

## Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA)

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Scottish Charity No SC027600

Alan Rees MBE  
Secretary  
20 Seaforth Drive  
Edinburgh EH4 2BZ  
Tel. 0131 315 3006  
Email. at.rees@sol.co.uk

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Norman Baker MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department for Transport  
Sustainable Travel and Equalities  
Zone 2/24. Great Minster House  
76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR

Dear Minister

### **Public Bodies Bill - Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)**

I am replying to your letter sent out to stakeholders in June under the above heading. Our Alliance is a disability-led network providing a forum for the regular exchange of information and views on transport and mobility issues for disabled people.

We held a meeting in Edinburgh on Friday 15th July to discuss your letter which members of SATA attended, together with representatives of nine other organisations. We have also obtained views from our individual and corporate members working in the voluntary, public and private sectors across Scotland. The conclusions we have reached are as follows.

- We are strongly against the abolition of DPTAC. We note the comment by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee that "the cull (of quangos) will not save much money or improve accountability" and this applies to the abolition of DPTAC.
- We reject the possible non-statutory "successor arrangements" you are suggesting as being unworkable and ineffective.
- DPTAC should remain as a statutory body with its present remit to provide independent and credible advice to Ministers and the Government.
- It has achieved much in its 25 years history but still has a lot of work to do:

- (a) to ensure access to, and attendance at, the 2012 Olympic Games in London and issue a report afterwards which will also influence the holding of the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and other major sporting and cultural events,
  - (b) to review its work and achievements so far but also prepare and consult on a strategic plan and a focused work programme over set 2-3 year periods to 2020 and beyond,
  - (c) to update existing publications and industry guidance to reflect experience and current practice,
  - (d) to maintain its legislative duties, especially on rail access.
- It must keep its majority of disabled people as members but also attract others with expertise. We are concerned that the number of members has already been run down giving rise to the impression that the eventual demise of committee has already been decided.
  - It must have a settled and dedicated secretariat at arms length from DfT to provide administration and links to a range of Government departments and other agencies
  - It must have a dedicated budget sufficient for it to do its work and access to government research resources.
  - It must report annually to Parliament (as it is required to do at the moment but has not done so for the past two years in contravention of the 1985 Transport Act).
  - It must maintain its concordat with its statutory equivalent in Scotland, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS).

### **Answers to questions in Annex A of your letter**

#### **(1) What disability advice does the Department need?**

Ministers and the DfT need appropriate (and sometimes challenging) advice which is focused on improved mobility/access rather than just the physical accessibility of different transport modes, important though that is. They should be advised on how transport services do or do not give people mobility to enable them effectively to participate in social and economic life. Comprehensive data on this is singularly lacking. They should then be given advice on appropriate interventions that will deliver cost-effective improvements in the mobility of people with restricted mobility, with policy links to social inclusion, social justice, equalities and well-being. .

#### **(2) Could this advice be delivered solely through stakeholder bodies?**

No. They should of course be consulted but, as the letter points out, there are lots of them with particular interests. It needs a body such a DPTAC to take a lead and have an overview.

#### **(3) Are there examples of where DPTAC has provided good /poor advice or failed to act?**

It has an excellent track record on responses to government consultations, giving

advice on disability rights legislation, achieving technical specifications, etc. An area where there has been a marked lack of progress has been in the regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles, although this can be put down to the government dragging its feet after promising, but so far failing, to act.

In line with our answer to the first question, we think strategic issues have been neglected. The outcomes of legislation and regulations for improved modal access have to be established. However they may be found not to have increased the mobility of the majority of disabled people very much, if at all. So other measures have to be taken, such as more sensitive routing of buses (along the Scandinavian 'service route' model developed in the 1980s) and door-to-door transport/DRT.

**(4) Are there different areas of advice needed to ensure mode-specific transport is addressed?**

Yes. There are specific issues to do with travel modes such as ferries for instance (especially small ferries and ports) that require very specific attention and particular knowledge. Similarly access to small airports and planes

**(5) Does the Department require specific (ie technical) advice or does it need further general disability awareness advice?**

Both. Government needs technical advice and advice on more general matters such as how to improve disability awareness, driver training and public information, all of which need constant attention and vigilance. These can be obtained from different sources but need to be co-ordinated to ensure consistency and only DPTAC is in a position to do this at the UK level.

**(6) Would the Department receive better advice from consultants?**

Consultants get data from existing research or new data by surveys, etc. from transport users or (less often) non-users. The advice they produce is valuable but always needs evaluation and is no substitute for having a body such as DPTAC. The DfT has procured advice in this way on many occasions and should have all the data it needs on cost and outcomes.

**(7) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the options (in the letter)**

As stated above we are not in favour of any of the options. They none of them have the advantages of DPTAC as a statutory body comprised of a majority of disabled people, two essential factors to provide government and the transport industry with authoritative and credible advice. It should not just be left to ministers or civil servants to seek advice - as one of our members said "They don't know what they don't know". The statutory right of disabled people to be heard is vital.

Finally, we ask you to consider our views seriously and consult us again when you have made a decision on the way forward. In fact we think you should have consulted on that decision itself now rather than just the alternative options and

later the one you say you will choose. We maintain that the best thing is to decide to retain DPTAC as a statutory body to continue advising you and your colleagues on measures which will go on improving the mobility and travel opportunities of disabled people, but then to open up further debate on the manner by which that is best and most effectively done.

Yours sincerely

Alan Rees  
Secretary