

T: 0845 774 1741

E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

David Stewart
Convener of the Committee
c/o Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP



petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

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Dear David

CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS PE1098 and PE1223

Thank you for your letter of 22 June, expressing the Public Petitions Committee's concern at the time being taken to request devolution of powers relating to school bus safety.

I think it may be useful if I refer you to Keith Brown's letter to the Committee dated 3 November 2011 regarding the timescale within which it is possible to formally acquire new powers and implement any subsequent legislation. Mr Brown stated then that this would not be a matter to be entered into lightly and it is certainly not a quick or simple option.

I am aware that Public Petition Committee Members are keen to see these powers transferred and legislation progressed as early as possible. However, I am sure you will appreciate that the full impact of any proposed legislation is properly considered prior to implementation, to avoid any unintended negative consequences.

In order to inform this decision and to address a concern from CoSLA we have been gathering information on current provision and the potential costs of implementation to local authorities. Currently 12 local authorities already have seatbelts fitted on all of their school transport services, as a contractual requirement.

The process of uncovering the data on costs for the remaining 20 local authorities has proved impossible, despite a sustained and exhaustive effort by officials through the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO). To fulfil this requirement we have decided to undertake research to establish fully the financial implications to local authorities. This will be taken forward in partnership with Transport Scotland and CoSLA, to produce detailed costings, on a national level.

In taking forward this work I would emphasise that the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to making sure that school transport in Scotland is as safe as it can be. To this end we have, as requested by the Public Petitions Committee, commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to carry out a full evaluation of the good practice guide on school travel safety issued by Transport Scotland to all local authorities in December 2010. Following this evaluation, we will also offer school travel safety workshops to relevant local authority staff and all partners and providers of school transport based on the guide and to enable discussion of good practice already in place in Scotland.

I trust the Committee will now be reassured that every effort is being made for resolution on this matter. The Minister for Housing and Transport will keep the Committee updated on this issue.

ALEX NEIL