

4. SCHOOL WORKSHOPS – PEER TO PEER FOCUS GROUPS

Overview of key issues from this chapter

The key issues raised by respondents in twelve primary, post primary and special schools about travelling to school were;

- Standing on school buses
- Seating on school buses and the use of the 3 for 2 rule
- The provision of seatbelts in school buses
- Behaviour of other young people on school buses and while walking or cycling to and from school
- Behaviour and attitudes of bus drivers
- Heavy traffic and congestion, especially close to the school
- Traffic speeds
- Traffic noise
- The time taken to make journeys on foot, by bus or in the car
- The distances to be travelled to and from school
- Walking and using footpaths safely
- The provision and maintenance of safe footpaths and cycle lanes
- Crossing roads and the provision and availability of safe crossing points or crossing patrols

4.1 Introduction

A total of twelve schools participated in the peer to peer workshop phase of the research. Peer researchers, drawn from NICCY's youth panel, which worked alongside the research team, conducted these discussion groups. The workshops and discussion groups were designed to explore a wide range of issues associated with the journey to school and transport. A fuller discussion of the study methodology for this phase of the research can be found in Annex 1¹. The schools involved in this phase of the work were carefully selected to ensure representation of the secondary, grammar, primary and special education sectors as well as the Integrated, State controlled sectors and schools that operate under the auspices of the Council for Catholic Maintained schools (CCMS). This chapter presents an overview of each of the schools involvement in this part of the study, followed by a detailed account of the key issues raised by pupils in their workshops. The key outcomes of the workshops highlighted serious reservations about school bus provision – safety, age of vehicles, seating and standing arrangements and overcrowding. Concerns about the impact of congestion was another issue that featured heavily in the workshops; especially where it occurs close to schools, as well as parking or drop off/pick up arrangements for many pupils. Issues of personal safety and security were also raised in the discussions.

4.2 Overview of schools

A total of 11 students took part in the workshop which was held in Lagan College. These pupils were selected from two year groups (year 11 – age 14/15) and (year 14 or upper sixth – age 17/18). All participants travelled to school by bus. Sixteen buses serve Lagan College, ranging from those serving Belvoir Estate to Bangor, Killyleagh and Downpatrick. The vast majority of pupils travel by bus, with a smaller proportion travelling by car, and a few walking with very small numbers cycling. The location of the school was found to make walking to and from the campus difficult as there are few houses nearby and the council have only recently constructed footpaths leading up to the school.

Fifteen students from Methodist College, aged 11-14 took part in three discussion groups about school travel and transport. Methody has a large catchment area, compared to many other schools, with one pupil (not present) travelling from Dromore, County Tyrone every day. This is, however, an exception, with the majority of pupils coming from all over Belfast, most areas of County Down, County Antrim and a number from Armagh. Many different modes of transport are employed by pupils given the catchment area coverage. These include walking from the local area (Malone and Lisburn Roads etc), travel by car, use of public Ulsterbus and Metro services, use of a dedicated school Metro bus and travel by NI Railways into either City Hospital halt or Botanic halt.

¹ The peer research was undertaken in workshops and discussion groups. The discussions were based around a topic guide and worksheets see Appendix 1 for the topic guide Appendices 2 and 3 for the worksheets.

School safety zone at
St Brigid's College,
L/Derry
(photo: S Mackey,
2005)

At St Brigid's College in L/Derry, fifteen pupils took part in the workshop. They were drawn from two specific year groups – year 11 (age 14/15) and year 13 (age 16/17). Some respondents walked to school while others travelled by car. Nobody in the group came to school by bus, but there were a small number of pupils who stated they use the Derry City Ulsterbus service.

The school has recently developed a travel plan and infrastructure improvements have also been made. These include a school safety zone outside the school on the Glengallaigh Road, cycle lanes and new shelters for bicycles. The safety zone consists of traffic calming measures, traffic islands, reduced speed limits and a toucan crossing¹. A further 20 students took part in the workshop at Fort Hill. They were drawn from an age range of 11 years to 18 years old. The students worked in three groups discussing issues and obtaining information from each other regarding journeys to and from school. A number of pupils walked, cycled, used Ulsterbus services or came to school by car and moped. This wide range of transport modes raised a number of important issues in the discussion groups on transport experiences, thoughts and feelings about their daily travel to and from school. Some of the more artistic GCSE art students also drew small pictures of different transport modes to enhance their discussions!

A total of 20 pupils participated in the focus group at St Joseph's College, working in four groups. A large number of pupils walk to the school (situated on the Ravenhill Road) from the surrounding areas, including the Ormeau Road and the Markets, while some come from further a field (Poleglass and Four Winds). There are three schools alongside each other on this stretch of the Ravenhill Road – Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, St Michael's Primary School and St Josephs College. A school safety zone consisting of bike lanes and traffic calming measures was introduced on this stretch of the road in 2003.

Translink bus, drawing by female student, Fort Hill College

A selection of fifteen pupils aged 11 to 18 were present for the focus group in Cambridge House Grammar School. The school has a wide catchment area with pupils from within walking distance and others coming from 20 miles away. This means that a majority of pupils use both public Ulsterbus and dedicated school services provided by Translink. A smaller number also come by car and a proportion walk from residential areas close by. Fifteen students from years 9, 10 and 11 (age 13 to 15) at The Dalriada School were present in the workshop. Many students travel a considerable distance to school (more than 20 miles) with others living within

¹ Toucan crossings are where pedestrians and cyclists share a wide and unsegregated crossing.

walking distance. A large proportion of pupils travel by bus and this resulted in a significant number of discussions in the peer to peer workshop about the services they use.

Fifteen pupils aged 10-11 took part in three discussion groups in Forge Integrated Primary School. They used a list of questions and consulted photographs of transport and travel to help them articulate their views on travel to school. The majority of children travelled to school by car, with a few using a dedicated school bus operated by Translink and a number walking. Fifteen children took part in the workshop at Ballymacrickett Primary School. They ranged in age from 7 to 11. This was a more interactive session as the younger children were found to have problems engaging with the subject and so a game of 'snowballs' was played. This involved the peer researcher calling out some statements about transport and travel to school and the children (in 2 teams) had to write down their thoughts before scrunching the page up and throwing it into a basket in the middle of the room. The location of the school on a narrow road about 2 miles from the village of Glenavy means that the majority of pupils come to school by bus provided by Ulsterbus or car. The absence of footpaths and the narrow twisty nature of the road means there are no pupils who come to school on foot or by bike.

A total of 20 primary 5 (age 8/9) pupils represented Enniskillen Integrated Primary School in the workshop. The school is located on the edge of Enniskillen; around 2 miles from the town centre and the majority of pupils are bussed in or come by car. There is a long wide avenue leading to the school and a bus turning circle provided just outside the gates. Ballinamallard is a rural village primary school. Pupils who participated were aged 8-11. Many children who live in the village walk to school, while others are taken by car or even taxi. Only a small number use a public Ulsterbus service, normally with parents, while a handful travels on the bus alone. drawing by male student, Mitchell House School

As with all special education schools, Mitchell House has a large catchment area. One pupil travels by taxi from Magherafelt every day. The school specialises in education for physically disabled students and all pupils are provided with transport to bring them into school and take them home. This transport is provided by Education and Library Board (yellow) buses, private minibus companies and a number of taxi firms. The students all drew pictures of themselves travelling to and from school.

4.3 Travel in a typical school week

At Lagan College, the students discussed their travel to and from school. Distances travelled varied from just 2 miles to over 20 miles. Issues were raised about the length of journeys by Metro school bus from Belvoir Estate, just about 3 miles away. One respondent stated that he was at one of the first stops in the morning and one of the last in the afternoon. The journey takes 45 minutes as the bus then heads towards the city centre, Stranmillis, Malone, Ravenhill and Cregagh. This was cited

as a serious issue considering the initial distance from school is so short – *‘I only live 3 miles from the school, but the journey takes 45 minutes!’* (male student, Lagan College). Other issues cited included overcrowding and late running of some buses every morning, especially on the Ravenhill, Cregagh and Saintfield Road routes due to high levels of traffic on these routes – *‘I never get to school on time, the traffic is so bad’* (female student, Lagan College). People often have to stand in the aisle, at the front or sit three to a seat. It was felt that, on some occasions, overcrowding is so bad that the bus is over the legal capacity limit – *‘I really think it’s so unsafe’* (female student, Lagan College). Some pupils felt that a double decker would be more useful due to their higher capacity.

The discussions then centred on free school transport entitlements, with a number of pupils highlighting the fact that they have to pay to use the school buses. One student who lives in the Ravenhill area said that he used to have a school bus pass provided, but this was withdrawn more recently with no reason offered. It was also stated that many students feel that paying to go to school is unfair – *‘I have to go to*

School safety zone at St Brigid’s
College, L/Derry (photo: S Mackey,
2005)

school, I have no choice, but I shouldn’t have to pay for transport to get me there’ (male student, Lagan College). On a more positive note, however, some pupils stated that the bus driver sometimes didn’t take money from them. Differences in routes in the mornings and afternoons meant that some pupils have to pay more for one journey than another, for example 60p going to school and £1.00 coming home! It was highlighted that no allowances are made for cheaper fares when still in full time education over the age of 16 – *‘we are still not earning, so we shouldn’t have to pay the full fare’*

(female student, Lagan College). Most people indicated that they enjoy the journey by bus as they can spend time with friends; just one pupil stated that he just endures the journey because he has to.

Despite infrastructure improvements and initiatives in St Brigid’s College to encourage people to walk or cycle to school, a battle is still being fought with those who come by car and don’t need to. Many pupils live in the surrounding area, with journey distances ranging from less than a mile to just over 5 miles. The times taken to travel to school vary quite significantly as a result of heavy traffic in the area. Many pupils who live locally and who walk can have the journey completed in just 5 or 10 minutes. Issues were raised about those who travel by car on a journey of just 3 or 5 minutes and the reasons why they don’t walk centred around issues such as heavy traffic levels, unsafe areas and crossing of roads without patrols or crossings available. Many students, at St Joseph’s College, were unaware of the safety zone outside the school. Of those who were aware, the suggestion was that the introduction of the safety zone and related traffic calming measures has had little

impact on how they feel about their journeys to and from school. Their concerns were still about crossing the road and the speed of traffic using the road immediately outside the school.

Some respondents in St Brigid's College get lifts to school with a parent on their way to work, but walk home again. Those who do walk have numerous roads to cross and do so where there are no crossing patrols. Some students walk for *'as long as 20 or 30 minutes'* (female student, St Brigid's College). Concerns were expressed about very busy major roads where cars travel fast and how this made some of the pupils worried about their safety as a pedestrian, especially in the winter when drivers may be unable to see them – *'there's an accident just waiting to happen'* (male student, St Brigid's College). More safety concerns were highlighted as there are felt to be very few places with traffic lights so that the road can be crossed safely.

drawing by female student,
Forge IPS

The children from Forge Integrated Primary School described their trips to and from school using words and drawings. Distances travelled to school and journey times varied significantly as some children travelled considerable distances. These distances

are not unusual where parents want their children to be educated at an integrated school because this type of education is often unavailable within their immediate area. For other children who live close by access to the school is less of a problem as they can walk or cycle to school.

The cycle club and cycling proficiency takes place on a Wednesday so many children bring their bikes then – *'this is really good fun'* (female student, Forge IPS). Two girls in the discussion group stated that they came to school by bus and immediately suggested that they enjoy this experience as there are other children on the bus and they can travel with their friends. However, children also stated that they don't always feel safe on the bus as there are no seatbelts so *'you could get badly injured if you crash'* (female student, Forge IPS) as well as the fact that *'the bus driver sometimes swears'* (female student, Forge IPS) which, it was agreed makes them sometimes feel uneasy. Furthermore, concerns were expressed about cars parked in the bus lanes and how this annoys those children who use the bus – *'I get so upset when cars block the bus lanes'* (female student, Forge IPS). It was suggested that *'motorists should get fined for parking in the bus lanes and then we could get to school on time'* (male student, Forge IPS).

A large number of pupils in Fort Hill College walk to school these journey times can take anything between 5 to 20 minutes. The school is located in a busy area of Lisburn, so virtually all those who walk have to cross at least one very busy road to get to and from classes. This, it was suggested can cause problems especially in areas with no crossing patrols or traffic lights. In some areas there is only a 'lollypop' woman in the mornings but not in the afternoons. This has caused some concerns, especially among younger students – *'we need a crossing patrol in the afternoon too; it's just so dangerous, especially in the winter'* (female student, Fort Hill College).

It was highlighted that many people who walk *'feel unsafe in the dark or bad weather'* (female student, Fort Hill College), partly because of 'stranger danger' but also because of the dark colour of their uniforms which means that motorists would find it difficult to see them in bad conditions. Those who chose to walk suggested it was because they live close by and/or have little or no choice, but that they would get a lift if one was available. Furthermore, as the school is an integrated one, *'there are no sectarian problems or unwelcome comments/behaviour'* (male student, Fort Hill College).

The children from Ballymacrickett Primary School, in their discussion of journeys to school, made much of the cars or jeeps in which some of the boys come to class – *'my daddy brings me in his jeep, its so big and I feel really safe in it'* (male student, Ballymacrickett PS).

drawing by male student,
Ballymacrickett PS

The majority of pupils stated that they have to travel to school by car as the school is located on a narrow country road which is dangerous - *'roads too dangerous to walk along'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Distances travelled by those who go to Ballinamallard Primary School vary from just under a mile from the school to more than 5 miles away, and even as far as Enniskillen (8 miles) in one case. This also means there is a significant variation in the time taken by different children on their journeys to school. Some stated that they walk for about 2 minutes, while others drive for 5 minutes and some even travel for up to 20 minutes by bus. The reasons cited for travelling to and from school by the mode used were that the children have *'no choice'* (male student, Ballinamallard PS). One such pupil said that he would like to walk, but his parents would not let him because they felt it was *'too dangerous'* (male student, Ballinamallard PS).

Table 4.1 below gives an overview of the key issues raised by pupils in each of the twelve schools

Table 4.1 Key issues of concern raised by school

Key issues raised	Lagan College	St Brigids College	Fort Hill College	Forge IPS	Ballymacrickett PS	Cambridge House	Dairiada School	Enniskillen IPS	Ballinamallard PS	Methodist College	Mitchell House	St Josephs College
Overcrowding on buses	Y		Y			Y	Y			Y		Y

Standing on buses	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y			Y		Y
Seatbelts on buses	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y
Condition of buses	Y		Y			Y	Y					
Behaviour on buses	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y
Supervision on buses	Y		Y			Y	Y					
Reliability of buses	Y		Y			Y	Y			Y		Y
Traffic Congestion	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Traffic parking	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Traffic noise				Y				Y	Y		Y	
Traffic speeds				Y				Y	Y		Y	
Condition of footpaths	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y			
Provision of footpaths	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y			
Crossing roads	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y			
Crossing patrols	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y			
General road safety	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Personal Security	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y					Y

4.4 Travel by Bus

Issues were raised in Lagan College about the restructuring of bus routes following the introduction of the Metro Network in Belfast by Translink in February 2005. This has meant significant problems for some pupils, having to get buses at different times and in different places. Furthermore, unreliability was also cited as a problem with buses often being very late or not turning up at all. Similar concerns were raised in St Joseph's College. Students in both schools expressed concerns about the length of time taken to make short journeys in buses. In some cases, *'route planning leaves a lot to be desired – the bus goes round the world for a shortcut!'* (female student, Lagan College).

For those students who stay at school after 4.00pm for various activities, problems getting home are significant.

This is a common problem in all schools and something that concerned many pupils who have to *'hang around the*

Ulsterbus vehicle on school bus duties
(Photo: S. Mackey, 2002)

school grounds in the dark' (female student, Lagan College). Furthermore, at Lagan College, the last bus leaves the school grounds at 4.00pm, after which, pupils have to walk a significant distance along a relatively dangerous road (especially in the wet and during winter) to get a Metro bus at Four Winds terminus. In other situations, pupils expressed a desire to stay behind to participate in extra curricular activities, but couldn't because they would then *'have no way to get home'* (male student, Lagan College and male student, Dalriada School). When pupils do get the 4.00pm bus from Lagan College, it was suggested that *'the route is not always consistent'* (female student, Lagan College). It was claimed that *'since the Laganside bus yard*

and depot was relocated to Great Victoria Street, the bus driver sometimes ends the journey at the Europa' (male student, Lagan College) instead of at the Laganside Buscentre. This, it was claimed causes serious problems for pupils trying to get home to areas of North Down and East Belfast as they then have to make their own way across the city to the Laganside Buscentre to get a bus home.

In terms of the actual journeys made by bus, problems such as smoking on vehicles and inadequate heating and/or ventilation were also raised by pupils who travelled by public transport from all schools – *'the drivers let people smoke and drink (alcohol) and don't ever have the heat on in the winter'* (female student, Dalriada School). Some of the school buses are also very old and some pupils don't feel safe or confident travelling on them – *'some of the older buses are rickety and dangerous'* (female student, Cambridge House). It was widely felt among pupils who use the bus that *'Translink have no interest in the welfare of those who use the school transport they provide as they get paid for it anyway'* (female student, Lagan College) and that *'the drivers treat school pupils like dirt'* (male student, Cambridge House) and *'drive like maniacs and don't care about our safety, only to get their shift done and get home or something'* (female student, Dalriada School).

Safety concerns were discussed in detail at all the schools discussion groups. These concerns seemed to focus on the provision of seatbelts, more than 2 people on a seat and the state of some of the older buses. It was felt that seatbelts *'should be offered on all buses'* (female student, Methodist College), but pupils were unsure how seatbelt wearing could be enforced. It was suggested that people should *'at least have the choice'* (male student, Cambridge House). On the other hand it was recognised that, *'if everyone was expected or required to wear seatbelts, capacity would be reduced and some students would be refused travel'* (female student, Dalriada School). This would require more buses, but all were acutely aware that Translink do not have access to such funds – *'this is evident by the state and age of their buses, especially those put on school runs'* (male student, Cambridge House). Another group stated that the buses are smelly and dirty *'old bangers'* (female student, Dalriada School) that are not reliable or punctual and often break down.

female students, Dalriada School,
Ballymoney

It was suggested that the current situation is that *'buses are not adjusted to the amount of people trying to use them'* (male student, Methodist College) and that in recent years, while the school population

has increased in many circumstances the number of buses provided has not. On this issue, it was agreed that the Education Boards and the transport provider *'do not react quickly enough'* (female student, Dalriada School) to different situations arising at the beginning of each school year. There was a feeling also that there was *'lack of effort to ensure everyone has safe transportation at the beginning of September, when new pupils are still finding their feet'* (female student, Lagan College). It was found to be a common occurrence that there are often more pupils trying to use school buses at the beginning of the year until they get used to the way in which they need to travel – *'capacity and overcrowding is so bad it's very dangerous at this time'* (female student, St Joseph's College).

It was also felt that Translink tend to *'prioritise public services over school services'* (female student, Methodist College). Regarding seatbelts, it was felt in Fort Hill, St Joseph's and Methodist College that nobody would use them if provided, but *'it wouldn't necessarily be a bad idea to give people a choice'* (female student, Methodist College). On the other hand, however, this, it was again felt, would reduce capacity on an already overstretched system and would mean more people would be left standing at the side of the road as a result of being refused travel on a full bus – *'its not safe waiting at the side of the road for a bus either'* (male student, Dalriada School). This, it was argued, would cause other potential safety and security concerns. It was agreed that there are *'too many pupils sitting on the seats provided as well'* (female student, Fort Hill College).

The behaviour of pupils on buses was also discussed in some detail in all of the secondary school workshops. On occasions where pupils from other schools use the same bus, it was revealed that, in general, the different *'factions simply ignore each other'* (male student, Fort Hill College). Fighting or bullying was only mentioned

Photo by S. Mackey, 2005

briefly in the workshops at St Joseph's, Cambridge House and Dalriada, and in relation to situations where arguments had broken out over seating. The majority of situations were, it is claimed, trouble free and bullying was felt to be a non-issue amongst these pupils. The main reason for this is, perhaps, the fact that *'older pupils tend to keep order on the buses'* (male student, Cambridge House). The behaviour of some pupils in the Fort Hill workshop on the bus was discussed in more detail and the role that school prefects play in keeping order was also highlighted. It was felt that an *'increased level of supervision'* (female student, Fort Hill College) on bus services should be implemented, partly because it was felt that bus drivers *'command no respect from school students partly due to their own attitude towards the students'* (female student, Lagan College).

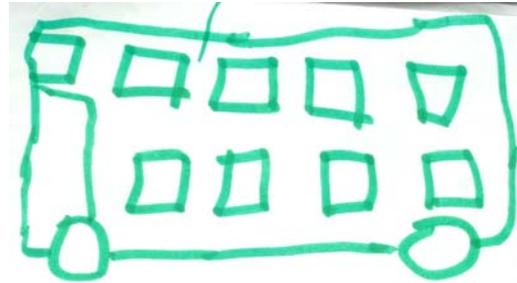
Using buses in wet weather caused some discontent. The non-provision of bus shelters in many areas, combined with the vandalism of shelters where they are in place and the fact that they were often not large enough to hold groups of children waiting in poor weather were all cited as problems. There is also no provision for drying off when arriving at school. *'When it rains, we get to school soaked and can't get dried off anywhere. If we had shelters at the bus stops this would be better'* (male student, Dalriada School).

Translink provide all the school buses for Fort Hill College, Dalriada School, Cambridge House, Methodist College and Lagan College. These include a mix of scheduled public service buses and dedicated contract school buses. The major issues surrounding the use of this mode of transport included *'severe overcrowding'* (male student, Methodist College). Serious concerns were expressed regarding the number of people trying to use buses at all these schools and the inadequate provision of vehicles for all these pupils. Standing is not uncommon and the entire *'vehicle is often jammed full'* (male student, Cambridge House) on many routes. This

is common on both scheduled service buses and contract school buses which are sometimes shared with pupils from other schools.

Bus reliability and punctuality problems mean that many pupils are often late for school, and on occasions pupils have been turned away from a full bus – *'buses are never on time and I'm nearly always late'* (female student, Methodist College). The attitudes of some bus drivers were, again, also highlighted with many students stating they are *'often rude and drive too fast'* (female student, Forge IPS). Furthermore, for those who do not get free school transport, fares are considered too high – *'I can't afford to get a decent lunch because I have to pay to get the bus home'* (male student, St Joseph's College).

In Ballymacrickett Primary School, of those who travel by bus, they were all able to state that they use a blue Ulsterbus. There was also much discussion about the large numbers of children on the buses and the problems negotiating the small narrow roads to and from the school or when cars are parked outside the school grounds. *'The bus is always really full and very noisy.'*



'A double decker'
drawing by male student,
Ballymacrickett PS

'It can also be very bumpy on the road up to school – I think the driver goes too fast and I sometimes get a sore back!' (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Many of those who use the bus also stated that they like it because they are able to *'talk with friends'* (male student, Forge IPS) and that the bus is full of people of their own age who they are acquainted with. Overcrowding was not a term that was used, but some children expressed concerns about the fact that there are *'a few who have to stand'* (male student, Ballymacrickett PS) sometimes. Furthermore, the children stated that they would feel safer on the country roads used on their journeys if *'everyone had a seat and seatbelts'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS).

In Cambridge House, the school and public services provided by Ulsterbus were the subject of much more debate and conversation than in any of the other school workshops. Very severe overcrowding was highlighted as a major problem on all buses, including both public scheduled bus services and contract school bus services. Pupils stated that this could result in *'many people hav(ing) to remain standing for the entire journey which can be more than 30 minutes'* (male student, Cambridge House) or pupils *'regularly being turned away'* (female student, Dalriada School). These issues were compounded by buses not stopping at bus stops (*'buses drive past stops leaving students standing'*, male student, Cambridge House), drivers not giving pupils enough time to get off at their requested stop (*'people cannot get through the crowded aisles to get off the bus'* male student, Dalriada School), the poor condition of the vehicles themselves, the regularly poor attitude and rudeness of drivers towards students and bad behaviour on overcrowded buses with the result that many pupils have *'genuine serious concerns'* (female student, Cambridge House) for their safety.

Reliability and the condition of buses was brought into question by all users. Services regularly *'failed to turn up or even operate'* (male student, Lagan College) and the conditions on some buses were considered *'very poor – almost like cattle trucks in some cases'* (female student, Methodist College). Fares were also considered too high for those who have to pay their fares. In Ballymena, bullying is considered a *'serious problem for younger pupils on the bus'* (female student, Cambridge House). This problem, it was claimed, is compounded by the *'poor attitude of drivers and their inconsiderate, rude, abrupt response to any problems'* (female student, Cambridge House) that occur on the journey. It was again, also suggested that, on the rare occasions when drivers do attempt to intervene they *'do not command respect'* (male student, Cambridge House) from students and lack authority, with the result that they have no or little impact on the problem behaviours encountered. A related concern was that *'many students are disrespectful towards elderly members of the public who also use the bus services'* (female student, Lagan College and female student, Cambridge House). Some younger pupils also felt *'lonely and isolated'* (female student, Methodist College) on buses.

Drawing by male student, Mitchell House

Many students at Cambridge House had serious concerns about conditions at Ballymena bus station. It was stated that *'intimidation, sectarianism and bullying'* (male student, Cambridge House) are common place there, especially in the afternoons. Incidents involving fireworks, fighting, bullying and crowds of people make this a *'very scary environment for all, but especially for young people'* (female student, Cambridge House). It was felt that a recent police presence has had *'little impact'* (male student, Cambridge House) on this situation. It was suggested that there is a serious security and safety issue in the bus station and on some buses, with many students *'refusing to travel through the bus station for fear of their own safety'* (female student, Cambridge House).

If students miss a bus or are refused travel due to overcrowding, the next bus is *'often very late'* (female student, Cambridge House), making some feel pupils feel unsafe and insecure, especially in bad weather conditions. Many buses are also *'not numbered correctly'* (male student, Cambridge House and female student, Dalriada School). This, it was stated, makes pupils feel unsure and many have found themselves on the wrong bus as a result. Increased supervision was requested in Ballymena. The location of bus stops was called into question with many students having to walk *'significant distances to reach the stops'* (female student, Cambridge House). A number of students also stated that they have to walk up dark lanes and alley ways creating a feeling of insecurity on their journeys to/from school. In Dalriada School, concerns were again raised about the punctuality of buses and the fact that sometimes they fail to turn up as required. This was followed up by a list of concerns about the actual journey on buses, with issues such as overcrowding and

the condition of vehicles taking precedence. A list of concerns made by one of the groups in the discussion looks like this: *'buses are...*

- *Full*
- *Stuffy*
- *Long journeys*
- *Too warm*
- *Have bullies on them* (Dalriada school group, male and female students)

Concerns surrounding bus pass provision generated a significant amount of discussion amongst those who do not receive free transport entitlements. This group of pupils felt that it is an unfair situation particularly with fares being high. Smoking and behaviour of pupils on buses leading to incidents of bullying were also highlighted as concerns with a desire to see an active response to combat these problems being expressed. This was reinforced with concerns about the poor attitudes of bus drivers.

While the school buses at Enniskillen Integrated Primary School are not filled to capacity, the children had a few issues with their transport. These centred around personal safety concerns and the lack of seatbelts available on buses. Bullying was an issue raised by children in this workshop as they share buses with students from the neighbouring Institute of Further Education. Some pupils felt intimidated and scared when on the bus with these other older students. When they approach the bus driver for help in a situation where bullying or fighting (between their own pupils) occurs, the response is to *'hit them back'* (female student, Enniskillen IPS) and nothing is done to prevent or stop the bad behaviour. Many children, therefore, do not like the bus. Other negative aspects of bus travel included that it is noisy, slow and generally unpleasant. Another child stated that they don't like using the bus because *'people push'* (female student, Enniskillen IPS) them out of the way.

'The bus leaves me off and then I walk home'
drawing by male student, Enniskillen Integrated PS

Children who use the bus in Ballinamallard tended not to do so every day. The main reasons for bus use were when parents were unable to collect children from school in the afternoons. This meant that virtually all journeys by bus took place on the return homeward journey. Those pupils who used the bus stated that they

found it to be an enjoyable experience. Amongst this group of pupils there was no mention of the issues that concerned children at the other school workshops. The children stated that they enjoyed meeting friends on the bus and also liked looking out the windows to get a good view of everything as they drove past!

Some students at Methodist College make journeys involving 2 or more buses. One such example is from Newtownards, which involves a bus into Belfast (Ulsterbus)

and then a second bus to school (Metro). Such a journey takes more than one hour and can often be late as a result of heavy traffic – *'it can be very difficult if the bus is late or doesn't turn up'* (male student, Methodist College). Many students found the bus services to be nearly always late and unreliable with many not turning up at all or on time. There was no specific mention of overcrowding on buses, but it was highlighted in the discussion that the majority of bus services used are scheduled services and they can always be full with other passengers. One pupil in the St Joseph's College workshop stated that they travelled from Poleglass by minibus, operated by the school every day at a cost of £10 per week. This student was happy to do so as it provided him with a way of socialising with others and brought him directly to and from school – *'its good, I like it and my parents are happy to pay the money'* (male student, St Joseph's College).

4.5 Cycling

While none of the participants in Lagan College workshop cycle to school, it was stated that other pupils do so. The main reasons for those who could cycle but don't

centred on the busy and unsafe roads on the route to school – *'the road outside school is really dangerous because cars speed along it – I wouldn't feel safe cycling even though I live close enough'* (male student, Lagan College).

Sheltered cycling facilities at St Brigid's College, L/Derry (photo: S Mackey, 2005)

According to information provided by St Brigid's College cycling has increased threefold amongst pupils, since the introduction of cycle lanes, bike sheds and the provision of lockers. Respondents who cycle do so in the better weather and not in wet or dark conditions. Much was made of the school's initiatives to encourage cycling and how much safer people feel using the bike as a result – *'it's good to know you have somewhere to keep your bike safe and lockers'* (male student, St Brigid's College). There are extensive cycle lanes surrounding the school, and these cater for the vast majority of people who travel to school this way. There is also, however, little in the way of cycle provision further from the school and this was seen as a barrier to further expanding the number of cyclists – *'we need more bike lanes in Derry'* (female student, St Brigid's College). Cycle facilities have also been provided at St Joseph's, in Belfast, as part of the safety zone developments. Nobody in the workshop group used a bike to travel to and from school, but it was agreed that the provision of covered and secure bike racks and lockers for cyclists was a good idea, though nobody was sure if this had resulted in increased numbers of students using bicycles at this school.

At Forge Integrated Primary School, there are no cycle sheds or secure facilities for bikes in the school. Those who bring bikes lock them up on railings outside the front entrance. This is seen as an unsatisfactory arrangement because the bikes can get wet in bad weather – *'when it rains my bike gets soaked'* (male student, Forge IPS). Many of the children stated that they enjoy cycling because they get exercise and they enjoy bringing their bikes into school, especially on a Wednesday for cycle club and cycling proficiency – *'its really good fun'* (female student, Forge IPS). There

were safety concerns associated with travelling to and from school by bike at this school as a result of heavy traffic moving quickly, lack of cycle lanes and having to use the footpath – *‘sometimes I feel unsafe because the roads are so busy and the cars go too fast’* (male student, Forge IPS). Many cyclists suggested that they would like to see separate cycling lanes as well the provision of reflectors and lights etc for improving the visibility of cyclists. Some children stated that they don’t like cycling and that they wouldn’t be encouraged to use the bike because they are worried about traffic congestion and the speed of vehicles.

Fort Hill pupils expressed concerns about the level of traffic and the resulting safety concerns for cyclists and mopeds. Traffic congestion means that there is little space for separate cycle lanes close to the school and this, it was felt, is a major deterrent to potential cyclists – *‘not many people bring their bikes because they don’t feel safe’* (female student, Fort Hill College). Not only does this deter cycling but a lack of safe and secure cycle facilities on school premises is also a further deterrent – *‘there’s nowhere to keep bikes safe anyway’* (male student, Fort Hill College). Moped users suffer from the same concerns, and this has resulted in the only moped user no longer using this mode of transport.



drawing by male student, Fort Hill College

In Ballinamallard, a number of pupils said that they would like to cycle to school but they are currently not allowed to do so, except on days when they have cycling proficiency. There are no facilities for keeping bikes and the roads and footpaths were considered too narrow to cycle safely.

4.6 Travel by Car

A large proportion of respondents in all schools travel to and/or from school by car. This is despite the fact that a significant number of pupils also live within walking distance and that some schools have been actively encouraging people to walk or cycle. Congestion was an issue that created much discussion especially when it occurs close to the school gates in the mornings and afternoons. Congestion in and around Methodist College on both the Malone and Lisburn roads and St Joseph’s College on the Ormeau and Ravenhill Roads was cited as a major issue by many who use the car. This, it was stated, often made students late for class, but many have become resigned to the fact that this is an aspect of travel they cannot do much about – *‘there’s not much we can do about traffic, so we just have to accept it’* (female student, Methodist College). It was also felt that *‘many people just don’t want to do anything about traffic. There are so many cars with just one person in them, but nobody seems to care’* (male student, St Joseph’s College).



drawing by female student, Fort Hill College

People tended to travel by car as they felt it is more comfortable, they don't have to leave home as early and because their parent(s) gave them a lift on the way to work – *'I can get extra time in bed if my dad takes me in!'* (male student, St Brigid's College). Furthermore, some pupils stated that they feel safer in the car on dark and wet mornings and also when the traffic

is heavy. More people come to school by car in the morning than go home in the afternoon as their parents are working – *'I have to walk home, because my mum and dad don't finish work 'til later'* (female student, Fort Hill College). At Fort Hill College, many pupils travelled to school by car as their parents give them a lift on their way to work in the mornings. Travel by car in other circumstances was not common, as many people prefer to walk or go on the bus with friends.

A majority of children in Forge Integrated Primary School also stated that they enjoyed travelling by car to and from school as it is warmer, quicker, easier and safer due to the presence of seatbelts – *'car is the best way to go!'* (male student, Forge IPS). The car, it was felt, is a really good way of getting to school as *'it gets us there quick'* (female student, Forge IPS and male student, Ballymacrickett PS). Not only this, but overall the pupils thought that travelling by car to school is better. They highlighted the comfort and safety aspects and how much better they feel travelling by car. Congestion was an issue that the children were not concerned about – *'I don't really care if traffic makes me late for school, I'll get there sometime'* (male student, Forge IPS). Many more pupils suggested that when they are in traffic jams they don't mind and that they are used to it, though one child stated that they don't like the car because they spend too long in traffic – *'we just sit there and go nowhere'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS).

The remainder of participants in Ballymacrickett Primary School who do not travel by bus stated that they travel by car (or jeep!). Some children told the group that there are sometimes problems passing cars parked on the road and there have been occasions when collisions have occurred, though these consist of 'scrapes' rather than crashes – *'my dad's car got scratched because another car was parked in his way and he tried to get through'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Everyone who travels by car in the primary schools stated that they enjoy doing so for a number of reasons. These reasons included the fact that they get to school and home faster, it is not noisy and that they can listen to the radio – *'my mum has Chris Moyles on the radio and I can listen to it'* (male student, Forge IPS). They all seemed to appreciate the privacy and personal space afforded to them by car travel. The majority of children stated that they came to and from school by car as they had no alternative, mainly due to safety concerns while attempting to walk – *'we couldn't walk as there are no footpaths to school and its too dangerous'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Children who travelled by car in Enniskillen Integrated Primary School also stated that this is a largely positive experience for a number of reasons. These

included speed, ease and fun. Many also stated that it prevents them from getting wet and they can remain *'nice and dry and warm'* (female student, Enniskillen IPS) for the whole journey. These pupils also don't have to face students from the Further Education College and, therefore, have no worries about bullying or intimidation. Again, many children in Ballinamallard who used the car for their journeys to and from school enjoyed the experience. Some stated this is because they can keep warm and dry, they don't have to get up as early and many stated that because they live in the country they have no other choice – *'I have to get the car, there's no other way'* (female student, Ballinamallard PS). The only negative issues raised about travelling by car included the number of cars outside the school, particularly in the afternoons. This, it was suggested, can make it very difficult to get past and sometimes the children are delayed as a result. This is also a problem in the mornings, *'but it isn't as bad then'* (female student, Ballinamallard PS).



drawing by male student,
Ballymacrickett Primary School

There was much less discussion about travelling to and from school by car in Cambridge House than there was about the use of bus services. Those pupils who do travel by car stated that it is generally a positive experience. This was apart from the heavy traffic levels around Ballymena and especially on the Galgorm Road outside the school and the neighbouring Ballymena Academy. Roadworks were an issue that many people highlighted as a concern – *'there are always roadworks near school, it can be very frustrating'* (female student, Cambridge House). The continuing programme of highway maintenance compounds congestion problems and makes journeys longer with many students being late for class on a more regular basis – *'these roadworks make us late to school, especially in the bad weather'* (female student, Cambridge House). Congestion in general and, more specifically, around Dalriada School in Ballymoney was also highlighted by those who use the car here. This, it was suggested, is an issue that many people just have to accept – *'we can't do anything about it'* (male student, Dalriada School). Of those who travel by car, many do so instead of walking because they prefer to do so, while a few do so because parents leave them off on their way to work – *'I would just rather go in the car because I can'* (female student, Dalriada school)

4.7 Walking to and/or from school

Firstly, in St Brigid's College, it was highlighted that sometimes people felt unsafe in the Shantallow area because of the presence of gangs and groups of people who hang around – *'it can make you feel unsafe, but you just put your head down and walk faster!'* (male student, St Brigid's College). This was the only area in which such specific personal safety concerns were expressed. Some respondents across all schools only walked to school in good weather, while there are many who had to

walk to school in all conditions as they have no other option – *‘I walk in the rain and the snow as we don’t have a car’* (female student, St Brigid’s College). Concerns were, however, still prevalent regarding walking through certain areas, though walking anywhere in the dark was an area of increased concern among all participants, especially with St Brigid’s students and those from St Joseph’s who walked significant distances to the Markets area or beyond – *‘we just walk fast, ‘cos you don’t know who’s around’* (female student, St Joseph’s College). Of those who walked to and from Cambridge House Grammar School, journeys tended to be less than 10 minutes with little in the way of concerns apart from walking in dark or poor weather conditions. The absence of all but one crossing patrol in the vicinity of Dalriada School was an issue of concern, with many students expressing disquiet about the speeds and levels of traffic on their routes to and from school.



Children walking to school
(picture by female student, Forge IPS)

The children in Ballymacrickett Primary School were fully aware of the reasons why they either choose not to walk or why their parents don’t allow them to do so. These reasons were particularly well articulated in the group and centred around the issue of safety and the lack of available footpaths, and the presence of many tight narrow bends and steep hills in the immediate vicinity of the school. One child stated that they would not consider walking as *‘you could get hit by a car or stolen by somebody!’* (male student, Ballymacrickett PS) with another expressing concerns about *‘getting run over and killed’* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Those who walked to Ballinamallard Primary School tended to live in close proximity, at least, within the village. Many stated that they don’t

mind walking in good weather, but dislike it during the winter or in the rain – *‘I don’t like getting wet and then being in wet clothes all day’* (male student, Ballinamallard PS). Everyone said that they felt safe walking and that it makes them feel good because they get good exercise from it – *‘it makes us healthy!’* (female student, Ballinamallard PS). Some said they would like to see traffic lights, which would make it easier for them to cross some busier roads.

One child stated that they wore reflectors while walking in the dark, but they didn’t like doing so as they have to walk alone and sometimes, in the bad weather, they feel a little unsafe – *‘the bright yellow things are a good idea, though!’* (male student, Ballinamallard PS). It was suggested that they would like to have a walk to school week – *‘I think it would be good fun and we could get healthier all together’* (female student, Ballinamallard PS).

4.8 Travel by Train

New CAF Train (Photo: S. Mackey, 2004)

Some pupils in Methodist College used the NI Railways service to get to and from school. Much was made of the level of comfort of the new CAF trains and how the students enjoyed travelling on them – *‘they are light years better than the old things, but still not perfect!’* (female student, Methodist College). This was, however, offset by the fact that they were often late and very busy with no seats available. It was agreed that the service is, however, now much better than previously.

4.9 Issues about the Street Environment and Areas

The majority of school buses at Lagan College drop off and pick up pupils in the school grounds at specially constructed bus stands. This, it was felt is a good arrangement with sufficient safety measures such as *‘guard rails and plenty of open space’* (female student, Lagan College). Other buses collect pupils and leave them on the road outside the school gates, a situation that was less enthusiastically received amongst pupils in the discussion group. Problems such as *‘narrow footpaths and large amounts of traffic’* (male student, Lagan College) here were also issues for concern. When pupils were using the scheduled Metro bus services from Four Winds terminus (about half a mile from the school), narrow footpaths, traffic levels and the speed of traffic in this area were mentioned as safety problems. Furthermore, there is limited space and poor shelter facilities at the terminus – *‘it can get very crowded and there’s hardly any room to stand’* (female student, Lagan College).



drawing by female student
Ballinamallard Primary School

The majority of pupils in St Brigid’s College agreed that they normally felt safe in the area surrounding the school, despite busy roads. Some expressed safety concerns further away from the school in the Shantallow area and during dark, cold and wet weather conditions. Crossing points *‘could be better and traffic lights could be provided’* (females student, St Brigid’s College) in certain areas to aid the crossing of busy roads. Pupils in St Joseph’s stated that they had never considered or thought about their safety in the immediate vicinity of the school due to the large numbers of other pupils in the area at the same

time – *‘there are so many of us, we are hard to miss!’* (female student, St Joseph’s College). It was suggested that the safety zone had not slowed traffic down because congestion had already done so – *‘it’s not that useful because the traffic is so heavy before and after school that the traffic goes dead slow anyway’* (female student, St Joseph’s College).

Serious concerns were expressed about the main Belfast to Lisburn Road close to Fort Hill College. There is a busy roundabout junction which, it was felt, is unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists as well as a narrow section of the road close to the school gates which acts as a bottle neck – *‘there is so much traffic using this road that it’s just not safe for us’* (female student, Fort Hill College). This is where the crossing patrol is and it was felt it was a vital help to those crossing this section of the road – *‘even though there are traffic lights there, the crossing patrol is just for the primary school, but when we can use it, it really helps use feel safer’* (female student, Fort Hill College).

4.10 Other factors

One major issue which also featured in two of the discussion groups was the issue of lost property and how many pupils had never been able to retrieve items left on the bus – *‘when something is lost, we never get it back’* (female student, Methodist College); *‘you have to be really careful you don’t leave anything on the bus, because if you do you have no hope of getting it back!’* (female student, Fort Hill College).

One pupil in Forge Integrated Primary School wrote that they would ideally like to *“travel to school by plane or helicopter. I would like this because I could get to school quickly and land in the playground!”* (male student, Forge IPS). The reasons for this view centred around the fact that those who use the bus can’t easily get into the



drawing by male student, Forge IPS

school grounds or along the road to the school because of the cars parked in the bus lane. This seemed to be a major source of frustration for these children and they expressed a desire to see this situation change – *‘something needs to be done about it’* (female student, Forge IPS).

Furthermore, concerns were expressed by children at all four primary schools about the speed of traffic outside schools and the fact that they don’t always feel safe walking or cycling as a result of this. More provision for cyclists was requested across all the schools, specifically secure bike sheds and paths as well as reflectors and more visible clothing – *‘me and my friends would like to use the bike, but we think its not safe at the minute’* (male student, Ballinamallard Primary School).

4.11 Suggestions to improve school travel experiences

The participants in Lagan College, Cambridge House, Dalriada School and Methodist College made some suggestions about how they would like to see their journeys to school by bus improved. The level of comfort afforded by the seats was mentioned by these students as an area for improvement and the provision of seatbelts so people can use them if they choose to. It was, however, recognised that if seatbelts were to become a legal requirement and the three-for-two seating arrangement was abolished that more buses would be required. Concerns were raised about how this could be done, the time it would take and how, in the interim, people would be refused travel on capacity grounds – *‘there’s no other way around it, there needs to be more buses’* (female student, Methodist College) and *‘the government will need to pay for that’* (male student, Cambridge House). It was also suggested that adult supervision was required on some routes in order to keep pupils ‘in line’ and to prevent smoking and/or threatening behaviour on the buses – *‘there is a real need for supervision to stop any trouble’* (female student, Cambridge House).

In L/Derry, it was felt that the speed limit on the Glengallaigh Road outside St Brigid’s College *‘should be reduced from 40 mph to 30 mph’* (female student, St Brigid’s College) and that the crossing patrol woman should be reinstated, her job was cancelled as a result of education board cut backs, and that crossing patrols removed from areas with traffic lights should be re-instated – *‘it’s ridiculous’* (female student, St Brigid’s College). The provision of a safety zone, cycle lanes and sheds and the development of a travel plan have made a huge impact on the safety of pupils. The majority of those present stated that they now *‘feel much safer’* (male student, St Brigid’s College) amongst the busy traffic while either walking or cycling, but *‘more could still be done’* (female student, St Brigid’s College). Concerns were still expressed about the lack of crossings and patrols as well as those who still insist on coming to school by car when they live a short distance away.

Children who walk to Forge Integrated Primary School expressed concerns about the levels of traffic and the speeds of vehicles on the Ormeau and Ravenhill Roads. It was suggested that this makes them sometimes feel unsafe, especially in bad weather and that they would only walk on days when they absolutely have to. There was a request for more pedestrian crossings and lower speed limits outside schools – *‘we need more help so we can feel safer’* (male student, Forge IPS).

The participants in Fort Hill College produced a list of suggestions they would like to see to improve safety and to make their journeys to and from school better. It was felt that *‘traffic lights should be installed at the Low Road entrance’* (female student, Fort Hill College) to the school as it can be difficult crossing there. Bicycle lanes and secure facilities would, perhaps, encourage people to cycle to school, so these were also included as suggestions – *‘we need to get people to at least consider these things, so it needs to be made easier for them’* (female student, Fort Hill College). In terms of bus service provision, it was suggested that if the school bus is going to be late, the *‘school should be contacted and informed of this’* (female student, Fort Hill College). Furthermore, it was felt that another school bus is needed on the Belfast

523 service as overcrowding on both the dedicated school bus and the public bus that shadows it is a major problem.

It was felt that, although seatbelts on buses may be desirable amongst many respondents, they would rather not have them if it means a decrease in bus capacities and results in more students *'being refused travel and left standing at the side of the road'* (male student, Fort Hill College), thus creating other potentially serious safety issues. The issue of fares was further highlighted. It was suggested that costs for those who have to pay to use the bus are *'too high'* (male student, Fort Hill College). Complaints were made about having to pay while others have free transport entitlements. A summary of other suggestions includes *'better seats, bigger or more buses (double deckers?) and more space to get on and off'* (female student, Fort Hill College) the vehicles.

Provision of parking at Ballymacrickett Primary School was an issue of concern with many children stating that it makes them feel unsafe when walking from the car or bus into school. This, it was revealed, will be rectified with the impending construction of a new school. Children also suggested that they would like to see seatbelts provided on school buses and, furthermore, stated that they would *'definitely use them'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS). Moreover, some children were concerned about the state and age of some of the vehicles – *'they rattle a lot'* (male student, Ballymacrickett PS). It was suggested that newer safer buses with improved seating would be well received by the children here – *'we sometimes get new buses and they are really nice'* (female student, Ballymacrickett PS).

All students from Cambridge House Grammar School who use the bus suggested that *'more capacity is needed'* (male student, Cambridge House) along with safer more modern vehicles and better supervision, both onboard and at the bus station. It was also felt that congestion problems would be relieved if roadworks were timed to take place at times such as *'school holidays and at weekends'* (female student, Cambridge House). It seemed to many respondents that roadworks are becoming more of a problem during the school term time.

4.12 Special Education Transport Provision

All transport is dedicated and highly organised to meet the needs of these pupils. This results in only minor problems occurring – *'we never have any bother, the bus is good'* (male student, Mitchell House). Such problems relate to the actual journey experience itself as opposed to the provision of transport. Many students said that they *'like and enjoy'* (female student, Mitchell House) their trips to and from school. There were few negative comments, but some were aired in the discussion groups. These included issues of misbehaving on buses and occasions when pupils annoy the driver or the escort by *'playing up'* (male student, Mitchell House) for attention. These are not, it was revealed, common occurrences.

Those who travel by bus stated that they enjoy the company of friends and like being able *'to talk to each other, the escort and the driver'* (male student, Mitchell House). Some pupils stated that they *'do not like sharing a taxi'* (male student, Mitchell House) with other people, while many also said they relax and sleep during their journeys.

ELB school bus (Photo: S. Mackey, 2004)

4.13 Summary and Conclusion

The main concerns highlighted by pupils in all schools included overcrowding of buses, lack of seatbelts, reliability of services, timekeeping, bus stops and shelters and general behaviour issues. Congestion was also raised on a number of occasions as were issues of footpaths, cycle lanes and walking or cycling through certain areas. At one of the workshops concerns were raised about the recent removal of crossing patrols as a result of Education Board financial cutbacks.

The key issues of concern are the same across all age groups, school types and locations. Many students had ideas about how to improve their journeys to and from school. These included more buses, better seating on public transport vehicles, seatbelts on buses, reliable services, supervision, trained and more polite or receptive bus drivers and inspectors who are more appreciative of the needs and concerns of school pupils. 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. A common feeling throughout all pupils in the twelve schools who use bus services was that overcrowding could be solved with the provision of extra vehicles or double deckers. If seatbelts were required to be worn, it was recognised that capacity levels on buses would be reduced and if more vehicles were not provided pupils would be refused travel, which presented more safety concerns for respondents. This, and the issue of funding to provide seatbelts and extra vehicles was considered a necessity in many cases – after all, it was suggested *'what price a single life'* (female student, Lagan College) if these measures are not paid for.

In terms of congestion, many pupils see it as something they can do nothing about and accept it as a *'fact of life'* (male student, Methodist College). 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.

Table 4.2 Positive experiences of school transport by school type/age group

	Bus safety	Bus seating	Bus seatbelts	Friends on buses	Bus drivers	Little Congestion	Low Traffic speeds	Low Traffic noise	Journey time taken	Walking safely	Crossing Patrols	Good Footpaths	Good Cycle lanes
Primary school age				Y		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Secondary school age				Y							Y	Y	Y
Special school	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y				

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 highlight the key features of positive and negative school transport experiences as articulated by pupils in the twelve primary, secondary and special schools in which workshops were held. These are considered to be the key issues the pupils want to articulate. In many cases there are positive as well as negative experiences, but the main issues surrounding safety of bus travel, walking, traffic levels and the provision of cycle lanes and footpaths are overriding concerns for pupils in all areas.

These concerns were voiced by all students who participated and there were suggestions that circumstances could and should be improved. This was despite an acute awareness of funding difficulties surrounding the provision of buses and infrastructure improvements.

Table 4.3 Negative experiences of school transport by school type/age group

	Bus standing	Bus seating	Bus seatbelts	Behaviour on buses	Bus drivers	Heavy Congestion	Traffic speeds	Traffic noise	Journey time taken	Walking safely	Crossing roads	Poor Footpaths	Poor Cycle lanes
Primary school age	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
Secondary school age	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Special school				Y					Y				