SUBMISSION FROM THE ROAD HAULAGE ASSOCIATION

1. I refer to the call for evidence on the Scotland Bill as it now stands and in particular how the UK Government has responded to the earlier proposals made by the Scottish Parliament. The Road Haulage Association (RHA) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond. The RHA is the primary trade association representing road haulage businesses in the UK. Members range from the smallest to the largest operators in the country. In Scotland and Northern Ireland we represent nearly 1,000 members.

Our main response is limited to one subject related to the key questions posed by the Committee in its consultation paper:

Speed limits

2. The Session 3 Committee of the Scottish Parliament supported the proposals put forward earlier by the RHA that the Scottish Parliament should have the power to amend speed limits for particular classes of vehicle such as Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs). However we are extremely disappointed that the latest version of the Bill does still not include this important power. We believe that Scotland should not miss out on this opportunity to take the power which would enable the current HGV speed limit of 40 mph on single carriageway roads to be raised by a modest amount.

3. The proposals in the current Bill also leaves the speed limit powers for the Scottish Parliament in an incomplete, messy state. As the Session 3 Committee highlighted, Scotland’s roads, by their very nature, may need different solutions for vehicle speeds than those in England and it would be far more clear cut for all decisions on speeds allowed on Scottish roads to be made by Scottish Ministers.

4. The RHA strongly believes that the archaic 40 mph HGV speed limit on single carriageway roads needs to be increased to 50 mph – along with rigorous enforcement measures. Scotland has many single carriageway roads which are the lifeblood of the Scottish economy in being able to move goods efficiently across the country. The 40 mph limit was set decades ago in an age when lorries were far less well equipped from a safety and environmental point of view than they are today.

5. The A9 is a prime example where the numerous stretches of single carriageway result in the “platooning” of vehicles behind HGVs with resultant frustration for car and van drivers (most of whom are not aware that 40 mph is the HGV speed limit). Recent studies of A9 traffic have shown that fewer accidents are likely to occur as a result of raising the HGV limit. The A9 may be the main example but such situations of car drivers’ frustration, not to mention cost to businesses of slower journey times, is replicated across Scotland from the Borders roads north. Unlike England we do not have a motorway system virtually linking the country from end to end allowing HGVs to travel at speeds of up to 60 mph. Raising the speed limit in the way we suggest has been put into effect in New Zealand with positive safety results. (A copy of a study into
the New Zealand experience of raising the HGV limit has been passed to Transport Scotland).

6. It seems nonsensical in a situation where the Scottish Parliament is moving to direct control over most domestic issues that it would be able to set speed limits in some ways but not others. We therefore urge the Scotland Bill Committee to press the UK Government to include an enabling provision in the current Bill along the lines previously proposed by the Session 3 Committee.

7. Finally the RHA also strongly supports an early move towards the Scottish Parliament gaining effective borrowing powers to enable Scottish Ministers to make the crucial investments needed in Scotland’s transport infrastructure.

Phil Flanders
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