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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Dear Minister

Road safety and young drivers

As you are aware, the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee took evidence on road safety issues in relation to young drivers at its meeting on 8 February and then from you and your officials at its meeting on 22 February. Following these evidence sessions, the Committee agreed to write to you to set out our views in relation to what was heard.

Background

In June 2009, the Committee took evidence from the then Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change on the Scottish Government's road safety framework which set Scottish road safety targets to 2020, compared with the average Scottish figures for 2004-08.¹

The Framework contained a number of commitments in relation to eight key priorities which need to be addressed in order to achieve the Scottish road safety targets. Two of the priorities were to address accident rates involving drivers aged between 17-25 and to reduce accidents on rural roads.

The Committee agreed to explore the progress being made towards meeting the Framework commitments which relate specifically to young and new drivers in rural areas. Specifically, the Committee wanted to explore with stakeholders what specific work is being taken forward and identify whether any further action may be necessary to address the behaviours of young and new drivers to reduce the number of road accidents in which they are involved.

¹ Scottish Government.2009. *Go Safe on Scotland's Roads it's Everyone's Responsibility*. Foreward,

Scottish Government's progress towards road safety targets in relation to young drivers and rural roads as set out the Framework

The Committee welcomed the publication of the Framework in 2009 and the establishment of the Road Safety Strategic Partnership Board, where the Scottish Government has brought together all the key partners to govern the delivery of the commitments set out in the Framework.

One of the commitments was to conduct a public debate on young driver issues including graduated licences and additional training. The Committee looks forward to the publication of the reports from that debate due to be published later this month. **The Committee requests that the Scottish Government informs the successor committee of the outcomes of the young drivers' debate and provide details of how the issues raised will be taken forward which should include timescales for action.**

The Scottish Government committed to publishing an annual report providing figures setting out its progress in meeting road safety casualty reduction targets and key actions to be taken to meet the commitments set out in the Framework. In February 2011, the Scottish Government published the annual report for 2010. The Committee notes that it is not possible to measure how effective the action plan has been to date as the latest figures released contain road safety statistics based on figures for 2009. **The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government writes to the successor committee to bring its attention to the latest road safety figures for 2010 once these become available.**

Graduated driver licensing

The Committee explored with witnesses the main reasons behind the disproportionately high levels of road accidents involving young drivers. Many reasons were cited such as driver distraction and a sense of invincibility among young drivers however, the Committee was told by all witnesses that by far the most important factor is a lack of experience.

The Committee heard that comparative research carried out by a number of academics has shown that interventions which are evidence based have been the most effective in tackling the problems associated with the inexperience of young (and new) drivers, the most notable being graduated driving licensing.

Graduated driving licensing allows young drivers, over a period of time, to gain more experience while reducing their exposure to risks. High risk situations for young drivers, such as night time driving and carrying passengers of a similar age, are minimised during this period as experience is gained during this period by only driving during the daytime or driving under supervision at night. The Committee also discussed with witnesses the role that parents could play in policing a voluntary graduated licensing scheme and in various road safety education campaigns and interventions.

The Committee acknowledges that any proposed legislation relating to graduated driver licensing schemes would be a reserved matter and, to date, the UK Government has given no indication that it plans to introduce such a

scheme. The Committee further notes that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change wrote to Westminster on this issue in 2009 expressing disappointment that this issue was not being taken forward by the UK Government. **The Committee would be interested to hear if there are any further plans to write to the UK Government on this issue.**

In addition, the Committee acknowledges that it is important that young drivers themselves feel that any graduated licensing scheme operates on a fair basis and does not simply discriminate against young drivers. Witnesses gave examples of incentives which could be considered as part of any graduated licensing such as reduced insurance premiums for drivers who had completed the scheme.

The Committee believes that there would be merit in the Scottish Government giving detailed consideration as to whether scope exists for a graduated driver licensing scheme to operate in Scotland on a voluntary basis perhaps with parental involvement and/or insurance companies; how this could be implemented and its effectiveness measured.

The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government explores these issues further and reports to the successor committee on its findings.

Effectiveness of road safety education campaigns and local enforcement policies

The only significant road safety matter that has been devolved to the Scottish Government is the promotion of road safety by the provision and dissemination of information and advice relating to the use of roads. It is for this reason that the Committee wished to explore the effectiveness of road safety education campaigns and how their effectiveness is monitored.

The Committee heard conflicting views on how effective road safety education campaigns are but there was general agreement that, in conjunction with enforcement and interventions, such campaigns are key to reducing road accidents involving young drivers. There was also a general consensus among witnesses that more could be done to ensure that educational campaigns are evidence based and that it was essential to monitor and measure the effectiveness of such campaigns.

The Committee heard details of a number of campaigns including the Scottish Government's country roads initiative, North of Scotland Driver Awareness Team's campaign and Grampian Police road safety campaigns. The Committee appreciates that many examples of good practice exist throughout Scotland with varying approaches being taken.

During evidence, ACPOS told the Committee how various enforcement policies had been successful in tackling road safety statistics in Grampian particularly in relation to young drivers and how it would be useful if there was a mechanism for rolling out such policies across Scotland.

The Committee invites the Road Safety Strategic Partnership Board to work with ACPOS to consider how information relating to enforcement

initiatives could be shared across Scotland and best practice be encouraged.

The latest research into the effectiveness of road safety initiatives was undertaken in 2005 and suggested that early years education on road safety issues resulted in safer drivers later in life.

The Committee believes that it is time to update existing research and recommends that the Scottish Government should undertake further research and gather data which will help understand better how effective and appropriate current road safety campaigns are in reducing the number of accidents involving young drivers.

The Committee invites the Scottish Government, through the Road Safety Strategic Partnership Board and in partnership with key stakeholders, to explore the possibility of providing a 'one-stop shop' where all this information can be accessed. In addition, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government works with key stakeholders to identify areas where a common approach across Scotland may be appropriate.

While the Committee does not intend to report on this issue, its legacy paper will detail possible areas in which the successor committee may wish to explore. On behalf of the Committee, I would be grateful for a response to the points raised in this letter in due course which will also help inform the successor committee in its future deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick Harvie MSP

Convener

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee