RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

THE SEATBELTS ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL

The Aberdeen City Context
Aberdeen is a unique place in Scotland. Though the City has benefited from the prosperity brought by the oil and gas industry, now that the rest of the UK economy is recovering from recession, Aberdeen is experiencing a decline due to the drop in the price of oil. This is compounded by pressures on infrastructure, connectivity, housing and skills. The effects of this include job losses, falling property prices and loss of custom.

Despite this decline, Aberdeen City continues to make a significant exchequer contribution to Scotland and the UK and this is expected to continue into the future.

Through our Regional Economic Strategy the City / Region is continuing to support the oil & gas industry, but also taking a more sustainable, diversified approach by attracting non-oil business. The City Council is also leading the largest regeneration programme ever seen in Aberdeen to support vastly improved transport, connectivity and investment in the city centre.

The Council is committed to working in partnership, both with other organisations as well as directly with communities themselves, to support the people of Aberdeen to prosper, no matter their social circumstances, and to break a cycle of deprivation that is repeated generation after generation. We want Aberdeen to be a city where there is equality of outcomes and opportunities for all our children, irrespective of their circumstances. Investment in children is one of the best and most valuable long-term investments we can make. Investing shared resources to target prevention and early intervention for children and young people is central to tackling inequality and improving life chances.

Call for views on the Seatbelts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill

I would like to thank you for providing Aberdeen City Council the opportunity to provide written evidence on the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill and its likely impact. I am aware that our officers have been significantly engaged in the development of the Bill and have provided a considerable level of data and information to the Scottish Government during the development stages.

With regards to our views on the specific questions posed we would advise the following:

1. Are you in favour of the Bill and its provisions? Do you think the Bill achieves its aim of improving safety on school transport?
   Aberdeen City Council is in favour of the Bill. We currently stipulate the requirement for seatbelts on all of our School Transport services (with the exception of supported bus services). As such, this legislation would make this a requirement across the Country and ensure consistency in this safety requirement across all school transport.
We believe this will improve safety on school transport. Seat belts are designed to retain people in their seats during a crash, and so prevent or reduce injuries, as such the requirement of these can only but serve to improve safety standards on school transport.

2. **18 local authorities have already chosen to make it a requirement of their school bus contracts for seat belts to be fitted on dedicated school transport. Do you feel that this has been successful?**

As one of those local authorities yes we do feel this has been successful. It is a requirement by law while travelling in a car or such vehicles and as such the safety implications of not wearing a seatbelt are just as significant on school transport regardless if this is delivered by a saloon car or a coach, accordingly we feel it should be a stipulation.

While it is difficult to appraise the success without it being tested, and thankfully we haven’t had any significant incident to do so, we do find seatbelts provide a clear benefit. For example we recently had a minor incident where a coach undertaking school transport had to brake suddenly. In such situations all pupils were safely seated and were wearing seatbelts and as such there were no consequences of this. However had the passengers not been wearing seatbelts they may have been injured or ejected from their seats, accordingly the success is clearly demonstrated.

The provision of seatbelts is important, but it is essential that the use of them is enforced and this can be difficult for drivers or passenger assistants to enforce. Accordingly, the use of seat belts needs to be accompanied with education in their benefits and passenger protocols/contracts should also be put in place by local authorities.

3. **Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill?**

We appreciate at this stage the Bill is aiming for all transport to have, as a minimum, lap belts. Aberdeen City Council is keen to stipulate the requirement for all school transport to require the use of 3-point (adjustable) seat belts to ensure maximum safety. We have found it impossible to implement such a condition at the present time as the market place is not set up for such a requirement, with many coach operators not having vehicles with such a restraint and the cost of retrofitting being prohibitive. While this position will change in time as newer coaches being manufactured tend to have 3 point seatbelts as a matter of course, we would appreciate the consideration of such a requirement in the Bill to ensure the transport industry is progressive and proactive in implementing the highest standards of safety restraints.

4. **Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups?**

Aberdeen City Council does not believe that the Bill will have a particular impact on equalities groups. As aforementioned this is no different to the requirement of seat belts in cars. Anyone not able to use a seatbelt for whatever reason must have an exemption certificate and this will continue to apply. In addition wheelchair users should be transported using appropriate occupant restraint systems and this will continue to apply.