

Anyone who has witnessed the difference in traffic between term time and school holidays will know the impact of the school run on congestion.

Consequently local authorities are increasingly looking at ways of cutting car journeys to schools. One of the most recent ideas is to use a website to link parents who offering or looking for lifts for their children.

Hannah Moore, the school travel plan co-ordinator at Cambridgeshire County Council, is one of the first to put the idea into practice. She said: "I have been working with 12 independent schools in the same area of Cambridge. As these are private schools, they have a huge catchment area and the children are not entitled to free public transport. Parents also said their children were too small and the distance too great for them to travel other than by car."

Carol Smith, bursar at St Faith's, one of the participating schools, said: "I think it's a tremendous idea. We have put together recommendations for parents on what they ought to do before they commit themselves to lifts, such as looking at the car, seat-belts, insurance, meeting the driver. It's the joint responsibility of both parents to make sure that they are happy."

A secure website has been provided by Shareajourney.com and is run by volunteer parent Sue Dampier, whose own daughter is now old enough to travel by train.

Although she has registered 26 families she has not had a match yet. She said: "We launched at the start of the autumn term by then travel arrangements had been finalised. I think it will pick up after the results of the next entrance exams are out and parents suddenly realise they need to arrange transport."

She is not alone in her optimism that this system can work. Other local authorities are moving towards similar schemes with the London Borough of Bromley launching at Easter. Its project will include Criminal Records Bureau checks of participating parents.