

Responses to consultation on East Sussex County Council's proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2026-2027

Supporting information

Comments were sought on any aspect of the Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2026/27 although respondents were asked to comment separately on the financial contribution aspect. Ten respondents left 18 comments to the consultation.

Some comments related to the costs and operation of school coaches. The cost of a vacant seat reflects the true cost of seat on a coach under contract to the Council. The criteria for offering places give priority to students who live in the area served by the school sixth form.

In cases where travel assistance is considered necessary for a student aged 16-19 with an EHC plan, a contribution towards to the cost of travel is required. The post 16 parental contribution fee has historically mirrored the cost of the bus fare for 16-19 year olds (the 'Freedom Pass'). This approach was adopted because many non-SEND young people use the Freedom Pass to travel to college, thereby creating parity between SEND and non-SEND learners. As the Freedom Pass increased in price in February 2026, the contribution in 2026/27 will rise to £760 per student. Low-income families are required to pay half this amount (£380). The contribution remains below the average when benchmarked against other local authorities.

Some respondents felt that post-16 transport should be free. There is no obligation to provide free transport. The policy is targeted towards those who could not attend college without the Council's help. ie where it is necessary. Even so, a contribution is required. Students facing financial hardship can apply to their course provider for a discretionary bursary. The Statement signposts young people and their parents to sources of available financial help.

The comments received are set out below:

General comments

- 1) I think 16-19yr olds should have free travel, Mon-Fri during term time, to encourage education and those who want to work or follow apprenticeship programmes. The cost of local travel hinders many families and young people and it would benefit the local economy and encourage young people to train, work or study after leaving school.
- 2) It seems once children turn 16 they are left to find mainstream education and find their own way into college if unable to get a coach
- 3) I believe it is unfair that parents are required to pay for post-16 transport.

In areas such as Hailsham, local sixth forms have closed or offer limited options, meaning many students have no real choice but to travel to continue their education. Public transport is therefore essential, not optional.

Families who are not on benefits are also struggling due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Many working households fall just above eligibility thresholds but are already finding it difficult to cover basic living costs. Adding hundreds of pounds per year in transport costs will have a significant impact on families who are already struggling to cope.

Access to education between 16 and 18 should not depend on a family's ability to pay for travel, especially when suitable local provision is unavailable.

I urge the Council to reconsider this policy and provide fairer support so that all young people can access further education regardless of their financial circumstances or where they live.

- 4) Seeing as education is compulsory until the age of 18 and my son's transport has been free from 11-16 it seems unfair (and possibly a barrier) that from 16-18 that you have to pay.
- 5) The policy seems to be pitched correctly at those who genuinely could not make the transport arrangements for their young person and require the local authority's assistance.
- 6) The prices for the bus are way too high, at 16 years we are required to pay adults prices which is £3 for a single ticket on my local bus. As someone who gets the bus to school every day, those in year 12 and 13 are required to pay for a daily travel to school, leading to some of my peers missing the school when they have one or two lessons because they see it as a "waste of money". This is the bus from Rotherfield to Beacon Academy. Everyone I know always complain about 16+ having to pay for an adult ticket while our minimum wage is much lower than an "adults" is.
- 7) Now is a time when petrol costs are high so the price seems high. Wouldn't sign up now as costs may change before September.
- 8) Way too much parents are squeezed already they have children who have to stay in education meaning not working and unable to earn anything near this to help pay for this cost and parents still have to fork out food clothing etc as for another 2 years the child has to stay in education people are not hiring the young people due to too many restrictions on hours they can work.
- 9) Transport to Beacon Academy Crowborough should be free because it is the catchment school from Forest Row. If you choose elsewhere then that is your choice are would be fair that you have to pay. The children have to stay in education and over £700 for transport is too much to be able to find in today's climate, especially when many families will have two children they need to pay for.

Comments on the financial contribution

- 1) Who has this money especially when previously using a taxi.
- 2) I do not agree with the increased parental contribution.

For many families, especially in areas such as Hailsham where local sixth form options are limited, students have no realistic choice but to travel to continue their education. Public transport is essential, not optional.

Families who are not eligible for low-income support are also struggling financially due to the cost-of-living crisis. An annual charge of £760 places a significant burden on working households who may already be struggling to meet basic living costs.

Access to post-16 education should not depend on a family's ability to afford transport. I believe the contribution is too high and unfair for families who have no alternative.

- 3) A 33% rise is unacceptable; how many other goods and services would get away with this level of increase.
 - 4) Forget the percentage increase. The cost is actually very good value for money for what you get in return.
 - 5) £760 annually is a price not many families are willing to pay, this change will most likely will lead to decreased attendance. Even with reduction of 50% for low income families, £380 per year is a huge amount, as known already low income families are less likely to prioritise education, meaning they won't encourage their children to go in on days where they have minimal amount of lessons or lessons that they don't see as "useful" like personal development or physical education.
 - 6) the proposed rise is excessive at 33%.
 - 7) Now is not a good time to do costings as petrol prices are high with world issues. Would wait until nearer September as things may have changed and costs may have come down.
 - 8) Low cost families get all support the full time workers get none and do not have any extra money as everything has gone up they earn more but get less help and end up paying more out making them on less money than the low income families.
 - 9) It's way too much for an average family to afford. Those that will suffer the most are those that don't meet the threshold for low income but are just above it.
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