

# members' briefing

NOVEMBER 2001

## Going Places

### Taking people to and from education, social services and healthcare

**Home-to-school transport, social services transport and non-emergency patient transport provide access to public services, promoting social inclusion. They also help to reduce car use, thus contributing to the environmental agenda. The users include some of the most vulnerable people in society. Expectations may rise in response to best value.**

- councils spend about £600 million a year on transport to special schools and to mainstream schools and colleges
- they also spend over £150 million a year taking people to and from social services

**Public services are becoming increasingly user-focused. However, these transport services remain strongly finance driven.**

- many people are likely to be confused by the complex arrangements that subsidise and support their travel
- authorities vary in how they exercise discretion on eligibility for home-to-school transport

- some users are concerned about poor quality vehicles, rude drivers and poor driving, and vandalism and bullying on mainstream home-to-school transport; and unprofessional behaviour – such as swearing and bad driving – by some drivers and passenger assistants on special educational needs and social services transport
- service standards vary
- drivers and passenger assistants are not always trained, briefed on passengers' needs or police-screened when they should be. The taxi drivers who help to provide the transport have often received no training

#### In addition...

- budget setting should be improved and more realistic. Overspend problems are common
- home-to-school transport should be better integrated with wider transport policies

- use of resources and value for money can be improved further, for example by more co-ordination of arrangements within councils and between councils and health bodies, better use of IT, reviewing routes and better management of the use of taxis and hired-cars
- local authorities face challenges, including joint commissioning of health and social care; individually designed packages of social care; inclusion of children with special educational needs at mainstream schools; the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act; increasing specialisation by schools; and a growing emphasis on after-school activities.

**Central government can help by reviewing the framework within which councils and health bodies work but councils have opportunities further to improve services and user-focus. Effective home-to-school and social services transport play key roles in allowing people to access public services and so make significant contributions to education and social care.**

If you want to know more the National Report, *Going Places: Taking People to and from Education, Social Services and Healthcare* looks at these issues in more detail. On 13 December 2001, the Commission will also publish practical handbooks for local government managers that contain detailed good practice checklists and case studies.

Audit Commission, *Going Places: Taking People to and from Education, Social Services and Healthcare*, (National Report), ISBN 1 86240 329 5, £20.00, stock code: GNR2643

Audit Commission, *Improving Transport for Social Services Users: A Practical Handbook for Managers*, ISBN 1 86240 330 9, stock code: LMH2650, £25.00. Available from 13 December 2001.

Audit Commission, *Improving Mainstream Home-to-School Transport: A Practical Handbook for Managers*, ISBN 1 86240 331 7, stock code: LMH2651, £25.00. Available from 13 December 2001.

Audit Commission, *Improving Home-to-School Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs*, ISBN 1 86240 332 5, stock code: LMH2652, £25.00. Available from 13 December 2001.

These, and more copies of this briefing (stock code: GEB2646) are available from:

Audit Commission Publications, PO Box 99, Wetherby, LS23 7JA, Freephone 0800 502030.

# Action by local authorities

LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD:	THIS WILL:
<i>Improve user-focus</i>	
Consult with service users and their parents/carers and with other stakeholders such as schools and social services centres	Identify whether current arrangements meet user needs and, if they do not, what improvements are needed to create quality, user-focused arrangements
Ensure that services meet health and safety and other legal requirements and also reflect the results of consultation. (Councils should work to national quality standards once these have been set by central Government, enhancing these locally if they choose, so that they reflect local needs and priorities)	Help to ensure that services are safe and meet users' needs and expectations
Work with schools and transport providers to address vandalism and bullying on mainstream home-to-school transport, considering whether it is necessary in appropriate cases to place passenger assistants on vehicles	Reduce vandalism and bullying, making bus-based travel to school more attractive to pupils and parents. This will reduce operators' losses to vandalism, and so help to control contract prices. Improved pupil behaviour will also make driving school buses less stressful, helping to address driver shortages and associated wage pressures
Ensure that drivers and passenger assistants are properly trained and screened	Help to meet health and safety obligations and improve customer care
<i>Take account of the wider policy context</i>	
Examine arrangements in the context of wider policies on access to, and the location of, education facilities and social services, when carrying out best value reviews	Ensure that best value reviews are not focused narrowly on technical aspects of transport but that they also address fundamental questions about why transport services are needed and about who is to use them
Consider policies and arrangements in the context of social inclusion, wider environmental policies, broader transport policies and the health and fitness agenda	Integrate approaches with broader transport and travel policies
<i>Work with others</i>	
Consider whether there is scope to improve access, efficiency, effectiveness and customer focus, for example by working in partnership. Options include greater co-operation across departments within the authority, working with PTEs (in the metropolitan areas), with community transport bodies from the voluntary sector and with health bodies	Identify opportunities to provide customers with integrated, user-focused services or to use resources more efficiently
<i>Review funding</i>	
Set realistic budgets that reflect demand and the authority's service standards, and monitor expenditure regularly and effectively	Take account of service standards when setting budgets and reduce the likelihood of budget overspends
<i>Improve efficiency</i>	
Review the use of IT, route planning and scheduling and the use of taxis and hired-cars	Release resources to fund improvements in quality
<i>Improve how the services are managed</i>	
Clearly delineate transport roles, especially when transport is provided in-house	Help ensure that client departments are setting and monitoring performance against quality standards. It will also help with budget setting and monitoring
<i>Monitor performance more effectively</i>	
Use contracts or service level agreements that encourage service providers to meet and exceed safety and quality standards	Help to ensure that safety and quality standards are met
<i>Plan for change</i>	
Review how transport requirements and funding need to change in response to the challenges ahead	Ensure that transport arrangements respond to increased joint commissioning of health and social care, to other changes in social care (such as individually designed care packages) and to changes in education (such as greater specialisation by schools and a greater emphasis on after-school activities)

Source: Audit Commission