

Home to School Transport in North Yorkshire

What's changed – and what can we do about it?

An information guide for parents and carers – March 2026

Foreword

Why this guide exists

North Yorkshire Council's revised Home to School Transport policy has now been in place 18 months. The first cohort of pupils impacted were those starting a new school in September 2025. For many of those families, the changes in school transport eligibility came as a shock — often only becoming clear when paid transport was refused in May 2025. Rural families living in villages and hamlets across our county have been particularly badly affected.

This guide is intended to:

- explain in plain English exactly what has changed
- highlight common problems parents & carers are encountering
- share concerns raised by schools and rural communities
- explain what rights residents have
- set out practical steps residents can take if their school transport entitlement has been removed, or is at risk of being removed
- encourage individuals and communities to speak out and take action

It draws on the experiences of hundreds of families across North Yorkshire and on the work of the School Transport Action Group (S.T.A.G.), which since 2024 has been challenging the Council's approach, gathering evidence, and supporting parents in fighting decisions through appeals, complaints and referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman.

1. What's changed?

Until July 2024, eligibility for free home-to-school transport in North Yorkshire was based on a child attending either their **catchment school** or their **nearest school**, provided statutory distance criteria were met (over 2 miles for under-8s, and over 3 miles for over-8s).

In July 2024, North Yorkshire Council voted by majority to change this approach, driven by a need save money.

The key change

- **Free transport is no longer based on catchment school**
- **Eligibility is now based on the nearest school only**

Alongside the shift to a nearest-school only, transport rights linked to two home addresses, faith schools and grammar schools have been removed for all primary and secondary pupils.

NOTE: Families meeting low-income criteria may be eligible for extended rights with transport to one of their three nearest schools, rather than only the single nearest.

If a child attends (or plans to attend) a school that is *not* deemed the nearest by the Council's measurement system, free home-to-school transport will usually be refused — even if:

- it is the child's local catchment school
- siblings already attend that school
- the alternative school is outside the local authority's boundaries
- the alternative school is unfamiliar, impractical, or attended by no other children from the community

These rules apply to:

- **any child starting a new primary or secondary school from 1 September 2024, and**
- **any child already attending a school who has a change of home address, even where free transport was previously provided.**

NB - Our understanding is that the council's intention going forward is that eligibility for school transport will be automatically reviewed annually.

2. How is "nearest school" calculated?

What the policy says

All distance measurements are made using the Council's internal GIS mapping system, which is updated annually each September.

Under the policy, North Yorkshire Council states that:

- distance is measured using what it calls “available walking routes”, which may include footpaths, bridleways, tracks, rights of way and roads
- distances are measured from a “fixed point” inside the home address to the nearest school entrance
- distances are claimed to be accurate to the nearest one-thousandth of a mile (0.001 miles) as measured by its GIS mapping system

What families have experienced

In most cases, the distance difference between nearest school and second nearest is under a mile. This means tiny mapping errors can decide whether a child gets free transport or not.

Through appeals, complaints and evidence gathering, families have identified recurring technical problems affecting distance measurements, including:

- incorrect start and end points being used
- missing school entrances or gates within the mapping system
- unsafe or unviable routes using non-public rights of way and dangerous sections
- refusal to correct known mapping errors when raised
- refusal to issue maps on request (since October 2025)

3. The consequences

Uncertainty for children

Children may not know which school they will attend, who they will be with, or how they will get there until very late in the process. Friendship groups can be split and siblings separated, increasing anxiety at an already difficult transition point.

Pressure on parents

Parents are required to make high-stakes school choices without knowing whether transport will be available, or whether a paid-for bus pass will be offered. Decisions are often confirmed at the last minute and in some cases, after the start of the new term, placing significant pressure on work arrangements, childcare, household finances and stress levels.

Communities divided

Villages and neighbourhoods that previously fed into a single school are increasingly fragmented, with children from the same area sent to different schools. Established

community links are weakened as families are pulled in different directions. Examples now exist of villages where all children would have gone on a single bus to the same school where now different vehicles will be required to take different children from the same village in opposite directions because a school is marginally closer.

Schools set to lose out

Schools that lose pupils because of the policy lose funding. In turn that may leave them little choice but to cut staff and reduce course offerings. Smaller schools (primary schools with less than 50 children and secondary schools with less than 500) are particularly vulnerable, with year-on-year uncertainty increasing the risk of long-term instability and potential closure. In many cases children are being redirected to school in other local authority areas, taking with them education funding much needed by North Yorkshire schools and redirecting it to other counties.

4. Who did this – and why?

Like all councils, North Yorkshire Council is under significant financial pressure. Home-to-school transport costs have risen in recent years, driven mainly by increases in the number of pupils with special educational needs, whose transport is a statutory duty.

A minor Government policy wording change in 2024 under Rishi Sunak's leadership, prompted the Council to review its school transport arrangements. This has been used by the North Yorkshire Council leadership team used to justify a shift to a nearest-school-only model.

The change has been driven by the Conservative administration at North Yorkshire Council supported by Labour councillors.

Liberal Democrats, Greens and some Independent councillors have consistently opposed the policy.

The Council has acknowledged that the nearest-school-only approach does not, by itself, deliver savings. Instead, the money saving model relies on families opting out of Council transport altogether, allowing routes and buses to be withdrawn over time. In practice, this shifts cost and responsibility onto parents.

5. Bus passes

Where free home-to-school transport is refused, parents may apply for a paid bus pass.

- the cost is currently £818 per year (and increases annually)
- passes must be reapplied for each year and are not guaranteed
- families will not find out until July/August whether they have secured a pass for the September term
- passes can be withdrawn at any time with as little as one week's notice

The Council has acknowledged that its approach involves winding down bus routes and reducing vehicle capacity over time to save money, increasing uncertainty for families who rely on paid-for transport.

Removal of paid for bus passes in the future also threatens to limit the ability of 16+ pupils in rural areas where there is no public transport provision to access higher education.

6. The right to appeal

If you are denied free home-to-school transport, you have the right to appeal.

Last year, over 200 parents exercised that right. Only a small number (less than 10%) were successful.

Criticism of the appeals process has been widespread. Concerns raised by parents include:

- very low success rates
- long delays and slow decision-making
- inconsistent outcomes between similar cases
- changing paperwork or procedures between hearings
- limited opportunity for parents or representatives to speak
- unclear or poorly explained decisions

If you are not satisfied with how your case has been handled, you are entitled to take your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (lgo.org.uk). The Ombudsman is an independent body that investigates complaints about councils.

The process can be slow, but it is independent of the Council. Multiple cases from last year are now under active investigation. As well as investigating individual cases the Ombudsman has the power to question more broadly how the policy is being implemented and explore claims of systemic maladministration.

Several families, frustrated by the council's refusal to allow them access to key data or receive replies to queries have made formal complaints to the Information Commissioners Office. Live external investigations into the Council's withholding of information are now underway.

7. So, what can parents do?

Step 1: Get your maps

- A. If you haven't already done so, visit the North Yorkshire Council's website (northyorks.gov.uk) and search for their 'Find my nearest school' online tool which will send you the names and distances to your seven nearest schools to your address (as measured by current version of NYC's mapping system).
- B. Next, if your catchment school isn't top of the nearest list, email schooladmissions@northyorks.gov.uk and schooltransport@northyorks.gov.uk and copy in your councillor, requesting the maps showing the routes and coordinates for start and end points used to measure distances to the relevant schools. Ask for zoomed in maps so you can clearly see the routes taken and the school entrance used. **Include the fact this is an official subject access request and that you are formally requesting this information as an Environmental Information Request and Subject Access Request.** The council have 20 working days to respond – if they miss the deadline, chase and escalate.

Step 2: Scrutinise the route used

- A. With maps in hand, check the route that has been used to measure distance carefully. Look for any sections of the journey that are unsafe, unwalkable or not legitimate public rights of way.
- B. Contact the STAG team we can check the start and end coordinates for you (if they have been provided) and help you plan your next move - our email is SchoolTransportAG@gmail.com.

Step 3: Appeal

You have the right to appeal within 20 days of being denied transport (details are on the letter issued with the refusal which you will no doubt receive between mid-May and mid-June).

You can also request an appeal at any time after that date if new material evidence is revealed (i.e. mapping coordinate errors). Contact your councillor and the new Corporate Director for Children & Young People's Services – her email el.mayhew@northyorks.gov.uk to request this.

Let us know if you do decide to appeal – we can help.

Step 4: Lodge a formal complaint with the Ombudsman

Anyone who has lost an appeal and felt the process was unfair or if errors have been made by the council and have not been corrected then they may wish to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. You can also add new evidence to an existing submission at any point. Details will be provided by the council if your appeal is not upheld or your request to appeal is rejected.

Step 5: Deploy people power

Involve your local parish council, get together with other parents, have community update meetings, ask for support from local schools, tell your story to the press.

There is power in numbers. The Council believe this will blow over – let's prove them wrong.

8. You are not alone

Many hundreds of families across North Yorkshire are dealing with the same issues. Understandably, many parents feel angry, anxious or exhausted by this process.

While policy change may take time, individual decisions can still be challenged, and errors can still be corrected. Asking questions, checking the detail and seeking support are not unreasonable — they are necessary.

The School Transport Action Group (S.T.A.G.) exists to share information, support parents, gather evidence of systemic problems, and push for a fair, transparent and workable system. We won't give up until this is sorted but we do need your help.

Let's change this together.

Contact S.T.A.G:

Email: schooltransportag@gmail.com

Facebook: School Transport Action Group – North Yorkshire

APPENDIX ITEM 1: Whose side is your NYC councillor on?

HOW DID YOUR COUNCILLOR VOTE ON THE SCHOOL TRANSPORT MOTION?

The vote on 21st May was a much needed opportunity to bring back school transport rights to North Yorkshire's local catchment schools. Sadly, that chance was missed. Thank you to the 35 councillors who voted with us. Shame on the 45 who didn't and the 4 who abstained. As for the 4 who missed the meeting - we needed you with us. This one really mattered.

THANK YOU

SHAME ON YOU

CHRIS ALDRED (LIB DEM)	RICH MAW (IND)	KARL ARTHUR (CON & IND)	CARL LES (CON & IND)
HIGH HARROGATE & KINGSLEY	WEAPONNESS & RAMSHILL	CLIFFE & NORTH DUFFIELD	VILLAGE & BROMPTON ON SWALE
JOY ANDREWS (LIB DEM)	JOHN MCCARTNEY (NY IND)	ALYSON BAKER (CON & IND)	CLIFF LUNN (CON & IND)
PICKERING	OSGOLDCROSS	HILLSIDE & RASKETT	WILLOUGHBY & HAMBLETON
PHILIP BROADBANK (LIB DEM)	ANDREW MURDAY (LIB DEM)	PHILIP BARRETT (NY IND)	JOHN MANN (CON & IND)
FAIRFAX & STARBECK	PATLEY BRIDGE & NIDDERDALE	GLUSBURN & SUTTON IN CRAVEN	OATLANDS & PANNAL
ERIC BROADBENT (LABOUR)	DAVID NOLAND (GREEN)	DEREK BASTIMAN (CON & IND)	HEATHER MOORHOUSE
NORTHSTEAD	SKIPTON NORTH & EMSAY	SCALBY & THE COAST	(CON & IND) GREAT AYTON
BARBARA BRODIGAN (LIB DEM)	BOB PACKHAM (LABOUR)	NICK BROWN (CON & IND)	SIMON MYERS (CON & IND)
RIPON URE BANK & SPA	SHERBURN IN ELMET	WATHVALE & BISHOP MONKTON	MID CRAVEN
ANDY BROWN (GREEN)	STUART PARSONS (NY IND)	DAVID CHANCE (CON & IND)	ANDY PARASKOS (CON & IND)
AIRE VALLEY	RICHMOND	DANBY & MULGRAVE	SPOFFORTH & TOCKWITH
LIZ COLLING (LABOUR)	JACK PROUD (LABOUR)	MARK CRANE (CON & IND)	CLIVE PEARSON (CON & IND)
FALSGRAVE & STEPNEY	SELBY EAST	BRAYTON & BARLOW	ESK VALLEY & COAST
FELICITY CUNLIFFE-LISTER	JOHN RICHIE (LABOUR)	GARETH DADD (CON & IND)	HEATHER PHILLIPS (CON & IND)
(LIB DEM) MASHAM & FOUNTAINS	WOODLANDS	THIRSK	SEAMER
MELANIE ANN DAVIS (LABOUR)	SUBASH SHARMA (LABOUR)	CAROLINE DICKINSON (CON & IND)	JANET SANDERSON (CON & IND)
SELBY WEST	NEWBY	NORTHALLERTON SOUTH	THORNTON DALE & WOLDS
STEPHANIE DUCKETT (LABOUR)	STEVE SHAW WRIGHT (LABOUR)	KEANE DUNCAN (CON & IND)	KARIN SEDGWICK (CON & IND)
BARLBY & RICCALL	SELBY WEST	NORTON	LEYBURN & MIDDLEHAM
MICHELLE DONOHUE MONCRIEFF	DAN SLADDEN (LIB DEM)	RICHARD FOSTER (CON & IND)	DAVID STAVELEY (CON & IND)
(IND) HUNMANBY & SHERBURN	SOWERBY & TOPCLIFFE	WHARFEDALE	SETTLE & PENYGHENT
KEVIN FOSTER (GREEN)	MONIKA SLATER (LIB DEM)	SAM GIBBS (CON & IND)	ROBERTA SWIERS (CON & IND)
HIPSWELL & COLBURN	BILTON GRANGE & NEW PARK	GARDENS & CENTRAL HARROGATE	CAYTON
HANNAH GOSTLOW (LIB DEM)	ANDY SOLLOWAY (NY IND)	TIM GROGAN (CON & IND)	MALCOLM TAYLOR (CON & IND)
KNARESBOROUGH EAST	SKIPTON WEST & WEST CRAVEN	MONK FRYSTON & SOUTH MILFORD	HUBY & TOLLERTON
BRYN GRIFFITHS (LIB DEM)	NEIL SWANNICK (LABOUR)	MICHAEL HARRISON (CON & IND)	ANGUS THOMPSON (CON & IND)
STOKESLEY	WHITBY STREONSHALH	KILLINGHALL, HAMP. & SALTERGATE	NORTH RICHMONDSHIRE
PAUL HASLAM (IND)	ANDREW TIMOTHY (LIB DEM)	ROBERT HESELTINE (CON & IND)	PHIL TRUMPER (CON & IND)
BILTON & NIDD GORGE	STRAY WOODLANDS HOOKSTONE	SKIPTON EAST & SOUTH	WHITBY WEST
MIKE JORDAN (REFORM)	MATT WALKER (LIB DEM)	DAVID HUGILL (CON & IND)	STEVE WATSON (CON & IND)
CAMBLESFORTH & CARLTON	KNARESBOROUGH WEST	HUTTON RUDBY & OSMOTHERLEY	N'ALLERTON NORTH & BROMPTON
PETER LACEY (LIB DEM)	ARNOLD WARNEKEN (GREEN)	NATHAN HULL (CON & IND)	DAVID WEBSTER (CON & IND)
COPPICE VALLEY & DUCHY	OUSEBURN	WASHBURN & BIRSTWITH	BEDAILE
STEVE MASON (LIB DEM)		GEORGE JABBOUR (CON & IND)	JOHN WEIGHELL (CON & IND)
AMOTHERBY & AMPLEFORTH		HELMSLEY & SINNINGTON	AIKSEW & LEEMING
		DAVID JEFFELS (CON & IND)	GREG WHITE (CON & IND)
		DERWENT VALLEY & MOOR	KIRKBYMOORSIDE & DALES
		TOM JONES (CON & IND)	ANNABEL WILKINSON (CON & IND)
		SCOTTON & LOWER WENSLEYDALE	MORTON ON SWALE & APPLETON
		NIGEL KNAPTON (CON & IND)	WISKE
		EASINGWOLD	PETER WILKINSON (CON & IND)
		ANDREW LEE (CON & IND)	APPLETON
		ROEBUCK & CHURCH FENTON	ROMANBY
			ANDREW WILLIAMS (CON & IND)
			RIPON MINSTER & MOORSIDE
			ROBERT WINDASS (CON & IND)
			BOROUGHBRIDGE & CLARO

NO SHOWS

ON THE FENCE

JOHN CATTANACH (NY IND)	LINDSAY BURR (NY IND)
CAWOOD & ESCRICK	MALTON
SAM CROSS (IND)	DAVID IRETON (CON & IND)
FILEY	BENTHAM & INGLETON
CAROLINE GOODRICK (CON & IND)	JANET JEFFERSON (NY IND)
SHERRIFF HUTTON & DERWENT	CASTLE
MIKE SCHOFIELD (NY IND)	KIRSTY POSKITT (NY IND)
HARLOW & ST GEORGE	TADCASTER

Follow the **SCHOOL TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP** for help and info:

[facebook.com/groups/schooltransportactiongroupnorthyorks/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/schooltransportactiongroupnorthyorks/)

Contact us at SchoolTransportAG@gmail.com