

PE1223/UUU

Transport Scotland Letter of 27 October 2016

I write in response to your letter of 29 September seeking further clarification of Transport Scotland's position regarding Glasgow City Council's (GCC) research into enhanced school bus signage, in relation to Public Petition PE 1223.

You will be aware that there is a particularly mixed national evidence base in relation to such signs and, whilst Transport Scotland has long been an advocate of local authorities using enhanced signage where they are deemed appropriate in their particular circumstances, we feel there is not currently compelling justification for any kind of nationally-directed roll-out programme.

Glasgow's full evaluation report is publically available and can be seen at

http://www.gosafeglasgow.com/public/uploads/pdf/1447674515_road_safety_pdf.pdf, however, in order to facilitate the Committee's deliberations it may be beneficial to set out some detail on how it was conducted and some of the findings.

GCC's research encompassed three elements: real-time on-road tests where motorists were stopped and questioned; a hazard perception test on a pre-recorded video of a road route (similar to that in the UK driving test); and pilots with a small number of school transport providers.

Given that the main purpose of the enhanced features is to make the signs more noticeable in order that motorists are aware school children may be boarding or getting off, this is the key element in Transport Scotland's considerations. In terms of full length enhanced signs, very similar to those adopted by Aberdeenshire, only 11% of people identified these when prompted in hazard perception tests in daylight conditions, with only 8% doing so in darkness.

During the on-road tests, only 13% of people identified the full length enhanced sign as a hazard when prompted, just a 2% increase in the identification rate for the statutory minimum. This compares very poorly with recognition rates for other hazards, such as 58% for a road-side school sign and 64% for a 30 mph sign.

In terms of the pilot with bus companies, under a third (29%) of drivers felt that the enhanced signage had a positive impact during the test period, 35% said it had not, and a further 35% said they weren't sure.

Given that the vast majority of people did not identify the enhanced signs in Glasgow City Councils trials, these findings therefore cannot be said to provide a compelling body of support for such signs.

Whilst we recognise that the study does, in parts, suggest some muted support for enhanced signage, this is very heavily caveated with statements such as: *"While the findings were not conclusive, this study suggests the main benefits of the enhanced signage appeared to be improved visibility and understanding."*

As set out in our previous submission, Transport Scotland does advocate local authorities using enhanced signage where the circumstances are appropriate, yet given that such transport 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, there is a need for local flexibility on the issue. This seems borne out in Glasgow's findings with the report stating *"This study suggests that it is important that policy makers and those commissioning school buses recognise that adapting school bus signage is one of a range of potential measures which may influence driver awareness, behaviour and ultimately the level of accidents."*

Transport Scotland also notes that the Glasgow City Council's report states: *"it is also important to recognise that even with enhanced signage and the addition of lights, the school buses were poorly identified as hazards in comparison with other hazards" and "While this study suggests that the existing statutory minimum signs are poorly identified or understood, it cannot be assumed that improving their visibility will in itself be effective (or the most effective) means of improving driver behaviours around school buses"*.

Whilst Aberdeenshire's previous report may seem more supportive in relation to Glasgow's, and this may be indication that enhanced signs are more noticeable on

a coach on a country road than a double-decker bus in a busy urban environment, there was little evidence that drivers actually changed their speed or vehicle position in the live, on-road trials in this research either.

As the current national evidence base also now signals that there are competing factors which could make enhanced signage less effective or appropriate in different areas, we feel there is unlikely to be a one-size-fits all solution to these matters and that the case has not been made for any kind of national roll-out scheme at this stage.

Transport Scotland is clear that there can be no greater responsibility than the safety of our young people, which is why it has taken forward a wide range of work in this area, as outlined in our previous submission, and in relation to reducing risks on the school run in general.

The option of enhanced signage is currently open to all local authorities in Scotland if they feel that it is relevant and beneficial to their specific needs on the ground, and we will continue to point this out in our ongoing routine engagement with them.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Rooney

Road Safety Policy, Transport Scotland