

Councillors Briefing Note No. 369

Department: Highways and Transport with support of Public Health
Further Enquiries to: Ruth Durrant, Rachel Kent (Public Health)
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Direct Line: 01225 713483



HomeRun

Introduction

This briefing note is to provide you with information about a trial we have been undertaking with a smartphone app called HomeRun, our plans for the future, and how the project links with our efforts to encourage more children to travel actively to school, and to reduce car congestion associated with the school run.

What is HomeRun?

There is a concern in many communities about the impacts of the school run which include air-pollution, a reduction in active and/or independent travel, and inconsiderate parking leading to tensions between schools and local residents. HomeRun is a smartphone app which helps parents to car share, and logs real-time information on modes of travel, distance and route travelled. Parents can connect with other parents nearby and car-pool, as well as being able to follow their child's independent journey to school. They can highlight areas of concern, such as busy roads which are difficult to cross, and receive a notification once the child has cleared this area.

What are the benefits?

There will be different benefits for children, parents, schools, and the council. By reducing the number of cars on the school commute, and encouraging active modes of travel (even if for part of the journey, such as the walk to and from the bus-stop or car park), benefits should be seen in the following areas:



The data provided can inform likely interventions, for example by revealing popular areas for parking, the average number of minutes of active travel per child, and areas for improvement such as parents who are choosing to drive from an area where there is a school bus or many others are walking.

Some examples of the findings:

- One primary school located in a market town showed that 40% of cars used in the school commute are for journeys under one mile;
- A school in a village close to a market town showed an average of 3.3 minutes exercise per pupil per commute; there is a lack of pavements within the village, and because of this children on a particular residential estate are entitled to free bus travel. However, many of these parents still choose to drive their children to school, for a variety of reasons (e.g. younger siblings);
- Parents of children attending three schools in a village location south-east of Salisbury have been encouraged to drop their children off at a park-and-ride location and use a shared use off road path to the school. However, our data shows that pupils are still being dropped off outside the school, and that those using the path are cyclists, or those travelling part of the way by bus.

Data generated by the app can be used by the school to inform their travel plan, reducing the need for more time-consuming traditional methods of data collection such as survey forms.

By having real data of actual commutes and routes used by pupils will enable the school and the local authority to look at tailored interventions to try and address activity levels, air quality and congestion.

Next steps

A procurement exemption has been approved to proceed with a three-year open licence under which the app would be free to all state-funded Wiltshire schools, and through which the council would have access to two county-wide reports and ten detailed school reports per year. Both the council and the schools taking up the app would have a data console showing metrics such as minutes of active travel, carbon emissions, and average journey lengths and times.

Other steps we need to undertake are:

- To work with one or more schools, using the data generated so far, to tailor interventions to their situation;
- To encourage further take-up with schools and to “profile” types of schools (e.g. urban secondary with good transport links, rural village school without pavements and with wide catchment) so that proven interventions can be applied to schools with a comparable profile.
- To collaborate with other council departments such as passenger transport, highways and public protection to look at how we can make better use of the app.

Wiltshire councillors are invited to contact the school travel plan advisor should they have particular schools in mind to take part.