

HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT: ASSESSING AN AVAILABLE ROUTE

Introduction

West Berkshire Council's Home to School Transport Policy sets out the circumstances in which it will provide free transport to children and young people travelling to school or college. It relates to West Berkshire residents of statutory school age (from the term following 5th birthday to the end of Year 11).

Local Authorities are required by law to provide help for some pupils but may also provide help for others on a discretionary basis. The Home to School Transport Policy on our website contains full details of statutory and discretionary assistance which may be available.

In terms of travel between from home to school, we assess whether there is an available route. Risk assessments are undertaken in accordance with guidance notes issued by Road Safety GB in 2012 'Assessment of Walked Routes to School' and the Department for Education 'Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance'.

What is the route assessment for?

The Council does not determine the arrangements you may wish to put in place for your child. The available route assessment is to determine whether you qualify for transport.

The route we assess may be a different route to your preferred route. We would take account of any available route which is within the statutory walking distance.

Age	Distance
From: the term following the child's 5th birthday To: 7 years old.	2 miles walking distance from home, each way
From: the child's 8th birthday To: the end of the academic school year in which their 16th birthday falls.	3 miles walking distance from home, each way

The assessment of an available route is a mechanism for assessing entitlement to free transport, and not a directive about how a family makes their arrangements

What are the parents' responsibilities?

The law states that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that a child gets to school, including accompanying them, if appropriate. Hazards a child may face when alone are discounted in the national guidance, as assessments are made in the context of a child accompanied by an adult. Therefore, we assess a route based on the national expectation that a child will be accompanied by a suitable adult.

It is also the parents' responsibility to ensure that a child has suitable clothing and equipment for the journey (for example: boots, wet weather clothing, reflective bands, and torch). The national guidance is quite clear that conditions such as muddy footpaths or lack of lighting do not mean that a route is not available and expects that these issues can be overcome through the use of suitable clothing and equipment.

Who assesses the route?

Where the route involves roads, this is assessed by the Road Safety team. Where the route includes off-road routes, such as footpaths or Rights of Way, this is assessed by the Education Service. For some routes, input is required from both teams.

Staff will visit the route in person, and may walk the full length of the route or aspects of the route which need greater consideration during the assessment. Staff may also visit the route on different days and in different conditions.

The Road safety team will also access supporting information and data, such as vehicle volumes and accident statistics in relation to the route.

How is the Risk Assessment undertaken?

Assessments usually take place in the morning during the time children would be travelling to school and may also be undertaken at home time in the afternoon. Visits are timed so that crossing assessments of main roads take place at the times when the number of children travelling to school is highest.

No crossing point can be absolutely safe; the term used in the guidance is "reasonable safety" which would make the walking route available.

Assessments do not determine whether a route is "safe" or "dangerous". All roads may be thought of as presenting some element of road safety risk, whether they are heavily trafficked urban routes, or more lightly trafficked rural routes.

Statutory guidelines confirm that available routes may include crossing fields, wooded areas and public parks. Rights of Way will normally be considered available at all times as well as Permitted Paths and Bridleways.

The Council takes these factors into account:

We will assess:
Road width, visibility and the severity of bends
Existence of 'safe refuge': footpaths and verges, road markings at the side of the road
Existence of Rights of Way, Permitted Paths and Bridle Paths
The volume of traffic at the relevant period of day
The type of traffic and its relative speed
Difficulty of road crossings
Nature of road (urban/rural) and driver expectation
The presence or otherwise of speed limits and other warning signs
The accident record along the route

A high volume of fast-moving traffic is not in itself a reason to grant a route unsuitable - there may be a footpath and good crossing points along the route that would render it safe. Similarly, the lack of a footpath or verge would not be a reason to grant a route unsuitable if there was, for instance, a very low volume of traffic and good visibility. Even if there isn't a footway the walking route might still be assessed as available. The assessment will take account of traffic flows and whether car drivers have enough time to slow down or pedestrians have time to step-off the road or verge.

In line with Road Safety GB guidelines, we will not consider:

We will not consider:
Isolation of route
Local weather conditions
Transient events - road closures, construction work, seasonal weather (e.g. flooding, snow, ice)
Temporary surface conditions (e.g. mud, puddles)
Lack of street lighting
Lack of pavements
The presence of uncut hedges
Difficult terrain/arduousness of the route - steep hills are not a hazard
The time taken to walk the route

We have the final decision on whether a route is available.

What happens after we have assessed a route?

Assessments are recorded in a written report which contains maps and, if necessary, photographs. The route is assessed for hazards and a level of risk, with recommendations:

- Where a route is classified as low risk, transport will not be provided, unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- Where a route is classified as a medium risk, transport will not be provided, unless exceptional circumstances apply. The parents will be advised of the recommendations in relation to the medium risk sections of the route.
- Where a route is classified as high risk, transport will be provided.

What if I don't agree with your assessment?

Where a route is the subject of a discussion, we will share the route assessment with you and consider your comments in the context of the national guidance. We will provide a written response to your concerns.