

PE1223/T

PETITION 1223

This is not written as government papers are, or as most items you will read on a day to day basis.

It is written by a grandfather, who saw his grand daughter, change from an active 8 year old to a now 15 year old, wheel chair bound, who cannot sit or stand without support & requiring 24 hour care for most tasks,. A comparison would be a puppet without strings. There are many like Erin!

I also represent many other families who have suffered over the last 30 years, we have seen the pain in other families, where have children have a 3 minute memory span, & sadly parents whose children wont ever come home. This is why I started this petition, to save lives & injuries to school pupils.

After my last petition was closed in 2006 a pupil was sadly killed leaving a school bus in Fife, on the 2nd October 2010 we had a doubled decked bus turn over leaving pupils with serious injuries, & so it goes on, luckily no deaths due to seat belts being fitted for the first year by Aberdeenshire Council, can you imagine the results without these belts on that bus, all buses that carry children should have them fitted.

Also the last two tragic accidents in Keswick & Lanark with the loss of life & severe injuries.

Many LA's in the UK are totally ignorant of many of the safety features they can use; we are often told "Hazard Lights can't be used on school buses.

There is immense ignorance of school bus safety regulations thought the UK that only the passing of laws will achieve ensuring everyone sings from the same hymn sheet.

This needs to be urgently addressed, most charities seem to concentrate on teaching safety, where as in effect its legislation that needs changed as well.

Turning to the SCOTS letter which is basically incorrect & fact full of inaccuracies. It seems they are not even aware ATCO supported our first petition in 2006.

SCOTS> [The statistics do not say whether a seatbelt was fitted or worn so it is not possible to say whether or not the 2 casualties might have reduced.](#) This is a serious omission indeed, the pupils were in fact crossing the road, not on the bus, but again like most organisations there are no suggestions trying to improve safety, as in many replies from transport organisations, from Transport Scotland, to DOT quoting the law or current regulations.

Also stated > [There is currently no single seatbelt that will fit all ages and some children require the use of a booster seat.](#) As far as we ROSPA understand on main school buses a booster seat are not required, so again wrong!

[There is currently no single seatbelt that will fit all ages;](#) neither do car belts but they all adjust. It appears other LEA have managed to do so, as belts are already fitted to many school buses?

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This statement from CPT, who represents bus operators, is incredible, remember they want the contract as well, yet state

[>operators often wish its vehicles to have a clean smart external appearance and will not wish to have the external appearance cluttered with such fitments? Yes it says it all!](#)

Another was > [to force a driver to constantly replace and remove signs during short distance empty runs is considered unnecessary.](#) Incredible & very sad

The common theme that runs through all these organisations is no mention of how they can help or change safety; it's never positive regarding change. Children's needs are always ignored, they protect their organisation firstly. Sadly many animals have more rights as regards safe travel & under legislation. A reply from Stats 19, the accident figures quoted "wouldn't" specifically relate to school bus incidents but encompass other types of parked vehicles". It is only as accurate as the reporting police officer's recording of the incident, they are often otherwise busy. Stats 19 figures have never been 100% accurate, plus the fact they were rounded up to cover years where the figures were a guestimate

Statistics never show in reality the problems. Each seriously injured child is usually a brain damaged child, children slightly injured can also go on to develop other serious brain problems, details from CBIT.

Many school bus deaths & injuries are simply classed as pedestrian accidents & have been for the last 30 odd years.

It's been discussed at Westminster for over 30 years & again after every accident, yet nothing changes, LA are allowed to set their rules, which very sadly allows a some pupils travel to school safer than others, thought the UK in fact, because LAs don't all insist on every safety measure being taken, so it is not inclusive safety. It's a fact some pupils travel to school safer than others, which cannot in 2010 be morally or legally right.

The regulations simply requires the sign to be "plainly visible" to road users and does not provide any further guidance. Often the front signs are propped up on the passenger door side, others on the rear can be too high, too low or in the middle. A huge windscreen, a tiny sign taking up a mere 300 mm either way. Smaller than a hard hat sign on a building site, fact!

The new rear signs being trailed by Aberdeenshire Councils are larger, but with a larger vehicle stopped behind, even another bus, they can be masked to the second vehicle, so not plainly visible from behind at all.

Sometimes the sign is behind tinted windows, they are not visible enough & this should involve the police.

Rear safety sign on school bus, size 450x450, again there is no legal size. But many bus companies ignore this, Aberdeenshire are changing this, but why no flashing lights on the sign, this is being short sighted when strides can be taken forward regarding the use of small strobe lights.

Why can we not simply have a school bus that looks like one & provides adequate safety for the pupils, it's simply normally a coach or bus, with two small signs, is this really the best we can do in 2010, when electrical gadgets are so cheap?

That is why we ask for flashing lights Northern Ireland style for 2011 on the bus sign or in fact small strobe signs on the sign itself, they cannot be missed & every flashing light is visible to every driver, it catches all drivers' attention.

We are told much of this can be cured through contracts; the truth of the matter is LA will not do so. We are told that when a school bus is out of contract they have no control over the signs use? Yet this is when the problem arises!

We have been through this time & time again with the same standard replies from Transport Scotland & DOT, etc, but no end result, regulations should in fact cement things together, but don't.

Can't we have a meeting with all involved, bus companies, the petitions committee, the Government, LAs & ourselves to thrash this out, & give these regulations some teeth? This is beyond me, pupils should take center stage here, but don't.

In fact a change of law would do just that, then the claimed "I forget" would not apply, drivers don't forget their yellow jackets. What about a judicial review, on the basis that all LA are not using the safety advice available to them, nor in fact that the DOT are giving hard & fast rules, but regulations without teeth.

There is little joined up thinking & apparently little thought about changing how everyone views school transport outside this committee. It is not enough to say accident figures are coming down, that all can be changed in one single accident. More thought should be placed on how we ensure pupils safety, through education in a real way, not through cartoons, which it appears hardly work & through legislation that in time usually works as it beds in.

Many LAs ignore these regulations, some don't know they exist. This means pupils travel safer in some parts of the UK than in others & we are now contacted by parents & groups through out the UK, so many worried parents then!

[This is unfair, it discriminates & is selective in choice, and it is also a disgrace in the year 2010. This problem has been ongoing for over 30 years!, We still have regulations & recommendations, that many bus ops & LEAs don't apply,](#) What is the point, if they are toothless regulations, we need a law change here

We all know that children tend to be the most vulnerable to injuries and it is because they are exposed to dangers that are beyond their cognitive and sensory development. It's not until later teens do they developed crucial judgment skills to estimate how far away a car is and how quickly it is approaching.

I ask this is forcibly taken forward to the DOT & Westminster, & as this parliament slowly comes to an end next year, & expect this petition with it, is this now the time that school bus safety is now openly discussed by the Scottish Parliament, also in Westminster itself for a consensus of opinion.

This might mean that both the Parliament & petitions committee can take this further with more force to those who change the law.

Bus companies tell us the school safety sign safeguards other vulnerable groups using the bus, disabled & older folk. But it was not designed for that; this is a mind set that needs broken.

These regulation's need to made law with clear guide lines & with penalties involved, then there would be no excuse for any driver forgetting.

All LEAs should also operate the same safety measures; it should not be a piece meal effect. I hear the argument, LAs need to decide for themselves what is right & best for their area, possibly in some cases yes, no in other cases like this, where basic safety & common sense is not being applied evenly , that is why we have this mess, LAs doing there own thing.

We ask that the DOT & the UK Parliament insist new laws are passed, so LEAs are led by these same laws to apply the maximum safety requirements, which they don't at this time. This can surely be started within our own chamber, there has to be an appetite for this going by my replies from MSPs & MPs.

Yes it's that simple, as most of our suggestions have been through out this petition, we ask for nothing that cannot be achieved by someone who has the power & will to change. Without change lives will still be lost & pupils injured to the extent that they are brain damaged, is this the only way ahead. Surely in 2010 we can change this, surely there has to a will to do so, you are all parents or grand parents, problem is in fact none of this has visited your own family, once it does, your mind will change, however we would not wish this on any family , that is why I am hear again today.

Surely any right minded person would agree things need to change, that this cannot go on, what I do know is without change parents will continue lose children, or have them left brain damaged at the least, when a solution can be achieved.

After the next bus accident, & there will be one soon, can you live with yourself if you don't change & insist on new laws?

We can not stop fighting for change, how can we knowing that more deaths will follow. You need to read the heart breaking letters we get going back to 1972 & still no change. If we don't continue to fight for school pupils safety, for a safety policy that ensures every school pupil has the same right to safety UK wide, who does.

As a committee, once again, knowing all that has been already discussed through the petition, we ask; help us change something that saves lives & injuries.

PLEASE

OUR WANTS ARE SIMPLE

- A school bus to look visually like one
- We want flashing lights on the bus or the sign itself , if NI can do this , so can we, not simply hazards lights
- We want the safety sign larger more visible, why should adverts on a bus carrying pupils should be larger than the safety sign,
- We want a new regulation/law making it an offence to display the safety sign when its not used on a school bus, which we feel makes simple common sense otherwise why have a regulation in the first place
- It's left to bus drivers or in fact there employer to decide when the sign should be removed, should they decide on your child's safety, I think not.
- Signs to be displayed properly, there is no law that states where the sign should be displayed, common sense should tell you it must be visible to all drivers, its not, it can be placed anywhere on the coach or bus.
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY** We want a regulations/laws that states every child in the UK has the same right to safety, at present LAs, put in place what they think is correct, Your child could be less safe than one in another area
WHY
- We want seat belts in all buses used by pupils, their in your car, why not in the bus, there is a law in place but it uses the date of registration before it becomes force able. hence old buses

Each fatal accident costs the public purse £1.5 million pounds, then there is support & care from social services for those who require lifetime care. Which i am sure cannot be to far away from this figure