

I ask that this petition be carried forward until we can guarantee the lives of school children.

We find this reply from Stewart Stevenson a disappointment, we are unsure exactly what he has in mind.

Aberdeenshire Council has been involved since this started in 2004, & to be honest, we find their approach patchy so far, the simplest of cures, ensuring the sign is removed is only one. They have to their credit started a trial as regards SeeMe & do have other solutions to come apparently, but dark nights again grow closer. We await their promises given to Stewart Stevenson & ourselves in December 2008.

There are many simpler solutions that can be implemented that will help save lives & injuries, other local authorities can also adopt them, & these will help, but we need to hear a need to do so.

All safety measures need to be the same over Scotland, if this does not happen, some children will have better safety measures than others, this is not inclusive care for children, it's a piecemeal approach, that cannot work safely.

To leave safety problems with any local authority, will result in little being done,

For us the whole situation is beyond understanding, it appears to us no council wants to truly resolve this issue, it now falls to your petitions committee to try & salvage something that will save lives.

Failing this it will need to be raised within The Scottish Parliament itself, we cannot turn our backs on children now. How can we!, other families are relying on us & yourselves.

Many private operators have a good coach fleet, well up to date, well maintained, but have problems because their pricing takes in the cost of a newer fleet. Where as those with older coaches can bid low, the results we see in Alford & in other areas under operation coachman. More money surely has to be spent on school transport, we get what we pay for! Visit Scotland can find £800,000 to pay for for survey's. This does wonders for school transport safety.

It has been underfunded for years, in fact barely looked at, until this was brought before the petitions committee in 2006.

Aberdeenshire told me they have to accept best value, in other words the cheapest price, as financially they could not fight any court case to prove otherwise, I was told this at a meeting. Does this mean the school contract is not worth the paper it's printed on!

Safety measures need to be the same Scotland wide, otherwise some children will have better safety protection than others, this is not inclusive care for children, it is, it's a piecemeal approach, that cannot work, but it's the one in place now, today, & it's in daily use.

Every local authority needs the same safety rules, surely, the result of not doing so results in bus companies, or in fact the drivers themselves, deciding when the signs & lights should be displayed, a ridiculous situation, that cannot be allowed to continue.

We see in the letter from the Dept of Transport, there is some leeway regarding legislation, there are numerous suggestions, all would benefit children, this being the case, we see no reason what so ever that local authorities cannot be encouraged/forced to adopt them & asap, as said, there seems to be this lack of will to do so.

If a council adopts any H&S legislation, it applies to all their workers, surely the same situation should apply to school children & safety, so all are protected, accidents do not recognise postcodes.

What happens if you don't, can be seen in replies I have from Local Authorities.

We have also to recognise this problem is not just Aberdeenshire's, but the whole of Scotland. We recognise Aberdeenshire's contribution re seat belts will make & the costs involved, however removing a sign & using lights will cost virtually nothing?

We have no records of deaths from lack of seat belts as yet, but we recognise a child requires the same safety they would expect in their family car, so yes, they are required.

It seems that every decision asked, falls to the Local authorities, this being so, the realisation for us is little will be done , the councils will decide.

This should not be, it should be a national safety policy, protecting all children on school transport, at least.

Some simple schemes will never see the light of day, some expensive schemes that will benefit some children may possibly be adopted , because they are high profile.

It seems even although COSLA & ATCO recommend a safety policy , councils still go their own way, looking from the outside in, we do not see the democracy at work here.

This month alone I have record & reported 7 instances of "outing jollies" & service buses wrongly showing the safety sign, this is only in this small part of Scotland

One was a tour bus, Henry's Coaches, Neilston, Glasgow, parked in Macduff, with posters stating it was hired to David Urquhart travel, not only showing the school safety sign , but the safety sign was sprayed on to the coach, which of course means, its never comes off, how does this work for school safety. Most routes this bus is on, the safety sign is displayed, probably incorrectly.

I would like to draw the committees attention to this mail, it was submitted a bit late due to Mr Hutton being on holiday.

This again shows something need to be done amongst local authorities. This statement 'when not undertaking a contracted service' surely means no one can force a school bus contractor to remove the sign at anytime

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Alan Hutton <alan.hutton@spt.co.uk>

To: schoolbus.safetygroup@yahoo.co.uk

Cc: Jane Hutton <jane.hutton@spt.co.uk>

Sent: Wednesday, 3 June, 2009 14:14:24

Subject: Complaint BEAT989-1098

Thank you for your e-mail of 22 April and I note your comments regarding the use of school signs.

SPT act as agents for 11 councils for the purpose of procuring and managing their school transport requirements. Whilst we would support your assertion that use of the signs on other journeys dilutes other road users association with the transport of school children, neither SPT nor the councils can take action against a transport operator when not undertaking a contracted service.

However, a letter has been distributed to all operators of school contracts in our area providing guidance that signs should only be displayed on appropriate journeys to assist in raising awareness of the safety critical nature of their use.

I trust that following this guidance, operators will review their procedures in the use of signs

We asked all local authorities simple questions, the replies are as follows, you need to remember that I have reported numerous bus companies for showing the sign incorrectly ,nothing is done part from the councils writing to the offending company, & then nothing happens, its still displayed, effective council policy, how do we stop this happening.

Dumfries & Galloway

Our conditions of contract state " School bus signs should only be displayed on dedicated school transport services.....They should not be displayed at other times."

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? This is down to driver discretion

Council policy is that seatbelts will be fitted on all dedicated school journeys. This does not apply to the carriage of school children on local bus services and any change to this would require careful consideration by the relevant Council Committee.

North Ayrshire Council

[2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so.

Q2 This is a matter for individual companies. Many of them have them fixed to the vehicle because of the tendency for the signs to go missing.SPT encourages all operators to remove

them when not carrying pupils to and from the school.

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? Q3 Some operators do use hazard lights when pupils are getting on or leaving the bus. Some operators have modified vehicles to have more visible or additional hazards.

East Dunbartonshire Council

[2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. It is up to the individual contractors whether they remove the school bus safety signs after a contract has been completed.

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? This is not normal practice.

Midlothian Council

[12] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. Normally

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? Some operators do, although we do not make it a requirement.

Scottish Borders Council

[2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. Operators are asked to remove the signs when not carrying children but we don't check this currently as part of our inspection regime.

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? This is not common practice

DUNDEE

Dear Mr Beaty, All buses used by Dundee school children when travelling to and from school are deployed on commercial routes, and consequently operate under the usual commercial licence. A mix of vehicles is used to transport children with additional support needs -taxi, minibus - and all such vehicles operate within licence and the terms of the agreed contract. Yours sincerely, Jim Collins .Director of Education Designate.

NO INFORMATION AT ALL

The Moray Council

2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. Our terms and conditions do not specifically require the sign to be removed. When legislation was introduced this Council requested that the removal of school bus signs be made mandatory but this was not included in the subsequent legislation. We are aware that we have no legislative power to insist they be removed. We have in the past written to all our contractors advising that we consider it good practice for the sign to be removed when not carrying school pupils.

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? Yes. We have also just equipped one of our own buses with additional high visibility flashing lights and we are in the process of acquiring further sets of high visibility lights for our own fleet.

Shetland Islands Council

[2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. Yes

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? No

East Ayrshire Council

[2] Is the school bus safety sign removed when no children are aboard? We are aware that there is no legal requirement to do so. Some companies will remove school bus signs but most do not.

[3] Do the coaches/ buses use hazard lights to warn motorists, when loading or unloading, out with school property ? This is not required in our condition of contracts so it would be up to each individual operator.

As you can see its a real mix & match, this is not what school safety should be about, this is not inclusive child safety.

It is hard to obtain information from local authorities, however from this sample , rules differ widely. This obviously shows children in different authorities are being put at greater risk than others.

Surely with the best will in the world , we cannot allow councils & bus companies to set the

agenda, we see the result's of this so far, not even the basics of safety measures in place & those that are are at odds with each other.

So where does this leave us & Scotland's children, the SEE ME scheme to be trialled by the councils in this area, unless it is used at every bus stop, will again promote safety more for some than others, so it needs to cover every bus stop.

The cost is, each flashing bus stop will cost £1.300 p/a & each child's sender unit £35.00 p/a, why can this not be tied in with other cheaper safety measures,

Some School Transport Deaths in scotland, not counting the hundreds of seriously injured children

ABERDEEN 1993. ABERDEENSHIRE 2008 2 deaths ANGUS 1983 AYRSHIRE 1993 -
BIGGAR 2001 CARNWARTH 1994 TWO DEATHS EDINBURGH 2007 FALKIRK 2001
GREENOCK 1983 GIRVAN DATE UNKNOWN NVERNESS 2000s 2 deaths STIRLINGSHIRE
2000
MORAYSHIRE 1972 PERTHSHIRE 2001/2005 WEST LOTHIAN 1999 plus 2 other fatalities in the
1980s.

Total cost £1.5 million for every fatal accident, £3-400,000 for serious injury , plus, a horrdous cost, but it is the reality of accidents, any spenditure outlayed could be recouped from this!
Can we really make school buses more visable & forget about the service buses that also carry school children,how do we make these more visable,the questions seems to go on & on, because no one has ever really questioned these laws , these laws or regulations now however are being questioned.

Not to do so would be to allow those children to be less protected than others, yet they are still on the school run, or in fact a school outing, where they still need protecting.

We can change nothing, we can do nothing apart from laying this before you,you have the power to change things, to turn school bus safety around, not to do so is going to condemn some children to death & many hundreds more to inuries that leave them wheel chair bound & brain damaged.

Not an easy decision for anyone, we realise this, but it will happen again & again, we know not all accidents can ever be totally stopped, but you are in a positon to be ensure there are many less.

Maybe the only way to solve this question is to have a judicial enquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Ron Beaty

www.schoolbus.org.uk