

PE1223/Q

As regards the Scottish Government, or at least their spokes person, I fail to understand this letter.

Its letter is the biggest "cop out" I have ever read.

It appears to me & in fact others within our group that it's simply "buck passing"

I look at this letter in total disbelief that any government can come to a decision where they sit on their hands & in fact do nothing. But simply leave every decision to LA.

At this moment I am saddened to think on this as a Scottish Government decision. I feel our Scottish government is so far removed from what its people & voters require.

However a decision that places safety of school children on local authorities, when in fact Our Government should be taking the lead & should in fact rise to the occasion regarding school bus safety, I know there is a huge problem with this, as in fact the committee does.

> They state Local authorities meet regularly under the auspices of the Road Safety Working Group of SCOTS (the Society of Chief officers of Transportation in Scotland) to discuss transport matters and share good practice.

What did they actually discuss & what decisions were made regarding this & it should be available under the freedom of information act if not forthcoming. This should also include any discussions with the police, all should be available.

Is this in fact is this even good practice by our government?

A government that allows a safety difference between local authorities that don't give school pupils the same level of safety across our own country. Many school buses without seat belts, the removal of the safety sign, the lack of hazard lights being used, the sign being so low down its masked by other vehicles etc, the simply fact that a school bus is a normal bus with the smallest safety sign they can fit & is in most cases a normal bus, nothing really standing out to show otherwise, next time you see a school bus, look at the sign, do you think it is sufficient on such a wide expanse of glass or on the back?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our government addressed these safety issues with an open heart & open minds & did not simply quote this or that, but actually addressed matters that could help?

How can they possibly share good practice when they ignore this matter & pass it into the hands of LAs, that fact that some pupils travel to school safer than others should sound alarm bells, that every local authority can cherry pick as to what they wish, or think, should be included as regards safety in a school contract.

They also state they

> There is no doubt that excellent progress has been made towards achieving current road casualty reduction targets for 2010  
Stats 19 that records these figures are not totally correct!  
We know this, they know this, you know this!

Why not issue strict government guidelines re school bus safety as a government; this surely could be done instead of leaving it up to LAs  
Why does our government not lead by example, this is what the voters expect.

Who then can force a LA to change, we can't!

Ordinary people have no power over this, we cannot change this, nor can we change the minds of LAs, until of course some tragic accident happens, which it will, then we will see all the hand wringing again, hear all the expressions of sorrow, yet the Scottish Government will not grasp the thistle & take control. We are going round in circles!

They state > What lessons have been learned from this and in what specific ways has school bus safety improved?

But do not even answer the question in fact, it has not improved, deaths are ongoing as are injuries.

I would ask the petitions committee to read Key 2007 Road Accident Statistics Where by it states stats 19 are inaccurate to begin with, I also have this in writing from Road Safety Scotland

Some one alighting from a bus is recorded as a pedestrian accident, which it is not. This covers school pupils. Some accidents fall through the safety net.

The figures stated will change with every accident. It would only take one accident to destroy these figures & they in fact have already changed sadly regarding the bus crash in Biggar in November & the death of a school pupil. As the ones in England would change with the recent school bus deaths in Cumbria.

One injury would change these figures, they are in fact meaningless; they are simply a guide & should not be relied on.

No one can forecast what will happen in 1 year, never mind 5, its fine saying all this is left to LAs, but many will not change, some will not respond to mails from us asking what there safety procedures are, so how will we ever find out, the Government needs to ask.

This is not our job; this is the job of government, surely!

What about the other LAs through out Scotland, has the government even asked them exactly what safety measure they take & what they consider safe working practices, or in fact good practice, or is this also left to our group?

You asked them "What lessons have been learned from that and in what specific ways has school bus safety improvements"

The only change I can see is in Aberdeenshire who are making huge strides to ensure school bus safety, we are grateful for that, but what about the other LAs, what are they doing? We SIMPLY have a fragmented school transport safety policy.

Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2020: Framework Summary

They State they Investigate, report and implement ways to help ensure schoolchildren's safety when getting on and off school buses

Have the Scottish government done so? & how have they done so.

This whole reply says nothing, I feel so sorry for the petitions committee who have worked so hard on this to end up facing in effect a brick wall of "we don't want to know", Its up to the LA, the same ones who wont listen to us.

Some simply refused to acknowledge our mails, nor in fact found the subject important enough to reply to.

SPT gave us a vague reply to the effect that they managed, I think 11 councils, & as far as they knew there were no problems, however they were not aware of the changes they could make, so where does that statement stand, as far as I am aware Lanark is one, this would cover the Biggar School accident !

Aberdeenshire & other LAs we have been in contact with tell us, contrary to our government & DOT opinion, who both state the removal of the school safety sign can be implemented through contracts.

That this is incorrect, LA insist they have no power to insist this can be implemented on out of contract school bus, BUT this is exactly where the problem lies, on out of contract buses.

How on earth can this even start to work under this basis, someone is being liberal with the truth, the question is, who!

> Does the size of the bus determine the size of the safety sign at the back? For example, is the 'school bus' sign the same size at the back of a single deck bus as it is on a large 100 seat double deck bus?

Their answer does not even state the sign can be larger, it only says "minimum size" The same answers to questions time after time, and it's a disgrace.

It's little wonder LAs are unsure of steps to take.

Both COSLA and ATCO (Scotland) support the signs removal. Yet no one in government has taken this particular problem forward to Westminster.

The questionnaire I sent to some LAs showed that many were totally unaware of any safety changes they could make as in size of sign, illuminated signs, higher hazard lights, or the fact hazard lights them selves could even be used.

We had to tell them, the Scottish Government certainly did not do so!

Nor in fact did the DOT, it was only when questions were asked by MSPs & ourselves of the DOT these came to light?

This is the state of school bus safety, that pupil's rights to safety are being ignored by some LAs, & in fact by the Scottish Government by not ensuring all pupils have the same level of safety.

The Scottish government tells us the LAs have a responsibility of care to pupils, if I may add, so does our government!

What about the Scottish Government meeting their statutory obligations & not simply buck passing it to LAs.

This whole letter it seems is buck passing in every way

Why cant the Scottish Government give strict guide lines , instead of "best left to LAs" Its not best practice left to them.

As stated "It is not, however, for central government to try to influence contracts which are the statutory responsibility of education authorities.

How would or could guidelines affect contracts, what rubbish, they are guidelines to LA, not bus companies.

I may add, these changes by Aberdeenshire Council would never of happened if not for the deaths of two teenagers, they were prompted not just by the accidents but by pressure by us, it was not a voluntary decision they took.

There have been other fatalities in Aberdeenshire & other injuries long before these ones, nothing changed

I have been campaigning since my grand daughter was run down & left brain damaged in 2004, nothing changed then, it took two deaths, it took our pressure group to open eyes & ears.

However these decisions are welcomed & it now places Aberdeenshire at the fore of school bus safety, where does that leave the rest of the LA.

As regards the FAI

The reason the Sheriff made a fatal decision to do nothing was due to a simply fact, he told us on the last day " he was impressed that on his way to the FAI he saw one bus driver remove the sign"

On that, some of his judgement was based, not that he asked if we had evidence to the contrary, which we do!

He believed one school bus driver who in court swore on oath he used hazards always, whom we consequently proved he did not & had not done so for months, we in fact had the driver removed from that run, the same run that Robyn Oldham was sadly killed on, because we had evidence he did not use hazards & said he never would!.

I would copy two small items to you in closing from John Burch of the CPT, it makes interesting reading

There are a number of reasons why the UK stopped short of requiring signs to be removed when vehicles were out of service and not carrying school children. Firstly in some cases it is impractical to remove signs from vehicles where there is no rear window and the sign has to be displayed in some other way on the rear of the vehicle. Some operators have chosen to display the symbol in the form of a permanently painted branding on the rear (for example on some yellow school buses). **I add on other buses as well**

These signs notoriously go missing when shifted constantly to and from vehicles. While it may work to have a sign store pool from which drivers take signs on some occasions and in some places – in others it is not appropriate (for example in small outstation locations very common with school operations).

Some operators experimented with slip plates or flip over signs. Others with roller blind displays. All have had varying degrees of success, but tend to have their pros and cons depending on vehicle / operation type eg a mixed coach operation often wishes its vehicles to have a clean smart external appearance and will not wish to have the external appearance cluttered with such fitments, **[ THIS IS THE SAFETY SIGN WE ARE TALKING ABOUT I ADD, maybe these companies should not in effect have the contract if this is their way of thinking ]** while bus operators may find that a destination display or electronic version of the display works well for their drivers).

Often vehicles are engaged on school operation all day, but move between sites. While they may be out of service between live runs, they are still on school work all day.

To force a driver to constantly replace and remove signs during short distance empty runs is not favoured in many quarters

**So safety in this instance is not favoured, yes we have a long way to go**

This is a tragic situation that the Scottish Government is also in danger of copying, by leaving this in the hands off LAs & bus companies, What will change safety wise, nothing I am afraid because there is no incentive to do so & no penalties for not doing so.

It is sad to think that again another school pupil will be killed or injured through LAs & governments ineptitude to grasp this serious situation & instead simply sit on their hands, because there are no real benchmarks being provided , no information going out to LAs, no ensuring things will change & no will to change school bus safety, more a fact of simply thinking "It wont happen to us". Now that is very dangerous thinking!

Yet it goes against my faith to be angry, I know in Gods time it will be sorted, Gods time is however not mine, I need to realise this.

But I place my faith in him & in the knowledge that over time things do & will change

Meantime the Scottish government will continue to sit on its hands & pass the blame, so accidents will tragically still happen through lack of safety procedures, please remember this petition in the days to come, when you again hear the sad news of another pupils death or injury.

**It is sad that even although I have tried & in fact the petitions committee have tried & we really appreciate the work you have done.  
School bus safety it seems will remain a serious & contentious issue in years to come.**