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Dear Edward,

I write to update the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee (RECC) regarding measures connected to the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill following the Stage 1 Debate on 23 May.

I would again like to convey my thanks to yourself and RECC members who contributed to that debate in what was a very productive discourse, building on the Committee's particularly helpful Stage 1 Report as Parliamentary considerations continue.

You will be aware that a number of members in the chamber raised the issue of costs associated with the Bill. This was also a theme which emerged in the Committee's report. I gave assurances to engage with CoSLA to look at what can be done to further explain or refine cost forecasts contained in the Financial Memorandum presented alongside the Bill as introduced.

Firstly, it is worth stating that the costs as outlined are over a 14 year period and therefore – whilst the overall total figure may appear stark – this equates to £6,313 per council from 2018, rising incrementally to £23,906 per local authority from 2022 and costing that much annually for the duration. Viewing the costs in this manner can help to frame them within a bit more context.

Although a council-by-council breakdown has not yet been allocated, as this will be agreed by the standing joint Scottish Government and CoSLA officers' Settlement and Distribution Group, breaking the figures down as an annual cost divided between Scotland's 32 councils provides a helpful illustrative example when considering the financial forecasts.

I have written to CoSLA and Scottish Government officials have been in touch with the organisation's officials yet, given the proximity to the recent local government elections, there will be no CoSLA officer bearers in place until after their Convention meeting on 30 June. This means that no Ministerial or political level engagement involving myself and/or Gillian Martin MSP can take place until after this date.

You will also be aware that there have been quite compelling representations made in Parliament regarding the prospect of the legal duty within the Bill being extended to school trips or excursions, and Ms Martin MSP gave a firm commitment to look at bringing forward an amendment on this issue at Stage 2, currently scheduled for 28 June. The Scottish Government also supports her in these considerations.

Any such extension to the Bill could be seen to significantly alter its provisions and, also taking into account the situation with CoSLA regarding the above, the Scottish Government therefore intends to bring forward a revised Financial Memorandum ahead of Stage 3.

As you know, the Scottish Government is to notify the European Commission of the provisions in the Bill under EU Directive 2015/1535 (Technical Standards and Regulations). This will take place over recess and the summer months, with Stage 3 scheduled for later in the year.

We will therefore also use this time to take forward productive engagement with CoSLA on the costings for the home-to-school element of provision, making clear Parliament's comments and considerations and ensuring these are taken into account ahead of the revised Financial Memorandum being lodged ahead of Stage 3, whilst also exploring any costs associated with any relevant amendments from Stage 2.

Please note I am also copying this letter to Gillian Martin MSP.

Best Wishes,
H. You
HUMZA YOUSAF