

**PE1223/II**

**Petitioner Letter of 27 November 2011**

Regarding seat belts and school bus safety being devolved.

Once again it seems Transport Scotland are the hold up, this situation is now becoming ridiculous. To take 12 months to resolve seems beyond the pale, I am at a loss of how we continue to proceed?.

As you know we do not have the political clout of IAM or Rospa, we are simply a group of parents and grandparents who have either lost children or had them seriously injured.

Of course seat belts do not answer the question of signage which is as important; I think Keith Brown was told DfT wished to wait on the EU before deciding.

This safety problem goes hand in hand with seat belts, so we not only protect pupils inside the bus.

Why would this need to wait, there are many signs within the EU that will never be uniform for various and obvious reasons.

Northern Ireland has already changed their safety signs with the statement:

- the signs must be illuminated when children are travelling to and from school on a 'school service' and the flashing warning lights must be in operation while children are getting on and off the bus, and for up to eight seconds after the door is closed.

From 24 March 2011, all Northern Ireland's buses, coaches and minibuses providing home to school services are now allowed use new high impact illuminated signs and flashing warning lights. These new signs and lights will be gradually introduced over the next three years becoming mandatory in September 2014

In Wales seat belts will become compulsory on all school buses in October 2014.

Where is Scotland in all this?

**We don't in fact even have** a good practice policy as local authorities (LAs) adopt what they want, thereby ensuring some pupils travel to school safer than others

It does also affect those south of the border, I have photos of tour buses with the school bus safety sign permanently stuck to the back of buses also used for school work.

This of course also happens in Scotland as we know, and of course totally dilutes the purpose of this sign, why would anyone with any sense display a school safety sign on something other than a school bus?, but they do.

We also have signs displayed that are illegal, that are passed by police officers, including traffic police on a daily basis.

I had a meeting with Grampian Police regarding this and was also told any sign that is not clearly visible is illegal, as I already knew.

Why then is this allowed, why is no bus company prosecuted, clearly visible means not an angle inside the windows, but flat against the window and not on the passenger side.

As we again know the sign can be any size, so why do LAs continue to allow the **smallest to be used, safety. We don't think so.**

The sign is small enough on some of the larger windscreens **it's** hardly visible. placed at this angle on the passenger side of the bus/coach.

This means it is not fully visible to oncoming traffic, which is its purpose, this is illegal under RVLA amendment [1994], something Keith Brown's department might like to check on, this is how we read it, as do police officers, yet no bus is stopped, unless reported by us.

Why do we allow a bus company or in fact a driver to decide where a safety sign should be displayed, most LAs have safety officers, it's they who should decide, but only if they have full knowledge of the subject, it is more complicated than simply placing a road sign where there are laws to show or stipulate this.

As said before, and acknowledged by many safety organisations, the best way of addressing visibility problems is by lighting, how hard would it be for small powerful LED lights to be placed with a sign and having larger signs as there is no stipulated maximum size.

Aberdeenshire Council were leading the way in this, but after the announcement a year ago, few in fact are used.

A main obstacle seems to be bus operators, who tell us it affects the coaches atheistically, is this sensible comment from those who transport pupils that the

looks of a bus are placed ahead of safety. If so companies that hold this view should not apply for contracts.

So where are we after all this time, our thanks go to this committee for keeping this petition live, to the past committee for a belief that safety will change, in fact what has changed apart from being told in 12 months things might change, but not on safety signage.

When I started my first petition in 2006, much of school bus transport was a grey area, not now, since then we have found out many things can be changed and simply. Like the position of a sign, we have also found out that many LAs and Bus companies **don't want change, it costs!**

Looking at Keith Brown's reply I am amazed when he quotes accident figures.

There is no distinction between pupils killed or seriously injured leaving the school bus, they have for the last, at least 30 years simply been called pedestrian accidents and as far as we are aware even the NHS does not record this information.

One reason for both omissions is that officers on the scene and NHS staff during emergency admission to hospital have other matters on their minds.

No where does he mention improving signage, apart from informing us LAs can insist on changes, **yes correct, but they don't** and have not done so over 30 years.

This he must know will never happen unless forced to.

Incredibly some bus companies are unaware of what size should be used and where.

Is Keith Brown and Transport Scotland quite happy that pupils travel to school safer in one part of Scotland compared to another, does this happen in his constituency? He states:

>They can, of course, already do this quite simply by stipulating that only coaches built after 2001 are used in school contracts as construction and use regulations stipulate that any coaches built since then must be fitted with lap belts.

We are told that lap belts are unsafe, it needs to be a crossover belt I would ask if his department would comment on this asap?

Keith Brown should know this won't happen, LAs will not change anything themselves or without being told to. Otherwise they would have already done so, **it's best done by regulations and** legislation.

Every LA has had a chance to update safety, even after accidents going back 30 years, they have in fact rarely done so, any that have recently is due to pressure from us, parents and the petitions committee and I find his timescale ridiculous as regards safety.

The UK government has offered to devolved power on this issue, I would have thought an SNP government would have welcomed additional powers asap?

Keith Brown might note in this instance only, in Fife, at the start of the new school session, not one bus company was legal, Mr Gary Moyes, lead officer, whose **words were in fact "found all operators failing to comply with the signage regulations"** "If this is happening in Fife , its certainly happening elsewhere as we know. This is a shocking indictment surely.

So why is this allowed to continue?.

Keith Brown may also wish to look back the petition and actually read that school bus signage is a huge concern and has been raised already.

Also he might like to ask his constituency LA what safety measures they take, or **don't**, and also look at the way signage is used.

This is the second petition regarding this, years of work and dedication, not only by myself but by your petitions committee and in fact clerks, we pay tribute to you all. **It's** self funded and at a cost because of the distance from Edinburgh I have to travel from and I have rarely missed a meeting.

Yet where do we stand today, the door to devolved powers on school bus is open, lets grasp , I am, like your selves at a loss to explain what happens next.

I cannot let this go, not in fact will I, another death or serious injury would be one too many.

Stats19 have never been 100% correct and in the last few years they cobbled figures together, that has been admitted to us in writing.

So we read that smoking might be banned in cars, drinking on trains banned, we already have changes, like the use of mobile phones, LAs have parking officials and wardens with legal powers to enforce these problems, it seems the fact that

pupils travel to school safer than others does not worry them, of course it does not raise revenue!

They cannot and in fact will not apply sensible rules to school bus safety, they are unwilling to listen to us and it appears yourselves, only a few LAs replied to **the question re "Do your school buses have seat belts"**

They have the power to **change safety procedures, but don't!**

I expect every MSP on this petitions committee, will have had at some time over the years sadly deaths and injuries in their constituency by school pupils as they leave the school bus, I ask you to think seriously about the way LAs handle this.

It will happen again, pupils will be killed or left wheel chair bound, lets us ensure it's not on our watch.

LAs also condone that school bus safety sign should be shown on mini buses carrying over 8 pupils, why would those in an 8 seater mini bus travel less safely.

Can anyone on the committee explain this, I doubt it.

Who makes these decisions?

Why are the safety officers in LAs not speaking out?

Again this is why we need rules and regulations, otherwise there will be no change.