



Association
of Colleges

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Bus Services Bill

Public Bill Committee

A submission from the
Association of Colleges: March 2017

2-5 Stedham Place, London WC1A 1HU T: 020 7034 9900 E: publicaffairs@aoc.co.uk www.aoc.co.uk

[@AoC_info](https://twitter.com/AoC_info) [in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Association-of-Colleges) Association-of-Colleges

Background

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents and promotes the interests of 308 Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges established under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Further education colleges provide high-quality technical and professional education and training for young people, adults and employers. They prepare over three million students with valuable employability skills, helping to develop their career opportunities.

Colleges are inspirational places to learn because education and training is delivered by expert teaching staff in industry-standard facilities. From basic skills to postgraduate degrees, colleges offer first rate academic and vocational teaching, in a range of professions including engineering, hospitality, IT, construction and the creative arts.

College Transport: Key Facts

- Nearly 80% of local authorities have reduced their transport support and bus services have been significantly reduced or cut altogether in recent years.
- Outside of London, 50,000 young people have lost their transport to sixth form or college since 2008¹
- In England, a total of 372 bus services have been reduced, altered or withdrawn.
- The average travel distance for 16-18 students in some constituencies can exceed over 25 miles.²
- Research reveals that 49% of students cannot always afford to travel to attending college or their place of training.³
- 40% of students spend £5 or more a day travelling to their college or place of training⁴

¹ <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/tell-your-council-save-our-school-and-college-buses>

² Average travel distance for 16-18 year old in Berwick-upon-Tweed is 25.5 miles (Campaign for Better Transport)

³ ⁷AoC and NUS Survey of 2,107 students <https://www.aoc.co.uk/news/students-are-struggling-afford-travel-costs>

- Poor access to student transport can have an adverse effect on college attendance and may prevent students attending not only their school or college, but their place of work or training.
- The Government's target of achieving 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020 will only be achieved if young people can access their place of study and work easily and affordably.
- Given the introduction of the raising of the education participation age (RPA) to age 18, we believe equal treatment must be given to 16 to 18-year-olds in schools and colleges to mirror the transport rights currently offered to 16-year-olds in schools.
- The loss of student transport provision has led to an estimated additional 100+ million car journeys each year, increasing pollution and safety risks.

Bus Services Bill

The Bus Services Bill provides a timely and useful opportunity to ensure that affordable and accessible transport is made available to young people as part of the proposed changes to franchising arrangements. We believe that the existing arrangements for local authorities to provide transport support needs for young people accessing education and training could be significantly strengthened. As part of the assessment of any proposed franchising schemes, a franchising authority or local authority should place particular emphasis on ensuring the proposal outlines plans on how they will meet the local transport needs of students.

Affordable and accessible transport for all

Despite local authorities having the responsibility to ensure transport is made available for 16 to 18-year-olds, many colleges subsidise transport for their students as the provision is too often patchy, expensive and infrequent. However, successive reductions in college funding have made it harder for colleges to continue to subsidise transport provision. Since 2010, spending on local bus services has declined significantly, with a total of £73.8 million cut from support bus services in England, a reduction of 25%.⁵

⁵ Campaign for Better Transport – Buses in Crisis 2015 Report

Students should be able to access the education or training that is best for them and should not be forced to choose a course as a result of transport restrictions. Taking a course which interests and engages a young person is the best way to keep them in education and therefore maximise their chances of securing sustainable employment or a place in higher education.

Limited transport – A barrier to education and social mobility

A lack of cost effective and available student transport presents a barrier to education and can prevent the poorest students from accessing further education and training. Research by the Association of Colleges and NUS found that 49% of students⁶ cannot always afford to travel to attend their college or place of training.

Colleges have the most engagement with helping young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The introduction of raising the participation age to 18 (RPA) means that all young people are required to stay in education or training and therefore need accessible transport in order to do so. There is a fear that this already varied transport provision is getting worse, potentially leading to further increases in NEETs and a decline in social mobility.

Additional research by the National Society of Apprentices shows that apprentices spend an average of £24 a week on travel⁷ which is a significant cost associated with getting to work as the national minimum wage for apprentices is £2.73 an hour (set to increase by 20% to £3.30 as of October 2015).

Almost half of the apprentices surveyed (47%) said that the cost of public transport had influenced their decision on where to do their apprenticeship. A further 20% said that poor public transport infrastructure has had an impact on their choice of apprenticeship.

The barrier that transport poses for apprentices is particularly important to bear in mind given the Government's commitment to creating 3 million apprentices by 2020.

A rural and urban issue

Successive cuts to transport has disproportionately affected students in rural areas as services tend to operate on a less frequent basis and are often the only form of transport in and out of a rural area for young people. However, due to the rising costs of bus fares (around a 50% increase in the last 10 years) the lack of access to affordable and accessible transport has also been increasingly the case

⁶ AoC and NUS Survey of 2,107 students <https://www.aoc.co.uk/news/students-are-struggling-afford-travel-costs>

⁷ [National Society of Apprentices Travel Research](#)

for urban colleges as well. As a result, the majority of colleges have to subsidise transport to allow students to travel to their place of study and often spend huge sums of money investing in this key service.

Highest average travel distances for 16 to 18-year-olds

Many students have to travel a considerable distance to get to their place of study, leaving many with inefficient and costly access to infrequent transport.

We have produced some research that shows the average distance travelled for 16 to-18-year old college students in the top ten constituencies:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Berwick-upon-Tweed | 25.5 (Miles) |
| North Cornwall | 23.0 (Miles) |
| Richmond (Yorks) | 18.1 (Miles) |
| Thirsk and Malton | 17.8 (Miles) |
| North Dorset | 17.6 (Miles) |
| Hexham | 16.7 (Miles) |
| Louth and Horncastle | 16.4 (Miles) |
| Penrith and The Border | 16.3 (Miles) |
| Torridge and West Devon | 16.2 (Miles) |
| South West Norfolk | 15.3 (Miles) |
| Mid Norfolk | 14.7 (Miles) |

Improving student transport through the Bus Services Bill

As outlined above, students are suffering with the inefficient and costly access to their transport, jeopardising progression to further education, training and work. We believe the Government's Bus Services Bill presents a unique opportunity to address the issues outlined throughout this submission.

As part of the commissioning of new and existing franchising schemes in Clause 4, we believe that applications for schemes should consider and outline plans to address the state of student transport needs in local areas, in order to ensure students have the affordable and accessible transport they require. Through the 'Assessment of proposed schemes' section (123B), the Committee should reflect that in addition to the consideration guidelines, there must be a need to ensure that any proposed franchising authority takes into account and assesses existing student transport requirements, in order to address the issues facing their access to transport.