

NEWS RELEASE

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GRANITE CITY STOP WINDS UP YELLOW SCHOOL BUS TOUR

DAVID BLUNKETT HEARS HOW LOCAL INITIATIVE WORKS FOR ABERDEEN

THE Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP today (Thursday) joined pupils from Aberdeen's Robert Gordon's College on board their school bus during a fact finding visit in his role as Chairman of the Yellow School Bus Commission.

The Commission was set up by international transport operator FirstGroup last year to examine and quantify the potential benefits of yellow school bus-style dedicated home to school transport programmes.

Mr Blunkett was joined by other members of the Commission for a visit to Robert Gordon's College, where a yellow school bus programme has been operating successfully for several years. There, the Commissioners met with parents, pupils and Head of College Hugh Ouston, to hear first hand how the North-east's only yellow school bus programme works.

Mr Blunkett said: "We have travelled to Aberdeen to hear the views of parents, teachers and other members of the community, and, of course, from children themselves. I have a real sense that there's a public and political momentum building in support of Yellow School Buses.

"These iconic vehicles have been providing a safe and high quality means of carrying children to and from school for generations in North America. It is encouraging to hear how they are also working in various programmes across the UK, including here in Aberdeen. By offering a real alternative to the school run they now also seem to deliver the prospect of relieving congestion from our increasingly crowded towns and cities and consequently making a real contribution to reducing our impact on the environment and climate change."

2/

Mr Blunkett and the Commissioners, including John Burch and Garth Goddard, also met pupils to learn more directly from the children about how their yellow bus service has become a part of the school day.

Robert Gordon's College, Head of College Hugh Ouston said: "We are delighted to welcome Mr Blunkett and his colleagues from the Yellow School Bus Commission to Aberdeen. We have been operating a yellow school bus service here in the city for several years and having a dedicated transport service for our children, has provided significant benefits to the school, the community and the environment."

The Commissioners also met with Professor John Nelson, Director of the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Transport Research. The Centre is assisting the work of the Commission and will be carrying out a review of the public feedback which has been received during the UK-wide Yellow School Bus Tour.

Prof Nelson said: "We have enjoyed working with the Commission on such a policy-relevant piece of work. Research at our Centre focuses primarily on major issues related to achieving a more sustainable transport system with an emphasis on environment, society and technology. The challenge of tackling home to school transport cuts right across our research agenda."

Mr Blunkett then rounded off his visit to Aberdeen in a meeting with Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive of FirstGroup plc.

Mr Lockhead said: "Our own experience of operating yellow school bus programmes both in the UK and in North America shows that this is a tried and tested way of delivering a high quality, safe and reliable home to school transport system. The programmes deliver benefits to a wide range of groups and offer a win-win situation for everyone involved. The buses are popular with children, who enjoy travelling in them and parents and teachers appreciate the quality and security of service they provide.

3/

“The work of the Commission and the public feedback which has been gathered, will help inform the debate on the delivery of dedicated home to school transport, and will also look at ways to bridge the funding gap that has prevented the national roll-out of yellow school buses in the UK.”

The visit to the North-east rounds off a very successful three-month UK tour, during which members of the Commission have visited school bus programmes to understand how yellow school bus and other dedicated home to school transport initiatives are working. The Commission is due to publish a report later this year which will help to inform the debate about the future development of such initiatives.

The Yellow School Bus Tour has also taken in dozens of towns and cities across the UK. An original American-built yellow school bus modified as a mobile exhibition centre has been gathering the views of parents, pupils and all those interested in school transport. The bus was today parked in Aberdeen’s Castlegate gathering the views of the public in specially produced questionnaires.

David Blunkett added: “We would like to thank all of those involved in this tour and particularly those members of the public who have come on board the bus to have their say. With the invaluable feedback we’ll get from the consultation tour we will evaluate the best ways of delivering this sort of service and making recommendations on how we match the US in the proportion of children who get to school in this way.”

To find out more about the work of the Yellow School Bus Commission and complete the questionnaire online go to www.ysbcommission.com

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4/

Note to editors:

The members of the Yellow School Bus Commission are:

- **Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP (Chairman), 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.**
- **Lt. Col Tex Pemberton OBE - Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport with West Sussex County Council and Conservative County Councillor since 1997.**
- **Baroness Ros Scott - Liberal Democrat front bench spokesperson for the department of Local Government and Communities and former member of the Commission for Integrated Transport.**
- **John Burch, deputy director of operations at the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT). He sits on the CPT School Transport Committee and the DfT School Transport Experts Panel.**
- **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.**
- **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. Also a member and supporter of a wide range of organisations including Friends of the Earth and the Equality Network.**

The Commission was set up following independent research of around 1,500 parents carried out by raisingkids.co.uk earlier this year. This clearly indicated that parents are seeking an alternative and viable solution for the school run. The research produced the following key findings:

- **38.7% of primary school children get to school by car – almost four times more than their parents' generation**
- **21% of secondary school children get to school by car – over three times their parents' generation**
- **86% of parents would be willing to send their children to school on a dedicated school bus**
- **The main benefits of a dedicated school bus service are the environmental benefits of reducing the school run (51.1%) and peace of mind knowing children are safe (34.4%)**
- **60.8% of parents think such services should be funded through a mixture of parental contribution, local and national Government spending**

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