

Assessment of School Bus Pick-up Points

Executive Summary

Prepared by MVA for
West Dunbartonshire Council

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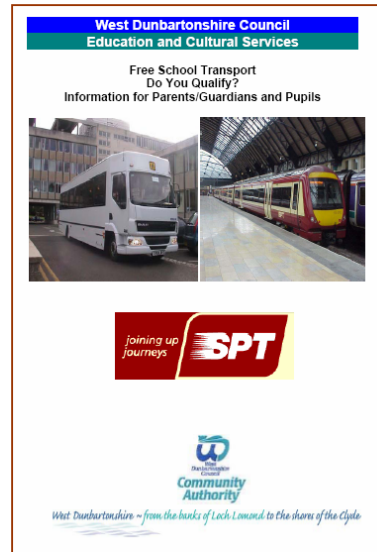
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In Scotland, under Sections 50 and 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities have a duty to provide free transport or transport facilities for children who live outwith the statutory walking distances to school, which are:

- 3.2 kilometres (two miles) or more for pupils under eight years old; and
- 4.8 kilometres (three miles) or more for older pupils.

Within West Dunbartonshire, school bus transport is provided for children who live more than **one mile** from primary schools and more than **two miles** from secondary schools. There are more than 100 pick-up points where buses stop to uplift school pupils. These range from public bus stops to rural roadside locations and the number of pupils uplifted at any one stop varies up to about 20.

The Scottish Executive's Circular No. 7/2003 provides updated guidance to local authorities about the provision of school transport and their statutory duties including provision of free school transport and safety of pupils when using school transport. The Circular also states that:



"Scottish Ministers expect authorities to keep their school transport provision under review to secure, as far as is reasonable and practicable, the safety of pupils at all times, in accordance with their duties under the Act and the Schools (Safety and Supervision of Pupils) (Scotland) Regulations 1990."



In light of the Scottish Executive guidance, West Dunbartonshire Council, as part of its continuous improvement agenda for local education and transport services, chose to initiate research into the methods which should be used to undertake engineering assessments of school bus pick-up points and give consideration to the hazards associated with such points.

The Council commissioned MVA Consultancy to undertake the initial desk research exercise which aimed to identify:

- whether there was any policy to undertake such an exercise elsewhere;
- whether there was any prevailing experience; and
- what the important issues were.



The desktop research highlighted that local authorities and school transport contractors (bus or taxi operators) have a common law duty of care for the safety of pupils under their charge. However, an engineering assessment to evaluate the risks associated with school bus pick-up points is not required by law. There is no reference to such engineering assessments in any of the Scottish or UK Government's school travel related policies which simply focus on:

- modal change, by encouraging use of alternative modes (public transport, walking and cycling) for school travel rather than private car; or
- child accident reductions, by either creating or improving the physical environment or through safety education.

Communication with other local authorities, English Passenger Transport Executives and the Sustrans "Safe Routes to School" co-ordinator highlighted that, although there are many schemes related to the above Government policies, no comprehensive assessments related to school bus pick-up points have been undertaken. Most of the related information available to define the key points in a school bus pick-up point assessment came from North American experience in school transport bus initiatives and experience in bus stop audits.



Responses to a 'state of the art' questionnaire, which was sent to all Scottish Local Authority school travel coordinators, suggests that there are only two Councils considering undertaking school bus pick-up point assessments although the majority of Council's support the idea of a system for an engineering assessment.



It should be noted that this study only considered pupils' safety whilst waiting, boarding and alighting at school bus pick-up points. It did not consider journeys to or from the home to these points nor from these points to or from schools. The study did not consider journeys and behaviour on school buses either.



Recommendations

Site Assessments

From the research, a pro-forma has been developed for site assessments in order to highlight the risks associated with school bus pick-up points. It covers many topics including provision of guardrails, lighting, signing, the footway width, approach visibility, shelter, stopping location for parents dropping children off or waiting for the bus to arrive. The differences between urban and rural sites can also be considered. Road conditions, vehicle speed and the likelihood of the hazard being a danger can also be considered.

We recommended undertaking a few site assessments as a pilot exercise to confirm the suitability of the pro-forma and to accurately assess the detailed challenges that may be faced in the field and the costs associated with undertaking such exercises. Following the pilot, a modified assessment form has been prepared.

The output from the pilot assessments formed the basis of a report containing the original and amended pro-formas and our conclusions on its wider use. The information gathered can be used to populate a database and thereafter used to identify a list of prioritised sites and schedule remedial actions if required.

Database for School Pick Up Points

For the wider use of the Assessment Form, we recommend that assessors be provided with detailed route maps for the school bus routes showing the pick-up points. Ideally such information would be stored in a GIS environment and would involve:

- obtaining route details from the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport;
- mapping these on a suitable mapping background, colour coded by school;
- adding details of the bus pick-up points and annotating them to provide a unique reference number for each; and
- creating a database which would be related to the bus pick-up reference mapping and contain all of the engineering assessment details for each bus stop.

Additionally, we recommend examining the available STATS19 accident records for those sites considered to be worthy of more detailed review to determine whether or not there have been any accidents associated with any of the pick-up points. This is particularly important in prioritising the pick-up points that should be subject to remedial actions.



Shared Responsibilities Handouts

School transport is a shared responsibility and all parties should be aware of the different roles that they can play to promote safety at school bus pick-up points. All stakeholders have some degree of responsibility and their roles, identified during the study, are shown in the Figure 1.

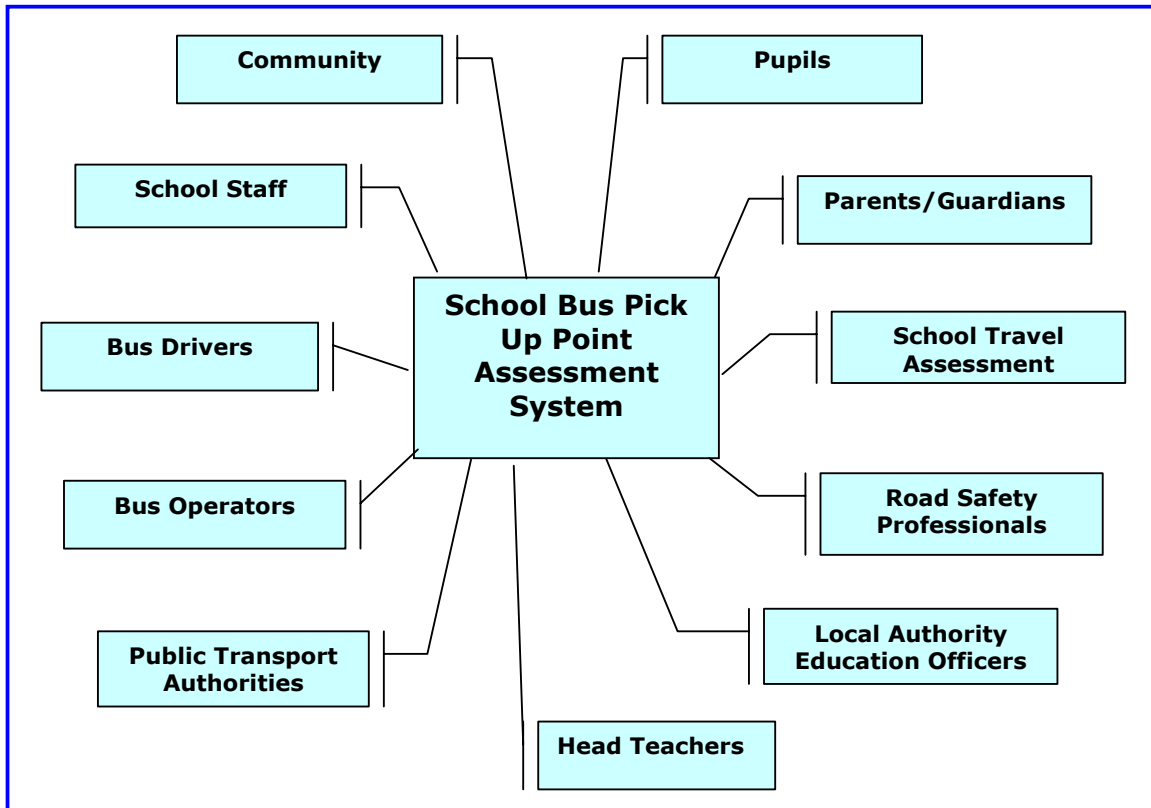


Figure 1: Stakeholders of a School Bus Pick-Up Point Assessment



We recommend that in a school bus pick-up point assessment system these roles and responsibilities should be clearly communicated to all parties in the form of



information handouts as in the bespoke scheme developed by West Yorkshire PTE, METRO's SAFEMark). In so doing, it would send a clear message to parents on the actions being taken by the Council.

Branding Exercise

We also consider that there is potential to create an award scheme with a trademark for best practice in school transport pick-up point assessment provision. This could be based on the experience gained in West Dunbartonshire and then transferred to other local authorities within the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area.

