

# Improving the commissioning of school transport for vulnerable children

## Norfolk County Council

### The Challenge

- Reduce the cost of SEN school transportation, while maintaining a secure and safe service for vulnerable young people

### The Benefits

- Annual cost savings, contributing to a target cost reduction of £500,000
- Improved understanding of SEN pupil's travel needs
- Greater efficiency in the processing of SEN travel request applications
- Better information to support the strategic development of SEN facilities in Norfolk



Norfolk County Council is using Esri's ArcGIS platform to help it arrange the most suitable school transportation for pupils with special educational needs. This insightful application of GIS is improving services and safety for children, while also helping the local authority to achieve its cost savings target.

### The Challenge

Every year, Norfolk County Council is required to arrange travel to and from school, by minibus, car or taxi, for over 2,000 pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The county is predominantly rural and covers a large area of 2,074 square miles, so the annual budget for SEN transportation in Norfolk exceeds £10 million. In common with all departments within the council, the SEN transportation team was under pressure to reduce its operating costs and downscale this budget, but its priority none-the-less remained the same: to provide safe and secure journeys for vulnerable young people.

At the time, the SEN transportation team made decisions about journeys based on manual reports and commonly referred to a map pinned to the wall to help them understand distances between pupil addresses and schools. It was a lengthy, manual process, which relied largely on people's experience and knowledge of the county, and this was neither efficient nor sustainable.

### The Solution

Norfolk County Council has been licensing geographic information system (GIS) solutions from Esri UK and gradually introducing new solutions for the council based on the Esri ArcGIS platform for over six years. So, when it came to creating a solution for the SEN school transportation team, the organisation already had both the technology and skills it needed in-house. "We married ArcGIS with our new data warehouse to create the solution," explains Tony Collins, Senior Analyst Programmer, GIS and Data Warehousing, at Norfolk County Council. "From the original concept, it took us just two months of development."

The solution, known internally as the SEN Travel Viewer app, allows the SEN transportation team to view a map of Norfolk and see at a glance, where pupils live, which schools they attend, what kind of vehicle they travel in, if they travel alone and how far they travel. The team can now easily see and investigate anomalies, such as two pupils in adjacent villages having separate transportation to the same school. They can also use the app to plan and commission the most appropriate journeys for pupils who are new to the area, reaching school age or changing schools, taking into account existing transportation arrangements for other pupils nearby.

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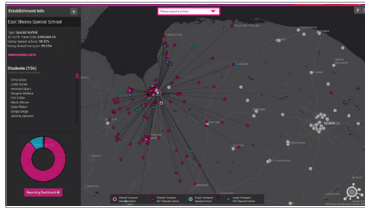
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“Our new ArcGIS app allows us to provide a high quality transportation service for children with special educational needs, while operating cost efficiently”

Tracy Jessop, Assistant Director of Highways and Transport, Norfolk County Council



ArcGIS provides clear insight into the journeys travelled by pupils with special needs

### Benefits

#### ***Reduced costs in the provision of school transport***

As Norfolk County Council can now more easily identify opportunities for pupils to share journeys or make shorter journeys, it can reduce its expenditure on transportation, while continuing to meet pupils' needs. In its first year of use, the council expects the SEN Travel Viewer app to make a significant contribution to the SEN department's savings target of £500,000. "Our new ArcGIS app allows us to provide a high quality transportation service for children with special educational needs, while operating cost efficiently," says Tracy Jessop, Assistant Director of Highways and Transport, Norfolk County Council.

#### ***Fine-tuned services that meet the needs of vulnerable pupils***

Using ArcGIS, members of staff now have better access to information, which enables them to ensure that travel arrangements are the most appropriate for pupils' needs and security. "ArcGIS enables the council to take an evidence-based approach to commissioning school transport and justify the need for explicit transportation services for specific pupils, based on a better understanding of the journeys they need to make," says Tim Hudson, Information Exploitation Team Manager at Norfolk County Council.

#### ***Improved staff productivity and faster decision making***

The app has been well received by members of staff, who can now work more productively. The rapid visualisation of schools and pupil locations enables the SEN transportation team to make quicker decisions about the most suitable transportation routes and methods. Consequently, the team can process applications in less time and advise families about travel arrangements more promptly. As Mr Hudson says, "The app speeds up the whole SEN transportation process, from beginning to end."

#### ***Better information to support future planning***

In the future, the SEN Travel Viewer app will also be used to help pinpoint the most advantageous locations for new SEN schools and facilities, based on the proximity of the young people who require access to these services. The council will be able to identify central locations and plan strategically to reduce journey times and improve convenience for pupils and their families. In this way, ArcGIS will continue to play a key role in helping the council to improve both the quality and cost efficiency of SEN provision throughout the county in the years ahead.