

PE1223/QQ

PETITION COMMITTEE
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Dear Members

Alex Neil quotes TLA carried out a full evaluation of the good practice guide on school travel safety issued by Transport Scotland to all local authorities in December 2010.

This is untrue in reality, our input was too late to affect any questions asked, they were kindly added after all other decisions had been made.

So much for including us, who were congratulated by Mike Penning for finding out regulations, others did not know of!!

I also ask why this is the case when it formed part of the petition.

The powers to change signage is reserved to the UK Government **and at present there are no plans to devolve signage to the Scottish Government.**

Once again its not just about seat belts, but how simple changes in signage would improve safety.

Safety is a chain, leave out one part and it disintegrates.

I am today, 11th September in the process of reporting a Stagecoach bus to Aberdeenshire council for displaying the sign on a service run, and reported another in Moray last week. Its ongoing, some drivers don't care, this attitude can only be changed through a law, not advice that has already been given, obviously Aberdeenshires penalty policies don't work.

Unless the following questions are asked, in up coming TRL evaluation, nothing will change, regardless of Alex Neil's assurances.

Questions very relevant and we did not get any answers to, nor in fact were ever evaluated, see details at last page.

[1] How does the school sign perform behind normal glass as regards refraction?

[2] How does it perform behind tinted glass as above, and why are LAs not aware of this problem?

[3] How does the safety sign perform as regards the smallest being used, when in fact any size can be?

[4] How does the positioning of the school safety sign affect safety?

[5] How does the positioning of the safety sign affect oncoming traffic, when it is the smallest used and can be placed on the front windscreen almost lying flat?

[6] How does the positioning of the safety sign at the rear affect safety?

[7] At what distance does a driver approaching the bus actually see this safety sign?

[8] Does he agree all pupils should travel to school safely, if so why does safety vary between local authorities (LAs)?

Only a handful of drivers were asked by Aberdeenshire council regarding the safety signs, although most thought the larger ones best. It was not however a scientifically based trial therefore lacked a great deal of credibility.

Dr Neil Stewart of TRL, whom we found a great help in every way, the problem was his remit did not go far enough. If we had taken part there would be no need for a 2nd evaluation.

I have enclosed some correspondence from him that states there is a gap in knowledge.

Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, speaks about good practice.

What good practice, there is none!, as long as pupils travel to school under different safety rules, good practice should not vary with post codes, but be across the board.

Currently 12 local authorities already have seatbelts fitted on all of their school buses.

It is not just seatbelts, it's the whole safety aspect.

The process of uncovering the data on costs for the remaining 20 local authorities has proved impossible.

LAs refuse to reply, or do they find this impossible to do? That is shocking news they can ignore requests.

To fulfil this requirement we have decided to undertake research to establish fully the financial implications to local authorities.

At least this should provide the information required, it will also show those LAs who have Transport managers in charge who are unaware of their responsibilities as regards school bus safety.

As I have already stated, in the case of signage it would cost very little, Aberdeenshire has already accomplished a change, and of course ensuring the signs are removed when no pupils are aboard would have no cost.

The problem being, without a law, it will slip, penalties imposed do not work, we are still reporting this problem even in Aberdeenshire

However, I am sure you will appreciate that the full impact of any proposed legislation is properly considered prior to implementation, to avoid any unintended negative consequences.

I agree with this; however it cannot be used as a scapegoat exit.

As stakeholders we would love to be involved in the discussions, as those most affected our opinions should be taken into consideration!

In taking forward this work I would emphasise that the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to making sure that school transport in Scotland is as safe as it can be.

This will only happen through making laws ensuring safety It is plainly not as safe as it can be, there are no set rules regarding school bus safety, nor on signage, only advice

How does the Scottish Government propose they will ensure every LA acts on any measures agreed, as the Scottish Government cannot force any LA to adopt its safety procedure, unless it's made a law.

Safety signage gives drivers on the move information as they approach the bus from either direction.

Leaving the safety sign on, which is still a common problem, even when it's written into a contract, and I still reporting this on a monthly, sometime weekly basis.

Some LAs have adhesive safety signs on mini buses, buses and coaches, all used on a daily basis on service runs.

Why would on earth would any, transport manager or LA allow this, it again confuses drivers and renders the sign irrelative.

Drivers, require clear cut signage. No LA would allow confusing road signage, so why on the school bus.

I have recently reported to Fife Council adhesive signs, on Fife line buses on out of school work, it did not even merit a reply from them.

We have other LAs who use them on disabled buses, possibly illegal, it is a school bus sign!

Following this evaluation, we will also offer school travel safety workshops to relevant local authority staff and all partners and providers of school transport based on the guide and to enable discussion of good practice already in place in Scotland.

Evaluation, workshops for Pete's sake, I have been campaigning since 2004, at Parliament since 2006, and here we are now 2012. Transport Scotland. Scottish Government.

WORKSHOPS - GOOD PRACTICE, there is no standard good practice, what world does Alex Neil live in? Why not a law to ensure safety, as in Mobile phones, drink on trains, etc.

We found out the safety sign could be any size and admitted so by Mike Penning MP after being told for years it could only be the smallest size to the front.

We have huge coach windscreens with the smallest sign possible showing, this sign warns oncoming drivers, but due to its size could not possibly do so, it's often smaller than the coach number the pupil need to find their transport. Yet this sign has to inform an approaching driver, doing upwards of 50 mph that pupils are leaving the bus, impossible.

The signs can be as large as required, no legal size, Aberdeenshire have improved the rear sign, but for some reason, forgotten the front?

Yes this is the chance to get it right, but in the meantime one death or serious injury will be one to many.

Seems incredible, we can erect wind farms, underwater farms, legislate re alcohol on trains etc, in a very short time scale, but cannot get LAs, nor Scottish Transport or the Scottish Government to agree on a safety strategy to keep school pupils safe.

Now that is simply beyond me! It's time this is raised on the Parliament floor itself I think!

Ron Beaty

Replies below from TRL

Hi Ron

I would like to thank you for your time and feedback yesterday regarding the guide to improving school transport safety. I spoke to Jill Mulholland yesterday afternoon and informed her of our discussion and your comments on the guide.

In light of our conversation I have updated part of the guide to note that the position of the school bus sign should be clearly visible to other motorists and that the sign should not be displayed behind vehicle windscreens.

My contact details are below if you would like to contact me to discuss anything further.

Kind regards,

Neale

Hi Ron

Having looked into this and consulted with expert colleagues here at TRL (and their contacts) I offer the following as the best response to your email:

No one I consulted was aware of any research of the reflective luminance of school bus signs, especially when situated behind glass.

The application of anti-graffiti or anti-dew film on general road signs reduces luminance by around 5% (e.g. very little difference).

However, glass could have a much larger effect, especially if tinted and if the sign is not placed directly onto the back of the glass.

If the sign is at an angle (i.e. not vertical but propped up on a dashboard) this would impact on the luminance also.

TRL has both computer simulation software and physical sign luminance testing facilities but has never been requested to test school bus signs.

I have had some very interesting discussions regarding this issue and there does appear to be a research knowledge gap.

I hope you don't mind but I have copied in Jill Mulholland, Ian Robertson and Ewan Wallace to this email as I believe it will be of interest to them.