

Leader of the Council**By email only**

Councillor J Lester

The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport

Great Minster House

33 Horseferry Road London SW1P 4DR

Our Ref: JL/NT

Please ask for: Councillor J Lester

Direct line /
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5 February 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Support for Pilot Schemes to Improve Young People's Access to Public Transport

I am writing on behalf of Herefordshire Council in accordance with a Notice of Motion recently considered by the Council, relating to improved transport assistance for young people in Herefordshire aged 16–19. The Council has undertaken a detailed analysis of the feasibility and financial implications of extending travel assistance for this age group, and we seek your support in exploring national solutions and enabling local pilot schemes.

Background and Notice of Motion

The Notice of Motion includes the following requests:

That the Executive prepare proposals for inclusion in the 2026/27 budget for:

- a. A pilot extension of the transport assistance scheme for 16–19-year-olds in education, enabling travel during evenings, weekends, and school holidays, with full evaluation of the pilot's impact.
- b. Identification of potential funding sources, including the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) revenue grant, Local Transport Grant revenue allocations, anticipated savings in other service areas (such as Economy and Public Health), and potential partnership or sponsorship contributions from bus operators.

That the Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State for Transport to urge Government support for such pilot schemes and to request action on the Transport Committee's recommendation to explore national free or discounted travel for young people, supported by long-term, devolved funding for bus services.

This letter fulfils that instruction.

Summary of Local Analysis and Financial Impact

The Council's Public Transport Team has completed an assessment of the potential costs associated with expanding travel assistance to allow full, seven-day access including evenings, weekends, and holiday periods. Key findings from operator feedback and internal modelling include:

- Current student pass income totals £1.236 million from approximately 1,200 students (paying £1,030 each)
- An uplift proportional to increased days of use (from 190 to 361 days) indicates a minimum subsidy requirement of £1.1 million, though this does not account for evening use.
- Combined operator (there are nine different bus operators in Herefordshire) estimates indicate a subsidy requirement of £3.7 million to support full extended access across all bus operators.
- If transport were made free for 16–19-year-olds, total costs would rise to approximately £6.42 million, including lost income and increased network access

This scale of cost is beyond what the Council can sustainably fund without significant and long-term external support outside of current BSIP funding levels.

Operators have also expressed issues requiring consideration—including revenue loss, capacity pressures, the need for smartcard/app-based ticketing, and potential positive impacts on public health, reduced car dependency, and long-term public transport.

Request for Government Support

Given the financial pressures on local authorities and the importance of ensuring equitable access to education, employment, and social mobility for young people, Herefordshire Council urges the Department for Transport to:

- Support and co-fund local pilot schemes testing extended or free travel for 16- to 19-year-olds.
- Act on the Committee's recommendation to explore a national scheme offering free or significantly discounted travel for young people.
- Develop long-term, devolved funding mechanisms for local bus services that enable rural and sparsely populated areas—such as Herefordshire—to deliver consistent, affordable access to transport.
- Work with councils and bus operators to evaluate the long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits of accessible youth travel.

Such support would not only allow Herefordshire to consider implementing the pilot proposed in the Notice of Motion but would also contribute to national objectives relating to education, productivity, social equity, decarbonisation, and modal shift.

Herefordshire Council welcomes the opportunity to work with the Department for Transport on exploring the feasibility and wider community benefits of enhanced transport access for young people. We would be pleased to discuss our findings and potential pilot models further and would appreciate guidance on any emerging national strategy or available funding streams that could support this important work.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR JONATHAN LESTER
LEADER OF HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL