

Transport/Road Safety: Policy Paper

Role of Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People (NICCY)

The Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was established in 2003 with the principal aim of safeguarding and promoting the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Article 7(3) of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI) Order 2003 is to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children and young people by relevant authorities. The legislation requires that NICCY advise Government on the effectiveness of policy and practice as they relate to children and young people.

Introduction

Since the inception of the Office, children and young people have highlighted road safety as a major concern to them. Issues such as the cost travel, provision of public transport, safety when crossing or walking along roads, access to walkways and cycle routes have been raised by children and young people across the North.

NICCY's research with parents and professionals has also highlighted concerns about road safety, especially for children travelling to school. Congestion outside school gates, insufficient bicycle lanes and footpaths are issues highlighted by professionals.

Safety in relation to travelling and transport remains a priority for NICCY. Following NICCY's review of safer routes to school 2006, the recommendation relating to the removal of the '3 for 2' rule and standing in school buses has been implemented by the DOE; seat belts are currently being phased in on school buses; and safety signs are being installed on all buses..

Rights Framework

In determining how to carry out her functions, the Commissioner's paramount consideration is the rights of the child and NICCY is required to base all its work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Although not enshrined in domestic legislation, in signing up to the Convention, the UK government has made a clear commitment to children that it will honour all the rights in the Convention. It is NICCY's view that all policies developed by the relevant Departments whose responsibility it is to ensure the safe



transportation on children and young people should be based within a children's rights framework. Specifically we believe that the following articles should underpin and guide any developments in policy and operation of those policies:

Article 3- The best interests of the child must be primary consideration in decisions made by legislative bodies or administrative authorities.

Article 6 – The state must ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child.

Article 12- The views of the child must be given due weight in all matters affecting the child

Article 28- Children have the right to access education

Article 36- Children should be protected from any activities that could harm their development.

Statistics¹ on Road Casualties

In 2006/07, 8 children under the age of 16 lost their life as a result of a road traffic accident. 128 children were also seriously injured.

11% of all casualties on the roads were children and young people under 16 years, totaling to 983 people. 2/3 these casualties were passengers in a car while 25% were pedestrians.

Key Issues

These are informed by discussions with children and young people across Northern Ireland in 2004² ; in 2006³ and as part of our most recent unpublished research into children's in 2007.

- **Rural Issues**

Many of the young people interviewed highlighted poor public transport and the cost of public transport, especially in rural areas, for example,

"A bus does come some nights of the week to go to the cinema [in the nearest big town] but it has set times when leaving. It leaves

¹ PSNI **Statistical Report No. 5** INJURY ROAD TRAFFIC COLLISIONS & CASUALTIES 1ST APRIL 2006 – 31ST MARCH 2007

² Kil Kelly et al (2004) Children's rights in Northern Ireland

³ Hine, J., Mackey, S., Gunay, B., 'Safer Journeys to School' (2006), Belfast: NICCY; The research was commissioned in partnership with the Department for Regional Development and the General Consumer Council



at 10pm and so we can't see a long film or the bus will leave. The bus doesn't even leave us home to our houses. We end up being left at our village and then having to get our parents to get in their cars and lift us" (Girl, aged 15), (QUB report, p.200)

"I live in the country and there is no transport. There is a bus stop but no bus so if I want to go somewhere I have to get my parents to take me so we need a bus" (Boy, aged 13), (QUB Report, p.147)

"They should have transport for every town because it is not fair for some towns to have it and not others. So transport should be for everyone" (Girl, aged 15), (QUB Report, p.147)

Furthermore, one in seven of all those who raised the issue of poor public transport in the research were aged between 15 and 16 years old, "perhaps reflecting the point that once children get older they increasingly desire to spend more leisure time away from their own community" (QUB Report, p.146).

There are also particular concerns that children living in rural areas have to walk long distances to access not just school buses but public transportation on unlit, isolated and/or unsafe country roads with no footpaths or verges and heavy traffic, potentially presenting risks to their safety. A lack of bus shelters in rural areas was also raised by professionals.

- **Safety on School Buses**

The lack of seatbelts on public transport is also a matter for concern, particularly considering the numbers of children and young people who avail of the service for school and other purposes, although we must recognise that this issue is currently being addresses by the Department of the Environment.

There is significant research in relation to bullying and misbehaviour on school buses. The report of the Northern Ireland Assembly's committee on the environment raised this issue; the committee recommended an investigation of *'the factors that contribute towards vandalism, bullying and misbehaviour on buses, with a view to applying appropriate Action Plan measures as rapidly as possible.'*⁴ Concerns regarding bullying and sectarianism on school buses and at bus stations were also raised by children and young people in our research projects.

⁴ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/environment/reports/report1-01r.htm#2>



Safer journeys to school report students raised issues regarding safety on school buses. For example, School bus services have a fixed time table, if pupils miss the school bus and have wait a long period of time for the next they *'feel unsafe and insecure, especially in bad weather condition,'* or Pupils participating in extra curricular activities can face significant problems in getting home.

- **Disability Issues**

Compared with other regions in the UK, Northern Ireland has a higher incidence of disability, including severe disability. Children and young people with disabilities have limited opportunities for play, leisure and social interaction, often further hampered by inadequate public transport, particularly the lack of provision of accessible entry and space for wheelchairs.

In NICCY's review of school transport, concerns have been expressed that the provision of space for wheelchairs on school buses reduces their capacity. Any such provision should comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Under Articles 2 and 23 of the UNCRC, the State has an obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination to enable children and young people with disabilities to achieve the greatest possible self reliance and to lead as full an active life in society as possible.

*'we don't come home at the right time, it's too slow the banana bus....
We're embarrassed on that bus. We hide under the seats'
(girl aged 14)⁵*

- **Costs**

Young people aged 16 and 17 have expressed their concern at being forced to pay adult prices on public transport yet they are not permitted to take part in other activities restricted to adults. As previously stated children and young people in rural areas cited the cost of public transport as a barrier to accessing leisure services and activities.

*'We are still not earning, so we shouldn't have to pay the full fare'
(Female student)⁶*

⁵ Kilkelly et al (2004) Children's rights in Northern Ireland

⁶ Hine, J., Mackey, S., Gunay, B., 'Safer Journeys to School' (2006), Belfast: NICCY; The research was commissioned in partnership with the Department for Regional Development and the General Consumer Council



- **Congestion around school gates and need for school safety zones**

In School Transport research, both parents and children and young people expressed their concerns about severe traffic congestion outside school gates. This is having a knock on effect on the safety of students walking and cycling. In some cases pupils expressed their concern about the absence of school crossing patrols, insufficient pedestrian crossings near the school and a lack of traffic calming measures around the 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) ⁷

- **Road Safety**

In 2006 there were eight child fatalities on Northern Ireland's roads, while this figure was a record low, it is still too high. We all need to continue our efforts to end all road deaths especially child fatalities. Children and Young people themselves have identified road safety as an emerging issue in NICCY's current children's rights research. They see the need to improve road safety so they can access play and leisure facilities and travel to school in a safe environment. Children and young people living in residential areas outlined numerous concerns regarding specific areas of their communities and villages where roads are not safe and improvements are needed, such as traffic calming measures, pedestrian crossings and speed limits. Reducing the number of children killed on our roads is a key indicator in the children and young people's strategy

"The speed of cars on the road is crucial. The road I live on is really bad. It was dug up and resurfaced last year. People thought it would make the road safer. Yeah right! Cars fly up the road at 100mph, no exaggeration! It's a racing track. It's mostly young boys who do it" (Girl, aged 14). ⁸

In a recent survey⁹ of 295 children and young people in schools across Northern Ireland, 53% of pupils said they feared being knocked down. 4 in 10 children said they find it hard to cross the road and 65% said the roads around

⁷ Hine, J., Mackey, S., Gunay, B., 'Safer Journeys to School' (2006), Belfast: NICCY; The research was commissioned in partnership with the Department for Regional Development and the General Consumer Council

⁸ Kilkelly et al (2004) Children's rights in Northern Ireland

⁹ www.brake.org.uk 'Let kids live- road safety week 2007 survey results



their school are dangerous. 45% the children and young people said they had been hit or nearly hit by a vehicle when walking.

Graduated Driving Licensing

Graduated Driving Licensing (GDL) schemes operate in some jurisdictions. These schemes allow new drivers to gradually build up their driving skills and experience over a set time period, as is the practice in other countries.

Some aspects of GDL exist in Northern Ireland through the R (restricted) plates that new drivers must display; they are not as comprehensive as those in operation in other countries, such as New Zealand, California, and New South Wales in Australia

The schemes vary across the world however A Canadian study¹⁰ suggests as a minimum the following best practices:

At learner stage:

- A minimum duration of at least 12 months.
- A mandatory requirement for certified supervised practice of at least 50 hours.
- Eliminate the "time discount" for driver education.

At intermediate stage:

- No unsupervised night driving from 9:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. (exemptions for home to work or school or school events, and other approved purposes).
- No teen passengers when driving unsupervised (for novice drivers under 20 years of age) during the first 6-months to 12-months (immediate family members exempt).

A National Evaluation of Graduated Driver Licensing Programs¹¹ in the US showed substantial reductions in 16-year-old drivers' fatal crash involvement rates (approximately 20%).

¹⁰ Mayhew, Simpson, Singhal; Best Practices for Graduated Driver Licensing in Canada; October 2005.

¹¹ Baker, Chen and Li National evaluation of Graduated Driver Licensing Programs



An analysis from New Zealand¹² showed the positive impact on road accidents following the introduction of the GDL. Car crash injuries for young people aged 15-19 years fell by 23%.

Recommendations

- The Northern Ireland Executive must make an explicit commitment in relation to improving safety for children and young people traveling on our roads. The current target contained in the children and young people strategy of a 50% reduction in the number of children and young people killed in road accidents by 2012, needs to be supported by clear action by all the relevant government departments.
- The Minister for the Environment should develop a comprehensive road safety strategy which addresses the needs of all, but especially children and young people. This strategy should support sustainable transport, include safe walking and cycling routes, address safer routes school plans and continue to reduce the number of child road deaths.
- The Department for Education should review the current statutory walking distances for home to school transport, to identify the impact that changes could have on school transport provision.
- The Department of Education should ensure that road safety continues to be included in the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools, with an assessment of the impact of this awareness programme in schools.
- The Department of Education in conjunction with Translink need to review the cost of operation for public and school transport, including the three mile rule, and prices for young people aged 16 years to 18 years old.
- The Department for the Environment should implement an enhanced programme of Graduated Driver Licensing for newly qualified drivers based on examples of best practice from elsewhere, including restrictions on night time driving, restrictions on passenger numbers and extra supervision for newly qualified drivers.
- The Minister for Regional Development should further develop and improve walking and cycle routes to make this a more attractive and

¹² Graduated Driving Licensing- A review of some of the current system (TRL report 529, 2001)



safer alternative, in order to reduce car based journeys. The department should ensure all schools to take part in the Safer Routes to School initiative.

- Road Service should expand plans contained in the Action Plan of the Children and Young Peoples Strategy to introduce speed management measures outside twenty rural schools to include all schools, prohibiting parking around school gates and introduce traffic calming measures in the area, which can lead to few child casualties, less congestion and safer roads for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The Department of Education in association with children, young people, parents/carers and schools should introduce a dedicated strategy to tackle bullying and inappropriate behaviour and protect children on school buses.
- District councils should work in partnership with Planning Service and Roads Service to make residential areas safer for children to ensure their right to play and right to health- traffic management schemes, reduce speed limits, pedestrian and cycle crossings.
- The Planning Service need to involve children and young people in planning decisions for their area and the impact on road safety by carrying out child impact assessments on any proposed developments/planning decisions.

Message from the commissioner

The safety of our children and young people is paramount, therefore it essential that all forms of transport are accessible and safe for them. We need to ensure that the opinions of children and young people are taken into consideration when developing public transport routes and services.

NICCY looks forward to working in partnership with children and young people, Department of Education, Department for Regional Development and the Department of the Environment as well as Translink to make these policy recommendations a reality.

