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I am writing to update you on matters raised at the Equal Opportunities Committee at its meeting on 11 March 2008.

Firstly, I undertook to feed back to the officials who are involved in the discussions with Glasgow City Council and the Commonwealth games organising committee the importance of reflecting on the opportunities for disabled people becoming involved in the 2014 games. The Government continues to work closely at official and Ministerial levels with its Glasgow 2014 partners (Organising Company, Glasgow City Council and the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland), to deliver the best Commonwealth Games ever. We are committed to our role in the delivery of an inclusive Games for Scotland. Together with our Glasgow 2014 partners, we will engage with the appropriate representative groups to look at how best to develop opportunities for people with disabilities throughout the 2014 Games.

Moreover, from a Games legacy perspective, all equality groups, including disability groups, are being consulted as part of the “Glasgow 2014 – Delivering a lasting legacy for Scotland” consultation process which the First Minister and other Glasgow 2014 partners launched on 15 February 2008. We are currently confirming the membership of the Scottish Legacy Board and its supporting sub groups to help develop and deliver a Games Legacy Plan. In doing so we will ensure that the interests of all groups, including disabled people, are represented.

Secondly, I was asked to make inquiries into the timescale for bus companies making their fleets fully accessible to disabled people. I can confirm that the timetable by which buses must be fully accessible is set out in legislation reserved to Westminster under the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVR) 2000. All new buses have had to be fully accessible since 31 December 2000. All other buses must be fully accessible by 1 January 2017 and all coaches by 1
January 2020. Until then, fleet renewal and deployment is a discretionary operational matter for individual bus operators. The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging bus operators to meet these regulations within the timetable.

Thirdly, I also undertook to look into whether appropriate training infrastructure is in place that will guarantee that people are being given enough time to get on to buses. I can confirm that all the large operators and some smaller operators have training programmes and commitments to train drivers to SVQ Level 2. The Level 2 SVQs cover not only driving standards but a fair amount of customer care, including disability awareness. While operators have to maintain their timetable, passenger safety is paramount and all staff have this impressed upon them. No operator wants to have avoidable accident insurance claims. The EU Driver Training Directive requires individuals who wish to hold a Public Service Vehicle licence to obtain a Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). New drivers must obtain an initial qualification and thereafter it must be renewed every 5 years by undergoing at least 35 hours of approved periodic training. The requirement for initial training comes into effect in September 2008. Disability Awareness is part of the required syllabus for drivers.

Finally, I was asked to raise the issues of concessionary taxi fare schemes during ongoing discussions with COSLA, which I will be pleased to do. However, it is important to note that the Scottish Government do not provide specific funds to local authorities to deliver concessionary taxi fare schemes; nor do we require them to offer such schemes. Some local authorities provide schemes on a voluntary basis where they consider them to be appropriate and affordable; others do not. As things stand, the Scottish Ministers have no powers to require local authorities to introduce such schemes.

I hope this information is helpful.

JOHN SWINNEY