

# NATIONAL SCHOOL PARTY TRAVEL SCHEME

From Stations...

to Education: A

Ticket to Opportunity

Unlocking  
Opportunities...

One Journey at a Time.

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## SUMMARY

We propose the introduction of a National School Party Travel Scheme on National Rail. Across the country, more must be done to broaden pupils' engagement with educational activities outside the classroom. The rising cost of coach travel places school trips beyond the reach of many budgets, particularly in disadvantaged areas. As a result, pupils are being denied vital opportunities to develop cultural capital, social skills, and broader life experience.

## SOLUTION

Modelled on Transport for London's long-standing initiative, the National School Party Scheme would allow state school groups to travel free or at a heavily discounted rate during off-peak times for educational, cultural, and sporting trips as part of a nationally recognised scheme.

This would widen access to enrichment opportunities, support social mobility, and make efficient use of underused rail capacity.

The National School Party Travel Scheme offers a practical, forward-looking response to challenges in education, transport, and social equity.

Together, these solutions create a scheme that is low-cost, high-impact, and aligned with national priorities across education, transport, and the environment.

## BENEFITS

The benefits of the scheme extend beyond education alone:

- **Educational equity:** Ensures all pupils, regardless of background or school budget, can access museums, historical sites, and cultural venues. By removing the transport cost barrier, no child is excluded from opportunities to broaden their horizons.
- **Levelling up:** Reduces regional inequalities by giving schools in disadvantaged areas affordable access to cultural capital. This supports equality of opportunity and strengthens national cohesion.
- **Enrichment:** Provides pupils with greater access to cultural, historical, and heritage sites, enabling learning in real-world contexts and enhancing social and cultural development.
- **Sustainability:** Encourages the use of rail instead of coaches or private vehicles, cutting congestion, lowering emissions, and reducing air pollution while making efficient use of underutilised off-peak services.
- **Future of rail:** Familiarises young people with public transport, encouraging long-term ridership and embedding sustainable travel habits in the next generation.
- **Tourism and culture boost:** Increases school visits to regional museums, galleries, and heritage sites, supporting both cultural vitality and local economies.

## CONSIDERATIONS

As with any national initiative, challenges must be acknowledged. These include capacity management on busy routes, the administrative work of developing and managing a booking system, and potential adjustments to operator revenue models. However, these concerns can be mitigated through phased rollout and careful design. The overall net benefit—educational, social, and environmental—far outweighs any drawbacks.

## NEXT STEPS

The immediate priority is to establish a joint working group bringing together the DfE, DfT, schools, trusts, and cultural partners. This group should oversee a pilot with publicly owned rail operators, testing the booking system and managing capacity. From there, the aim is clear: build broad parliamentary backing and deliver a phased national rollout.