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

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill. COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government and partners to develop the Bill and we are happy to offer it our support.

Key Points
The following are our key points on the Bill:

i. COSLA fully supports the Bill as drafted. COSLA has supported the intent behind the Bill since 2014 when the proposal was first suggested by Scottish Government. Since then COSLA has been a key member of the working group which was established to develop the Bill.

ii. We view the legislation as a formalisation of existing local authority good practice on school transport. This Bill is not an emergency measure but a carefully crafted legislative instrument designed to make a safe system even safer. It is intended to apply to the journey which pupils make every school day and to which local government already has a statutory responsibility.

iii. Considerable effort has been invested by COSLA, Scottish Government and other partners to ensure that the Bill is practical and deliverable. This work has included extensive engagement with transport professionals in local government and other groups. The definition of dedicated school transport set out in the legislation has been carefully discussed by all partners to ensure that it meets the original aim set out by Government but remains deliverable and within the devolved competencies of the Scottish Parliament. We, therefore, support maintaining a focus on dedicated school transport between home and school. We wholeheartedly recommend that this definition is supported by the Committee.

iv. The resource implications of the Bill have been carefully assessed in line with our usual practice for legislation. COSLA has worked with Scottish Government and all our member authorities to obtain the most accurate national estimate of the cost of the Bill. The figure in the financial memorandum reflects the additional cost to local government of implementing the legislation as drafted and is based on the definition of dedicated school transport used in the Bill. If the definition used in the Bill is changed, or if the scope of the Bill were to be altered, then we would expect the cost to local government to also change. Under this circumstance and as per normal practice, we expect that this cost will be met by Scottish Government.

v. We do not foresee the Bill impacting adversely on any group. As an example, local authorities already have duties to meet the needs of children with additional support needs and have in place established policy and practice for ensuring their safe journey to school.

vi. We acknowledge that legislation requiring the wearing of seat belts is a matter reserved to the UK Government. While this Bill focuses on requiring councils to ensure that seat belts are available on dedicated school transport, much can and is
done to ensure that seatbelts are worn. There is a responsibility on local authorities, schools and parents to ensure that children are aware of the importance of wearing seatbelts. Further to this, we believe that publicity surrounding this Bill will also be helpful at raising awareness still further.

**Conclusion**
COSLA hopes that the above key points make clear our support for the Bill as drafted. This is not a large or complex Bill, but its simplicity belies the extensive work which has been put in to get the Bill to this point. As we have said, school transport in Scotland is already safe and this Bill is a proportionate response, which will underpin existing local authority good practice. We understand that even though the Bill is short that the Committee will wish to scrutinise it carefully. This is to be welcomed and we hope that our points will assist the Committee with its work.

COSLA
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