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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Home-to-School Transport Costs Surge to £2.3 Billion in 2024 as new Report Calls for Urgent Reform

Today IMPOWER and the County Councils Network have released a new report which spotlights the financial pressures local authorities' home to school transport budgets and sets out key strategies for local areas to adopt to help meet the challenge.

The CCN Dialogues report *The Travel to School Challenge* underlines the critical need for a holistic, system-wide approach in order to address escalating home to school transport costs. The growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for SEND students, coupled with an increase in more costly travel such as individual taxis and passenger assistants, has intensified the challenge.

Since 2014, the number of EHCPs has surged by 140%, with average costs per SEND pupil rising 32% from £6,280 to £8,299. This rise in demand has led to a dramatic increase in home to school transport costs over the past decade, and CCN figures project costs to reach £3.6bn per year by 2030 for councils across England. Findings indicate that CCN members bear 57% of total home-to-school transport costs across the country, despite serving only 42% of England's school-age population.

The CCN is calling on the government to prioritise transport reform to relieve local councils of unsustainable financial pressures, with minister promising reforms to the wider SEND system next year.

To address these challenges ahead of any substantive reform, the report outlines several key strategies for councils to adopt locally:

- **Influencing demand:** The report highlights the merits of early planning and decision-making support, using tools like Cornwall County Council's "trajectory model," which identified £1.4 million in potential savings through improved parental communication and increased uptake of personal transport budgets.
- **Data-driven approaches:** New, data-driven approaches, can help councils tailor transport options to each child's needs while planning for transitions to more independent travel.
- **Maximising independence:** By offering independent travel training and promoting personal transport budgets, councils like Sheffield City Council are actively reducing reliance on council transport, realising immediate savings of £86,000 this academic year.

This report highlights the combined importance of efficient service planning at the local level, alongside the need for increased government investment to support councils in fulfilling their educational transport obligations. Sharing best practices is therefore essential to improving service delivery across all councils.

In April 2024, the CCN, in partnership with IMPOWER, hosted a webinar with over 50 members and officers from the CCN's membership to discuss ways to enhance home-to-school transport services.

The session, which included officers from both People and Place directorates, featured two councils sharing their own reform experiences and invited open discussion on local challenges and support needs. This report compiles the insights and practical strategies shared, underscoring the value of collaboration and innovative approaches in meeting rising demands.

Sean Hanson, Chief Executive of IMPOWER Consulting, said:

“Home-to-school transport is a critical service for families, yet the financial burden on councils is unsustainable and growing faster than many other local services. We can’t afford to simply patch the system; we need a fundamental shift in how we approach SEND transport, prioritising innovative, data-driven solutions that empower councils to manage demand and improve efficiency.”

Simon Edwards, CCN Chief Executive of the CCN, added:

“This report shines a light on the scale of the challenge councils are facing. With costs and demands at record highs, local authorities face intense pressures that are worsening each year.

“Whilst the national commitment to reforming the SEND system is welcome, this report highlights the important role for local authorities to play in sharing best practices. By proactively addressing these issues now, councils can help to the foundations of a sustainable home to school transport provision ahead of wider reforms that not only save costs but also improve quality and independence for young people.”

Discover the full report “The Travel to School Challenge,” [HERE](#).

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Notes to editor:

About IMPOWER

IMPOWER is different. IMPOWER has a deep understanding of the complexity of public services and how to deliver change, recognising that a different kind of challenge needs a different type of approach. IMPOWER doesn’t just assume innovation can be shoehorned into the public sector. Instead, borne from this understanding, and over two decades serving the public sector, it developed EDGEWORK®. This unique transformational approach enables organisations to make the required mindset shift – towards a focus on outcomes and working across organisational and system boundaries – and provides the tools that make this easier.

IMPOWER believes passionately that change can only be effective and sustained if impact is delivered through co-production. There is a better way. Better outcomes cost less.

IMPOWER operates in the following areas: Whole Council Transformation, Adult Social Care, High Needs and SEND, Children’s Social Care, Health and Social Care Interface.

Visit <https://www.impower.co.uk/>

About CCN

The County Councils Network (CCN) is the representative body for England's County and unitary councils, providing a collective voice for the country's largest local authorities. CCN advocates for policies that support the unique needs of England's County areas, which encompass over 26 million residents and account for 39% of the nation's gross value added (GVA). With a mission to strengthen local government and improve services, CCN champions sustainable, community-driven approaches to pressing issues like health, social care, education, and infrastructure.

The 37 member councils work collaboratively within CCN to develop evidence-based policies, share best practices, and address the distinct challenges faced by rural and semi-rural communities, from transport and housing to climate resilience and economic growth. Through partnerships with government bodies, third-sector organisations, and the private sector, CCN plays a vital role in shaping policy and driving forward initiatives that improve the quality of life and services for local communities.

For more information, visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk.