

REGULATORY COMMITTEE
9th OCTOBER 2002

**WILTON/SALISBURY: FAIRVIEW ROAD, WILTON,
TO WESTWOOD ST. THOMAS SCHOOL, SALISBURY -
REQUEST FOR FREE SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

Purpose of Report

1. To summarise issues and events and to reach a conclusion regarding the safety of the walking route in this area.

Background

2. This issue has been considered over a protracted period of time, having taken account of issues raised by Wilton Town Council and parents of pupils living in Fairview Road, Wilton.
3. The full background to this report is set out in the report considered by Members of the Regulatory Committee on 15th May 2002, which is attached at **Annex 1**.
4. To summarise comparatively briefly the background to this issue:-
 - (i) The shortest available walking route is 2.9 miles (three miles is the qualifying distance whereby the County Council has a duty to provide free transport).
 - (ii) If the walking route is considered by the County Council to be unsafe, then free transport can be provided.
 - (iii) The County Council uses prescriptive guidelines to assess the safety of walking routes. These are attached at **Annex 2**.
 - (iv) Two officers walked the route and assessed it as safe for a child of compulsory upper school age to walk (age 13-16 years).
 - (v) This opinion was endorsed by the Road Safety Officer.
 - (vi) An alternative and shorter potential walking route, using Penning Road, was identified. Whilst some pupils from Quidhampton in particular have used this track unofficially for years, some upgrading would be required to bring it up to the standard of an available walking route.
 - (vii) Members decided to walk the Penning Road track to assess its potential suitability as an available route, and this walk was carried out on 22nd July 2002.

- (viii) Subsequently, before reaching a conclusion regarding Penning Road, Members decided to walk the full existing safe walking route via Roman Road and Pembroke Road. This walk was carried out on 16th September 2002. A map showing both routes is attached at **Appendix 1** to **Annex 1**.

This meeting will therefore consider the findings of the site visits and reach a conclusion thereon.

Route Safety Assessments

5. The extract from the County Council's Education Transport Policy which relates to the assessment of walking routes is attached at **Annex 2**. These guidelines incorporate definitions devised by the County Road Safety Officers' Association.
6. Statutory provisions determine that the County Council is responsible for providing free transport if the shortest available walking route is three miles or more. The route in question is 2.9 miles.
7. It is important to bear in mind that the three mile qualifying distance for free school transport is merely the breakpoint which determines whether:-
 - if over distance, the County Council has a duty to provide free transport; or
 - if under distance, the parent is responsible for making and paying for any arrangements to get the child safely to school (whether this be by lift-share arrangements, cycling, travelling by bus or walking).
8. In assessing a walking route a judgment has to be made whether the route is 'available'. If an adequate walkway exists of firm surface and at least one metre wide, then the route is 'available'.
9. Other factors that subsequently need to be considered are:-
 - the potential for molestation;
 - additional issues, eg crossing points, the age of the child, and accident data (relevant to term-time dates and times when children would be travelling to or from school).
10. To reach a conclusion on whether free transport should be provided, the following questions need to be answered:-
 - (i) Could the child walk to school unaccompanied, with reasonable safety?

If the answer is yes, then there would normally be no case for the provision of free transport.

If the answer is no, then (ii) below should be considered.
 - (ii) Could the child walk to school, accompanied by an adult, with reasonable safety?

If the answer is yes, then there would normally be no case for the provision of free transport.

If the answer is no, provision of free transport should be considered but the matter should be referred to the Area Highway Engineer to investigate whether any cost-effective road improvements could be made as an alternative.

Note In connection with (ii) above, it should be noted that the proposed improvements to Penning Road were put forward in response to parental concerns that the existing safe route (walked by Members on 16th September) is too long to walk. Members have not yet determined whether they endorse the Road Safety Officer's view that this existing longer route is safe for a child (accompanied as necessary) to walk.

Related Factors

11. At present the age range of Westwood St. Thomas School is 13-18 years. From September 2005 this age range will broaden to 11-18 years. However, with the admission of 11 year olds to the school in 2005, the 'parental duty to accompany' (detailed in paragraph 12 below) must be emphasised even more strongly. Route safety is only a consideration whilst a pupil is of compulsory school age. (Beyond this a student is old enough to be working for a living and to be responsible therefore for his/her own safety).
12. The parental duty to accompany a child "*... as necessary, on their way to school, or to find another responsible adult to do so ...*" must be remembered here. If the parent is unable to accompany, or to find another adult to do so, then the County Council can point to the existence of a public bus service.
13. A bus service operates from a bus stop located on the A36 just beyond the first crossing point for children from Fairview Road, Wilton. The current fares, taking pupils directly to the school campus, are 77p single or £1.20 daily return.
14. Accident data, provided by the Police initially, has been interrogated to find details of any accidents occurring along the walking route to school at times when pupils would be going to or from school. Over the three years to June 2002 (the latest date for which information has been supplied) one accident occurred. This involved a pedestrian in Pembroke Road walking into the path of a car, incurring slight injuries, in June 2002.

Summary

15. It is of paramount importance to be clear about the issue to be decided upon here, which is whether a safe walking route (accompanied as necessary) to the school exists. The issue is clearly not one of whether it is more desirable to grant free bus passes as an alternative to walking to school.

Financial Implications

16. The cost of providing bus passes for each child from Fairview Road to Westwood St. Thomas School is presently £228 per annum for five children for three years at the school. However, it is the question of whether the walking route is safe which is to be decided here, rather than cost being the determining factor.

Conclusion: Options Considered

17. Assessing the route according to the guidelines in the County Council's Education Transport Policy (in the opinion of the Education Transport Officers and the Road Safety Officer) a safe walking route 2.9 miles long exists via the A36, Roman Road and Pembroke Road. This absolves the County Council of any duty to provide free transport under its statutory obligations. It means that parents are responsible for making their own arrangements (eg to lift-share, cycle, travel by bus or walk).
18. There is also the option of upgrading the Penning Road route to the standard of an available walking route. This cuts approximately one mile off the distance to school and would provide an improved access route for all the community. Work would include street lighting and tarmac laying, with an enhanced crossing facility on the A36 where children would need to cross.

Recommendation

19. Members are asked to consider all the relevant issues and to decide whether:-
 - (i) To endorse the Officers' opinion that the walking route via the A36, Roman Road and Pembroke Road is safe for a pupil of upper school age to walk, accompanied as necessary; and/or
 - (ii) To commission improvements to the Penning Road track to upgrade it for use as a shorter available walking route to school.

Reason for Recommendation

20. The decision given by Members represents the final avenue in the appeal process for considering the safety of walking routes to school.

RICHARD J. LANDER

Director of Environmental Services

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

Environmental impact of the Recommendation contained in this Report:

There will be a positive impact on the environment by encouraging responsible alternative ways of getting to school safely (ie lift-share, cycle, bus or walking)

