

## **6. STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

### **Overview of key issues from this chapter**

The key issues raised by stakeholders, including public and private transport (coach, bus, minibus and taxi) operators, Education and Library Boards, Political representatives, school management bodies, statutory and non-governmental organisations were;

- overcrowding on school buses
- behaviour of school pupils
- seating arrangements and provision on buses
- standing on buses
- provision and enforcement of seatbelt wearing
- the 3 for 2 rule and capacity issues
- bullying

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings from a survey of stakeholder's views on the school transport system in Northern Ireland. Stakeholders were identified and contacted and questionnaires were distributed electronically. A number of organisations successfully completed and returned the stakeholders questionnaires. A small number of organisations which had been contacted, as they had been identified as organisations with an interest in the travel patterns of young people (Disability Action and The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister), stated that as they were not involved in school transport provision they would not be participating in the survey.. One organisation preferred not to fill in the questionnaire but they sent a copy of a briefing paper they produced covering the area of transport to schools. Three organisations expressed their opinion with regard to the questionnaire but they did not want their identity to be revealed. Three politicians responded to the consultation – Wilson Clyde MLA (Democratic Unionist Party, Antrim), Samuel Gardiner (Ulster Unionist, Upper Bann) and Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA (Democratic Unionist Party, Lagan Valley). Other political representatives from all parties were asked to complete a questionnaire, but no returns were received. Some information, however, from political parties has been obtained through press releases and party policy statements or manifestos relating to the issue of school travel, namely from Derek Hussey, Ulster Unionist spokesman on education; Sammy Wilson, Democratic Unionist spokesman on education; Tommy Gallagher, SDLP spokesman on education and John Dallat, SDLP MLA for East Derry.

This chapter summarises the findings of the stakeholders' survey and information obtained from directly from statutory bodies, such as the Education and Library Boards and political parties about their various roles relating to or involvement in school transport in Northern Ireland. The key issues identified by transport operators included concerns about behaviour of pupils on buses, while 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. A number of private taxi and contract hire minibus operators were approached to be interviewed for this element of the research. A need to include such operators was identified as many have significant involvement in transporting pupils to and from a wide range of schools. The majority of operators refused to be involved in this research, but a small number, however, were happy to be interviewed. These operators did not want their identities revealed.

Security concerns were expressed by two taxi companies and one minibus operator. One taxi firm, which provides transport in the greater Belfast area for a wide range of special schools and a small number of primary school children, did not express any major safety concerns. Issues surrounding the behaviour of some

pupils in transit were, however, an issue for concern, especially when taxi-sharing amongst pupils who were poorly behaved. This was cited as a major problem in some instances as taxi firms are often employed to transport some of the more volatile pupils. Serious concerns were also expressed about child protection when there is one child with one driver. This, it was stated, is an issue many drivers have problems with when they find themselves with only one child in the vehicle. Many drivers have highlighted the fact that they are left open to ‘all sorts of accusations’. This was also a concern for the second taxi operator who participated in the research, and who provides transport in the Lisburn area to Belfast and surrounding outlying schools, especially special schools.

The minibus (contract and private hire) operator which agreed to participate mainly serves schools in the Greater Belfast area, especially special schools with private hire activities for primary and secondary schools when participating in educational visits etc. Behaviour of special school children was felt to be a concern. Instances of bullying, even when an escort is present have been recorded. The operator, however, mainly considered school transport activities to be trouble free and highlighted that strict rules surrounding the wearing of seatbelts are enforced – all children abide by these. Wearing of seatbelts may not always occur during private hire trips, but teachers are present to enforce discipline.

## **6.2 School transport provision**

The provision of school transport in Northern Ireland is undertaken by three key suppliers – the five Education and Library Boards, a vast array of private coach and taxi operators and Translink, through Metro, Ulsterbus and, to a lesser extent NI Railways. It should also be remembered that the ELB’s are wholly responsible for the provision of school crossing patrols. As highlighted in Chapter 2, school transport assistance is offered on a restricted basis – to and from the ‘nearest suitable school’, rather than to the school of choice. Statutory walking distances are applied as a mechanism by which these limited resources are distributed – namely at distances of over 2 miles for children under the age of 11 and over 3 miles for those older than 11 years of age. The exceptions to this rule are children with statements of special educational need, for whom transport assistance is provided irrespective of distance.

The Education and Library Boards commit to providing transport assistance on the basis that

- The welfare and safety of children and young people are paramount in all decisions
- The right of parents to exercise choices in accordance with existing legislation is recognised
- Transport assistance will be provided in the most cost effective and efficient manner, using public transport, board vehicles and contract hire services as appropriate

- The boards will exercise a proper duty of care in all aspects of the delivery of the transport service, and will ensure that all staff are carefully recruited and fully trained
- The boards will ensure that all vehicles and staff engaged in contract taxi, bus or minibus services meet all prevailing regulatory requirements (WELB Policy Statement, 2005).

Moreover, special transport need may arise where a pupil is unable to walk, lives under the qualifying distance from the designated school but is unable to walk safely to that school accompanied by a parent due to an exceptional road safety hazard, is unable to use board or public transport without assistance, has a medical condition or severe learning difficulty as assessed by an educational psychologist, which indicates that special transport arrangements must be made (SELB Policy Statement, 2005). Translink do not provide transport to special schools as board vehicles, taxis and contract hire minibuses cater for all pupils. It was also stated that Translink do not offer the required facilities for special school transport – disabled access, wheelchair lifts and onboard escorts or supervision. The pattern of provision by all five education and library boards includes transport to primary schools, secondary schools, grammar schools and special education schools. Secondary and grammar school transport is largely covered by Translink services where possible, with back up from board vehicles, especially in rural areas where accessibility is an issue. Many instances see board buses connecting with Ulsterbus services to provide adequate transport for pupils in more isolated locations (Mackey, 2005; stakeholders' response, 2005).

**Table 6.1 Education Board Principles for School Travel  
(stakeholders response, 2006)**

Principles relating to walking	Principles relating to the provision of school bus transport
<p>The statutory walking distance is applied, based on the shortest walking route between the door of the pupil's permanent home address and the nearest entrance door of the school</p>	<p>Where there is no suitable school or schools within statutory walking distance from a pupil's home, the board may provide transport assistance to any suitable school, provided that a board or public transport service to or in the vicinity of that school is already available.</p>
<p>Where there is a suitable school or schools within statutory walking distance from a pupil's home and the pupil attends a school outside statutory walking distance, transport assistance will be provided only where the pupil has been unable to gain admission to every suitable school within statutory walking distance.</p>	<p>The boards will not introduce a new bus route or extend or vary an existing route in a way which would involve additional cost except where the change is necessary to ensure a pupil is not required to walk more than the statutory walking distance. Where a route extension is approved the extension will be linked formally to the transport entitlement of specified pupils. When those pupils no longer require the service, the extension will be discontinued.</p>
	<p>Where a pupil applies for transport assistance to a more distant school in order to complete a course of study leading to GCE A-level qualifications, assistance will be granted only when evidence is provided that no suitable school within statutory walking distance of the pupil's home can offer suitable GCE A-level provision.</p>
	<p>Transport assistance will not be provided for students who wish to attend a more distant college to undertake a qualification which is available at the nearest college within statutory walking distance of the student's permanent home address.</p>
	<p>Sessional tickets for public transport will be issued to pupils and students who qualify for assistance. These tickets may be used for journeys made each weekday during the academic year (1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> June) between their home stage and the school or college campus where they are enrolled. The forward journey must be completed before 12 noon and the return journey by 6.30pm. Translink may authorise travel outside of these times following a request by the boards.</p>

**Table 6.2 Schools served by the operators and providers.**

	Primary schools	Preparatory schools	Secondary (high) schools	Grammar schools	Special Education schools
BELB	Y		Y	Y	Y
Classic Coaches	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
SEELB	Y		Y	Y	Y
SELB	Y		Y	Y	Y
SJ McDowell	Y		Y	Y	Y
Translink	Y		Y	Y	Y
NEELB	Y		Y	Y	
WELB	Y		Y	Y	Y
Belfast Bus company	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

### 6.3 Safety and Home to School Transport

The operators also provided information on the level and type of service they provide. A vast number of pupils receive transport assistance by ELB bus, Translink service or by private coach and minibus operators. This amounts to

- o 3990 in the Belfast Education and Library Board Area,
- o 22084 in the North Eastern Education and Library Board Area,
- o 19611 in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area,
- o 26456 in the Southern Education and Library Board Area
- o 25650 in the Western Education and Library Board Area
- o 7054 travelling to Further Education Colleges (Department for Education Schools Census, 2004-2005)

**Table 6.3 Transport Provision by ELB area (DE School Census, 2004-2005)**

Service used	BELB area	NEELB area	SEELB area	SELB area	WELB area
ELB vehicles	918	2424	2665	9443	12430
Private Hire of P/T	264	0	386	50	679
Translink – bus	1952	16264	13585	11847	8535
Translink – railway	11	528	242	33	0
Lough Swilly Bus	0	0	0	0	137
Taxi	461	628	1122	1205	617
Parents' car	16	772	1028	292	72
Private coach/minibus	368	1463	493	3586	3066
Strangford/Rathlin ferry	0	5	90	0	0

The private coach operators have a responsibility to comply with legislation requiring the fitting of seatbelts to faster vehicles (up to 63mph) and minibuses. These smaller operators are under strict responsibilities to not permit standing and

to ensure all pupils have available seatbelts. This is shown in the responses – where all private operators which participated and who are contracted to provide school transport are obliged to provide seatbelts where possible within current legislation. The ELB's have stated that they operate in line with the legislation requiring seatbelts to be fitted on smaller minibuses. This is evident in the responses contained in table 6.4 below where seatbelts are mainly provided by ELB's on minibuses in the fleet.

**Table 6.4 Service Provision Details**

	Total number of				Do you provide seatbelts for pupils?
	buses provided	seats provided	schools served	pupils served	
<b>SELB</b>	176	6808	291	8947	Yes on some vehicles (mainly minibuses)
<b>BELB</b>	No info provided	No info provided	No info provided	No info provided	Yes on some vehicles (mainly minibuses)
<b>NEELB</b>	No info provided	No info provided	No info provided	No info provided	Yes on some vehicles (mainly minibuses)
<b>WELB</b>	237*	7450**	223***	12603§	170 board, 1269 sub-contracted buses are seat belted (mainly minibuses).§§
<b>SEELB</b>	92 board owned	No info provided	300+	21000+	Yes on some vehicles (mainly minibuses)
<b>Translink</b>	1205 Ulsterbus 253 Metro	See Table 6.5			
<b>Samuel Hughes T/A Classic Coaches</b>	3	139	21	No info provided	Yes
<b>Belfast Bus company</b>	16	452	10	150	Yes
<b>McDowell SJ</b>	100+	23000+	100+	23354	Where possible in line with current legislation (on coaches)

\* this figure excludes spares, also 155 sub-contracted and some Translink

\*\* this figure excludes spares, also 2182 sub-contracted and some Translink

\*\*\* 110 sub-contracted and 91 Translink

§ 3748 sub-contracted and 9443 Translink, these are Sep 2004 figures and 05/06 returns are not available at time of publication

§§ by March 2006, also refer to Translink for Translink buses

In Translink's case, the majority of school buses operated by the company (standard stage carriage buses) are not legally required to have seatbelts fitted and, in any case, as the company stated in their response, there is no legislation to enforce the wearing of these on coaches that have them fitted. The position of the operator of Metro and Ulsterbus is that they meet the legal requirements regarding load factors, capacities and the provision of seatbelts (see table 6.5). Furthermore, Translink state that they have 'maintained an excellent safety record; the safety of all passengers, an especially scholars, remains Translink's top priority' (stakeholders' response, 2006). Translink have also indicated that travel by bus is about 10 times safer than travelling by car and that the safety risk to pupils travelling by bus is low.

**Table 6.5 Information about Translink school services**

Seats Provided	Schools Served	Pupils Served	Do you provide seatbelts for pupils?
<p>Because of the nature of Translink operations whereby school pupils travel on dedicated school buses and ordinary service buses there is no definitive number of school seats allocated to school pupils. Each passenger has an entitlement to travel and therefore buses are allocated to routes so as to operate within policy and legal requirements.</p>	<p>433 named schools served in the Ulsterbus area and 78 named schools served in the Metro Area. However this does not take account of school pupils who board scheduled service buses, pay cash fare and who do not specify their destination school.</p>	<p>Translink have issued a total of 61,496 passes. These are for pupils who are entitled to free school transport and to those non entitled pupils who have purchased a Translink pass. This figure does not take account of pupils who tender a cash fare on board the bus as described.</p>	<p>Buses by their manufacture and design are not required to have seatbelts fitted. This is the norm for urban bus operation throughout the UK. Coaches built after 1998 have seatbelts fitted at manufacture. Therefore those vehicles in our fleet which are of a coach design do have seatbelts whereas the rest of our fleet do not. If by nature of the duty rota a coach type vehicle is operating on a service which carries school pupils, then seatbelts are present. However there is no legislation to compel the wearing of these.</p>

At least 61,496 pupils (with free passes) and possibly up to 65,000 pupils travel to and from school by Translink services daily in 1458 buses. This translates into an average load factor of 45 pupils per bus at any one time, but does not indicate the dangers of and frequent occurrences of overcrowding on some services. As Translink, itself admits many pupils travel on scheduled service buses, placing capacity pressures on some routes.

#### **6.4 Safety and Security**

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the recent rise in costs of home to school transport has been attributed to the rising cost of public transportation provided by



Translink and private taxi hire. Politicians and pressure or interest groups have, as result, expressed severe concerns about overcrowding and behaviour on Translink services. This has, however, been overshadowed by the impending cost of providing seatbelts for all and increasing the number of buses on the roads accordingly. Sammy Wilson MP MLA, Democratic Unionist Party Education Spokesman has stated that the cost of providing home to school transport could double if pupils were compelled to wear seatbelts – “the reaction’s going to be ‘yes, we’ll have this gold-plated transport system, but we can’t afford it for as many youngsters’...therefore we start looking for ways at tightening the criteria and that means that youngsters who currently get a bus to school will not get one.” (DUP, 2005). It could, according to Mr Wilson, cost up to £50 million to implement the law and he fears that the Government could use this as an excuse to scrap free transport altogether. East Derry SDLP MLA John Dallat states that he believes “in this day and age children should not be standing while making lengthy journeys to school...the issue of seat belts should not be an economic argument”. Furthermore, Tommy Gallagher, SDLP MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the party’s Education Spokesman expressed concern in 2002 about the Southern Education and Library Board’s decision to end concessionary transport to pupils living within the statutory walking distance to their nearest school – “the decision poses a serious danger to children who as a result will have to walk the roads to get to school. It is especially unfair to families in rural areas where the school bus service is, to say the least, unsatisfactory”. Wilson Clyde MLA stated that school transport must and should be provided for all school children but it must be made as safe as possible with each child having its own seat and seatbelt. Ulster Unionist Party Education Spokesman, Derek Hussey has stated that the “financial implications of fitting seatbelts on school buses must be fully examined...we cannot afford to take risks with children’s safety and this whole area must be addressed now” (UUP, 2005).

According to Wilson Clyde MLA (DUP representative for Antrim Borough), there should not be any children standing which is a very dangerous position to be in should the bus have to stop very quickly. Concerning bullying and behaviour, he suggested this would not happen if a conductor was employed on all school buses who would be responsible for ensuring that the children all wear their seatbelts and also ensuring that they all behave properly while they travel. Furthermore, it was Mr Clyde’s belief that it is impossible for the driver to carry out these important duties. School transport for all school children is or should be the safest form of transport and is also environmentally friendly cutting out the many private vehicles having to transport children to school and also makes it more suitable for parents who do not have their own transport. They said “Our future is in our children and it is of the utmost importance that all efforts are made to protect them while they are being educated”.

This is a serious concern and Translink have expressed concern about the possibility of not being able to carry as many pupils if seatbelts and capacity reductions were introduced with the result that pupils are left at the side of the road thereby creating more potentially serious safety concerns. The safety concerns

expressed by many stakeholders are focused on seating arrangements, seat belt provision, overcrowding, bullying and supervision. In terms of the safety issues surrounding school transport, the remaining participants of the survey shared more or less all the aspects given in Table 6.6 below. Serious concerns are highlighted by operators, politicians and other interested parties. The key issues of concern appear to be safety issues of seatbelts, the 3-for-2 rule and overcrowding. Many of the stakeholders felt that these are the three aspects of school transport that need to be addressed most urgently. Moreover, the same stakeholders felt that, on addressing these key safety concerns, behaviour and bullying would improve as a result. The Western Education and Library board provided the following information as the ELB responsible for the largest and most rural area of the Province.

**Table 6.6 Cost Information from WELB (stakeholders' response, 2006)**

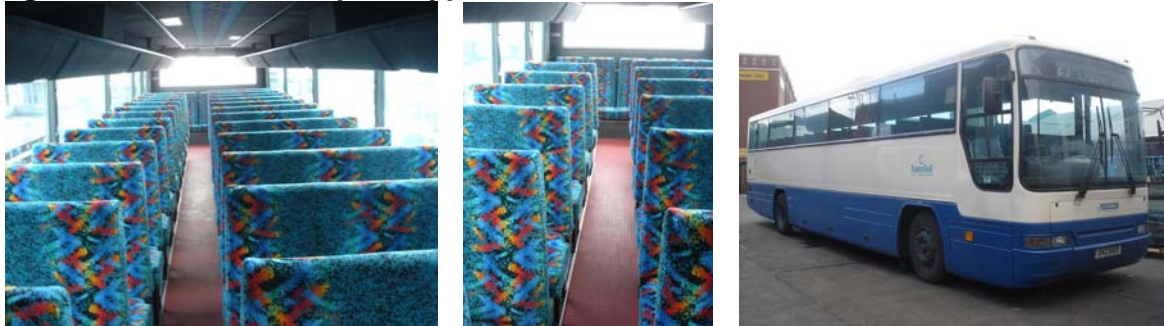
	2004/5 School Year Available seats	2005/6 School Year Available seats	% Difference
Board Buses - Belted	3342	4071	22
Board Buses - Unbelted	4670	3941	-16
Private Bus Hire - Belted	1380	1350	-2
Private Bus Hire - Unbelted	1906	1560	-18
Total Availability (Private bus Hire)	3286	2910	
% Availability now Belted (Private Hire)	41.99	46.39	
Ulsterbus - Unbelted	9444	9444 (Approx)	0
Belted availability (Total Board and private hire)	4722	5421	15
Unbelted availability (Total - including Translink)	16020	14945	-7
Total Availability	20742	20366	-2
% Availability Now Belted (All)	22.76	26.61	

	Pupils Transported	Seats Available	Cost/Day	Cost/Pupil
Private Bus Hire - Belted	930	1350	£2,470.35	£2.65
Private Bus Hire - UnBelted	2080	1560	£2,815.90	£1.35
Private Bus Hire - UnBelted (not 3 for 2)	543			
Additional cost to put a belt on pupils				<b>£1.30</b>
Cost/Annum to belt every pupil currently unbelted				<b>£513,760.00</b>

The cost of providing a seatbelt for every pupil in the Western Education and Library Board area is £1.30 more per pupil than if not provided with a seatbelt. This may not seem like a lot, but would cost a total of over £500,000 annually in one

board area alone. The annual cost of implementation of seatbelts for all pupils would be immense. Translink also highlighted the fact that they have a fleet of buses resealed from 53 to 62 or 65 seats for school duties and that they are currently piloting a programme of reseating their fleet of older express coaches from 53 seats to 69 seats.

**Figure 6.1: Translink prototype vehicle for use on school duties**



This vehicle has been fitted with seats to ensure no pupils are standing while on the bus. Translink state that initial trials are being carried out in the Ballymena area (at February 2006). Solutions such as this have been mooted as possibilities to be rolled out across the province.

Translink stated that they have concerns about behaviour and bullying on their buses. They feel that the current school bus model, 'while not perfect, provides a good basis on which to build a better school bus operation' (stakeholders' response, 2006). Issues of overcrowding, seating, standing, seatbelts and the 3-for-2 rule are not considered as serious by Translink and they stated they operate safely and satisfactorily within the legal parameters. The private coach operators who participated, and who are required to operate under strict legislation governing seating and seatbelts, had many more concerns surrounding behaviour and bullying as well as seatbelts, standing, seating and the 3-for-2 rule (see table 6.4 below).

**Table 6.7 Safety concerns**

	Overcrowding on buses	Behaviour	Seating on buses	Seatbelts on buses	3 for 2 rule	Standing	Bullying
BELB							
SEELB	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
SELB	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
NEELB							
WELB	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Translink		Y					Y
Sustrans							
CCMS	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
Childrens' Law Centre	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y
J Donaldson MP MLA	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
S Gardiner MLA		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
W Clyde MLA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Classic Coaches	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
SJ McDowell	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
Belfast Bus Company	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y

The South Eastern Education and Library Board stated that the major issues for them are behaviour on Translink vehicles and allegations of bullying. These were cited as a reason for children having to have alternative transport provided and paid for by the Education Board. The Western Education and Library Board stated that failure to wear seat belts on buses carrying children who do not attend special needs schools was an issue for their operations. It was felt that they cannot force or coerce children to 'belt up'.

The protection of pupils and bullying were the main issues highlighted by stakeholders with regard to the security of school transport. This is an issue of serious concern for bus and taxi operators as it can lead to safety problems, but was cited as a problem for children who walk or cycle to school as well. Sustrans have concerns about road safety issues and they try to address these through their Safe Routes to Schools initiative. Issues such as the lack of crossing facilities, proper cycle and walking paths, speed and volume of traffic are some of the key concerns raised in their work with pupils and parents (stakeholders' response, 2006). Samuel Gardiner MLA (Ulster Unionist, Upper Bann) recently (16<sup>th</sup> January 2005) wrote to the Minister, Angela Smith, regarding school crossing patrols in the SELB area asking for transitional funding in a situation where by the end of January 2005 some 25% of all school crossing patrols in the board area would have been lost – "in the light of this could you (Angela Smith) possibly speak to your colleagues in order to see if earmarked transitional funding could be put in place as part of the transition process from one system to another to cover such sensitive

issues as school crossing patrols where children's lives are being put needlessly at risk".

The South Eastern Education and Library Board emphasised the responsibility of parents. Most accidents occur when a child leaves the vehicle, not while the child is on board the vehicle (stakeholders' response, 2006). The Western Education and Library Board reported that parents of pupils not entitled to transport assistance and who are seeking transport often request for routes to be changed to provide transport from closer to their home. They also reported that pupils should be able to travel in safety and reasonable comfort and that this is a key aim which they are constantly striving to achieve. Boards should ensure that the number of pupils being carried on their vehicles does not exceed the maximum laid down in the Public Service Vehicles Regulations (stakeholders' response, 2006). Where vehicles are fitted with seatbelts, it was suggested that the Boards should encourage pupils to wear them. In case of board vehicles which are not fitted with seatbelts the Boards all stated that they comply with stringent DOE construction and use regulations which permit children under the age of 14 to be conveyed on the basis of 3 for 2 seating. Their fleets are carefully and regularly serviced by the Board's own engineers to ensure the maintenance of rigorous safety standards.

The Belfast Bus Company provided detailed information about their policies and procedures. The operator stated that the number of passengers being carried must at no time exceed the stated seating capacity of the vehicle being used. Passengers must not stand whilst vehicle is in motion. All gangways and fire exits must remain clear at all times. Passengers travelling in wheelchairs must have the wheelchair properly clamped to the floor using the necessary clamps and personal seatbelt. Drivers must in any circumstances attempt to change the wheel with any passengers in the vehicle. They must arrange to have the puncture repaired as soon as possible. If the driver is involved in an accident which causes damage to any person, other vehicle(s) or any animal no in his/her vehicle, the driver must stop and give name and addresses of himself/herself and the company, registration number etc. The accident must be reported to Police as soon as possible. He/she should record the details of injured passengers. Passengers must be taken to a safe point in the case of a fire. Details of other parties must be obtained. Then the company should be informed. In terms of maintenance of the vehicles, the Belfast Bus company stated that it is the driver's responsibility to ensure the vehicle's oil and water levels are checked daily prior to start of shift. The driver must immediately report fault to the office or Transport Manager.

Security issues are distinct from safety issues and cover elements or experiences that may affect a pupil's personal security, the security or peace of mind of a bus driver or issues that cause concern to the operator. The majority of respondents cited the protection of pupils as a major security concern, while issues and (potential) instances of bullying while enroute to or from school also featured heavily in the concerns of all the stakeholders who responded. Translink only cited two factors that concern them, sectarianism and bullying, while issues related to the wearing of uniforms and the resultant problems that arise between different schools

featured prominently with Classic Coaches. The politicians who responded were all concerned with the protection of pupils at all times, supervision (particularly on school buses) and bullying. These issues are considered as major problems by many political representatives and many parties have highlighted the need to maintain a high level of pupil protection at all times, especially with regard to the cutbacks in crossing patrols by the Education and Library Boards in 2005. Table 6.7 below illustrates the issues of security highlighted by the stakeholders that responded.

**Table 6.8 Security Issues and Concerns**

	Protection of pupils	Supervision of pupils	Sectarianism	Uniform issues	Religious issues	Ethnicity issues	Bullying issues
BELB	Y						Y
SEELB	Y						Y
SELB	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y
NEELB	Y		Y				Y
WELB	Y		Y				Y
Translink			Y				Y
Sustrans							Y
CCMS	Y						Y
Childrens' Law Centre	Y						Y
J Donaldson MP MLA	Y	Y					Y
S Gardiner MLA	Y	Y					Y
W Clyde MLA	Y	Y					Y
Classic Coaches	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
SJ McDowell	Y						Y
Belfast Bus Company	Y	Y					Y

The ELB's have produced guidelines (Education and Library Boards of Northern Ireland, 2004) on the responsibilities of pupils, parents and schools when using school transport services, with the aim of ensuring as safe a level of use as possible. These guidelines are available and have been agreed by all five boards.

**Table 6.9 Responsibilities of Pupils, Parents and Schools**

Pupils' responsibility	Parents' responsibility	Schools' responsibility
<p><b><u>Getting from home to school or to the bus stop/pick up point</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leave in plenty of time so as not to rush</li> <li>- Walk on the pavement, don't run</li> <li>- Wear reflective or fluorescent strips to make you more visible</li> <li>- Walk facing the traffic and in single file where there are no pavements</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Walking to and from the bus stop/pick up point</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be punctual and don't rush</li> <li>- Always accompany young children</li> <li>- Walk the route and talk about the hazards</li> <li>- Teach children about road safety</li> <li>- Cross the road yourself to meet children</li> <li>- Know the safest route and use it</li> <li>- Do not block bus stops with your car</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure pupils understand rules for safe travel and the consequences if these are not observed</p> <p>Encourage pupils to stand back from the kerb when waiting for the bus</p> <p>Warn pupils about the dangers of distracting the driver's attention</p> <p>Ensure pupils are released promptly from class and encourage them to go quickly and safely</p> <p>Work with transport operators and the ELB's</p> <p>Take a firm line with pupils who misbehave</p>
<p><b><u>At the bus stop/pick up point</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Always be conscious of personal safety</li> <li>- Stand at the stop or pick up point and keep well back from the edge of the footpath</li> <li>- Do not play around</li> <li>- Wait until passengers have got off the bus</li> <li>- Get on the bus one at a time and do not push or shove</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Cycling to the bus stop/pick up point or to school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make sure your children are proficient cyclists</li> <li>- Make sure they wear helmets and that the bike is maintained well</li> <li>- Make sure there are lights fitted and working</li> </ul>	<p>Provide safe access to and from the buses</p> <p>Ensure cars are not causes of obstructions and danger</p> <p>Adequate supervision of arrivals and departures</p> <p>Ensure all pupils are onboard before departure</p> <p>Provide transport operators with holiday and closure times</p>
<p><b><u>On the bus or taxi</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not obstruct the gangway or other seats</li> <li>- Behave sensibly and safely</li> <li>- Be still and fasten seatbelts if available</li> <li>- Know where emergency exits are</li> <li>- Do not open or play with emergency exits</li> <li>- Avoid confrontation with the driver or escort</li> <li>- Follow all instructions given in the event of a breakdown or accident</li> <li>- Consider and treat other passengers with respect</li> <li>- Do not smoke</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Driving your children to and from school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure your children wear seatbelts</li> <li>- Take care in the vicinity of the school</li> <li>- Leave plenty of time</li> <li>- Stop on the school side of the road</li> <li>- Make sure the children use the door at the pavement side of the car</li> <li>- Drop off and collect quickly from a safe location to avoid congestion</li> <li>- Do not cause an obstruction</li> <li>- Be considerate of others when parking</li> <li>- Comply with requests made by the school</li> </ul>	<p>Be consistent with discipline</p> <p>Ensure all buses are not overloaded</p>
<p><b><u>Cycling to bus stop/pick up point or to school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wear a helmet and make sure your bike is safe</li> <li>- Have lights fitted and working</li> <li>- No loose clothing, wear reflective or fluorescent strips</li> <li>- Have a safe and secure place for your bike at the destination</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Driving your children to and from school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure your children wear seatbelts</li> <li>- Take care in the vicinity of the school</li> <li>- Leave plenty of time</li> <li>- Stop on the school side of the road</li> <li>- Make sure the children use the door at the pavement side of the car</li> <li>- Drop off and collect quickly from a safe location to avoid congestion</li> <li>- Do not cause an obstruction</li> <li>- Be considerate of others when parking</li> <li>- Comply with requests made by the school</li> </ul>	<p>Be consistent with discipline</p> <p>Ensure all buses are not overloaded</p>
<p><b><u>Arriving at school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not leave the bus until it stops</li> <li>- Don't push or shove</li> <li>- Use the Green Cross Code when crossing roads at all times</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Driving your children to and from school</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure your children wear seatbelts</li> <li>- Take care in the vicinity of the school</li> <li>- Leave plenty of time</li> <li>- Stop on the school side of the road</li> <li>- Make sure the children use the door at the pavement side of the car</li> <li>- Drop off and collect quickly from a safe location to avoid congestion</li> <li>- Do not cause an obstruction</li> <li>- Be considerate of others when parking</li> <li>- Comply with requests made by the school</li> </ul>	<p>Be consistent with discipline</p> <p>Ensure all buses are not overloaded</p>

## 6.5 Range of Distances, Journey Times and Schools

Operators and providers stated the range of distances, journey times and schools covered by the transport they provide as given in tables 6.5 and 6.6 below. Distances and journey times recorded by all those operators who completed the survey are widely varying and take into account the number of and different types of schools served, bearing in mind that many children who avail of ELB transport services and those of taxis and private coach or minibus operators travel further to reach schools, especially special schools.

**Table 6.10 Distances travelled by operators**

	0-5 miles	6-10 miles	11-20 miles	more than 20 miles	a mix of these
BELB					Y
Classic Coaches			Y	Y	
SEELB					Y
SELB					Y
SJ McDowell					Y
Translink					Y
NEELB					Y
WELB					Y
Belfast Bus company	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Table 6.11 Journey times**

	less than 15 mins	15-30 mins	30-45 mins	45-60 mins	more than 1 h	a mix of these
BELB						Y
Classic Coaches			Y	Y	Y	Y
SEELB						Y
SELB						Y
SJ McDowell						Y
Translink						Y
NEELB						Y
WELB						Y
Belfast Bus company						Y

Distances are particularly significant in rural areas, especially for transport services provided by and on behalf of the Western Education and Library Board. Many pupils here spend significant times travelling to and from school. The same is true



of those who travel from many outlying areas to special schools, particularly in the Greater Belfast area with pupils coming from Counties Armagh and Tyrone every day. The figures provided here show that all operators cover both long distance and shorter school trips. It was also highlighted by one respondent that although distances within Belfast tend to be relatively short in comparison with many outlying areas, the corresponding time taken to make the journey is often longer. Concerns were expressed at this, and the increasing time taken to make journeys within urban areas, mainly due to congestion. It was suggested that it is not uncommon for children to be late for school as a result and that times spent onboard the bus or in the vehicle are often excessive, presenting increased safety concerns as the pupils may become restless. This is a particular concern highlighted by those operators (ELB's, private minibus and coach companies and taxi firms) which transport children with special requirements or needs.<sup>1</sup>

## 6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has provided information from stakeholders – namely operators, political representatives, Education and Library Boards, and non-governmental organisations regarding their views on school transport – their safety concerns, security concerns, capacity issues, procedures and guidelines relating to health and safety, responsibilities of parents, pupils and schools to ensure safer school travel. Many of the concerns may largely be perceived, but are nonetheless, genuine. It remains to be seen how the school transport model for Northern Ireland evolves in the future and how these operators and stakeholders views are addressed.

Translink have 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: the mileage calculations are a total mileage as school pupils travel on both dedicated school routes and normal service routes.

Further information was obtained from two operators regarding distances travelled. For Translink the following figures<sup>1</sup> were obtained:

Unladen annual mileage:

Metro (within Greater Belfast): 493,875 miles approx

Ulsterbus: 3.7 million miles approx

Laden mileage

Metro (within Greater Belfast): 6.46 million miles approx

Ulsterbus: 25.1 million miles approx

This shows significant mileage covered by the company's 1458 buses but, should be noted, that this is not exclusive of school journeys, see footnote.

For the Belfast Bus company the following figures were obtained:

Unladen annual mileage: 18000 miles

Laden annual mileage: 224000 miles

and standing) in 2001 would require 'additional buses to be provided at additional cost to ELB's and/or users'. Translink continue 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.

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 the stakeholders in this chapter. Operators, politicians and interested parties alike consider the following issues as cause for concern;

- overcrowding on school buses
- behaviour of school pupils
- seating arrangements and provision on buses
- standing on buses
- provision and enforcement of seatbelt wearing
- the 3 for 2 rule and capacity issues
- bullying

Our analysis of the stakeholder questionnaires shows that operators are concerned about behaviour issues but do not attach importance to the issue of providing seatbelts as many pupils would not wear them. It is also stated that travel by bus is up to 10 times safer than by car. There are concerns across all stakeholders regarding standing on buses and the safety implications of this and overcrowding issues. The responses contained in the stakeholder questionnaires prove that there are prevalent safety and security concerns and that issues about overcrowding, behaviour and walking need to be addressed to satisfy the points raised by stakeholders in this survey.