

Travel Plan Officers go back to School

On 18th February 2003 Lewis McDonald, Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, presented the recommendations of the Scottish School Travel Advisory Group at Oakbank Primary School, Perth.

The report contained 20 recommendations, the most significant of which was the funding of **School Travel Plan Officers** for each of the Scottish Local Authorities. There will be three main strands to these posts:

- The **evangelical** role to promote best practice within schools and with school travel teams
- The **practical** role, working across local authority departments to provide facilities, advise on Cycling, Walking, Safer Streets spending, etc.
- The **co-ordinating** role to co-ordinate the work of school travel teams within any cluster of schools and identifying and developing any opportunities for the travel teams to work within existing local initiatives, thereby working with others towards common goals.

Many Local Authorities find that the hardest part of developing a Safe Routes to Schools Scheme is getting the individual schools to be actively involved and keeping them enthusiastic. This is where the School Travel Plan Officer comes in.

A School Travel Plan (STP) is a summary of **activities to improve safety and health** in a school, by encouraging safe and active travel on journeys from home to school. Activities may cover a range of areas including physical changes to the area around the school, curriculum work, road safety education, promotional events, training etc. It will also contain information about what the existing travel situation and issues are.

The STP should be written with consultation and involvement of the wider school community so that everybody's opinion is taken into consideration. The strength of a completed School Travel Plan is that it contains an agreed **set of actions** to which everybody is signed up. This then signifies an all-round commitment to developing safe and active travel.

The initiatives within an STP are the key link between any physical measures being implemented and encouraging modal shift. An analogy that is often used is, **You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink**. In other words, it is important to teach pupils about the physical measures and for the school to be actively involved in promoting them through their School Travel Plan.

As part of the SSTAG recommendations;

Future Scottish Executive guidance to local authorities on their use of Public Transport Fund /CWSS resources should specifically highlight the need for local authorities to consider school travel issues. It should ask local authorities to ensure that the school travel plans developed by the schools in its area and its own CWSS spending plans complement each other.

This is partly to ensure best value for any spending, but also to help to ensure that the implemented measures, don't lead to other problems, e.g. *new cycle parking [will not lead to] increased accident rates.*

A school travel team within each school will develop STPs. These teams will be made up of a range of people including those with responsibility for health, curriculum

development, the environment, and community issues. Experts will be invited to join the group as and when it is felt appropriate. The role of the team is to be two-fold, to include *strategic responsibility* to actively encourage healthy and environmentally friendly travel choices and *operational responsibility* to ensure that relevant initiatives run smoothly, e.g. boarding of buses, proper use of cycle storage areas, etc. *The STP should contain short and long term targets to achieve modal shift on the school run and should be subject to constant review.*

At initial glance, this may seem like yet another initiative for schools to have to cope with. However, this isn't the case as the STP offers schools the opportunity to bring together various pieces of work that they are already undertaking, including curriculum development, road safety, health education, education for sustainable development and education for citizenship. It also provides an opportunity to develop practical initiatives within these areas. Many schools also have every-day concerns related to school travel, e.g. parents parking on yellow zig-zag lines outside the school, problems with neighbours concerned about cars parking in driveways and on pavements. Yet, for headteachers, this has always been an area that they have found hard to deal with, as the only real option seemed to be 'polite persuasion' of parents. If the message is combined with one of the importance of walking to school as part of a healthy lifestyle with a reduced impact on the environment and supported by practical measures, e.g. a walking bus, cycle parking, parent's waiting areas, park and walk areas away from the school, then the number of parents dropping off at the school gate, may actually start to decrease.

The new School Travel Plan Officers will be able to take on the role of bringing together the messages and initiatives related to School Travel Plans and supporting schools with their implementation.

Initial findings of research into the effectiveness of the Travel Plan Co-ordinator Bursary Posts funded by the DfT in England and Wales found that:

- More travel plans had been generated because of the STP posts, than would have been without them
- Where it is too early for 'after' monitoring, or where after monitoring hasn't yet taken place, it was felt that the TP posts had led to increased awareness of the transport/ environmental and health reasons for changing travel behaviour
- Most schools reported that they had found the post holder very useful when developing a travel plan

All of this can only be good news for the health of young people today, and potentially the attitudes of the next generation of adults.

One timely development, which will help to turn the STTAG recommendations into reality, is the doubling of the Sustrans SRTS Team in Scotland. Sustrans now has two part-time SRTS Officers working to support Local Authorities in encouraging young people to travel to school by more sustainable means.

Philippa Davison

Philippa works part-time for Sustrans developing the SRTS programme in Scotland and is also part of the DHC Team which has been commissioned by the Scottish Executive to carry out research into children's attitudes towards sustainable transport.

Further information is available at:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/sstag-00.asp>