

Unsafe Walking Routes Assessment Policy

Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to provide home to school transport for eligible children (as defined by Section 508B of the Act).

The Act specifies that one of the categories of eligible children for whom transport must be provided, is defined as “children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest suitable school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe to walk” (Department for Education Statutory Guidance 2014). This document only relates to this part of the Act. In relation to all other applications for free school transport please see our policies on our website at www.shropshire.gov.uk

This policy applies to children who live within the statutory walking distance to their catchment or nearest suitable school. Shropshire Council may give help with travel if the route has been assessed as “unsafe” and there is no other alternative route below the walking distance. This policy has been written in line with the Department for Education Statutory Guidance 2014 and the Road Safety GB Assessment of Walked Routes to School guidelines 2021.

Assessment and calculation of routes

The Council uses a mapping system to establish the distance between the home address and the catchment or nearest suitable school. A route may be a road, public byway, footpath, public right of way, canal towpath or a bridleway which provide a suitable walking surface. This system measures along the footpath network between the pupil’s home gate or drive to the nearest gate/entrance of the school grounds. (Please note that some internet packages may show different measurements as they use the road network to measure distances.)

If a route has been assessed within the last 5 years and not deemed to be an “unsafe walking route”, it will not be reassessed, unless there is evidence of material change to the route that may affect its classification. If the route has never been assessed or was assessed more than 5 years ago, it will be walked or observed (traffic counted) by a member of the team to determine if it should be classified as “unsafe”.

Timing of Assessments

The assessment of the route will take place on a school day and at the same time as if your child was walking to or from school at the start and end of the normal school day. If there are road crossings to be made along the route, the assessment will include a traffic volume count to establish the level of traffic using the route. If the concerns are regarding the route between a pick up or drop off point, then the timings of the assessments will be adjusted accordingly. If Shropshire Council finds that a section of the route is considered “unsafe to walk” then it will no longer be included as part of the statutory walking distance measurement.

If there is an alternative route which avoids the “unsafe to walk” section of the route, Shropshire Council will measure the new route and if it is further than the statutory walking distance, then free school travel assistance will be provided. However, if the

alternative route is still less than the statutory walking distance, free school travel assistance will not be provided.

Accompaniment

Where a local authority decides that a route is reasonably safe for an accompanied child, there is a general expectation that the parent/carer will accompany their child or make other suitable arrangements for their journey to school. A child will not automatically be eligible for free home to school travel solely because their parents/carers work commitments or caring responsibilities mean they are unable to accompany their child themselves. A child may not be able to walk a route in reasonable safety if they are alone but may be able to do so if they are accompanied by an adult.

This policy therefore assumes that a child will be accompanied by a responsible parent/carer.

Risks

The assessment process considers only the potential risk created by traffic, highway and topographical conditions. Local authorities are not legally obliged to provide free transport just because parents perceive the route to be unsafe on the grounds of personal safety and security.

Shropshire Council does not consider the following when assessing whether a route is “unsafe to walk”:

- Local weather conditions – severe weather may be regarded as a reason for a child to be absent from school
- Transient events – road closures, construction work, flooding
- The presence of uncut hedges
- Difficult terrain/arduousness of the route – steep hills are not considered as “unsafe to walk”
- Practicalities or time taken to walk the route
- Personal security or safety

Street Lighting

The absence of street lighting is not a factor on its own that would determine a route to be “unsafe”. This is because sight lines and visibility are considered during the assessment process and it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that their child/ren wear suitable clothing and footwear, including reflective clothing if appropriate and flashlights where necessary.

Road Accident Data

The accident record for the route over a period of 3 years will be taken into consideration. The existence of an accident record does not necessarily indicate that the route is unsafe for the journey to school, this would depend on the type, nature and relevance of the incidents.

Crossing Points

When it is necessary to cross a road, where there are marked pedestrian crossings, pedestrian refuges, signal controlled junctions (with a pedestrian phase) and location with a School Crossing Patrol the route will not be deemed an “unsafe route to walk”. At locations where there is no such facility, crossing points will be assessed to ensure there is a suitable crossing point with sufficient visibility and traffic gaps to cross in reasonable safety (see Traffic Count below).

When assessing a route, an officer will document where there is a need to cross and identify where it is appropriate to cross and the visibility at that point.

Footways and Verges

For all sections of road where there is a footway or roadside strip of reasonable width then the route is not deemed to be “unsafe to walk”. Where there is no suitable footway or roadside strip, the route may still not be deemed to be “unsafe to walk” if there are verges which provide a “step off” for pedestrians when vehicles are passing and adequate visibility to provide sufficient advance warning of approaching traffic.

Traffic Count

A route will not be seen to be “unsafe” to walk, for the following reasons:

- There is a continuous adequate footway; or
- There are step-offs on roads which have a light volume of traffic but have adequate sight lines to provide sufficient advance warning; or
- On roads with a very light traffic flow, no step-offs but sufficiently good sight lines to provide adequate advance warning.

If there is a need to cross roads there must be sufficient gaps in the traffic flow and sight lines to allow enough opportunities to cross safely. Where traffic flow is greater than 240 vehicles per hour we will undertake a gap count analysis where children are expected to cross the road.

Passenger Car Units

3 pedal cycles = 1 PCU

2 motorcycles = 1 PCU

1 Car = 1 PCU

1 light goods vehicle (up to 3.5 tonnes gross weight) = 1 PCU

1 Bus/Coach (over 3.5 tonnes) = 2 PCUs

Goods Vehicles (over 3.5 tonnes) = 2 PCUs

Goods Vehicles (over 7.5 tonnes/multi axle lorries) = 3 PCUs

All vehicle counts are two way except on one way systems. Dual carriageways are counted as one way on each side.

Where the two way (one way of a dual carriageway) traffic flow is below 240 vehicles per hour the road is assessed as safe to cross. This is based on the original County Road Safety Officers Association criteria and is equivalent to 1 vehicle every 15 seconds and allows a reasonable gap time to cross a 7m wide road at a walking speed of 0.91m per second.

A verge is a minimum area that a pedestrian could use as refuge which is defined at 1.5 metres in length and 0.5 metres in depth.

Only single unbroken sections of non-verged road will be measured and applied against, the cumulative effect on non-verged lengths on an entire route will not constitute the road being classified as “unsafe to walk” in its own right.

Professional Judgement

Particularly in rural areas, the exercise of continuing professional judgement is likely to be required. Professional judgement will be exercised in all route assessments.

Appeals

If an application for travel assistance is not approved, you do have the right to appeal, all details of our appeals process can be found on our website at www.shropshire.gov.uk or email schooltransport@shropshire.gov.uk to request a copy of the appeals policy.