8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings from the peer to peer workshops, youth organisations focus groups, parents groups, pupil questionnaire surveys and parental surveys. These findings are considered in the context of previous research, examples of best practice and the policy environment for the provision of school transport in Northern Ireland (and, where appropriate, in the UK). ***The impetus for this research has come from children and young people who expressed concerns to NICCY about no seatbelts, the three for two rule, overcrowding and bullying on buses. For those who do not travel by bus, concerns were raised about the absence of footpaths and cycle paths and congestion at school buildings. In terms of key policy issues, there needs to be clarification of the policy objectives about what school transport is for.***

There are currently wide ranging debates about the costs associated with the provision of home to school transport in Northern Ireland and also in other parts of the United Kingdom. At the same time there are concerns about the operation of statutory walking distances and how these are used to provide transport assistance. This has raised issues about whether provision should be based on need rather than the current blanket coverage over the statutory walking distance. Transport policy is also now concerned with managing transport demand and school run journeys made by car. The question is how these trips can be shifted to other modes including public transport, walking and cycling.

The report has considered the policy context for the provision of home to school transport in Northern Ireland including the operation of statutory walking distances. This includes information on school travel patterns and safety concerns including seating arrangements and seat belt provision, overcrowding, bullying and supervision. Currently regulations allow three children aged under 14 to share two seats where seatbelts are not fitted. There are legal limits to bus occupancy, as explained in Chapter 2, the Public Service Vehicle Licence (PSV) stipulates the maximum number of passengers a vehicle can carry, and any passengers in excess of this number would be in breach of the regulations except where the 3 for 2 seating concession is applied. This concession allows operators where buses are not fitted with seatbelts to carry additional seated passengers if they are aged 14 years and under. Following the NI Assembly Environment Committee inquiry in 2001, the DoE (2003) indicated that action had been taken with the with regard to the progressive introduction of seatbelts on all new ELB vehicles. Translink on the other hand are still legally permitted to transport pupils without seatbelts.

Evidence presented to the NI Assembly Committee for the Environment (2001) cited the issue of bad behaviour of pupils on buses and resultant safety concerns. It was suggested that consideration should be given to supervision on buses, but also

noted that this raised the issue of who would be responsible for this and how would it be paid for. The abolition of the 3 for 2 rule at the time was proposed as one of the possible solutions to this problem, as it was identified as one of the factors associated with promoting poor behaviour. The recommendation of the committee was that an investigation should be undertaken into factors that contribute towards bullying and bad behaviour and that an Action Plan should be developed to deal with the problem.

Chapter 3 considers surveys carried out by government, operators and academic institutions into issues of safety, capacity and provision of bus services, walking, cycling and car use for the school run. Studies have been carried out into road safety, school location, safer routes to school, health and cognitive effects of travel and transport on young people and transport consequences of potential changes in circumstances. Chapters 4 and 5 provide information on the peer to peer school workshops and focus groups with youth and parent organisations. The information contains details on travel experiences, both positive and negative, modes of transport used and feelings or perceptions about these. Safety and security concerns are also explored at length and take account of travel by bus, car, on foot or by bicycle. This information is followed up by the data presented in Chapter 7 from the pupil and parent surveys carried out across 25 schools in Northern Ireland. The data presented highlights the patterns of travel to school by car, bus, train, taxi, on foot and by bicycle as stated by both the pupils and parents and then looks at the issues affecting mode choice within each transport mode, followed by details about worries and concerns expressed by respondents about the trips to and from school. Finally, measures suggested to make travelling to and from school are highlighted.

The information obtained from key stakeholders' survey was discussed in Chapter 6. The key issues coming from transport operators in this phase of the research included concerns about behaviour of pupils on buses. The political representatives highlighted concerns about standing, seatbelts and overcrowding on buses. There is limited support for seatbelt provision on vehicles partly as a result of the potential cost, capacity constraints and the need for more vehicles which, if not supplied, would mean pupils are left exposed to other safety risks.

8.2 Key Findings

From the evidence presented in this report, there can be no doubt that there are serious issues and concerns surrounding the provision of school transport. Many of these concerns have been expressed by school transport stakeholders, pupils and parents alike. There are also key concerns highlighted about the provision and entitlement to free school transport and these factors are considered in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The key themes explored in the peer to peer workshops and the discussion groups undertaken with youth organisations and parents included travel experiences;

behaviour of other young people and how this affected travel experiences. The key issues arising from discussions around these themes included safety concerns, standing and overcrowding on school buses, provision of seatbelts on buses, congestion, journey times and personal likes and dislikes of the ways in which pupils travel to and from school. These concerns included real fears about bullying and sectarianism. These fears provided an insight into the similarities between the concerns of parents and the worries and experiences of the pupils themselves. Moreover, the difference between parental perception and the realities experienced by the pupils was evident by the differing levels of concern expressed about a number of issues including, the need for seatbelts, sharing seats on the bus, standing on the bus, behaviour and walking safely to and from school. Serious concerns were also raised about transport for disabled pupils. Some potentially dangerous situations where wheelchairs have not been securely fastened in place for transportation have created feelings of insecurity, fear and a lack of confidence when travelling. Chapter 5 reinforces these arguments and augments those articulated in the peer to peer workshops (Chapter 4) with input from parents and youth groups taking into account those with special educational needs, physical disabilities, sight problems, children from deprived areas and those from ethnic backgrounds.

8.2.1 Operation of statutory walking distances

In Northern Ireland home to school transport assistance is offered on a restricted basis. Since 1997 free home to school transport is provided to the 'nearest suitable school' rather than school of choice (DE, 1996). It remains to be seen with the introduction of more parental choice under the post-primary review whether this may change. To determine which pupils should receive assistance the ELBs use the mechanism of statutory walking distances. A pupil living beyond this distance will receive home to school transport assistance. As a mechanism for allocating limited resources it is widely used across the UK by local authorities to determine eligibility for free school transport. In Northern Ireland, as defined in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, these statutory walking distances are 2 miles for a pupil under 11 years old and 3 miles for older school children. Children with Statements of Special Educational Need are not subject to these arrangements and receive free home to school transport.

There are clearly concerns about the way in which transport assistance is provided and the operation of the statutory walking distances approach to determine whether transport assistance can be offered. For example, pupils living three miles from their nearest school might live in an area well served by affordable, good quality, and reliable public transport; whilst pupils in another area, and living 2.9 miles from their nearest school may have poor or even no public transport options available - in effect forcing them into private cars. However, the impact of current legislation is that the former group have to be provided with free home to school transport, whilst the latter are unlikely to get any transport assistance. Research has also indicated that

children attending Irish-medium and integrated schools have particular difficulties with access to suitable transport due to the wider spread of schools. LEAs in other parts of the UK have sought to reduce the distance statutory walking distances to overcome some of these problems. Nonetheless there are issues surrounding the adequacy of the statutory walking distance approach as a mechanism to ration transport assistance.

8.2.2 Costs of operation

The provision of school transport must be viewed within the wider context of management issues associated with the school estate in Northern Ireland. Within the current funding crisis, school transport is a potential target for cuts, as are school meals, school crossing patrols and Special Education Needs budgets (NICCY, 2005). Other on-going pressures on the management of the school estate for DE include: the backlog of capital works on school property, statutory duty (under the Belfast agreement) to encourage and manage Irish Medium and Integrated schools which in turn creates commitments for these schools, increased expenditure on school security measures in light of increased attacks on staff and vandalism, and accelerated costs arising from the policy and legislative environment (e.g. Disability Discrimination Legislation) (DE, 2002). As a result of these pressures the Department of Education in Northern Ireland is seeking ways in which the costs of home to school transport can be contained. In Northern Ireland around 5% of the annual education budget is spent on home to school transport, £57 million in 2002/2003, in 2004/2005 this figure had risen to £62.5 million.

In 2002, compared to other parts of the UK, Northern Ireland spent a larger proportion of their education budget on school transport despite the average cost per pupil being the lowest in the UK (DE, 2002; Sean Thorthwaite Consultants, 1998). A larger proportion of children are in receipt of transport assistance, 33% compared to 16% in the UK as a whole (DE, 2002) and the population is more sparsely distributed. The average cost is lower, however, for a number of reasons. The recent rises in the costs of home to school transport has been attributed to a number of factors. These factors include the rising cost of public transportation provided by Translink due to increased operating costs associated with increases in labour costs and high levels of vandalism. Increases in the cost of fuel and the higher than average fleet age are also factors that have contributed to the costs increases.

Translink has, however, been criticised for raising prices above inflation for school travel passes that are paid for by the ELBs, this has typically been between 4-5% over the period 1999/2000 to 2003/2004. As a result some ELBs have been prompted to look at running their own services. In Northern Ireland the number of children with Special Education Needs has increased. This section of the pupil population (which in 2004/2005 accounted for 7.5% of the school population (representing 7370 pupils) is entitled to free transport provision, and are transported on a combination of ELB vehicles, taxis and private hire minibuses and coaches,

although a small number of children with statements of special needs are issued with bus passes for Translink services if it is felt that this suitable (DE, 2005). Also larger numbers of pupils are travelling to integrated schools.

8.2.3 Growth of car based journeys to school

Concerns surrounding the growth in the number of journeys to/from school made by car and the reduction in walking have resulted in policies and approaches being developed that seek to counter changes in the nature of home to school transport (DfT, 2003a; 2003b). Schools are now actively encouraged to develop School Travel Plans which seek to promote and adopt measures that can encourage walking, cycling and a greater use of public transport. These measures typically can include infrastructure work, adoption of safe routes to school, walking buses, secure bike sheds and lockers. In Northern Ireland this approach is being piloted across six schools with the intention to roll out a safer routes to school programme to more schools (NICCY, 2005).

Other research has also highlighted many of these issues surrounding school transport. The vast increase in traffic on the roads and the number of children who now travel to school by car as opposed to walking, cycling or using the bus is conducive to the levels of congestion experienced close to schools and adds to safety concerns for those who would continue to walk. The common parental perception has been shown to be that children are safer travelling by car and that, if they were to walk, cycle or use the bus, they would be exposed to a number of unacceptable risks. Evidence is available to show that there are many risks to travelling by car and that there have been many more accidents involving children who travel by car. A number of studies have investigated the factors involved in influencing school mode choice and factors increasing school journey length (Ewing et al, 2003; DfT, 2003; NTS 1995-97; DETR, 1999; Stead and Davies, 1998; Begg, 2001; Sayer, 2004). Mode choice and increased journey length are closely related as these studies have shown that as parents choose to transport their children by car, traffic levels and journey times increase as a result. Much of the research has considered the differences in perceptions and realities. Essentially, many studies have shown that a number of parents refuse to let their children walk or cycle to school alone as a result of a number of misapprehensions relating to safety and security. The detrimental effects of these choices have also been researched and include impacts on physical and mental health, personal, social and cognitive development and environmental concerns (EPPI, 2001; Begg, 2001; Sutton Trust, 2005; Hillman, Adams & Whitelegg, 1991; Mayer Hillman, 1999; BMA, 1992; Hillman, 1993; Whitelegg, Gatnell & Naumann, 1993)

The data presented Chapter 7 provides information on the travel patterns of pupils and the choices made by both them and parents as summarised below as well as the reasons for travelling by a particular mode and the reasons influencing decisions not to use particular modes. Comparisons are offered between the responses of

parents and young people across different age groups and school sectors. 66.2% of all pupil respondents use the car for some or all journeys to school and stated that the main reasons they use the car are that they want to, parents want them to, it's a fast and comfortable way to travel and it's considered the safest way possible. Some pupils also highlighted the fact that they have no alternative to the car and have to use it to get either to and/or from school or that public transport (mainly bus) services are not suitable, viable or reliable alternatives. Moreover, the main reasons for not using the car were cited as not wanting to, parents not wanting their children to or that they don't have access to a car in their household.

Although not very popular, car sharing can be very effective in reducing congestion, especially close to schools. There are now data based computer systems available to match up compatible routes and proposed journeys to school (Mouchel Parkman, 2004). The key is flexibility about times and routes to reduce the peak traffic flow and to reduce the number of cars on the road.

8.2.4 Estimation of demand

From the survey, 53.5% of all pupil respondents use the bus for some or all journeys to school and highlighted a number of reasons for using the bus service provided. These reasons included that many pupils simply want to travel by bus as they often see their friends onboard and consider it to be a good social outlet. Many pupils suggested that their parents want them to use the bus or that they have free school sessional tickets (bus pass) for school travel. A number also stated that they have no other option. Reasons for not using the bus were summarised by pupils who stated that they don't want to do so, they don't like it, it is a mode not considered reliable by many, it tends to be overcrowded or they don't think its safe enough. There is a clear need to ensure that demand for school transport is accurately estimated to avoid problems of overcrowding, especially at the beginning of the school year in September.

The main concerns that continued to be highlighted by pupils and parents throughout the qualitative and quantitative stages of the research included overcrowding of buses and general behaviour issues. The key issues of concern have been shown to be the same across all age groups, school types and locations, while parents seem to be more concerned about many issues than pupils. These issues of concern are further reinforced from the information obtained through the pupil and parent questionnaire surveys. Again overcrowding on buses, supervision and behaviour on buses, congestion and infrastructure improvements, provision for walking and cycling and initiatives to improve school bus transport are imperative if their safety concerns are to be addressed.

8.2.5 3 for 2 seating and standing

The exemption of buses, for school travel, from safety regulations that apply to other modes of transport is causing a great deal of debate in Northern Ireland. This includes the 3 for 2 rule, the lack of seatbelts and standing on buses. Operators, however, view the costs of implementation and enforcement of seatbelts as being high in terms of labour productivity for drivers, journey time for students and parents, capital investment in terms of fitment of audio and video warnings, and compliance costs for example in terms of penalties for drivers and pupils.

Serious worries were again also expressed regarding the safety of children, especially on overcrowded buses. It was also recognised that there are serious financial constraints placed upon the development of initiatives to fit buses with seatbelts and to provide more buses. While the concerns regarding safety and security are extremely valid ones on the part of both parents and pupils, a major change in mindset also needs to be achieved. Many pupils and parents simply choose to travel by car because it is the easiest and most convenient way. It is also evident that many parents choose to drive or walk their children to school personally as a result of safety and security fears.

Translink stated that the issues relating to bus capacity and seatbelts are quite different. It is also suggested that the immense cost and practicality implications arising from moves to prohibit standing and to implement seatbelts on all buses should be considered carefully and separately. The implementation of recommendations by the Northern Ireland Assembly on bus capacity (3 for 2 rule and standing) in 2001 would require 'additional buses to be provided at additional cost to ELB's and/or users'. Translink continued by stating that the implementation of seatbelts would also incur a significant financial cost, but would also have implications for the current school bus 'model' in Northern Ireland – namely increased separation of schools services from scheduled stage carriage services, 'with knock-on implications, cost and social, for the future provision of rural bus services across N.I.' (Translink, 2005). Furthermore, Translink considers that the current school bus model in Northern Ireland provides a sound basis on which to build and that any future changes should be best considered within the bigger picture of overall public transport requirements.

The key elements of best practice recommended to reverse the decline in bus usage include;

- Improving services – increase the convenience of using the bus and raise perceptions of safety.
- Lowering fares – concessions
- Tackling crime – issues of vandalism, graffiti and assault
- Raising awareness – marketing to promote services and publicise routes and fares initiatives
- School and parent organised transport schemes – dedicated school buses provided for those who do not qualify for statutory transport provision.

First Group claim that their yellow school bus is “not just a vehicle – it’s an institution”, an integrated school transport system with the potential to reduce congestion, help children, help schools and support parents. The yellow school bus initiative includes one of the safest passenger transport vehicles in the world, near door-to-door services and the same driver every day (First Group, 2005).

8.2.6 Walking and cycling journeys

Waiting for buses was also an area of concern with many stops not having shelters and safety issues were raised with numerous pupils crowded on footpaths at the side of often busy roads.
The key concerns expressed by young people and parents about walking and waiting for buses through the questionnaire surveys are;

- Road safety – traffic levels and speeds, crossing roads and using footpaths safely (parking and unloading activities make this problematic)
- Congestion
- Behaviour of other young people
- Fear of strangers
- Safety in some areas
- Journey times and distances to be travelled
- Perceived safety on public transport – supervision, overcrowding, standing and seating arrangements, behaviour and the age of vehicles

In terms of congestion and road safety, many pupils see it as something they can do nothing about. Many pupils prefer to travel by car than walk and, as a result, congestion levels are increased around schools, especially in bad weather. This was a fact that did not affect the resolve of those who continue to travel by car. Concerns for those who walk included traffic speeds and the level of traffic. Moreover, issues surrounding the provision of footpaths in some areas, were also raised. In some areas footpaths are insufficient for the numbers of pupils using them and safety concerns were aired as reasons why many pupils do not walk or cycle, but instead are driven to and from school in many circumstances.

In Northern Ireland the majority of journeys to school are made by car while walking and bus use have declined. A total of 31% of all pupils in Northern Ireland receive transport assistance, a greater proportion than in England and Wales. Increased parental choice under the post-primary review will also place more pressure on this system and may even contribute to further increases in car use on the home to school journey. Attention has also been focused on the 3 for 2 rule, standing and overcrowding experienced on school buses and scheduled services run by Translink, despite rises in the price of the annual travel pass (paid by the ELB’s), as explained in Chapter 2. This represents a significant cross-subsidy from education to transport (£26 million for bus services in 2004/2005), but is seen as essential to maintaining a bus network in many areas. The costs of home to school transport have risen dramatically. In Northern Ireland £57 million was spent on home to school

transport by 2004/2005 this had risen to £62.5 million. Although the average unit costs compare favourably with other parts of the UK, the spend in Northern Ireland accounts for a greater proportion of the education budget. A concern about the impact of government budget cuts on ELB services has been well documented.

34.4% of all pupil respondents in the survey walked for some or all journeys to school and suggested a number of reasons for walking. These include being healthy, they want to, their friends walk with them, it's a short distance and that some have no choice or alternative. Main reasons for not walking to and from school were identified as having to cross busy roads in dangerous locations, the journey takes too long and is too far on foot and that some pupils simply don't like walking. Just 0.9% of all pupil respondents cycle for some or all journeys to school. The only reasons cited for cycling were that the pupils who do so simply want to. Reasons for not cycling included having to cycle on busy and dangerous roads, some pupils don't like cycling, it takes too long in some cases and a number stated that going by bike is not practical in school uniform and with school bags etc.

Measures to promote safe routes to school for both walking and cycling have taken increased precedence in recent years. Developments have included development of 'safe route' measures close to schools and on heavily used routes to and from schools. These have also involved the redesigning of road space to provide for pedestrians and cyclists (realigned junctions, cycle lanes, wider pavements, drop kerb pavements; railings at narrow kerbsides; highway improvements at road crossings, walking buses and reductions in traffic congestion and pollution together with safer driving at reduced speeds. The provision and development of walking infrastructure promotes sustainable transportation. More specifically, the provision of such infrastructure will protect the role that walking plays in terms of mode share by encouraging walking activity; enhancing the status of cycling and encouraging a growth in mode share; promoting healthy lifestyles; improving accessibility levels, environmental quality and contributing to improved perceptions of safety (Hine and Mitchell, 2003). Recently improvements have been made in terms of giving pedestrians greater priority, especially at road crossings (DfT, 2003).

School travel plans aim to encourage schools to identify and solve problems associated with the school journey (especially those related to safety). The plans are produced by the schools themselves and do not have to include physical measures to improve routes but instead are a 'way of living and learning (Road Safety Strategy for Wales, 2003). They also involve the identification of practical measures to more effectively and efficiently manage school travel. The aims of the plan should include;

- Reduce traffic congestion close to the schools
- Increase the personal safety of pupils and parents on the journeys to and from school
- Offer alternative modes of travel to pupils and parents
- Improve health and fitness levels
- Identify problems school pupils face on their journeys and deal with them
- Develop independence and self-esteem among pupils

- Reduce or remove the vicious circle of school travel – parents fear danger of traffic so they drive their children to school, resulting in an increased level of traffic and the parents fearing safety from the level of increased traffic (Sustrans, 2002).

8.2.7 School hours

The operation of flexible school hours in some areas of Northern Ireland has had the effect of reducing the pressure on the transport system. Such a scheme is operational in Ballyclare where the two main secondary schools vary their start and finish times. The same buses operate for the two schools but do not have to carry pupils from both schools at the same time. This reduces crowding problems as well as having an impact on the traffic levels by levelling the morning and afternoon peak flows.

The five Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards meet annually to attempt to harmonise school terms and holidays in order to secure discounts from bus operators and to make the provision of transport to and from school (especially those which share buses) as efficient as possible (DfT, 2004). There have, inevitably been difficulties surrounding holiday arrangements, but some progress has been made and small discounts have been achieved. It is, however, still the case that some schools in the same area do not harmonise term times.

8.3 Recommendations

These recommendations are presented in two sections. The first section presents three different sets of recommendations that reflect three different policy pathways or choices. These different policy drivers are raising key issues about the nature of provision for home to school journeys in the future.

8.3.1 What is the objective of home to school transport?

1. **Getting children to school – current system**
   This is the current main purpose of school transport provision in Northern Ireland. The system is designed to ensure pupils arrive in the class room as required and that this is undertaken in the most efficient a manner possible. These efficiencies are often lost in the economic costs of transporting so many young people between home and school twice a day. There can be no doubt that the aim to get the children into and out of the class room is met for a vast number of pupils each and every day for 190 days of the year. In 2004/2005 a total of 31% of the pupil population in Northern Ireland were in receipt of free home to school transport. Free school transport is administered by the Education and Library Boards by a variety of methods including: the

issuing of free bus passes/tickets for public transport, ELB buses, contract hire of minibuses and taxis, and the payment of allowances for car travel.

To determine which pupils should receive assistance the ELBs use the mechanism of statutory walking distances. A pupil living beyond this distance will receive home to school transport assistance. As a mechanism for allocating limited resources it is widely used across the UK by local authorities to determine eligibility for free school transport. In Northern Ireland, as defined in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, these statutory walking distances are 2 miles for a pupil under 11 years old and 3 miles for older school children.

2. Special needs transport – current system

Children with Statements of Special Educational Need are not subject to these arrangements and receive free home to school transport regardless of the distance they live from their school.

3. Modal shift

U.K transport policy is increasingly concerned with managing school run journeys made by car and how these trips can be shifted to other modes, namely public transport (bus and train), walking and cycling. This would require an expansion of the provision of transport assistance to entice people out of their cars. Provision of free home to school transport is offered on a restricted basis. Since 1997 free home to school transport is provided to the 'nearest suitable school' rather than school of choice (DENI, 1996). A pupil living beyond this distance will receive home to school transport assistance. There are problems with this policy, the wider spread of schools in Northern Ireland means that children often have further to travel and, there is a concern that, as newcomers, the integrated sector loses out to more established schools in transport planning' (Kilkelly et al, 2004; NICCY, 2005).

In Northern Ireland it has been suggested that the three mile rule can restrict assistance to children for whom the school attended is the nearest suitable school in one of a number of categories – maintained, controlled, Irish Medium, integrated, denominational and non-denominational grammar (Kilkelly et al, 2004). To achieve the desired modal shift and to eradicate the problems of traffic at school caused by parents insisting to escort their children to school by car, alternatives must be made more attractive and proved as viable, safe and cost effective alternatives. This can only be done by expanding the provision of free school (bus) transport to those who need it under the three mile boundary and for the school of choice rather than the closest school.

4. **Targeting need**
   Increased targeting of the school transport resource on low income non car owning families is likely to increase car. Evidence suggests that there is a suppressed demand for school transport and that reductions in school bus transport result in an increase in car journeys.

The recommendations in table 8.1 are drawn from the key policy issues and findings illustrated in section 8.2 of this report and are based on the three main policy goals;

1. Maintaining the current system of provision of home to school transport
2. The achievement of modal shift, mainly involved in getting people out of their cars
3. To target provision of home to school transport for those who need it

Table 8.1 Recommendations and policy impact

Recommendations	Policy Goal	Recommendations & Policy Impact
1. Review operation of statutory walking distances	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision**	Statutory distance should remain the same with no more incentive for increased numbers to walk and no provision for more pupils receiving transport assistance
	2. To achieve modal shift	The statutory distance would need to be reduced to make bus use available to those who need it and to make this a more attractive and viable alternative to the car.
	3. To target need	The statutory distance would be increased or removed and provision would be based on household car ownership and/or proof of no car ownership and/or low household income

2. Review costs of operation	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision**	High taxi costs require addressing and a reduction in this expenditure actively sought
		Bus passes offered for outward and return journeys regardless of use should be replaced with technology (smart passes) to ensure payment only for those journeys made by the pupil
		Review of the provision of Special Education transport to ensure efficiency, especially with regard to taxi costs
		Increased operating costs would be offset by smart card ticketing to ensure only the journeys made are paid for
	2. To achieve modal shift	An integrated school transport network would result in lower average costs – e.g. a unified Translink and ELB unit
		Bus passes offered for outward and return journeys regardless of use should be replaced with technology (smart passes) to ensure payment only for those journeys made by the pupil
	3. To target need	Costs would require reviewing and capping as, with fewer pupils eligible for assistance, operators would be liable to increase costs.

3. Reduction in car based journeys to school	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision**	No reduction in car based journeys to school
	2. To achieve modal shift	A reduction in car use through the implementation of safer routes to school initiatives and school safety zones should be encouraged
	3. To target need	No reduction in car based journeys to school
4. Clearer estimation of demand for school transport assistance and provision	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision** **2. To achieve modal shift** **3. To target need**	Needs to be more accurate to ensure an eradication of capacity problems on buses experienced at the start of the school year in September. The use of ICT and development of existing school pupil databases as well as accurate and reliable information from the school role to accurately forecast pupil numbers should be implemented
5. Review the impact of the 3 for 2 rule and standing on school buses across the entire network	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision** **2. To achieve modal shift** **3. To target need**	Standing and the 3 for 2 rule should only be used where absolutely necessary. This would reduce capacity and would require more vehicles or finding a more efficient use of existing vehicles. Implementation of seatbelts on buses would also potentially reduce capacity levels and would also require more buses or more effective use of existing fleets. It is recommended that measures are implemented to remove the 3 for 2 rule and to provide seating for all pupils when planning services

6. Increase walking and cycling journeys	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision** **2. To achieve modal shift** **3. To target need**	Would require infrastructure improvements to make walking and cycling more attractive and a safer alternative – e.g. school safety zones, safer routes to school initiatives, cycle lanes, secure cycle facilities The provision of improved walking and cycling infrastructure (footpaths and cycle lanes) should be provided to further promote these modes and increase the relative safety to encourage use. (also school safety zones and safer routes to school initiatives)
7. Introduction of flexible school hours	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision**	Flexible school start and finish times and harmonised holiday / term times should be implemented to relieve pressure on the existing school transport system – both buses and traffic levels / congestion
	2. To achieve modal shift	Flexible times where some schools start and finish later than others would ensure there was more seated capacity on school buses and should be used to attract people away from their cars
	3. To target need	No impact

8. Reductions in cases of bad behaviour on school transport	**1. Maintain existing system of school transport provision** **2. To achieve modal shift** **3. To target need**	There is a clear need for adult supervision or the widespread use of CCTV on school buses to curb bad behaviour. School prefects should be more widely used to record and, where necessary, report on offenders. There needs to be a review of the 3 for 2 rule and standing on the school bus in terms of the contribution of these arrangements to poor behaviour.. Pupils tend to misbehave more on a crowded bus where supervision is more problematic and where more individuals collectively cause trouble. An increase in vehicle provision is necessary where 3 for 2 occurs regularly. The Accessible Transport Strategy states a need for a joined up approach to maximise resources to bring about positive changes to school transport.

8.3.2 Further information on recommendations - Safer Routes to school initiatives

Essentially, safer routes to school schemes are means by which people are actively encouraged to think about their travel decisions (see Chapter 3). A key element of this approach is the mapping of routes which children take to and from school and identifying the problems or potential problems that exist along the way (Scottish Executive, 2003). In this context, safer routes projects include pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities, new (lower) speed limits and traffic management schemes, schemes to provide adult accompaniment for children who walk to and from school, classroom activities and lessons about road and personal safety and better facilities for cyclists at schools (secure bike racks/sheds and lockers etc). The benefits of a safe routes to school project include;

- Fewer child casualties and road accidents
- Healthier lifestyles
- Safer roads for all – especially pedestrians and cyclists
- Less pollution and congestion
- Greater independence and freedom (Safer Routes, Northern Ireland, 2003).

Leading examples in Northern Ireland schools can be seen at St Brigid's College in Derry/Londonderry and St Joseph's College on the Ravenhill Road in Belfast. Full details of their safer routes schemes can be found in Chapter 3. These schemes are to be encouraged and actively promoted. The evidence contained in this report points towards the need for such measures to be adopted to address the concerns expressed by both parents and young people about the relative safety of their trips to and from school. The promotion of greater independence and freedom afforded by many such schemes is one such measure that may address the concerns raised in the focus groups and surveys about walking safely. The safety of pupils while walking was one such reason for a small proportion who do so, safer routes schemes seek to address these issues.

8.3.3 Further information on recommendations - School Travel Plans

As also identified in Chapter 3, school travel plans aim to encourage schools to identify and solve problems associated with the school journey (especially those related to safety). The plans are produced by the schools themselves and involve the identification of practical measures to more effectively and efficiently manage school travel. The aims of the plan should include;

- Reduce traffic congestion close to the schools
- Increase the personal safety of pupils and parents on the journeys to and from school
- Offer alternative modes of travel to pupils and parents
- Improve health and fitness levels
- Identify problems school pupils face on their journeys and deal with them
- Develop independence and self-esteem among pupils
- Reduce or remove the vicious circle of school travel – parents fear danger of traffic so they drive their children to school, resulting in an increased level of traffic and the parents fearing safety from the level of increased traffic (Sustrans, 2002).

Furthermore, a school travel plan sets out possible measures schools could adopt to reduce problems caused by the 'school run' such as;

- Walking buses
- Crossing facilities
- Pedestrian training
- Traffic calming measures (St Michael's Primary School, St Joseph's College and Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Ravenhill Road Belfast – 'school safety zone')
- Car sharing
- Walk to school weeks
- Information and marketing of alternatives (Tameside Council, 2005)

Such plans have been or will be implemented by a handful of schools. These, it is considered, are important measures to be adopted by all schools in order to identify the problems particular to that school and to address them using some or all of the measures mentioned above.

8.3.4 Further information on recommendations - School safety zones

Measures such as those adopted by St Joseph's College on the Ravenhill Road in Belfast and St Brigid's College in Derry/Londonderry are also to be recommended. These safety zones feature traffic calming measures such as crossing islands, lower speed limits, kerbside railings and flashing lights to alert drivers to the location of the school. There is also no parking permitted outside the school gates, relieving concerns about congestion close to the school and safety for pupils negotiating parked cars to cross roads or to use the footpath safely. These concerns were highlighted by parents and pupils throughout this research (see chapters 4, 5 and 7), thus the argument for the implementation of school safety zones across the board is a strong one.

8.3.5 Further information on recommendations - Reductions in standing and use of the 3 for 2 rule on school buses

The research has identified serious concerns about standing on buses and the use of the 3 for 2 seating rule. These concerns were expressed by pupils and parents, but more emphasis was placed on the length of time some pupils spend standing and the relative safety of having to do so. While the 3 for 2 arrangement is only used as a capacity 'buffer' it was felt by many that this is an unacceptable arrangement as well. It is recommended that measures are implemented to remove the 3 for 2 rule and to provide seating for all pupils when planning services. With greater targeting of resources and more efficient management of the school bus fleets, these problems may be eradicated. It is recommended that measures are implemented to remove the 3 for 2 rule and to provide seating for all pupils when planning services.

8.4 Moving forward

The best way to move forward and to bring about positive change to address the issues highlighted by this report includes the establishment of a steering group. This should consist of key stakeholders which would be tasked with looking at how school transport can be improved in the light of these findings and the recommendations provided by the Assembly Environment Committee in 2001.