

Passenger Numbers

In the main, Hackney carriage and Private Hire vehicles and drivers are used for transport into Special Needs & Disability (SEND) Establishments throughout Essex and beyond. The number of passengers travelling is constantly increasing along with an increase in the complexity of requirements. Passenger numbers can fluctuate throughout the school year – it is not the case that we tender for September and that remains static until the following July. Passengers are constantly added throughout the year and needs change, so we are often asking providers to add additional vehicles and staff to existing contracts.

The table below shows the current numbers travelling and the projected figures up to 2025. We have to apply caveats to the June 2020 – 2022 figures which have been heavily impacted by the pandemic. Therefore, using the % increase seen over the last 12 months to project the next 2 years may not necessarily reflect the true situation. We will only really understand the true position in a year's time as we better understand the true impact of the pandemic on SEND students overall. We do know though, that the figures will continue to increase as SEND school provision increases and more homes are built.

Month/Year	Jun-19	Jun-20	Jun-21	Jun-22	Jun-23	Jun-24	Jun-25
SEND students on hired transport	2459	2515	2567	2724	2902	3090	3290

Driver Training

Essex County Council (ECC) is currently reviewing the training package for our Passenger Assistants (PA) with a view to making the training more robust and certificated. The training will be developed by education and training specialists and will also give PAs the opportunity to further develop any other training needs they have. The aim of this is to make the role more attractive to individuals and to improve the timeframe around current training requirements for our most complex passengers. Some elements of this training can also be extended to drivers working under a (potentially) restricted licence along with basic training around autism awareness & communication skills. ECC are happy to contribute to a training package for education transport drivers with input from our SEND colleagues.

Mobilisation for September

Providers have regularly raised the issue with ECC that the licensing process is slow, restrictive and not relevant to those drivers who are only interested and employed for education transport services. Existing processes have impacted on mobilisation for September often resulting in students missing out on transport for some time if drivers cannot get through the licensing requirements quickly. It is appreciated that there are requirements to be met in terms of training, suitability, safeguarding etc. If this could be speeded up for education transport drivers and the training adjusted to meet specific requirements for this type of transport, the impact on providers and passengers would be instantly felt. Therefore ECC support this proposal of a restrictive licence to positively influence and area of the passenger transport market which is currently struggling and where demand is increasing. We will support Uttlesford if this is to be piloted with a view to extending wider in Essex if successful.