

Dear Headteacher,

As you will be aware the Department for Transport (DfT) and Department for Education (DfE) have issued guidance on the transport arrangements that should be in place when schools resume in September. I am writing to let you know how the Combined Authority can continue to help you with school transport and what limitations there are in what we are able to offer.

We want schools to know that there is much we can do support you, but this will be constrained by the availability of spare capacity within the transport system and funding in the absence of additional Government support.

In brief, the guidance states that dedicated school bus services will be treated differently to the public transport network in that social distancing will not be required. It also states that additional school bus services should be provided where possible to reduce reliance on the public transport network and that children who live within two miles of school should walk or cycle where possible.

The Combined Authority is keen to support partnership working with local councils, schools, and transport providers to implement the guidance.

The following summarises our initial overall approach and limitations. This is, of course, subject to continuous review and possible further change:

- We will put back in place the services to your school that operated in the 2019/20 academic year (preCOVID-19) subject to the usual annual refinements to address changes in demand . Unfortunately, it will not be possible to transport children in class or year bubbles and services will therefore be scheduled according to where children live. The DfE guidance does not require year/ class bubbles to be kept separate on transport.
- Our planning is based upon your current start and finish times. If these are to radically change, please advise us as soon as possible as there will be cost and resource availability issues to address. In such an eventuality we would seek to share transport resources with other schools.
- In following the Government guidance allowing higher occupancy rates, we will be using all seating capacity on buses. On secondary school services, all children will be required to wear a face covering unless exempted for medical or other reasons. Travel Assistance Cards to show to the driver are available for download at wymetro.com.
- Subject to availability, the Combined Authority will arrange additional, temporary, school bus services to ensure that children are not required to stand.
- We are aware that many students use regular bus services to get to school and that social distancing has limited the capacity of these bus services to less than 50%. We are therefore seeking to establish where this may be a problem requiring additional buses. Any intelligence from schools would be most helpful. Some schools are surveying parents about requirements from September, it would be useful to include questions about travel intentions and concerns in these surveys.
- The Combined Authority is currently testing the market to establish how many additional buses may be available to schools in the region. Subject to availability,

- we will procure additional, temporary, school bus services to resolve public transport capacity issues.
- • Schools should contact the relevant local authority for advice about the travel arrangements for children who live outside their authority.
- • We will prioritise the transport needs of children who live furthest away from school. As a starting point we will aim to transport all children who live more than two miles away. Where children live less than two miles from school, we would assume they will walk or cycle to school in line with Government guidance. By prioritising services in this way, it will assist in redeploying vehicles to areas of high demand.
- • Operators will be required to follow Government guidance on hygiene and cleanliness.
- • Transport to swimming pools and other centres organised by the Combined Authority will not be provided until after the October half term break so that resources can be used to provide additional school bus services. This arrangement may have to be extended further.
- • To support the above, where applicable, the closing date for receipt of applications for bus passes has been extended from 26 June 2020 to 31 July 2020. This will allow more time for service planning. It would be appreciated if schools would use their usual communication channels to let parents know that applications received after this date may mean their children are not factored into the new arrangements.

We have secured an agreement from operators to work on greatly reduced timescales for re/scheduling existing services and procuring any new ones for additional/alternative options. In most cases, decisions on services will need to be made by the end of July at the latest. If a school is unable to confirm plans by then it is unlikely that we will be able to make further changes.

In the case of capacity on current dedicated school bus services, the Combined Authority will take steps to ensure that suitable provision is in place.

Where children are reliant on public transport, we will use our best endeavours to establish from the school census and bus operators a list of journeys where capacity is likely to be an issue. However, this may not provide the full picture and we are therefore seeking your assistance in this matter. It may be that the school already holds information on the use of public transport. If so, we would ask that you share this information with us. If not, we would ask that you carry out a survey of parents. This need only be as simple as asking if their children use public transport and the service number they normally use.

If you wish to contact us or send information in connection with this, you can do so at restart2020@westyorks-ca.gov.uk, or, 01133 481122 which will be available from Friday 10 July 2020.