# North Yorkshire council faces backlash over risky school transport cuts



In North Yorkshire, controversy is brewing over the council's recent decision to restrict free home-to-school transport exclusively to a child’s nearest school. Critics, including campaign group School Transport Action Group (STAG), argue this policy change prioritises the council's image over genuine financial prudence and poses significant risks to the safety and well-being of students, particularly in rural areas where transport routes can be treacherous.

The council's leadership maintains that reverting to the previous catchment-based system would lead to increased expenditure, putting financial strain on their already challenged budgets. Council leader Carl Les indicated that continuing with the new policy aligns North Yorkshire with broader trends seen in neighbouring authorities, which have likewise eliminated discretionary transport services. He emphasised that this move does not compel families to send their children to the nearest school but relieves taxpayers from covering costs associated with parental choice.

Despite these assertions, the STAG claims that many councillors privately question the projected savings of up to £4.2 million annually, suggesting that the anticipated benefits of the new system may be vastly overstated. They contend that the revised regulations might instead result in higher costs if all eligible students opt for free transport, as the council would be required to cover additional routes that are now deemed suitable under the new guidelines.

The opposition mobilised rapidly, with a motion to revert to the catchment system being put forward for a vote at an extraordinary council meeting. This was prompted by persistent parental concerns, particularly from families living in rural areas like Swaledale, where access to nearby schools can be precarious, especially during winter months. Over a thousand signatures have been gathered on petitions urging the council to reconsider, highlighting fears of increased danger and logistical complications resulting from the policy changes.

Adding to the dispute, there have been allegations of a ‘cover-up’ during discussions around the changes, with campaigners expressing dissatisfaction over the lack of opportunity for public contributions at council meetings. A recent meeting addressing these issues was paused amid uproar from parents and councillors who demanded transparency regarding the implications of the new transport policy.

Safety remains a significant concern among families, with critics of the new policy arguing that it may force children to use routes that have not been properly assessed for risk. The council, however, insists that transport routes for contracted services undergo rigorous risk assessments. Nevertheless, many parents fear that this may not adequately address their specific safety concerns, which they feel are particularly pronounced in rural contexts where road conditions can be harsh.

The message from the council's leadership remains contentious, with Carl Les urging dissenters to articulate their plans for the £4 million in savings should the motion to revert be passed. This interrogation of fiscal responsibility speaks volumes about the underlying tensions between budgetary constraints and the welfare of local communities.

As this debate unfolds, campaigners are rallying support for a protest at County Hall before the council meeting—an effort to amplify their voices in an increasingly fractious discourse surrounding educational transport provision in North Yorkshire. The outcome of the vote is eagerly anticipated by both supporters and opponents, with the potential to significantly impact the future of school transport in the region and the lives of countless families.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 1, 4, 5
3. Paragraphs 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
5. Paragraphs 4, 5
6. Paragraphs 1, 4
7. Paragraphs 1, 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.richmondshiretoday.co.uk/council-trying-to-save-face-rather-than-save-money-over-home-to-school-transport-changes/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2kzwdd0n8o> - Parents in rural North Yorkshire are campaigning against the council's decision to limit free school transport to the nearest school. Over a thousand people have signed a petition urging the council to reconsider, citing concerns over safety and the impact on families in Swaledale, where roads to the closest schools are considered dangerous in winter months. The council maintains that the routes used by school bus contractors are risk-assessed.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckgyz9vx938o> - A meeting to discuss changes to home-to-school transport in North Yorkshire was halted after parents and councillors alleged a 'cover-up'. The council proposed limiting free transport to a child's nearest school, aiming to save up to £3 million annually. Campaigners, who had collected 2,000 petition signatures, expressed concerns about the policy's impact on communities and schools. The meeting was deferred to allow for further information.
4. <https://www.thescarboroughnews.co.uk/news/politics/campaigners-to-protest-at-key-north-yorkshire-council-home-to-school-transport-meeting-5075625> - Campaigners plan to protest outside a crucial North Yorkshire Council meeting discussing home-to-school transport changes. The council intends to restrict free transport to the nearest school, a move opposed by the School Transport Action Group (STAG). The group criticizes the council for not allowing public statements at the meeting and urges the reinstatement of free transport to local catchment schools.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2gvxnnedpo> - Parents in rural North Yorkshire have raised safety concerns over proposed changes to school bus provision. The council plans to limit free transport to the nearest school, potentially requiring children to travel on unsuitable roads, especially in winter. Families argue that the policy could lead to missed school days and increased costs, while the council asserts that contracted transport routes are risk-assessed.
6. <https://www.harrogateadvertiser.co.uk/education/north-yorkshire-councils-home-to-school-transport-policy-change-branded-draconian-as-families-face-confusion-5104736> - North Yorkshire's new home-to-school transport policy, which limits free transport to the nearest school, has been described as 'draconian' by parents and councillors. Families report confusion and distress over the changes, with some children potentially being separated from siblings due to differing school choices. Councillors have criticized the council for not adequately informing the public about the policy shift.
7. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/council-defends-controversial-cuts-to-school-transport-across-rural-north-yorkshire-4869521> - North Yorkshire Council defends its decision to cut approximately £4 million from school transport services. The council's new policy restricts free transport to the nearest school, a move that has faced criticism from parents, especially in rural areas. The council argues that the changes are necessary to reduce the £51 million annual expenditure on school transport.