Written response to the recommendations from National Express Group PLC

Further to your letter dated 13 September 2007. Please note for your records that Denis Wormwell has resigned from the Company and I have been appointed the Acting Chief Executive.

National Express Group, Bus Division, welcome the opportunity of commenting on behalf of our wholly owned subsidiary Tayside Public Transport Company Ltd. trading as Travel Dundee, on the Equal Opportunities Committee report "Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities"

In general, National Express Group support the recommendations contained within the report as your aim of removing barriers for disabled people coincides with the our own aim of "making travel simpler" for all.

We were pleased to read in the report your comments that "access to transport is variable, but excellent in Dundee", This reflects the investment in new low floor, easy access buses by National Express Group and also Travel Dundee’s effective partnership working with Dundee City Council to bring about a real step change in the delivery of public transport in the city. Of the 980 bus stops within the city, only two are not yet fully accessible and work is ongoing to create a 29 metre clearway at all bus stop to ensure the bus can fully access the stop and make maximum use of both the new kerbing structure and the low floor bus.

Dundee City Council is one of only two authorities to establish Area Access Panels. This panel is part of the consultation process in regard to disability access and Travel Dundee participates fully as members.

It is worth highlighting that access to public transport, including for disabled people, was considered as part of the development of the National Transport Strategy, this being published in November 2006. In addition, the Scottish Executive issued a report in May 2006 entitled "Improving Public Transport for Disabled People" following commissioned research. The recommendations of this research, we understand, were to formulate strategies and initiatives to improve accessibility and opportunities for travel.

We would however, like to comment on those recommendations which specifically apply to bus operation in the Transport section of the report and advise the committee on the progress made to date.

Recommendation 112: The Committee recommends that Transport providers be encouraged to make their transport fleets accessible ahead of the deadlines provided for in legislation and that relevant assistance be made available to support the process by national of local government as applicable.
Response: The dates for bus companies to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are still matters reserved to the Westminster government. However, Travel Dundee has worked closely in partnership with Dundee City Council and the Scottish Executive to improve its bus fleet ahead of government deadlines. In November 2005, Travel Dundee were the first major bus company in the country to achieve a 100% low floor, easy access bus fleet, and as a result there has been an increase in passengers with disabilities making use of public transport.

**Recommendation 115:** Travel information should also be made available in real-time in accessible formats to support disabled people while travelling and travel information providers should link their information systems to those of other operators to assist whole-journey planning.

Response: Travel Dundee has been actively working with Dundee City Council to develop a robust Information Strategy for the city. As a result, all Travel Dundee buses are fitted with GPS equipment to facilitate real time information at more than 300 locations throughout the city and available through SMS for all stops. In addition, high quality information maps and printed timetables are located at each bus stop with Smartcard triggered audio announcements available at key locations. Journey planners providing high quality door to door journey planning and interactive mapping can also be found at key locations. Other bus company information is also available, this being coordinated by Dundee City Council.

Travel Dundee is also a member of Traveline Scotland which provides journey planning information for bus, rail and ferry services throughout Scotland. Information on all Travel Dundee services can also be found on the company's web site.

**Recommendation 117:** The Committee recommends that the Scottish Executive introduce and ensure the enforcement of minimum national standards in relation to staff training in disability equality and the provision of suitable customer care for disabled customers.

Response: National Express Group places a high priority on staff training.

All Travel Dundee bus driving and customer facing staff have had Disability Awareness Training, the training being developed in conjunction with the Area Access Panel, advice from the Mobility and Access Committee and with much appreciated assistance from the McKinnon Centre for Disability in Broughty Ferry. In addition all staff within Travel Dundee undergoes a Customer Care training programme which has a specific section on how to deal with disabled passengers. The industry in general works closely with "Go Skills" and with the Scottish Vocational Qualifications to provide ongoing training for bus drivers.

I trust you will find these comments useful in your committee's deliberations.
To finish on a lighter note, I can advise the committee that Travel Dundee has been nominated for an award at the Scottish Disability and Business Awards 2007, where the aim is to recognise the Scottish business community's genuine achievements in tailoring their businesses to be "disability friendly". We are extremely proud to have been nominated.

NEIL BARKER
Acting Chief Executive
National Express Group PLC
UK Bus Division
11 October 2007