



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Review of the School Transport Scheme

Phase 2 Report



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Chapter 1 – Summary of Phase 1 – Findings, Recommendations and Outcome

Background to the Review of the School Transport Scheme

The review is examining the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs and the Primary and Post-Primary School Transport Schemes in terms of how each element of the schemes currently operate, to include eligibility criteria, trends, costs, cost drivers and an overall review and assessment of the objectives of the scheme.

The review will also examine the potential for integration of different strands of the scheme and a more co-ordinated approach with other Government Departments that also use transport services.

The review will consider issues such as climate action, supporting rural development and promoting where possible initiatives that encourage walking and cycling to school.

Methodology for the Review

A Technical Working Group has been established to review the School Transport Scheme as it currently operates and to make recommendations to a Steering Group. The Steering Group will report on the findings and recommendations of the Working Group and will prepare a report with recommendations for consideration of the Minister on the future operation of the School Transport Scheme.

The Desk Based review commenced in February 2021 and is being conducted over three phases:

Phase 1 - an examination of issues for mainstream pupils relating to the nearest and next nearest school (February 21 – June 21)

Phase 2 - a detailed analysis of the objectives of the School Transport Scheme, for both the mainstream and SEN schemes (July 21- December 22)

Phase 3 – an examination of issues around eligibility criteria, scheme performance, scheme expenditure and the potential for scheme integration

Phase 1 of the Review

Phase 1 of the review set out to examine the eligibility criteria for pupils on mainstream transport, specifically the requirement that in order to qualify for mainstream transport pupils must be

attending their nearest school. It is clear from the operation of the scheme that a significant number of pupils fulfil the distance criteria to their nearest school but attend their next nearest school and are therefore not technically eligible under the current eligibility criteria. The Phase 1 report examined the issues that arise on an annual basis and explored the potential options for September 2021 for this cohort of pupils with non-eligible status.

In examining these potential options as part of Phase 1 of the Review, the objective was not to pre-empt the outcome of the latter phase and overall review of the scheme. The objective was to examine potential options to deal with the anomalies arising from changes to eligibility criteria in 2012 and any options/recommendations arising from this phase of the review are considered provisional pending the final outcome of the full review of the School Transport Scheme.

The options that were considered for September 2021 are set out below:

1. Implement the 2012 Scheme Changes at primary and post-primary and remove or reduce vehicle capacity to cater for eligible pupils only.
2. Maintain the scheme in line with 2012-2019 custom and practice.
3. Maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures on post-primary services similar to those in 2019

Having fully considered the above options and pending the outcome of the full review, the recommendation was to maintain the scheme as it currently operates but with temporary alleviation measures similar to those in 2019 on the post-primary transport scheme. This recommendation was based on the analysis of benefits over risks/issues for each option considered and the value achieved on a per pupil basis. It was considered that this option would result in transport being provided for an estimated additional 1,882 post-primary pupils in the 2021/2022 school year, who are eligible for transport to their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school and who otherwise would not have been allocated a ticket. In June 2021, the Steering Group presented the Minister this initial interim report on eligibility with an examination of issues for mainstream pupils relating to the nearest and next nearest school.

Following consideration of this report, measures were approved which allowed for the provision of transport for post-primary students who are otherwise eligible for school transport but are attending their second nearest school and had applied and paid on time.

This arrangement is in place for the current school year pending completion of the full review of the School Transport Scheme

All primary and post-primary pupils who are eligible and who applied and paid on time and all post-primary pupils who meet the criteria for the temporary measures year have been accommodated on school transport services in the 2021/22 school year.

Pending completion of the outcome of the full review of the School Transport Scheme, Temporary Alleviation Measures at post-primary level have been continued for the 2022/2023 school year.

Key Findings of Phase 1

As part of the analysis conducted for Phase 1 some of the key findings highlighted were:

- Scheme changes announced in 2012 with regard to eligibility have never been implemented and this has resulted in a number of anomalies and in increasing numbers of children availing of school transport on a concessionary basis annually.
- The issues are more pronounced at post-primary level where every year a number of pupils who are deemed not eligible are not successful in getting a ticket for school transport. In the majority of cases these pupils are eligible for transport to their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school.
- A relatively small number of concessionary pupils are unsuccessful in getting a ticket on an annual basis but this causes a significant amount of disquiet and frustration for parents and impacts significantly on the time and resources of both School Transport Section and Bus Éireann.
- It was not the intention of the 2012 scheme changes, as recommended in the 2011 Value for Money Review, to effect a widespread change to the schools traditionally attended by pupils from localities around the country as identified in Phase 1 of the review.
- With regard to scheme costs, the main cost driver on the Scheme in recent years is the SEN Transport Scheme. The initial analysis on projected costs indicates, on the assumption that the scheme continues to operate as it does currently, that the SEN scheme will continue to be the main cost driver.

Issues Highlighted that Require Further Analysis in Phase 2

As part of the discussions of the Technical Working Group a number of issues were highlighted that the group felt further analysis is warranted. It was agreed that these issues are captured within the Terms of Reference for the review and that further examination and analysis of these issues will be considered in greater detail in the second phase of the review. The issues raised include:

- The need to consider the objectives of the scheme and whether it is to increase numbers on transport and reduce car journeys or is it to reduce costs of the scheme;
- Consideration to be given to an increase in the annual ticket charge;
- Consideration to be given to the impact of any changes to the scheme on the administration (in both terms of work/costs) of the scheme;
- Consideration to be given to the need to consider integration with public transport;
- Consideration to be given climate action consideration of reducing car journeys, reducing carbon emissions and fleet issues.

This next phase of the review, involves a detailed analysis of the objectives of the School Transport Scheme, for both the mainstream and SEN schemes.

This phase of the review will include the following which are set out in further detail in this Phase 2 Report:

- Examination of the evolution of the original objectives of the Scheme
- Examination and assessment of the Scheme and how the Scheme fits with broader school planning policy
- Examination and assessment of the Scheme and how the Scheme fits with broader Education and Government policy
- Examination and assessment of the Scheme in the context of Programme for Government commitments
- Examination of the value for money and fiscal sustainability of the scheme (including the cost to the Exchequer and parents/guardians).
- Examination and analysis of transport schemes in other jurisdictions
- A stakeholder engagement process

Chapter 2 – Rationale for the Scheme with reference to the Public Spending Code

In exploring the rationale for School transport scheme it is necessary to look at the how transport supports and contributes to other social and economic outcomes. Transport services facilitate and enable other parts of our society and economy. This chapter highlights the lack of alternative public transport options in rural Ireland, as well as the reliance on cars for travel to education. It also highlights the contribution of the scheme to achieving several government priorities.

The rationale for the Governments funding of School Transport falls under three headings:

1. Market Failure and redistribution
2. Lack of public alternatives
3. Contribution to multiple policy areas

1. Market failure and redistribution

Market failure and redistribution are the core economic rationale for government intervention in School Transport Scheme, a more detailed economic rationale is included in chapter 9.

As set out in the Public Spending Code:

Market failure... exists where private individuals or firms do not produce the optimal level of a good or service from a societal perspective. A practical example of market failure is the need for subsidised bus services on socially desirable yet uneconomic routes.¹¹

School transport contributes to addressing market failures across several important policy areas. In examining market failure it is necessary to examine the market failures across a number of related areas, primarily: congestion in towns and climate emissions and air quality are the main market failures that arise due to the lack of public transport options and over-reliance on car for travel purposes.

Externalities are a common source of market failure. If a good or service produces externalities, this means that the market will not provide the socially optimal level of that good or service. This leads to a rationale for government intervention to correct for the externality, to ensure that economic efficiency and social wellbeing are maximised.

¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/99068/c14c842b-2afc-41d6-8429-045548548ecc.pdf> p21

Externalities in relation to School Transport include:

- Environmental pollution: emissions that impact on climate and air quality negatively impact all of society, not only the drivers of cars.
- Traffic congestion: as the impact of additional cars on the road network impacts on all road users.
- Higher noise levels from more cars on the roads impact negatively on both urban and rural residents.

In addition to existence of externalities as a rationale for government provision of services, the School Transport Scheme also contributes to equity, social inclusion and redistribution. The School transport scheme reduces transport costs for families that purchase tickets, and for holders of Medical Cards, who are exempt from the charge if they are eligible for school transport costs. School Transport provides for improved transport access to education for rural households, reduces rural isolation and supports well-connected and liveable communities. With 34% of rural households having one car or fewer and 40% of rural households not living within 15 minutes of amenities including a shop, post office or a bus stop.² *Connecting Ireland*, highlights that two in five villages in Ireland are not connected by public transport to their nearby bigger town; the School Transport scheme is essential to these communities.

Pareto efficiency, or Pareto optimality, is an economic concept where resources cannot be reallocated to make one individual better off without making at least one individual worse off. Pareto efficiency implies that resources are allocated in the most economically efficient manner, but this does not imply equality or fairness. An economy is Pareto optimal where no economic change makes any individual better off without making at least one other individual worse off.

The school transport system is a step towards Pareto optimality. School Transport is a Pareto improvement if the allocation of the service has made at least one person better off, and no person worse off. The goal of Pareto improvements should be to reach a Pareto optimum, where no improvement to the scheme can be made without making someone worse off. A movement towards this Pareto optimal point would allow the market for transporting students to school to operate with less market failures. Any market failure would mean an inefficient allocation of resources and Pareto inefficiency. Remembering that fundamentally, economics is the study of efficiently allocating scarce resources, the school transport scheme allows us to more efficiently allocate scarce resources.

² When exclude return home.

2. The lack of public transport alternatives

The National Household Travel Survey 2017 sets out the national picture of travel habits, which is one dominated by car usage, with 7 trips in every 10 being taken by car. Walking is the second most popular mode of transport, however, it only accounts for less than 2 trips in every 10. At a national level, public transport does not play a major role in the travel habits of Irish people. The usage of bus/ coach and DART/ Train/ LUAS are low nationally. This may be the result of poor accessibility, particularly in rural locations. In rural areas, 24 percent of all trips are for educational purposes, of which 78 percent were by car.^{3,3}

Two Irish villages in every five are not connected by public transport to their nearby bigger town, and public transport timetables are often poorly aligned. A 2021 report by the National Transport Authority to inform the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan found that just over a quarter (26 percent) of the population are not served by public transport or are served by a very limited service which “means that in some cases that a commute to work or education by public transport is simply not possible.”²

This is attributable to a dispersed settlement pattern with 30 percent of the population living outside towns and villages. Using data from the CSO’s Measuring Distance to Everyday Services (2019), only around 15 percent of the population live more than 5km from a public bus stop; with over 5 percent living more than 10km from a bus stop. Over 27 percent of the population live more than 5km from a post-primary school; with 10 percent living more than 10km.

Furthermore, time to walk to a bus stop gives a clearer picture of the difficulty in accessing public transport services. The National Household Travel Survey 2017, which is a nationally representative sample, found that in rural areas only 44% of the population lived within a 15 minute walk of a bus stop. Nationally, 71 percent lived within 15 minutes of a bus stop; in Dublin City this rises to 99 percent.⁴ In 2017, in rural areas, which are defined as areas with a population of fewer than 1,500, 30 percent of households had 1 car; 52 percent of household had 2 cars; while only 4 percent of households had no car. This does not examine the adequacy of footpaths on roads for safe walking. In the survey as part of this review, 96% of parents responded stating that public transport was not an option for their child as a means of transport to and from school.

³ Includes further and higher education. ⁵Department of Transport Common Appraisal Framework p40 (<https://assets.gov.ie/34326/6bb58b8fe9424bce9595f0a118fc334e.pdf>)

⁴ https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/National_Household_Travel_Survey_2017_Report_December_2018.pdf
<https://www.caro.ie/getattachment/News/Climate-Action-Plan-2021-Annex-of-ActionsPublishe/CAP2021.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB>

3. Contribution to multiple policy areas

The Department of Transport's *Common Appraisal Framework* provides guidance for appraising transport programmes. All impacts are taken at a societal level, therefore impacts such as vehicle operating cost savings are not just for families of those availing of the School Transport Scheme but also other road users.

The wider policy objectives and priorities that the School Transport Scheme contributes to, as set out in the Department of Transport Common Appraisal Framework⁵, are as follows;

Economy - Includes any time savings or vehicle operating cost saving that arise due to the scheme from all road users.

Safety - Includes safety savings due to fewer cars being on the road because of the scheme.

Integration - Includes integration with and contribution to goals set out in the NDP, transport priorities, rural development goals and climate change goals etc.

Environment - Emissions reduction, air quality, and noise reduction. In 2020, road transport alone accounted for 94% of transport emissions. Road transport also contributes to increased levels of noise, and pollutants that can have a negative impact on people's health and the environment. School transports reduces these factors.

Accessibility and Social Inclusion - Includes the benefits of the scheme to those from lower incomes, and from rural areas with no public transport alternative, and offers benefits in terms of accessibility for children with special educational needs.

Physical Activity - Includes the promotion of active travel as part of travel to school, for example walking to and from bus pick up and drop off locations.

The School Transport Scheme is an active contributor to enable other strategic outcomes. A summary of some of these are as follows:

Including Four of the ten Strategic Outcomes of **Project Ireland 2040** including:

- Strengthening rural economies and communities;
- Sustainable mobility;
- Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society; and □
- Access to quality childcare, education and healthcare.

Under the **National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)**, launched

December 2021, the Department of Transport has set out enhanced regional and rural connectivity and decarbonisation as two of its four investment priorities. It also includes for prioritisation of sustainable modes including active travel and public transport.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP) and **National Sustainable Mobility Policy** references the review of the School Transport Scheme and identifying measures to improve the sustainability of the scheme (Action 46 and CAP action 235). Transport emissions account for approximately 40% of energy-related CO₂e in Ireland. The binding national CAP targets require:

- 51% Greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction by 2030
- Net carbon zero by 2050

It is expected that changes in place by 2030 will include changes in infrastructure, services and measures that enable and encourage more people to make the switch to more sustainable modes of travel. The **strategic framework for active travel and public transport in Ireland to 2030** sets out key actions such as:

- Supporting safe, accessible, comfortable and affordable journeys to and from home, work, education, shops and leisure.
- Travel by cleaner and greener public transport.
- A shift away from the private car to greater use of active travel and public transport.

The primary focus is to cater for daily travel needs in a more sustainable manner. The **Programme for Government** commits to a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 with an objective to achieve a climate-neutral economy (net zero) no later than 2050. These commitments are now reflected in the **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021**.

The **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021** establishes a system of carbon budgeting with three five-year economy-wide budgets included in each carbon budget programme. In order to help achieve these targets, the **Climate Change Advisory Council** identify required transport modal shift from private car to public transport, as outlined in page 33 of their Technical Report and also referenced extensively in the **Climate Action Plan 2021**. Transport is a major contributor of carbon emissions, and reaching the ambitious targets for transport in the government's Climate Action Plan will require significant increases in more sustainable modes, including public transport and the School Transport Scheme.”

The Rationale for the scheme in promoting cleaner, safer and more sustainable mobility is critical for climate policy. It also represents an opportunity to improve our health, boost the quality of our lives, meet the needs of our growing urban centres, and connect our rural, urban and suburban communities. The scheme also fits in with broader Government Policy/Programme for Government Commitments this element is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3 – Evolution of the original objectives of the Scheme

A history of the School Transport Scheme

The provision of school transport services in this country dates as far back as 1909, when the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury authorised the Lord Lieutenant to provide what they called “covered vans” to convey children to national schools. These vans could be provided, however, only where a national school was closed and its pupils transferred to another school and subject to the condition that the number of pupils habitually using them would not be less than ten. The vans were horse drawn.

While no specific age or distance limits were laid down, the Commissioners of National Education applied the scheme only to “children whose homes are so distant from any existing school as to make their attendance thereat by walking either impracticable or very irregular”.

There were few changes in the scheme until the School Attendance Act of 1926 was passed, although motor vans gradually superseded the old vans. A number of boat services from islands around the coast were also set up. The new Act indicated that a national school was “accessible” to a child if, (a) S/he lived within two miles of it and was under 10 years of age; (b) S/he lived within three miles of it and was over 10 years of age.

On passing of the Act, grant-aided school transport was limited to children to whom schools were not “accessible” in accordance with these provisions.

From the outset, because of the sparsity of the Protestant population, special transport schemes were devised to suit the circumstances of Protestant National Schools.

In the early 1950s the Department intensified its policy of closing small national schools as part of a rationalisation of school building provision. The pattern of national schools in the past had resulted from a very limited mobility on the part of school-children and schools generally were provided within “walking distance” of the children’s homes (walking distance estimated to be approximately 3 miles).

Developments both in mechanical transport and in the road network meant that a new pattern of larger schools was possible at a more economic cost and with greater benefits to the children, educationally and otherwise. To facilitate the new policy the transport scheme was liberalised with all the children in the area of a closed school being given free transport to the new school, irrespective of their distance from it.

These earlier schemes therefore had two broad objectives:

- (a) To relieve hardship where children had too far to travel to their nearest school
- (b) To support an alternative policy to the continuance of small schools

The schemes were all grant-aided and allowed for considerable local initiative and control.

The school manager employed and paid the transport contractor, subject to the Department's sanction, and was recouped the greater portion of his expenditure by a state grant. All the fieldwork – checking of mileage etc. - was done by school inspectors.

None of these schemes applied to post-primary pupils. Free transport to post-primary schools was introduced with the advent of free post-primary education in 1967. The overall scheme was underpinned by a Government decision brought by the Minister for Education in 1966, F11168 of 11 November 1966 and Government memorandum S.18/13/68 brought by the Minister for Finance on the 17th November 1966.

The post primary scheme provided free transport to second level pupils who lived three or more miles from a centre in which free post-primary education was available and the organisation and administration of these services was given to C oras Iompair  ireann (CIE) acting as agents of the Minister for Education. It was therefore, from the beginning, a comprehensive countrywide scheme, serving every post-primary centre in the country.

The introduction of this scheme altered the picture for primary school transport also.

Following the establishment of the free transport scheme for post-primary pupils, all those duties in regard to primary transport formerly carried out by the school manager were transferred to C.I.E. and the services were made free of charge, apart from a voluntary nominal local contribution.

The scheme for children with Special Educational Needs began in 1975 when sanction was sought to the Department of Finance to pay a grant to families to assist with ensuring a child with a disability could attend school

The Department of Finance sanction specified that *“the grant should, of course be reduced if the pupil concerned does not attend school for a substantial portion of the year for which it is paid.”* It was envisaged that the grant would equate to about 50% of the cost of bringing a child to school. No family income criteria was applied in determining whether grants should be paid.

Arrangements from 1967

As mentioned above, the School Transport Scheme was established in 1967 on an administrative basis, which is still the case today.

The School Transport Scheme consisted of three elements in which transport could be applied for, Primary, Post Primary and for children with special educational needs (SEN) The scheme which caters for primary school⁵ children had the objectives;

⁵ Department circular letter 23.67 on the primary school scheme contained information on eligibility and organisation of the scheme

- To relieve hardship where children had to travel too far to their nearest school
- An alternative to continuance of small schools

The scheme which caters for post-primary School⁶ children had the objectives;

- To provide equality of opportunity for children who have excessive distances to travel to the nearest post-primary school or who are unable to attend such a school because their homes are too far away

The Post Primary scheme was introduced as part of an educational package to support free education, free tuition, free books and maintenance.

The Post Primary scheme also included provision for students to attend Gael Coláiste once a service could be made available and at least ⁷ eligible students applied for the service. A provision was also made for students who wished to attend Protestant secondary schools.

Primary Scheme - pupils were eligible for free school transport if they resided 3.2 kilometres or more from, and were attending their nearest national school or school of amalgamation as determined by the Department. In the case of amalgamations, pupils residing in a closed school area may have been deemed eligible for transport to the school of amalgamation only. A “closed school area” was defined as an area where a primary school had been closed and amalgamated with another. Pupils for whom the closed school would have been the nearest were eligible for transport, without reference to distance rules, to the school of amalgamation, even though this school may not have been the nearest school.

Post-primary Scheme - Pupils were eligible for transport if they resided 4.8 kilometres or more from their local post-primary education centre, that is, the centre serving the catchment area in which they lived. The scheme was not designed to facilitate parents who chose to send their children to centres outside of the catchment area in which they resided. However, pupils who were fully eligible for transport to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they resided could apply for transport on a concessionary basis to a post-primary centre outside of their own catchment area – otherwise known as catchment boundary transport.⁸

⁶ Analysis undertaken by the Department of Transport in 2017 indicated that the time costs of traffic congestion could grow by over 75% up to 2025 and more than treble between then and 2033 – reaching a peak cost as high as 2.08bn in the Greater Dublin Area alone - Costs of Congestion: An Analysis of the Greater Dublin Area

⁷ Department Circular letter 2/67 wording modified in Department Circular 8/68 to include the wording “country children”

⁸ Information taken from: *A value for money review of the school transport scheme 2011*

The scheme to provide transport for children with special needs dates back to 1975 where sanction was given to issue a grant payment to a family to provide transport for their child with special needs. In 2008 an updated scheme was established which provided transport for pupils with special needs. The objective of the scheme was;

- The purpose of the scheme is to provide a reasonable level of transport service for children with a diagnosed disability and/or special education need, who because of the nature of their disability, may not be in a position to avail of a school bus service which would be time-tabled to pick up other children along the route of the service.

Additions to the original scheme

Since 1967 other dimensions have evolved from the original school transport scheme, these include;

- Special arrangements for traveller children
- Extension of school transport to Multi-Denominational and Inter-Denominational schools
- Special Summer arrangements for Special Needs Children with severe/profound disability and autism
- Transport of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- Transport of children to and from Respite Centres
- Transport for Foreign exchange students
- Transport of pupils from the border with Northern Ireland to post-primary schools □ Transport for over 18 year olds

Changes following the Value for Money Review, 2011

Changes to the school transport scheme (primary and post primary) were announced in Budget 2011, derived from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the School Transport Scheme.

At primary level it was recommended that the distance eligibility should remain at 3.2 kilometres, that the “closed school area” rule would cease and that a charge should be introduced.

At post primary it was recommended that while the distance eligibility of 4.8 kilometres should remain the same, the school transport catchment boundary policy should cease and that eligibility for post-primary transport should be on the basis of the nearest post primary centre or school for any new pupils.

Pupils at that time who were eligible for school transport, retained their transport eligibility for the duration of their schooling, provided their circumstances did not change.

For both schemes it was recommended that the minimum number of 7 eligible pupils for a service to be introduced be increased to 10 eligible pupils

Under the revised criteria introduced in 2012 on the mainstream schemes the following is the position with regard to eligibility:

Primary School Transport Scheme - The Primary School Transport Scheme supports the transport to and from school of pupils who reside not less than 3.2 km from and are attending their nearest national school, having regard to ethos and language.

Post-Primary Transport Scheme - The Post Primary School Transport Scheme supports the transport to and from school of pupils who reside not less than 4.8 km from and are attending their nearest post-primary education centre/school, having regard to ethos and language.

In the case of both schemes, distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant school. In both schemes a minimum number of 10 eligible pupils residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, is required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

A table summarising a breakdown of the changes is attached below:

3.1 CHANGES TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL SCHEME FOLLOWING THE 2011 REPORT

	Pre 2011/12, 2012/13	Current
3.2 KMS OR OVER FROM NEAREST SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	ELIGIBLE
CLOSED SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	CEASED
CENTRAL SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	CEASED
ONE TEACHER SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE TO NEXT NEAREST	
CHARGE	NO CHARGE	Now €100 per child for both eligible and concessionary, family max. of €150

MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF ELIGIBLE	NO CHARGE	NO CHARGE
MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF NOT ELIGIBLE	NO CHARGE	CHARGE
MINIMUM NUMBERS FOR RETENTION OF SERVICES	7	10

CHANGES TO THE POST PRIMARY SCHEME FOLLOWING THE 2011 REPORT

	Pre 2011/12, 2012/13	Current
4.8KMS OR OVER FROM NEAREST POST PRIMARY CENTRE/SCHOOL	ELIGIBLE	ELIGIBLE
4.8KMS FROM NEXT NEAREST POST PRIMARY CENTRE	CATCHMENT BOUNDARY ELIGIBLE	NOT ELIGIBLE
CHARGE	€300 FAMILY MAX €650	€350 FAMILY MAX €500
MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF ELIGIBLE	NO CHARGE IF FULLY ELIGIBLE OR CATCHMENT BOUNDARY ELIGIBLE	NO CHARGE IF ELIGIBLE
MEDICAL CARD WAIVER – IF NOT ELIGIBLE	CHARGE	CHARGE
MINIMUM NUMBERS FOR RETENTION OF SERVICES	7	10

The terms of the School Transport Scheme since 2012

Children are eligible for transport at primary level where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school, and at post primary level where they reside not

less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest post primary school/education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis, where seats are available after all eligible applicants have been accommodated on school transport services.

In February 2022, a cost of living reduction package was approved by Government, the family cap for school transport fees was reduced from €220 per family at primary level and €650 per family at post-primary level. A reduced cap of €500 per family at post-primary level and €150 per family at primary level. The annual charge for school transport services is €100 per annum per child for primary children and €350 per child for post primary children.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) were exempt from paying the annual charge. In addition, there was no charge for children who are eligible for school transport under the terms of the School Transport Scheme for children with Special Educational Needs.

In July 2022, Government approved funding for the waiving of school transport scheme fees for the 2022/2023 school year as a temporary measure. This was announced as part of a targeted suite of measures to help families with back to education costs and was part of a wider package of cost of living measures. The cost to the exchequer for this measure is circa € 19.5m.

Ticket registration for the 2022/23 school year closed on 29 July by which time almost 130,000 applications/registrations were received for mainstream school transport. This figure includes 44,299 new applications as well as roll-overs from the previous school year.

At the start of the 2021/2022 school year, there were circa 103,600 children carried on mainstream school transport services. At the time of writing this report, a total of 126,000 tickets issued for mainstream services, this would indicate a significant increase in demand for mainstream transport for the 2022/2023 school year.

Children are now eligible for SEN transport where they:

- have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability set out in Department of Education and Skill's

(DES) Circular

02/05 and

- are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO). Decisions regarding transport eligibility will be based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of first enrolment. Eligible children will retain their eligibility while they remain enrolled in the special class/special school or unit. All eligible children are exempt from school transport charges.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT GRANTS

Grants may be paid to eligible pupils in certain circumstances, towards the cost of private transport arrangements. To be eligible for a grant, an application for transport must first be made and eligibility determined.

A remote area grant may be offered once a pupil is deemed eligible for the school transport scheme, in the following circumstances;

- Where there are not enough children residing in a distinct locality to warrant a service;
- Where no suitable service is available, or
- Where the distance is more than the minimum distance for eligibility for transport generally (3.2kms primary or 4.8kms post-primary).

A special transport grant for pupils with special education needs towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be provided at the discretion of the Department of Education and Skills in situations where:

- Bus Éireann is not in a position to provide a transport service;
- A child's age, behavioural difficulties or medical needs are such to make the provision of a transport service impracticable;
- An escort is considered necessary and the provision of such support is not feasible; The costs of establishing / maintaining a service is considered prohibitive.

From an operational perspective the grant is always offered where it is the most economic option. If the parent/guardian cannot accept the grant then a service is put in place.

A number of anomalies have been identified since the amended school transport scheme has been in place and as identified in Phase 1 of the review. There are no longer any pupils eligible under the previous eligibility criteria and all pupils on the scheme are now considered for eligibility under the post 2011 criteria. This has shown up a number of anomalies with particular regard to pupils who are eligible to their nearest school but who are attending their second nearest school based on traditional enrolment patterns.

Parental preference, transfer patterns from primary to post-primary, and admissions policies with regard to feeder schools, among other issues, all impact on school choice. This can mean that pupils may not always attend their nearest post-primary school.

Of the pupils availing of transport on a concessionary basis in the 2019/20 school year:

- At primary – 35% of the total concessionary pupils are 3.2km or more from their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school;
- At post-primary - 74% of the total concessionary pupils are 4.8kms or more from their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school:

Of the remaining 65% primary and 26% post-primary concessionary children, these children are not attending either their nearest or second nearest school, or they are under the requisite eligibility distance criteria.

It was not the intention of the 2012 scheme changes, as recommended in the 2011 Value for Money Review, to effect a widespread change to the schools attended by pupils from localities around the country. Such changes have potential implications for school planning and budgeting that were not anticipated in 2011.

POST-PRIMARY TRANSPORT SCHEME -TEMPORARY ALLEVIATION MEASURES

As above, the experience of the school transport scheme shows that while the current criteria are based on the provision of transport to the nearest school, there is a significant cohort of pupils at post-primary level whose historic pattern of attendance is to their next nearest school or post primary school centre. A number of such pupils are carried on a concessionary basis where seats are available. However, a shortage of concessionary places gives rise to significant disquiet on the part of parents and public representatives in various regional locations on an annual basis. In light of this, in September 2019, the then Minister for Education and Skills sanctioned temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme.

Under the measures, no new routes were added or created (that did not exist prior to 2012). However additional or increased sized buses were provided in order to provide transport for pupils who met this criteria on the post-primary transport scheme.

Following phase 1 of the review an interim report issued to the Minister for Education with recommendations for the 2021/2022 school year to maintain the scheme as it operated at the time but

with temporary alleviation measures similar to those in 2019 on post-primary transport. This recommendation was based on the analysis of benefits over risks/issues for each option and the value achieved on a per pupil basis. This option displaces the least amount of eligible pupils and provided transport to meet expected demand for service users and is therefore aligned to the commitment in the Programme for Government to reduce car journeys thus promoting sustainable transport, reducing traffic congestion at schools and in towns, and supports rural communities where alternative means of public transport may not be an option

Chapter 4 – Examination of the Scheme and how the Scheme fits with broader school planning policy

One of the recommendations of the March 2011 Value for Money Review of the School Transport Scheme was that *that the school transport catchment boundary policy should be ceased and that eligibility for post-primary transport should be on the basis of the nearest post-primary centre or school for any new pupils*

Historically, with the introduction of free post-primary education, the country was divided for planning purposes into geographic districts, each with several primary schools feeding into a post-primary centre with one or more post-primary schools. These catchment areas were determined following consultation with local educational interests. The intention was that these defined districts facilitated the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. They were also the basis for the operation of the STS at post-primary level. There were approximately 280 catchment areas.

While the 2011 VFM report did not find any evidence that the Catchment Boundary system was a key factor in the rising cost of the School Transport Scheme, other than noting that transport for some pupils was not to the nearest post-primary centre, it was not clear whether this was an efficient organisation of school transport at post-primary level. In particular, given the number of complaints about the catchment boundaries from parents and schools this system was a source of considerable administrative burden to the School Transport Section as a lot of staff time was consumed in answering queries or processing complaints in relation to this issue.

In relation to the planning of school infrastructure, the general approach of the Department at that time was to plan on the basis of attendance of pupils at their nearest primary schools and that following completion of their primary level education those primary school pupils then transfer into attendance at their nearest post-primary schools or the nearest post-primary centre except in cases where parental choice was exercised in certain circumstances.

Accordingly, the report recommended *that the school transport catchment boundary policy should be ceased and that eligibility for post-primary transport should be on the basis of the nearest post-primary centre or school for any new pupils*.

As part of Phase 1 of the current review, one of the key findings of the report was that the experience of the school transport scheme shows that while the current criteria are based on the provision of transport to the nearest school, there is a significant cohort of pupils at post-primary level in particular whose historic pattern of attendance is to their next nearest school or post primary school centre.

Parental preference, transfer patterns from primary to post-primary, and admissions policies with regard to feeder schools, among other issues, all impact on school choice. This can mean that pupils may not always attend their nearest post-primary school. The evidence with regard to concessionary tickets indicates that in some areas pupils traditionally attend schools that are not their nearest, but that their next-nearest school is a similar distance away. Some 75% of postprimary pupils in these areas are over 4.8 KM from their nearest school and therefore would be eligible for transport to that school if they chose to attend it. At primary level some 35% of the total concessionary pupils are 3.2km or more from their nearest school but are attending their second nearest school;

It was not the intention of the 2012 scheme changes, as recommended in the 2011 Value for Money Review, to effect a widespread change to the schools attended by pupils from localities around the country. Such changes have potential implications for school planning and budgeting that were not anticipated in 2011.

Planning for School Accommodation

Currently, as set out in the National Development Plan, the Department's Geographic Information System (GIS) and associated National Inventory of School Capacity, together with engagement with relevant stakeholders, is used to identify and forward plan school accommodation requirements including for special needs provision. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and utilises its GIS, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit, school enrolment data, information on planned and current residential development activity, as well as Project Ireland 2040 housing and population targets to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise and where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Where data indicates that additional provision is required at primary or post primary level, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
 - Provision of a new school or schools.

In this regard, the school building programme will align with NPF objectives in delivering, over time, more compact growth and a rebalancing of growth between the regions. Maximising the utilisation of existing school sites will assist in achieving alignment with the NDP compact growth objective. In the interim period, the school building programme will continue to respond to existing and previously planned demographic growth, with the objective of ensuring modern school facilities for every child. The focus of the school-building programme is progressively shifting from primary to post-primary level reflecting the fact that post-primary enrolments at the national level are not projected to peak until 2025. However, additional primary level provision will continue to be

required to support housing provision, and will be essential to achieving the growth targets for the five cities.

In addition to providing for demographic growth, the resources available under the NDP will support delivery of a number of key priorities in the schools sector:

- Proactively catering for special needs requirements with a particular emphasis at post-primary level
- A strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock as part of underpinning the transition of the school system to an era of Net Zero carbon by 2050
- A strategy for improving Asset Management/ Maintenance regime.

While the national enrolment trends projected a peak enrolment at primary level of 2018/19 and post primary level at 2024/25, the demographic analysis exercises forecast significant regional and local variation between School Planning Areas (SPA) at both primary and post primary level which will impact on requirements for additional capacity in those areas. The most recent analysis undertaken by the Department projects that over 76% of the 314 school planning areas at primary level have stable or decreasing projected enrolments for the period to 2025, whereas some 88% of the school planning areas at post-primary level are anticipated to have increased enrolments for the period to 2028, with most expected to reach a peak in the next two or three years.

School Transport – Alignment to School Planning Policy

Based on experience of where issues arise on an annual basis an analysis was conducted on a number of sample areas to assess if the School Transport Scheme is in line with school planning policy.

As outlined previously eligibility criteria changes were announced in 2012, but were never fully implemented. Prior to 2012, post-primary pupils were eligible for transport if they resided 4.8 kilometres or more from their local post-primary education centre, that is, the centre serving the catchment area in which they lived (i.e. within the transport catchment boundary). Post 2012, the use of the catchment boundary areas to determine eligibility at post primary level ceased and children were considered eligible if they met the distance criteria and were attending their closest school/post-primary centre. Some of the areas where issues arise annually are listed below, and have arisen in the main because children who were considered eligible for transport to school in the town listed for prior to 2012 are no longer considered eligible for transport to that town, but are considered eligible to the town listed for post 2012. In most cases the distance to either town is analogous and children are 4.8kms or more from either town.

Sample Areas Examined a) Rosslare, Co. Wexford

Prior to 2012 post-primary pupils were considered eligible for school transport to schools in Wexford town. Post 2012, and when the criteria changed to nearest school, post-primary pupils are considered eligible to Bridgetown, Co. Wexford.

For school accommodation planning purposes, Rosslare town is spread over two school planning areas – Wexford and Bridgetown.

There are 6 post-primary schools in the Wexford school planning area with a total enrolment of 3,653 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020, 24% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 76% from schools within the planning area.

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection, all schools in Wexford School Planning Area with the exception of Selskar College reported being oversubscribed for first year places.

A project to provide a new 1,000 pupil school building for Selskar College is currently at Stage 1. This will provide good capacity in Wexford school planning area once complete.

There is one post-primary school in the Bridgetown school planning area with a total enrolment of 554 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020 13% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 87% from schools within the school planning area.

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection the school did not report being oversubscribed or undersubscribed.

A project to provide an extension and refurbishment for a total LTPE of 850 pupils at Bridgetown College is currently underway. This will provide good capacity in Bridgetown school planning area once complete.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION IN THE AREA:

Under the pre 2011 scheme criteria:

- 4 routes (4 large buses) serving Wexford from Rosslare
- 5 routes (2 large and 3 mini) serving Bridgetown from Rosslare

Current position under the post 2012 scheme criteria changes:

There are 370 pupils on 9 routes serving Rosslare in total comprising:

- 231 pupils on 5 routes (5 large buses) serving Wexford from Rosslare carrying 223 concessionary and 8 eligible children in the current school year.

- 139 pupils on 4 routes (2 large, 1 medium and 1 mini size buses) serving Bridgetown from Rosslare carrying 3 concessionary and 136 eligible children.

Impact of implementing 2012 scheme criteria in full:

- All Rosslare children requiring post primary school transport would be facilitated to travel to Bridgetown. Therefore if the children transferred to Bridgetown services would be provided for them and there would be no savings on the school transport scheme.
- It is likely private services would be procured by parents locally or additional car journeys would be required to Wexford.
- The potential movement of over 220 children from Wexford PPC to Bridgetown PPC would potentially create capacity in Wexford but could cause capacity pressures in Bridgetown.

Impact of maintaining current transport services

- Maintaining existing services would be at no additional cost to the scheme.
- The potential for movement of pupils from the Wexford post-primary centre to the Bridgetown post-primary centre would be unlikely to happen with traditional patterns of enrolment likely to continue therefore there are unlikely to be implications for building capacity.
- For school accommodation planning purposes Rosslare town is spread over two school planning areas – Wexford and Bridgetown – and therefore school transport would be aligned to school planning policy.

b) Kill, Co. Waterford

Prior to 2012 post-primary pupils from Kill were considered eligible for school transport to Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford. Post 2012, and when the criteria changed to nearest school, post-primary pupils are now considered eligible to Tramore, Co. Waterford.

For school accommodation planning purposes Kill is located in the Kilmacthomas school planning area.

There is one post-primary school in the Kilmacthomas school planning area with a total enrolment of 812 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020, 41% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 59% from schools within the planning area.

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection, the school reported being oversubscribed for first year places.

An extension project at the school is currently in architectural planning but this will provide little additional capacity given continuing growth in numbers at the school.

There is one post-primary school in the Tramore school planning area with a total enrolment of 1,185 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020 8% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 92% from schools within the school planning area.

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection, the school reported being oversubscribed for first year places.

There are no current school building projects at post primary level in the school planning area. There appears to be limited spare capacity at post primary level in the school planning area.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION IN THE AREA:

Under the pre 2011 scheme criteria:

- 2 routes (1 large and 1 medium size buses) serving Kilmacthomas from Kill
- 1 route (1 large bus) serving Tramore from Kill *Current position*

under the post 2012 scheme criteria changes:

There are 169 pupils, 4 routes serving Kill in total comprising:

- 123 pupils on 3 routes (2 large and 1 mini size buses) serving Kilmacthomas from Kill carrying 24 concessionary and 99 eligible children in the current school year.
- 46 pupils on 1 route (1 large size bus) serving Tramore from Kill carrying 5 concessionary and 41 eligible children.

Impact of implementing 2012 scheme criteria in full:

- Bus sizes would be reduced to cater for eligible pupils only. 24 children currently availing of transport from Kill to Kilmacthomas would lose seats on those services and 5 children availing of transport from Kill to Tramore would lose seats on that service. If these children are eligible to the other post-primary centre, services would have to be provided and there would be no saving to the school transport scheme.
- It is likely private services would be procured by parents locally or additional car journeys would be required.

Impact of maintaining current transport services

- Maintaining existing services would be at no additional cost to the scheme.
- School transport services would facilitate traditional enrolment patterns.
- For school accommodation planning purposes, Kill located in the Kilmacthomas school planning area, where the majority of school transport services currently serve and therefore school transport would be aligned to school planning policy.

c) Quin, Co. Clare

Prior to 2012 post-primary pupils were considered eligible for school transport to Tulla, Co. Clare. Post 2012, and when the criteria changed to nearest school, post-primary pupils are considered eligible to Ennis, Co. Clare.

For school accommodation planning purposes, Quin is in the Ennis school planning area.

There is one post-primary schools in the Tulla School planning area with a total enrolment of 678 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020, 53% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 47% from schools within the planning area

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection, the school reported being oversubscribed for first year places.

St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla, appears to be operating to its full capacity.

There are four post-primary schools in the Ennis school planning area with a total enrolment of 3,379 pupils in the 2021/2022 school year. In 2020 6% of first years were from primary schools outside the school planning area and 94% from schools within the school planning area. .

In the 2021 Schools Data Collection all schools reported being oversubscribed for first year places.

A project to provide an extension for a total LTPE of 1,000 pupils at Rice College, Ennis is currently in architectural planning.

A project to provide an extension for a total LTPE of 750 pupils at Ennis Community College is currently in architectural planning.

These projects are expected to assist in easing enrolment pressures in Ennis school planning area once complete.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION IN THE AREA:

Under the pre 2011 scheme criteria:

- 1 routes (1 bus) serving Tulla from Quin
- 3 routes (3 buses) serving Ennis from Quin

Current position under the post 2012 scheme criteria changes:

There are 154 pupils on 4 routes serving Quin in total comprising:

- 38 pupils on 1 route (1 large size bus) serving Tulla from Quinn carrying 11 concessionary and 27 eligible children in the current school year.

116 pupils on 3 routes (1 large and 2 medium size buses) serving Ennis from Quin carrying 40 concessionary and 76 eligible children.

Impact of implementing 2012 scheme criteria in full:

- Bus sizes would be reduced to cater for eligible pupils only. 11 children currently availing of transport from Quin to Tulla would lose seats on those services and 40 children availing of transport from Quinn to Ennis would lose seats on that service. If these children are eligible to the other post-primary centre, services would have to be provided and there would be no saving to the school transport scheme.
- It is likely private services would be procured by parents locally or additional car journeys would be required.

Impact of maintaining current transport services

- Maintaining existing services would be at no additional cost to the scheme.
- School transport services would facilitate traditional enrolment patterns.
- For school accommodation planning purposes Quin is located in the Ennis school planning area, where the majority of school transport services currently serve and therefore school transport would be aligned to school planning policy.
- It is noted that both post-primary centres have accommodation capacity issues with a number of projects planned in the Ennis post primary centre. It is further noted that St. Joseph's Secondary School appears to be operating to its full capacity. Maintaining services to both centres would allow for consideration to be given to transport to

facilitate attendance at both centres and therefore ensuring optimal use of school building stock.

Taking the issues examined in this chapter into consideration it is considered that in cases where traditionally children attended a particular school or post-primary centre and change in enrolment patterns arising due to school transport could impact negatively and cause accommodation pressures in certain schools.

Alternatively in cases, where continuing to provide transport to the second nearest school will facilitate pupils to attend a post-primary centre that is at or over capacity, and whereby the nearest school has capacity, transport may be an important driver in ensuring access to the school with capacity, while at the same time not causing a significant change in enrolment patterns to the traditional school or schools of attendance where there has been capital investment.

The approach would be to support and to align to school planning and building policy to ensure optimal use of school capacity and investment of state funding, Where the Planning and Building Unit identifies local school accommodation pressures but capacity in the wider area it will engage with School Transport Section to consider whether a transport solution may provide an additional option for consideration in addressing the school place requirements.

Planning for Special Schools and Special classes

In planning a school placement for a child, the NCSE has regard to a number of factors including the suitability of a proposed placement and the geographical distance from a child's home. Every effort is made to minimise distance and time in getting to and from school.

In many cases school transport is provided for children attending school placements outside of their own locality and issues arise as a result in regard to the integration and inclusion for children with special educational needs.

The purpose of the school Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources and to supporting the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Children are eligible for transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with Department criteria and are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class or special school that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers. In essence School Transport Section has no role in the decision on school placement and transport is provided to the nearest available school that is or can be resourced to meet the child's special educational needs, as advised by the SENO in the application form that is submitted for school transport. However, there is capacity in the application process for additional factors to be taken into consideration and additional information in

relation to such factors would in these instances be provided by the SENO on the application form for consideration by the School Transport Section. The NCSE operates under the Department of Education's policy parameters in regard to the school transport scheme. Decisions in regard to the provision of transport are made by School Transport Section.

School Transport Section will continue to work with the Department's School Planning and Building Unit and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to work towards a more inclusive and integrated approach. As provision of SEN places increases at a local level, school transport requirements will reduce but this will happen over time as more students with SEN are provided with suitable educational placements closer to their home address. There has been some progress made on this in recent times, as set out below.

As set out in the National Development Plan, the Department and NCSE are proactively planning for and delivering significant investment in Special Education accommodation, particularly SEN class provision at post primary level.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice within the Department to include a SEN Base in the accommodation brief for new school buildings. Typically, a two classroom SEN Base is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom SEN Base is provided in new post primary schools.

Permanent accommodation for 292 special classes and additional capacity for 122 classrooms in 22 special schools was delivered during the NDP period 2018 to 2021.

Furthermore, the Department has an existing pipeline of circa 1,300 school building projects across the various stages of planning, design, tender and construction. This includes 700 projects which will deliver over 1,300 new SEN classrooms and 200 replacement SEN classrooms catering for approximately 7,800 SEN pupils across primary and post primary. Almost 100 of these projects are currently on site and these will ultimately deliver classroom spaces for almost 1,000 additional SEN pupils.

The Department and the National Council for Education continues to plan for additional SEN accommodation provision to meet future needs across the country.

This collective collaboration aims to ensure that education for children with SEN, suited to their needs, is appropriately dispersed across school planning areas. . This will ultimately reduce the journey time and distance for children on school transport services, respond to individual circumstances and will allow for further potential to integrate SEN and mainstream services where possible and appropriate taking into account the care needs of the children involved.

Chapter 5 – Examination of the Scheme and how the Scheme fits with broader Government Policy/Programme for Government Commitments

It is included for in the Programme for Government Commitments that we will:

- *Accelerate sustainable transport plans for schools. We will complete the review of the School Transport Scheme to seek better outcomes and reduce car journeys. The School Transport Scheme should work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme*
- *We will conduct a comprehensive review of the School Transport Scheme, identifying recommendations for the scheme to provide better value and a better service for students, including those with special educational needs, and examining issues such as the nearest or next-nearest school*

The Technical Working Group has conducted an analysis and engagement process to assess where the scheme is aligned to wider Government Policy and Programme for Government Commitments to also assess where potential changes are required to align the scheme to those policies and commitments. This chapter sets out the wider Government policies considered and to which it is considered that the School Transport Scheme plays an active role in delivering on these policies.

As referenced in Chapter 2, the School Transport Scheme is an active contributor to enable other strategic outcomes. Four of the ten Strategic Outcomes of **Project Ireland 2040** include:

- Strengthening rural economies and communities;
- Sustainable mobility;
- Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society; and Access to quality childcare, education and healthcare.

(Emphasis added in bold and underline below to relevant objectives)

5.1 National Development Plan 2021 to 2030 (part of the Project Ireland 2040 campaign)

While school transport is not specifically mentioned in the National Development Plan, there are a number of areas where the provision of school transport services, currently and through consideration of options for the future operation of the scheme, can support the objectives of the plan, as set out below under the various objectives:

Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities

- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
- National Broadband Plan
- Supports for the remote working hub network
- Better public transport through the Connecting Ireland bus programme

Sustainable Mobility

- BusConnects for Ireland's Cities
- Commuter Rail – Regional Cities, MetroLink and Dart+
- Greener and Cleaner Bus Fleet

Access to quality Childcare, Education and Health Services

- Investment in First 5 Initiatives
- Delivery of 150 to 200 school building projects will be delivered annually over the period 2021 to 2025
- Expansion of primary and community care in line with Sláintecare

It is noted in the plan that, greater public investment in areas such as education and health can have a positive impact on inequality:

- Households on low incomes are financially constrained and tend to consume less health and have worse outcomes in terms of life expectancy. Equitable access to health can increase productivity and earning potential, and thus decreasing income inequality.
- **Better access to education allows individuals to invest in human capital, increases productivity, promote social mobility, and this benefits the overall economy.**

.Making good quality schools and healthcare more accessible to households on low incomes can, help to reduce inequality.

Sectoral Strategies - Transport Across rural Ireland, the regional and local road network connects communities and supports public transport services. The NDP will also support the expansion of sustainable mobility options, both in the context of improved public transport and expanded active travel infrastructure, with the aim of offering citizens in rural areas a sustainable alternative to the private car. Expanding sustainable mobility options in rural areas, in particular through the provision of increased PSO supported services, can help realise the NPF's objectives of improving connectivity between towns and villages and revitalising and rejuvenating these areas.

5.2 Climate Action

Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) sets out the Government's climate ambition and includes a commitment to increase the number of journeys taken using sustainable travel (public transport, cycling and walking) by 500,000 by 2030. To support this, existing public transport services will need to be improved and additional services provided. The operation of the School Transport Scheme should reflect this ambition and offer a practical alternative to private car usage to school-going children and their families.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 provides a detailed plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and setting us on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050, as committed to in the Programme for Government and set out in the Climate Act 2021.

It is set out in the Climate Action Plan that in order to support public sector bodies leading by example, a Climate Action Mandate will apply to all bodies covered by the decarbonisation targets, with the exception of local authorities and commercial semi state bodies (where sectorspecific mandates have already been developed), and the school sector (for which a climate action mandate specific to the particular circumstances in schools will be published in 2022). Both the Climate Action Mandate, and the School Sector Climate Action Mandate, will be reviewed annually.

It is set out in the targets in the plan that in order to meet the required level of emissions reductions by 2030 the following actions will be undertaken:

- Provide for an additional 500,000 daily public transport and active travel journeys
- Develop the required infrastructural, regulatory, engagement, planning, innovation and financial supports for improved system, travel, vehicle and demand efficiencies
- Increase the fleet of EVs and low emitting vehicles (LEVs) on the road to 945,000,

- Raise the blend proportion of biofuels to B20 in diesel and E10 in petrol
- Reduce ICE kilometres by c. 10% compared to present day levels
- Undertake a programme of work which will review progress and further refine measures that will seek to deliver the additional c. 0.9 Mt CO₂e reduction by 2030 in a fair and equitable manner

Expanding sustainable mobility options to provide meaningful alternatives to everyday private car journeys is necessary to reduce transport emissions. Continued and enhanced investment in walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure and services across the country is required on a scale not previously seen. There is a commitment to deliver an additional 500,000 daily sustainable journeys by 2030 (c. 14% increase on current levels) through the implementation of major transport projects such as:

- BusConnects
- Connecting Ireland
- Expanding rail services and infrastructure in, and around, major urban centres
- A significant increase in our walking and cycling investments

New technology will also increasingly play a key role in the realisation of climate action goals, with electric bicycles, electric cargo bicycles, and (when legalised) e-scooters, extending both the number and length of sustainable trips across Ireland

A key ambition is, therefore, to provide citizens with reliable and realistic sustainable mobility options to enable better mobility choices. To this end, a broad suite of supports will be utilised, including:

- additional area mobility management planning; further pedestrianisation of city centres and school streets; investments in active travel infrastructure; improvements to the capacity, frequency, reliability and journey time of public transport services; and promoting greater awareness of these improved walking, cycling and public transport options.
- Modal shift from the private car to sustainable transport will also be supported through the new 10-year *Sustainable Mobility Policy*. Alongside continued significant investment and expansion of active travel and public transport infrastructure and services, the new policy will include actions in the areas of behaviour change; demand management; and transport-led development – including multi-modal transport hubs, transforming how people travel through the greater use of sustainable transport.

The new approach to public transport will be based on a vision of an integrated public transport network, enabling short, medium and long distance trips for people in every part of Ireland. This will

mean increasing the frequency of existing rail and bus services, and expanding the bus network through the Connecting Ireland approach, while ensuring their timetabling to enable connected journeys.

The Safe Routes to School programme was launched in 2021 to support walking, scooting and cycling to primary and post-primary schools. The programme will invest to create safe walking and cycling routes within communities, to alleviate congestion at the school gates and increase the number of students who walk, scoot or cycle to school

Reducing internal combustion engine (ICE) car trips is essential if we are to achieve our transport emission targets. Achieving this level of reduction in the timeframe envisaged presents a significant challenge given that technology advances can only achieve so much and the heavy reliance on the car among certain cohorts of the population and in certain parts of the country where more sustainable alternatives are limited. For this reason, the suite of potential demand management will need to be delivered in a way that achieves a just transition and supports economic wellbeing.

5.3 Rural Development

The “Our Rural Future Rural” development policy which provides an outline for the growth of rural Ireland over the following five years, a key objective of this policy is to support the sustainability of rural communities and support more people to continue to live and work in rural locations

“Our Rural Future – 2021 – 2025” is a whole-of-Government policy for the sustainable development of rural Ireland. The policy is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland for decades. It contains more than 150 commitments for delivery across Government, until 2025, and supports the delivery of other key Government policies and objectives, including Project Ireland 2040, the Climate Action Plan, and the National Remote Work Strategy.

Our Rural Future represents a new approach to rural development, and takes a more strategic and holistic approach to investing in and maximising opportunities, inclusivity, and sustainability for people living and working in rural areas. The Government’s vision is for a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national wellbeing and development, to ensure no one is left behind.

Connectivity, particularly through transport links, is hugely important for people who live in rural areas. The policy recognises that equitable availability of services is essential to encourage people to live in rural communities. Fit-for-purpose transport services and schemes, particularly in terms of quality, reliability and affordability, is an important socio-economic enabler for rural areas.

The Climate Action Plan and efforts to promote decarbonisation have highlighted an additional need to reassess how people travel. Improvement and further integration of rural transport services will enable people to continue to live in rural areas, and access education and social activities.

Included as part of the key deliverables outlined in the plan, the following are set out in regard to transport:

- Provide improved rural public transport services and pilot new transport initiatives to enhance the quality of life for people in rural areas.
- Deliver expanded Local Link services through the NTA's Connecting Ireland, Rural Mobility Plan.
- Ensure that public transport services in rural and regional areas are accessible to persons with disabilities and reduced mobility.
- Through the Healthy Ireland programme, support improved health and wellbeing of rural communities in collaboration with Local Authorities and local stakeholders and partners.
- Invest in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country. Invest in the local and regional road network to maintain roads to a proper standard and improve regional accessibility.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process conducted for the review of the School Transport Scheme, the Department of Rural and Community Development stated that they welcome sustainable transport solutions which encourage social cohesion and its broader benefits. They acknowledged that the school transport scheme also assists in combatting social isolation and reducing social exclusion, for example by facilitating people with disabilities to access school. They further welcomed the cross-Government approach to this review, which will support and complement other Government strategies; one which identifies new measures to develop the infrastructure and facilities, as part of the School Transport Scheme offering, to encourage people to live in rural Ireland.

5.4 Initiatives to encourage walking and cycling to school Safe Routes to School Programme

The Safe Routes to School Programme, which was launched in March 2021. The programme is an initiative of the Department of Transport and supported by the Department of Education. It is operated by the Green-Schools Programme in partnership with the National Transport Authority and the local authorities.

The Safe Routes to School programme was launched to support walking, scooting and cycling to primary and post-primary schools. The programme will invest to create safe walking and cycling

routes within communities, to alleviate congestion at the school gates and increase the number of students who walk, scoot or cycle to school.

Alongside the provision of cycle parking the Safe Routes to School Programme aims to support active travel to school (walking and cycling) by offering schools the opportunity to: Improve safety at the school gate by providing ‘front of school’ treatments to alleviate congestion and improve access routes to school by improving walking and cycling infrastructure.

The Safe Routes to School Programme is referenced in the *Our Rural Plan* whereby it is stated that the Programme for Government places an emphasis on improving our transport infrastructure to ensure that people can travel more safely by bicycle or by walking in our towns and cities. The Government has committed to investing €1.8 billion in walking and cycling over its period in office. This will facilitate a step-change in the number of people journeying by bicycle or foot on a daily basis.

The Programme for Government also envisages that every Local Authority, with assistance from the National Transport Authority, will adopt a high-quality cycling policy, carry out an assessment of their roads network and develop cycle network plans which will be implemented with the help of a suitably qualified Active Travel Officer with clear powers and roles. While cycling networks are mostly associated with urban travel, there is huge potential for cycling within and between rural towns and villages, and particularly in the hinterland of rural towns. The Government has committed a €50 million fund in 2021 for Local Authority investment in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure, specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country.

As part of the review of the School Transport Scheme it is noted that as part of the stakeholder engagement process that while there is general support for programmes to support walking, cycling and active travel to school, it is the case that for many children walking or cycling to school is not an option given the distance they live from their school of attendance, concerns over road safety and lack of street lighting or foot paths in many parts of rural Ireland or because of a child’s special needs. With regard to the latter it was also raised as part of the stakeholder engagement process that consideration should be given to including children with special educational needs in the Safe Routes to School Programme and that such schemes should be designed to be accessible to all.

With regard to safety on roads, more than 80% of road deaths in Ireland occur on rural roads, according to the Road Safety Authority and the Garda Síochána⁹ despite more collisions in urban areas. The RSA deliver key road safety messages to a diverse audience - from primary school children to farm workers - through a wide range of engaging and interactive campaigns, initiatives and resources. In their six month road safety review which was completed in 2021, they noted that:

- Ireland did not see reduction in fatalities in 2020 in line with reduced traffic, and has slipped to 5th position in EU 27 ranking in 2020.

⁹ [PowerPoint Presentation \(rsa.ie\)](#)

- Drivers and motorcyclists' highest risk for fatalities in 2021 to date, but vulnerable road users represent a higher share of serious injuries to date relative to fatalities.
- Increased focus on preventing serious injuries acknowledged and will be of priority in the next government Road Safety Strategy.
- Change in pattern evident for day of week and time of day for fatalities, but Dublin and rural roads represent high proportion of fatalities.
- Concerning regression in attitudes towards speeding suggests increased need for education/enforcement in this area in particular.
- Urgent need for road safety education and enforcement as country opens up.

School transport helps to increase road safety as it seeks to reduce the number of single vehicle journeys on Irish roads especially rural roads.

5.5 Development of Transport Infrastructure - Bus Connects/Ireland Connects

As stated in section 5.1, it is included in the Climate Action Plan that expanding sustainable mobility options to provide meaningful alternatives to everyday private car journeys is necessary to reduce transport emissions. Continued and enhanced investment in walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure and services across the country is required on a scale not previously seen. There is a commitment to delivering an additional 500,000 daily sustainable journeys by 2030 (c. 14% increase on current levels) through the implementation of major transport a number of projects including BusConnects and Connecting Ireland.

BusConnects is the National Transport Authority's programme to greatly improve bus services in Irish cities. It is a key part of the Government's policy to improve public transport and address climate change in Dublin and other cities across Ireland. BusConnects Dublin includes the Network Redesign and the Core Bus Corridors. BusConnects is a key component within a number of Government and regional policies which include the National Development Plan 2021-2030, Climate Action Plan 2021, the National Planning Framework 2040 and the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035.

Connecting Ireland is a major public transport initiative developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) with the aim of increasing connectivity, particularly for people living outside major cities and towns. The plan aims to improve mobility in rural areas, and it will do this by providing better connections between villages and towns by linking these areas with an enhanced regional network connecting cities and regional centres nationwide.

Connecting Ireland seeks to make public transport for rural communities more useful for more people, and it will do this by:

- Improving existing services;
- Adding new services; and
- Enhancing the current Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) network which meets the transport needs of people who live in remote locations.

As part of the Connecting Ireland initiative, the NTA completed a comprehensive assessment of the existing network of regular public transport services operating across the country on a county-by-county basis. This has given a clear understanding of how well the public transport network currently serves towns and villages in terms of service levels at certain times of the day and days of the week. It has also helped to clearly identify the issues such as gaps in the network where the option to use public transport is not available.

Ireland is not densely populated. Outside the major urban centres, Ireland's settlement pattern is distributed in a highly dispersed manner. Therefore, it is difficult to cost-effectively organise public transport services to cater to everyone's needs. In very isolated rural areas, the demand for travel may be so low as to preclude the provision of traditional bus services. These needs may be more readily met by innovative means, such as demand responsive services, local hackney services or community car schemes. Other factors complicating the delivery of effective public transport in rural Ireland include the trend of an aging population who often suffer diminished mobility and the trend amongst the younger segment of the population to leave rural areas to pursue employment and education opportunities in towns and cities.

The NTA has recently finalised proposals for Connecting Ireland and has commenced the rollout of new and improved services which will happen on a phased basis from 2022 to 2025

It is also worth noting that the NTA recently commenced a pilot integrated TFI Local Link public transport project in Co. Leitrim which is useful in considering future potential for integration of school transport and public transport. The integrated pilot project for Leitrim consisted of the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the Donegal Sligo Leitrim Transport Coordination Unit (TCU) working closely with the HSE to plan and develop a revised network of TFI Local Link services for Co. Leitrim. The services are designed to meet the needs of mainstream public transport users as well as the transport needs of passengers accessing (non-emergency) health care services. The first phase was implemented on 28th June 2021, with all services now introduced.

As referenced above, the NTA recently launched the *Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan*, which identifies gaps in connectivity across the country, excluding the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), regional cities and large towns. *Connecting Ireland* proposes enhancing existing services, adding new bus routes and new services, in addition to expanding the demand responsive local bus network. The revised services for the Leitrim project are aligned with *Connecting Ireland* and have significantly increased the connectivity between locations and improved access to facilities and services.

Prior to the roll out of this pilot project, the TCU procured and managed a number of ‘closed’ transport routes on behalf of the HSE with a charge applicable to all users of these services. These routes served a range of HSE day services including mental health, intellectual disabilities and older people services. The revised network and timetable amalgamates all of these ‘closed’ routes into mainstream public transport, providing fully integrated and accessible services which are covered by the Free Travel Scheme.

5.6 The rights of the Child

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO¹⁰) is an independent statutory body, established in 2004 under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 (2002 Act). Under the 2002 Act, the Ombudsman for Children has two core statutory functions:

- to promote the rights and welfare of children under the age of 18 years living in Ireland, and
- to examine and investigate complaints made by or on behalf of children about the administrative actions of public bodies, schools and voluntary hospitals that have or may have adversely affected a child.

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992, the Committee on the Rights of the Child provide guidance to States on how to fulfil their obligations to children under the UNCRC and periodically examine States’ progress in this regard. The OCO have communicated certain principals in their submission, including the right to education. As regards children’s right to education, every child in Ireland has a constitutionally protected right to education. The provision of transport to school can be seen as a critical component to realise this right. This right to education must be achieved on the basis of equal opportunity and must be accessible to everyone without discrimination. The provision of access to appropriate and, where necessary, specially tailored forms of transportation is crucial to the realisation by persons/children with disabilities of their right to education. It is therefore vital that between the three available schemes, children of all abilities are enabled to travel to school.

Decisions affecting a child’s access to school transport should be timely, made in the shortest time possible and grounded in an understanding that availability of transport should never act as a barrier to children’s enjoyment of their right to education.

Independent, effective, safe, accessible and child-centred redress mechanisms should also be in place to facilitate children and their representatives to appeal decisions relating to school transport. In line with the Council of Europe’s Guidelines on child-friendly justice, all children and families should be

¹⁰ Information provided from the Ombudsman for Children’s Office Submission, February 2022

informed about their right to appeal, how to access available redress mechanisms and the follow-up given to any appeal that is lodged, including the relevant professionals involved.

In accordance with Article 19(2) of the CRC, protective measures should include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment. Authorities at all levels of Government are responsible for the protection of children from all forms of violence

The OCO have highlighted concerns on individual cases, in doing so it ensures that the School Transport Scheme is in line with wider policies in relation to promoting the welfare and rights of children in Ireland.

TUSLA, The Child and Family Agency ¹¹is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland.

The Agency operates under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, a progressive piece of legislation with children at its heart and families viewed as the foundation of a strong healthy community where children can flourish. Partnership and co-operation in the delivery of seamless services to children and families are also central to the Act.

TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS) operate under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, a piece of legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. TUSLA has responsibility for ensuring that every child in the State attends school or otherwise receives an education, and for providing educational welfare services to support and monitor children's attendance, participation and retention in education;

By working together with parents, schools and young people they overcome barriers to their school attendance and participation. TESS have highlighted any concerns to School Transport Section to ensure transport is in place where appropriate, thus enabling students to continue to attend school.

5.7 Access to Education for Children with Special Educational Needs

It is included in the Programme for Government that we will “Ensure that each child with a special educational need has an appropriate school place, in line with their constitutional right”.

¹¹ Information provided from [EWS Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

The EPSEN Act includes the aim that children with special educational needs should be educated, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment and that those with special educational needs should have the same rights to appropriate education as children without special educational needs.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process one of the findings was that the SEN Transport Scheme supports many children in attending specialist school placements which they may otherwise may not be able to attend. Many children attend special classes and special schools that are some distance from their home and the SEN school transport scheme is highly valued by these families who due to the requirement to bring other siblings to school, the lack of their own transport and other additional commitments may not be able to transport their child to the special class/ special school in which their child is enrolled.

Many children due to their special education needs may not be able to access mainstream school transport or public transport. The SEN school transport scheme provides an appropriate environment (with escorts where required) which facilitates children with special education traveling to school.

It is noted in the recently published document by the National Council for Special Education - “Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes - An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society” that a number of considerations are set out which are relevant to the review of the school transport scheme, including:

- *We consider that all children benefit from living in an inclusive society where together they learn to understand difference that arises from diverse groupings – whether race, ethnicity, disability, gender, religion and so on. The NCSE is aware of the argument that in order to build inclusive societies children should first be educated together rather than being separated into different schools or class groupings based on their needs or disability.*
- *We consider there has to be robust evidence to justify why students should have to travel, sometimes considerable distances, outside their local area in order to attend school and in doing so lose the connection to their local communities.*
- *We question why certain local state-funded schools should be able to decide only to admit students of a certain ability, even though these schools can be resourced to accept all students. We encourage the Minister to commence, as soon as possible, Section 62 (7) (e) (iii) of the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018 and other relevant sections. Section 62 prohibits schools from taking into account a student’s academic ability, skills or aptitude when deciding on an application to the school.*

The NCSE has also advised that issues related to the lack of provision of closer suitable placements and the specialism which a specific setting offers the student in meeting their needs can be considered mitigating factors. This is relevant especially in relation to special schools where under current specialist setting parameters, specific schools currently offer curricular and specialist medical supports not offered or suited to meeting the needs of children as do other schools. Within the terms

of the policy advice for Inclusion currently at Ministerial level, the provision of educational placement provision to all children within their local area would see a change in this context

Under the current eligibility criteria children are deemed eligible for transport to the nearest school or class that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined in consultation with the NCSE and its network of special educational needs organisers (SENOs). As part of the stakeholder engagement process issues were identified about how this often means children travelling long distances to schools outside of their communities. However, as stated above, it was also a finding of the stakeholder engagement process that the SEN Transport Scheme supports many children in attending specialist school placements which they may otherwise may not be able to attend. As referenced above many children attend special classes and special schools that are some distance from their home and the SEN school transport scheme is highly valued by these families who due to the requirement to bring other siblings to school, lack of own transport and other commitments may not be able to transport their child to the special class/ special school.

Chapter 6 – Examination of the value for money of the scheme (including the cost to the Exchequer and parents/guardians).

In the school year 2019/2020 there were 120,578 pupils on school transport at a cost of just under €224m and estimated emissions of 70,638tCO₂ Coe travelling 132m km.

Total Costs

As outlined in the Phase 1 report of the Review the total cost for running the School Transport Scheme in 2019 was €223.6m.

In 2019 some 93.71% of the total scheme costs were funded by the Exchequer with the balance of funding coming from pupil contributions.

With regard to the cost breakdown in terms of pupils on the mainstream scheme and SEN scheme, in 2019, this was:

- Mainstream services costs were €85.6m or 38% of the total scheme costs with mainstream pupil representing 106,357 or 88% pupils of the total pupils.
- SEN services costs were €121m or 54% of the total scheme costs with SEN pupil representing 14,221 or 12% pupils of the total pupils.
- The balance being the administration costs associated with running the scheme.

The total cost per child on mainstream services was €1,100 in 2019. With Parental contribution covering 14% of these costs. The cost to the exchequer during the same period has was €941 per child.

Special Educational Needs Scheme Costs

Cost on a per pupil basis.

The total cost per child on SEN services was €8,680 per pupil in 2019. SEN transport is generally availed of at no charge to the parent.¹²

The cost per pupil on the SEN scheme is higher than that per pupil on the mainstream scheme due to the fact that services are more specialised, can be individual in nature, tend to be longer in terms of distance travelled and may require escort support.

TABLE 6.1

School Transport Scheme - Projected Costs 2019-2027 with assumptions									
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Total Mainstream Costs	85,931,335	90,972,147	96,194,716	100,458,702	104,967,554	102,113,225	103,966,503	105,397,841	106,595,038
Total SEN Costs	121,518,445	135,947,019	152,312,834	184,059,237	199,112,078	217,358,701	235,172,702	256,023,457	277,436,240
Total Service Costs	207,449,780	226,919,167	248,507,550	284,517,939	304,079,632	319,471,926	339,139,205	361,421,298	384,031,277
Total Administration Costs(Excluding Dept Costs)	16,451,648	16,748,600	17,036,451	17,322,966	17,363,012	17,343,545	17,198,933	17,011,671	16,783,483
Total Projected STS Costs	223,901,428	243,667,766	265,544,001	301,840,905	321,442,644	336,815,472	356,338,138	378,432,969	400,814,761
Mainstream costs as a % of total costs	38%	37%	36%	33%	33%	30%	29%	28%	27%
SEN costs as a % of total costs	54%	56%	57%	61%	62%	65%	66%	68%	69%
Administration costs as a % of total costs	8%	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%

¹² These costs are based on a combination of the actual costs per BÉ audited statement of account and the Departments expenditure on grants, Bus Escorts and other non BE costs as per the appropriation accounts. 2019 was the last year of normal operations prior to the impact of the Covid pandemic on the scheme operation and costs and is therefore being used as the base cost for the review.

Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 6.2

School Transport Scheme - Pupil Numbers availing of Transport									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Primary	41,186	40,490	40,711	39,893	39,952	39,630	38,729	38,294	38,128
Post-Primary	63,546	63,656	64,113	62,893	64,118	64,795	65,545	66,104	68,229
Total MS	104,732	104,146	104,824	102,786	104,070	104,425	104,274	104,398	106,357
SEN	8,238	8,317	9,239	9,791	9,822	11,650	12,500	13,410	14,221
Total on Transport	112,970	112,463	114,063	112,577	113,892	116,075	116,774	117,808	120,578
Concessionary of Total									
Primary Concessionary	4,312	6,026	7,297	9,669	12,169	12,272	14,108	14,181	15,050
Post-Primary Concessionary	542	2,923	5,103	8,989	12,987	12,970	14,297	14,286	15,069
Total Concessionary	4,854	8,949	12,400	18,658	25,156	25,242	28,405	28,467	30,119

School Transport projected costs

An initial analysis has been conducted on the projected costs of operating the scheme. This initial analysis is based on a number of assumptions:

Mainstream (MS) related costs are based on the 2019 cost per MS pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 6.2 as above together with the following assumptions:

1. No change to the current pupil contribution rates. (It was recently announced that the annual pupil contribution charge has been removed for the 2022/2023 school year. This was announced as a temporary measure for the 2022/2023 school year so this remains as an assumption)
2. Contractor costs assume an increase of 5% per annum in line with current trends with a subsequent decrease to 3.5% per annum in line with the projected decrease in demographics.
3. Contractor costs continue to remain at 90% of the total MS costs.

Summary of Parental Costs	Return Journey to pick up point*	Return Journey to Avg CSO Distance to School**	Return Journey to Avg STS Distance to School***
Distance of one way journey	3.2km	10km	20.5km
Round Return Journey Distance	12.8Km	40Km	82Km
<u>Daily Costs of Round Return Journey</u>	€	€	€
Average Estimated Fuel Costs	1.22	3.82	7.84
Average Estimated Non-Fuel Costs	1.49	4.66	9.55
Average Journey time Costing	4.21	13.17	26.99
Total Estimated Daily Costs	6.93	21.65	44.38
<u>Annual Costs of Round Return Journey</u>	€	€	€
Average Estimated Fuel Costs	223.99	699.97	1434.93
Average Estimated Non-Fuel Costs	272.74	852.30	1747.22
Average Journey time Costing (commuter)^	771.02	2409.43	4939.32
Total Estimated Annual Costs	1,267.74	3,961.70	8,121.48
<u>Annual Emission charges to Society</u>	€	€	€
CO ₂	6.27	20.07	40.15
NO _x	2.62	8.38	16.77
PM2.5	1.15	3.69	7.38
Total Estimated Annual Costs	10.04	32.15	64.30
Total Estimated Costs of Parent Transport	1,278	3,994	8,186
Notes for table users:			
Example 1* This example is it assumed that the Post Primary Pupil resides 3.2km from their nearest pick-up point for which their is no grant,and parent/guardian chooses to drive the pupil to and from the pick-up point and travels the 2 return journey from the home of the pupil. The Cost of a Bus ticket has not been factored in this example.			

Example 2**In the example of where an eligible pupil did not use school transport and the parent takes the decision to drive the pupil to and from post primary school and travels the 2 return Journeys from the home of the pupil, using the average CSO distance of propriamity to the nearest post primary school , which is 10km.(In this example we are using the eligible post primary school pupil number as a % of the total population. In order to be eligible for school transport a pupil must reside 4.8 kilometres or more from their nearest education centre. CSO figure - taking the % of the population from the CSO data for distances living greater then 5Km (as 4.8km is not represented in the data) eligible Post primary school and apply this % to the post primary school going population in the varies categories and the average of this data gives us the 10km.

Example 3***In the example of where an eligible pupil did not use school transport and the parent takes the decision to drive the pupil to and from post primary school and travels the 2 return journeys from the home of the pupil, using data supplied by BÉ on the average distance a Post Primary mainstream pupil travels on the school transport scheme services in 2019, of 20.5km.

^Commuter Time- Commuter time is used as this is the journey purpose - Companion/escort journeys .Average CSO hourly earning for 2019 were used in these assumptions.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) related costs are based on the 2019 cost per SEN pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 6.2 above, together with the following assumptions:

1. An increase of 6% per annum on the current SEN pupil rate in line with current trends on all associated SEN costs.
2. That the uptake of SEN transport remains at 94% of the total SEN pupil population who are attending special schools and special classes.

Administration related costs are based on the current cost per pupil rate and take into account the annual profiled pupil numbers as set out in table 6.2 above, together with the following assumptions:

1. These costs to remain static in line with current trends. However, while it is noted that the cost of administering the scheme since 2011 has been relatively static, the number of routes and vehicles particularly on the SEN scheme has grown significantly.

Value of the scheme to the Exchequer and parents/guardians

In this section we examine the value of the scheme to parents/guardian on mainstream transport and the value of the scheme to the Exchequer. In general, parents/guardian of SEN pupils tend to receive door to door transport at no added charge to the parent. Value identified in this section is in relation a parent/guardian of a mainstream pupil would similarly apply to a parent/guardian of a SEN pupil where they drive their child to school.

Cost per pupil

In 2019, the total mainstream cost per pupil for the exchequer was €941 as taken from phase one of the review.

PARENTAL COSTS

The following are examples used to illustrate the estimated costs of transport for parents as provided in the table – Summary of Parental Costs.

Example 1 - Taking the example of a typical post primary pupil who uses School Transport services and resides 3.2km from their nearest pick-up point. Assuming that the pupil's parent/guardian chooses to drive the pupil to the pick-up point. That parent would expect to have incurred a total cost of €1,628 in the 2019 school year, this cost includes a parental contribution of €350, based on a single ticket for a one-child household.

Example 2 - Where an eligible pupil did not use school transport and the parent takes the decision to drive the child to the nearest post primary school, using the CSO's current average distance to their nearest post primary school (when eliminating all those under 5km) of 10km, this is estimated to have cost the household on average €3,994 per annum. This is €2,366 greater than the cost of putting the child on school Transport.

Example 3 - where an eligible post primary pupil did not use school transport and the parent takes the decision to drive the pupil to post primary school, using the average current distance a mainstream pupil travels on the school transport scheme services of 20.5km this is estimated to have cost the household on average €8,186 per annum. This is €6,558 greater than the cost of putting the child on school Transport.

EXAMPLES OF PARENTAL COSTS PER PUPIL IN 2019

	Mainstream Primary	Mainstream post primary	Mainstream post primary - no transport –20.5km to school
Annual parental contribution	€100	€350	N/A
Cost of driving to pick up of 3.2km	€1,278	€1,278	N/A
Total Cost to parent	€1,378	€1,628	€8,186

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN ANALYSING THE COSTS

Motorised individual transport is also closely associated with other traffic-related problems, such as injuries and fatalities, air pollution, congestion, noise, and urban heat effects.

In general, the cost of travel is impacted more for a lower income families, living in a low walkable Deprived (LWD) neighbourhood, and as such these families are significantly more likely to have more cars per adult and do less active travel than if you lived in a high walkable Deprived (HWD) neighbourhood. And while there isn't a significant difference in the fuel spend the average in a LWD

household spends €10 more per week on fuel despite earning €12k less per annum before tax than HWD households.¹³

The health benefits with active travelling are important to note. The Sustainable Mobility and Transport 2021 survey found that in relation to alternatives to car usage, over four in ten (40.2%) of those driving for the purposes of going to school/college, said that they could take the bus instead while one in nine (11%) said that they could walk.

The World Health Organisation for Europe has identified that if all citizens in the EU aged 20- 74 cycled or walked an additional 15 minutes a day, 100,000 premature deaths could be prevented each year.¹⁴

EMISSIONS AND EMISSION COSTS

The SEAI have identified transport as by far the largest source of energy-related CO₂ emissions in Ireland reporting 12,000,000tCO₂e per annum. Before the COVID-19 pandemic it was responsible for over 40% of energy related CO₂e emissions in 2019. Transport had caused most CO₂ emissions every year from 2013 to 2019. Public Transport produces 4.4% of total transport emissions in a year whereas private cars contribute to nearly 52% of transports total annual emissions. According to the SEAI as set out in the report *Energy related CO₂e emissions in Ireland 2020* when CO₂e emissions from private cars reduced by 21% in 2020 this was a total saving of 1,300,000tCO₂. School transport emissions were estimated at 70,638tCO₂e in 2019.

Emissions come at a cost to our environment, our pockets and to our health. The shadow price of carbon for non-Emissions Trading System (nETS) emissions is based on the estimated cost to Ireland of removing emissions from the atmosphere i.e., the abatement cost. Economic appraisals are required, where appropriate and relevant, to value emissions from the “basket of seven” greenhouse gases Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), Methane (CH₄), Nitrous Oxide (N₂O), Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF₆), Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), Perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and Nitrogen Trifluoride (NF₃) were practicable for inclusion.

ABATEMENT COSTS

The total School Transport Scheme emissions are estimated to be 70,638 tCO₂e per annum. The estimated abatement cost that Ireland will face to reach binding climate targets is estimated to be just over €162m or a discounted cost of €82m in estimated abatement costs when using the Shadow Price of Carbon 2019-2050 per tonne of CO₂e emissions (non-ETS) as set out in the Department of

¹³ Source - **The Future of Sustainable Urban Mobility: Enabling Travel Behaviour Change - Dr Lorraine D’Arcy, Sustainability Action Research & Innovation Lead, TU Dublin**

¹⁴ ^ (using the figures in Dept. of Transport Appraisal based on 2011 GNP values and <https://distancecalculator.globefeed.com/> as distance /time calculator).

Transport's Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects and programmes dated March 2016 (Updated October 2021).

NON GREEN HOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Emissions from school transport alone can cause local air quality problems and associated health impacts. High levels of pollutants also have the potential for secondary impacts on water quality, nature conservation resources and the built heritage:

1. Particulate Matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres (PM_{2.5}) - Rural Based – €119k per annum
2. Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x) - €4.1mm per annum

The estimated average cost of damage marginal abatement cost from GHG in economic terms from the School Transport Scheme are as follows:

3. CO₂e emissions - €5.2.m per annum

The calculations for Non-Methane Volatile Organic Compounds (NMVOCs) and Sulphur Oxide (SO_x) have not been assessed at this point. The above total for GHG and non GHG emissions costs are €9.4m annually for the exchequer (As it is a cost of repairing the damage i.e. proving health services, water treatment etc.).

It also recommended that appraisals continue to place a value on noise where appropriate. As this point no value on noise has been factored into these costings.

The total emissions of the School Transport Scheme equates to an average CO₂e emissions per pupil per annum of 0.37 t CO₂e and the average abatement cost from GHG and non- GHG emission is estimated at €43 per pupil per annum.

The total emission created by a parent/guardian to place a mainstream pupil on transport when living 3.2km from a Bus Stop and where the parent choses to drive the pupil to the bus stop is less than 0.31t CO₂e per annum based on 2019 values. The average cost of estimated cost of damage from GHG and non- GHG emission is estimated at €16 per annum per car.

Where a parent does not use school transport and takes the decision to drive the child themselves in an average size family car to post primary school using the average distance CSO distance to their school of 40km daily for a double round trip, the estimated annual emissions created by this is 1t CO₂e per car based on 2019 values. The average cost of estimated cost of damage from GHG and non- GHG emission is estimated at €47 per car.

Where a parent does not use school transport and takes the decision to drive the child themselves in an average size family car to post primary school using the average distance a pupil travels currently

under STS to their school of 82km daily for a double round trip, the estimated annual emissions created by this is 2t CO₂e per car based on 2019 values. The average cost of estimated cost of damage from GHG and non- GHG emission is estimated at €94 per car.

EFFECTS ON EMISSIONS FROM REMOVING THE SCHEME.

As set out in the National Travel survey 2019, one fifth of journeys for the purposes of companion/escort journeys include collecting or escorting somebody to their place of education/ collecting or escorting somebody to a childcare facility. Private cars are the transport mode with the largest energy use.

The same survey identified that just under 29% of all journeys were less than two kilometres and almost three in ten (29.5%) journeys of less than two kilometres were companion/escort journeys, when the journeys are over 8km were identified this reduced to 14.6% of journeys. Of journeys that were much shorter, less than quarter of an hour, almost one quarter (24.3%) were companion/escort journeys reducing down to 11% for the same reason when journeys were over 60 minutes in duration. Companion/escort journeys accounted for 22.4% and 22.7% respectively of private car journeys of persons residing in Dublin and outside of Dublin. Companion/escort journeys accounted for nearly three in every ten (28.8%) trips taken by persons in the 35 to 54 years age group. Nearly one quarter (23.7%) of journeys by persons in the 35 to 54 years age group travelled in the morning between 07:00 and 09:59, while a further 19.3% of journeys taken by this age group were between 13:00 and 15:59.

MAINSTREAM TRANSPORT

It is estimated that if mainstream school transport was removed altogether and alternative transport arrangements were put in place by parents this would displace over 69,164 families, creating daily emission of 138,328 t CO₂e per annum which would be additional emissions of 95,380 tCO₂e when compared current mainstream STS emissions of 42,948 t CO₂e per annum. Also a disbenefit to parents would be the value of their lost time using the value of commuter time this is estimated to be a total loss of €388m per annum when using 2022 values for time and traveling the current STS average distances.

Other cost factors include:

- The averaged additional abatement costs from GHG and non- GHG emission would be €4.4m per annum.
- A cost of €201m to exchequer in abatement charges or discounted at €118m..
- In addition there would be an additional costs to the exchequer of increase congestion in our towns and cities, increase the cost for

wear and tear on cars and roads and the number of road traffic accidents and increase would be estimated cost in the region of €62m on an annual basis and with a potential to result in an additional estimated 3 road deaths per annum..

EFFECTS ON EMISSIONS WITH INCREASED CAPACITY ON BUSES

Based on 2019/20 data, if all 50,300 available seats (excluding SEN routes), which could potentially be filled based on future decisions associated with the scheme, this could potentially have a positive impact on daily CO₂e emissions by reducing the amount of single vehicle (car) journeys saving an additional 367 t CO₂e on a daily basis or 67,161 t CO₂e per annum. Furthermore this would be at no extra costs to the exchequer. In fact it could deliver the following savings:

- Saving in relation to estimated cost of damage from GHG and non-GHG emission would be *€1.6m per annum. (€64.3*25,150)
- Savings in abatement cost €73m or discounted to €43m,.
- It also offers parents a benefit in quality of life with additional leisure time/reduced commuting time. The estimated benefit of this time is €141m.
- In addition there would be an additional savings to the exchequer on reduced congestion in our towns and cities, reducing the cost for wear and tear on cars and roads and the number of road traffic accidents would be estimated saving in the region of €23m an annual basis and a potential to save 1 road death per annum.

The following table summarises the analysis and detail above.

TABLE 6.3 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF PARENTAL COSTS AND BENEFITS OF THE STS

Parental costs (2019)	Costs per pupil per annum per household	Emissions per Pupil per annum based on 2019 emissions	Averaged Shadow cost of Emissions per pupil per annum based on 2019 emissions	Discounted Abatement costs per pupil for charges up to 2050 payable by the exchequer. Based on 2019 emissions	Other qualitative measures
On School transport - Potential Parental cost for post primary mainstream pupil on STS(including a drive to pick up point)	€1,557	0.71t CO ₂ e	€10	€1,438	If all citizens in the EU aged 20-74 cycled or walked an additional 15 minutes a day, 100,000 premature deaths could be prevented each year.
Not on School transport Parental cost for pupil not on the STS (40 km per daily)	€3,994	1tCO ₂ e	€32	€2,015	Disbenefit of €2,409 to each household in relation to time taken to make journey. Increase collision costs, increased wear and tear on our roads.
Not on School transport Parental cost for pupil not on the STS (82 km per daily)	€8,186	2tCO ₂ e	€64	€4,029	Disbenefit of €4,939 to each household in relation to time taken to make journey. Increase collision costs, increased wear and tear on our roads.

*Estimates are based on the previous CO₂e emissions calculation and assumes that pupils accommodated travelled previously 2 per car journey.

The estimate assumes all spare seats are accommodated regardless of specific demand and supply characteristics associated with local geographic/demographic conditions

TABLE 6.4 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF STS MAINSTREAM EXCHEQUER COSTS AND BENEFITS

STS Exchequer Costs	Costs per mainstream pupil annum	Averaged Emissions per Pupil per annum based on various climate targets*	Averaged Shadow Price of Emissions per pupil per annum based on reaching various climate charges	Averaged Discounted Abatement costs per pupil for charges up to the period 2050 based on reaching various climate charges	Other qualitative measures
2019 Exchequer cost	– €941	0.25 tCO ₂ e	€29.63	€462	Lower health costs due to reduced collisions and reduced emissions.
Removal of mainstream Transport	€-	.65tCO ₂ e	€60.97	€1,105	Increased health costs due to reduced collisions and reduced emissions.
Increased Capacity on STS (no additional services)	€639	0.09tCO ₂ e	€14.58	€189	Lower health costs due to reduced collisions and reduced emissions.

Any further or future options arising from the review will be fully analysed as part of phase 3.

Calculations

2012 Scheme Changes

Implementing the 2012 Scheme Changes in full would involve the removal of all routes with less than 10 eligible pupils and the downsizing of vehicles to cater for eligible pupils only.

Of the total 68,229 post-primary pupils who availed of transport in the 2019/2020 school year some 15,069 pupils availed of transport on a concessionary basis. Of the total 38,128 primary pupils who availed of transport in the 2019/2020 school year, some 15,050 pupils availed of transport on a concessionary basis.

Based on 2019/2020 School year removal of routes with less than 10 eligible pupils would affect 1342 routes and see the removal of services to give an estimated saving of €12.9 million with 11,138 concessionary pupils losing services and possible displacement of 6,447 eligible pupils.

Implementing the 2012 scheme changes in current school year 2021/2022 would affect 1,480 routes and see the removal of services to 26,393 pupils (6,858 eligible and 19,535 concessionary pupils) and which would result in savings of just under €7million per annum.

Furthermore this removal of services would also result in an estimated additional daily emissions of 71,812 KgCO_{2e}, assuming pupils displaced travelled 2 per car journey.

In terms of emissions, diesel and petrol fuelled private cars can emit up to 5 times more carbon dioxide than buses per passenger kilometre. In the context of the STS, if a minibus is withdrawn from a STS route, it would on average only take two additional diesel or petrol cars making the school journey to exceed the carbon dioxide amounts emitted by the minibus

Based on the DoE query, below is a draft estimate of current daily CO_{2e} emissions associated with the School Transport Scheme -2019/2020 - Daily emissions are as follows

CO _{2e} Equivalent Emissions	Post Primary	Primary	SEN Post Primary	SEN Primary	Total(KgCO _{2e})
Taxi	120	302	11,278	49,664	61,365
Mini	10,796	18,725	6,417	76,025	111,963
Medium	42,822	44,229	548	6,347	93,946
Large	73,516	42,734	500	404	117,153
Double Decker	917	525	0	0	1,442
Total	128,171	106,515	18,744	132,440	385,870

Calculations are based on estimated fuel litres based on current estimated daily KM's.
 Co2Emissions (KGCO2E) are based on 2.638 per litre of fuel
 The estimate is based on laden KM's does not take into consideration individual route characteristics including vehicle type, pupil loadings, road conditions, congestion, etc.

Additionally, based on 2019/20 data, the table below shows the impact of occupying number of available seats (excluding SEN routes), which could potentially be filled based on future decisions associated with the scheme. This could potentially have a positive impact on daily CO₂e emissions as shown below by reducing the amount of single vehicle(car) journeys: (fill all seats – no extra cost, pupils no's,

CO ₂ e Emissions	Post Primary	Primary	SEN Post Primary	SEN Primary	Total
Taxi	67	388			455
Mini	10,389	26,686			37,074
Medium	33,402	69,119			102,522
Large	82,088	139,076			221,164
Double Decker	1,617	4,268			5,885
Total	127,564	239,537			367,101

Estimates are based on the previous CO₂e emissions calculation and assumes that pupils accommodated travelled previously 2 per car journey.

The estimate assumes all spare seats are accommodated regardless of specific demand and supply characteristics associated with local geographic/demographic conditions.

Furthermore, the following table provides estimates of the potential additional daily fuel emissions which could occur if runs with less than 10 eligible were curtailed resulting in additional double occupancy vehicle (car) journeys: (bus not running and Car put on and daily emissions

CO ₂ e Emissions	Post Primary	Primary	SEN Post Primary	SEN Primary	Total
Taxi	150	173			322
Mini	4,251	13,474			17,725
Medium	8,125	9,310			17,435
Large	17,704	18,529			36,233
Double Decker	-3	100			97
Total	30,226	41,586			71,812

Estimates are based on the previous CO₂e emissions calculation and assumes pupils displaced travelled 2 per car journey.

Projected estimated numbers of pupils to avail of School Transport

Table 6.2 presents projected demand using demographic trend data.

The estimated number of pupils to avail of transport at primary level has peaked and it is anticipated that demand (both eligible and concessionary) will decline in the next 10 years.

With regard to post-primary, demand overall is expected to peak in 2024 in line with demographics, with 2021 being the key year for increased demand for concessionary places.

Chapter 7 – Examination and analysis of transport schemes in other jurisdictions

In undertaking this review, a number of EU member states were invited to complete a survey to assist with the analysis of transport schemes in other jurisdictions. A total of 12 complete or partially complete surveys were returned. In addition, a meeting was held with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, to discuss how the school transport scheme operates in that jurisdiction.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education is responsible for home to school transport policy and legislation; the Education Authority (EA) is responsible for its operation, administration and delivery. Eligible pupils receive transport assistance in a number of different ways: on dedicated EA buses (yellow buses), dedicated school buses provided by Translink or private operators, are awarded passes for use on public bus/rail/ferry services and where necessary, some pupils are transported by private taxi. Where an eligible pupil cannot be provided with a seat on a vehicle, a parental allowance may be awarded.

In the last school year approximately 85,700 pupils availed of transport assistance a cost of £91 million which is equal to €105.5m

Eligibility for Assistance under Current Home to School Transport Policy in Northern Ireland

Circular 1996/411 breaks down the provision of transport assistance for qualifying pupils to two criteria: walking distance and suitable school.

The walking distance is set in legislation as being 2 miles for primary school pupils and 3 miles for post-primary. A suitable school is a grant-aided school in any of the following categories: – Catholic maintained – Irish Medium – Controlled or Other Voluntary – Integrated – Grammar (denominational) – Grammar (non-denominational)

Therefore a pupil will currently be eligible for transport assistance: (i) if they live beyond the relevant distance criterion and attend a suitable school; and (ii) they have been refused a place in all suitable schools in their chosen school category within 2 miles of their house (3 miles for post-primary).

A pupil may also be eligible for transport assistance if they have statement of special educational needs that specifies a special transport need.

The Department undertook a review of the school transport scheme in 2018 which is currently on hold since March 2020 due to a wider independent review of the NI Education system.

With regard to the survey responses received from EU member states, the data provided indicated that school transport services are for the most part state funded and operated locally through municipalities or local authorities. Few member states reported the responsibility or partial responsibility to be a Government department. For this reason, many states do not have available data for total costs or numbers of pupils accessing the scheme. Table 7.1 below illustrates the main aspects of the scheme in the various member states

- In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education have responsibility for some groups and therefore have provided an approximate figure of 140,000 pupils travelling to school on a daily basis. While the approximate total cost of the service per year in Elementary - 220.000.000 HRK Secondary- approx. 280.000.000 HRK (a total equivalent of €66m per annum).
- Portugal have no central data for pupil numbers, however the cost of special education school transport is reported at €10 million per year. Transport services for children with special educational needs are managed by municipalities in partnership with schools and transport services for children with special educational needs are 100% funded by the state.
- In Luxembourg the cost is approximately €60 million for the provision of school transport services to pupils. There are no figures available for primary school pupils as they usually attend their nearest schools, there are 50000 secondary school students attending school.
- In Romania a total of 130,000 avail of school transport per school year at a cost of €20.2 million per year.
- Finland have reported on figures for primary school and post primary school transport separately. In 2017 a total of 119086 were eligible for free school transport which equates to one fifth of the school population for that age group. School transport was also provided to pre-primary school pupils. The cost per pupil for primary school students was €1350 per pupil and over €180 million to provide these services for the 2017 year.
- For post primary students in Finland, the data provided was for the 2019/2020 academic year. A total of 45186 students availed of school transport, costing €43 million. There is a higher budget of €57 million available for the 2022 school year.
- School transport is free in a lot of EU member states or heavily subsidised.

Eligibility

For the most part, the eligibility tends to be distance from the pupil's home to their school. More information is included in table 7.1 below.

- The distance requirement varies from a zero distance requirement in Luxembourg to 7 or 9 kilometres requirement depending on age or grade in Finland and Denmark. Geography can also be a factor in eligibility,
- In Hungary for example, they offer free school transport only to those who attend school in their district regardless of distance.
- In Germany the entitlement to school transport only exists when travelling to the nearest school, however, *“a partial refund of travelling costs may often be granted in cases where parents decide to send their children to a school other than that which is nearest to their home”*.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Similarly to Ireland, in most of the returned data from respondent member states free transport is provided for students with special educational needs. In some member states SEN pupils' travel to school on mainstream school transport, public transport or transport which is suitable for their needs. Some students attend separate SEN schools or classes and some pupils are integrated in to mainstream classes.

- In Hungary, they reported that; *71% of SEN children attend inclusive schools whereas 29% of children attend schools especially for SEN children, more precisely either distinct schools especially for SEN children or schools which have a section for SEN children.*
- In Romania school transport services are fully inclusive to SEN students.
- In Luxembourg SEN students can attend mainstream schools or students *with specific needs may attend a class at a competence centre, either full-time or alternating with attendance at a regular primary or secondary school. The children might attend classes in the competence centres either on an occasional basis or for children with multi-disabilities on a permanent basis when integration in a regular school is not possible. The competence centres are organised by the central government which also provides specialised transport services*

Walk and cycle to school initiatives

Four out of ten of the respondent member states reported that they have initiatives to encourage other forms of travelling to school such as walking and cycling, six member states did not have initiatives and two did not return any data.

- In Portugal for example *bicycle and helmet kits are distributed to all schools (2 kits per 2nd cycle of basic education schools (5th to 7th grades) - the bicycles can be used by all schools and students in the school clusters.*
- While in Luxembourg the Department of Education *supports projects in the schools aiming at teaching children to use and ride a bike safely and to motivate them to use the bicycle as a means of transport.*
- *Finnish Schools on the Move is a national action programme aiming to establish a physically active culture in Finnish schools and other educational institutions. Schools and institutions participating in the programme implement their own individual plans to increase physical activity mainly during the school day but also during the way to school or after school. The programme is carried out by the Finnish National Agency of Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture.*
- In Lithuania Schools actively participates in European activity week which encourages travel to school using zero emissions.

7.1 Data from EU Member States

Country	Eligibility data	Cost	Responsibility
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Germany	Slight differences in each Lander. Generally a minimum of 2km for Kindergarten and upper grades are 3-4km No distance requirement for SEN	Varies in each Lander, subsidised usually depending on parental income.	Local Authorities
Portugal	Distance – 3km No distance requirement for SEN	Free for all students	Local Authorities, funding through direct transfer from state budget derived from local taxes
Croatia	Children in elementary school (1 st to 4 th grade) who live more than 3 km away from school; children (5 th to 8 th grade) who live more than	Subsidised (75%) Or 100% if students are disadvantaged	Regional government – elementary school. Ministry of Science and Education – special
	5 km away from school and children with disabilities. For children who live in the settlements without public transport or who need to use routes without pedestrian walkways to travel to school transport service is provided regardless of distance from home to school.		needs and co finances public transport secondary schools.
Finland	Distance 5km primary, 7km secondary or time it takes to travel	Subsidised, public transport, school transport or grants. Free once eligible	Municipalities and Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland
Hungary	No distance, there is no mileage limit, but as a result of the legislation, the district of the school providing compulsory admission is adapted to the place of residence of the students.	Free, school bus, bus company, public transport or grants provided.	School transport is provided by maintainers such as state, church etc

Lithuania	Distance – 3km or over	Free of charge public transport is accessible only for those students who live in rural areas and are required to travel up to 40 kilometres to their schools. 20 percent discount on the public transport is given for all the students who live in the city area.	60 independent municipalities, Department of Education, science & sport are responsible for the partial supply of busses.
Luxembourg	No distance – all eligible	Free of charge, public transport or school transport	For primary education the communes are responsible for school transport service, transport to and from secondary schools is under the responsibility of the Ministry of public transport
Malta	Distance – 1km or more, attending state school in a particular geographic location	Free of charge	Data not supplied
Romania	Geographical area considered	No charge, free public transport or school transport, those not attending school in their home area are still given free transport	Department of Education
Slovenia	Distance - for those over 1 st grade – 4km or more	Free transport	Local community
Denmark	Distance- 2.5km for 1-3 year grade 6km for 4-6 year grade 7km for 7-9 year grade 9km for 10 th grade	District school – free, other areas may incur a cost. Public transport and school transport	Municipalities

Estonia	Different for each local authority, geographical area considered	Can be a charge depending on authority. Public transport can be used depending on local authority.	Local authority
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Chapter 8 – Analysis of the stakeholder engagement process

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, the Department identified key stakeholders in order to seek their views on the School Transport Scheme and incorporate these views and opinions in to the review of the scheme. The Department developed a strategy for collaboration and communication with stakeholders. Overall there were five separate stakeholder groups. Letters issued to a number of stakeholders including school management bodies, parent representative organisations, special education interest groups, EU member states, and school principals to seek their views on the school transport scheme. Parents/guardians and post primary students were invited to complete online surveys.

A series of bi-lateral meetings were completed with relevant Government Departments, agencies/bodies and organisations to discuss the review and to seek views. Meetings have been held with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, the National Transport Authority, the Department of Transport, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Ombudsman for Children, the National Council for Special Education, the School Transport Appeals Board, the National Council for Special Education, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, TUSLA, Bus Éireann and the Road Safety Authority.

The following table at **8.1** indicates the number of submissions and survey results received as part of the stakeholder engagement process.

TABLE 8.1

Stakeholder Groups	Numbers received
Complete surveys from Parents/Guardians	8,180
Complete surveys from Post Primary Students	2,433
Complete surveys from children attending Primary & Special Educational Needs Schools.	87
Submissions from school management bodies, parent representative organisations, principals representative organisations	6
Other Departments and Organisations	5
School Principals	73
Special Education Interest Groups and industry representatives	4
Other (emails received from parents)	37
Other (emails received from employees of schools)	18
Public Representatives	3
EU Member State Surveys	12

Parents/Guardians

Parents and guardians were invited to complete an online survey so that their views on the school transport scheme could be heard and included in the review of the scheme. A total of 8,180 completed surveys were submitted. A further 4,384 surveys were incomplete.

Of the completed surveys that were returned for analysis, these returns included thousands of ‘other’ free text responses of parent’s/guardian’s views. A full list of questions asked in the survey and the statistical data responses are contained in the appendix 1. Of the 8,264 respondents to question 1, a total of 59.7% used or had previously used the department’s School Transport Scheme services, the remaining 40.3% did not use the service at the time of the survey.

Question 2 asked parents/guardians to respond with which service their families used. A total of 5883 responded, 40.4% used primary school transport, 42.3% used post primary transport and 17.3% used Special Educational Needs school transport.

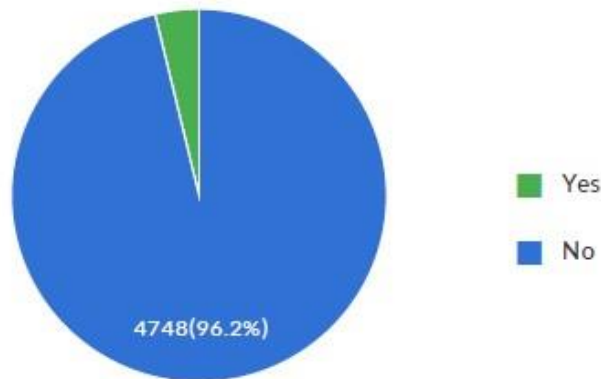
In analysing the information gathered in this survey, it is clear that school transport is vital for families. In question 6 the parent/guardian survey asked how important school transport is, 88.1% of

respondents returned an answer of essential, while 11.7% stated it was important, only .2% stated it was not important.

There were two possible responses for question 7, as illustrated in the chart at 8.2 below most of the respondents' state that public transport is not an option for them.

CHART 8.2

If School Transport was not available, is Public Transport an option for you?

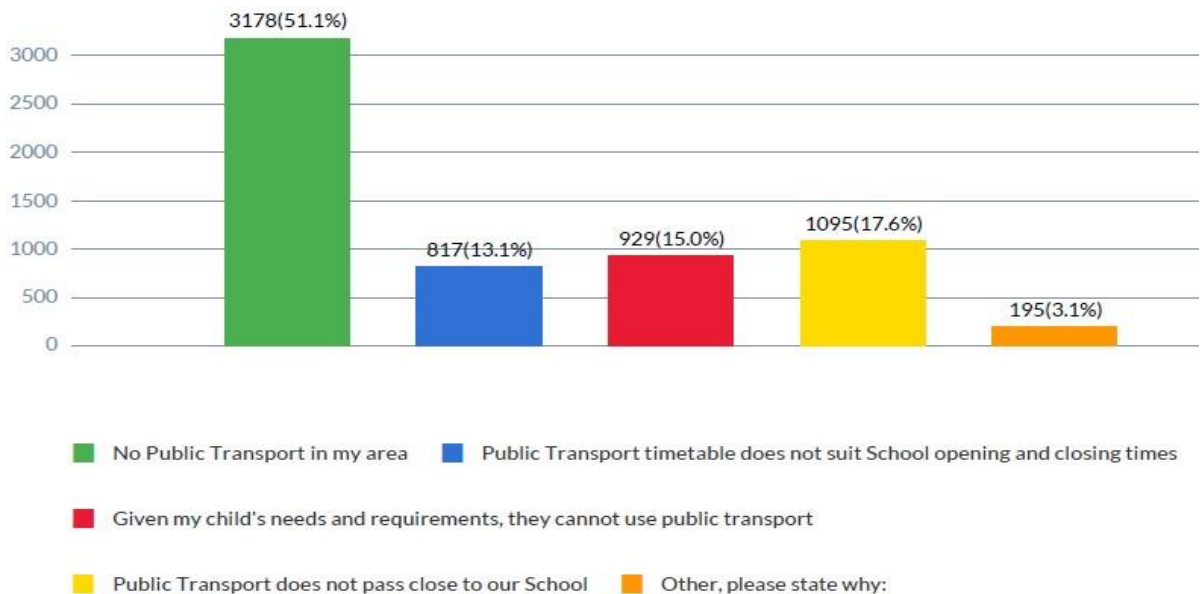


In the follow up question parents/guardians were asked if they responded “no” to question 7 to advise why. The statistical information of those responses are available in the chart at **8.3** below.

GRAPH 8.3

Parent and Guardian School Transport Survey / If you selected 'No' to the above question, please advise why

If you selected 'No' to the above question, please advise why



Of those responses 3.1% (195) responded with other free text. Some of the key themes in these responses relate to:

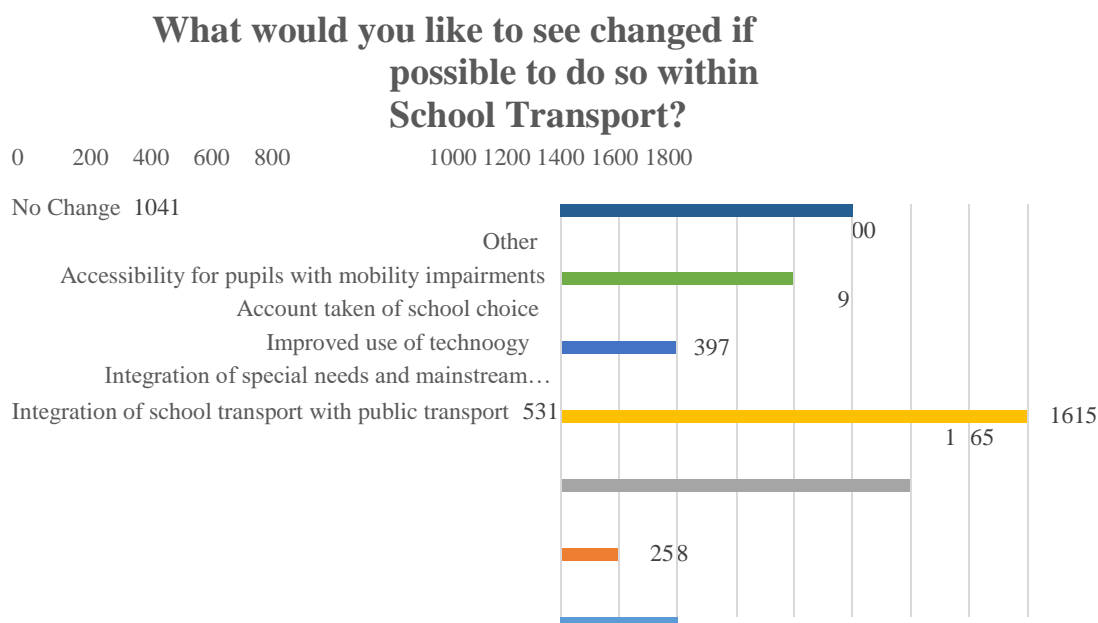
- The cost of private transport is too expensive.
- The lack of availability of alternative transport in rural settings.
- The difficulty working parents would face to attend work on time.
- Children are too young to use public transport.
- Some children that avail of SEN transport could not attend school if transport was not available due to the high cost of private transport, or their particular needs are met when they use school transport.
- ¹⁵Safety concerns for students.

¹⁵ Comments why public transport is not used: 1. For safety reasons and the public buses are not reliable/on time. 2. We don't have a car and my youngest couldn't use public transport as she is autistic with a moderate learning disability. 3. My children are too young to go on public transport unaccompanied by an adult. 4. It would mean crossing a dual carriageway or getting a transfer to the school. Possibly not that they cannot use public transport, but not capable of using it on their own

When asked what is working well with the school transport scheme, the highest response at 22.9% was that it was a safe, efficient service, the second highest response at 19.8% was that it helps families live and work in rural Ireland.

Parents/guardians were asked if possible, what changes they would like to see made to the scheme. In the chart at 8.4 below, it illustrates the importance of choice for some families when making decisions regarding school places.

GRAPH 8.4



Post Primary Survey

Post primary students were asked to complete an online survey. When asked how important school transport is to you, over 73% of respondents said it was essential, 18.3% said it was important and 8.09% said it was not important. Over 86% of those that responded said that public transport was not an option for them. There were over 70 comments relating to why public transport was not an option, some post primary students mentioned that:¹⁶

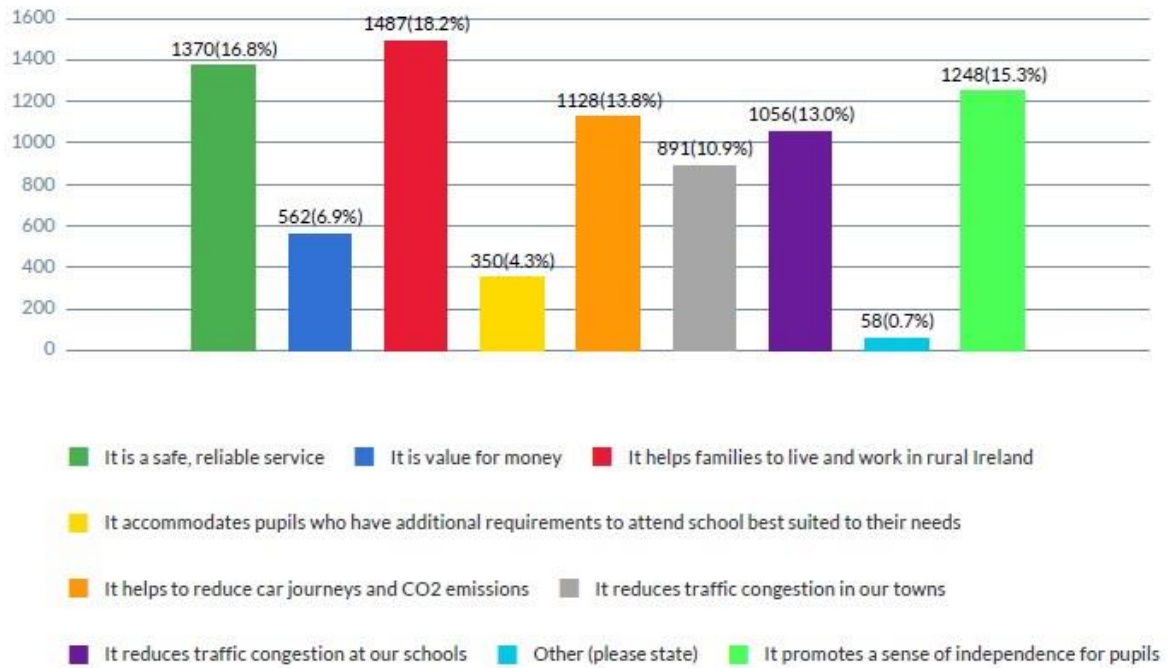
- Public transport does not pass close to their home/school.
- They live in a rural location where public transport is not available.
- School is close enough so they can walk/cycle.
- Some children with Special Educational Needs could not travel on public transport due to their complex needs.
- Parents/guardians drive them to school.

When post primary students were asked what is working well with the school transport scheme as illustrated in chart **8.5** below, the highest response is also the highest response in the parent/guardian survey which relates to helping families to live and work in rural Ireland.

- ¹⁶ 1. *My work timetable does not allow me to drive to the nearest stop which is 15 minutes away by car .*
2. *Our village only has 1 public bus passing through a day .*
3. *Bus passes my school but not from where I live.*
4. *My child has complex needs. Public transport is not suitable. Also we live in a very rural location*

GRAPH 8.5

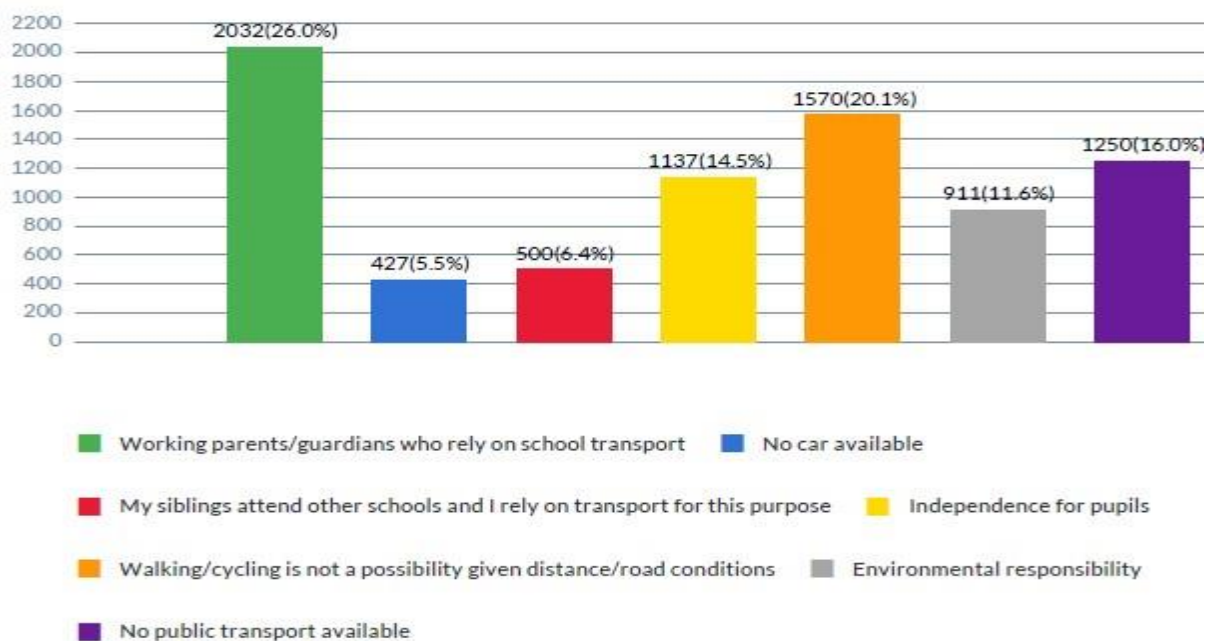
What in your opinion is working well with the School Transport Scheme?



When post primary students were asked why they thought school transport was important chart 8.6 below illustrates that the reliance working parents/guardians have on the scheme is a high priority for families.

GRAPH 8.6

In your opinion why is School Transport important?



Over 40% of the respondents to the parent/guardian survey said that their family did not use the service. When asked why they do not use the service, 1,418 which equates to 37% of the respondents stated that there was no bus service to the school.

The table 8.7 below illustrates, that some families that are yet to use the service are unsure of where to find information on the School Transport Scheme.

TABLE 8.7

Do you know where to find information in relation to making an application for school transport?	
Bus Éireann or Bus Éireann’s website	1219 (29.7%)
SENO or NCSE	60 (1.5%)
Department’s website	264 (6.4%)
School	600 (14.6%)
Other parents	323 (7.9%)
Social Media	54 (1.3%)
I do not know where to find this information	1544 (37.6%)
Other	38 (0.9%)

Climate Action

93.5% of parent/guardian and 94% of post primary student respondents said that school transport plays an important role in climate action. When asked how climate action could be improved, some of the following suggestions were received:¹⁷

- Additional electric/hydraulic vehicles should be used.
- Older vehicles should not be used as they cause higher emissions.
- Unnecessary use of private cars can cause higher emissions/traffic congestion.
- Distance eligibility should be reduced to encourage walking and cycling.
- Additional cycle lanes should be provided.
- Transport should be at full capacity.
- Students should attend their closest school.
- Encourage more people to use the service which will cut down on single car use.

Eligibility

For both parent/guardian and the post primary surveys comments relating to distance eligibility are as follows:

- Distance eligibility should be reduced/abolished.
- Primary and post primary should have the same distance criteria.
- The distance eligibility is too far.

¹⁷ Climate Action comments: 1. The school needs to take this into account as i live 5 minutes' walk to school but will be forced to drive 10 minutes to another school because of entrance criteria. This is wrong in this climate focused age. The government needs to take action to fix this.
2. It would be prudent for children to be attending schools in their local area. The school my child wants to go to is actually walking distance from my house. However there are buses and cars coming from up to 40 minutes away, bypassing their local schools to attend the school in my town. It is environmentally irresponsible for this to be happening. 3. Using environmental friendly petrol or hybrid bus
4. Newer buses 5. There are too many mini buses going to schools when larger buses to take more pupils would cut down on traffic, congestion and fumes 6. I don't think the buses are very efficient and emit a lot of harmful exhaust gases due to their age. Majority of buses in my area are shadowed by plumes of black smoke behind them.
7. Lay on set modern school buses that are environmentally friendly ie electric or hybrid. Keep our kids safe too. 8. Electric options

Comments relating to the closest school eligibility stated that¹⁸:

- The closest school rule should be abolished.
- Families should have more choice.
- This rule is unfair as the difference between the distances of two schools is sometimes minimal.
- The closest school rule should change back to 2011 catchment area rule.

Issues relating to cost of school transport were identified as¹⁹:

- The cost should be reduced or abolished.
- The cost is too expensive.
- The cost difference for families between primary and post primary is concerning.

There was a high response of commentary received in the free text ‘other’ responses in relation to concessionary tickets. Parents/guardians and post primary students responded that²⁰:

- Concessionary tickets should be abolished and recipients made eligible,
- Tickets should be given for the duration of the time the child attends school,
- School choice should be an option,
- More transport should be put on if there are higher demands regardless of eligibility.
- ²¹Child (ren) have missed school because they did not get a place on transport.
- Parents paid privately to bring their children to school.
- Parents had to reduce working hours to transport children to school.
- Cost of concessionary tickets should be reduced.
- Families should be notified sooner if they have a ticket.
- There should be a reduction in the requirement of 10 eligible student tickets to maintain a service back to 7 as it was pre 2011.

Special Educational Needs

When parents/guardians were asked would they like the option for their child to travel on a mainstream service, 89% said no. The chart below at 8.8 illustrates why, the issues mentioned in the other comments section related to:²²

- Being on a mainstream service would leave the child vulnerable to danger. It may be an option if there was a School Bus Escort on mainstream travel.
- The child's needs limit the options for integration in mainstream transport.

¹⁸ *More option available. My child did not get a seat on the bus this year even though she had one last year. This being because we can only apply for a concessionary ticket. She is penalised because she choose to go to a school that is not the closest school to our house. This needs to change. There is no public transport in our village.*

¹⁹ 1. Weekly/monthly ticket or leap card .medical card holders could pay a nominal fee there by reducing the cost for people like myself who work in low payed jobs. 2. Price difference between primary (€100) and secondary school (€350) ?cost tickets as school location is a same, and we use same bus and same road route

3. Reduce cost especially for two family members

²⁰Commentary for Concessionary: 1. *The concessionary ticket doesn't allow parents to use their kids medical card for payment despite not getting into the closest school.*

2. Allow more flexibility for rural transport tickets. Concessionary tickets means we are left waiting until the very last minute to find out if we have a service or not, often the first day of term. Shorter distances needed if no public transport is available.

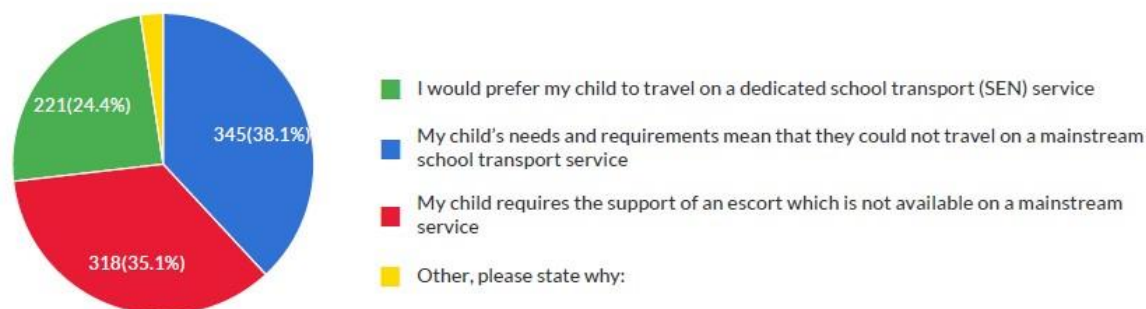
²¹ Commentary when no school transport was available: 1. *"Because of the pandemic, one parent was able to do some of the school drops/collections. Kids did miss some school because of it".*

2. *"I had to pay for a taxi 3 times a day"* 3. *"My husband had to reduce his working hours to transport children to school".*

²² Comments for SEN: All of the above. My child needs stability and close care when being transported. He could not travel main stream consistently as he is too often highly anxious and needs the smaller SEN transport with escort to ensure he is calm going in and out of school. Removing this service would be horrendous for him and could result in him not being able to go to school without me having a financially impacting change to my work to drive him which would impact the therapies we have to pay for privately as is

Bullying behaviour may occur on school transport.

CHART 8.8



Other Comments

For both the parents/guardians survey and the post primary student survey, there was an option to submit any other views or comments which they felt should be considered as part of the review of the scheme. A total of 2942 free text comments were received from parents/guardians and a total of 2447 free text comments were received from post primary students. In analysing these comments it became clear that many had more than one point. The key findings of this analysis were similar to the overall feedback received from submissions, surveys and bilateral meetings.

The concerns and issues that received the highest response rate centred on routes and whether they can be amended to reflect the individual needs of the parent/guardian or post primary students, concessionary allocation, cost, distance criteria, closest school rule eligibility, choice of school and the climate/congestion issues.

There was a high response rate regarding the essential nature of school transport in facilitating employment for parents and some concerns were raised around safety on transport and at pick up and drop off points. More support for rural families was also highlighted with many stating it was unsafe for children to walk or cycle to school. Information provision was also a concern with some parents and post primary students requesting a more electronic way of providing information from Bus Éireann that contains route information and an updated application status.

CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN ATTENDING PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SETTINGS.



The School Transport Section in the Department of Education worked with the Department of Children, Equality, Integration, Disability and Youth (DCEDIY) to consult with students who use the School Transport Scheme for Special Educational Needs (SEN) or the Primary School Transport Scheme to ask them what was working well with the scheme and how the scheme could be improved.

Pupils attending four schools took part in the consultation. 63 pupils attending 2 special needs schools shared their views on the School Transport Scheme for Special Needs Schools, and 32 primary school pupils shared their views on the Primary School Transport Scheme.

During the consultation the children were asked three questions and were asked to write or draw their response to each one. The questions asked were:

- What is good about your journey to school?
- What is not so good about your journey to school?
- What could make it better?

What is good about your journey to school?

The overall findings indicated that children were generally happy with their journey to and from school. The children mentioned the positive social interactions of the journey as spending time with friends, a friendly driver or the kind school bus escort²³. Both children from the mainstream and Special Educational Needs settings mentioned spending time with friends, the

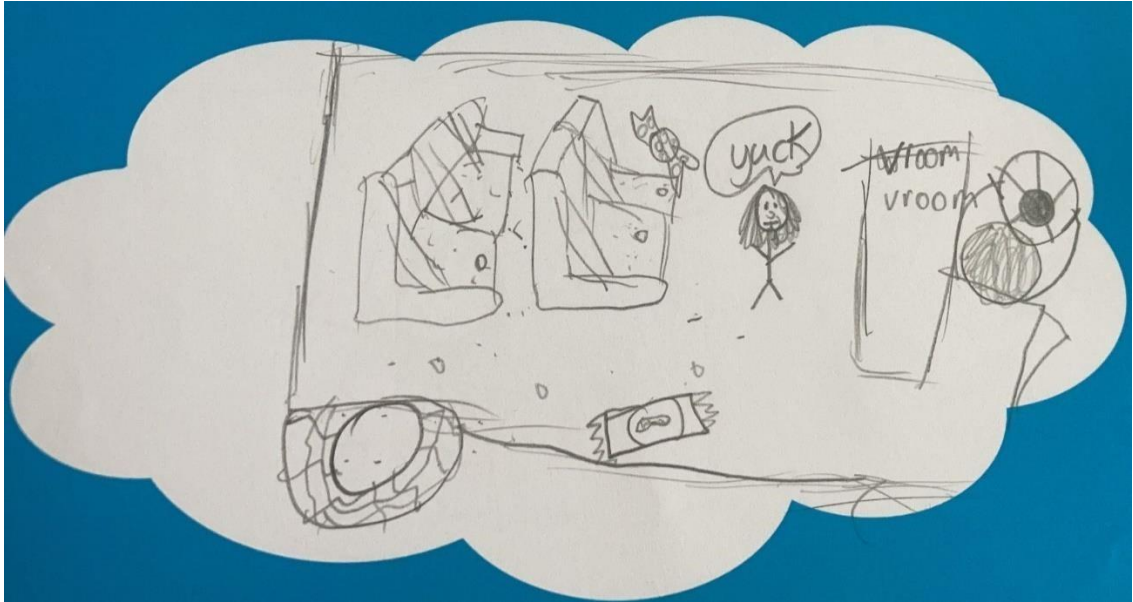
bus/taxi driver, children travelling on Special Educational Needs transport mentioned the escort, and the radio/listening to music as what is good about their journey.

- ²³*My bus escort brings things for me to colour and play with. (Special Needs School).*
- *I like that we talk a lot. I like my bus escort. She is good company (Special Needs School).*
- *I love to see my friends. I like to talk to my friends. (Mainstream School)*
- *I meet my friends on the bus. We are happy together. (Special Needs School)*



What is not so good about your journey to school?

In their response to this question, children who use mainstream and those using SEN transport services described the noise on transport, and the behaviour of other pupils in the bus. Some children disliked the early starts and several children described feeling tired on the bus. Some children travelling on mainstream services mentioned the condition of their bus being dusty, having rubbish on the floor and some having difficulty with seatbelts²⁴. A small number of the pupils from the special needs schools described long journeys and being bored on the bus.



- ²⁴The noise can be really loud sometimes but its fine most of the time (mainstream transport).
- Sometimes some of the seatbelts don't work. It is dirty so they should clean it more often (mainstream transport).

It should be noted that when asked *what is not so good about your journey*, many children commented that they were happy with their journey and would not change anything²⁵.

What would make it better?

Both groups of pupils made different suggestions for improvements. Pupils using the mainstream service focused on improving the interior of the transport such as cleaner buses, fix seatbelts, use the air conditioning. While pupils availing of Special Educational Needs transport suggested improving their travel experience by having a choice of music/radio station or having some entertainment such as a TV/IPAD and to reduce the noise/annoyance on the bus from bad behaviour²⁶.

It is clear that pupils using the mainstream and the SEN services place a great importance on the social aspect of travelling to and from school. Time with friends, chatting to the driver and school bus escorts feature highly in the consultation responses. While some suggested improvements were mentioned, generally the views overall were positive, travelling to and from school is a pleasant experience.

Bilateral meetings

As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the Department of Education met with a number of other departments, organisations and agencies to seek their views on the School Transport Scheme. The key findings of these bilateral meetings are as follows:

Climate Action – concerns around the impact on climate action if significant numbers of pupils are removed from School Transport/this being contrary to the goals in the Climate Action Plan.

Climate Action Plan and the commitment to 50% reductions in emissions by 2030 – concerns over issues with older vehicles, increased emissions, impact on air quality and climate change.

Walking and cycling initiatives – general support for initiatives to improve the promotion of walking and cycling to school where possible and in addition to school transport.

Transport and Rural connectivity - general support to promote integration between school transport and public transport services, but seen as a longer term option. The benefits of supporting rural development and rural living through provision of adequate transport services is noted.

Special Needs Scheme – the importance of the SEN scheme in facilitating access to school for children with special needs who otherwise may not be in a position to attend school is seen as vital for those children and their families.

Integration of the SEN and Mainstream schemes generally accepted as a positive approach but recognition that for some children with SEN, integration with mainstream may not ever be an option.

- ²⁵*Nothing is not good about my journey to school. I love every minute of it. I'm happy I'm not by myself anymore now that I have two more people on the bus with me. I could never be more thankful to have two more people on the bus with me. (Pupil at special needs school)*
- *Nothing. Everything is very good about the bus. (Pupil at mainstream school)*
- *Nothing I enjoy my journey all the time. (Pupil at mainstream school)*
- ²⁶*If the seats were cleaner and people were calmer. (Pupil at mainstream school)*
- *Stricter rules and no yelling because yelling could distract the driver. (Pupil at mainstream school)*

Some of the key issues raised as part of the written submissions received are:

- Length of journeys for some SEN pupils and the requirement for planning for the provision of SEN schools and classes.
- Issues around recruitment and retention of School Bus Escorts.

- General support for walking and cycling but recognition that for some children walking and cycling may not be an option (for some children with special needs or for children living in rural Ireland with no footpaths/street lighting/living long distances from their school).
- Insufficient public transport in many parts of the country, therefore school transport is a vital service.
- Climate change – school transport is an important instrument in tackling climate change and in reducing congestion in towns/at schools.
- For children with special needs, the service is vital in ensuring they can attend school.
- Issue of ethos being treated differently at primary and post-primary for eligibility.
- Discrete services for children from the Travelling Community should be considered so as to ensure no barriers to education.
- SEN Transport – sometimes delays in processing applications, not understanding the rationale provided by SENOs, delays sanctions for transport, more engagement required with parents in the process, more information should be provided to parents in the case of an application being refused.
- Concessionary pupils who get a ticket should be allowed retain it for the duration of their education.
- Training for drivers and escorts on SEN services – more training is required.
- The cost difference between primary and post-primary tickets should be considered. Free transport should be provided to children whose families are in receipt of state benefits.
- There should be more flexibility in eligibility criteria to take account of school choice.
- School transport services supports families who live and work in rural Ireland.
- Updating of school bus fleet to support climate action.
- Updating of ticketing and reporting technology.
- We received submissions that mention the overall administration of the School Transport Scheme, while all feedback is welcome, it is stated in the Terms of Reference under the scope of the review that the broader School Transport Scheme related issues, such as route design/efficiency or scheme administration arrangements are outside the scope of this review.

Chapter 9 – Examination of the fiscal sustainability of the scheme

In examining the fiscal sustainability of the scheme, the base year for analysis is 2019 as this is the last year of normal operation of the school transport scheme, i.e. it was prior to the impact of the pandemic, the current fuel price increases and the current conflict in Ukraine, which have all impacted on the operation and cost of the school transport scheme.

Similarly, in projecting costs, the projected cost does not take into account external impacts such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased fuel prices or the impact of the current conflict in Ukraine or other similar such events that could impact on the scheme between now and 2027.

1. Historic Costs

The total cost for operating the School Transport Scheme in 2019 was €223.6m. Over the period 2011-2019 total costs have increased by some 30% or €52.4m. Adjusting for inflation which accounts for €6.27m of this increase, this is a net increase of €46.1m or just under 27%.

In 2011, the breakdown of costs were as follows - 52% mainstream related costs, 35% SEN related costs and 13% administration related costs. In 2019 the spend profile has shifted to 54% SEN related costs, 38% mainstream related costs and 8% administration related costs.

Some 93.71% of the total scheme costs are funded by the Exchequer with the balance of funding coming from pupil contributions.

With regard to the cost breakdown in terms of pupils on the mainstream scheme and SEN scheme, in 2019, this was:

□ Mainstream services costs were 38% or €85.6m of the total scheme costs with mainstream pupil representing 88% or 106,357 pupils of the total pupils. □ SEN services costs were 54% or €121m of the total scheme costs with SEN pupil representing 12% or 14,221 pupils of the total pupils.

2. Projected costs

It is projected that in 2027 it could cost an estimated €400m to operate school transport services if all projected eligible and concessionary pupils were catered for. In 2021 prices this €400m would

have a net present value (NPV) of €303m. This projected cost does not take into account other external impacts such as the impact of the Covid pandemic, increased fuel prices or the impact of the current conflict in Ukraine or other similar such events that could impact on the scheme between now and 2027.

It is projected that the 2027 costs will be:

- Mainstream services costs - 27% or €106.6m of the total scheme costs with mainstream pupils representing 84% or 103,037 pupils of the total pupils using scheme services. In 2021 prices this would be an NPV of €105.5m.
- SEN services costs - 69% or €277.4m of the total scheme costs with SEN pupils representing 16% or 20,371 pupils of the total pupils using scheme services. In 2021 prices this would have an NPV of €198.3m.

Under the assumptions in projecting these costs, the figures indicate that the SEN scheme will continue to be the main cost driver for the scheme with both pupil numbers and costs projected to increase.

School Transport Scheme - Projected Costs 2019-2027 with assumptions										
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	
Total Mainstream Costs	85,931,335	90,972,147	96,194,716	100,458,702	104,967,554	102,113,225	103,966,503	105,397,841	106,595,038	
Total SEN Costs	121,518,445	135,947,019	152,312,834	184,059,237	199,112,078	217,358,701	235,172,702	256,023,457	277,436,240	
Total Service Costs	207,449,780	226,919,167	248,507,550	284,517,939	304,079,632	319,471,926	339,139,205	361,421,298	384,031,277	
Total Administration Costs (Excluding Dept Costs)	16,451,648	16,748,600	17,036,451	17,322,966	17,363,012	17,343,545	17,198,933	17,011,671	16,783,483	
Total Projected STS Costs	223,901,428	243,667,766	265,544,001	301,840,905	321,442,644	336,815,472	356,338,138	378,432,969	400,814,761	
Mainstream costs as a % of total costs	38%	37%	36%	33%	33%	30%	29%	28%	27%	
SEN costs as a % of total costs	54%	56%	57%	61%	62%	65%	66%	68%	69%	
Administration costs as a % of total costs	8%	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Financial Rationale

As outlined in chapter 6 it is financially beneficial for a household to use school transport than to drive their child to school and it is more cost beneficial to the exchequer to have more pupils on the mainstream School Transport Scheme as better value for money is achieved this way.

As can be seen in the table below removal of mainstream service would cost the Exchequer additional abatement costs before discounting of just under €105mm between 2019 and 2050.

The real benefits to the exchequer of the school transport scheme can be seen through its economic, environmental as well as health and wellbeing benefits all of which have been outlined in this report.

Removal of Mainstream School Transport costs in 2019						€		
Additional Abatement costs (Co2 with the scheme less Co2 with parents driving)						103,342,186		
Addition - Shadow price of		Current	No STS	Difference				
Co2		781,721	2,776,882	1,995,161				
Nox		1,826,040	1,159,788	-666,252				
PM		530,257	510,727	-19,531				
		3,138,019	4,447,397	1,309,378		1,309,378		
Total Shadow price of additional Emissions created						104,651,563		

3. Economic Rationale

There are many strong economic arguments for the school transport scheme. At its simplest, economics is concerned with the allocation of scarce resources. In allocating resources to the school transport scheme, it provides a targeted cohort of pupils', particularly those who face geographical constraints, ease of access to schools. A sustainable school transport scheme has wider economic benefits than merely improving access to schools and education. An economic rationale considers wider societal impacts on top of financial flows. Societal impacts can often be abstract and difficult to calculate, however these societal impacts are crucial when we consider the fiscal sustainability of a scheme of this scale. In many cases the economic/societal benefits may outweigh the financial costs to the scheme. In the case of the school transport scheme the wider economic benefits may include the reduction in environmental impacts, lower noise pollution, and reduced traffic congestion etc. School transport schemes can also have benefits including the reduction in environmental impacts, lower noise pollution, reduced traffic congestion and increased road safety, to healthier, more alert and engaged pupils, to increasing independent travel and associated life skills for pupils with SEN.¹⁶

Externalities

Without a school transport scheme, transporting children to school would have many negative effects on the wider society, these effects are known as negative externalities. Externalities are a source of market failure. If a good or service produces externalities, this means that the free market will not yield the socially optimal level of that good or service. This leads to a rationale for government intervention to correct for the externality, to ensure that economic efficiency and social wellbeing are maximised. Externalities can be both positive and negative. The government response depends on which type of externality is generated. A negative externality is generated when the action of producing a good or service leads to a negative effect on a third party. In economic terms, it is assumed that if the price of a good or service incorporates the externality, this leads to the optimal level of production. Examining the rationale of transport services is complex as transport services facilitate and enable other parts of our society and economy rather than being used for their own sake. Therefore, in exploring the rationale it is necessary to look at how transport supports and contributes to other outcomes. In this case the negative externalities of transporting children to school should be weighed against the positive externalities associated with education.

¹⁶ Timothy Ross, Patrick Bilas, Ronald Buliung, Ahmed El-Generdy, A scoping review of accessible student transport services for children with disabilities, Transport Policy, Volume 95, 2020, Pages 57-67, ISSN 0967070X.

Positive externalities associated with education include increased economic growth through productivity and innovation, increased socialisation, civic engagement and effectiveness of democratic institutions, increased health literacy and consequent reduction in negative health outcomes, lower crime rates, market efficiency and adaptation to technological change, higher employment levels etc. As the positive externalities of education far outweigh the negative externalities associated with transporting children to school, the school transport scheme aims to reduce the negative externalities associated with transporting children to school while also maintaining or perhaps even improving the positive externalities associated with education.

The school transport scheme will reduce the negative externalities associated with transporting children to school for example, a move to the school transport scheme from families driving their children to school will see a reduction in CO₂e and particulate matter emissions, road congestion, noise pollution and a reduction in the cost of time to parents. The damage caused by CO₂e particulate matter emissions has a particular negative impact on air pollution. According to a report completed by the Environmental Protection Agency, in 2019 alone particulate matter caused up to 1300 premature deaths in Ireland putting greater strain on our healthcare system. This figure is rising year on year, implying that children are most at risk of the negative externalities associated with air pollution. None of these issues are fully solved with the school transport scheme, however, they are all vital steps in the right direction in ensuring that transporting children to school tenders greater fiscal sustainability.

Merit Goods and Consumer Surplus

Merit goods, such as the School Transport scheme, are goods or services that the government feels that people will under-consume, and which ought to be subsidised so that consumption does not depend primarily on the ability to pay for the good or service. A merit good leads to a rationale for government intervention to ensure that the good is produced in the event that the free market does not produce it. This rationale is contingent on a determination that the benefits of provision outweigh the costs.

Parents and pupils are subject to imperfect information as they do not fully realise the benefits associated with the consumption of a merit good. The school transport scheme, generates an external benefit to others, from which society gains, but such benefits are unlikely to be known or recognised at the point of consumption. Given that decisions to consume are driven by selfinterest, it is unlikely that this external benefit will be taken into account when parents and pupils evaluate the worth of school transport. For example, a pupil may prefer traveling to school in their family car as they find it more comfortable, however, the pupil has likely not considered the long term environmental impacts in making this choice. From the pupil's perspective, putting a value on these external benefits is impossible, especially at the time of deciding to use school transport or not. The government deals with this imperfect information by subsidising or making school transport free (for medical card holders).

By subsidising or eliminating the cost of school transport the government are increasing the consumer surplus for parents or guardians who pay for school transport. The consumer surplus of a good represents consumers' willingness to pay minus what the consumers actually paid. As the cost of school transport, drops for the parent, the gap between the parents willingness to pay and what they actually pay increases. The increase in this gap is an increased Consumer Surplus. In cases where a drop in price leads to a larger uptake in school transport this will also see an increase in consumer surplus as we now consider the consumer surplus of the individuals who were not part of the scheme previously. This in turn allows a wide range of households to hold more money and therefore spend their consumer surplus elsewhere in the economy, which will help to stimulate economic growth. Hence, the government's treatment of school transport as a merit good, not only has external societal effects but also positively effects consumer surplus, enhancing the schemes fiscal sustainability.

Equity

Equity in the school transport scheme means providing equality of access to schools to all students, regardless of their social background or geographical locations. Government intervention to reduce inequity in transporting children to school helps to improve ease of access to school and promotes social inclusion for those living in geographically remote areas. Improving equity through the school transport scheme does not mean ensuring that every student has access to the same school transport, but that any geographical or economic constraints that might prevent a student from having equal opportunities are mitigated. The goal of government intervention to improve opportunities for students is to ensure that ease of access to education is unrelated to geographical area, as far as that is possible. Equity is not the same thing as equality. Equality would imply spending the same amount of time and resources on each student regardless of need. Equity allows for consideration of disadvantage, and facilitates a rationale for investing different amounts of resources in different areas based on need.

Horizontal equity refers to treating similar people in the same way. For example, if two students have similar geographical restraints, then horizontal equity is achieved if both are provided with the same services. Horizontal equity relates to perfect information and to equal power.

Vertical equity relates to making sure that resources are distributed proportionally. It might cost more to cater for a student with geographical restraints, but this can be justified on the grounds that they need extra help to enjoy the same opportunities as other students. Vertical equity also relates to redistribution. If school transport is partially paid for by taxes within a progressive taxation system, then providing standardised education to every citizen is redistributive because everyone gets a quality education, but more of the system is paid for by higher earners. This leads towards a fairer and more equal society.

Employing the principles of horizontal and vertical equity and combining these with evidence of successful interventions, some implications emerge for policy. In this context, a rationale exists for ensuring that the needs of all students are met, taking account of the fact that different students have different needs. In addition, ensuring vertical equity means taking a progressive approach to funding

disadvantaged students. Setting goals to tackle monetary, geographical restraints and accessibility for students and monitoring the progress and effectiveness of the investments would have beneficial impacts on both equity and fiscal sustainability.

Furthermore, in the case of equitable policy making for school transport there is a strong macroeconomic rationale for providing additional resources to the scheme, particularly with regard to the benefits of SEN services. Research indicates that there can be significant short and long term benefits in the application of independent travel training for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities on public transport services. The experience for SEN pupils can result in long term benefits to the individual in terms of a skill for life that might lead to greater social inclusion and employment prospects.²⁸ This in turn can stimulate economic growth and benefits the school transport scheme's fiscal sustainability.

²⁸ Jun Park & Subeh Chowdhury (2022) Towards an enabled journey: barriers encountered by public transport riders with disabilities for the whole journey chain, *Transport Reviews*, 42:2, 181-203, DOI: 10.1080/01441647.2021.1955035

4. Issues to consider

The cost of operating school transport has increased by some 30% or €52.4m in the period 2011 to 2019. The projected costs to operate school transport in 2027 is €400m, an increase of €176.9m or 79% over the period 2019 to 2027.

The main cost driver of the scheme has been and is projected to continue to be the SEN scheme.

It is acknowledged that options will need to be considered and implemented to ensure future fiscal sustainability of the scheme, including:

- Integration of the SEN and Mainstream Schemes where possible
- Review process to be built in to the SEN transport scheme
- Integration with public transport
- Restructured school transport charges
- Encouraging and enabling use of spare capacity on existing services
- Balancing the climate cost and climate savings against the cost of providing additional school transport provision
- Balancing the economic benefit to rural communities (allowing families live and work in rural Ireland, the employment created

mainly in rural communities by the operation of the school transport scheme) against the cost of providing school transport scheme services

These issues will be considered further in phase 3 of the review and all options emerging for the potential future operation of the scheme will be fully costed.

Chapter 10 – Objectives of the School Transport Scheme - Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, taking on board the issues considered in all previous chapters, the Technical Working Group sets out what it sees as the objectives of the School Transport Scheme. A number of potential options are set out to allow the scheme to deliver on these objectives. These options will be fully explored in the final phase of the review in order to make recommendations on the future operation of the scheme.

10.1 Original Objectives of the School Transport Scheme

The School Transport Scheme was established in 1967. It was created with the main objective of facilitating access to primary and post-primary education for those children, who because of where they reside, might otherwise have difficulty in attending school regularly.

The analysis conducted as part of this phase of the review indicates that for many families and children this remains a very valid objective and that for some families, in the absence of the scheme, they would face challenges in getting their children to school. This was highlighted in particular in the responses to parental surveys whereby over 88% of respondents said the School Transport Scheme is essential when asked how important the scheme is to them, and over 96% of respondents said that if school transport was not available, public transport is not an option. In addition, it was highlighted that for some families, given the rural location in which they live, not only is public transport not an option, but it is also the case that for many children walking to cycling to school is not an option given the distance they live from their school of attendance, concerns over road safety and lack of street lighting or foot paths in many parts of rural Ireland or because of a child's special needs.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process one of the findings was that the SEN Transport Scheme supports many children in attending specialist school placements which they may otherwise may not be able to attend. Many children attend special classes and special schools that are some distance from their home and the SEN school transport scheme is highly valued by these families who due to the requirement to bring other siblings to school, lack of own transport and other commitments may not be able to transport their child to the special class/ special school.

Therefore, it is considered that this original objective is still relevant and that it should remain that one of the objectives of the School Transport Scheme should continue to be to facilitate access for children to education.

10.2 What should the objectives of the School Transport Scheme be?

As stated above, it is considered that the original objective of the scheme is still relevant and that it should remain that one of the objectives of the School Transport Scheme should be to facilitate access and attendance for children to education. However, the review has highlighted other objectives which need to be considered in the assessment of what the objectives of the scheme should be. These include supporting the following:

- The right to education – in building on the objective to facilitate attendance, school transport as a support to ensure access and the constitutional right to education.
- School planning policy – to work with school planning and building policies to ensure optimum use of school building stock and capital investment.
- Facilitating access to the labour market – the scheme is an important enabler in facilitating access to the labour market for working parents/guardians. This was highlighted in the survey of both parents/guardians and post-primary students, with responses illustrating the reliance that working parents and guardians have on the scheme.
- Government policy – while not specifically referred to in some of the Government policies that were examined as part of this phase of the review (with the exception of the Climate Action Plan which has a specific reference to the review) the school transport scheme facilitates and enables other parts of our society and contributes to wider Government policy, such as:
 - Climate Action Plan – contributing to the objective to achieve 51% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 and the objective to achieve an additional 500,000 active travel journeys in that timeframe.
 - National Development Plan/Project Ireland 2040 –contributing to strengthening rural communities, sustainable mobility and access to education objectives.
 - Our Rural Future – supporting connectivity through transport links which is vital to rural communities.
 - Safe Routes to School Programme – supporting the initiative, but important to recognise that this is not possible for all children.
 - Bus Connects/Connecting Ireland – to build on the potential to integrate school transport and public transport and achieve synergies.

- The rights of the child – to recognise that it is enshrined in the constitution about the right to education, a rights based approach, equitable access for all children, supports for children to ensure access to education and promoting the rights and welfare of children.
 - An Inclusive Education for and Inclusive Society – to support the rights of children to be educated in as an inclusive environment as is possible.
 - Road Safety Strategy – to support a move toward vision zero in providing a safe service that removes cars and congestion from towns and the school environs.
- To provide a fiscally sustainable scheme and to provide value for money to parents and the exchequer

10.3 Potential options for the future operation of the scheme to meet these objectives

In ensuring that the scheme can achieve the aforementioned objectives, a number of potential options are proposed, which will be explored fully in the next and final phase of this review. These are:

- 1. Reduce or remove distance eligibility criteria, while being mindful of not reducing to such an extent so as to discourage walking/cycling initiatives, but which would have the potential to encourage more families to use school transport and reduce the number of car journeys.**

Distance eligibility has remained the same since 1926 at a very different time when there was less vehicular traffic on the roads, walking may have been the only option to attend school.

Reduction of distance eligibility could be considered as a current objective of the scheme by:

- reducing distance eligibility to 2km for primary and 3km for Post Primary
- making the distance eligibility equal for primary and post primary by reducing both to 2km
- reducing eligibility to a minimal amount so that walking/cycling can still be encouraged

2. Assess ticket charging options – should ticket charges be removed, reduced or increased or should restructured ticket charges be introduced?

Ticket charges have remained unchanged since the 2012 budget following the 2011 VFM report (with the exception of the temporary measure introduced for the 2022/2023 school year, which is to temporarily waive fees as a cost of living measure).

In order to offer some choice for families and ensure there is adequate capacity, restructured ticket charges could apply. For example; if a student attends their closest school their ticket would cost the least amount. For the second, third and fourth closest the ticket cost would be higher. Those that require transport and have the ability to pay, can do so with an increased choice of schools.

3. Transport based on demand as opposed to eligibility criteria

- Transport to be provided where there is a minimum number regardless of eligibility but with perhaps restructured ticket charges as referred to above. As has been seen from the analysis undertaken in this phase of the review, parental preference, transfer patterns from primary to post-primary, and admissions policies with regard to feeder schools, among other issues, all impact on school choice. School transport services would facilitate traditional enrolment patterns.

4. Initiatives to encourage more use of the primary scheme

There is spare capacity in some locations particularly at primary level, in order to encourage using transport at this level there could be

- An option for a school bus escort on board mainstream primary services as information provided in the parent/guardian survey does suggest that families are less likely to allow smaller children to travel on transport.
- Engagement with local areas where there is additional capacity/pilot schemes in areas to promote more use of transport at primary level.
- Offer minimal cost tickets for primary pupils

5. Integration of SEN and mainstream schemes (short and long term options)

As emerged in the stakeholder engagement process it is clear that SEN services are vital to families. The stakeholder submissions included views that students with special educational needs would greatly benefit from the independence of travelling to school with their peers on school transport. While this should be considered, we should also note that for some children, based on their needs, travelling to school on a mainstream service may not be a possibility. In the short-term the following options could be considered:

- School Bus Escorts are a vital part of the SEN scheme – could they travel on mainstream services where appropriate?
- Adaptation of vehicles.
- Training for drivers, escorts and information provision for students also travelling to support inclusiveness.

In the longer-term, it is considered that integration will only be fully potential as more special needs provision in terms of school places are available locally,

6. Integration with public transport

In the longer term there is potential to liaise with the NTA on the Connecting Ireland project which is currently in implementation phase. for potential synergies. The Department of Education and the NTA will continue to engage with a view to establishing where potential synergies may exist.

In all of the above, the Technical Working Group is mindful of the need to consider:

- Balancing the benefits of climate action against the cost of the scheme
- Balancing the economic benefits of the service, particularly in rural Ireland – employment created by the scheme itself, benefits of the scheme to working parents, etc. – against the cost of operating the scheme.
- The fiscal sustainability of the scheme.

10.4 Conclusions

The objectives of the School Transport Scheme are:

- To facilitate access and attendance for children to education in recognition of a child's constitutional right to education.
- To facilitate and support access to the labour market for working parents/guardians.
- To provide a safe, reliable and quality service
- To support school planning and building policy to ensure optimum use of school building stock and capital investment.
- To support Government policy with particular regard to –
 - The Climate Action Plan
 - The National Development Plan/Project Ireland 2040.
 - Our Rural Future 2021 – 2025
 - The Safe Routes to School Programme
 - Bus Connects/Connecting Ireland.
 - An Inclusive Education for and Inclusive Society
 - The Road Safety Strategy.
- To provide a fiscally sustainable scheme and to provide value for money to parents and the exchequer

As part of phase 3 of the review, the potential options as referenced in this chapter will be fully explored and costed, with a view to making recommendations on the future operation of the scheme to meet the above mentioned objectives.

Phase 3 of the review will involve a detailed analysis of issues around eligibility criteria, scheme performance, scheme expenditure, the potential to integrate the different strands of the schemes and the potential for integration of different strands of the scheme and a more co-ordinated approach with other Government Departments that also use transport services and will make recommendations on the future operation of the scheme.

Appendix 1 — Parent/Guardian Survey

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Parent/Guardian School Transport survey Questions

First Question

1. I am a parent/guardian of a child/children;
 - a) Who use or have used the Department's School Transport Scheme services (PART 1)
 - b) Does not use the Department's School Transport Scheme services (PART

Part 1

2. Please select the type or types of School Transport your children/children use
 - a) Primary School Transport
 - b) Post Primary School Transport
 - c) Special Educational Needs School Transport (mainstream or dedicated service)
3. Where did you find the information in relation to making an application for school transport?
 - a) Bus Éireann or Bus Éireann's website
 - b) SENO or NCSE
 - c) Department's website
 - d) School
 - e) Other parents
 - f) Social Media
 - g) Other:
4. How easy was it to access this information?
 - a) Easy
 - b) Moderate
 - c) Difficult
5. If you answered 'Difficult' to the above question. In your opinion, how could this information be easier to access?
6. How important is School Transport to you?
 - a) Essential
 - b) Important

c) Not Important

7. If School Transport was not available, is Public Transport an option for you?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. If you selected 'No' to the above question, please advise why

- a) No Public Transport in my area
- b) Public Transport timetable does not suit school opening and closing times
- c) Given my child's needs and requirements, they cannot use public transport
- d) Public Transport does not pass close to our School
- e) Other, please state why:

9. What in your opinion is working well with the School Transport Scheme?

- a) It is a safe, reliable service
- b) It is value for money
- c) It helps families to live and work in rural Ireland
- d) It accommodates children with special needs to attend the school best suited/resourced for their needs
- e) It helps to reduce car journeys and CO₂e emissions
- f) It reduces traffic congestion in our towns
- g) It reduces traffic congestion at our schools
- h) Other, please state why:

Primary or Post-Primary School Transport Schemes

10. If you currently use a Mainstream School Transport Scheme service, what type of ticket(s) does your family hold? You may choose more than one option if it applies

Primary School - Eligible ticket

- a) Primary School - Concessionary Ticket
- b) Post Primary School - Eligible ticket
- c) Post Primary School - Concessionary Ticket

11. Do you know the cost of a Bus Éireann School Transport Scheme ticket?

- a) Yes
- b) No

12. In your opinion, what would you like to see changed if possible to do so within School Transport?

- a) Integration of school transport with public transport
- b) Integration of special needs and mainstream transport
- c) Improved use of technology (online ticketing, ability to scan ticket from a smart phone, etc.)
- d) Account taken of school choice
- e) Accessibility for pupils with mobility impairments
- f) No Change
- g) Other, please state why:

13. Are you aware that applications for mainstream school transport must be made through Bus Éireann's on-line application system?

- a) Yes
- b) No

14. Are you aware that there is a closing date for school transport applications each year?

- a) Yes
- b) No

15. Are you aware that there is a closing date for payment of tickets each year?

- a) Yes
- b) No

16. Are you aware that if you are eligible for school transport and make a timely application (i.e. by the closing date in April) and there is no service, you may be eligible for a Remote Area Grant?

- a) Yes
- b) No

17. In your opinion is the current distance criteria for eligibility reasonable?

- a) Yes
- b) No

18. If you answered No to the above question do you think this distance criteria should be:

- a) Decreased
- b) Removed
- c) Increased

19. If your child/children use **Primary School** Transport What is the average length of your child/children's journey to primary school (length of time one way) on their school transport service?

- a) Less than 30 minutes
- b) 30 minutes to 1 hour
- c) 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes
- d) Over 1 hour and 30 minutes. Please provide details of the length of journey in the box:

20. If your child/children use **Post Primary School** Transport

What is the average length of your child/children's journey to post primary school (length of time one way) on their school transport service?

- a) Less than 30 minutes
- b) 30 minutes to 1 hour
- c) 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes
- d) Over 1 hour and 30 minutes. Please provide details of the length of journey in the box:

21. If your child/children use Primary School Transport Does your child/children normally travel:

- a) Both morning and afternoon
- b) In the morning only
- c) In the afternoon only

22. If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to Primary School?
- a) After school extra circular activity in evening
 - b) Parent/Guardian available to drop or pick up child/ren
 - c) Other, please state why:
23. If your child/children use Post Primary School Transport Does your child/children normally travel:
- a) Both morning and afternoon
 - b) In the morning only
 - c) In the afternoon only
24. If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to Post Primary School?
- a) After school extra circular activity in evening
 - b) Parent/Guardian available to drop or pick up child/ren
 - c) Other, please state why:
25. If your child/children use Primary School Transport. Could they walk or cycle to school as an alternative?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
26. If 'No' to the above question, please advise why:
- a) Unsuitable road conditions
 - b) Distance too far
 - c) My child's needs are such they cannot use these options
 - d) Other, please state why:
27. If your child/children use Post Primary School Transport. Could they walk or cycle to school as an alternative?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
28. If 'No' to the above question, please advise why:
- a) Unsuitable road conditions
 - b) Distance too far
 - c) My child's needs are such they cannot use these options
 - d) Other, please state why:

29. If your family has a concessionary ticket why is this the case?
- a) Distance from home to school is less than required eligibility distance
 - b) Not attending closest school
 - c) Both of the above
30. If your family has a concessionary ticket, have you ever been unsuccessful in obtaining a ticket for your child or children?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
31. If you answered Yes to the above question, how did you transport your child/ren to school?
- a) Driven by parent/guardian
 - b) Driven by alternative person or carpool
 - c) Arranged private bus
 - d) Children walked or cycled
 - e) Public Transport (public bus, train, luas etc.)
 - f) Other, please state why:
32. If your family is not attending their closest school, why is this the case?
- a) Parental choice
 - b) Tradition for children in the area to attend their school of attendance
 - c) Bus service does not run to closest school
 - d) Closest school is not the parish school
 - e) Closest school was full
 - f) Other, please state why:

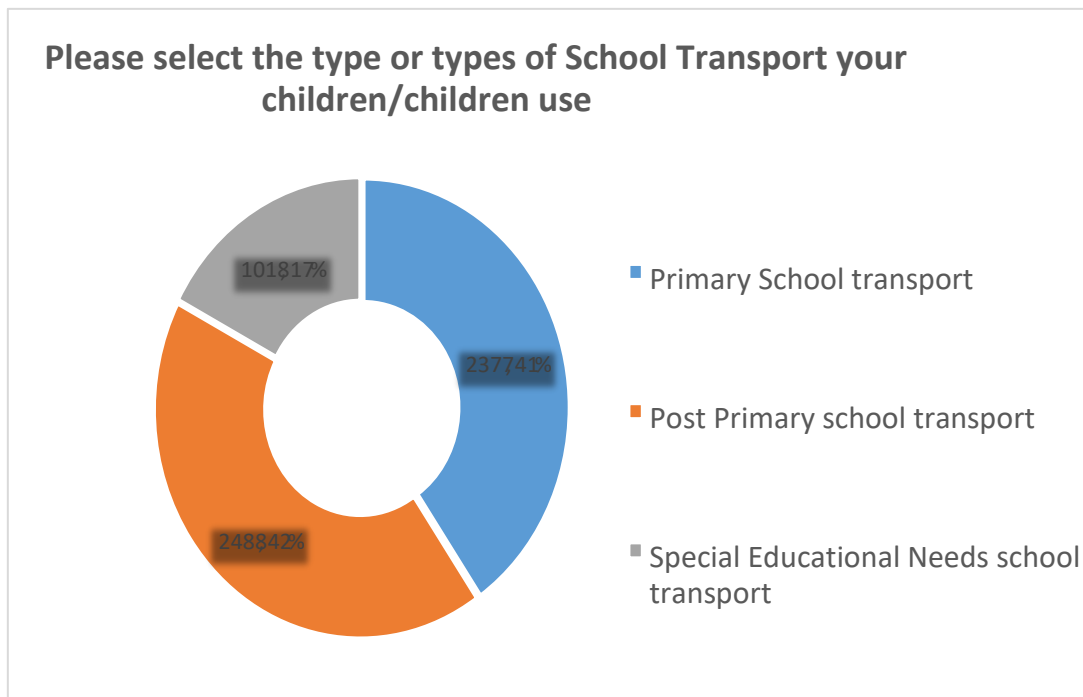
Parent/Guardian School Transport Survey

General Information

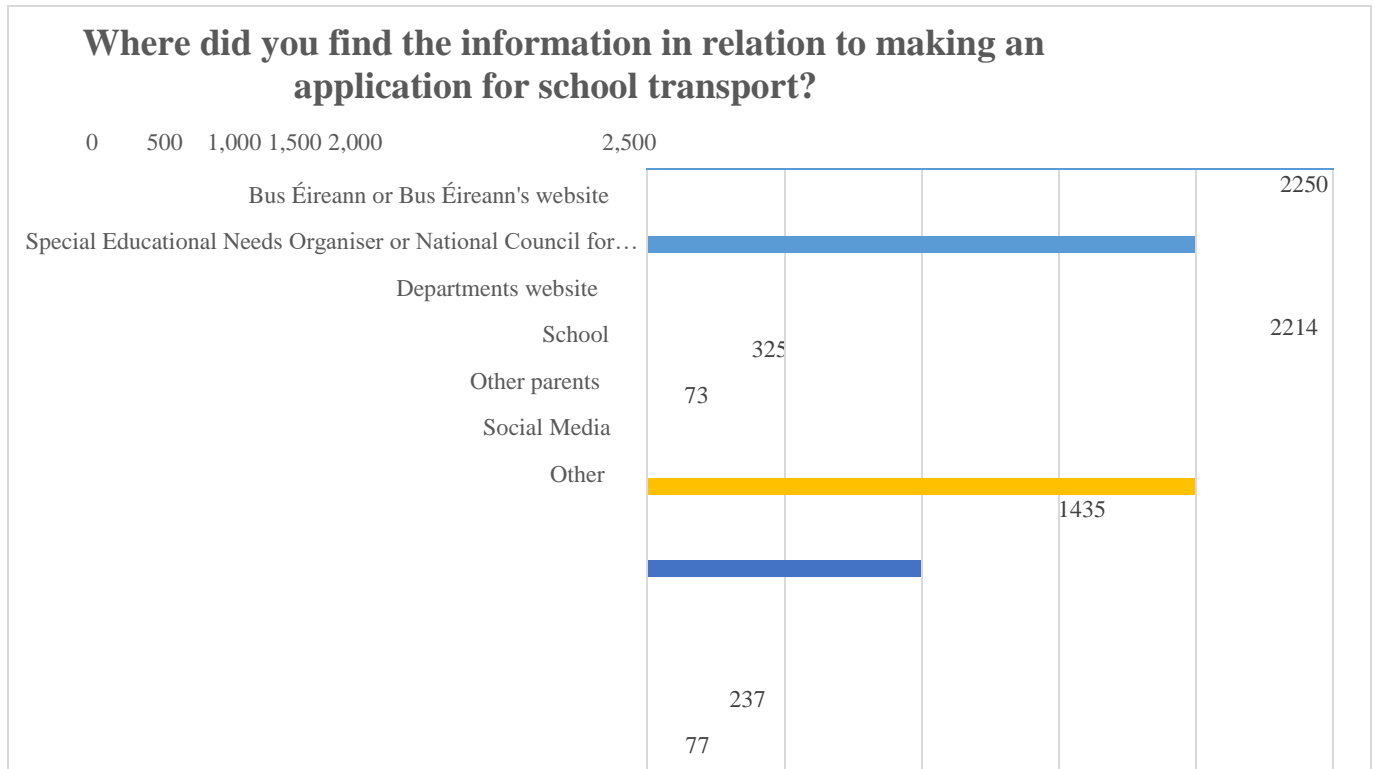
I am a parent/guardian of a child who:

Use or have used the Department's school transport service	4936 (59.7%)
Does not use the Department's school transport services	3328 (40.3%)

Use or have used the Department's school transport service

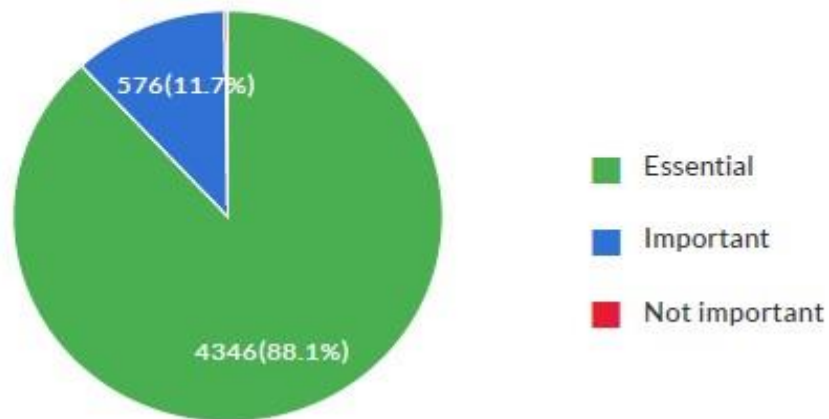


School Transport – how to apply



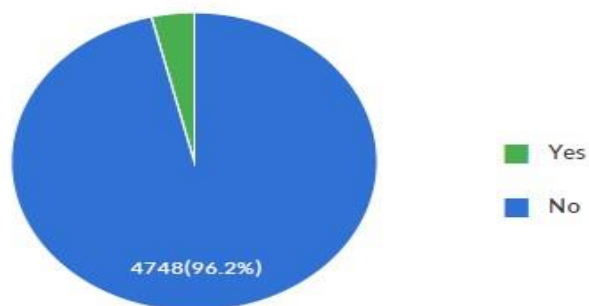
How easy was it to access this information?		
Easy	Moderate	Difficult
2201 (44.6%)	2331 (47.2%)	402 (8.1%)

How important is School Transport to you?

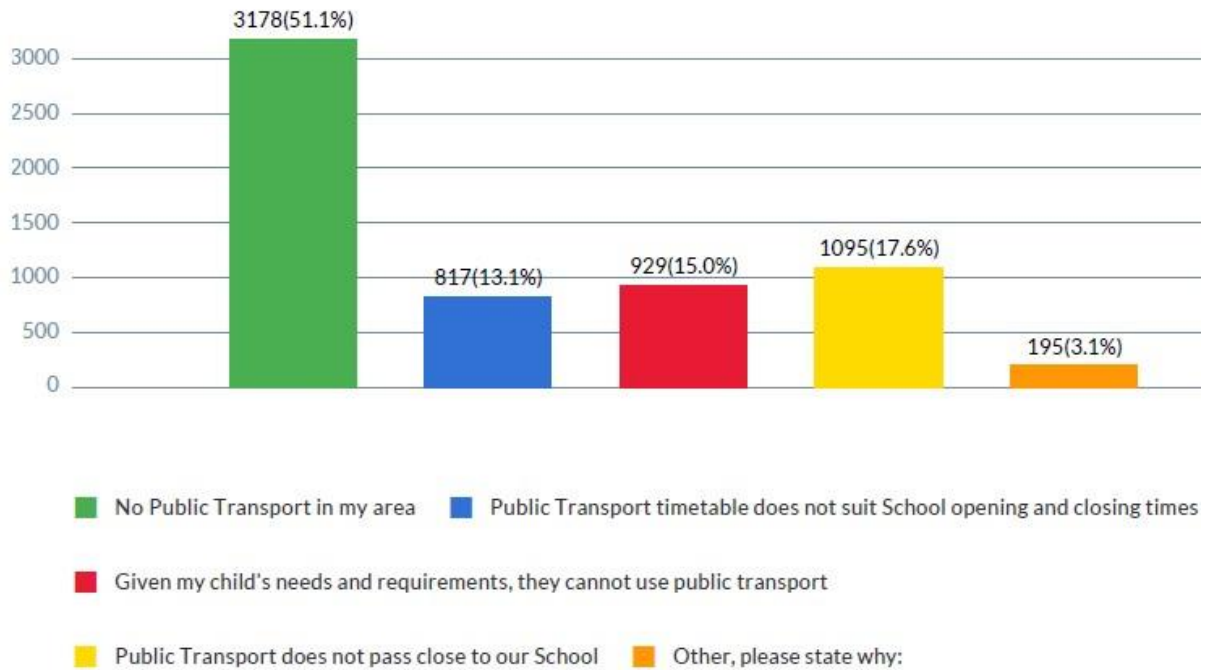


School Transport and Public Transport

If School Transport was not available, is Public Transport an option for you?

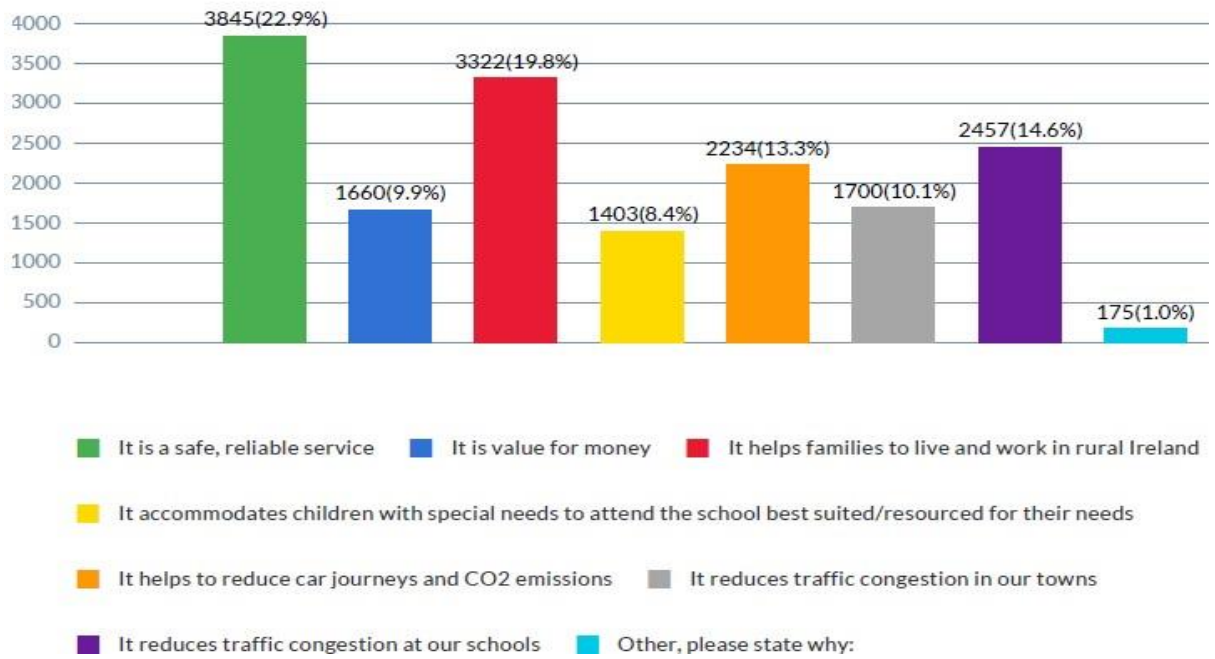


If you selected 'No' to the above question, please advise why

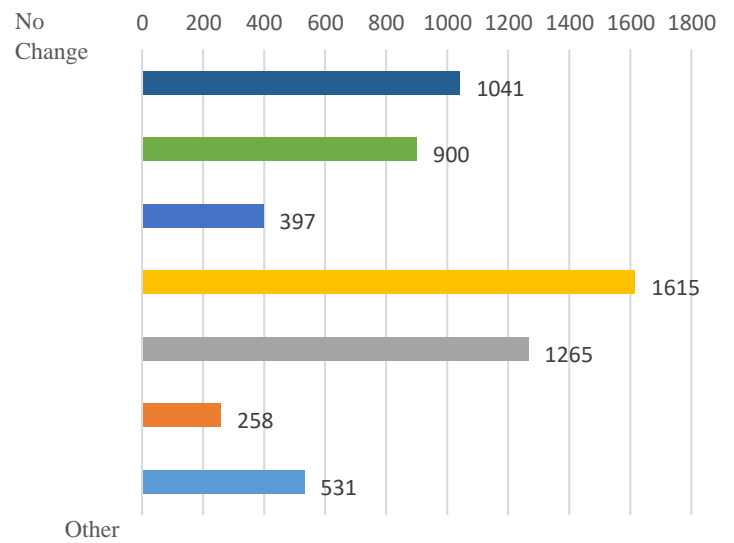


View of the current school transport scheme and change

What in your opinion is working well with the School Transport Scheme?



What would you like to see changed if possible to do so within School Transport?



Accessibility for pupils with mobility impairments

Account taken of school choice

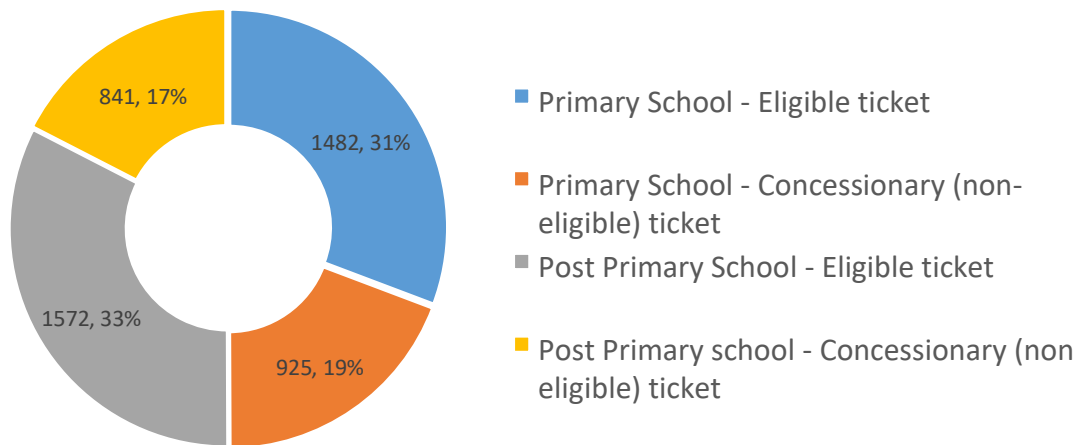
Improved use of technology

Integration of special needs and mainstream transport

Integration of school transport with public transport

Mainstream – Primary / Post Primary school transport scheme

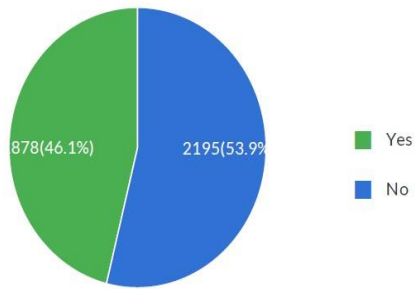
What type of ticket(s) does your family hold



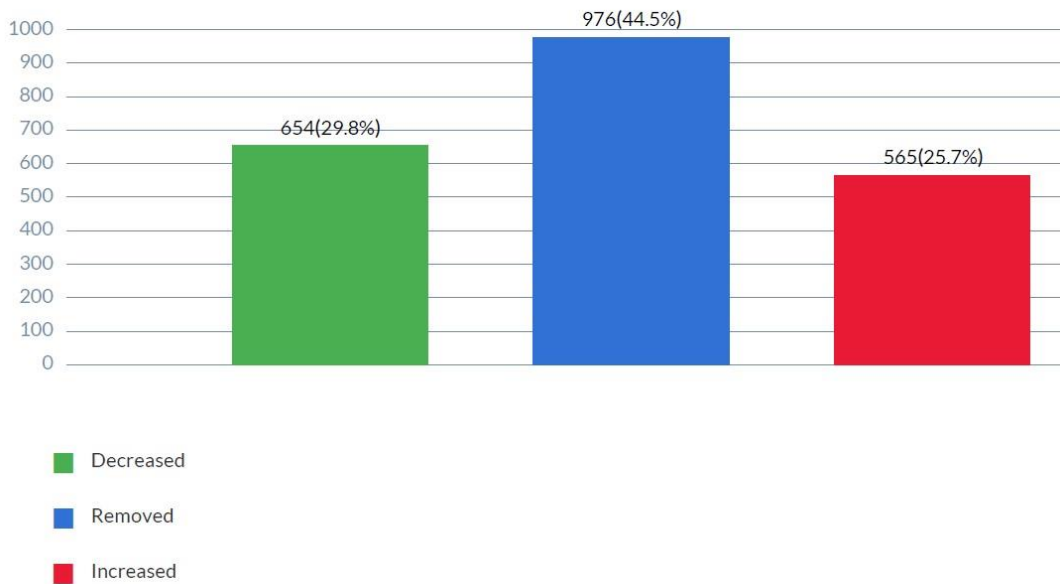
Parent / Guardian awareness of current school transport scheme

Do you know the cost of a Bus Éireann school transport scheme ticket?	
Yes	No
3672 (90.2%)	401 (9.8%)
Families who wish to avail of school transport and have their eligibility status assessed should apply on-line in a timely manner to Bus Éireann on Bus Éireann's website	
Yes	No
3849 (94.5%)	224 (5.5%)
The closing date for school transport applications for the 2022/23 School Year is Friday, 29th April 2022	
Yes	No
3275 (80.4%)	798 (19.6%)
The payment deadline date for payment of tickets for the 2022/23 School Year is Friday, 29th July 2022	
Yes	No
3490 (85.7%)	83 (14.3%)
Are you aware that if you are eligible for school transport and make a timely application (i.e. by the closing date in April) and there is no service, you may be eligible for a Remote Area Grant?	
Yes	No
758 (18.6%)	3315 (81.4%)

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme, children are eligible where they live 3.2 kilometres or more at primary and 4.8 kilometres or more at post-primary from, and where they are attending, their closest school, having regard to ethos and language.



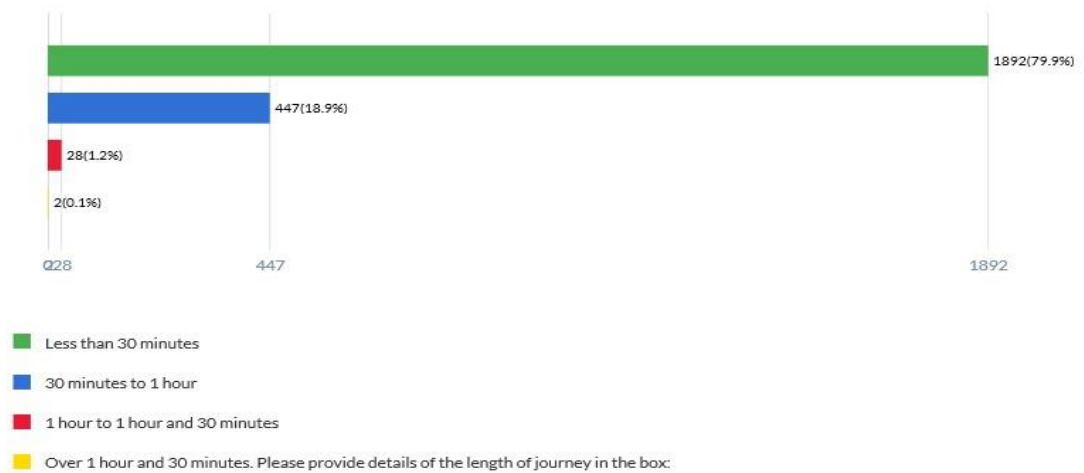
If you answered No to the above question do you think this distance criteria should be:



Mainstream school transport – PRIMARY

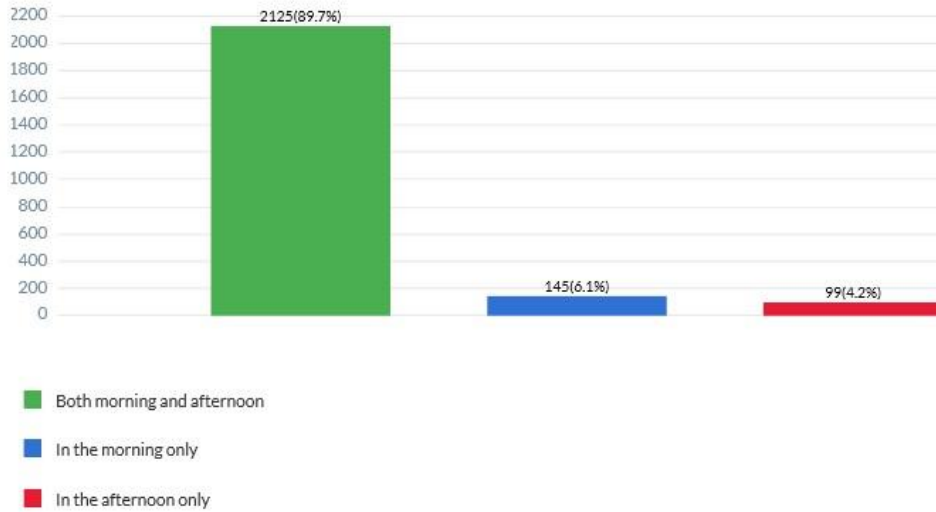
Length of school transport journey:

If your child/children use Primary School Transport

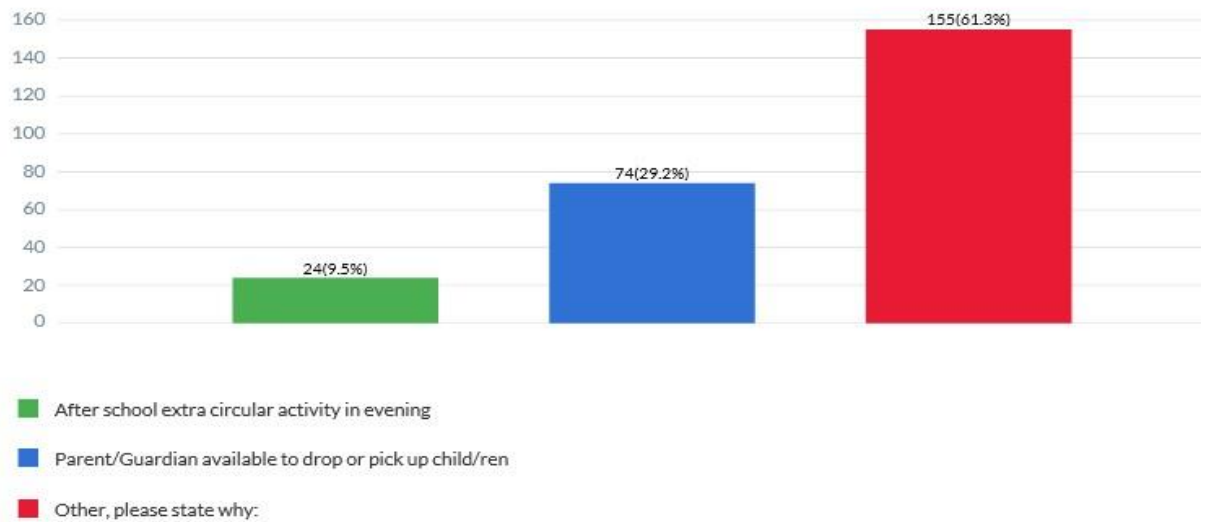


Number of journeys availed of each day:

If your child/children use Primary School Transport



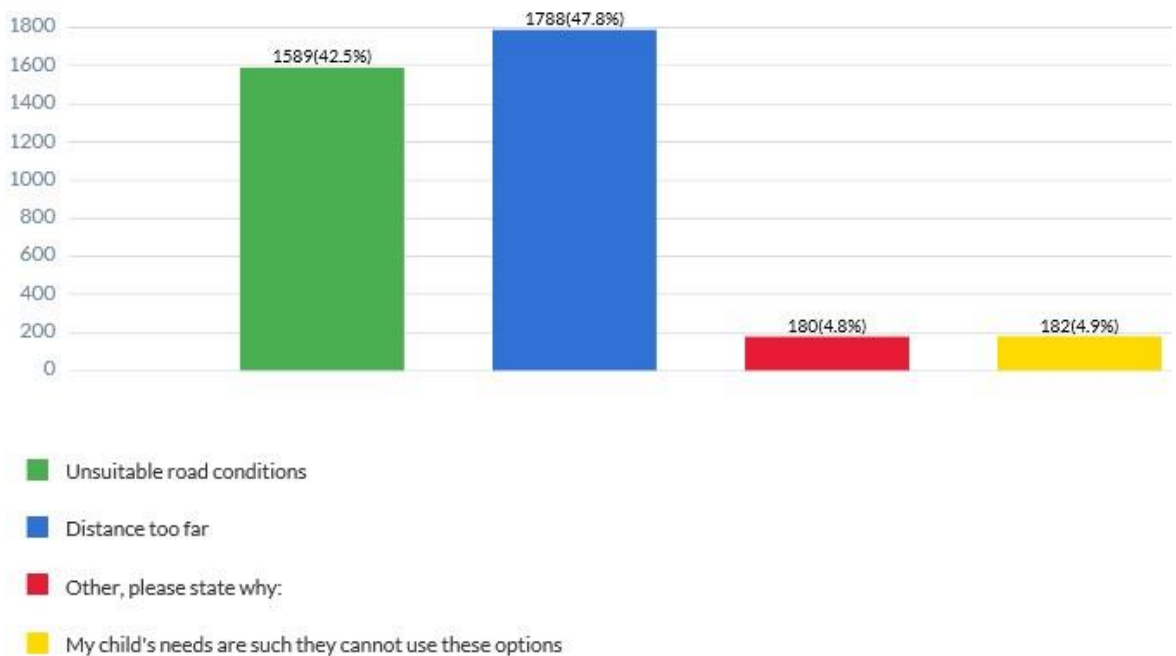
If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to Primary School?



Option of walking/cycling to school

If your child/children use Primary School Transport. Could they walk or cycle to school as an alternative?	
Yes	No
61 (2.6%)	2312 (97.4%)

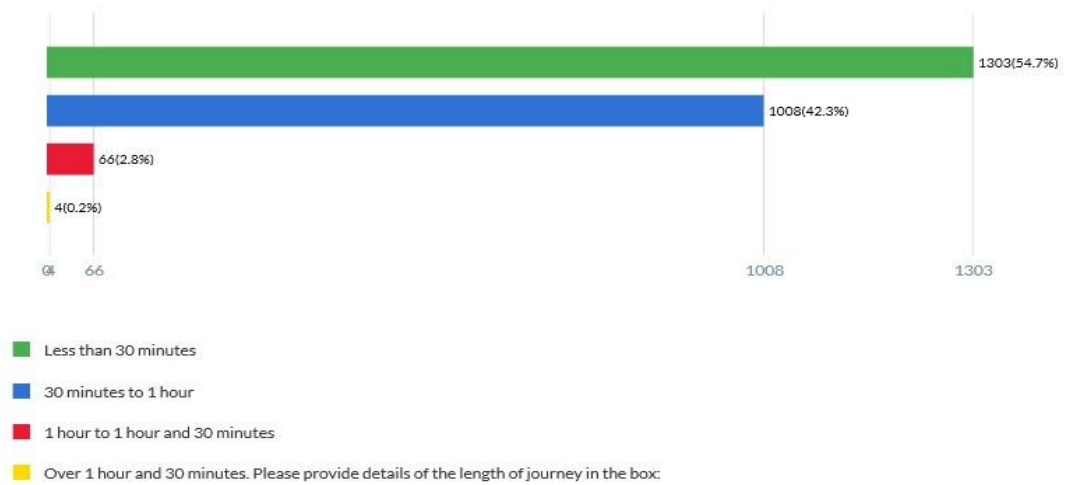
If 'No' to the above question, please advise why:



Mainstream school transport – POST PRIMARY

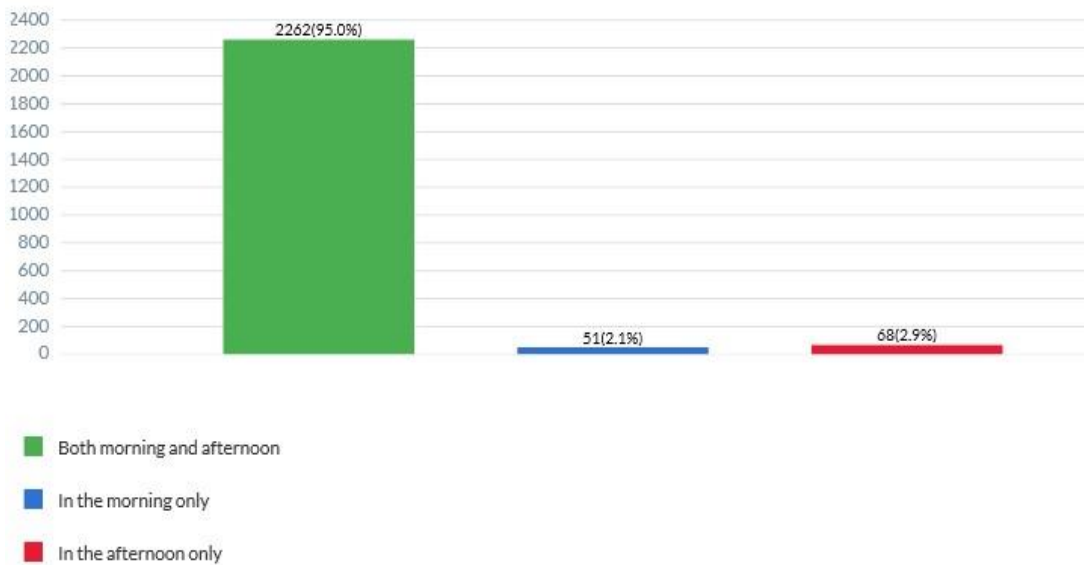
Length of school transport journey:

If your child/children use Post Primary School Transport

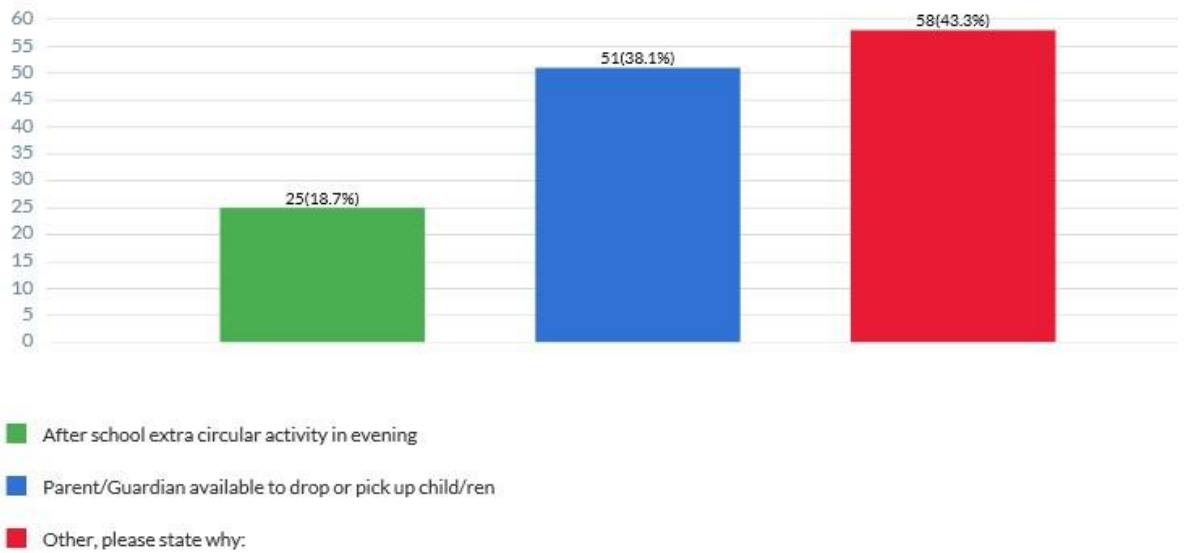


Number of journeys availed of each day:

If your child/children use Post Primary School Transport



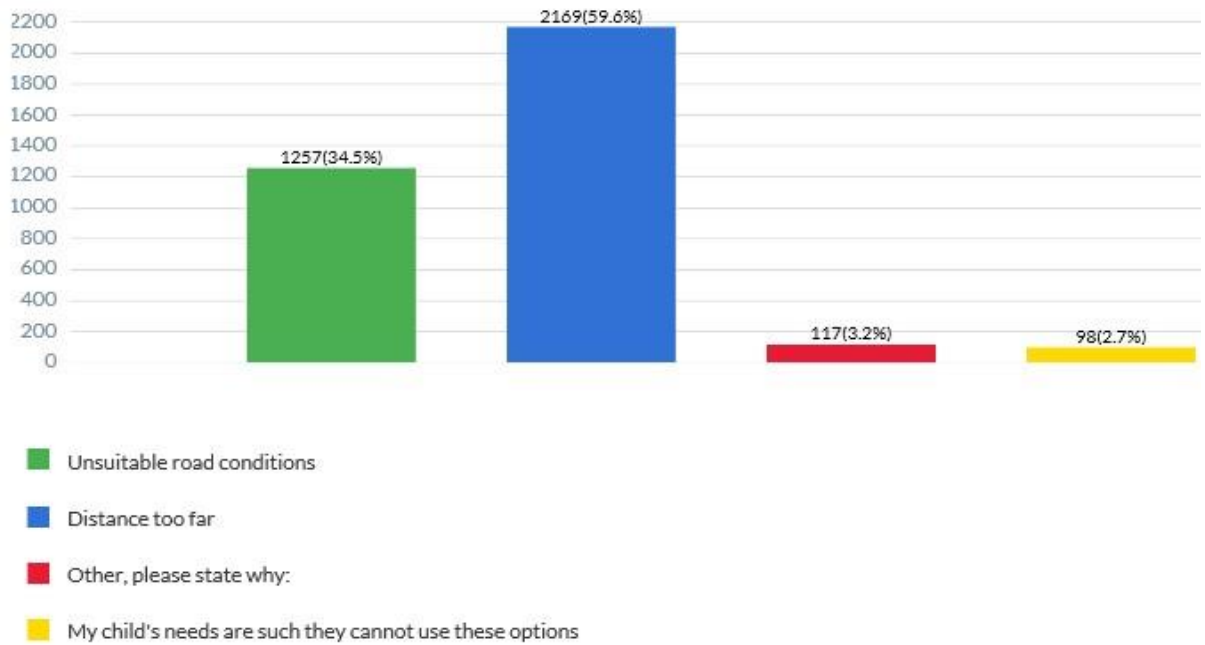
If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to Post Primary School?



Option of walking/cycling to school

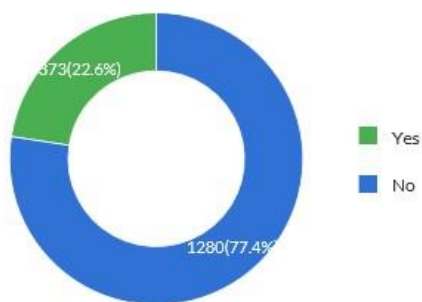
If your child/children use Post Primary School Transport. Could they walk or cycle to school as an alternative?	
Yes	No
21 (0.9%)	2363 (99.1%)

If 'No' to the above question, please advise why:

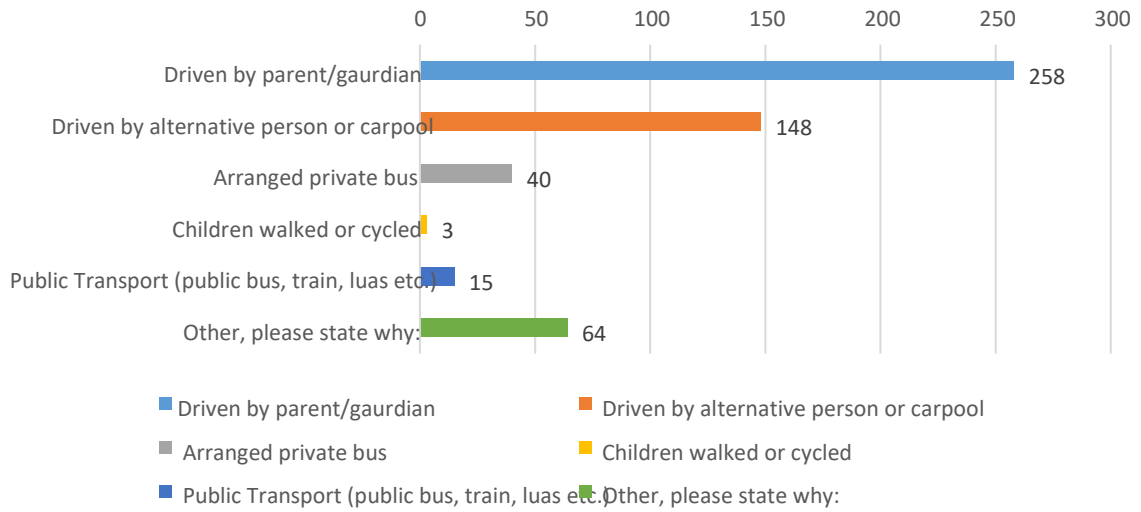


Concessionary mainstream school transport

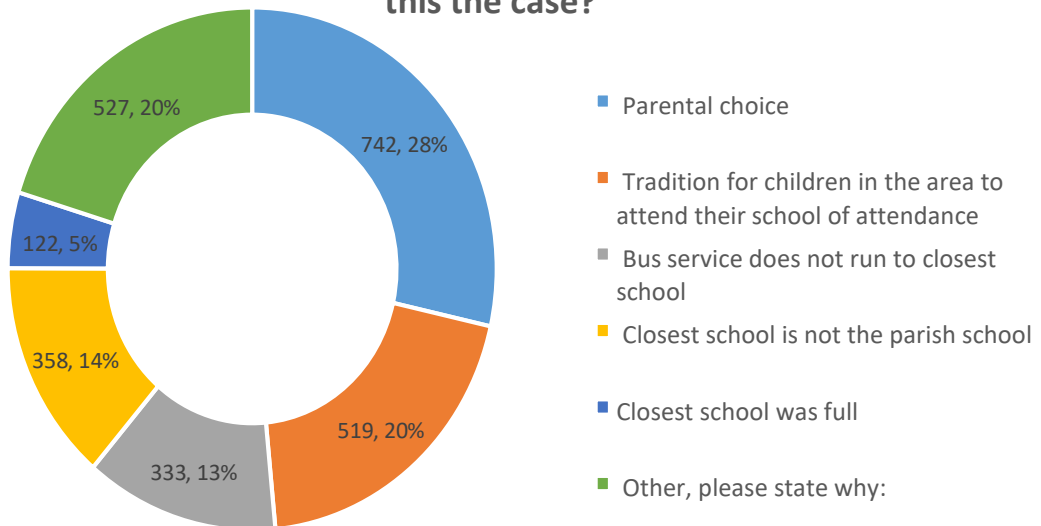
If your family has a concessionary ticket, have you ever been unsuccessful in obtaining a ticket for your child or children?



If you answered Yes to the above question, how did you transport your child/ren to school?

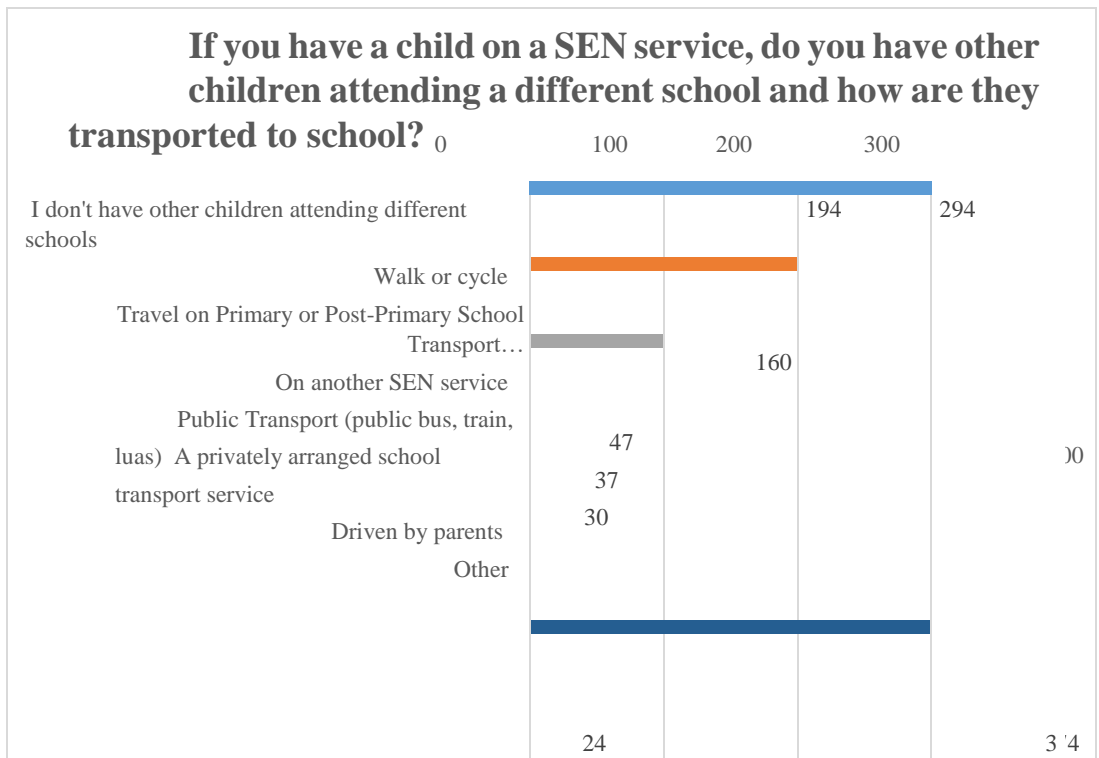


If your family is not attending their closest school, why is this the case?



Special educational needs school transport

Does your child / children avail of School Transport under the Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	
Yes	No
997 (97.8 %)	22 (2.2%)
If yes, is this a mainstream transport service or a dedicated service for children with special educational needs (SEN)	
SEN service	Mainstream service
950 (95.9%)	41 (4.1%)

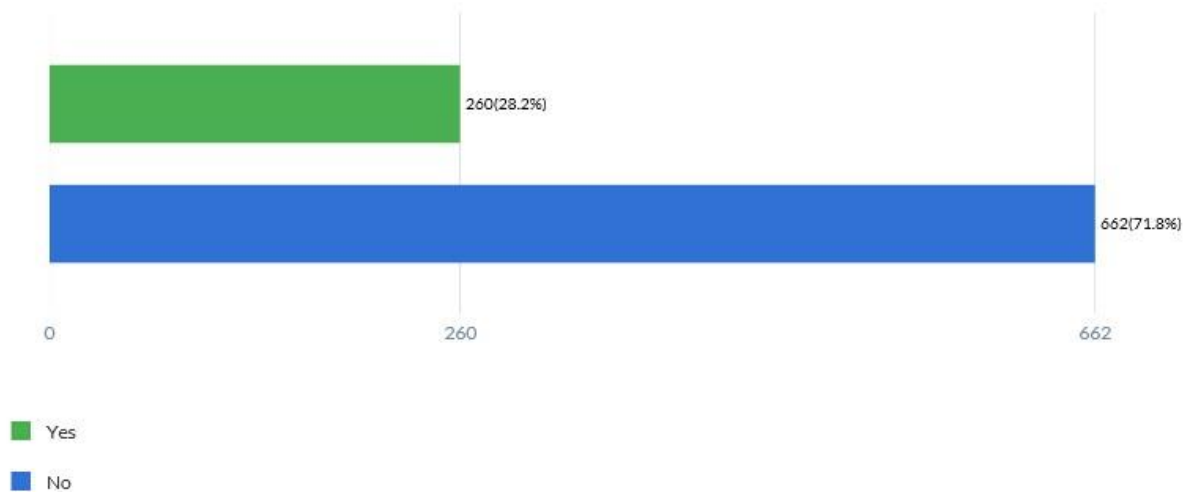


If your child travels on a SEN Service, does this have other children on the service?	
Yes, there are other pupils on the service	No, they travel on their own service
885 (88.0 %)	121 (12.0%)

Bus Escort

Does your child require the support of a School Bus Escort while travelling on school transport?	
Yes	No
922 (90.5%)	97 (9.5%)

If you answered Yes to the above question, in your opinion would it be possible for your child to travel on a mainstream service if they had the support of an Escort on that service?



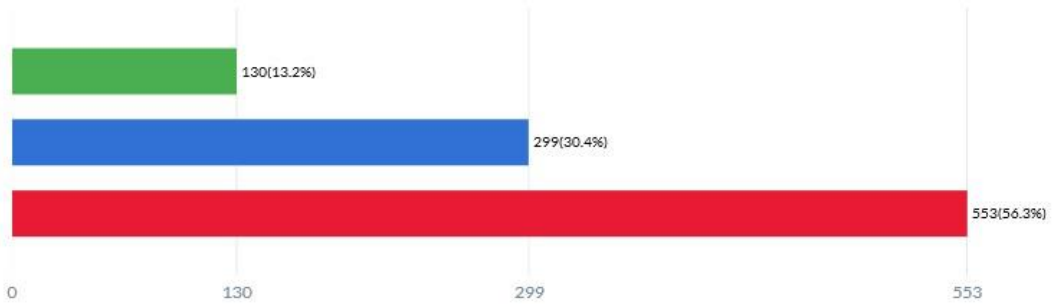
School of attendance

If your child travels on a SEN service what school do they attend?



- Their closest school that is resourced to cater for their additional needs (but not their local school)
- Their closest school geographically (their local school)
- Other, please state why:

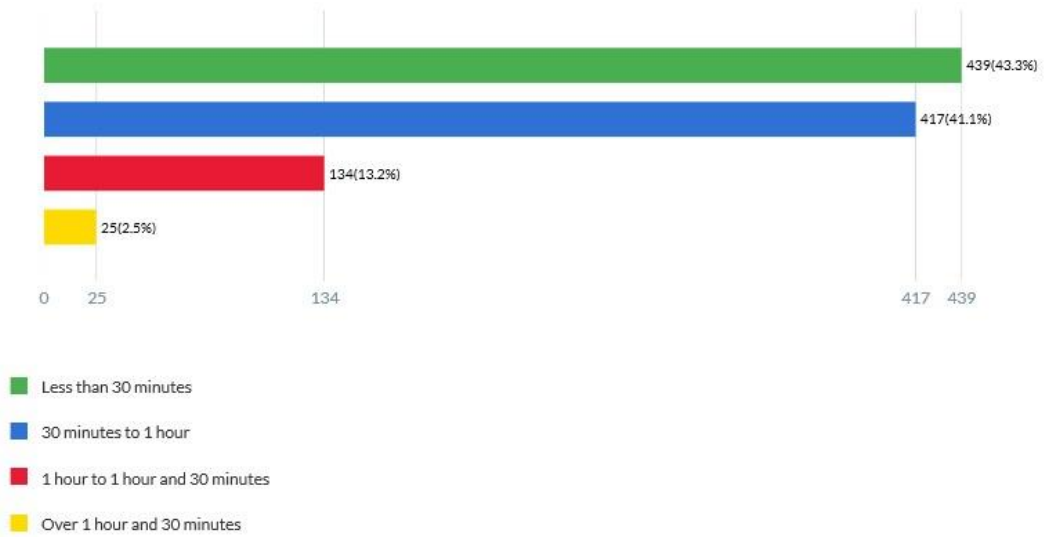
If your child does not attend their local school, would you prefer your child to attend their local school if the additional resources required became available?



- Yes, I would prefer for my child to go to school in their local area
- No, my child is settled in their school and I would prefer not to move them
- No, my child's needs are such that they must attend a special school

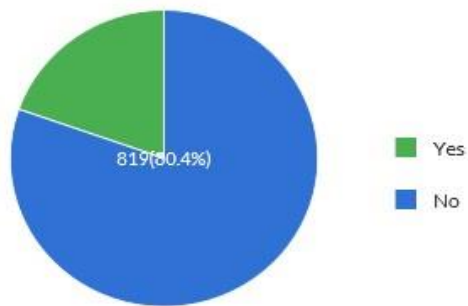
Length of bus journey

If you have a child on a SEN service, what is the average length of their journey to school (length of time one way)?



Special Transport Grant (STG)

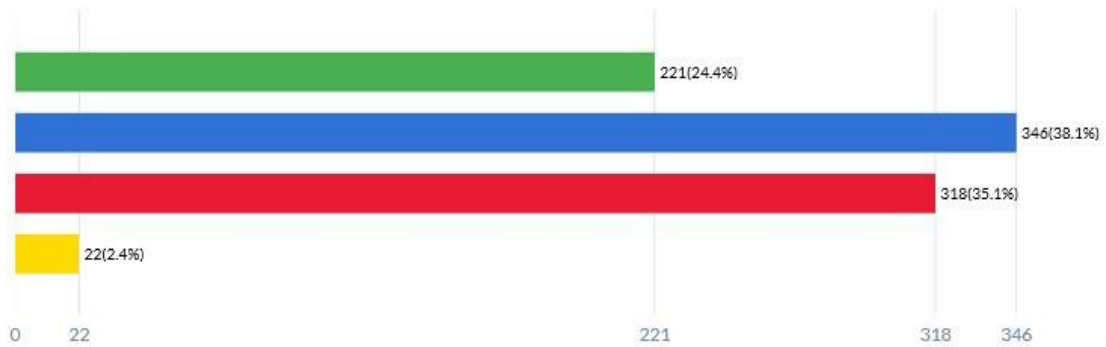
Are you in receipt of a Special Transport Grant (STG)?



If you avail of a Special Transport Grant and a service was offered to you, would you accept it?



- Yes, I would prefer if my child used a dedicated SEN transport service
- Yes, I would prefer if my child used a Mainstream transport service
- No, I prefer to bring my child to school myself
- No, my child could not travel on a service due to their needs and requirements



- I would prefer my child to travel on a dedicated school transport (SEN) service
- My child's needs and requirements mean that they could not travel on a mainstream school transport service
- My child requires the support of an escort which is not available on a mainstream service
- Other, please state why:

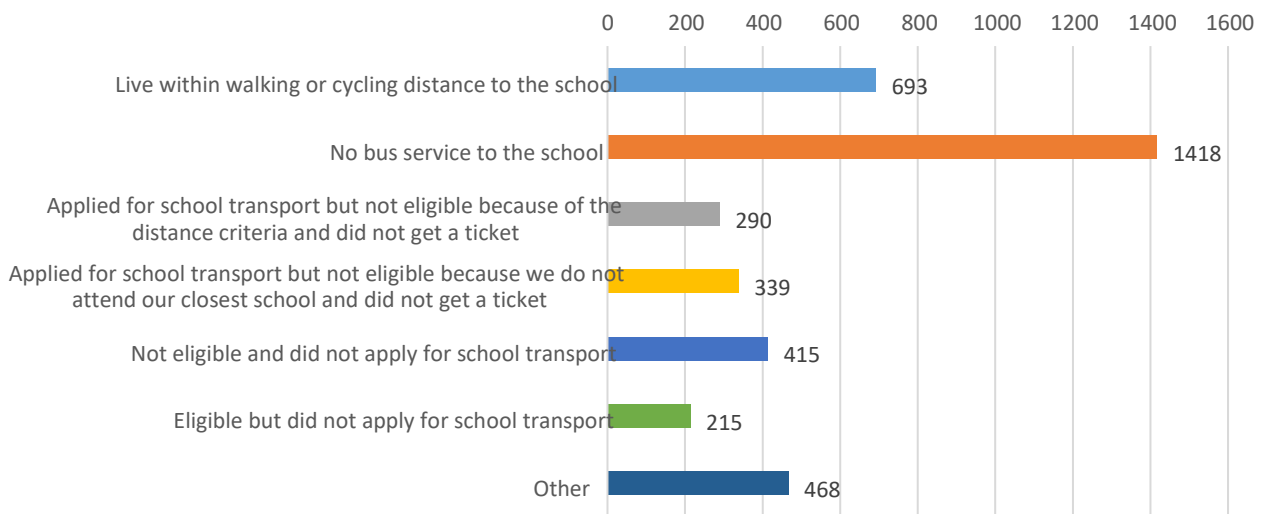
Option of integration of SEN and mainstream services

Taking into account your child/rens needs, would you like the option for your child to travel on a mainstream service rather than a SEN service?	
Yes	No
112 (11.0%)	907 (89.0%)

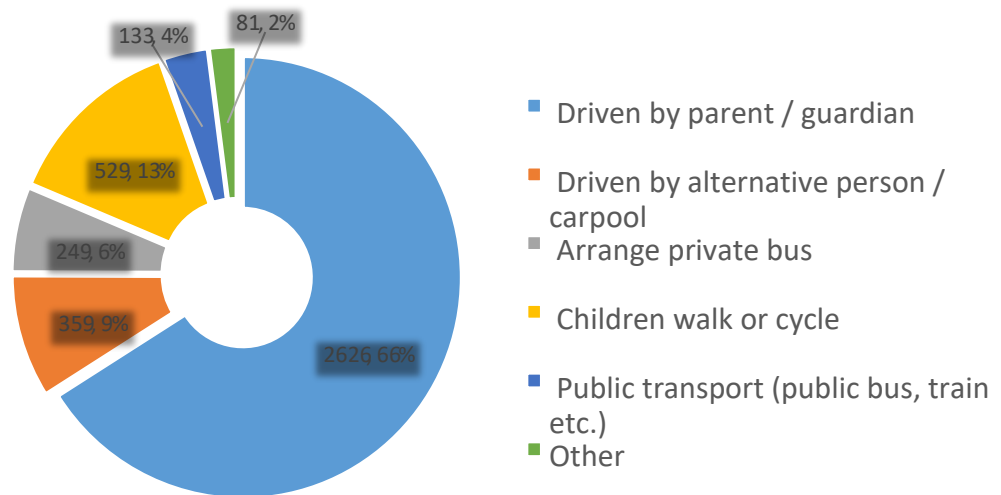
If you answered 'No' to the above question, why is this the case

Part 2 – Parent/Guardians who do not use the Department’s school transport services

Why do you not use School Transport Scheme services?



How does your family currently travel to school if not using School Transport Scheme services?



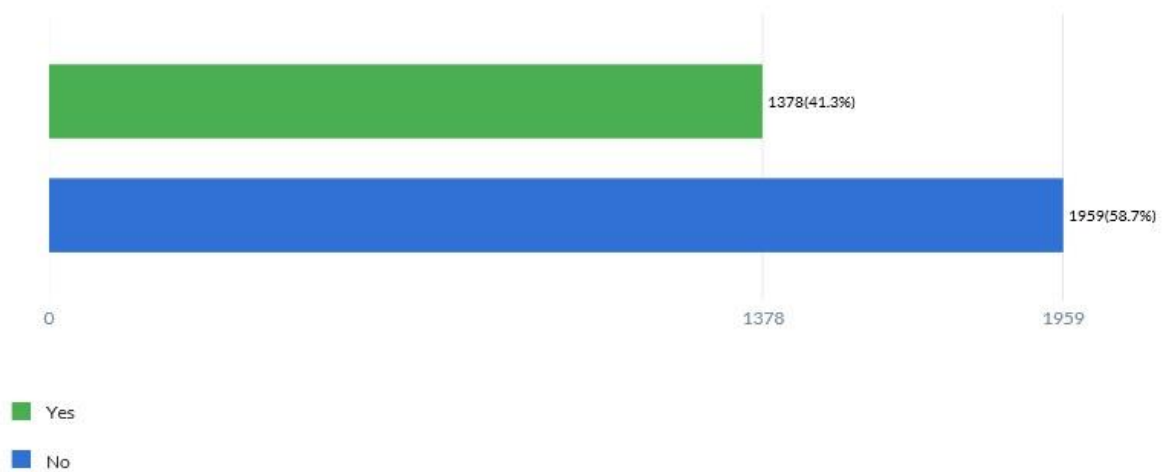
Information regarding school transport

Do you know where to find the information in relation to making an application for school transport?	
Bus Éireann or Bus Éireann's website	1219 (29.7%)
SENO (Special Educational Needs Organiser) or NCSE (National Council Special Education)	60 (1.5%)
Department's website	264 (6.4%)
School	600 (14.6%)
Other parents	323 (7.9%)
Social Media	54 (1.3%)
I do not know where to find this information	1544 (37.6%)
Other	38 (0.9%)

Distance criteria for school transport

In your opinion is the current distance criteria for eligibility reasonable?

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme, children are eligible where they live 3.2 kilometres or more at primary and 4.8 kilometres or more at post-primary from, and where they are attending, their closest school, having regard to ethos and language.



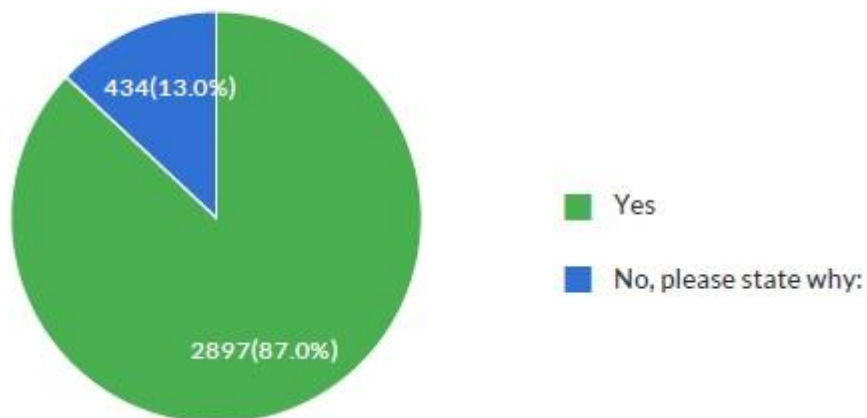
If you answered No to the above question do you think this distance criteria should be:

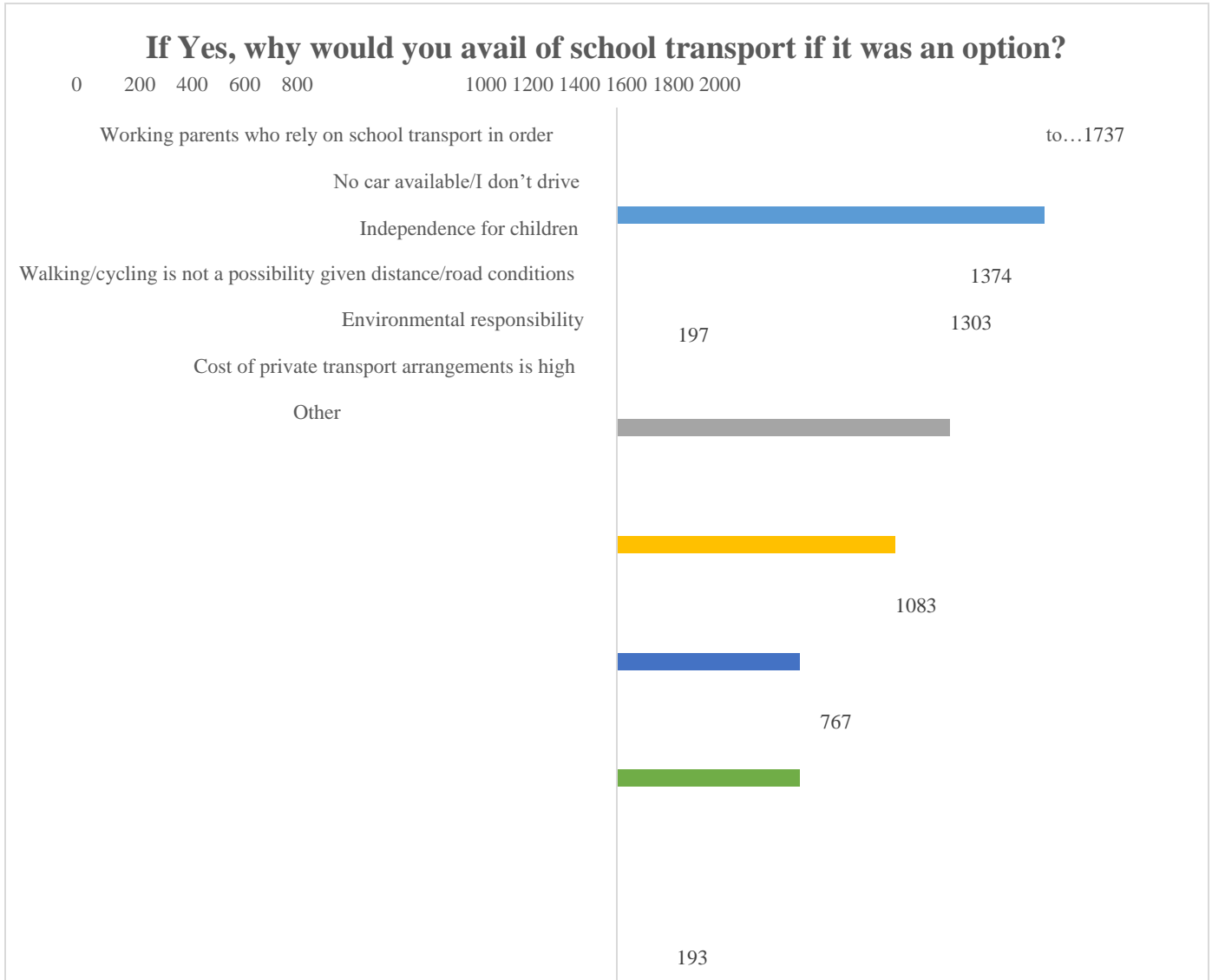


If you are not using a School transport scheme service and you pay for other arrangements (for example, public transport, private bus service), what is the cost per child per week?



Would you avail of School Transport if it was an option?





General Information

What county or city do you live in?

8277 Responses

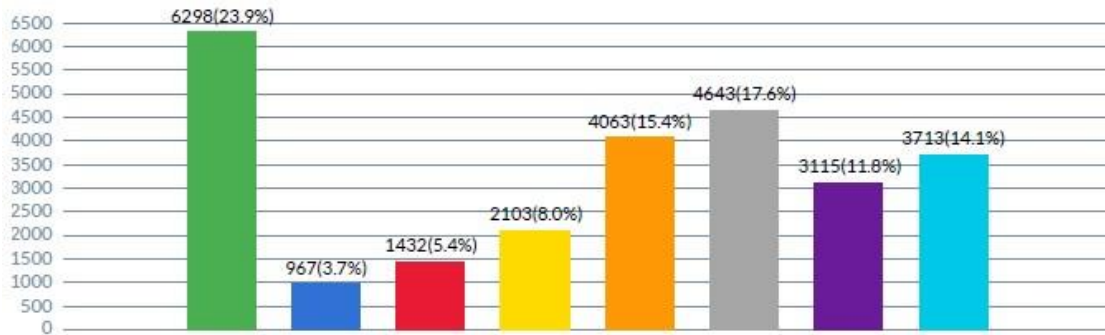
Answer	Count	Percent
Carlow	160	1.91%
Cavan	301	3.60%
Clare	121	1.45%
Cork City	145	1.73%
Cork County	1460	17.45%
Donegal	393	4.70%
Dublin City	188	2.25%
Dublin County	417	4.98%
Galway City	38	0.45%
Galway County	424	5.07%
Kerry	383	4.58%
Kildare	284	3.39%
Kilkenny	483	5.77%
Laois	77	0.92%
Leitrim	90	1.08%
Limerick City	17	0.20%
Limerick County	147	1.76%
Longford	99	1.18%
Louth	106	1.27%
Mayo	125	1.49%
Meath	604	7.22%
Monaghan	111	1.33%
Offaly	79	0.94%
Roscommon	105	1.26%
Sligo	215	2.57%
Tipperary	369	4.41%
Waterford City	39	0.47%
Waterford County	182	2.18%
Westmeath	105	1.26%
Wexford	457	5.46%
Wicklow	642	7.67%

Which county or city is your child / children's school in?

8277 Responses

Answer	Count	Percent
Carlow	160	1.90%
Cavan	308	3.66%
Clare	115	1.37%
Cork City	239	2.84%
Cork County	1416	16.83%
Donegal	390	4.64%
Dublin City	200	2.38%
Dublin County	333	3.96%
Galway City	78	0.93%
Galway County	390	4.64%
Kerry	398	4.73%
Kildare	321	3.82%
Kilkenny	479	5.69%
Laois	67	0.80%
Leitrim	88	1.05%
Limerick City	30	0.36%
Limerick County	109	1.30%
Longford	103	1.22%
Louth	118	1.40%
Mayo	118	1.40%
Meath	630	7.49%
Monaghan	112	1.33%
Offaly	87	1.03%
Roscommon	106	1.26%
Sligo	228	2.71%
Tipperary	354	4.21%
Waterford City	69	0.82%
Waterford County	154	1.83%
Westmeath	96	1.14%
Wexford	437	5.19%
Wicklow	681	8.09%

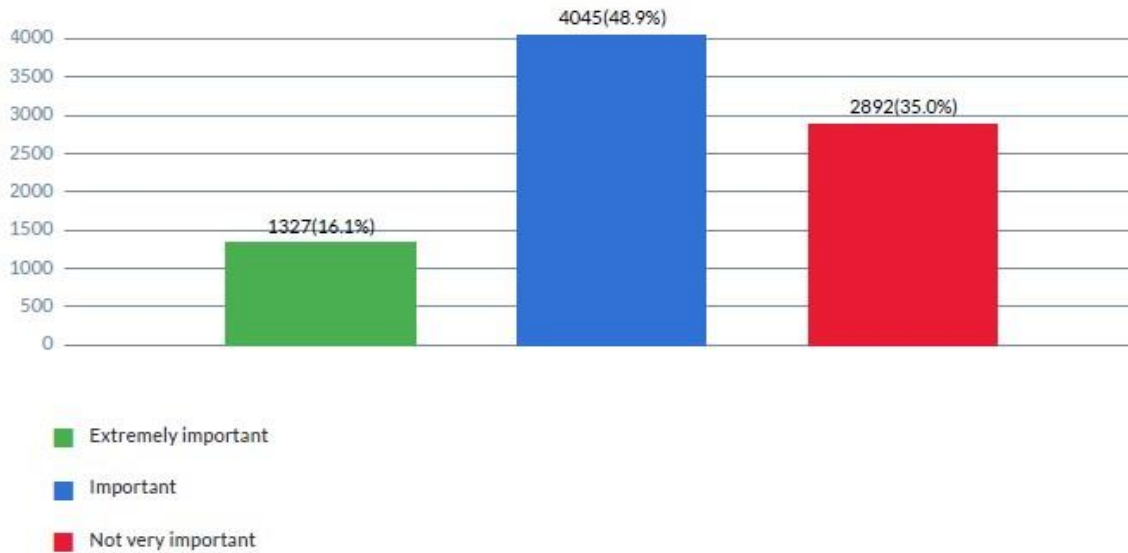
In your opinion why is School Transport important?



- Working parents/guardians who rely on school transport in order to attend work
- No car available/I don't drive
- Not possible for me to bring my child given the distance from home to school
- My children attend a number of schools and I rely on transport for this purpose
- Independence for children
- Walking/cycling is not a possibility given distance/road conditions
- Environmental responsibility
- No public transport available

Climate Action

How important is climate action to you?



In your opinion, does School Transport play an important role when it comes to supporting Climate Action?



Appendix 2

Post-Primary School Transport survey Questions

1. Do you currently use a Post Primary School Transport Scheme service where your ticket has been issued by Bus Éireann
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. If you answered No to the above question, how do you travel to school?
 - a. Driven by parent/guardian
 - b. Driven by alternative person or carpool
 - c. Arranged private bus
 - d. Walked or cycled
 - e. Public Transport (public bus, train, luas etc.)
 - f. Other, please state why:

3. Why do you not use School Transport Scheme services? Live within walking or cycling distance to the school
 - a. No bus service to the school
 - b. Due to my needs and requirements, I cannot use transport
 - c. Applied for school transport but not eligible because of the distance criteria and did not get a ticket
 - d. Applied for school transport but not eligible because we do not attend our closest school and did not get a ticket
 - e. Not eligible and did not apply for school transport
 - f. Eligible but did not apply for school transport
 - g. Other, please state why:

4. How important is School Transport to you?
 - a. Essential
 - b. Important
 - c. Not Important

5. If School Transport was not available, is Public Transport an option for you?
 - a. Yes

- b. No
6. If you selected 'No' to the above question, please advise why
- a. No Public Transport in my area
 - b. Public Transport timetable does not suit school opening and closing times
 - c. Due to my needs and requirements, I cannot use public transport
 - d. Public Transport does not pass close to our School
 - e. Other, please specify:
7. In your opinion, what would you like to see changed if possible to do so within School Transport?
- a. Integration of school transport with public transport
 - b. Integration of special needs and mainstream transport
 - c. Improved use of technology (online ticketing, ability to scan ticket from a smart phone, etc.)
 - d. Account taken of school choice
 - e. Accessibility for pupils with mobility impairments
 - f. No Change
 - g. Other, please state why:
8. What in your opinion is working well with the School Transport Scheme?
- a. It is a safe, reliable service
 - b. It is value for money
 - c. It helps families to live and work in rural Ireland
 - d. It accommodates children with special needs to attend the school best suited/resourced for their needs
 - e. It helps to reduce car journeys and CO₂e emissions
 - f. It reduces traffic congestion in our towns
 - g. It reduces traffic congestion at our schools
 - h. It promotes a sense of independence for pupils
 - i. Other, please state why:
9. "In your opinion is the current distance criteria for eligibility reasonable?"
- a. Yes
 - b. No

10. If you answered No to the above question do you think this distance criteria should be:
- a. Decreased
 - b. Removed
 - c. Increased
11. If you currently use a School Transport Scheme service, what type of ticket(s) do you hold?
- a. Post Primary School - Eligible ticket
 - b. Post Primary School - Concessionary Ticket
12. If you use School Transport, what is the average length of your journey to post primary school (length of time one way) on your school transport service?
- a. Less than 30 minutes
 - b. 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - c. 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes
 - d. Over 1 hour and 30 minutes. Please provide details of the length of journey in the box:
13. If you use School Transport do you normally travel:
- a. Both morning and afternoon
 - b. In the morning only
 - c. In the afternoon only
14. If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to your school?
- a. After school extra circular activity in evening
 - b. Parent/Guardian available to drop or pick up
 - c. Other, please give reason
15. If you use school transport, could you walk or cycle to school as an alternative? a) Yes
b) No
16. If 'No' to the above question, please advise why you could not walk or cycle to school:
- a. Unsuitable road conditions
 - b. Distance too far
 - c. My needs are such I cannot use these options
 - a. Other please state:

17. If your family has a concessionary ticket why is this the case?
- Distance from home to school is less than required eligibility distance
 - Not attending closest school
 - Both of the above

18. If your family has a concessionary ticket, have you ever been unsuccessful in obtaining a ticket for your child or children?
- Yes
 - No

19. "If you answered Yes to the above question and were unsuccessful in obtaining a seat, how did you travel to school?"
- Driven by parent/guardian
 - Driven by alternative person or carpool
 - Arranged private bus
 - Children walked or cycled
 - Public Transport (public bus, train, luas etc.)
 - Other, please state why:

20. What county or city do you live in?

Carlow	Cavan
Clare	Cork City
Cork County	Donegal
Dublin City	Dublin County
Galway City	Galway County
Kerry	Kildare
Kilkenny	Laois
Leitrim	Limerick City
Limerick County	Longford
Louth	Mayo
Meath	Monaghan
Offaly	Roscommon
Sligo	Tipperary
Waterford City	Waterford County
Westmeath	Wexford
Wicklow	

21. Which county or city is your child / children's school in?

Carlow	Cavan
Clare	Cork City
Cork County	Donegal
Dublin City	Dublin County
Galway City	Galway County
Kerry	Kildare
Kilkenny	Laois
Leitrim	Limerick City
Limerick County	Longford
Louth	Mayo
Meath	Monaghan
Offaly	Roscommon
Sligo	Tipperary
Waterford City	Waterford County
Westmeath	Wexford
Wicklow	

22. In your opinion why is School Transport important?
- a. Working parents/guardians who rely on school transport in order to attend work
 - b. No car available
 - c. Not possible for me to bring my child given the distance from home to school
 - d. My children attend a number of schools and I rely on transport for this purpose
 - e. Independence for children
 - f. Walking/cycling is not a possibility given distance/road conditions
 - g. Environmental responsibility
 - h. No public transport available

Climate Change

23. How important is climate action to you?
- a. Extremely important
 - b. Important
 - c. Not very important

24. Is or would climate action be a factor in your decision to use School Transport?

- a. It is a factor or will be a factor
- b. It is not a factor

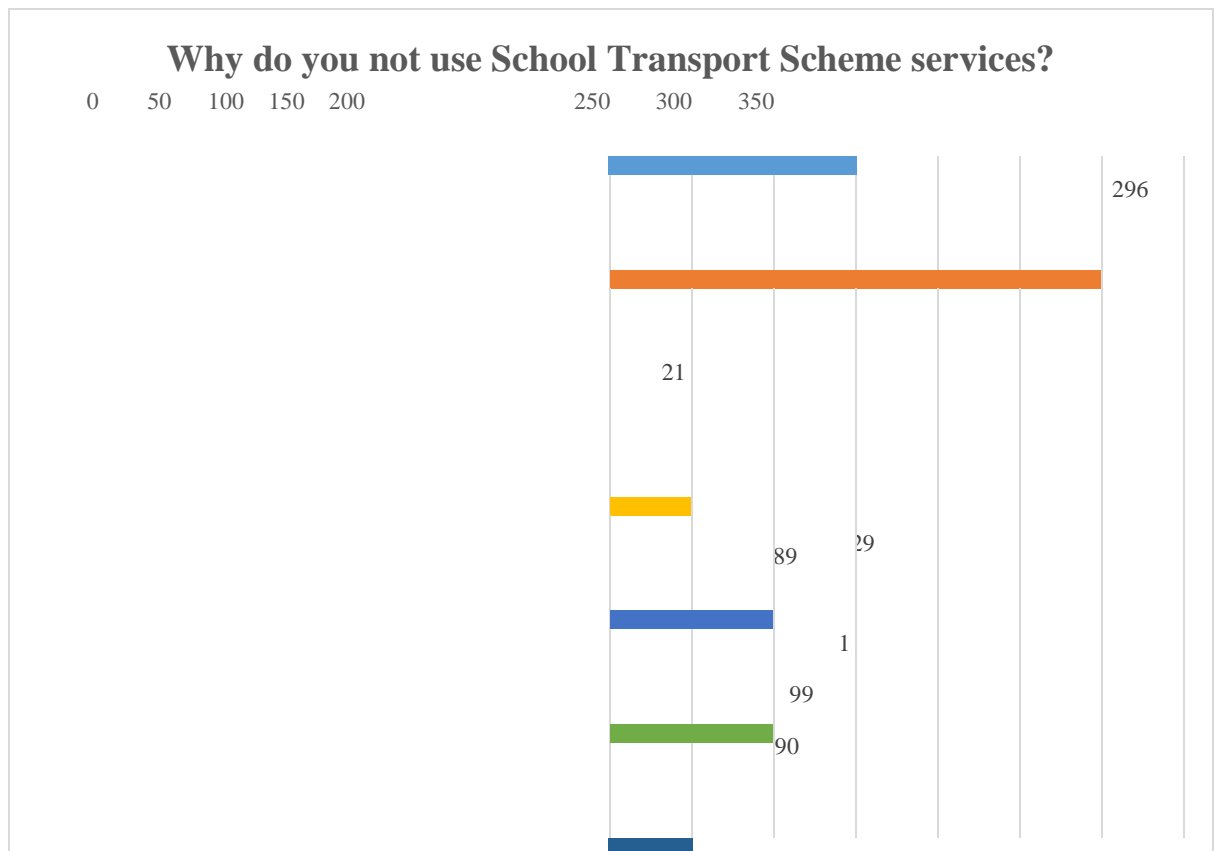
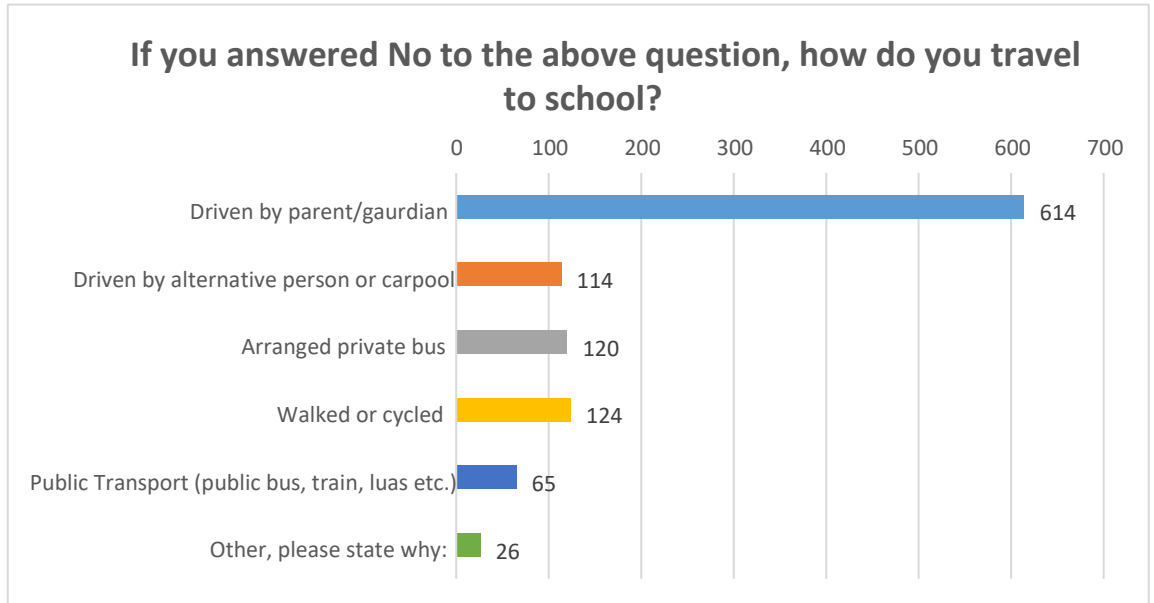
25. In your opinion, does School Transport play an important role when it comes to supporting Climate Action?

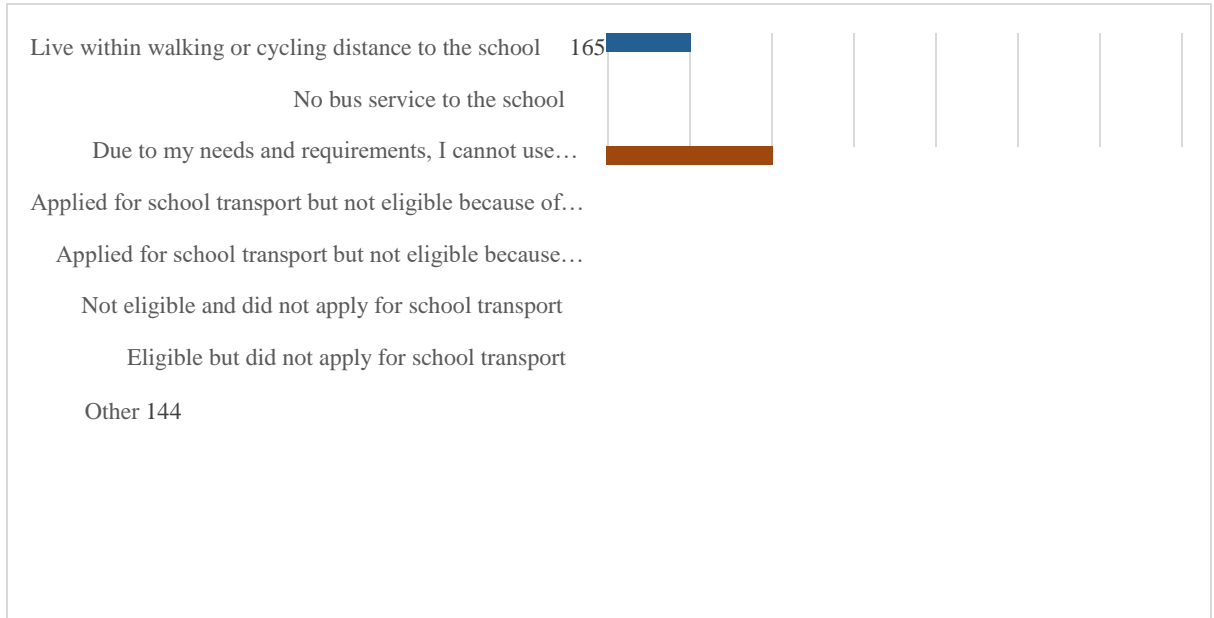
- a. Yes
- b. No

26. Do you have any other views or comments you feel should be considered as part of the review of the scheme? If so, please state why in the box below

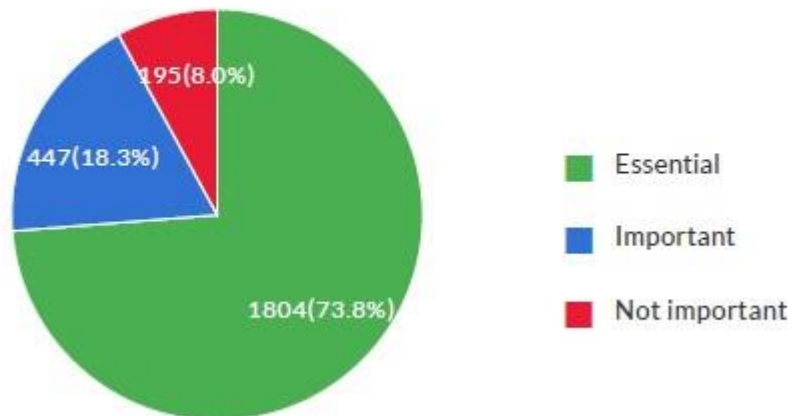
Post Primary Survey analysis

Do you currently use a Post Primary School Transport Scheme service where your ticket has been issued by Bus Éireann?	
Yes	1538 (61.9%)
No	908 (37.1%)



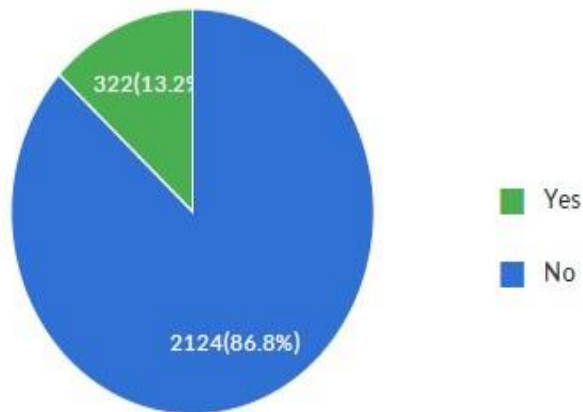


How important is School Transport to you?

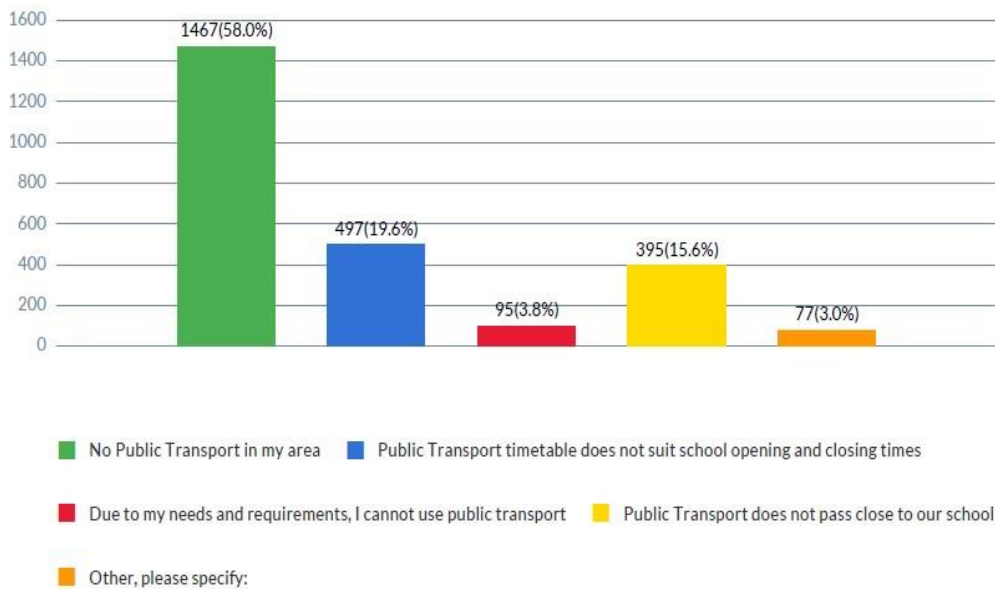


School Transport and Public Transport

If School Transport was not available, is Public Transport an option for you?

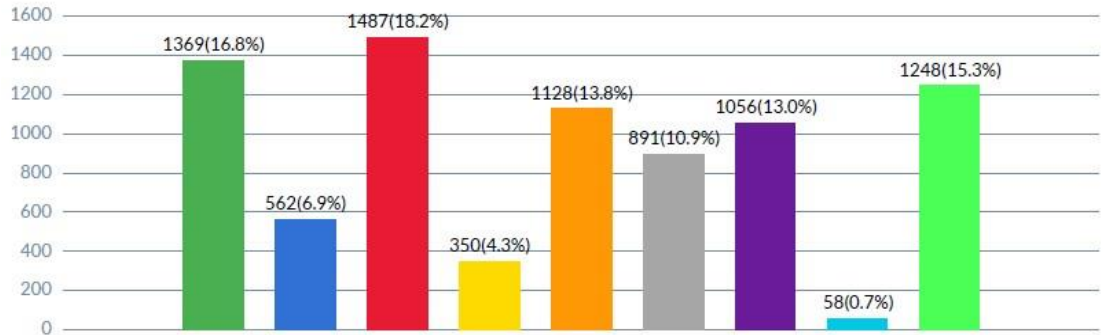


If you selected No to the above question, please advise why you cannot use Public Transport



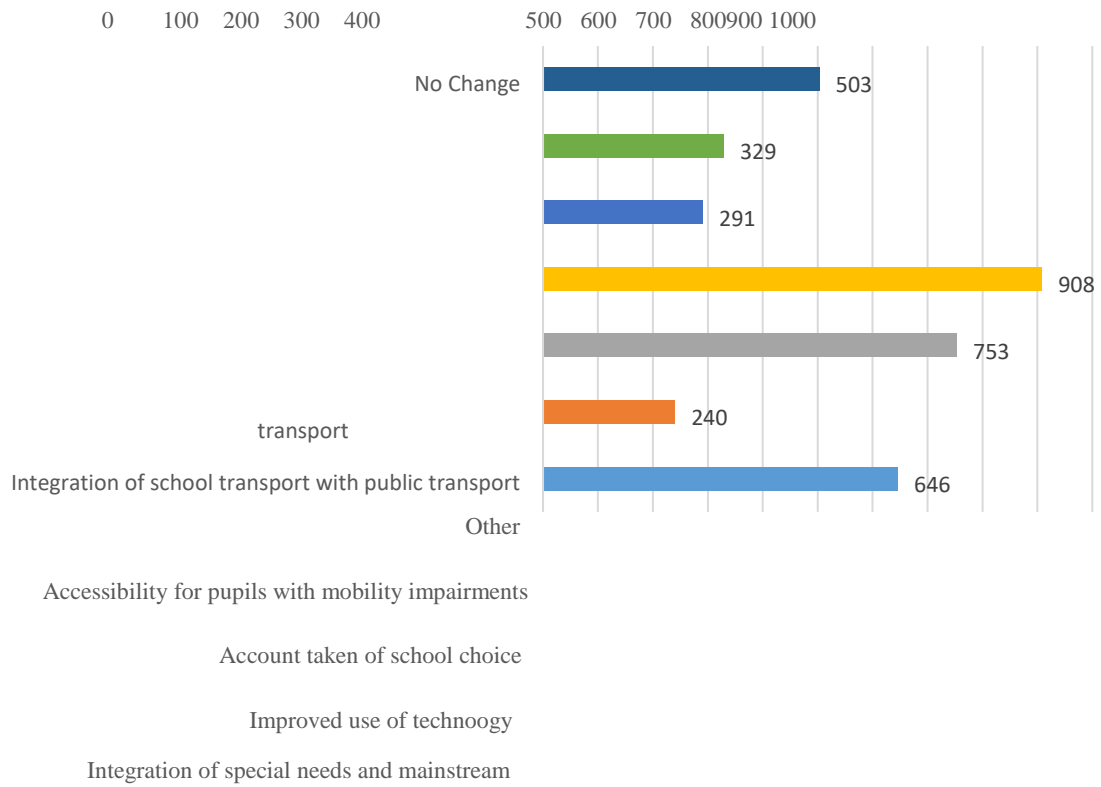
View of the current school transport scheme and change

What in your opinion is working well with the School Transport Scheme?

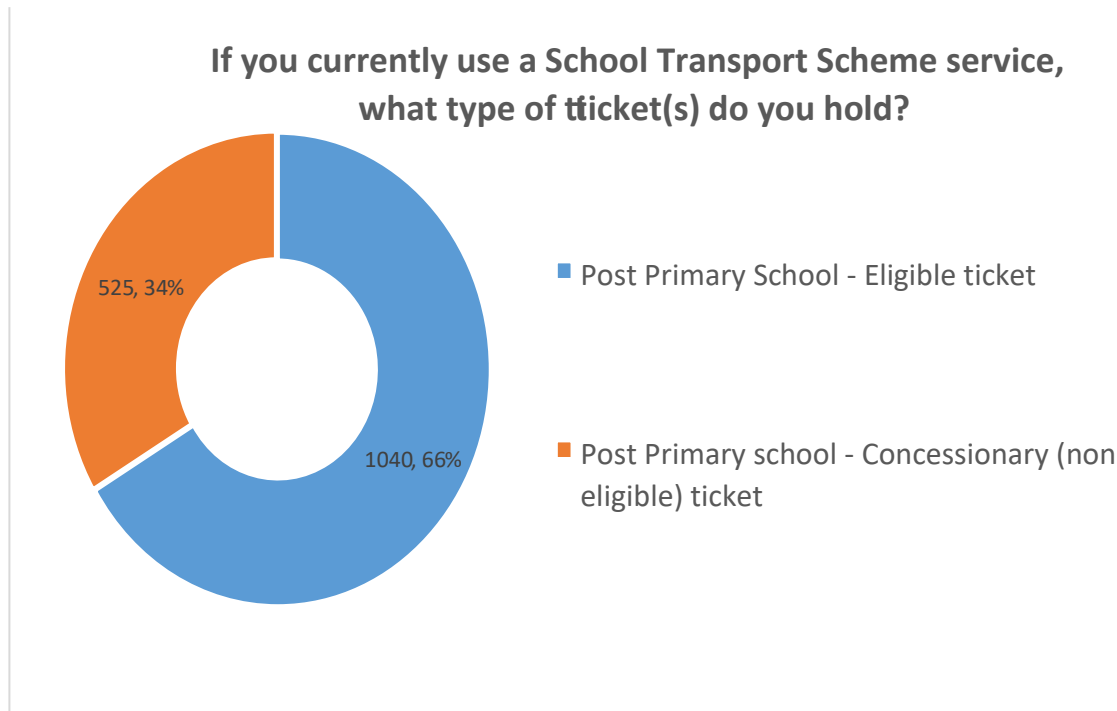


- It is a safe, reliable service
- It is value for money
- It helps families to live and work in rural Ireland
- It accommodates pupils who have additional requirements to attend school best suited to their needs
- It helps to reduce car journeys and CO2 emissions
- It reduces traffic congestion in our towns
- It reduces traffic congestion at our schools
- Other (please state)
- It promotes a sense of independence for pupils

What would you like to see changed if possible to do so within School Transport?



Mainstream – Post Primary school transport scheme



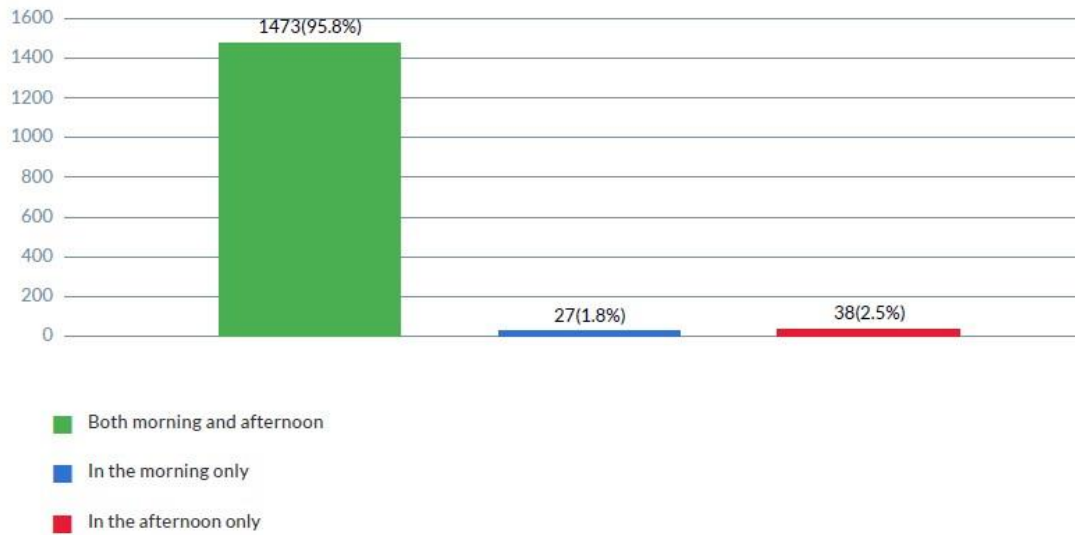
Length of school transport journey:

If you use School Transport

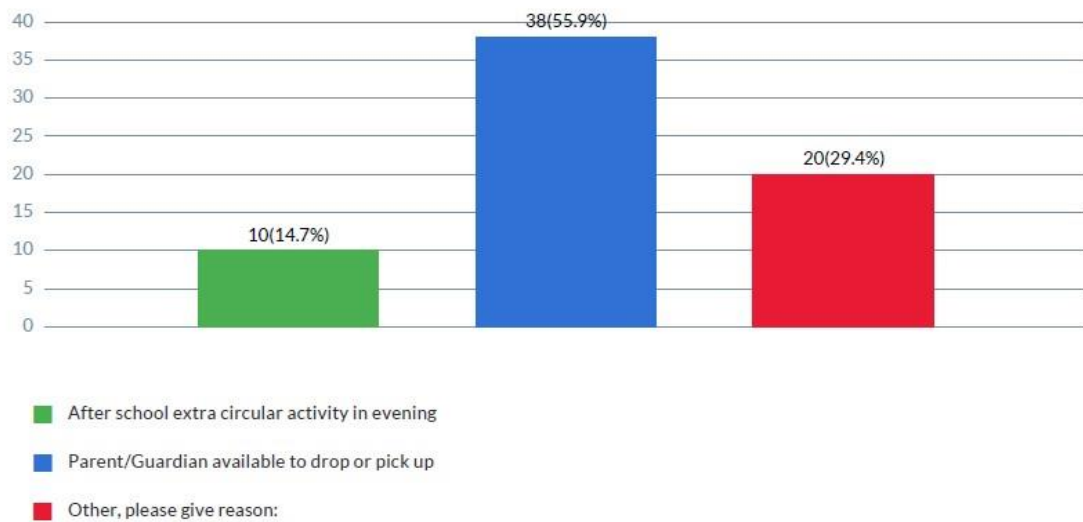


Number of journeys availed of each day:

If you use School Transport do you normally travel:



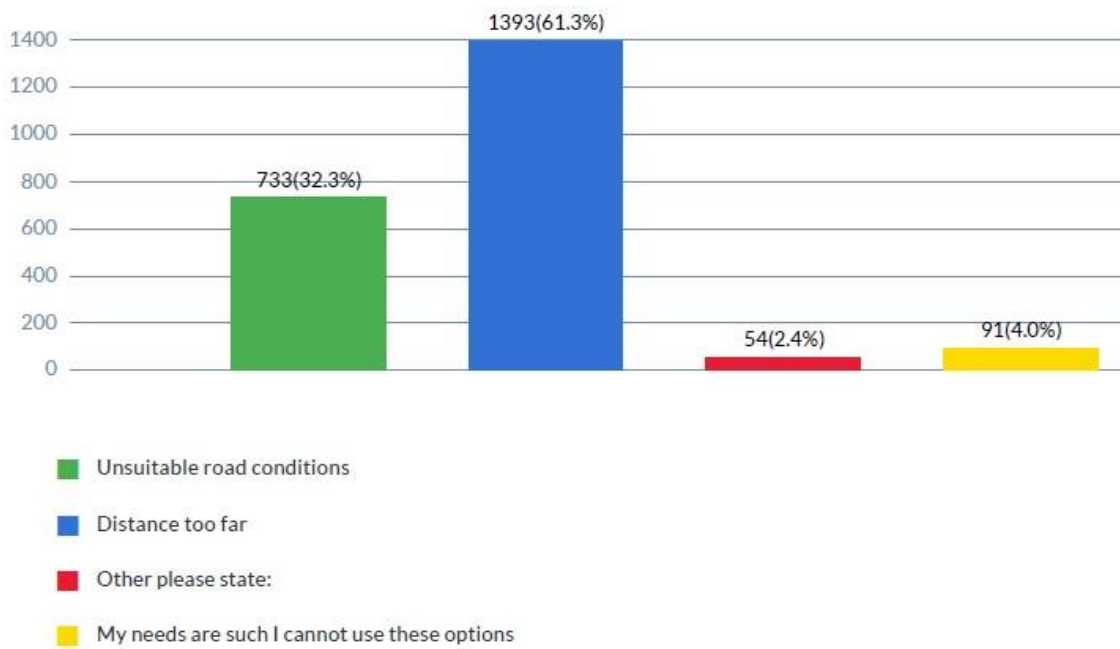
If you choose option morning only or afternoon only, could you please provide a reason to why only one journey is availed of to your school?



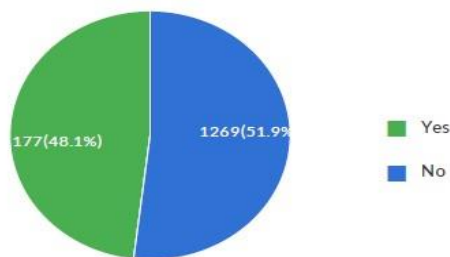
Option of walking/cycling to school

If you use school transport, could you walk or cycle to school as an alternative?	
Yes	No
22 (1.4%)	1517 (98.6%)

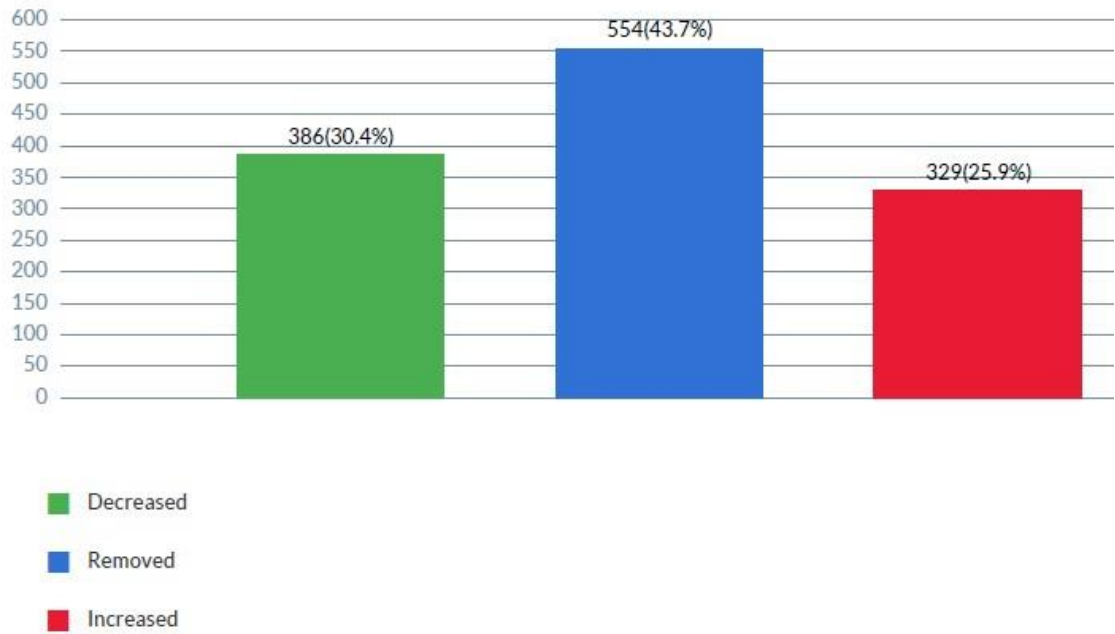
If 'No' to the above question, please advise why you could not walk or cycle to school:



Under the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible where they live 4.8 kilometres or more from their nearest post primary school/centre having regard to ethos and language.



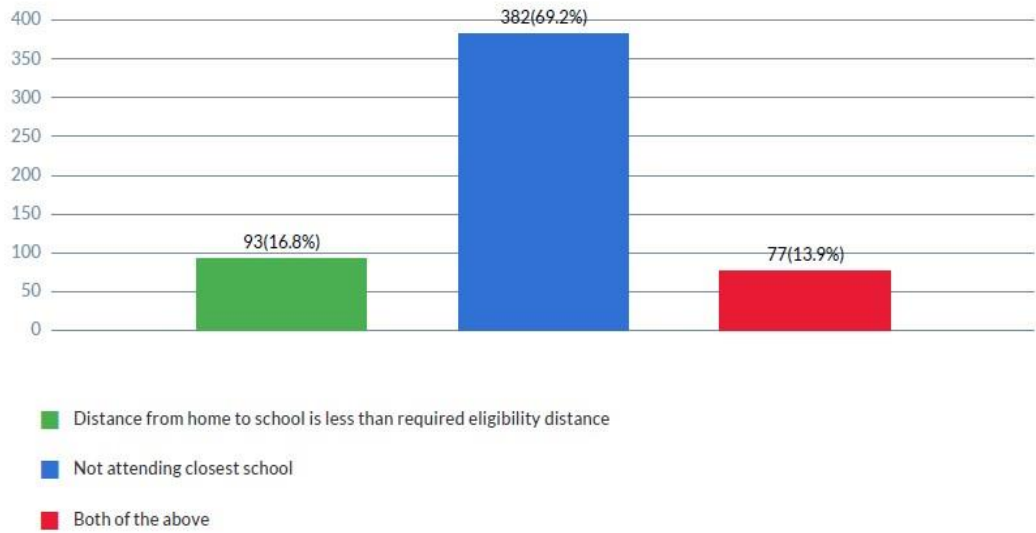
If you answered No to the above question do you think this distance criteria should be:



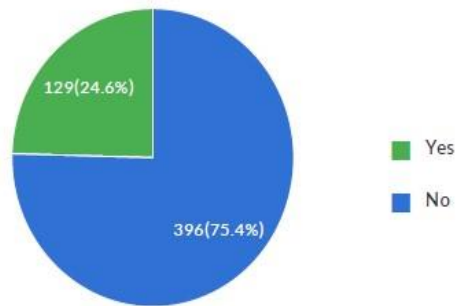
Concessionary mainstream school transport

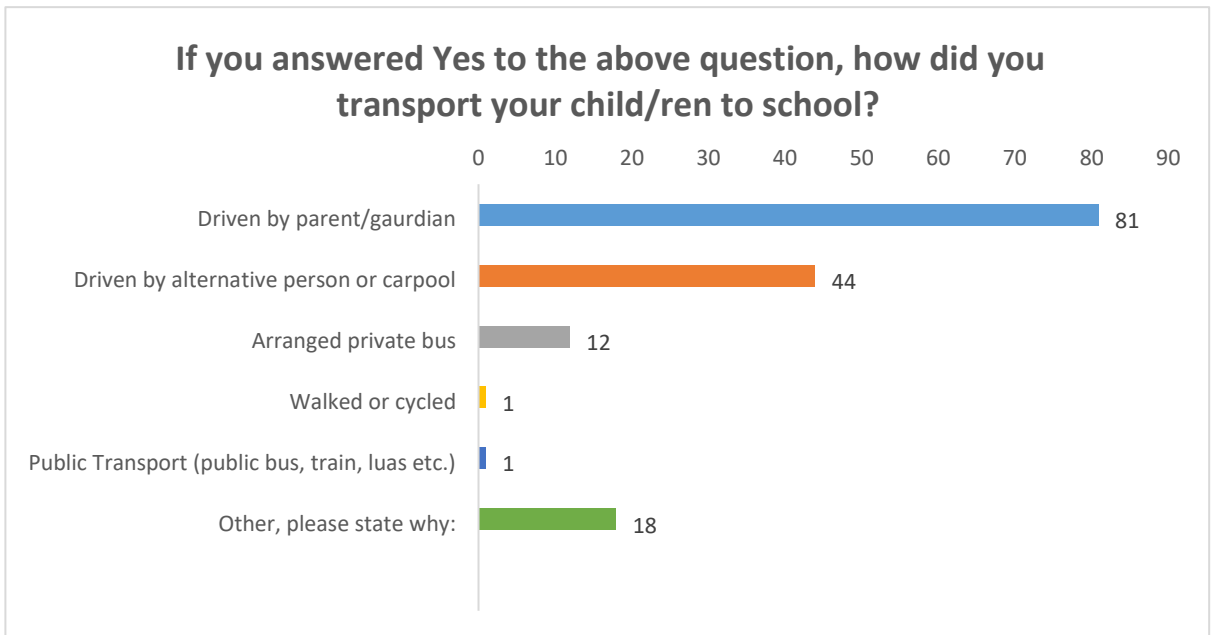
If your family has a concessionary ticket why is this the case?

Under the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible where they live 4.8 kilometres or more from their nearest post primary school/centre having regard to ethos and language.



If your family has a concessionary ticket, have you ever been unsuccessful in obtaining a ticket?





General Information

What county or city do you live in?

2447 Responses

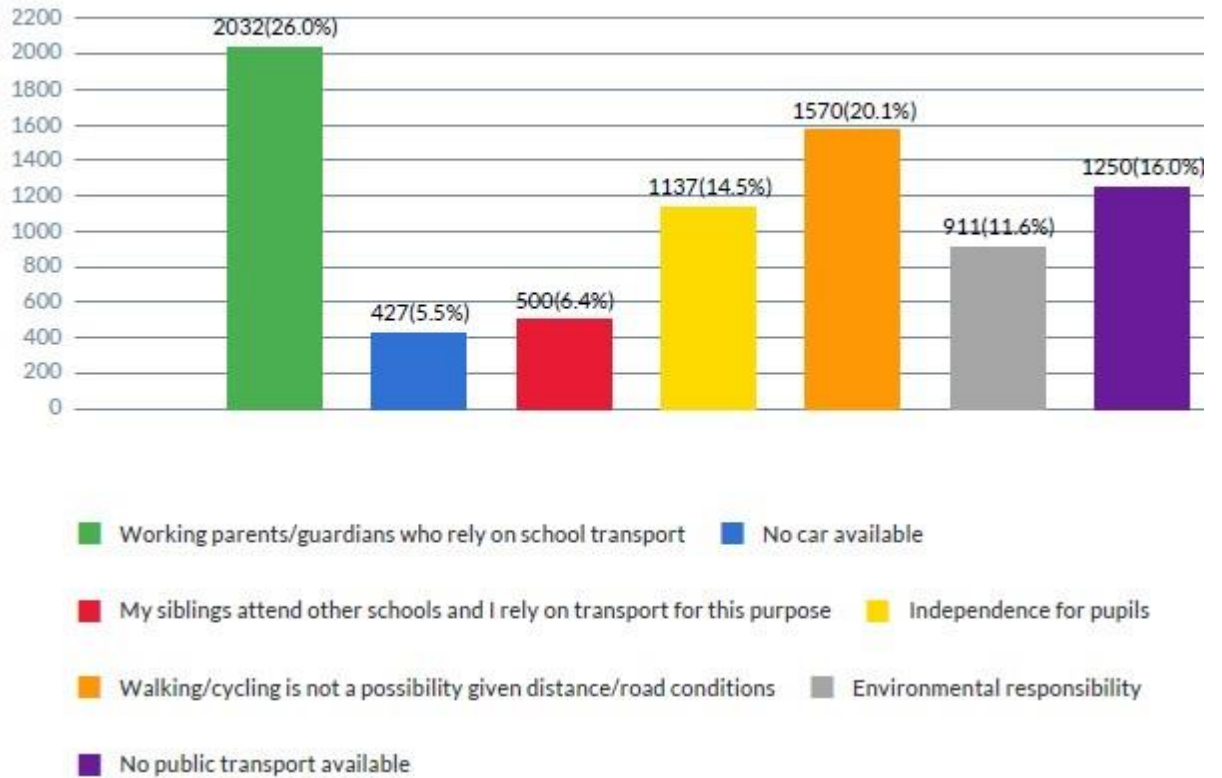
Answer	Count	Percent
Carlow	14	0.57%
Cavan	65	2.63%
Clare	80	3.24%
Cork City	35	1.42%
Cork County	353	14.31%
Donegal	392	15.89%
Dublin City	15	0.61%
Dublin County	93	3.77%
Galway City	33	1.34%
Galway County	62	2.51%
Kerry	246	9.97%
Kildare	111	4.50%
Kilkenny	48	1.95%
Laois	17	0.69%
Leitrim	25	1.01%
Limerick City	6	0.24%
Limerick County	154	6.24%
Longford	33	1.34%
Louth	34	1.38%
Mayo	20	0.81%
Meath	216	8.76%
Monaghan	18	0.73%
Offaly	11	0.45%
Roscommon	17	0.69%
Sligo	31	1.26%
Tipperary	71	2.88%
Waterford City	2	0.08%
Waterford County	39	1.58%
Westmeath	22	0.89%
Wexford	60	2.43%
Wicklow	144	5.84%

Which county or city is your school in?

2447 Responses

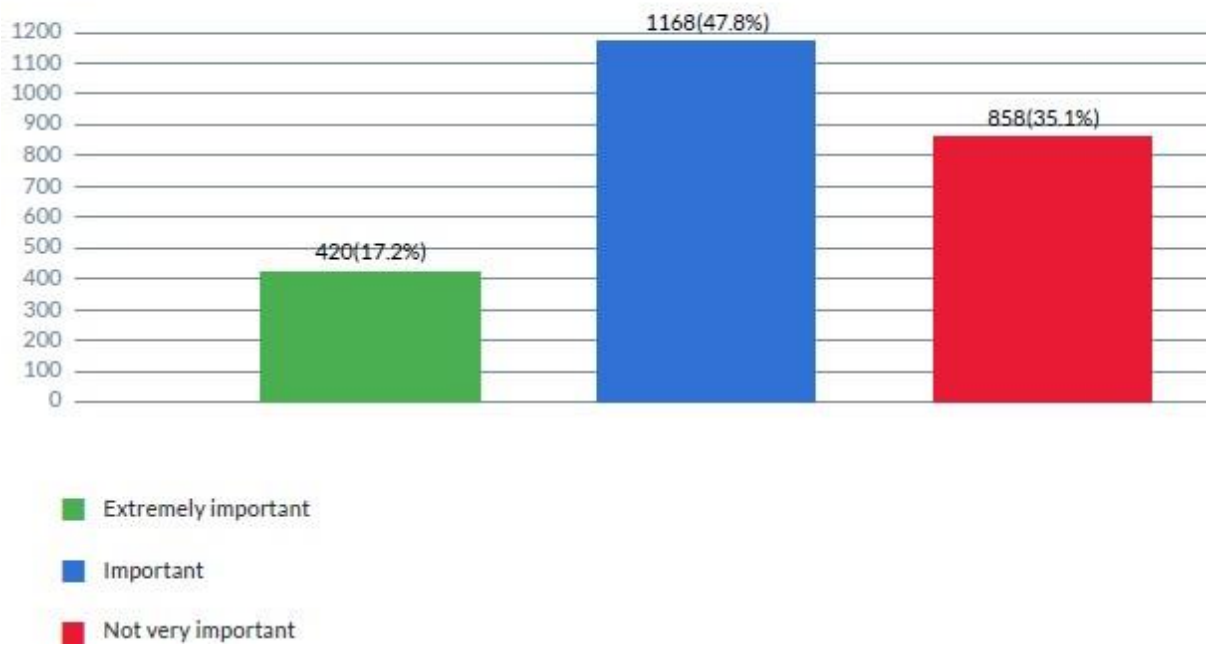
Answer	Count	Percent
Carlow	17	0.69%
Cavan	50	2.04%
Clare	76	3.11%
Cork City	36	1.47%
Cork County	360	14.71%
Donegal	391	15.98%
Dublin City	20	0.82%
Dublin County	70	2.86%
Galway City	45	1.84%
Galway County	52	2.13%
Kerry	246	10.05%
Kildare	113	4.62%
Kilkenny	39	1.59%
Laos	13	0.53%
Leitrim	20	0.82%
Limerick City	16	0.65%
Limerick County	140	5.72%
Longford	39	1.59%
Louth	51	2.08%
Mayo	18	0.74%
Meath	227	9.28%
Monaghan	13	0.53%
Offaly	12	0.49%
Roscommon	18	0.74%
Sligo	31	1.27%
Tipperary	74	3.02%
Waterford City	4	0.16%
Waterford County	30	1.23%
Westmeath	15	0.61%
Wexford	46	1.88%
Wicklow	165	6.74%

In your opinion why is School Transport important?



Climate Action

How important is climate action to you?



In your opinion, does school transport play an important role when it comes to supporting Climate Action?



94% yes 6% no