

HPCI response to HCC post-16 Transport Proposals (March 2026)

From discussions with our parent representatives, as well as wider community feedback, it is clear that there is significant anxiety about the potential impact of a Personal Transport Budget (PTB)-led approach on young people with SEND and their parent carers. While we recognise that for many families a PTB may be an appropriate and flexible option, a number of concerns have been raised about both the proposals themselves and the consultation process.

Risk of a “one size fits all” policy

Many families are worried that moving to PTBs as the default could lead to decisions that feel blanket in nature, rather than genuinely based on individual assessment. There is particular concern that this approach may disadvantage students with complex or high needs—such as those with severe learning disabilities, autism, significant medical vulnerabilities, or high levels of anxiety—who are unable to use public transport or be transported by untrained drivers. For these young people, specialist transport support is often essential.

HPCI members have also highlighted that the council already holds extensive information about young people’s needs through EHCPs. This information should make it possible to identify those who are highly likely to require ongoing transport support. Expecting parents to gather and submit additional evidence in order to “opt out” of a PTB risks placing an unnecessary burden on families and appears inconsistent with a genuinely needs-led approach. A policy that operates in practice as a blanket approach could also risk discrimination against disabled young people and their carers if individual circumstances are not properly considered.

Families of young people attending SLD or PNI schools—who typically remain in their placement until age 19—are especially concerned. It is highly unlikely that these young people will ever be able to travel independently, and asking parents to go through a two-stage assessment process despite clear existing evidence of need feels both unnecessary and insensitive.

PTBs may not cover the real cost of transport

Families have raised concerns that PTBs may not reflect the real-world cost of providing transport, particularly in rural areas where journeys are long and public transport options are limited or unavailable. Costs associated with taxis, fuel, time away from work, vehicle wear and tear, and driver availability can create financial risk that effectively shifts responsibility from the local authority to parents and carers. Families have also questioned whether the proposed uplift for young people with higher support needs would be sufficient to meet the additional costs involved.

If families feel compelled to share journeys with others in order to make transport affordable, this raises further practical and safety considerations. For example, young people with medical needs may need to attend hospital appointments during the school or college day. In such circumstances, shared transport arrangements could easily break down, potentially leading to missed education for other young people.

Parents with experience of PTBs have also highlighted several practical challenges with the current system, including payment only being made for one-way journeys unless authorised absence is evidenced, difficulties for families using electric vehicles, and the administrative burden of submitting spreadsheets to correct underpayments. This has led some families to

perceive the system as bureaucratic and based on an assumption that funds may be misused, rather than as a supportive mechanism.

Impact on non-driving families and vulnerable households

Families without access to a car, without a driving licence, or where parents themselves have disabilities may be disproportionately affected by the proposed changes. Single parents and low-income households may also struggle to manage the additional practical and financial burden. While transport contributions may be waived for families meeting Free School Meal or Working Tax Credit thresholds, many families fall outside these criteria but would still find the costs difficult to manage.

Impact on parental employment and family stability

Many parents rely on council-arranged transport in order to maintain employment. If they are expected to undertake multiple daily journeys, some may be forced to reduce their working hours or leave employment altogether. This would have significant implications not only for families but also for the wider community.

For families with more than one child or young person with SEND, the practicalities of providing transport themselves may simply not be manageable.

Cumulative stress on already stretched families

Parents have expressed concern that the proposals shift responsibility and risk onto families who are already under considerable pressure. There are worries that this could lead to increased appeals, reduced attendance, or young people being forced to change or leave educational placements if transport becomes unworkable.

Feedback on the current travel training offer

HPCI has also received feedback that the current travel training programme can feel highly prescriptive, particularly for autistic young people or those with demand-avoidant profiles. If a young person is unable to engage with the programme as it is currently delivered, families worry that they may risk losing access to transport support.

Families have also noted that travel training should be scheduled carefully to avoid clashes with GCSEs, mock examinations, and other key assessment periods.

Awareness and accessibility of the consultation

The information published in SEND News suggested that the changes would mainly affect families with young people aged 16–18. However, those families will not in fact be directly affected by the proposed changes. The families who will be most impacted—those with younger children who will move into post-16 provision in future—may therefore not realise the relevance of the consultation.

In addition, the consultation survey appears to assume that respondents are already using the service, which makes it difficult for other families to provide meaningful feedback. The consultation was also not easily located through the Local Offer search function, which may further limit awareness and participation.

More broadly, the consultation reads more like a survey than a policy consultation. Several questions appear quite leading, particularly for respondents such as colleges or professionals, which may affect the range of responses received.

Conclusion

HPCI and the families we represent want to see a transport system that genuinely reflects individual needs, protects access to education, and avoids unintentionally disadvantaging young people with SEND or their parent carers. We would welcome reassurance that the final policy will be flexible, lawful, and applied in a genuinely person-centred way, supported by practical measures that ensure all young people have a viable route to education.