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SNP SPECIAL PLEA FOR SCOTS ROAD TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

The SNP have made a special plea on behalf of Scots road hauliers and coach operators in a debate on road transport in the European Parliament in Strasbourg today. The Markov report includes recommendations to increase restrictions on the hours European lorry and coach drivers can work. SNP Member Ian Hudghton says these limits could "add to the difficulties" and bring "further increases in costs of essential goods and services" to businesses and residents in the rural and island communities of Scotland.

Explaining why he voted against moves to apply greater reductions in driving time to drivers, Mr Hudghton said:

"I endorse fully the need to improve road safety and to guarantee to road transport drivers the high standards of health and safety at work they deserve. However, we must not lose sight of the practical realities of transport in the peripheral areas of rural and island Scotland where, in many cases, there is simply no alternative to road transport for the carriage of goods and passengers.

"The SNP is concerned about the possible consequences of the proposals and fear that tour operators may come to regard the more remote areas of Scotland - many of which depend largely on tourism - as too far and too costly to include in their itineraries.

"Excessively restricted working hours for lorry and coach drivers would add to the difficulties already faced by residents and businesses in these areas and would bring further increases in the cost of essential goods and services. I have therefore voted against the amendments which sought to apply even greater reductions in driving time than were contained in the Commission's original proposal.

"EU regulations, if they are going to be seen as relevant must be workable. In this case a one size fits all is wholly inappropriate to the transport realities in Scotland's rural and island communities. I hope that the final proposal in relation to drivers working hours will recognise that some areas, such as the Highlands & Islands of Scotland, require a flexible approach to be taken and I hope that the Council & Commission will agree."

The Markov Report had its first reading in Parliament today and will be subject to further amendments in due course. The SNP will continue to press that the special circumstances of rural and island communities in Scotland be taken fully into account.

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