

news release

FROM Yellow School Bus Commission

Thursday 28th May

Response from Yellow School Bus Commission to Government statement on School Travel

Speaking after the publication of the Government response to the Transport Select Committee's second report on School Travel on Thursday May 28th, David Blunkett MP, Chair of the Yellow School Bus Commission, said:

"I welcome the commitment to a further publication which will also be informed by the input of the Department for Children, School and Families, and which is under preparation at the moment.

"The promised guidance will be crucial in achieving precisely what the Yellow School Bus Commission – and now the Department of Transport – has indicated to be a targeted approach.

"The Commission's report did not intend a universal rollout across both primary and secondary schools, but suggested a 5-year programme to lift from 5% to 15.5 the number of primary school children travelling by bus; and to reduce substantially the number of peak time car journeys which have doubled over the last 20 years specifically as a result of a parental switch and a change in walking habits.

"The cost benefit analysis undertaken by the University of Aberdeen was clearly intended to encompass climate change, energy saving and congestion, and without this full analysis the cost of old and unsuitable transport contracted on the basis of cost only, will inevitably prove to be somewhat more expensive than modern, purpose designed and appropriately organised transport.

“That is why the further announcements from Government will be welcome, and their additional analysis examined carefully as to whether it takes a comprehensive and holistic approach which demonstrates joined up Government across the four departments which have an interest in turning good intentions into something more than vague aspirations.

Ends

Notes to News Editors: For further information contact Duncan McGraw of First on 07889 095726 or Rob Newman, on behalf of David Blunkett MP, on 07769 934008.

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.

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.