

Unsafe Walking Routes Assessment Policy

Shropshire Council (“the Council”) has a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 (“the Act”) to provide home to school transport for eligible children (as defined by Section 508B of the Act).

This Policy relates only to those children who are defined by the Act as eligible for home to school transport if they “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 policy 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

The Council may give help with travel to a child who lives within the statutory walking distance to their catchment or nearest suitable school if the route has been assessed as “unsafe” and there is no other alternative route below the statutory 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 child’s home address and their 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 child’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 Council’s School Transport team to determine if it should be classified as “unsafe”. The classification will be assessed by reference to the criteria set out below.

Timing of Assessments

The assessment of the route will take place on a school day and at the same time as if the child is 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 the 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, the 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

A child may not be able to walk an unsafe route if they are alone but may be able to do so if they are accompanied by an adult. The Council will consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied and whether the child’s parent/carer can reasonably be expected to accompany the child.

There is a general expectation that the parent/carer will accompany the child or make other suitable arrangements for the child’s journey to school, unless there is a good reason why this is not reasonable to expect the parent/carer to do so.

A child will not automatically be eligible for free home to school travel solely because the parents/carers work commitments or caring responsibilities mean they are unable to accompany the child themselves.

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

Risks

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

The 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 – e.g. 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.

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.

Width of Road

Where there is an adequate width of road (a minimum of 6.5 metres usable road surface) a route will not be deemed to be “unsafe to walk”. Where the width of the road is less than 6.5 metres a traffic count will be carried out.

Traffic Count

On roads of less than 6.5 metre in width an “unsafe walking route” will be seen to exist where the traffic exceeds the maximum vehicle numbers per hour shown at Appendix A, for the relevant width of road, or where potential refuge from traffic falls below the level set out for relating traffic volumes and individual lengths of road where refuge is not possible. Where the count exceeds the maximum vehicle numbers per hour the Council will deem the route as “unsafe to walk”. Where the count falls below the maximum number the route will not be deemed as “unsafe to walk”.

Where visibility and audibility factors for pedestrians are substantially worse or better than the norm, the acceptable length of non-verged road will be respectively reduced or increased by one step (see Appendix A).

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 Appendix A, 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. Where HGV numbers in the hourly traffic count are more than 10 and where this constitutes more than 10% of the total traffic volume, the route will be deemed to be “unsafe to walk” regardless of whether the total traffic volume fails to reach the levels required (see Appendix A).

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.

Appendix A

Acceptable maximum length of single sections of road without verges or refuge before broken by a verge or refuge	Acceptable number of vehicles per hour by road width			
	>3.5 metres road width	3.5 > 4.5 metres road width	4.5 > 5.5 metres road width	5.5 > 6.5 metres road width
10m	201 - 240 max U	301 - 360 max U	401 - 480 max U	501 - 600 max U
15m	161 - 200	241 - 300	321 - 400	401 - 500
25m	121 - 160	181 - 240	241 - 320	301 - 400
35m	81 - 120	121 - 180	161 - 240	201 - 300
55m	61 - 80	91 - 120	121 - 160	151 - 200
75m	41 - 60	61 - 90	81 - 120	101 - 150
120m	31 - 40	46 - 60	61 - 80	76 - 100
160m	21 - 30	31 - 45	41 - 60	51 - 75
240m	11 - 20	16 - 30	21 - 40	26 - 50
300m	6 - 10	9 - 15	11 - 20	13 - 25
500m	1 - 5	1 - 8	1 - 10	1 - 12