



Children's Services Directorate

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Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for Schools
House of Commons
London
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Date: 25th August 2011

Your ref:

My ref:

Dear Nick Gibb

Removal of "Mode of Travel" item from the School Census

We are writing in respect of the decision by the DfE to no longer collect information about mode of pupil travel in the annual School Census as announced in ICES bulletin 50, end July 2011. Given that communications from DfE on this subject indicate that the decision was made at Ministerial level we feel compelled to write to you directly with an appeal to reconsider this decision.

As Directors of Environment and Children's Services for Dorset County Council we wish to register our dismay at the decision to remove the requirement to collect Mode of Travel from School Census. The removal of the requirement to collect Mode of Travel from School Census means that we, and every other Local Authority in England, will no longer be able to measure the performance of our policies in trying to encourage active and sustainable travel to school.

Of equal concern, is the implied message this decision sends that the DfE are no longer committed to promoting sustainable travel to school in spite of the clear benefits for children's health, development and the associated reductions in traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

We are troubled by the way this decision has been made, where what was reported to be a 'root and branch' review did not properly consult, consider, or allow any opportunity for the end users of the data to provide their views.

Upon enquiry, the reasons given for the decision by the DfE Data Development Team, chiefly relate to reducing bureaucratic burden. It must be noted that:

- Should Local Authorities wish to continue with gathering data on school travel, this decision will actually lead to increased burden at the local authority level
- As to the schools themselves there is considerable evidence to counter DfE's claim that schools saw the collection of this data field as a particular burden. In many schools the converse is true – ironically Mode of Travel is the one School Census field that is actively used in the classroom as a teaching resource^{*1}.

The "Mode of Travel" item in the Census currently provides an unprecedented spatial dataset that we have been using for five years, allowing us to target limited resources for maximum gain. This is efficient, evidence based decision making ensuring best use of taxpayers money. We suspect the decision to remove was made without the full knowledge of the value of what will be lost.

We hope that you will be able to reinstate Mode of Travel within School Census in the realisation of:

1. The value of this dataset across Local Authorities and Government Departments
2. Schools do not see the collection of the data as a particular burden and are in fact actively using it in the classroom¹.

Finally, we would like to point out that returning this data to schools in an accessible format is helping us to achieve a year on year reduction in “car use within walking distance” (i.e. the number of pupils living within walking distance who actually walk to school is increasing)². We only know this is happening because of the Mode of Travel School Census data and loss of this data will inevitably halt or even reverse this trend.

Yours sincerely

Miles Butler
Director Environment

John Nash
Director Children’s Services

cc: Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport
cc: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education

¹ Support for and use of Mode of Travel (MoT) by schools:

- National survey of schools April 2011. Over 1000 schools responded: 84% updated MoT on an annual basis 93.7% would like to see the MoT element as classroom resource material 86.9% want to be able to compare their MoT data with others.
- School Travel Health Check (based on MoT data): 2010 – classroom friendly data back to 4,800 schools in 29 authorities (22% of schools in England / 1.6 million pupils).
- Dorset sees excellent returns of MoT data– it is accurate, up to date and willingly supplied by schools. We are unaware of there ever being any complaint from schools about collecting MoT data within School Census.

² Promoting Active Travel to School: Progress and Potential. Mode Shift, DH & NHS SW, Nov 2010

