

Title: DfE walks away from active travel to school,

Sub title: Mode of Travel removed from School Census in DfE ICES bulletin 50.

Date: 25th August 2011

In a move described as “appalling” and “ridiculous” by Local Authorities (LAs) up and down the country, the Department for Education (DfE) have, after what a DfE officer referred to as purposefully “limited” consultation, announced that it will no longer ask schools to collect pupil Mode of Travel (MOT) data as part of the School Census.

This unilateral action has shocked the end users of this data - officers working at national, local and individual school level - who make use of this invaluable dataset to ensure evidence based planning and implementation in policy areas as wide ranging as local transport systems and safer routes to schools, increasing physical activity and tackling childhood obesity, the location of new school places and housing developments and not least, the delivery of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The decision was taken as part of a so called “root and branch” review of data collection requirements on schools through which, the Government stated it was “committed to engaging with front-line professionals to ensure our proposals have a real and meaningful impact on reducing bureaucracy for schools.” By limiting its consultation on this issue and deliberately excluding the end users of this data, including a large number of schools up and down the country, the DfE have failed to meet their commitment.

Emma Sheridan, Chair of Modeshift commented:

“Modeshift has received extensive feedback from Local Authorities across the country describing the significant problems that this decision will create and despite the timing of the announcement during the school holidays, we are receiving feedback from a growing number of schools who are stating that the collection of MOT data is, in contrast to the DfE claims, “not a burden” but rather something that they value and believe should be retained.

“With increasing pressures on local resources, MOT data from the School Census provides the best value foundation for an evidence-based, targeted, approach to achieving greater levels of active and sustainable travel to school. In addition, it is being used as a crucial tool in informing the planning of local services including new school places, housing, local transport initiatives and infrastructure and is the one School Census field that is actively used in the classroom as a teaching resource. If not reversed, this decision will only serve to increase bureaucracy and costs, both financial and human, for schools and Local Authorities at a time when they are already being stretched.

“The DfE, with this ill thought out decision, threatens to destroy years of hard work at LA and school level and ultimately it will be school communities that suffer as a result.

“Of equal concern, is the implied message this decision sends. Namely that the Department are no longer committed to promoting active, sustainable, travel to school in spite of the clear benefits for children’s health and educational development not to mention the associated benefits of reductions in traffic congestion and carbon emissions.”

Modeshift is urging all Local Authorities and other end users of MOT data, such as colleagues working in the health sector with a responsibility for active travel to school and childhood obesity to contact Nick Gibb, the DfE Minister responsible for School Census, directly to express their concerns about this decision and to request that it be reversed as a matter of urgency. We would welcome a dialogue with the minister on this issue as we are confident that the case exists for the retention of this dataset and that the extensive uses already being made of the data more than outweigh the small effort needed to collect it.

END

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