



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES WILL BENEFIT THE ECONOMY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE HEALTH OF OUR NATION, SAYS INDEPENDENT COMMISSION**

Dedicated school buses should be introduced across Britain to all primary and many secondary schools says an independent commission chaired by the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP.

The Yellow School Bus Commission includes representatives of the main political parties and experts in education and transport. During its year long review of school transport it discovered that the number of children travelling to school by car has doubled in the last 20 years – 41% of primary and 21% of secondary school pupils are now being taken on the 'school run'. This represents around one in five of car trips in the morning peak and on some roads journey times can double.

The Commission reports that a national roll out of yellow school buses (YSBs) would:

- offer children and parents a safe and attractive option for commuting to and from school;
- reduce local traffic congestion;
- benefit the environment;
- improve safety and wellbeing; and
- improve attendance and timeliness

The Commission recommends that:

- all schools should continue to promote walking and cycling for pupils living within one mile from primary school and two miles from secondary school.
- dedicated school buses should be provided for **primary school** children living over one mile from school.
- **secondary school** pupils should be encouraged to use scheduled bus services but dedicated school buses should be provided for distances greater than two miles to secondary schools where there is:
  - limited provision of scheduled bus services, or
  - serious behaviour problems with pupils on the public bus network, or
  - the potential to link with primary school YSBs

As well as providing safe and secure transport for children these new proposals would remove up to 180 million unnecessary car journeys per year.

The report estimates that providing school buses to primary schools would lead to financial benefits of £460m a year to parents and road users, with parents alone saving £92 million a

year on fuel and other vehicle costs. There would also be a net reduction of over 55,000 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum.

The report envisages funding of up to £10,000 per school for dedicated buses delivered through School Travel Plans, as an incentive for schools to stagger hours and work together to maximise the use of the new vehicles. Parents would pay a fare of between £1 and £2 per day except for those entitled to free school meals and/or currently entitled to free school transport. The scheme would require a phased introduction and the additional annual cost of such services would be £154m.

The more flexible approach for secondary schools would take up to 50 million more cars off the roads, would cost between £50m-£100m and is estimated to produce benefits of between £91m-£194m per annum.

The Chair of the Commission, the Rt Hon. David Blunkett MP called on government, locally and nationally, to take forward the recommendations:

"This is a forward-looking, realistic and highly relevant contribution to the debate not simply about transport, but about energy use, climate change and the sensible use and conservation of resources. This is about broad and highly relevant political issues as well as, crucially, the education, safety and security of our children.

"We are proposing a long-term programme which could revolutionise the way we do the 'school run'. But this is not just about the length of time parents spend getting their children to school; it is also about the impact this has on both society and business and enterprise, as well as key issues of energy conservation and climate change."

Other Commission members commented on the report, Baroness Ros Scott, Liberal Democrat front bench spokesperson for the Department of Communities and Local Government:

"Everyone notices how much less traffic there is on our roads during the school holidays. But what if we could find a way to reduce traffic at peak times the whole year round? And what if, at the same time, you could free up parents' valuable time, extend choice in education AND get young people used to public transport? Too good to be true - no it's not, and our report proves it."

Councillor Lt Col Tex Pemberton OBE, until very recently Conservative Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport with West Sussex County Council:

"I was absolutely delighted to be invited to serve as a member of the Commission as I have long championed the case for a safe and efficient bus system that parents can rely on to get their children to and from school. The benefits for the whole community in terms of less congestion and pollution on our roads and improved safety at the school gates would be enormous.

"From my involvement in the study I am now aware that the public very much want an improved way of moving children to and from school but on dedicated rather than public transport and in vehicles in which they can have much more confidence in terms of reliability and safety.

"West Sussex County Council was the first local authority to use American style yellow 'Bluebird' buses, so today's report will be of particular interest in our county."

Patrick Harvie MSP, Green Party representative for the Glasgow Region and Convener of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee of the Scottish Parliament:

"This report is one valuable element of the effort to tackle Scotland's school run culture, and there will be parts of the country where dedicated school buses have a real role to play in getting kids out of cars. The key to success will be ensuring that new school buses don't attract kids who are already walking or cycling to school, and I hope to see school bus companies also making a real contribution to fund cycling facilities in particular."

Garth Goddard, recently retired Programme Director for the North West Centre for Excellence national transport efficiency project:

"I have been involved in the organisation of school transport for 30 years and see in the Commission's report the opportunity to bring significant developments in the use of public transport, rather than the private car, to take pupils to and from school. When dedicated school buses are introduced they offer a safe, reliable and environmentally sound alternative to the car. I'm delighted to say that the north west was one of the trail blazers of dedicated yellow buses for home to school transport. For example, we already have a number of successful programmes in Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Wrexham and head teachers, parents and the whole community really understand and see the benefits.

"From the discussions we had with parents, students and teachers and from the public response to the exhibition tour, it was clear that there is widespread interest in having this form of school transportation in their communities. Clearly funding is an issue, but our visit to an initiative in Surrey showed that this can be tackled through partnership, and I would be particularly excited to see larger business organisations making serious funding contributions so that widespread yellow bus programmes could be made a reality."

John Burch, Deputy Director of Operations at the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) representing the bus and coach industry:

"Working with the commission has demonstrated to me that partnerships between education authorities, schools and bus and coach operators are already providing a quality innovative school transport product. Flexible scheduling, coupled to the right funding package will allow us to significantly expand the number of such schemes available. Quality comes at a cost, but by doing this we can improve the travelling environment for so many more children. If funds can be made available, then the expansion of such schemes will make everyone think positively about public transport options. I have no doubt this will encourage us all to use the car less in the future."

In addition John Nelson, Professor of Transport Studies, University of Aberdeen, whose team provided research and analysis for the Commission said:

"The challenge of tackling home to school transport cuts right across the current transport policy agenda. The work of the Yellow School Bus Commission has been underpinned by research and analysis which in turn has informed a credible set of recommendations."

Copies of the report are available on request or from the Commission website at [www.ysbcommission.com](http://www.ysbcommission.com).

## Notes to Editors:

**1. The Yellow School Bus Commission** includes representatives of the main political parties and experts in education and transport:

**Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP (Chair):** Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield Brightside. Former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Former Home Secretary and former Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

**Baroness Ros Scott:** Liberal Democrat front bench spokesperson for the Department of Communities and Local Government and former member of the Commission for Integrated Transport. She was Chair of the Local Government Association's Transport Committee.

**Councilor Lt Col Tex Pemberton OBE:** Until very recently, Conservative Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport with West Sussex County Council.

**Patrick Harvie MSP:** Green Party representative for the Glasgow Region since 2003 and Convener of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Patrick is also a member and supporter of a wide range of organisations including Friends of the Earth and the Equality Network.

**Garth Goddard:** recently retired Programme Director for the North West Centre for Excellence national transport efficiency project, for 8 years Head of Cheshire County Council's Transport Coordination Service and former advisor to the Shires' Public Transport Consortium.

**John Burch:** Deputy Director of Operations at the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) representing the bus and coach industry. He sits on the CPT School Transport Committee and the Department for Transport's School Transport Experts Panel.

## 2. Research & Analysis

During its year long review of school transport the Commission discovered that:

- around 41% of primary pupils get to school by car. Twenty years ago this figure was only 22%.
- 21% of all secondary school pupils are driven to school, more than twice the proportion driven 20 years ago.
- in the morning the 'school run' generates approximately one in five of car trips and on some major roads journey times can more than double.
- the school run contributes around one million extra cars on the road at peak times and a further 1.2 million cars driving extra distances for school drop-offs
- cars on the school run emit about 1 million tonnes of CO2 each year.

The Commission looked at a number of dedicated school bus initiatives in Britain as well as the school bus services in North America, where over 55% of children travel to and from school in the famous yellow vehicles. The Commission has met and talked with schools, parents, operators, transport authorities, other interested parties and, most importantly, many school bus users.

There is strong evidence that yellow school bus services will be popular and effective in Britain. Independent research by raisingkids.co.uk of around 1500 parents showed that 86% would be willing to send their children to and from school on a dedicated school bus. The pilot

programmes already running in Britain have had dramatic results in tackling modal shift where typically around two thirds of primary school users were previously taken to school by car.

In the Commission's view, yellow school bus operations in Britain should not just be about buses painted yellow. They represent a standard of quality and safety and generally include the following common features:

- dedicated and vetted drivers fully trained in both bus operation and child supervision
- a guaranteed seat for every pupil with three-point, all-age seat belts
- familiarisation and safety training for pupils
- registers for younger pupils, giving reassurance to parents
- measures to support good behaviour ranging from CCTV to Codes of Conduct
- dedicated single-deck vehicles designed primarily for the carriage of school children and with yellow livery in line with US practice.

The Commission has been supported throughout by the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Transport Research in evidence and data analysis, cost benefit modelling and review. The team was lead by Professor John Nelson, while evidence review and cost benefit analysis was conducted by Dr Steve Wright.

### **3. Administrative Support**

The Commission benefited from secretariat and administrative support provided by FirstGroup plc. First does not sit on the Commission. Both the Commissioners and First are committed to ensure that the independence of the Yellow School Bus Commission is assured.

### **4. Yellow School Bus Pilot Programmes in Britain:**

Nationwide there are around 30 dedicated school bus operations that demonstrate the features common to the Yellow School Bus model. They are located in:

- Aberdeen
- Bedfordshire
- Bracknell Forest
- Cardiff
- Carmarthenshire
- Cheshire
- Cornwall
- Durham
- Essex
- Flintshire
- Hampshire
- Greater Manchester
- Medway
- Merseyside
- Monmouthshire
- Newport
- Norfolk
- Northampton
- Paisley
- Staffordshire
- Somerset
- Surrey - Runnymede
- Warwickshire
- West Sussex
- West Yorkshire
- Windsor and Maidenhead
- Wokingham
- Worcestershire

### **5. Copies of the report are available from:**

Commission Secretary  
Yellow School Bus Commission  
c/o FirstGroup plc  
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## 6. Media Enquires

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**Ends**