



Walked Routes to Schools - Assessment Policy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Fife Council has a responsibility to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for distance entitled pupils to be transported to and from school. However, the Council also has a responsibility to consider walk route availability for those pupils living less than the agreed entitlement distances and to have regard to their safety.
- 1.2 This document outlines the Council's policy on determining available walk routes and the methodology adopted in carrying out assessments. In most cases, assessments will be carried out on walk routes up to 1 mile from a pupil's catchment area primary school or 2 miles from their catchment area secondary school. However, the policy can equally be applied in those situations where a pupil already qualifies for distance entitled transport but the walk route to their transport boarding point requires to be assessed.
- 1.3 This policy does not apply to pupils with additional support needs who have made a formal application for transport assistance under Section 4 of the Council's *Home to School Transport Policy*.

2.0 References and Source Data

- 2.1 The Education (Scotland) Act 1996 states:

After section 51(2B) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (provision of transport and other facilities) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

“(2C) In considering whether to make any arrangements under subsection (1) above in respect of pupils attending schools, an education authority shall have regard to the safety of such pupils.”

- 2.2 The Scottish Government provides guidance in its *School Transport Guidance Circular* <http://www.gov.scot/publications/school-transport-guidance-2021>. This document is primarily aimed at the burden placed on local authorities in circumstances where transport is provided due to distance entitlement. However, they do make reference to reviewing particular criteria.

“Ministers expect local authorities to keep their criteria for providing school transport under review and be flexible enough to consider factors, relative to the nature of the route, which might affect pupil safety. For any part of the route which includes a public road, relevant factors, where appropriate, could include volume and speed of traffic; visibility distances for drivers at a particular location; availability of safe crossings and “step offs”; sufficiency of footways, footpaths and subways; adequacy of waiting areas; built-up and wooded areas, and adequacy of street lighting.”

- 2.3 Road Safety GB & Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) jointly produced a guidance document in 2012, (updated in 2021), – *Assessment of Walked Routes to School* – covering the methodology for assessing walking routes to school. The Guidelines can be accessed from Road Safety GB at

<https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/RSGB-WRTS-04.21.pdf>.

- 2.4 Fife Council provides general information for parents relating to school transport. This is detailed at [School transport | Fife Council](#).

3.0 Policy Statement

- 3.1 Fife Council uses Road Safety GB guidelines as the benchmark for the assessment of walking routes to school, to ensure fairness in the provision of free transport on the grounds of road safety.
- 3.2 This policy, along with the supporting procedures for assessing a route, ensures a transparent decision-making process to allow an objective outcome to be determined.
- 3.3 The Council will ensure each school has a regularly reviewed *School Travel Plan*, to raise awareness of, and encourage more active and sustainable, travel choices. These plans set out practical measures and initiatives for reducing the number of car trips made to school and for improving safety on journeys.

4.0 Expectations

- 4.1 In support of our aim to safeguard pupils who walk to school there are several actions that are expected:
- All Fife schools work with their school and local communities, partnership groups and the Council's Roads & Transportation and Education Services to produce a *School Travel Plan*. Travel Plans are reviewed from time to time and will be made available on school websites to promote a positive safety culture.
 - Schools and Education Services also produce a traffic management plan for traffic and pedestrian circulation within each school's boundary. These plans will also be published on school websites.
 - Pupils who walk to school act responsibly themselves and are accompanied by a responsible adult, where appropriate.
 - In the absence of intervening circumstances (such as substantial or significant changes in legislation, guidance or temporary/permanent infrastructure changes which may affect the availability of the route), existing assessments for routes that are not deemed to be available are reviewed 5 yearly. New assessments are carried out as the need arises.
 - If there is any reasonable doubt, on the part of the Council, about the availability of a route, the Council provides transport.
 - Road users will behave reasonably and responsibly.

5.0 Assessment of Walked Routes

5.1 Persons Walking the Route

5.1.1 Parents/carers may want to consider additional appropriate measures, for example, the use of fluorescent or light-coloured clothing etc. It is assumed that all children walking a route will be accompanied by their parent/carer or another responsible adult where appropriate; that they wear suitable clothing and footwear; always remain vigilant and alert and that they will comply with all aspects of the Highway Code relating to pedestrians.

5.2 Assessing Officers

5.2.1 Walking routes are assessed by a core team of Assessing Officers who will walk the route on a school day, in the hour before morning bell time and the hour after afternoon bell time, to observe and note the features of the route and to gather additional information as required. They use a walked route assessment form (Appendix B) to record their findings.

5.2.2 All walk route assessments are carried out by a minimum of 3 assessing officers, comprising of representatives from the following:

- Fife Council Education Directorate
- Fife Council Roads & Transportation Services
- Fife Council Safer Communities Team

5.2.3 The group comprises professionals who have experience in reviewing and assessing walk routes to school. A collective decision on the availability of the route, based on the policy criteria, will be made by the assessing officers.

5.2.4 Elected members of the ward and the chair of the relevant parent council, where the walk route is located, will be invited (with appropriate notice) to attend the walked route assessment.

5.3 New Assessments

5.3.1 When a new request for a route assessment is received (this may come from a school, external body or individual in writing), this will be carried out, as soon as possible, subject to the availability of the assessing officers and arranging the timing of the assessment to be carried out within term time. Where a route has been assessed, there will be a 12-month time limit for any subsequent request for a reassessment, unless there is a significant change to the route.

5.3.2 The walk route assessment form will be completed, with the findings shared with the person making the request within 28 days of the date of the assessment. Any appropriate actions will be taken forward by the Council.

5.4 Review of Assessments (for routes deemed not to be available)

5.4.1 Routine re-assessments of a route will be carried out in accordance with a 5 yearly review timeline, with updated assessments being retained centrally. Only where there are significant interim changes will re-assessments be brought forward. Where a review results in a change to the availability of a route, any appropriate actions will be taken forward by the Council.

5.5 Criteria

5.5.1 The main criteria for determining the availability of a walked route are detailed in Appendix A.

5.5.2 In summary, for a route along or adjacent to a public highway to be considered available, there normally needs to be:

- a continuous, adequate footway or roadside strip on roads which carry normal to heavy* traffic, or
- step-offs, on roads which are lightly* trafficked and which have adequate visibility to provide sufficient, advance warning or
- on roads with light* traffic flow and no step-offs, adequate road width, visibility, observed traffic speed, volume and composition to provide sufficient, advance warning,

and, if there is a need to cross roads, there must be:

- Crossing facilities (Zebra or Signalised pedestrian crossings), or
- Pedestrian phases at traffic signals (including pedestrian refuges), or
- School Crossing Patrols, or
- Traffic calming (sufficient to enable safe road crossing), or
- Pedestrian refuges, or
- Sufficient gaps in the traffic flow and adequate visibility to allow enough opportunities to cross safely.

* traffic flow definitions are based on the RoSPA/Road Safety GB guidance mentioned in 2.3.

- Light flow is <240 vehicles per hour (if flow was evenly spaced across the whole hour, this would mean gaps between vehicles of at least 15 seconds)
- Low flow is 240-400 vehicles per hour (if flow was evenly spaced across the whole hour, this would mean gaps between vehicles of 9-15 seconds)
- Medium flow is 400-840 vehicles per hour (if flow was evenly spaced across the whole hour, this would mean gaps between vehicles of 4½-9 seconds)
- Heavy flow is >840 vehicles per hour (if flow was evenly spaced across the whole hour, this would mean gaps between vehicles of less than 4½ seconds)

6.0 Reviewing an Assessment Decision

- 6.1 There may be instances where the findings of an assessment are disputed. Under these circumstances a copy of the assessment and the details of the dispute will be forwarded from Education Services to a Review Board.
- 6.2 The Review Board will comprise of 3 Senior Managers of the Council from Education Directorate: Roads & Transportation Services and Communities & Neighbourhoods – who will not have taken part in the original, disputed walk route assessment (but who may subsequently choose to do so as part of a Review Board assessment) - and 3 councillors (not representatives from the ward where the walk route is located) will be invited to be part of the Review Board with the Senior Managers as part of the decision making process. One of these councillors will chair the Review Board.
- 6.3 The composition of the Review Board may vary depending of the availability of staff and will only meet to review specific requests as they are presented.
- 6.4 The appellant(s) will have the opportunity to present the reasons for requesting a review to the panel before a determination is made.
- 6.5 Where the Review Board agrees with the assessment a formal letter of response will be sent to the appellant(s) within 14 days of the meeting, advising of the Board's decision and no further action will be taken.
- 6.6 Where the Review Board is not in agreement with the assessment, the board may request that a further assessment be carried out by the assessing officers or that additional information be provided by other internal or external agencies for them to consider. Other interested parties e.g. a parent, headteacher, councillor or pupil (up to a maximum of 3 people) may accompany the assessing officers for the assessment to provide their views. This position will be advised to the appellant(s) within 14 days of the Board meeting. A further letter will be sent to the appellant(s) within 14 days of each subsequent Review Board meeting, outlining additional information considered and the decision reached.
- 6.7 If the Board overturns the findings of the assessment, its written findings and explanation will be appended to the assessment form for completeness and the required actions will be taken forward by the Council.
- 6.8 Escalation of a Review Decision
 - 6.8.1 Any further dispute will require to be submitted to the Council as a formal complaint, in writing. See *Making a Complaint to Fife Council*: -[Make a complaint | Fife Council](#).

Criteria for Use During a Walked Route Assessment

The following criteria will be considered, recorded or measured by assessors to ensure consistency in all assessments. It is, however, recognised that, in reaching a decision about a walk route, assessors should not necessarily consider each criterion in isolation but should consider its interaction with all others to determine walk route availability at particular locations.

1. Accompaniment

The assessment assumes that a child walking a route will be accompanied by a responsible adult, where appropriate. This is on the basis that the Council's statutory duty to ensure pupils get to school covers:

- those who live over the entitlement distance from their catchment school
- those who have an unavailable walk route.

Beyond this, it is a parent/carer's responsibility to ensure attendance at school, by virtue of Section 30(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980:

"It shall be the duty of the parent of every child of school age to provide efficient education for him suitable to his age, ability and aptitude either by causing him to attend a public school regularly or by other means."

The above is consistent with local authority policy across the UK and is backed by case law – most notably two House of Lords decisions (Rogers & another v Essex County Council 1986 and Regina v Devon County Council 1988), in which the former states,

"A route to be 'available'...must be a route along which a child accompanied as necessary can walk and walk with reasonable safety to school. It does not fail to qualify as 'available' because of dangers which would arise if the child is unaccompanied."

Any such decision would be family specific and not result in a route being deemed unavailable.

2. Footways and roadside strips

For all sections of road where there is a footway or roadside strip of greater than 1 metre in width, capable of being walked along, the route is considered to be available for that part of the journey. Verges and other unsurfaced strips at the side of a road will only be considered available if they can be walked without hindrance from vegetation or other obstacles and are free from undulations.

Where a footway or roadside strip exists, but is less than 1 metre in width, assessing officers will consider the interaction of site-specific factors, including the following, to determine availability:

- length of footway less than 1m width
- ability to step off onto an adjacent verge

- any necessity to step off onto the road itself
- traffic flow and speed limit
- sightlines/visibility
- additional footway obstructions
- accident data.

Where there is no suitable footway or roadside strip on roads where the two-way traffic flow (one way of a dual carriageway) is less than 240 vehicles per hour, the route may still be considered available if:

- there are verges which provide a “step off” for pedestrians when vehicles are passing, or,
- the width of the carriageway, observed speed, volume, composition of traffic and visibility deem the route as available.

3. Crossing Points

In all cases, it is assumed that pupils and the accompanying adult will, at some point, have to cross a road to make use of footways, roadside strips or verges and that they will always observe the Highway Code.

Where it is necessary to cross a road, the following circumstances will be considered:

- Assessing officers will make a note of where there is a need to cross a road, where it is appropriate to cross and the visibility at that point.
- All marked pedestrian crossings, zebra crossings, pedestrian refuges, signal controlled junctions (with a pedestrian phase) and locations with a School Crossing Patrol will be considered available.
- A crossing point will also be considered available where the two-way (or one way of a dual carriageway) traffic flow is fewer than 240 vehicles per hour and there is sufficient visibility.
- At locations with no crossing facilities and where the two-way traffic flow (or one way of a dual carriageway) is greater than 240 vehicles per hour, the crossing point will be assessed to ensure there is sufficient visibility. This assessment may include the application of traffic counters at the crossing point and a subsequent gap analysis for the hour before morning school bell and after afternoon school bell time (though, if the crossing point is distant from the school, the hour will be adjusted to reflect realistic walking times). A gap analysis will use the formula

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 \textit{Road} & & \textit{Average} & & \textit{Minimum} \\
 \textit{Width} & & \textit{Walk Speed} & & \textit{Gap Time} \\
 \textit{(metres to 2} & & \textit{(0.91 metres} & & \textit{(rounded to} \\
 \textit{decimal} & \div & \textit{per second)} & = & \textit{nearest} \\
 \textit{places)} & & & & \textit{second)}
 \end{array}$$

In general, if there are 4 gaps of at least the minimum Gap Time in every 5-minute period then the road is assessed as available to cross.

- Where a crossing point is required on an exit road from a roundabout, assessors will observe and record any potential uncertainties, caused by vehicle movements on the roundabout itself, which could cloud the decision to cross at the crossing point.

4. Other routes

An available route may include roads – metalled or otherwise – public paths, rights of way, footpaths and bridleways, which provide a suitable walking surface, passable without hindrance from surrounding vegetation or other obstacles.

For off-road routes, which include parks, wooded areas, grassland and public spaces, assessing officers will consider the interaction of site-specific factors including:

- surface
- lighting
- visibility/sightlines
- surrounding walls, vegetation or other barriers
- advice from Police Scotland.

Routes through cemeteries, graveyards, crematoria and places of worship will not be considered available for the purposes of route assessment.

Assessments may include information on an alternative walking route to the available one. Parents/carers/pupils may also identify alternative routes of their own. Such alternative routes may not be the most direct or the fastest route. Where an alternative route is longer than the distance entitlement criteria this would not lead to free transport entitlement given the existence of the originally assessed available route.

5. Gradient

The presence or absence of a gradient is part of the overall assessment of the availability of a route.

6. Street lighting

The presence or absence of street lighting is part of the overall assessment of the availability of a route.

7. Assessment of accident data

The assessors will note accidents over the previous 3 years – using data provided by Police Scotland – as part of the assessment. Accident data for the route may be considered.

8. Weather conditions

Weather is not considered in the assessment of walk route availability. However, the *impact* of weather on a route's availability may be considered e.g. regular flooding making a route impassable.

9. Pollution

Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) exist in several areas within Fife, more details can be found via: - [Air quality | Fife Council](#). A number of households, shops and

businesses are located within these AQMAs. The Environmental Health Team tackles pollution levels within these AQMAs through the implementation of the associated Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs) and both AQAPs have been successful in reducing air pollution within these areas to below the relevant statutory objectives.

In addition, air quality is monitored across Fife and, where exceedances of the statutory objectives are recorded over a two-year period, an AQMA would need to be declared with an AQAP set up to detail how air quality in the area will be improved. Unless recommended through an AQAP, air quality will not be considered as one of the criteria for defining walk route availability.

10. Crime

Police Scotland considers a *Community Impact Assessment* (CIA) for every serious crime, and this takes into account ongoing issues for an area. If a specific threat is identified - as part of a CIA - that concludes that pupils in an area may be at risk, Police Scotland would consider and implement various protective and preventative measures including liaison with Fife Council if this was deemed to be necessary.

Registered sex offenders (RSOs) are managed by Police Scotland's Offender Management Unit and their placement in a community involves a risk assessment of the individual and the neighbourhood in which they live. This includes proximity to schools and other establishments which could be at an increased risk, depending on the individual's history. The Offender Management Unit manages the RSOs, on an ongoing basis in the community.

11. Trunk Roads

Where a walk route is along or crosses (at surface) a trunk road, the assessors will liaise with Transport Scotland as to any specific, additional requirements for consideration.

WALKED ROUTE ASSESSMENT FORM

This form is for the purpose of recording the key findings and observations arising from a walked route assessment.

Record of Findings (collated from any Assessors notes/observations)

School/Educational Establishment & Route details

School/Educational Establishment Name	Route – write a brief description only (start/end point and key roads). <i>Attach map at end of document</i>
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Assessment Details

Date	Time
Weather Conditions	Key Observations

Assessors

Name	Designation	Organisation	Contact Details

Observers (including Councillors)

Name	Designation	Organisation	Contact Details

1. Is there a continuous adequate footway?

Describe the footpath suitability / condition / length

Explain if there is a requirement to cross a road

Describe where it is appropriate to cross

What is the visibility like at the point(s) of crossing?

If the width of the footway is less than 1 meter consider the following specific factors:

What is the length of the section(s)

YES NO

Is there the ability to step off onto an adjacent verge?

Can stepping onto the road be avoided?

What is the traffic flow like and speed limit?

Are sightlines and visibility good here?

Is the section free from any additional footway obstructions?

Is there any relevant accident data?

CONCLUSION: continuous adequate footway? Yes No

If yes, at this stage the route is deemed to be a non-hazardous walking route, please go to question 4. If no, please go to question 2.

2. In the absence of a continuous adequate footway, are there step offs with adequate sight lines?

Describe the suitability and nature of step offs

What is the visibility like at the step offs?

CONCLUSION: step offs with adequate sight lines? Yes No

If yes, at this stage the route is deemed to be a non-hazardous walking route, please go to question 4. If no, please go to question 3.

3. In the absence of a continuous adequate footway or step offs with adequate sight lines, where the route requires walking on the road surface, are there adequate sight lines?

Provide details

CONCLUSION: are there adequate sight lines? Yes No

If yes, at this stage the route is deemed to be a non-hazardous walking route, please go to question 4. If no, the route is an unsafe walking route, please go to question 5.

4. Are there any other considerations that will impact on the assessment outcome?

Describe the overall visibility / sight lines for pedestrians*

Describe traffic flow observations *

YES NO

Is there a need for a formal traffic count/gap analysis?

List all crossings / patrols / islands & speed limits

Describe any Paths/ Wooded Areas/ Vegetation/ known flooding (frequency over a year)

Make reference to the combination of site-specific factors including:

- condition and type of surface
- lighting
- visibility/sightlines
- surrounding walls, vegetation or other barriers
- advice from Police Scotland

What is the availability of public transport for the route?

Are there any exceptional features on the route e.g. type of vehicles?

Transport Scotland Input
(if appropriate) for routes
along A92 & A985

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Accident Data (damage
only, slight, serious &
fatal covering the last 3
years)

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**CONCLUSION: Are there any other considerations
that will impact on the assessment outcome?**

Yes No

**Where the traffic flow / sight line is considered, a record of any vehicle count / speed survey should be retained. Only relevant where a road is crossed without available traffic interrupters.*

5. **CONCLUSION: is the route available?**

Yes No

If the conclusion is no, please describe below any action that would be required that would allow for the route to be assessed as available in future

Action required:

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If the conclusion is yes, please describe below any action that would be recommended to improve the route.

Action proposed:

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**WALKED ROUTE ASSESSMENT FORM
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

Insert map, photographs here