RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
SEAT BELTS ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Regarding the Committee’s invitation to submit written evidence on the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill and its likely impact, and, in particular, on four specific questions pertaining to the Bill, Aberdeenshire Council would wish to comment as follows:

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?
Aberdeenshire Council were represented on the Scottish Government’s Seat Belts on Dedicated School Transport Working Group that considered the provisions of the Bill and is in favour of the provision of seat belts on dedicated school transport services. Aberdeenshire Council as an education authority transports approximately 10,500 pupils on home-to-school transport services every school-day and already requires the provision of seat belts on all our school transport contracts, whether they operate as dedicated school transport services or are also registered to operate as local bus services.

Prior to implementation of a policy of providing seat belts on school transport services in August 2010, Aberdeenshire Council commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to advise on the safety benefits of seat belt provision on school transport services and, on this basis, consider that such provision across Scotland will bring in-vehicle safety benefits. However, it is important to highlight that these benefits will only be maximised if pupils wear the seat belts provided and, in this respect, Aberdeenshire Council would welcome a national educational awareness programme to promote the importance of seat belt wearing by pupils on school transport services. It also remains the case that no one is legally responsible for 3 – 14 year olds wearing a seat belt, when these are provided on buses and coaches, and clarity on this issue would also be beneficial in maximising any safety benefits associated with the proposed legislation.

It may be that the Scottish Government may wish to consider the current and future requirements with regard to the responsibility of ensuring the seatbelts are worn by the passengers. Currently the statutory requirements in this regard are not as clear as they could be and tend to undermine the actual wearing of the belts by passengers.

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?
Aberdeenshire Council are one of the 18 local authorities referred to. As previously indicated, Aberdeenshire Council believe the provision of seat belts on dedicated school transport services to bring safety benefits, however the provision of seat belts on buses that are already an inherently safe mode of travel means that any reduction in the number of injuries or fatalities is likely to be extremely small and it is therefore impossible to quantify the success to date.
The Council advised local operators well in advance of the implementation date of our intention to require seat belts on all school transport vehicles in order to allow them time to install seat belts and/or purchase appropriate vehicles and, as a consequence, no difficulties were encountered from an operational perspective.

A major benefit has been the ‘peace of mind’ given to parents/carers. The absence of seat belts on buses operating school transport services was a major area of concern prior to the change in Council policy, and seat belts are simply no longer a public issue in Aberdeenshire because of the action taken.

3. **Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill?**
   
   School transport operational and other circumstances vary across Scotland and therefore Aberdeenshire Council would only seek to comment from a local perspective. From this perspective Aberdeenshire Council does not consider that any additional requirements should be placed on local authorities or bus operators as a consequence of the proposed legislation.

4. **Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups?**
   
   Aberdeenshire Council do not consider that the Bill and its provision will have any negative equalities impact on any protected group.

Aberdeenshire Council
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