

## **PE1223/SSS**

Submission from Transport Scotland of 21 September 2016

I write to provide you with an update regarding Public Petition PE 1223, as per our letter of 23 February 2016. I'm aware that there have been some changes to the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) membership following the Scottish Parliament Elections and this is a long-running petition with various different strands, both in terms of action that has been taken by the Scottish Government and calls for additional action. However I understand that, through legacy papers and briefings from the clerks, new members will be allowed to familiarise themselves with the history of the petition and the actions taken by the Scottish Government to date and therefore it's not necessary to go into a detailed timeline of the various milestones at this stage.

As previously stated, Transport Scotland has been carefully considering the national evidence-base in relation to the effectiveness of enhanced signs, which is particularly mixed following Glasgow City Council's evaluation trials, elements of which somewhat contrast previous Aberdeenshire Council findings from 2010.

What is clear from the body of research available is that home-to-school transport across Scotland is delivered in a variety of ways by different local authorities, using a wide-range of vehicles on diverse routes across urban and rural road networks.

Whilst the less-supportive report from Glasgow, in comparison to Aberdeenshire's, may be a signal that enhanced signs are less conspicuous on a double-decker bus in a cluttered urban environment than a coach on a country road, it is also apparent that the range of provision means there is unlikely to be a one-size-fits all solution to these matters.

You will be aware that Transport Scotland has long been an advocate of local authorities using enhanced signage where the circumstances are appropriate and, despite our promotion through national guidance and promotional workshops, there has been a reticence in take-up. The poor recognition rate of the sign within Glasgow's trial is unlikely to change local authorities' thinking on these matters and, whilst Aberdeenshire's findings indicated support for the enhanced signs in test-conditions such as focus groups and questionnaires, there was little evidence that drivers changed their speed or vehicle position in live, on-road trials in this research either.

Additionally, it has become apparent that, due to the wide variation of vehicle types and specification used for this transport, there are practical issues with fitting and removing larger enhanced signs from certain vehicles, which can pose significant challenges for some councils. Also, we are aware from feedback from individual councils that many do not see this as a priority area for action locally. Indeed, when Transport Scotland canvassed local authorities' interest in hosting the evaluation trials with funding support, which Glasgow ultimately undertook, only nine showed any interest.

As the current national evidence base now signals that there are competing factors which could make enhanced signage less effective or appropriate in different areas,

it is therefore Transport Scotland's position that the case has not been made for any kind of national roll-out scheme at this stage. There have been significant measures taken in this area over the course of this petition and we remain steadfastly committed to improving safety on the school run, as evidenced by our commitment to legislation making seatbelts mandatory on dedicated school transport, the subject of which was also previously a petition (PE 1098) often considered alongside this one due to the similarity in theme.

Transport Scotland has had dialogue with the petitioner, Mr Beaty, and recognises the valuable contribution he has brought to the issue of school transport safety in Aberdeenshire and across Scotland. Those efforts were a large factor in all of the work that has been taken forward with this petition, such as:

- Acknowledgement of Aberdeenshire's evaluation trials and its use as a basis for our national guidance;
- Promotional workshops with local government in order to raise-awareness of the guidance and spread best practice;
- The concessions we have secured from the UK Government for the current statutory sign to be given more prominence within the Highway Code and the learner driver process;
- Our funding for a comprehensive evaluation study of enhanced signage by Glasgow City Council.

You will be aware that legislative competence over the minimum standards for such signage remains reserved to Westminster and the UK Government has made clear that it is not minded to bring forward further statutory measures. As outlined in previous correspondence, legislative levers are not open to the Scottish Parliament in respect of enhanced signage due to the Scotland Act Order made last year concerning school bus seatbelts. This is because these new powers apply specifically to the description of such vehicles, rather than prescribing technical standards, and as such relate to fixed markings as opposed to a sign that can be displayed then removed. Also, given the evidence base now available and the varying considerations in different local authority areas which have come to light, it is also questionable whether legislation would be an appropriate undertaking.

Transport Scotland continues to take comprehensive measures to help keep pupils safe on the journey to school, such as our funding support to Sustrans for the Safer Routes to Schools programme, to help schools work with parents and the community to help reduce risks and encourage children to walk or cycle to school. Also, in order to help reduce speed on Scotland's residential streets, which children often use on their way to school, we published guidance on 20 mph zones and limits last year which local authorities are acting upon. We also provide funding support for Bikeability, run by Cycling Scotland, which sees 40 per cent of school children receiving on-road training to improve their skills and proficiency in order to make safer journeys by bike

However, for the reasons above, it seems unlikely that a national roll-out programme would be practical or justified at the current time, even with funding support as an incentive, and therefore Transport Scotland does not see a compelling case for pursuing it at this stage. Of course, as at present, local authorities who deem

enhanced signage to be appropriate for them are free to implement it and we will continue to raise the merits and benefits it can bring in our routine engagement with local government

Yours sincerely,

**Michael Kean**  
**Road Safety Policy, Transport Scotland**