next day families started receiving emails informing many of them that transport had been denied.

Sept 2025 new starters - The first cohort of children (those who started new schools in September 2025) have been the unlucky guinea pigs – with many of those families finding out last minute that transport had been denied. Many spent an anxious six months going through a messy appeals process. From more than 200 cases that went to appeal, less than 10% were successful. Over 20 have now escalated their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman and multiple live investigations are currently underway.

Sept 2026 new starters - Children scheduled to start school in September 2026 are now in the hotseat. Secondary school places have been announced, and transport decisions will follow in mid-May. For primary school aged children, school places are made public in April and transport decisions in mid-June. It is anticipated it will be another busy year for transport appeals.

Part Two: Evidence of impact on schools, families and rural communities

Meanwhile worries continue to grow over the negative impact on schools, families and rural communities as evidence mounts:

Loss of pupils and funding for schools - The recent Annual School Report shows a pattern of falling pupil roll numbers and increased pressure on funding. Anecdotal evidence from individual schools reveal concern over pupil numbers dropping as a direct impact of the new transport policy. This is particularly concerning for smaller

secondary schools such as Settle College and Boroughbridge High School and for rural primary schools, where every penny counts. The officer report presented in July 2024 predicted 1 in 4 small primary schools (less than 50 pupils) could lose pupils as a direct result of the policy change.

Education funding leaving North Yorkshire - An increasing number of North Yorkshire pupils are being required to attend schools out of the local authority boundary to retain access to their free transport rights – taking with them the DFE funding that should be going into North Yorkshire schools enabling them to maintain staff levels and curriculum choices. In some cases, out of county schools that tick the nearest school box, are actively recruiting pupils from North Yorkshire villages (e.g. Wetherby School in West Yorkshire).

Increases in cost per head travel costs – Admissions choices are starting to notably change in line with changes in access to free transport. Examples now exist (e.g. Swaledale, Appleton Roebuck) where previously children within a village or community would have taken one bus to the same school but where this year they will be split between three or four smaller vehicles travelling in different directions to different ‘nearest schools’ all because of marginal differences in distance. This increases costs, puts more vehicles on the roads, divides communities and severs friendships.

Withdrawal of paid for bus passes - Paid for bus passes are under threat with the council warning that the strategy is to downsize vehicles and cancel school bus routes as soon as possible to save money. Some communities have already seen the option of paid passes be withdrawn (e.g. Sheriff Hutton) and parents are increasingly aware that paid travel passes may be revoked with one week’s notice and may not be renewed from one term to the next.

Cut off 6th formers - Concern over withdrawal of access to paid for bus passes extends to 6th formers. Due to the lack of public transport students who pay for passes on school buses find it is their only way only way to access higher education in rural areas. We are aware that one third of school transport contracts are up for renewal in April each year and so are watching closely to see if bus passes are withdrawn midway through this academic year because of those renegotiations.

Growing community concern – Increasingly, parish communities (e.g. Buckden, Scorton, Sheriff Hutton) are getting together to discuss concern for their local children; the future of their local schools and, the viability of their village or areas as a place to attract and retain young families.

Parental pressure continues – STAG membership is now over 1000 and growing steadily. Press support for parents is widespread and continuous. There are no signs of fatigue from the public though some councillors, conscious of the elections which will take place in 14months time, are increasingly techy about this issue as it refuses to go away.

Part Three: The Post Implementation Review (PIR) Excuse – delay and deflection

The council have postposed a Post Implementational Review (PIR) that was initially promised to start in July 2025 as a mitigation for potential harm inflicted on rural communities (identified in the July 2024 Equality Impact Assessment). That review is now finally underway, though has been scoped by officers and is being conducted internally rather than independently.

The delayed timetable means Exec members will review the findings in Oct/Nov 2026, and they will be the ones to decide if any action is to be taken to correct or improve how the policy is being deployed. If so, this would go to public consultation in Spring 2027 just ahead of the May 2027 elections.

It would then be up to the new council in July 2027 to decide on whether to go ahead with the recommended changes. The first year of pupils to benefit would be those starting new schools in September 2028. This delay is deeply worrying – it condemns North Yorkshire to another 18 months of potential harm.

No comment has been made about compensation for errors made that have impacted 2025 and 2026 cohorts and that will also be applied to 2027 new starters. Our concern is that will be three full years of damage to children's schools and communities across rural North Yorkshire.

Part Four: Pathways to change

It should be noted the Post Implementation Review covers how the policy has been implemented, it does not cover scope for altering the core of the policy itself. That would require it returning to Full Council and a majority vote. Council rules state this can only happen post May 2026.

Parents and campaigners are also eagerly awaiting the decision of the independent regulators who are investigating as we speak.

Other routes to change are being actively considered.

It is crucial that parish councils, community groups and residents continue to draw attention to the impact of the policy and the issues arising from how it is being applied.

Your help on that would be invaluable.

For more information contact the School Transport Action Group team on info@schooltransportag@gmail.com and follow us on Facebook at for regular updates: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/schooltransportactiongroupnorthyorks/>

Appendix:

a) Issues inherent in the policy:

- i. **Failure to recognise the geography** of North Yorkshire and the impact that has in practical terms when trying to apply the distance rule.
- ii. Failure to recognise that the distribution of families and the reality of the need for many smaller schools to serve our rural county, results in a **fragmentation rather than a consolidation** of the number of routes and vehicles required to transport eligible children. As a result, a shift to nearest school only means that cost per head increases over time rather than decreases as more children are moved off buses and into smaller vehicles to whichever school is closest.
- iii. **Decision to measure distance by 'available walked route'** results in a system that is both complex to administer and largely irrelevant in some rural settings. This has resulted in marginal differences in distance and impossible routes. The lack of common sense that has been applied has increased parents' determination to challenge decisions.
- iv. Reliance on a savings model that is reliant on **squeezing children out of the system to save money**. This creates high levels of short-term pain followed by steadily increased costs as cost per head to transport eligible children will rise not fall over time.

b) Implementation errors raised in appeals and scrutiny meetings:

- i. **Failure to conduct a Social Impact Assessment** despite warnings from the public consultation. As a result, the impact on children, families, communities and schools (both immediate and longer term) were neither understood nor mitigated against when the policy was considered.
- ii. **Inadequate Climate Impact and Equality Impact Assessments** (the latter of which has changed without explanation three times in the last 18 months).
- iii. **Refusal to safety assess or exclude routes that are known to be impractical, unsafe or unpassable**. This includes high moorland routes, unsafe sections of journeys and non-public rights of way.
- iv. **Flawed appeals process** - including processes changes midway through last year's appeals, denial of full right to representation, failure to explain decisions, inconsistency in decisions made, refusal of case law as evidence, concerns around panel impartiality, refusal to permit appeals based on new material evidence.
- v. **Mapping errors** – in correct start and end points used to measure routes, missing school gates from council maps, use of non-public rights of way, inclusion of routes that are unsafe or impassable, refusal to correct mapping errors once identified,
- vi. **Information withheld** – refusal to supply route maps and coordinated to allow parents to verify routes used to measure distance are correct, missed deadlines and refusal to respond to information requests (including SAR, EIR AND FOI requests).