

PE1223/UU

Petitioner Letter of 11 November 2013

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY GROUP
TO THE PETITIONS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear All

I wish to place on record, our thanks for ensuring this petition has travelled the distance it has.

There continue to be fatalities in Scotland involving school bus transport and our prayers go out to the families involved. I can't help thinking lives could have been saved if buses were more visible, regardless.

I have enclosed this to update members who might not be fully aware of what **school bus safety is in its entirety, it's always hard** joining something half way through.

After a meeting with a representative of Transport Scotland where some **suggestion were taken away, I was left with the opinion that, it won't really** matter, i was told, virtually nothing would change, power devolved would be very little, as in Wales.

I believe the tool kit has recently been updated, although of course I have not had sight of it, so much for being kept in the loop.

My concern is, when bus safety is devolved, any committee will simply take the easy route & adopt much of what already exists to suit the UK, not Scotland & it IS not fit for purpose as it is as present.

Scotland should have a blank canvas to work on as regards school transport, let us use it wisely.

Don't let city vision cloud this problem of what we can do.

Accidents of course do happen in towns & cities; we have records of them as well.

Don't forget, most of Scotland is a rural area, we accept most of the population is in the central belt. However we also have a huge swath that is not.

Just south of Edinburgh to the borders, Perthshire, Aberdeenshire the west coast, Highlands & Islands, etc, it's huge.

My original petition was for the **No passing of school buses**, as petitions were joined, this particular request has been lost to sight.

Now as devolution powers are in our sights, I ask that we return to think seriously about NO PASSING. We now ask this is considered again, that this is the way forward.

We still think this is the best option, If this was done while the bus was unloading it would remove many of the problems.

Most accidents occur on the home coming journey however.

One complaint made by Transport Sec Sadig Khan when Malcolm Bruce raised a private members bill at Westminster for SCHOOL BUS SAFETY GROUP, was the fear traffic would speed up to avoid being behind a school bus, drivers already do this with any large vehicle, it is not an argument.

If the bus allowed vehicles to pass before moving off, this would eradicate much of this problem; it might increase time for the bus, but measured in minutes, not hours.

Being unable to police this is the same as not being able to police every 30 or 20 mph area.

Drivers mostly now slow down at schools where there is 20 mph signage that shows you the value of flashing lights.

Signage is another huge problem. It is a wide spread problem.

Signs incorrectly placed, none of this was thought through when regulations were made.

It's supposed to be clearly visible!

Not just for passing traffic, but also for approaching traffic.

Drivers need to know children are leaving a bus & being children, apt not to think ahead.

It is also a scientific fact that danger only starts to register in there early teens.

We need a visible school bus, hazard lights don't work, and every one who parks out side newsagents on double lines uses them.

I refer the committee to a reply to Frank McAveety who was convener, dated 12 March 2009, this shows what can be done meantime, yet very few LAs have adopted any of it.

Yet in itself, coupled with removing the safety sign would go some way to better safety for pupils.

We need extra lights & higher lights on the school bus. Which Dft state can be fitted, as can illuminated signs showing a steady light white to front , red to rear, once again there is no size limit, wording could be CAUTION SCHOOL CHILDREN, there is nothing stated how it should be worded.

Flashing lights that draw attention to the bus, LED flashing lights you see on long loads, small but very bright. Larger signs front & back, we found out the can be any size, so why would LAs & bus ops use the smallest possible.

The sign should be removed when no pupils are on the bus, if not why have it at all, it comes to a stage where its meaning is totally lost on other drivers so most drivers ignore it.

As I was told by Grampian police, it would be impractical to stop a school bus & check if they are wearing seat belts. That came from a Traffic inspector!!

The school bus should be one of the most visible & safest vehicles on our roads, **it's anything but?**

Why should it be left to a bus driver or bus op to place a sign where they **consider best? Of course they don't want to go out in the rain to remove it or place it.**

Why behind glass & often tinted glass where it does not reflect properly. The famous tool kit by the Transport Research laboratory that was supposed to **be adopted by LAs has in fact never really been, it's virtually ignored by every council so far.**

Very few have changed signage at all, the sign can in fact be any size, yet we see the smallest sign to the front that should warn oncoming vehicles, totally ignored, and **usually placed at the passenger side. Yet it's supposed to warn oncoming traffic.**

This tool kit was produced by Dr Neil Kinnear Transport Research. Transport Scotland has never to my knowledge attempted to take this forward to any conclusion, I might be wrong as I am not party to their discussions.

Please note, headlights are designed **not to shine into cab windows**, so the front sign it is not totally visible when placed inside a bus cab, NOR IT DOES NOT REFLECT as it should, that is the whole legal purpose of the sign, the law states clearly visible. It must reflect, so this is a clear danger to pupils.

Who on earth decided that pupils lives on a 7 seater mini bus are more valuable than those carrying over 7 , safety signs required for over a 7 seater , not under 7, are those children are of less value?

At present the law is so loose our local Procurator Fiscal cannot prosecute bus ops for failing to ensure the sign must be clearly visible, the law/regulations are to loose, ill advised & badly framed ,we can prosecute those who harm wildlife, but not those who endanger pupils lives, is that not sad!

I won't go into all we have asked for, as its all been discussed at sometime, its all on record.

My problem is how do we ensure once powers are devolved anyone will listen to what we have to say, our group are main stakeholders in this, not the **government or Transport Scotland, it's our pain, that parents have been** suffering with for over 30 years of deaths & serious injury... My fear is it will be left with civil servants who have no or little understanding of school bus safety.

But I won't give up representing the parents I do, as well as my own Grand daughter, left brain injured & wheel chair bound.

Most of these measures will cost a little financially, but most of all, there needs to be an understanding within your road safety experts, who totally fail to see safety as it should be & this includes COSLA, Transport Scotland & Assoc of transport providers, plus local authorities, they need to understand, what they have does not work, is unfair, is selective & discriminatory, as its not applied in every county, its piece meal across Scotland.

Every school child through out Scotland has the same right to be protected, one local authority area should not be safer than another. Every school child has the same right of safety.

Aberdeenshire has written to all its bus ops, time & time again regarding offenses against its school contracts, nothing changes, improves for a while, then slips back unless there are penalties, a finable offense, nothing will change.

Thank you for taking the time to update yourselves & by reading this.

My wish, to address the chamber on this, to address all Msps on this, to ensure its widest coverage.

This had taken over my life since 2004, it has cost me greatly financially, hugely time wise, would I wish it any other way, of course not, one life saved, one injury less is payment in full.

Kind Regards,

Ron Beaty
School bus safety group
www.schoolbus.org.uk