



investing in children

Fares Fair

The Investing In Children Transport Group Report

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Introduction

The Investing in Children Transport group came together in 1998 after two separate reports identifying transport as a key issue were published. In these reports young people drew attention to some of the problems we faced in getting around, and the consequences that can be caused by lack of mobility.

For example, if you live in a village, getting to a leisure centre can be a major and expensive expedition, particularly if you are over 14 and have to pay full fare. Or perhaps you want to get confidential advice about a health issue. It might be difficult to play for the school netball team which practices after school, if this means missing the school bus. Another example was having to walk through an unlit area on the way to school, and finding it difficult to get adults in authority to take our anxieties seriously.

Being able to get around safely and independently effects the extent to which we feel we are full members of the community. The present system favours better-off families with cars or the money to pay full fares on the buses - it discriminates against less well-off families, who often already feel that they are excluded.

We also had broader concerns about the environment and the future. It seemed to us that the way the system works in Durham encourages people to rely on cars, and therefore as soon as they are old enough, young people will also want to have their own transport. It would be much better for everyone if young people were growing up with a public transport system that they found accessible, reliable and affordable.

Exploring the Issues

It was agreed to pursue some of these issues further. In the first instance we arranged a meeting at Durham County Hall with representatives of the major bus companies and the County Council's Environment Department. At this meeting we particularly wanted to talk about the following :-

- Fares - too few concessions for young people
- Attitudes - of some drivers
- Frequency of buses

From our point of view the outcome of the meeting was disappointing. We all felt that we were patronised and told what **they** wanted us to know, and not what **we** wanted to know. We realized that information was power and for us to take part in the debate about transport in County Durham we needed, not only be able to talk about our own experiences, but also to have information about how transport was arranged elsewhere

We decided that it was important to gather research on transport in depth and to explore transport systems in other countries as well in other parts of England, to see how they worked in comparison to County Durham.

The Research.

We agreed Holland would be a good place to visit and also made contact with various County Councils around the country. We received no reply from some. Of those who did reply, we decided to visit:

- Cumbria
- Derbyshire
- Northumbria

On the next few pages of the report there are diaries of each visit that was made in England, and of course our visit to Holland.

Holland

The group took a lot of time planning the trip to Holland. We were concerned that our trip should be as environmentally friendly as possible. Therefore we decided to only travel by ferry, bus, tram or train.

We made contact with a number of groups in Holland, and eventually arranged to meet two groups during our stay in Utrecht. One of these groups was an environmental group similar to Local Agenda 21. Our second appointment was at a conference for Dutch Youth Councils.

We discovered a lot about transport in Holland. We found, to our surprise , that there weren't any concessionary fares on public transport for under 18's. Those 18 or over who needed to use public transport to access further

education were, however, eligible for concessions. Buses aren't the main means of public transport in Holland, as they are in England. In Utrecht, trams are used quite widely throughout the city. There is a particular means of transport which is very popular in Holland - this form of transport is cycling. With Holland being a flat area it makes cycling a popular choice. There are a lot of cycle lanes and bike parks for the public to leave their bikes safely, thus encouraging people to use their bicycles more. The Dutch also see cycle travel as a means to help cut down air pollution.

In Holland there is a system of 'train taxis' for those who live in rural areas where there is no other form of public transport. The taxi service collects from the train station and takes the public to rural areas within a five mile radius. The fares for the train taxis are quite low.

Cumbria

When we arrived at Carlisle Bus Company headquarters we were met by the executive of the company and two other employees. After explaining what Investing In Children is all about we asked a series of questions which provided information to help expand our research.

The fare structure in Carlisle is quite different from that in County Durham. In Carlisle young people up to the age of 16 pay 1/3 of the adult fare. The free school bus pass system, however is not as generous as in Durham. To qualify you have to live more than three miles from the school (which is the legal requirement). In County Durham it is two miles

Throughout the meeting the group felt as though the staff were quite happy to help, and seemed really interested in what Investing in Children were doing.

Derbyshire

On arrival in Derbyshire we were escorted to the Stagecoach East Midland head office on one of their buses. Here we met David Wood from the County Council's Environment Department, Tim Stevenson who works in the Education Department (responsible for school transport) and Pete Rogers, a manager from Stagecoach .

Pete Rogers gave us a detailed insight into the various schemes that operate. Children who are under the age of eight are entitled to free school transport if they live over two miles away from their allocated school. Children over the age of eight are entitled to free school transport if they live over 3 miles away from their allocated school. Post 16 are entitled to free school transport to their local college. 12,000 young people in Derbyshire have free school transport passes which can also be used on other routes.

Stagecoach (the main school service operators) have a company policy that states 'Every child will finish his or her journey'. This means that if a child has forgotten their pass or their bus fare they will still reach their required destination.

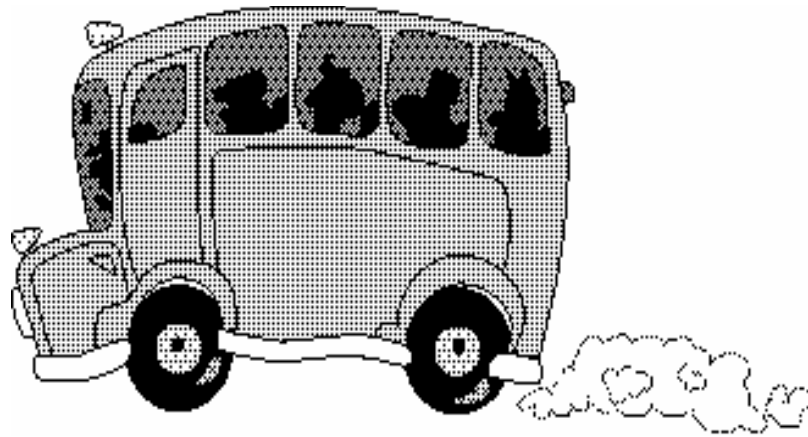
In the future Stagecoach are going to introduce some low rider buses which will provide easy access for disabled people, but presently these buses don't exist as they have not received funding. There are also Green Passes available for the blind and the deaf.

We discovered that the main sponsor of Stagecoach was the County Council. This money subsidises the concessionary fares. We were informed that all children up to the age of 14 pay 2/3 of the adult fare,(1/2 fare on the services subsidised by the county council). At the age of 14, all young people are issued with a travel pass from their school. This pass entitles them to pay 1/2 fares until the 18th birthday, provided they are in full time education. This pass is valid on buses, trains and it can be used outside of Derbyshire, in neighbouring counties, on certain routes. This entitles the young people to travel at any time to Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and locally, paying half fare by train or bus.

Another one of Derbyshire's transport schemes is the Community Transport Bus. There are 67 Community Buses in use in Derbyshire. The buses are there for the community to book to use at any time.

Cycling is also becoming increasingly popular in Derbyshire. At one comprehensive school young people are provided with a safe place to keep their bikes. A brochure is also provided which tells them the safest ways to travel to school and has a map of the town inside of it. Young People may only travel to school by cycle if they have passed their cycling proficiency test and wear a helmet.

Another great idea that Derbyshire County Council is trying to promote is a document called 'School Transport: A Code of Good Practice'. This document is issued to all drivers of school buses, to all pupils that use school transport and their parents. It consists of lots of information about all aspects of school transport, they need only to look at the document and it will tell them all of the information they need to know.



We were very impressed with Derbyshire's efforts and it seemed to us that their system allowed greater freedom for young people to get around both within the County and beyond. This is particularly interesting because Derbyshire is not part of an urban area like , for example, Tyneside, where, we were told, transport is cheaper because there are more people living closer together. In fact, Derbyshire is very similar to Durham, with lots of people living in pit villages in a rural county.

Northumbria

We decided to go to Morpeth to find out how they ran their bus services in comparison to County Durham. When we arrived there the woman who came to meet us just sat in the reception and asked us what we wanted to know. She then said she didn't know if she was the right person to be talking to, and took us to the office to talk to other employees.

The people who we met with didn't seem interested in what we were doing, and couldn't really give us any other useful or relevant information. However, while asking the questions we realised that they ran their bus service in a very similar way to County Durham (half fare to 14), except that their school mile ratio was still three miles before you could get a bus pass.

After the visit, the whole group felt as though the meeting was unsatisfactory and we wondered if we should maybe have met with some other people.

What we know now that we didn't know before.

At our first meeting at County Hall with representatives of Environmental & Technical Services, Go Ahead Northern and Arriva, we felt that our case was not taken seriously. For example, one of the suggestions we received was that we should take our concerns to Parliament as it was the Government's fault for not providing enough money to local government. We knew things were not that simple but felt that we would need to provide more evidence of our experiences and conduct research outside of Durham.

During our research we discovered that in Derbyshire fares for young people are more heavily subsidised, and that this subsidy is funded not by the bus companies but by the local authority. We also found out that half price fares for young people had produced the knock on effect of more people using the bus service, thus making it more cost effective for the companies and reducing the overall cost of the subsidy.

Of all the places we visited only Derbyshire operated a policy that promised that every child would complete his/her journey even if they had forgotten their bus pass or did not have the fare. Young people in Derbyshire are also provided with a very useful information booklet 'School Transport - A Code of Practice' which is also used by the bus driver.

Clearly Holland provides the best example of a safe cycle network. However, in Derbyshire cycling is encouraged too, with schools taking the lead in mapping out safe cycle routes to school and providing secure places to store bicycles.

What do we want to achieve?

- **Public Transport.**

Fares

We want fares for public transport to change. We agree with cheaper fares for the elderly but think they should be provided for young people and the unemployed because we don't work, therefore, don't receive an income. ⁱ

Bus services should be more frequent in rural areas. Linking the frequency of buses to the fares, if the fares were cheaper, more people would use the services and more frequently.

The issue of sustainability is raised here because if young people use public transport now it will be more likely that they will use it in the future. This then ensures custom for the transport companies in the future.

Timetables.

We also feel that people need better access to timetables, because they need to know what time a bus goes to and from a certain place, how frequently the buses run and how many buses run to a specific place.

Bus Shelters.

Public transport can be a bit daunting, especially during the darker hours of the day. This is sometimes because we feel unsafe in bus shelters which are unlit and made of brick, not glass. We feel anxious about brick bus shelters being perfect places for attackers to strike because the inside of the shelter can only be seen from the front. Glass bus shelters can be looked into from all angles. Passers by can help if they notice something unusual happening, and this might deter an attacker.



Driver Training.

We feel that bus drivers don't treat us with the respect that we deserve. Bus drivers should do a compulsory training course to help them communicate better with the public. As a result of our research on the Sour Grapes project, we discovered the issue of young people experiencing bad attitudes from bus drivers. They felt that they were treated differently just because they were young. Training for the drivers should include some input from young people. This could help with improving the drivers' attitudes towards young people.ⁱⁱ

Making a Complaint.

Following a meeting with the local bus companies they told us that if we have a problem we should make a complaint. Sometimes members of the public don't know who to complain to. There is often a telephone number on the inside of buses, but this is no use to the public if they aren't on the bus. For many young people, their complaint is that the bus hasn't stopped for them. We feel that there should be a freephone number on the outside of the bus and at bus stops. This would allow the public to make official complaints easily when necessary.

- **Safe Journeys to School.**

Quite a large transport issue for young people is their journey to and from school. There is very little, if any, advice given to young people and children about the safest routes to school. In other parts of England, such as Derbyshire, there is advice given, along with leaflets on child and young person safety.

A Headteacher of one of the schools in Derbyshire produced a leaflet “Stay Safe, Here and Back”. The leaflet unfolded into a map outlining the safe routes to take, bus pick up points and recommended crossings.ⁱⁱⁱ

If this sort of advice is practiced in Durham, young people and children would feel a lot more safe on their journey to school. This may encourage more children and young people to walk, improving their health and reducing pollution.

Lighting.

Lighting around a school is also an issue. Young people and children need to have good quality lighting around school when leaving, especially in the Winter and when leaving after school activities. This would also encourage young people to take part in after school activities, when they know they can get home safely.

Cycling.

We believe that there should be more cycle lanes in Durham which are much safer for cyclists because they keep the motor vehicles separate from the bike.^{iv} However there should also be some secure places for people to leave their bikes. Cycling to school in the morning is a good idea if you know your bike will still be there for you to go home on in the evening. As in Holland, safe routes and secure parking would then interest more people in using cycles, giving them a healthy and environmentally friendly form of transport.

Conclusions

In this report, we have tried to sum up what we have learned about transport over the last year. We have come up with some suggestions which we believe will make it easier for children and young people to get around safely and independently. We also believe that our suggestions, particularly about fares, will create a more equal system, which doesn't favour the better-off.

We believe this is important - we want Durham to be a fair place to live and grow up. We also believe it is important for the future - if we are going to look after the environment, we need to take steps to create a transport system that doesn't rely on the private car.

ⁱⁱ We were pleased to see that this has been acknowledged as a key target in the Environment and Technical Services Business Plan, 1999/2000.

ⁱⁱ In a survey of young people's attitudes conducted by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, when asked how they thought transport staff could be more helpful, 33% suggested they should be more respectful, polite and not shout.

ⁱⁱⁱ We know that this issue is being addressed in the County Durham Transport Plan. We would suggest that the scheme in Derbyshire is worth looking at.

^{iv} We see that this has been acknowledged in the Transport Plan. However, it isn't one of the proposed measures listed under Safe Routes to School.