

## **PE1223/L**

### **Petitions Committee Submission by petitioner.**

I found this reply hard to answer, It angers me that after all these months, this is all the Transport Directive can come up with, is this their answer to the parents of school pupils killed or injured, some seriously. I find myself questioning the establishment I thought would change Scotland for the better. I Read the reply from Transport Directive with sadness & incredulity. It's hard to believe this came from an organisation within our parliament.

Starting with what is has achieved as regards school bus safety, in fact nothing. Ambitions for road safety, what they will deliver over the next 10 years, we don't have 10 years, and neither does the next accident.

There is nothing there that specifically mentions school transport why does that surprise us; it's rarely mentioned until after an accident, that is the norm. I ask the committee to read each answer given by the directive, and then tell us what this means for school transport safety?

It goes on how it will ensure etc. Plenty words of little substance apart from collating results , high level strategic grouping, promoting, encouraging, supporting, intelligence led, I question that one ?buzz words

### The results of the SEEME Trial

We have no details of any of the following, nor have we read any of the following, nor have we been involved with any of the following, we are serious stakeholders in this, we are the ones affected & we find the following unacceptable, until we know how they were carried out & under what circumstances. These questions need answered & readdressed.

[1] Focus group discussions with pupils involved in the trail

How many pupils were involved, where did this take place & when

[2] When these discussions took place who else was involved?

LA officials SeeMe officials were leading questions asked, who prepared the questions?

[3] On line drivers survey.

We have never heard of it, when were drivers notified of this, where was it advertised, how many drivers took part & from which areas?

[4] How many bus drivers were questioned?

Were the companies national or were private firms involved in this?

How many drivers were questioned?

[5] A questionnaire was sent.

How many parents were asked, how many participated & in which areas, how was it ensured all parents were involved & replied?

Producing a booklet for the consideration of LAs, LAs meet regularly with others, share good practice, is school transport safety ever discussed, its certainly not acted on then.

The Scottish Government makes it clear that it is up to individual LAs to consider & dictate the best & safest ways to get children to school. This is hand washing in public, we have done all we can, its up to LAs, no it's not, an elected Government leads!

Children are being bussed by LAs under different safely policies, how can this be inclusive safety, how can The Transport Directive not have an answer to this. This is shocking news to any parent, a child in one region, will have greater safety measures than a child in another.

Does the petitions comm. think this is good practice, safe practice I ask each one of you that question? Safety needs to be implemented in a uniform way across every local authority? Not as it is at present, a piecemeal approach, some choose, others don't. Is this not failing & failing both child & parent, it's a total failure of safety; someone else's child is better protected than yours. What kind of Scotland is this?

Obviously this is not working, there has to be another way, LAs differ in the application of your Governments recommendations, school transport safety is not inclusive over all the regions, some are above the standard set, others below, just ask each one, do they implement your recommendations, or not & why not ? I have asked them.

Why when safety practices are adopted, they are mostly the minimum & not maximum?

Why is second best, it would not be allowed for adults, so why children?

Until we started to ask the awkward questions on school bus safety, no one really cared. Malcolm Bruce raised this matter in the House of Commons 10 years ago, we are now asking awkward question & we are still are not getting proper answers, only excuses from Transport Scotland, & not even good one's at that. School transport safety has not moved on in 30 years!

We ask you, where are the answers to the questions you actually asked of the directive, not the clever bulking up of wording on pages to make them look longer, take out most of what means anything & you end up with just over a page that gives a correct assumption.

So after all the questions you asked , the directive hardly answers any ,of course the last statement says it all .The Scottish Government tell us, they have no reason to believe that local authorities are failing in this respect. In that case explain why there is a safety difference between Local Authorities,  
Why do some have seat belts & others don't,  
Why some remove the safety sign & others don't,  
Why some use head lights & others don't.  
Why do some use hazard lights & some don't.  
Why do some bus companies allow their drivers , to make the decision whether both sign & hazard lights removed or used , then in the end no one does!

LAs have to fund any improvement themselves which in fact will probably see many safety projects shelved, like the SeeMe system at £1400.00 for each bus stop & £35.00 for each pupils senders unit. Multiply that for each pupil & each bus stop they use, I need to say no more! Neither is it the complete answer if it is to provide safety for every child.

If it is affordable & covers every LA & every bus stop, we will support it, if one LA decides not to adopt it, how can we support it, how can you support it?

There are other effective measures that are cheaper, we have already mentioned them in the past, one is a scrolling sign in the front & back window of each bus, "CAUTION SCHOOL BUS" OR "SCHOOL CHILDREN CROSSING SLOW DOWN" The Cost £1700 per sign which could come down with bulk purchase.

A Better & larger school safety sign that lights up, extra hazard lights fitted higher up on the bus. Simply make the bus more visible, is this so hard to do. In fact why not ask an expert on this subject who has designed a wonderful safety idea; I can give you his name, the bus companies are aware of him & are in fact working with him at this time, I think you should be also. Please allow him to contact you,

Transport Scotland have not thought school transport through, unless you come to the dangerous conclusion, we can place SeeMe bus stops only in certain areas, there by depriving children of an inclusive safety policy across Scotland. Every worker within this parliament & in every LA, are covered by the same safety legislations, should school pupils be any less protected, because they stay in different regions, I ask you this question ?

Why make a bus stop more visible, yet neglect to make the school bus the same, this is the vehicle that carries them, would this not be a safer option, but both are options. Does this not make more sense in today's financial climate & again we ask for a pilot for no passing, push for it, Scotland is capable of that surely!

How is all this going to be possible, funding, or at least help in funding should come from our Government. It is galling for us to see millions spent on other things, i won't list them however, but I am sure you will know some yourselves, yet school safety cannot get a slice of the cake. As an example, & not as yet naming the LA that replied meantime, as it would be unfair to them until all have replied. This is a reply from a mail sent to them

We would like to ask if your local authority is aware of the following safety measures regarding school transport; these are measures that can be asked of any LA & placed within their school bus operators contracts. Their reply in red.

Can ensure each coach is fitted with seat belts. **As a basic condition of contract all coaches and buses used for home to school transport must be fitted with seatbelts.**

Can ensure a pair of extra hazard lights is fitted higher up on the bus. **We are aware but this is not included in our standard terms and conditions as it would greatly restrict the number of operators who could tender for work.**

Can ensure the use hazard lights as children load & unload. **This is not common practice but could be incorporated.**

Can ensure the safety sign pictogram is removed when no children are being carried. **This is a condition in the terms and conditions for all coaches, buses and minibuses, however this is not enforced.**

Can ensure the pictogram safety sign display is larger, there is in fact no maximum size, most LAs use the minimum size. **Not aware and could be included.**

Can ensure an illuminated sign to front & rear stating CAUTION SCHOOL CHILDREN CROSSING or similar wording. **Not aware, not part of contracts at present.**

We ask if you have already considered any of these safety measures, or are in fact considering them. **As stated above.**

If so what was the outcome of these considerations & whether you will introduce them now. **We are under increasing pressure to keep contract costs down putting additional requests into the contracts, although improving service levels would have an impact on costs and restricting the number of operators who could bid.**

I am waiting for others to be sent to me

I urge you to read Transport Scotland's reply, then ask them to explain again what they mean & exactly what they have done, as in have done in normal speak. It appears on the directives side nothing has changed, in fact all we hear is there is no need to change, because a pamphlet explains all the safety measures to those who need them. A pamphlet explains, that says it all for us!

School bus safety in 2009 consists of two pathetically small signs, often not removed, on some buses screwed on, on others stencilled on, & hazard lights that every motorist uses at the newsagents, some use seat belts. Basically this to be the sum total of school bus safety in the 21st century. Is this really the best we can do to protect children from being run down as they leave the bus?

Why can't we ensure a school bus looks like one, many vehicles have more visible safety lighting then a school bus, but you could miss a school bus, especially if it's a service bus, also being used as a school bus, there are more safety laws for transporting animals than children.

The photo you see is from East Riding of Yorks, an in house engineer made a rough design, its used on trial fixed to 3 school buses, it can be improved on. It would need to be adapted for buses to be used, or be easily removed when not on the school run.

Possibly fitted higher, but it cant be expensive & most LAs will have someone who could make this in house? Surely we can all see looking at it, it's 1000 times better than anything we have at present & furthermore it's in use now! They simply asked VOSA who agreed, yet we have LAs 1 year past the last death, still pontificating, still unsure if they can do this or that, still asking both governments & the DOT for advice.

This council in England simply tried to do what they could, & by doing so placed shame on some of our LAs, who to say the least are slow to act, & in some cases totally unaware of the improvements they are able to provide.

We have asked all LAs in Scotland if they were aware that they had the power to insist extra safety measures could be used, most answered no! We then asked them if they were aware of these extra safety measures, as agreed by the DOT, most answered No. But many now through our intervention are aware & some intend to upgrade in the future that is encouraging, how ever the future is to far away for the next death or injury. There is a Department of Transport & OECD report which shows a lack of research in rural

areas. It states *from all appearances, the rural road safety problem has been neglected over the years in comparison to the high level of attention that has been given to the safety problems on motorways, and urban/residential roads and streets.*

*This is evidenced by the general lack of explicit safety policies or targets for rural roads in most OECD countries. Given this state of affairs, the rural road safety problem deserves a higher priority in future road safety policies, without neglecting the urban road safety problem.*

If I may just draw this to your attention

*When the UK ratified the UNCRC, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child , [does our Government also support this?] it made promises to the children and young people in this country that it would make life better for them by respecting and promoting the standards set out in the Convention. These promises are relevant to this petition & include:*

*Article 3.1 - the best interests of the child should be at least a primary consideration in decisions made by legislative bodies or administrative authorities;*

*Article 3.3 – institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety and health;*

*Article 4 – the State shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention;*

*It also sets out the fundamental human rights that all children around the world, without discrimination, are entitled to. It sets out minimum benchmarks in rights for children rather than “best practice”; countries are thus encouraged to exceed the standards laid out in the Convention, but should not fall short of its basic requirements.*

I think if this was brought before UNCRC, they would support our petition

So until the next accident Transport Scotland do nothing, we ask this committee, please ensure change, ensure safety over all of Scotland, ensure LAs are forced to heed decisions made by an elected government, not rejected by unelected council executives, ensure lives are saved & injuries are avoided.

You can do this, this is achievable, lets be proud of the day Scotland managed to ensure all school pupils have the same level of

protection on the bus. You will then have the eternal gratitude of every parent & avoid the tragic nightmare of losing or having a child impaired for life, is that not worth the effort.

I draw the committee's attention to the following. Saturday 24 th October in Fraserburgh, a bus from McColls of Vale of Leven, with a football team on board. **Showing the school bus safety sign**, this is never ending & only one example of what is a common event every weekend.

How can this help school pupil safety, even when the LAs tell bus companies, if they do, to remove the sign, many simply dont bother. So much for the Scottish Transport Directives assertion, that school transport is safe & they are doing all they can

What is the cure, push for a law that will make LAs & bus companies responsible, we await the next accident

To return to one of the question asked of the directive

**The Scottish Government has no reason to believe that local authorities are failing in this respect**

We believe, as do many parents & as in fact school pupils themselves do, & not to accept this as the truth, if school transport safety is not inclusive to every school pupil, this statement falls & it falls from a great height

Thank you for reading this statement, we rely on you now, there is no one else!





