



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 6 June 2023

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 6 June 2023

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Pastor Oli Higham from the Rock community church.

Pastor Oli Higham (Rock Community Church): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, may I offer you an invitation: an invitation to pause and reflect before you take on today's business, and to be reminded of the incredible people whom you are representing today.

I am from one of Scotland's most impoverished communities. I live in a Scottish index of multiple deprivation data zone that is in the bottom 2 per cent of Scotland. Around the corner is the Phoenix, which is a community centre offering a wide range of activities and opportunities that our church runs.

We aim to primarily serve three communities in the west end of Dumbarton: Castlehill, Brucehill and Westcliff. If we represented those areas statistically, it would be bleak reading, with stark and uncomfortable levels of poverty, educational attainment, unemployment and the same addictions that blight many of our communities. However, these are also communities full of incredible individuals. We believe that we are a richer people for their presence and their God-given talents.

You will make decisions today that affect our nation. Can I encourage you today not to consider Scotland as a series of data points but as the remarkable individuals whom you know in your own communities, from every strata of society, who carry the beautiful talents and giftings that God has bestowed on them.

As a means to help you reflect, let me name some amazing people from my own community. They include Fiona from Brucehill, who volunteers at our youth club and helps us to provide free breakfasts to our community; Naomi from Castlehill, who is part of the leadership team for our church community and brings joy wherever she goes; Lottie from Westcliff, who delivers a range of arts activities for our community and beyond; David and Gemma from Castlehill, who run taekwondo classes, providing physical and

mental health support; Janice from Brucehill, who helps to bring our community together; Cathy from Westcliff, who helps us to provide a range of activities for babies, toddlers and their parents; and Iain from Castlehill, who volunteers, giving drum lessons to local kids and free haircuts to our community.

I could name many, many more, but time does not allow it. So, let me finish, as I started, with an invitation: as you make decisions in this chamber today, may you see not just data and statistics, but the faces of the remarkable people who make up this nation.

May God's peace be with you today.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Deposit Return Scheme

1. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to commence its deposit return scheme on 1 March 2024. (S6T-01421)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Due to the United Kingdom Government's 11th-hour intervention to change the Scotland's deposit return scheme—both to remove glass from it and to add significant uncertainty around essential parts of it, such as the 20p deposit and the costs to producers and fees for retailers—it is clear that the scope and form of the scheme that this Parliament passed cannot go ahead as currently planned.

We are urgently establishing—we have been doing this over the past 10 days—the extent to which there is a way forward for a modified scheme in relation to its scope, terms and timescales. Crucially, that depends on whether the UK Government can provide timely, stable and reliable assurances on basic operational matters, such as trading standards, the 20p deposit and producer fees. It also depends on the extent to which there is industry support for an alternative scheme.

I am writing to the UK Government today to ask for an urgent discussion about those conditions. I will update Parliament at the earliest opportunity on the outcomes of those actions and what they mean for Scotland's deposit return scheme.

Liam Kerr: I am not sure that members heard a specific answer on whether the scheme will commence on 1 March 2024.

In any event, the minister mentioned glass. Circularity Scotland Limited—the scheme administrator—says that the scheme is viable to launch without the inclusion of glass, but the First Minister claims that removing glass would threaten the viability of the scheme. They cannot both be right, so who does not know what they are talking about: the First Minister or CSL?

Lorna Slater: The Scottish Conservatives are on very shoochy ground when discussing glass, given that Rishi Sunak, Alister Jack and their own Douglas Ross stood on a manifesto to put in place a deposit return scheme including glass. The UK Tories are not only undermining our scheme in relation to glass; it looks as though they are doing the same thing to Wales, too.

Glass is one of the three main materials that are used to make single-use drinks containers, and it accounts for more than a quarter of such containers. It does not make as much of a business case to run a system without glass. That would undermine the fundamental point of deposit return, which relates to the environmental and litter benefits. Even the UK Government's analysis of deposit return schemes across the UK shows that social benefits relating to reduced litter, emissions saved and the economy are increased by 64 per cent when glass is included. It is England that is the outlier by removing glass from a bottle return scheme.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There is much interest in the subject, so I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

Liam Kerr: We did not hear much in that response. The implication is that the minister thinks that CSL does not know what it is talking about in relation to glass.

However, that answer was instructive because, over the past week, the Scottish National Party-Green coalition has gone from mess to meltdown on deposit return. It has threatened to scrap the scheme, tried to pick a fight with the UK Government and been caught misrepresenting one of Scotland's leading drinks producers. Why does the minister think that division and conflict will be more productive than collaboration and co-operation in rescuing her scheme?

Lorna Slater: I must highlight to Liam Kerr and the rest of the chamber some of the misrepresentations that we have heard, particularly from the Secretary of State for Scotland. His accusation that glass would be used for aggregate is completely untrue and demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of how our deposit return scheme would operate and, indeed, how our wider recycling legislation operates. Alister Jack's misrepresentation in relation to the process that has been agreed and to adherence to common frameworks, as well as the lack of timeliness on decisions on VAT and trading standards, shows that the UK Government is not acting in good faith to support Scotland's scheme, going forward. In fact, it is doing everything possible to undermine the scheme.

Circularity Scotland and I are looking at how we can take forward an alternative scheme in Scotland, because the scheme that this Parliament passed has been shot down by Westminster. We are looking at an alternative scheme, and I will report back to Parliament as soon as I can on what that alternative might be.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The UK Government has shown nothing but contempt for the Scottish Parliament in using

the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 to, in effect, rewrite devolved laws. As Professor Aileen McHarg has suggested, there is nothing in the 2020 act that makes Alister Jack the arbiter of what goes forward. This should have been done through the common frameworks. How much investment from Scottish business has been lost as a result of the UK Government's misguided intervention and U-turn?

Lorna Slater: Hundreds of millions of pounds of investment from a range of businesses to prepare for the launch of the deposit return scheme are now at risk as a result of the UK Government's 11th-hour intervention. The exact investment figures are held by industry, but published estimates suggest that retailers will invest up to £200 million and that producers have invested about £100 million in the scheme. Alongside that, Circularity Scotland contractors such as Biffa will have invested significant sums—some estimate that that investment will be £80 million.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister will be aware that Sight Scotland has concerns about how blind and partially sighted people will be able to access and take part in the deposit return scheme. Just last week, Sight Scotland received a letter from the minister's officials, but it failed to address the issues that the organisation has raised. Will the minister take the concerns of Sight Scotland and others seriously and use the delay to the deposit return scheme to ensure that blind and partially sighted people can take part in the scheme?

Lorna Slater: Any deposit return scheme must of course be accessible to every person in Scotland, and that is true no matter whether people have disabilities or other impediments that make that more of a challenge. Particularly for non-sighted people or people who have difficulty with sight, the design of reverse vending machines absolutely is intended to take that into account. If a scheme is to proceed, the intention is to work with retailers and handlers to understand how they can best support customers who use manual return points. I refer the member to the equalities assessment that was undertaken as part of the deposit return scheme legislation.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister and the First Minister have wreaked havoc on the deposit return scheme. Can the minister tell us today when the missing gateway review will be published?

Lorna Slater: A series of independent gateway reviews have been undertaken throughout the design of the deposit return scheme, with the most recent having been carried out in March. The Scottish Government is considering carefully the recommendations from that review and will share those recommendations and its response with the

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee soon. Gateway review teams normally speak to between 12 and 15 interviewees. For this latest review, reviewers spoke to 45 people, which included CSL and a range of producers, retailers, wholesalers and hospitality representatives.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): This is a shambles that has been years in the making. All last week and over the weekend, we heard threats from the Scottish Government that, if the UK Government did not back down, DRS would be dead in the water. It now appears that the Scottish Government has backed down. Does the minister believe that that will add to the confusion and the loss of confidence in the proposals that the Government is trying to bring forward?

Lorna Slater: Liam McArthur will appreciate that the UK Government has now blocked the scheme that was passed by the Scottish Parliament. The devolved powers of this Parliament were used in 2020 to legislate for a deposit return scheme. That scheme included glass and clearly set a 20p deposit, and there was guidance to industry on how the scheme was to be interpreted.

The UK Government has used—some might say abused—the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 to impose changes on this devolved matter at a very late stage in development of the deposit return scheme. We now have to properly assess those changes. Our scheme, as passed by the Scottish Parliament, cannot go forward—we know that that is the case. Can an alternative scheme be made from the pieces that the UK Government has left us? That is what we are rapidly assessing with business stakeholders and Circularity Scotland.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As I understand it, in Wales, Mark Drakeford is taking a firm line and arguing that glass should be included in the scheme there. Can the minister explain why Scottish Labour is being so weak on the matter?

Lorna Slater: Indeed—

The Presiding Officer: The answer should be on matters for which the minister has general responsibility.

Minister, you can address the question to the extent that you address matters for which the Scottish Government has general responsibility.

Lorna Slater: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Labour used to be a champion of devolution as an opportunity to address a democratic void in Scotland and to ensure that Scotland could strike out on its own path if the Scottish Parliament, elected by the people of Scotland, chose to do so. That is exactly what Labour in Wales is doing by

designing its own DRS to include glass because it, too, understands the environmental and economic benefits of doing so.

Wales is at an earlier stage than we are on deposit return. It has not yet passed its regulations and, once it comes to drafting its regs and doing the detailed design, Wales will very likely face the same barriers that we are now dealing with.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): What would be the impact on glass recycling, including non-scheme articles, of rolling out separate kerbside glass collection to councils that currently do not have that service?

Lorna Slater: Brian Whittle will appreciate that we are assessing the substantial change to the deposit return scheme that has been imposed on us by the UK Government under which it cannot include glass. We are trying to figure out whether the scheme is viable and can go forward in Scotland, and that includes looking at the impact on recycling rates.

We know that kerbside recycling rates tend to get glass up to only about 63 per cent; deposit return can get glass recycling up to 90 per cent. That means a substantial reduction in broken glass litter and in carbon emissions. That is how we know that including glass is a good idea, but now that we cannot include glass in our scheme we will have to undertake a detailed assessment.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): After the delays and grandstanding between the UK and Scottish Governments, we deserve better than this. To get a viable DRS, the UK and the Scottish Governments should get around the table as quickly as possible, especially given that Circularity Scotland said today that the scheme could go ahead.

Over the past two weeks, I have asked the minister repeatedly whether she has explored all the options. The minister will be aware that, over the weekend, I wrote to her urging her to meet GS1 UK, which is the only company in the UK that can provide globally recognised barcodes. The minister has failed to meet GS1 UK, which is a not-for-profit company that has a solution that could, at least, reduce the burdens on industry in delivering the scheme, and, at most, change the conversation on the internal market exemption.

Will the minister commit to exploring every solution and to meet GS1 UK immediately, so that we can get a scheme that works?

Lorna Slater: I have reassured the member repeatedly that we have looked at every possible option for carrying forward the scheme as passed by the Scottish Parliament. We know that that is not possible, due to the limited exclusion passed under the Internal Market Act 2020. Today, I will

write to the secretary of state to ask for an urgent meeting tomorrow to deal with the operational matters and see whether we can get the UK Government around the table to discuss those things. I am not hopeful, given its track record: how long it took to make a decision on VAT, the fact that it still has not made a decision on trading standards and the fact that it has changed its mind very late in the day both on glass and on whether devolved nations should be able to set their own scope.

I also remind the member that barcodes are not part of the regulations passed by the Scottish Parliament and are therefore not part of the legislation that we can consider here. Because it has different powers, the UK Government may include barcodes in its scheme, but we do not know that because it has not passed the regulations yet. Therefore, it would not really help anything to discuss that with a barcode manufacturer.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Can the minister confirm that she is drawing up a modified scheme without glass and does she think that that modified scheme could be up and running by March next year?

Lorna Slater: Graham Simpson will appreciate that removal of glass is a substantial change. The question that he asks is what I am working through right now. The Conservatives are betraying their own commitments on DRS because they see undermining the Scottish Parliament as more important.

To decide whether we can go ahead with an alternate scheme without glass is a very substantial decision, so the First Minister and I will meet industry representatives tomorrow and I am attempting to get a meeting with the UK Government urgently to decide whether it is feasible for us to go forward with that.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Last week, Labour's First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, criticised the UK Government for reneging on a 2019 agreement that allowed Scotland and Wales to establish our own deposit return schemes that include glass. Westminster's Tory Government wants Wales and Scotland to wait for an English scheme, but what assurances has the minister had that there will actually be a DRS in England? When will it be up and running and will the rules for interoperability be?

Lorna Slater: Mark Ruskell will appreciate that I am unable to answer that question because the UK Government has not passed its regulations. It gives a date of 2025, but we have not seen any sort of critical pathway to making that decision. The UK Government has not got a scheme

administrator in place and it has not even determined whether the deposit will be 20p to match ours, so it cannot even answer basic questions about interoperability. It says that we have to adhere to its rules but it has not written the rules yet. Will the deposit be 20p? Will the producer fees change? We cannot answer that because the UK Government has taken away our power to do so.

South Uist Ferry Withdrawal (Demonstrations)

2. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands (Lab)): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported demonstrations in South Uist due to ferry withdrawal. (S6T-01426)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): Before I move to the very important matter of ferry services to South Uist, I want to acknowledge the news this morning that my colleague, the former Minister for Transport, has tendered his resignation from post. I thank him for his work, wish him well and ask that he is given the space to recover from the matters that he has very bravely spoken of this morning.

Moving to the substantive question and the important matter at hand, I acknowledge very clearly the dissatisfaction and upset that is felt. Ministers are very well aware of the strength of feeling from engagement that we have had, including during the former transport minister's recent visit to South Uist, and from meetings, including with the South Uist business impact group.

Technical issues with major vessels and delays to the annual overhaul programme have led to cancellations of sailings and, regrettably, some communities have been more impacted than others. Ultimately, the people of South Uist evidenced that by their demonstration on Sunday. The fact that they have lost confidence in CalMac Ferries is clear to see.

We have expressed to CalMac our disappointment at how communications and engagement have been handled, and I have been very clear that no stone is to be left unturned in addressing the issues for the Uists. I have asked urgently that CalMac review the route prioritisation matrix to ensure that it reflects the socioeconomic impacts that pertain, in particular, to fragile communities such as those on South Uist.

Rhoda Grant: I also wish Kevin Stewart a speedy recovery.

I say to the cabinet secretary that there is not a problem with comms; there is a problem due to lack of ferries. The blame for the lack of ferries sits squarely at the door of her Government. She must stop passing the buck, because South Uist has

lost confidence not in CalMac but in the Scottish Government.

The cabinet secretary must be concerned when she sees one third of the population of South Uist demonstrating their displeasure. If 200,000 local people descended on the Parliament protesting, the Scottish Government could not possibly ignore them. Businesses are going to the wall because of the Government's failure to provide ferries. Will she now compensate them?

Màiri McAllan: Operational matters on the running of the ferry network are for CalMac, so it is only right that I reflect that in Parliament. However, I will not prevaricate on the point that pressure in our ferry network is as acute as it has ever been.

Ministers empathise deeply with communities that have been affected. We understand their frustration and, for our part and within what we are responsible for, we are working in the here and now to press CalMac on the prioritisation matrix, which I mentioned in my answer to Ms Grant's initial question, as well as on communications—I understand that that is, perhaps, the tip of the iceberg; it is nonetheless important for day-to-day activities—and on ensuring that disruption is as minimal as possible. All the while, the Government is working to find and procure new additional vessels for the network. Six vessels are due on the network in the coming years, beginning as soon as the spring.

Rhoda Grant has raised the matter of compensation, which has, understandably and rightly, been raised many times with the Government. We have looked at the penalty deductions that are made in relation to failures in the ferry network; my view is that we should continue to use that money to reinvest in the network. I will give an example of how that is working to date. The £9 million cost of the charter of the MV Alfred, which is currently providing resilience on the route to Arran, is partly funded by performance deductions from CalMac of around £1 million to £3 million a year. It is right that that money continues to be used for that purpose, because we can see how it adds resilience to the network.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary is well aware that CalMac cannot build ferries; the Scottish Government can build ferries. She says that the Government paid £9 million for a charter; it could have bought the boat for £9 million.

Here in Edinburgh, businesses were rightly compensated for disruption when the tram line was being built. The Government clawed back £2.5 million in penalties from CalMac last year alone. The cabinet secretary could create a resilience fund from the money that was clawed back to help businesses that are going to the wall

right now because of her Government's incompetence.

It seems to me that it is a case of, "Out of sight, out of mind." If it happened in Edinburgh, we would not get away with it, but when it happens in South Uist, we just forget it.

Màiri McAllan: I will continue to engage with communities on the matter and, indeed, to press CalMac to do likewise. What communities want most, however, is a ferry service that is reliable for them so that they can get on with their lives without having to worry about disruption. I flatly acknowledge that that disruption is causing upset.

That is why, as I have outlined, we are, within the powers that are in the gift of the Scottish Government—and while acknowledging that operational matters are for CalMac—doing two sets of work. First, we are pressing CalMac in the here and now to improve resilience in the service, to improve communications and to test the prioritisation matrix to ensure that it takes into account all matters that are important to islanders.

At the same time, we are using powers that are within our gift to procure vessels and bring them on to the network. For example, since re-election, the Government has bought and deployed an additional vessel—the MV Loch Frisa—chartered the MV Arrow to provide additional resilience and capacity, and commissioned two new vessels for Islay and two for the Little Minch routes. That is before we speak of vessels 801 and 802, which are due to be delivered from Ferguson Marine Engineering Limited.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I also recognise the work that was done by Mr Stewart as minister—not least on his recent visit to South Uist.

The community of South Uist has had reason to feel that CalMac has been treating it with disdain. CalMac says that the decision to abandon ferry services to the island was made, essentially, because of its prioritisation process, but that process takes no account of the fact that the same route, the same community, the same businesses and the same individuals constantly bear the brunt of disruption. It takes no account of the relative economic fragility of the place and it takes no account of island circumstances. What can be done to challenge and reform the matrix or the process that is depriving South Uist of its ferry, and to ensure that South Uist stops being the default route for cancellation decisions every time there is disruption?

Màiri McAllan: I mentioned that the former transport minister had met the South Uist business impact group on Thursday last week. Discussions at that meeting centred principally on some of the issues that Dr Allan has rightly narrated, including

the route prioritisation matrix. To address those issues, ministers have pressed CalMac on the need to review the current matrix to ensure that Dr Allan's suggestions are included in it. I expect that to be done in deep consultation with the ferry community board and community representatives.

This afternoon, we will meet CalMac for an update on the substance of the work that we have asked it to do and on how it is ensuring that communities are consulted as part of the process.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On behalf of Conservative members, I wish Kevin Stewart a swift recovery.

Several small businesses from the Uists have contacted me calling for compensation for lost earnings that have resulted from the ferry crisis, and have stated that regular cancellations and rerouting have resulted in cancelled bookings and real fear for their future. I have asked this of the First Minister and I have asked Kevin Stewart, and I now ask the cabinet secretary. For the sake of those people and their livelihoods, will the minister revisit the Government's position on compensation?

Màiri McAllan: It would be wrong of me to be as candid as I have been about how much we understand the frustration of island communities but then to close myself off from discussions about anything that communities are calling for. I therefore recommit ministers to having conversations such as we have had with the South Uist business impact group and are having with CalMac.

However, I reiterate what I said previously on compensation: I believe that islanders want most of all for the Scottish Government and CalMac to focus on improving the service for the here and now and for the future, so that reliability on the service is not something that communities have to worry about daily. I have narrated already how some of the penalty deductions that are made from CalMac are utilised to provide the very resilience that everyone so desires. I believe that that is the right way to continue to address financing improvements, although I am listening to everyone who has a view on the matter.

Active Travel Transformation

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on S6M-09328, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on active travel transformation. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Patrick Harvie to speak to and move the motion.

14:29

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Thank you, Presiding Officer; I am delighted to do so.

I open the debate at what feels like a critical moment for active travel in Scotland. As members might know, walking and cycling are always my preferred ways of getting about, so I know first hand the many benefits of active travel. However, every day, I see places in my community and across the country where it needs to be made easier and safer.

In my role as the minister who is responsible for active travel, it has been a genuine privilege to be able to help to bring the benefits of active travel to other people. Perhaps the most impactful is when I meet young people who have been helped to get access to a bike for the first time, to gain the skills to maintain it and to have safe routes to use it. The independence that that gives them to go where they want when they want without cost or hassle is surely worth at least as much as the health and environmental benefits. I have found the role to be incredibly fulfilling, so I want to take time to acknowledge some of the progress that we have made so far, in this session of Parliament.

I have spoken before about the experience during lockdown of how, in the midst of otherwise dire circumstances, many people discovered their neighbourhoods anew through walking, wheeling and cycling. Hanging on to that benefit in the longer term was never going to happen by magic; investment is required to transform our built environment to support active travel. Therefore, we have committed record levels of funding, with just under £190 million in our budget for active travel in this financial year. We are well on our way to investing £320 million by financial year 2024-25.

We have helped to deliver flagship projects such as the bridges in Stockingfield and Sighthill in Glasgow, which bring communities closer together with connections and opportunities.

Less headline grabbing but no less important is the fact that we have been improving what we already have, such as by providing £14 million to extend and improve the national cycle network.

The removal of more than 200 barriers over the past year has helped to make the network's routes more accessible for everyone who chooses to walk, wheel or cycle along them. Those small measures can have a big impact for people who use the network, making everyday trips safer and more convenient.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In a different part of the minister's portfolio, he has quantified the cost of doing what we want to do through the heat in buildings strategy as £33 billion. What does he quantify as the cost of doing all that we want to do in the active travel space?

Patrick Harvie: The cost that we have committed to is £320 million or at least 10 per cent of the transport budget by the year 2024-25. Over the longer term, the sky is the limit in terms of the transformation that we could make in communities right across Scotland.

As we take that work forward, inclusion must be at the heart of our active travel policy, not just by creating better infrastructure but by working to close the mobility gap and meet the diverse needs of a diverse community. One example is the work of our delivery partners Cycling UK, which has formed a partnership with Spinal Injuries Scotland to develop a fleet of accessible and adaptable e-bikes that let people with spinal injuries and other mobility issues participate in cycling every day on journeys that many cyclists would take for granted—just going to the shops, commuting to work or attending an appointment. We should not accept that accessibility issues mean that someone cannot make an active travel journey.

In contrast with the priorities that held for so many decades, walking, wheeling and cycling are at the top of our sustainable travel hierarchy, which, in turn, informs our priorities for investment and policy decisions.

This year, I am again funding the Ian Findlay paths fund, which is named after the former chief officer of Paths for All who tragically passed away in 2021. The fund supports small local projects to make improvements to existing walking infrastructure and to make connections where there are gaps in local path networks.

I am very pleased to be able to announce today the launch of the £1.5 million active nation fund. The fund will make grants of up to £200,000 available to a range of public, third and community-sector organisations that are looking to scale up successful behaviour change interventions, enabling people to drive less and to walk, wheel or cycle as part of their everyday short journeys.

That is only a narrow sample of the wide range of activity across Scotland that is already happening. A lot of that work is still in the pipeline,

and I cannot wait to join thousands of other people in seeing the benefits.

That rising investment has already had positive outcomes. To give just one example, a scheme at Garscube Road in the north-west of Glasgow, which was funded through our places for everyone programme, resulted in a 300 per cent increase in the number of cyclists using the road, demonstrating the demand for safe spaces and connected routes. Also, just last week, research that was funded by the Scottish Government showed that the numbers of children walking, wheeling and cycling to their schools are now higher than they were before the pandemic, with almost 50 per cent of pupils getting to school actively.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I am interested in the minister's mention of schools. He will be aware that primary school kids often cycle to school, but that that tails off when they get to secondary school. What is he noticing now? Is that changing?

Patrick Harvie: We have a huge amount to do, not only with infrastructure, so that routes are safe, but to ensure that young people have access to bikes—and to different bikes as they grow and their needs change—and to the skills that they need to maintain them. There is a huge amount to do.

We are still in the early days of becoming an active travel nation and even the most ambitious projects that we begin today will take a few years to bear fruit, but I am determined to see our commitments and our record funding translate into real change on the ground.

In leading European cities, such as Utrecht and Copenhagen, such projects are commonplace and everyday. They are almost unremarked upon and are just business as usual, but getting to that position did not happen overnight; it took decades of persistent commitment across political and funding cycles. It also took an appreciation that increasing active travel is not just about active travel policy itself, and that how we manage wider transport policy is just as important. Therefore, our work on 20mph speed limits and traffic reduction targets matters, as does our economic development policy and how we plan, build and use our places—there is a role for national planning framework 4—as well as the commitment to 20-minute neighbourhoods.

That kind of sustained and integrated approach is becoming commonplace in other European cities, including in places such as Paris, Barcelona and Ghent, which some people might not associate with active travel. We can see our European neighbours transforming and re-

imagining their cities and that is what we want to do here too.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I know that the minister recognises my enthusiasm for giving people the opportunity to be active and to have active travel. Does he also recognise that the cities that he mentions already had significant active travel infrastructure and that we do not have that? We are starting from a lower position and must put more investment into delivering that active travel network before we can get people to use it.

Patrick Harvie: That is precisely why we are delivering record investment in this area. I repeat my case that places such as Paris and Barcelona perhaps did not have a strong track record and, unlike Amsterdam or Copenhagen, did not come from the higher starting point that the member talks about.

Where cities have achieved that change, they get more than health and environmental benefits. They find that, once their communities become safer and more pleasant places to spend time, they thrive. That is my ambition: that great environments for walking, wheeling and cycling become the default expectation. It must also be safe and easy to choose active travel in our rural areas and in smaller towns and villages, just as it should be in our cities.

There is still much more for us to do. That is why I published the new cycling framework for active travel in April this year. It supports our vision for active travel in 2030, when we want walking, wheeling and cycling to be the most popular modes of travel for short, everyday journeys. It will shape how Government, councils and active travel organisations will work together to deliver ambitious improvements and to remove barriers to cycling across the country.

The ambition shown by this Government in committing to the highest level of capital funding for active travel anywhere in the United Kingdom, and by far the highest amount in our history, means that we are starting to deliver. That is why I am very pleased today to announce an additional £20 million of active travel infrastructure funding that will go directly to local authorities, regional transport partnerships and the national park authorities. That new active travel transformation fund has been developed over the past few months in partnership with local authorities and others as a step towards reinvigorating our delivery models for next year and beyond.

This morning, I visited the south side of Glasgow and heard from city council colleagues how the fund has enabled the delivery of a project that will extend the already impressive south city way, connecting to the New Victoria hospital and a

nearby housing development of 400 homes. That £2.5 million scheme will improve local public spaces, prioritise people over vehicles and improve connectivity throughout the area.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I will if it is brief. I need to make some progress.

The Presiding Officer: I note that, at this point, we have some time in hand.

Liam Kerr: Will the funds that have just been given be ring fenced or will it be open to councils to use them as they please?

Patrick Harvie: The active travel transformation fund is available for councils to bid for. They can bring their projects forward and that money will be spent on delivering them.

The fund will deliver projects right across Scotland. An example is the £1.6 million to deliver phase 2 of the Alva academy link in Clackmannanshire, which will not only improve active travel for local children but will provide links to key employment centres that support about 1,000 workers. The fund will help to address transport poverty. It will also enable safe travel in rural communities. In Habost on the Isle of Lewis, we will provide £175,000 to connect the village with the local school.

We have been clear in our desire to develop the fund through a partnership approach, both directly with delivery bodies and through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I want to say how grateful I am for the constructive work of our partners, which is helping to ensure that the fund meets local needs wherever possible.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Is the fund a one-off pot of money or will year-on-year funding be built in so that local authorities can use it every single year?

Patrick Harvie: The development of the project is designed to be in line with the transformation project—the wider transformation of the delivery of active travel. We know that we need to change those delivery models if we are going to have a way of delivering active travel that is on the scale and at the level of ambition that the budgets to come set out. Because of that, we have launched the transformation fund this year to trial the model of giving the money directly to local authorities.

Because of the way that we have developed the fund in this first year, we have removed match funding requirements as we know that they can make delivery difficult, particularly for smaller delivery partners. We have a great first group of projects that have been funded this year but, beyond that, the process has identified a pipeline

of projects across Scotland that are worth nearly £700 million. I commend the genuine ambition that has been demonstrated by everyone who has developed them. The pipeline of projects stands us in great stead as it means that we have an exciting portfolio of projects that are ready to go and which match the scale of our budget commitments.

Because the real work of the fund is about turning ambition into delivery, I do not just want to see strategies; I want to see cycleways. I want to see the pipeline projects being turned into the fantastic environments for walking, wheeling and cycling that Scotland needs. The projects around the country that are included in today's funding announcement will help to do that, but they are just the beginning. The fund will deliver a diverse range of active travel infrastructure in both urban and rural locations. By providing more safe and segregated infrastructure, the projects will help to remove one of the key barriers to greater modal shift towards active travel.

I could not lead today's debate on walking, wheeling and cycling without reflecting on a huge event that will happen this summer. Scotland is in a unique position as the first country to host the UCI cycling world championships. You will be relieved, Presiding Officer—and I am sure that members will be as well—to hear that I am not the kind of person who will ever be seen in a Lycra skinsuit, hurtling round a velodrome. I am much more likely to be found going sedately along Sauchiehall Street dressed pretty much as I am today.

However, that difference captures a challenge and an opportunity that arise from the championships. The presence of world-class athletes from 13 disciplines and something like 1 million spectators converging on the country for two weeks will be a sporting spectacle, but I do not want it to leave a sense that active travel means only cycling or that cycling means only elite athletes using expensive specialist bikes.

Our task is to create a legacy that is about active travel as a way of going to work, to school or to the shops. It has been noticeable over decades that many of the countries with cycling superstars are also those with much more significant levels of everyday active travel.

We do not have to look far afield. Here in the UK, we have people such as Chris Boardman, former Olympic gold medallist and Tour de France yellow jersey holder, who now works as the national active travel commissioner with Active Travel England.

Here in Scotland, we have our own incredibly successful former professional cyclist in Lee Craigie, our ambassador for active travel. Lee is

due to complete her term in that role in September. I express my gratitude for the contribution that she has made to our national conversation on active travel. Lee has been passionate, considered and thoughtful in her role—and, what is most important, she has consistently provided robust challenge to Government. I am sure that she is looking forward to supporting Scottish Cycling ahead of the UCI World Championships over the summer and continuing to show that cycling is for everyone.

Whether people are training for the world championships, cycling to school or work every day, or just heading out for a bit of exercise once in a while, they deserve to be able to do so with confidence and in safety. It saddens me to hear from people that they would love to cycle more and would love their children to walk or scoot to school but that they fear for their safety. Yet again, this week, there have been tragic reports of deaths and injuries on our roads. Far too many people have lost friends and family members who were simply walking, wheeling or cycling to get around. One death or serious injury on our roads is one too many, so I say again that, as a nation, we still have a great deal more to do. We can, must and will do better.

We are putting in place the right building blocks: a record level of investment of nearly £190 million this year; the even higher commitment of £320 million next year; the new active travel transformation fund of £20 million, which I have announced today; the commitment to getting results from our policy not just on active travel but on transport as a whole, as well as on planning, economic development, procurement and more; and the recognition that we get the best results when we work together—national Government, local government, regional transport partnerships, the third sector and, above all, the communities that give leadership and bring forward their ideas for change. The Scottish Government, will continue to make that sustained investment, working together to achieve an active travel transformation for Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that active travel can bring significant benefits for people's health, the economy and the cost of living, and is critical for tackling the climate emergency and delivering on the commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20%; welcomes the Scottish Government's record budget for active travel in 2023-24; recognises that this is by far the highest investment in active travel per head across the UK; welcomes the new and additional £20 million Transformation Fund going directly to delivery partners to deliver new infrastructure at pace; commends the work of local authorities, regional transport partnerships and active travel delivery partners in turning that record level of investment into changes on the ground; notes the publication of the new Cycling Framework in supporting the wider 2030 Active Travel Vision, where walking, wheeling and cycling are the most popular modes of transport for

shorter everyday journeys, and looks forward to the opportunity presented by the UCI Cycling World Championships coming to Scotland in August 2023 to encourage more people to choose active travel.

14:47

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I start by saying how shocked I was to hear about the resignation of Kevin Stewart as Minister for Transport and his reasons for stepping down. I wish him only the very best in his recovery. I have always got on with Kevin in whatever ministerial role he has performed. [*Applause.*]

I agree with pretty much everything that Patrick Harvie has just said. That might surprise him.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): That is a ringing endorsement.

Graham Simpson: Is Douglas Ross still there? He is not. I thought that he was about to sack me for saying that.

Stephen Kerr: I am taking notes.

Graham Simpson: I hope that everyone who is taking part in the debate was able to do some active travelling over what was a glorious weekend. I certainly got on my bike—something that Patrick Harvie might wish me to do with a degree of permanence—and it was good.

Recently, my good friend Brian Whittle and I cycled out from East Kilbride towards Strathaven on a cycle route that uses country roads. We did not get to Strathaven because we came across a farm that had diversified into opening an outdoor cafe. [*Laughter.*] That was good enough for us and for the many locals who were using it.

I have cycled that route many times. All of it is on road, and I have to say that the roads are in an appalling state. In parts, they are dangerous to cyclists. Given that many cyclists have to go on the road, we need to concentrate on making the roads fit for purpose.

Mr Whittle and I enjoyed a few hours of old-codger chat and we will do so again soon, I hope. As you will be pleased to hear, Presiding Officer, we are not middle-aged men in Lycra. My approach, like the minister's, is that I do not have to wear special clothing to jump on a bike.

However, I have taken to wearing a helmet most of the time. That came about for me during lockdown, when I was cycling a lot more than I had been. It was a result of a couple of things. First, as I have already said, the roads were dreadful and I considered that there was a real risk that I could be thrown off my bike. The roads are worse now, so the risk is greater. Secondly, I felt that if I got a bright helmet, it would help me to be

seen by motorists, many of whom—let us face it—have little regard for cyclists.

Too many people do not feel safe on a bike, and that has to change. We need to make the infrastructure better and we need to take people with us on that mission.

Segregated routes are very important. The minister mentioned Barcelona. I have cycled there, and he is right to say that the city did not start off from a good point, but it has put in segregated routes and is perhaps a good example of how things can be done.

Here in Edinburgh, there are some fantastic off-road routes—the city is spoiled in many ways. It is investing heavily in more routes, but the council has too often been heavy handed in its approach and lacking in common sense. I do not want to get too parochial, but I recently cycled across the foot of Leith Walk, where the tramway has been built, and I just thought, “What the heck is going on?” I am not alone. The foot of Leith Walk has conflict written all over it.

All of us in this chamber back greater investment in active travel, be it in cycling, walking or wheeling. We went into the previous Scottish Parliament elections calling for 10 per cent of the transport budget to be spent on active travel, which is, thankfully, now the Government’s position. However, right now, a number of third sector organisations are worried about their funding and there is a fear of redundancies. Sustrans recently said:

“With less Scottish Government funding, we are left with no choice but to make cuts, which will reduce our impact on changing the way people travel every day. As a result, 21 of our Sustrans colleagues in Scotland are now at risk of redundancy and there will be an end or reduction to programmes right across Scotland.”

Some organisations have worked for months without funding. That is not good enough if we are to maintain any sort of momentum.

Patrick Harvie: The member, like others across the chamber, will be aware of the additional pressures that come from the current financial situation, including inflation and its impact on the Scottish budget, and the need to ensure that there is scrutiny.

One of the reasons for increased scrutiny of active travel is the increased level of budget. As something comes up the scale of spend, it requires additional scrutiny across the Scottish Government’s budget. I am very grateful for active travel partners’ understanding of the additional pressures that that brings to bear, and the extra work that they have done to provide the information that allows us to clear a huge amount of the spending that we have already committed to. They know that this Government is fully

committed to a hugely increased budget, unlike those elsewhere in the UK.

Graham Simpson: I want to talk about Scotland. The fact is that there are organisations out there that do not have certainty about their funding. When organisations such as Sustrans are having to potentially make people redundant, it sends out a very negative message.

In March last year, we debated active travel. At that time, I wished Mr Harvie all the best in his new role and offered to work with him on this policy area, on which we agree on so much. That has not happened, so I make the offer again. I would be happy to have regular meetings with Mr Harvie, so I look forward to his office getting in touch to set that up.

One issue that I have mentioned before—in fact, I mentioned it during that debate in March last year—is the lack of resources in councils, which is hampering progress. That is an issue that I mention in my amendment. Some councils do not have the expertise any more, or they may not have the people to run road safety courses—it could be anything.

There is a great project that was being talked about when I was a councillor in South Lanarkshire that has been stalled, apparently because of resources: the Westburn viaduct crosses the Clyde. Trains stopped using it in the 1980s and it has been closed ever since, but there is a plan in place to open it up and create a walking and cycling route over the river, which would be fantastic. I believe that Sustrans is geared up to go ahead, but there is no agreement on which council—Glasgow City or South Lanarkshire, on either side of the river—would maintain the new path.

The challenge of adoption of infrastructure for maintenance is a significant barrier to delivery. Perhaps the minister can assist in breaking the deadlock for the Westburn project, which could genuinely be transformational.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): The old Bathgate to Airdrie railway line was converted into what is an accessible and well-used cycle track. West Lothian Council and North Lanarkshire Council managed to work together collectively on that, so perhaps that is an example to cite locally.

Graham Simpson: That is a good example. I am familiar with that route, which I have cycled. I look forward to cycling with Ms Hyslop at a local project that she has invited me to; I hope that we will do that in the summer, which would be fantastic.

I have referred many times to the Government’s well-meant target of reducing car miles by a fifth by 2030, which is a mere seven years away. So

far, the Government has said nothing about how that will be achieved, but we know that the pace of delivery of the impressive active travel targets needs to be stepped up.

The cross-party group on sustainable transport, which I convene, produced a report in November that included five recommendations, which I will run through. They were:

“Provide clarity around policies, expected impacts, and timescales for implementation ... Pursue policies that target unnecessary car journeys ... Consider the equalities impacts of traffic reduction policies ... Ensure greater affordability of public transport services”

and

“Include van traffic as part of the traffic reduction target.”

The report said that we should

“consider the impact of freight on traffic volumes and emissions from road traffic. It must be ensured that reduction in emissions from cars is not cancelled out by an increase of emissions from delivery vans.”

So far, I have seen no progress to meet those recommendations. Nothing that the minister has said today has convinced me that we have any hope of persuading more people to use public transport. If anything, the little progress that there has been on active travel is going backwards.

As you know, Presiding Officer, active travel is good for the nation. Walking for 30 minutes or cycling for 20 minutes on most days reduces mortality risk by at least 10 per cent. Active commuting is associated with an approximate 10 per cent decrease in cardiovascular disease risk and a 30 per cent decrease in type 2 diabetes risk. The cancer-related mortality rate is 30 per cent lower among bike commuters.

It is a fact that a large number of people do not have cars, so we should make life easier for them and encourage those who have cars to use them less often. My amendment would not wipe out the minister’s motion—it would keep most of it. My amendment merely says that the Government should set out some of its plans. If we all want to improve active travel, that is not too much to ask. I urge members to back my amendment; I hope that we can all move in the same direction.

I move amendment S6M-09328.2, to leave out from “; recognises” to “ground” and insert:

“but calls on the Scottish Government to set out a detailed delivery plan that addresses how it will help local authorities that do not have the capacity to achieve the targets; calls on the Scottish Government to set out in detail how it plans to achieve a 20% reduction in car mileage by 2030”.

14:58

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland (Lab): I associate Labour with members’

comments following the resignation of Kevin Stewart. We wish him well in his recovery.

Somewhat belatedly, I welcome the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights to his role. In his own words, it is “no secret” that he enjoys cycling, and his personal engagement on active travel stretches back to well before he took on his portfolio. I hope that, from his appointment, we will see enthusiastic prioritisation of active travel infrastructure and progress through cross-party work on that shared goal.

We in Labour believe that active travel can bring significant benefits for our health, our economy and our environment. However, none of those benefits will be achieved without significant investment, planning and promotion. We welcome the Scottish Government’s funding commitments and progress on the new cycling framework, but we must also be honest about where the Government is letting us down.

Council budgets have been slashed, road repairs are waiting, planning has been delayed, pavement parking is widespread, speeding is rampant, congestion is building, and air pollution is choking us.

Why does active travel matter? Active travel is not just about leisure; it is also about making it easier to get from A to B off our own steam, not just because that will improve our health but because it will improve our environment and save us money. If we can find a way to make that one switch, the benefits will be transformational. Therefore, the importance of active travel cannot be overstated.

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mercedes Villalba: I would like to make some progress.

We know from research that active travel is associated with a lower likelihood of having diabetes or hypertension. Research also demonstrates positive mental health benefits from active travel. A study based in London found that, compared with commuting by car, walking to work is significantly associated with higher life satisfaction. In fact, commuters who maintained cycling to work for a year reported lower sickness absences and improved mental health compared with commuters who travelled by non-active means.

It is not only our health that improves through active travel; the health of our environment does so, too. Changes in active travel have significant life-cycle carbon emissions benefits. Research has found that an average person who exchanges one car journey per day for cycling for four days a

week would decrease mobility-related lifecycle CO₂ emissions by about 0.5 tonnes per year. That is roughly as much CO₂ as would be captured by 25 trees in a year. Imagine if we all made that switch—we would be a forest of millions.

With fewer cars on the roads, we will rid our environment of the relentless drone of traffic and quicken our nature recovery. We saw that during the pandemic. At first, we noticed the quiet, but we then heard the birds and other wildlife as they reclaimed the outdoors.

As much as we know that we ought to take better care of our health and our environment, it is hard to begin to think about that when the immediate reality is financial hardship, low pay, high prices and increasing demands on our time. The issue is not just that public transport is too expensive; it is too often impractical. When you are on a zero-hours contract, who has time to plan a journey with multiple changes? When you are working in healthcare or hospitality, who can be sure that they will finish work before the last bus to get home? When you are in insecure housing and are forced to move every six months, who has time to book three months in advance for the cheapest deal? When you are juggling childcare and caring responsibilities, whose plans will not change at short notice? It is no wonder that so many of us still opt for the reliability and convenience of a private vehicle. Once we are reliant on private vehicles, where would a walk or a cycle fit in, other than on a rare day off?

Let us remember that access to, and experience of, active travel are impacted by our gender, our ethnicity and whether we have a disability. We know that a lack of lighting in public parks and some streets means that women are less likely to walk or cycle after dark. We know that uneven paths and pavement parking can make it harder for people with disabilities to get around, and we know that people who are from black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by air pollution, as they are more likely to live in areas of environmental deprivation. Therefore, our encouragement of active travel must be inclusive while we seek to redress social as well as economic inequalities.

The truth is that the current choice between private vehicle or active travel combined with public transport is not a fair one. What we are experiencing is a problem with our whole transport network, the planning system and our political culture because when Government retreats, private commerce fills the void and, rather than build what many need, it builds what a few can profit from.

So, who profits from us being in this impossible situation? The oil companies, the multinationals, the private developers—the list goes on. Who

pays? Our pockets, our families' health, our neighbours' business and our polluted environment.

The Scottish Government's commitment to increasing active travel spending to 10 per cent of the overall transport budget is welcome—we made the same call in the Labour manifesto—but we cannot stop there. We must account for the reality that economic and social inequality has created by implementing a gendered approach and a diversity approach to transport infrastructure that ensures that safety, convenience and affordability are properly addressed, particularly for people with protected characteristics including women, black and minority ethnic people and those with disabilities. We must end the cuts to local authorities and invest in insourcing so that we treat active travel as the vital public service that it is, with well paid, unionised public sector workers at its heart.

A recent study showed that mothers participating in active travel led to more active children and young people, which contributes to long-term habits that are good for the young people and for our planet. Those are benefits that will build up over time; if we take the opportunity to invest now, we will reduce strain on our health, our health service and our roads.

That is why it is disappointing that in February we heard that only 3,650 bikes had been given out to school children so far. That figure is significantly below the 145,000 families who should be eligible. In order to ensure that infrastructure investment has the greatest impact, we must follow it up with support and promotion to encourage behaviour change.

Active travel policy must be about more than just encouraging people to walk, wheel and cycle at the weekend; it must fit within an integrated publicly owned transport system, so that it becomes the best choice for commuters. It must be rolled out alongside reductions in speed limits around our education centres, so that every child and young person has a safe and healthy journey to school, college or university. It must also enhance our natural environment so that every active journey comes with the benefit of wildlife and natural beauty.

Greater participation in active travel is the culture change that we need, not just to protect what we have and to combat climate change, but to make all of our lives a little more joyful as we travel and work alongside each other.

I move amendment S6M-09328.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the importance of local authority transport and planning funding in allowing all new and existing developments to include active travel infrastructure,

tackling potholes, cycle parking, and ensuring safe pavements and travel for all; believes that active travel policies should be more conscious of protected characteristics, including women, disabled people and BME people, and notes the recent report highlighting the decrease in children travelling to school in an active way.”

15:08

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I echo other members’ comments about the sudden resignation of the transport minister. I send him my good wishes for a speedy recovery.

The UCI cycling world championships coming to Scotland in August 2023 will be a chance to showcase Scotland and the United Kingdom to the world. It will bring a great tourism boost to Glasgow and the surrounding areas, which the sector will no doubt welcome after the disruption of Covid-19. I am sure that it will also inspire people to dust down their bikes and get back on the saddle—although I cannot guarantee that I will be one of them. For young Scots, I hope that the championships will spark enjoyment and intrigue, leading them to develop an enduring pastime. Whether it is a quick trip to work or the shops or a leisurely cycle in nature, we know that such journeys can have health benefits.

For many of us, using our car is the simple, default and easy means to travel: roads take us where we want to go, we are sheltered from the weather, we do not have to think about exerting ourselves to overcome a hill and we are on our own timetable.

That simplicity is the challenge with which walking, wheeling and cycling must compete. Addressing the issues that a car driver does not have to think twice about will go some way towards getting more people walking, wheeling and cycling.

Progress on ambitions is at an early stage, and I note that it will be in the next financial year—three years into this session of Parliament—that the Scottish Government fulfils the Bute house agreement that 10 per cent of the transport budget will be spent on active travel. However, it is not simply money that will help to reach those ambitions; societal and behavioural changes are needed, too.

We can all recognise the benefits of active travel—from saving money to health improvement and helping the planet—but we are not all switching our cars for bikes on short journeys. Transport Scotland figures show the previous high of 1.8 per cent of journeys under 5 miles being made by bike, which was last achieved in 2018, only modestly climbing to 2.8 per cent in 2021. That said, I note the change in methodology for the pandemic-affected years.

Safety looms large as a concern. Research from Cycling Scotland shows that two thirds of people would be more likely to consider cycling if there was less traffic on the roads. Although changes in cycle lane configuration will address some of those concerns, there are more structural matters behind the scenes.

Cycling Scotland’s research also highlighted the stubborn gender gap, with almost 80 per cent of women saying that they would be more likely to cycle if there was less traffic on the road, compared with just over 60 per cent of men. Men also stated that they were more confident cycling, compared with the responses from women. That speaks to the need for gender-sensitive planning more widely.

Those from minority communities are also underrepresented on the saddle. I note the work of the Sustrans community active travel support service to address that.

Our active travel infrastructure needs to be accessible across the board so that everyone feels that they can use and enjoy it. Even during Covid-19 restrictions and policies such as spaces for people, cycling did not seem to become that much more attractive to people. We will have to see how the figures stack up in the future, with Covid-19 restrictions having been fully lifted.

The Transport Scotland figures for 2020 and 2021 show an increase in walking, with almost 60 per cent of journeys of under 2 miles in 2020 being made by walking. That figure sat at almost 48 per cent in 2019. Again, figures will need to be assessed in the context of the full lifting of the pandemic restrictions, as there was a slight fall to 56 per cent in 2021.

Work to build new paths, connect old paths and re-evaluate urban spaces can boost active travel. I note the ambition for 20-minute neighbourhoods to encourage uptake of walking, wheeling and cycling. However, a lot of that does not apply to rural and island Scotland, where a car is not a luxury but a necessity. For island and rural areas, there will always need to be alternatives to active travel to cross greater distances and deal with geographical challenges. For some, accessibility needs are met only by car, but that does not mean that we cannot make improvements. We must do what we can to make car travel sustainable with advances in electric vehicles and charging points, as well as investment in our public transport.

The Scottish Government is moving in the right direction with investment and strategy development. We will continue to scrutinise that work, which is still in its infancy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): We now move to the open debate. I confirm that we still have quite a bit of time in

hand, so anybody who takes an intervention will get the time back and possibly a bonus over and above that. I call Christine Grahame for a generous six minutes.

15:13

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Deputy Presiding Officer, I must know what the bonus is first—I mean, I have to have notice of what the bonus will be.

Anyway, I am pleased to support the Government motion, and I welcome the additional £20 million of funding. As others have said, one of the unexpected and rare bonuses of Covid and its restrictions was the empty roads and streets, which made walking, but particularly cycling, safer and more enjoyable.

As a consequence, in the capital, Edinburgh city streets have many designated cycle lanes, which must give a degree of comfort to cyclists and motorists. However, I say in passing that some cyclists who ride through Holyrood park do not use those lanes but insist on using the road. I do not know why. Some do not wear reflective clothing. Some might have a bright light but simply rely on the rear reflector light to alert motorists to their presence. That rear reflector is all that we can see. I cannot fathom that either.

I return to the issue of roads. Cycle lanes are, of course, not available—nor would they be practical—on the main arterial roads in my constituency: the A68, A7, A707, A702 and A703. They are tricky to drive, let alone to cycle. There is also the hazard of the Sheriffhall roundabout—known to cyclists as “the meat grinder”—where the A7 meets the city bypass. I have never seen a cyclist try to tackle the Sheriffhall roundabout.

However, local and short distances are being tackled. I will start with the example of Borders schools, which are getting children into the habit of and having confidence in cycling. In February, I visited Stow primary school, which is undertaking Living Streets’ WOW initiative, which is a walk-to-school challenge. WOW is a pupil-led initiative where children self-report how they get to school every day using the interactive WOW travel tracker. Pupils who travel actively at least once a week for a month are rewarded with a WOW badge. WOW schools in Scotland see, on average, a 5 per cent to 10 per cent increase in pupils walking to school with a corresponding drop in car use, helping to reduce congestion and increase safety outside the school gates.

The Scottish Government awarded Scottish Borders Council £1.2 million funding for spaces for people, which included spend on measures such as 20mph speed limits in every town, to make the

roads safer for walkers and cyclists. The road from Clovenfords to Caddonfoot was closed as part of that. It proved to be such a success that the closure was made permanent, to create a car-free stretch, which is now used extensively by dog walkers and cyclists. The local primary school is also making use of the grass football pitch halfway down the road, because there is now safe access—previously the road, which has no pavement, had a 60mph speed limit.

The 20mph limit is now fully operational across the Borders. I believe that that has improved the lives of communities such as Stow, where there is a very narrow pavement abutting the busy and also narrow A7, which runs through the village.

Last year, the Hike & Bike Hub opened on Channel Street in Galashiels. It aims to promote active travel and healthy leisure activities, and to make them available to everyone, regardless of income on a “pay what you can” basis, so some are hired at the full rate, some are hired at a reduced rate and some are free.

There are also many bike recycling social enterprises. Examples are Re-cycles Penicuik; the Stow cycle hub at the station, which includes bike hire; and Just Cycle in Tweedbank, which recycles bikes that are destined for the tip. People do not need a lot of money to have a bike—there are some terrific bargains.

There is a 51-mile circular cycle route through the Scottish Borders that goes through Tweedbank, Melrose, past Leaderfoot viaduct and on to Scott’s view. Other routes run parallel with the Tweed, east and west. Those are absolutely protected, away from the main road, very flat and quite often tarmacked, so they are also suitable for wheelchairs and prams.

Borders Buses carries the sign “The bus you can take your bike on”. It has 23 bike-friendly buses. Those take people away from very busy roads that they cannot cycle on. People can put their bike on a bus in Edinburgh and Glasgow. They can also take their bike on the train.

Of course, there is the famous mountain biking centre at Glentress. That has different levels of biking trails and is for real cyclists. I have never been on any of them; I never intend to be. I value my bones.

In Midlothian, the council has been given funding of more than £266,000 for three projects. I will cite one as an example. Shawfair connections is to be completed in 2026. That is important, because Shawfair is an area with a huge household development and is adjacent to the Borders railway, with its own station. The project will commence in October and will consider priority routes for active travel infrastructure in the Shawfair area. Planning ahead is important. When

housing developments are being considered, there is a need to build in active travel routes at the beginning.

There are many cycle paths across Midlothian. Each Midlothian school has a travel plan that aims to encourage pupils and staff to walk, cycle or, more often, scoot. Currently, Midlothian has 17 cycle-friendly primary schools. In my patch, those are Strathesk primary school, Cornbank St James primary school, Cuiken primary school, Sacred Heart primary school, which are all in Penicuik, and another in Gorebridge.

There are also secondary school cycle clubs. Beeslack and Lasswade high schools offer extracurricular cycle clubs, and Penicuik high school is in the process of starting one. A lot of important work is being done in primary and secondary schools.

Other initiatives include the installation of cycle lanes, where appropriate—not on some main roads, for example—cycle and scooter parking provision at schools and route maps that show recommended safe routes to school. There is also bike week, with events including “Bling Your Bike”, which involves pupils decorating their bike or scooter, and “Ticket to Ride”, in which pupils receive raffle tickets for cycling that go into an end-of-week prize draw for cycle prizes.

Rosslyn chapel and the national mining museum in Scotland have become the first two visitor attractions in the Lothians to achieve the cyclists welcome award from VisitScotland.

There have, therefore, been substantial developments to encourage more cycling. However, the safety of cyclists must be secure. Several years ago, I tried cycling to Parliament. In order to access the cycle path through the park, I had to cycle only a short distance without a designated cycle path, but I was knocked off by a passing car and lost my confidence. I confess that my bike is now a very handy handbag rack in the hall, and there it will stay.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. The bonus to which I referred earlier is, of course, an annual membership for Glentress.

15:21

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): As I rise to speak, I am still reeling from the knowledge that I have been dropped as Graham Simpson’s cycling buddy in favour of Fiona Hyslop.

However, I am delighted to speak in this debate. As members are aware, I support investment in active travel. We should encourage physical activity given our country’s poor health record.

A report from December 2022 in the *Journal of Transport and Health* said that physical activity levels

“can be increased by implementing policies that provide convenient, safe, and connected walking and cycling infrastructures, promote active travel and give strong support to public transport.”

I also read an article on ScienceDirect that said that providing new walking and/or bicycle infrastructure was “strongly associated” with increased levels of physical activity.

Crucially, making it easier to access active travel encourages people to use active travel networks. Sustrans identified a lack of funding as one of the main barriers that local authorities face in delivering net zero. Even with Government funding, local authorities struggle to secure the match funding that is required to be shortlisted for projects, which slows down the delivery of that infrastructure. In addition, Sustrans says that the cost of infrastructure maintenance is often too significant for local authorities to meet alone.

That brings me to the Conservative amendment, in the name of Graham Simpson, which asks for a clear route and delivery plan to address how the Government will help local authorities that do not have the capacity to achieve our targets.

I wanted to have a look at the introduction of low emission zones now that one is live in Glasgow. I looked at a Sustrans report from 2019 on reducing car use in Scottish cities. The report says that the three ways to reduce car dependency are

“Developing high quality neighbourhoods ... Improving public transport provision, walking and cycling across cities”

to make them competitive with driving and

“Taking steps to reduce the number of cars within our cities and towns.”

The problem is that the Scottish Government started with the third one without recognising that people still have to travel across and into cities. The introduction of the car ban without the development of alternatives has put increased pressure on businesses, especially on people who drive older cars. The policy therefore has a disproportionate impact on those who can least afford car upgrades.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Brian Whittle accept that Glasgow has a pretty good local transport system? My constituency, which is not in a rural area, has 11 railway stations and at least six bus routes, with very frequent services. We have very good public transport in Glasgow.

Brian Whittle: I thank John Mason for that intervention, but it is problematic if people need to get in and out of the city, and it is quite difficult for

business people to travel from one meeting to another.

In Glasgow, there should have been infrastructure investment prior to the introduction of the low-emission zone to make the transformation as easy as possible for locals, commuters and businesses.

That takes me on to amendments that I tried to make when the Transport (Scotland) Bill went through Parliament in the previous session. Specifically, one amendment would have ensured that, under the LEZ legislation, all revenue above the cost incurred in administering the scheme would be used for activities that contributed to meeting climate change targets and actions to reduce air pollution. That amendment was not agreed to. It was voted down by the Greens, which came as a bit of a surprise to me.

Patrick Harvie: Just a few minutes ago, one of the member's colleagues asked me whether I agree that we should not tell local authorities how to use money that is provided for them. Is he now saying that we should dictate from the centre how money should be used locally? Surely he can recognise that there is a case for decentralising that decision making.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you the time back for taking that intervention, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle: As I said, before that legislation was introduced, infrastructure should have been in place to make it easier for people to get around. The Government already centralises so much of the money for local government. In this particular instance, we should make it easier for local councils to put in place that infrastructure. The LEZ legislation does not ring fence a budget to support alternative ways to travel through the zones, and there is no preparation of alternative travel infrastructure that is joined up in a proactive manner. The Scottish Government needs to plan for the implementation of low emission zones, ensure that travel is accessible and ensure that the decision to adopt public transport is as easy to make as possible.

I want to mention a third sector organisation in my area, Cycle Station, which recycles bikes. Last year, it recycled 640 bikes and put them back into the community at a fraction of the cost of new bikes. Cycle Station is actively engaging with the community to improve its services. It has increased its cycle training classes and learn-to-ride sessions. It now runs four such sessions on Saturday mornings for children aged three to 15. It started with classes for kids as young as three on balance bikes and, after feedback from the community, it now offers tailored classes for children aged seven to 10, which are fully booked.

Cycle Station's bike refurbishing work is aligned with the circular economy. The recent good weather has boosted sales, and it tells me that it is busy in the workshops with services, repairs and the refurbishment of bikes for reuse and redistribution. Because of that expansion, the organisation now needs additional space to meet the demand for refurbishing parts as well as whole bikes. Many of the barriers that Cycle Station faces align with the barriers that are set out in the Sustrans report that I referred to. Cycle Station says that the biggest challenge last year was gaining funding for the refurbishment of a new building in Darvel to allow the expansion of the operation and facilities for the benefit of the community.

I have previously invited the minister to visit Cycle Station. I again invite him to do so and see for himself the great work that the organisation does. The Scottish Government should consider how it can turbo charge its ambition by backing third sector organisations that promote active travel, such as Cycle Station. Those organisations are economically prudent and reach the very people whom we would all like to reach.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fiona Hyslop. You have a generous six minutes, Ms Hyslop.

15:28

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): By now, we all know about the physical and mental health benefits of active travel. They include feeling clearer headed after some fresh air, being more productive after a walk, saving on fuel and reducing traffic in our streets. I have a daily 50-minute walk as part of my commute to Holyrood via the train service, and I definitely feel the benefit of it.

The Scottish Government has continually displayed its commitment to active travel and to increasing levels of walking, cycling and wheeling. It has committed to spending at least £320 million, or 10 per cent of the total transport budget, on active travel by 2024-25, which is up from £39 million in 2017-18. That funding will go to projects throughout Scotland that will make public spaces more suitable for active travel, as well as pilot projects that will improve accessibility to such travel. That might involve offering free bikes to children who cannot afford them, bike storage schemes, shared hire schemes or bike riding and maintenance training for communities. That comprehensive approach will benefit people's health and wellbeing and improve their connections and their communities, not to mention that it will have a huge benefit to the environment in the form of reduced carbon emissions and traffic congestion.

As West Lothian, which I represent, is a county of small towns with regular commuters, we are well placed to demonstrate how active travel can work by encouraging residents to bike or walk to train or bus stations instead of driving into cities. I urge the minister to prioritise not just cities but those kinds of hub-and-spoke links in West Lothian for funding, because walking or wheeling to public transport hubs on the M8 and M9 for buses and rail stations, including the new station that we need at Winchburgh, just makes sense if we are to stop car commuting.

Liam Kerr: Six months or so ago, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that the member and I sit on produced a comprehensive report that said that one of the main concerns for councils was a lack of skills to deliver net zero programmes, particularly around active travel. Is the member aware of whether the Scottish Government has taken on board that particular recommendation to increase skills?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Ms Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop: I think that the particular issue in that respect is planning, which we know has an effect, whether it be on infrastructure for active travel or on other areas around net zero. My concern is whether regional transport partnerships are really effective at joining things up and sharing the skills between local authorities—which Mr Simpson might have referred to.

In Linlithgow, a world-class cycling facility—the West Lothian Cycle Circuit—was opened by minister Maree Todd just at the end of May. Yes, it has been built for competitions, but it also provides access to a safe and traffic-free environment in which children can learn how to cycle and adults, particularly women, can learn again how to cycle safely and confidently. Indeed, I suggest to Mr Simpson, who is a keen cyclist, that he might wish to visit the circuit.

This year, from 3 to 13 August, the UCI world championships will see the world's greatest cyclists come together across Scotland to compete at the highest level, to make history and to show the world the power of the bike. It is the biggest global cycling event that has ever been staged, featuring 13 world championships across seven disciplines, and it is a world-class event that will inspire and motivate people to try a bike again at our cycle circuit in West Lothian. I am proud to have played my part in negotiating and securing the UCI world championships event for Scotland when I was a minister.

Constituents also benefit from the West Lothian Bike Library, which works in partnership with the council to help people get active and connected through cycling. I would encourage my

constituents to take part in West Lothian Council's consultation on active travel in order to inform the West Lothian active travel plan and help the council bid for the funds that the minister referred to.

I have also had the opportunity to work directly with Sustrans, West Lothian Council and my constituents to improve active transport links in my constituency. Capstan Walk, which is a stretch of pathway linking the outlying Springfield area of Linlithgow to the town centre, was in a state of disrepair, despite being a core pathway used by pupils going to schools and by local people commuting to the train station. In collaboration with Sustrans and West Lothian Council, I have worked with constituents and co-ordinated efforts to get the pathway repaired, and it is now much more suitable for wheeling use. Such work is an example of how we can make accessible-to-all pathways that encourage walkers, cyclists, wheelchair users and those with prams to travel to their town centres safely and actively, instead of driving.

The national cycle network through Scotland consists of roughly 1,643 miles of routes, including 702 miles of traffic-free routes using railway paths, canal towpaths, forest roads, shared-use paths, segregated cycle lanes and redetermined rural footways. The network, which is a massive asset to Scotland, cuts through my constituency, enabling people to actively explore this beautiful country. If we look at the figures for 2019-20, we can see its benefit. It was used by 4.2 million people; 70.9 million car trips were saved; £1.64 billion was spent in local businesses by leisure and tourist users; and £21.5 million was saved by the national health service through the impact on people's health.

We know that the current planning system creates a dependency on cars, and I must ask the minister whether the planning stipulations for 2.4 cars in new housing developments are still happening. We also know that section 75 agreements could be better utilised by local authorities to support sustainable and accessible active travel and public transport links. Recently, constituents in Bridgend in my constituency contacted me, wanting the council to make use of section 75 agreements in proposed housing developments to promote cycle paths.

Active travel is not a priority for the Conservative party. Indeed, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak recently received an open letter from a coalition of charities, professional organisations and businesses urging a reversal of the proposed cuts to active travel funding announced by UK Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper, on 9 March. In comparison, the Scottish Government is putting the health and wellbeing of citizens and

the environment at the heart of policy, with a record level of funding for active travel in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to active travel. That positive development must continue, because, if it does, we will continue to see changes in people's health, the environment and the economy. There is a lot of power in active travel, allowing people to change lifestyles for the better, helping our environment and—importantly in the 21st century—connecting people in a greener and more sustainable way.

I am pleased to support the minister's motion.

15:36

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): A quarter of Scotland's emissions come from transport, and at 38 per cent, cars account for the largest share. Cutting transport emissions is vital if we are to prevent irreversible climate change and lead healthier lives; the Scottish Government's aim of reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 is an important goal and good active travel options do a great deal to reduce car use.

As the minister and others have mentioned, the UCI cycling world championships, which will take place in August across Scotland, including in my Stirling constituency, will be a fantastic showcase for cycling and active travel. However, we must also take the opportunity to understand why people do not choose active travel. The reasons include a lack of infrastructure. Smaller rural communities often suffer from connectivity issues, both within communities and between neighbouring areas, and fast roads with no pavements and poor public transport links make getting around sustainably a challenge. Paired with the increasing centralisation of services, including general practitioners and supermarkets, that leads to a higher reliance on cars. Indeed, with a figure of 584, Stirling has the highest vehicle ownership per 1,000 population in Scotland.

Reliance on cars also entrenches inequalities and limits accessibility for people who do not have access to one. In my constituency, there are key gaps in active travel infrastructure that still need to be filled, including the much needed connection between Doune and Callander. There is a massive demand for it—indeed, constituents ask about it all the time—but, at present, there is no safe or accessible route. Yesterday, I wrote to Sustrans for an update on progress.

Across my constituency, proactive rural communities are delivering excellent active travel projects. For example, the Killearn Community Futures Company is working on a path to better connect new developments with the rest of the

village. Regrettably, the planning system had allowed the developer to provide only a narrow pavement link for walking, with no provision for cycling or wheeling, so the community decided to take action and applied for Sustrans places for everyone funding. Although national planning framework 4 is a great step towards prioritising active travel links in planning, the people involved with that project are asking for higher minimum standards for new developments in that respect.

When I spoke to Stirling Council about active travel in rural areas, it highlighted the many engaged rural communities that are keen for improvement. However, when projects are prioritised on a value-for-money basis, it is harder to make the business case for those who live in areas with lower-density populations. Those rural routes might not have the same number of core users as city routes, but they are still an important step in connecting our rural communities and reducing car use. The council highlighted the potential for a dedicated fund for rural projects to progress key links, but it also needs provision of funds for maintenance, which is an important issue, too.

As we have heard, the Scottish Government has committed to spending at least £320 million, or 10 per cent of the total transport budget, on active travel by 2025, and I welcome the new £20 million transformation fund, with funding going directly to delivery partners. That will support faster progress in infrastructure improvements, and I hope that specific funds will be dedicated to rural areas. I am also pleased that in its "A Long-Term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030" the Scottish Government has highlighted the importance of better maintenance and increased provision in rural areas. Those things are much needed, and I am eager to hear how those aims will be achieved.

As we transition to more active travel, we are likely to remain dependent on cars in the near future. In the absence of reliable public transport links, steps should also be taken to find short-term solutions for rural communities. In my constituency, the community of Doune has faced high levels of car traffic and a lack of parking; the people there have worked hard to come up with an innovative solution in the form of park and stride, and an old council site outside the village has been repurposed for parking and electric vehicle charging. It encourages those who can to walk through the village to Doune castle, which was made famous by "Outlander" and Monty Python. The aim of the project is to reduce congestion in the village, increase footfall to local businesses and encourage visitors to spend more time in the village itself.

As we look to other nations and admire their active travel infrastructure, it is easy to forget that

the bike culture of the Netherlands, for example, was not a natural phenomenon; as the minister has noted, it was the product of hard work, fierce activism and investment over the course of many years. It will take hard work here, too, but the outcome will be so worth while. The benefits—reduced car use, lower emissions, cleaner air and increased wellbeing—are many, and I look forward to seeing how the Scottish Government will ensure that our rural communities make progress on this, too.

15:42

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

First, I apologise for my need to leave the chamber soon, as I have a meeting with the Minister for Parliamentary Business in my role as a committee convener. I will endeavour to be back as soon as possible and hope to be here for closing speeches. I thank the Presiding Officer for accepting my request.

We know how important active travel is to reducing emissions and improving health, alongside other related benefits. However, travelling around Scotland, we can clearly see that we need to do much more to shift away from car use. Our local authorities have a key role in delivery, but they face huge challenges with funding and in securing the necessary skills to deliver on programmes such as active travel, which are vital to net zero. Their budgets have been under significant pressure for a number of years; increasing the active travel budget now will not compensate for more than a decade of cuts. We need consistent investment that prioritises encouraging and enabling people to get out of their cars, to walk and to cycle so that we can reap the benefits for health, for the environment and for all our communities.

To encourage active travel to the levels that we want, it needs to be a key and core part of infrastructure development that is thought about in conjunction with public transport, housing and planning and social inclusion in the initial stages and in relation to maintenance. We need to think about the range of ways in which travel can be built into our lives and communities, and we need to ensure that people can access local services as well as onward transport routes.

In cycling provision, we have seen some significant improvements within cities and towns, but they have been a bit too piecemeal. Too often, cycle routes come to an abrupt stop and there are too few fully formalised routes with segregated lanes. There have been nowhere near enough improvements in connecting towns and villages with cycling networks so that people can cycle into towns and cities from the countryside and vice versa. Making those connections can stimulate

local economies and open Scotland up to more people, including people on lower incomes.

We have seen how the north coast 500 route has been used to bring tourists to that part of the country, but we should be looking at promoting cycling equivalents that would bring people to enjoy our scenery, communities and hospitality by getting around on their bikes. There are some beautiful coastal routes in Fife—I welcome the recent improvements around Aberdour—but there are still gaps.

As for walking routes, we need to look at the condition of the paths network and consider how to properly fund its on-going maintenance. A few members have raised that issue in the debate.

We should recognise that active travel must work alongside public transport. Commuters often have to be able to walk or cycle to bus stops or train stations. That means that we must provide suitable secure bike storage so that people are comfortable leaving their bikes when they make their onward journeys. It also means that we must increase the number of bike spaces that we have on trains and buses, so that bikes can be used at the other end of journeys. Christine Grahame highlighted that people who try to get around the country in her region too often find that they cannot access public transport modes with their bikes.

Behaviour change programmes are a key part of encouraging people to change their travel habits. In my region, organisations including Greener Kirkcaldy, which I visited recently, are working with the community to deliver sustainable change, including through walking festivals, cycle rides and training, and bike repairs and servicing. Bike doctor services are out and about in the community, which is making it easier for people to access the help that they need to get on two wheels, and is removing barriers to participation. I was pleased that my bike was recently made fit for the road by a bike doctor when he visited our offices in Lochgelly.

When it comes to increasing participation, more targeted action to change behaviours is needed. We need improvement in the data that is collected on active transport and gender, for example. However, we already know that men are much more likely to cycle than women are, and we know that the number of children getting to school by active travel modes is declining. We also know that access to active travel is often divided along economic lines or by rural and urban areas. Therefore, we need initiatives that target particular groups and encourage modal shift among them.

Sometimes, however, it is not modal shift that is needed; we must recognise, as Mercedes Villalba pointed out, that we are sometimes talking about

people who do not have cars. The Levenmouth area, which I represent, has one of the lowest levels of car ownership in the country, so we need to facilitate people who live there to be more active.

Behaviour change is not just about encouraging more people to walk or cycle. Cycling Scotland's annual "Give cycle space" campaign is running at the moment. It highlights some of challenges that need to be addressed. It surveyed more than 500 drivers who do not cycle themselves. Although 97 per cent of them agreed that people who drive too close to cyclists are putting lives at risk, more than a third of them admitted that they

"don't think of someone cycling as a person".

Instead, they are focused on getting past the cyclist and on with their journey. That is a frightening thought for anyone who is thinking about cycling. Segregated lanes are not always available or well maintained, nor is it required that cyclists use them even when they are available. I think that that point was made earlier in relation to the cycle lanes in Holyrood park.

In my region, the Levenmouth connectivity project seeks to transform provision for walking, wheeling and cycling in the Levenmouth area, including by upgrading around 24km of existing roads and paths, of which 10km will be segregated from vehicles.

The benefits of increasing active travel are huge, but securing those benefits needs consistent and improved support for local authorities in order that they can deliver the necessary infrastructure, alongside behaviour change programmes that enable people to make changes to their transport habits. The funds that have been announced today are welcome; however, although there are advantages to a bidding process, we need sustainable funding.

I welcome the UCI cycling world championships coming to Scotland later this year. I look forward to seeing the road race taking place in various parts of my region, as well as the time trial that will take place in Stirling. I would be keen to hear more from the minister about how the Scottish Government is working not just to encourage more people to choose active travel for such events but to generate an all-important active travel legacy from it.

15:48

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): I welcome the debate and commend the minister for the personal energy that he brings to this important topic. From my extensive discussions with him over the course of the period in which he has been in Government, I know how seriously he

takes the issues, and that he is providing the commitment and leadership that are necessary to advance the agenda.

One of the comments that the minister made in his opening remarks suggested that we must make active travel easier and safer. The more we think about how that can be turned into a practical reality, the better we will serve the interests of the policy agenda.

I took part in a local cycling exercise in the city of Perth. It is a place in which I do not normally cycle; I normally cycle in country areas on very quiet roads. I found cycling in the city of Perth to be a very unnerving experience because of the interplay with, and the volume of, fast-moving traffic. There are significant obstacles to people feeling that it is safe to cycle in particular contexts. That should underpin a lot of our thinking, because it all matters in terms of getting people out of cars and on to the other modes of transport that will help us to reduce carbon emissions.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I share Mr Swinney's experience of the difficulties of cycling around Perth. Does he agree that it has not helped that the local council there has taken out a number of cycle lanes over time, thereby making the streets potentially more dangerous?

John Swinney: That is a concern. I will speak soon about some issues in the Perthshire area, where my council colleagues are now taking back the initiative to ensure a far more sustained approach that will secure greater levels of participation in cycling and active travel, which are essential to reducing carbon emissions.

A key point that is at the heart of the Government's agenda and the minister's agenda is the creation of a common purpose between Government, local authorities, regional transport partnerships and communities. The Government cannot do this on its own, so it is not appropriate to land it all on the Government, because many decisions must be taken at the local level. That makes the stance that has been taken by the Conservative Party in today's debate just a little odd, because the amendment that was lodged by Graham Simpson would delete the motion's reference to the active investment that the minister is making today in local authority provision. Having made the plea that the Government support local authorities with funding, the Conservatives now want us to pass a rather silly amendment that would take away any reference to that particular point.

Mercedes Villalba made a strong point about the importance of improving air quality. The intervention that I wanted to make on her was to ask a bewildered question about what on earth the

Glasgow Labour Party was doing in the run-up to the introduction of the Glasgow low emission zone last week, when Labour members suddenly said that they thought that there were problems with the zone, despite their having made a manifesto commitment to delivering it.

I am not citing those examples to make unnecessary trouble for myself in a parliamentary debate—I always try to bring people in the chamber together—but I think that they are stunning examples of the problem that is faced by us, by the minister and by the whole climate action agenda. It is that we need to get people to establish a degree of consistency between our vigorous strategic agreement on the importance of tackling climate change and the specific things that we have to do about it on the ground. I cite the deposit return scheme, in respect of which there is a massive problem that has become an obstacle, and the workplace parking levy, which we have been told we cannot do. Many other things have been cited, but here we are, in an active travel debate, with the minister putting money on the table to help things to move forward while folk moan about it.

Graham Simpson: Will the member accept an intervention?

John Swinney: Since I have been citing him as the principal source of moaning and complaint today, I must give way to Mr Simpson.

Graham Simpson: I point out to John Swinney that at no point in my contribution did I moan or complain about anything that Patrick Harvie said. Perhaps he will recognise that I started my contribution by saying that I agree with what Patrick Harvie said. If Mr Swinney could adopt that tone, the debate would be all the better for it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you that time back, Mr Swinney.

John Swinney: I am trying to encourage people to establish a relationship between our strategic commitment to tackling climate change and their being prepared actually to do something about it ground. That is my point.

Let me move to some of the local issues that I told Mr Ruskell I would talk about. One good example that I see in my constituency is that some developments can enable active travel. For example, when the Perth flood defence scheme was put in place, an extensive cycling network was created. It goes off road around the North Muirton area and gives wonderful access to the city.

That will be complemented by the completion of the cross-Tay link route. I know that Mr Ruskell is not a fan of that particular development, but it will create a park-and-choose space where people

can park their cars then choose how they access the city from quite far out of the city, in a rural area.

I make the plea to the minister, as I did when he came to visit my constituency, that the Government look seriously at community aspirations for stronger regulation to enable communities to access land for community projects for active travel development. I have a number of examples, particularly in the Coupar Angus, Blairgowrie and Alyth triangle, where great community groups want to establish cycleways but are being thwarted by their lack of ability to progress land acquisition or to deal even with land-access issues, on which public authorities have stronger powers than community organisations.

When I visited constituents the other week, we cycled along the cycle route beside the A90 dual carriageway between Perth and Dundee, on the stretch between Walnut Grove and St Madoes. It is quite literally just a pavement at the side of the A90. For people who cycle along it, even those who are of sturdy determination, it is quite daunting and intimidating. We need to think about how we can develop spaces and routes. St Madoes is a growing commuter community for the city of Perth. There is an opportunity for people to use that route to access the city, but the infrastructure is not quite there. I have written to the transport minister about the issue, and I hope that Patrick Harvie will engage on the matter.

The Government is taking the right steps. I very much welcome the investment that it has announced today and the commitment to active travel. I hope that they will help us to get the modal shift that is necessary to support our ambitions on climate change.

15:56

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the debate. It comes after world bicycle day on Saturday, when we celebrated what I believe the Dutch call *fietsgeluk*, or bicycle happiness—a state that is perhaps typified by Graham Simpson and his rambling journeys around the countryside together with his lead-out man, Brian Whittle.

It is clear that the record-breaking levels of investment to create dedicated spaces where we can walk, wheel and ride in safety are starting to deliver. If we build it, they will come, and I am very encouraged by the minister's announcement of the transformation fund today. It will really help to build the capacity in local authorities, which has been dwindling in recent years.

We heard some examples from Stirling from Evelyn Tweed. In Stirling, we have the new railway

station concourse and the routes around town and out to the university. They represent the most significant step in redesigning the city's transport infrastructure that we have seen in more than a generation. I know that the minister visited Stirling recently.

The green shoots that are starting to appear around the country are testament to the work of a movement that has been relentless in its goal to reclaim the streets for people. I pay tribute in particular to Ian Findlay, who was such a wonderful advocate and an inspiration personally to me and to many others who joined him in that important mission.

Of course, the debate on active travel is about much more than simply modes of transport. Ultimately, it is about designing places that are friendlier, safer and healthier—places that feel accessible regardless of people's mobility, age, income or ability to drive. It is about places that are nice to spend time in—green, beautiful and sociable spaces.

We can ask people to walk, wheel and cycle and we can train and support them to do so, but if the streets are dangerous—if pavements are blocked and traffic is too congested or too fast—they will not do so. Even segregated infrastructure cannot possibly join up every single journey from door to door.

A key litmus test here is our schools. If young people and their families who live within just a couple of miles of places find it difficult to walk, wheel or cycle there, we clearly need intervention and investment. The streets where we live, work and play have to feel safer, with the car being a guest, and a polite and respectful one at that. Getting the foundations right is vital.

I highlight two simple national interventions that will be transformational for communities across Scotland: 20mph speed limits and the enforcement of restrictions on pavement parking—two issues on which I have enjoyed working closely with Kevin Stewart over the past couple of months. I very much wish him well for the future.

Traffic speed is often cited as the biggest barrier to cycling. Twenty miles per hour is the right maximum speed for the majority of roads on which motor vehicles mix with pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists. For every 1mph reduction in average speed, there is a 4 to 6 per cent reduction in road casualties—real lives that are being saved. The extensive Scottish Borders Council pilot has shown conclusively that 20mph benefits both urban and rural communities. That limit is popular, too; no sooner has one community switched to 20 than others demand to go 20 as well.

Some members might remember that, in 2019, I introduced a member's bill to make 20mph the

norm in Scotland. Although that bill did not pass at the time, progress has been made since then. The Welsh Government passed an almost identical measure and, as a result, the majority of Welsh roads that are currently 30mph will have flipped to 20mph by September this year.

In Scotland, all appropriate roads will be designated as 20mph by 2025. Councils have been asked to draw up detailed plans for implementation that are similar to those of Welsh councils. Some, such as Highland Council, have already led the way, rolling out 20mph across 116 communities early, before that deadline. Stirling Council hopes to complete the full roll-out of 20mph by the end of the coming year, with only four communities yet to have those limits installed.

However, there is still some way to go and it is critical that, in the absence of a national legislative change like the one in Wales, all councils commit to implementation in the same timescale so that the benefits of national communication and roll-out can be achieved, and that funding is provided by the Scottish Government.

I have found that the roll-out of 20mph often triggers a community conversation about how we can make our streets safer. I hope that the roll-out of the enforcement of pavement parking restrictions will do the same. The daily frustration that is felt by so many when vehicles block pavements is a barrier that many of us do not fully understand until we push a child's buggy or walk alongside friends who use a wheelchair. I therefore urge everyone who has a stake in their community's safety to respond to the current Transport Scotland consultation on enforcement.

This summer, we will see the power of the bike across Scotland. Incredible moments and memories will be made through the cycling world championships. However, I hope that the legacy of that will include greater awareness as well as greater participation.

As a sport, cycling is one of the great levellers. Although heroes such as Wout van Aert have already been seen training on the roads around Stirling ahead of the championship, there is nothing to stop mere mortals such as you and me, Presiding Officer, from hopping on a bike and joining him on the same roads.

However, another cycling hero—record-breaking Christina Mackenzie—was knocked off her bike last September while out training on those same roads around Stirling. The driver did not stop and has not been caught. Christina has made a recovery but, for too many others, a ghost bike by the side of the road is a lasting reminder of recklessness and tragedy. A fitting legacy for these first combined cycling world championships, here in Scotland, would be the delivery of a long-

awaited dashcam portal from Police Scotland, and I urge the Government to help to make that happen.

I look forward to a summer of fietsgeluk as we continue our journey towards becoming a safe and confident nation of cyclists, wheelers and walkers.

16:03

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I strongly believe in active travel. However, to make a confession at the start of my speech, I say that I have never really enjoyed cycling, so I will be concentrating on walking in most of what I have to say.

One aspect of active travel is walking or cycling in order to get to public transport, be that a bus or a train. However, those of us who have a car have to make a conscious decision on whether to use it for a particular journey. For example, on Saturday, I was at a Baptist Union of Scotland event at Larbert high school. I could have done the journey from home by car in about half an hour. However, I decided to combine walking and the train, partly so that I could read committee papers on the way, as time in a car is wasted time.

I am fortunate to have a local station within 10 minutes, and Queen Street station is excellent nowadays for changing between the low and high levels. I then had a 20-minute walk from the station in Larbert to the school, and I had much the same on the way back. It took me roughly one and a half hours to get there and nearly two hours to get back. In that example, the journey was between three and four times as long as it would have been if I had used the car. That was fine for me, and I felt that I had used the time well. I had had much more exercise than I would have done if I had used the car, so I certainly felt better and definitely slept better that night.

That is one of the key factors in comparing how to travel. It is not just about “shorter everyday journeys”, as the motion suggests. That is certainly one factor, but how much longer proportionately walking, cycling, and public transport can take is also important.

If I take the car to church on Sunday, it is about five minutes; if I walk, it is 20 minutes. That is a factor of four times as long. However, longer journeys are more competitive. For example, if I go to the SNP conference in Aberdeen by train, it will not be very different timewise from taking the car. Therefore, I would suggest that short local journeys are not necessarily the best starting point for getting people out of their cars, although they clearly are important.

Although I said that I would focus on walking, I am happy to mention cycling as well. We are seeing a tremendous increase in the number of dedicated cycle lanes in Glasgow, and the council is to be commended for that. I gather that there has been a £3.6 million investment, through the places for everyone programme, to encourage walking, wheeling and cycling in Glasgow.

Just in my own constituency, London Road is seeing considerable on-going work so that there will soon be cycle lanes most of the way from Bridgeton Cross out to Daldowie along London Road. That is on top of some great existing routes, such as the walking and cycling path along the Clyde from Carmyle to Glasgow Green.

Safety is another factor in all this, not least around schools, which have been mentioned already. There have been various attempts to encourage young people to walk or cycle to school, but the number still being taken by car should cause us a lot of concern. Maybe the parents are en route somewhere else and it is easier to drop the kids off on the way. However, the effect is to make it more dangerous for all the other kids going to that school, be that danger from the vehicles themselves, traffic fumes or whatever.

In Glasgow, there have been attempts to create exclusion zones near primary schools around 9 am and 3 pm, to prevent vehicles from coming right up to the school gates. If memory serves me correctly, that was piloted in Haddington, and I am enthusiastic about the concept. However, in Glasgow at least, the zones do not seem to be enforced much, if at all, and so they can be ignored by determined parents.

Safety on roads and pavements is the responsibility of us all. I frequently see adult cyclists riding far too fast on the pavement, and the impatience of many pedestrians to cross the road without waiting for the green signal is just asking for accidents to happen. On the other hand, if we want to encourage more walking, we need to make pedestrian crossings respond more quickly when the button to cross is pushed to change the lights. If people have to press the button and wait ages until the lights stop the traffic, it is no wonder that they are put off walking or take risks crossing the road. If we are serious about putting pedestrians ahead of cars and lorries, cars and lorries need to wait longer at red lights.

I will say something about what I believe are some of the other benefits of walking. One is clearly physical health, and if we want to tackle obesity and some of our other health issues, more physical exercise, including walking, is very much part of the answer. Then there is the importance of mental health. Here at Holyrood, we each have thinking pods in our offices, although I am not sure

whether cabinet secretaries and ministers have them.

John Swinney: They do not.

John Mason: Mr Swinney is indicating that they do not.

I confess that I do not use my thinking pod for thinking but use it as a shelf for storing papers. If I want to think, reflect, or even pray, I would rather go out for a walk, which I think is more positive. We have on our doorstep Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat. It was up there that I reflected and prayed back in 1983 and decided to dedicate three years of my life to Nepal.

We are all different, but walking can make a huge difference to our mental health as well as to our physical health. That would very much be the message from groups such as Paths for All, which is active in my constituency and elsewhere. In one of its tweets yesterday, it said that walking or wheeling

"can offer valuable time to ... Catch up with a friend or loved one ... Boost your mood and reduce anxiety ... Connect you to your local community and services"

and

"Offer you valuable time in nature."

All in all, I hope that members very much support the motion. The Government and our councils can do a certain amount by investing in cycle lanes, paths and low-emission zones, but we all—MSPs and citizens at large—have a part to play. How many of us have cars sitting in the Parliament car park that do not need to be there? Could we leave them at home next week and come here by using a combination of public transport and active travel? Let us set an example.

16:10

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): When I agreed to speak about active travel, I was not even sure what it was, and I am sure that many people out there do not really understand the term. Having looked it up, I see that it turns out that I am a big fan of active travel. Every day, I jump on my bike and then catch a train to or from Parliament. In doing so, I dash past the ranks of chauffeur-driven gleaming Government limos.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): For the benefit of Mr Findlay, other members and people more widely, I inform them that the Scottish Government has never had limousines. In their time, a lot of ministers have chosen to go to work by walking, by bicycle and by other modes of transport. Phrases such as the one that Mr Findlay just used do a disservice to him and the wider political debate.

Russell Findlay: I thank the former minister for his intervention. I must be imagining things when I see cars waiting—whether they are called limousines or whatever—to take ministers to and from official business.

To be fair, at least one minister frequently uses a bike—that is Patrick Harvie. I will spend most of my time talking about cycling. Just like Mr Simpson, Mr Whittle and Mr Harvie, I, too, am not a MAMIL. However, I am slightly perplexed at Patrick Harvie's reluctance to wear a helmet. At a bike safety course, the children who were taking part wore head protection, but the minister did not. He has reportedly said that there is no evidence that helmets make cycling safer, that they are of value only in a learning setting and—most intriguing of all—that they are not his style.

Sometimes, my heart is in my mouth when I see Mr Harvie on the streets of Glasgow, as he dodges and weaves through the traffic in Partick. Last month, he politely declined the offer of a gifted helmet from a newspaper.

It is vital for people to wear helmets. I have had a couple of crashes. As a child, I had a head-on collision with a lamp post, which might explain some things. There were no helmets in those days. Almost two years ago, I had another crash. Had I not been wearing a helmet, I would almost certainly have suffered quite a serious injury.

Patrick Harvie: Without casting aspersions on the motivation of the right-wing press for the stunt that they undertook, I hope that the party that often casts itself as the supporter of individual liberty will respect the fact that the matter is one of individual choice. I fully respect Russell Findlay's decision to wear a helmet, if that makes him feel safer, and I hope that he respects my choice.

Russell Findlay: I absolutely respect the minister's right to make that choice and I do not necessarily expect that he wants to listen to a Tory, but he might listen to the brain injury charity Headway, which has said:

"Using negative language that discourages the use of helmets puts lives at risk."

Ministers have a great deal of responsibility in that respect.

The Scottish Government's motion refers to the UCI cycling championships in Glasgow in August, which will be the world's biggest-ever cycling event—our party's amendment would retain that reference. A UCI team recently came into Parliament with a fixed bike, on which MSPs competed. One SNP minister pedalled with such gusto that he ripped his trousers; a Labour MSP sat at the top of the leaderboard for two days and then had another go when he was toppled. I will not name those members. I am far too modest to

mention who took gold, but suffice it to say that it was a rare Tory win in this place.

I hope that the SNP council will do something about the state of the roads before the UCI cycling championships come to Glasgow. We do not have potholes in Glasgow; we have craters that sometimes look more like a lunar landscape.

A Cycling Scotland survey found that one of the main barriers to people taking up cycling is concerns about road safety. Everywhere we look in Glasgow, we see significant sums of money appearing to be spent on improving active travel and cycling, but the results can sometimes actually make journeys more dangerous. I will give an example. Rubber delineators that separate cycling lanes from main roads can be a hazard in themselves. In addition, they cause cycle lanes to become very narrow and, in turn, those can become choked with rubbish and other debris, which is quite hard to clear with the equipment that councils have. That makes the cycle lanes quite dangerous to use and pushes cyclists back on to the road.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): That is interesting. If we are using space that is currently road space and reinventing it as cycle space, people have limited choices. There are different ways in which that can be done. There can simply be a line in the road, and we can keep our fingers crossed that everybody will stick by that, or we can use the type of infrastructure that started to go in during Covid. Russell Findlay is right about repairs, maintenance and cleaning, but we have to look at the choices because, with the nature of our roads, we do not have unlimited options.

Russell Findlay: I do not have a great deal of time but, in short, the thinking behind a lot of that stuff seems to be pretty chaotic and not really joined up.

I want to turn briefly to some of the Scottish Government's record on active travel. Let us take the access bike scheme, for example. The Scottish Government facilitated loans for people to get a bike on credit. Last time we checked, just four people had applied. That works out at a cost of around £35,000 per bike.

The SNP Government set a target of 10 per cent of all journeys to be taken by bike by 2020. The following year, that sat at just 2.8 per cent.

The SNP Government also pledged to cut car miles by 20 per cent by 2030. However, from 2015 to 2020, the miles driven by cars in Scotland went up by 8 per cent.

To conclude, the SNP Government often talks a good game about active travel, but its motion is an exercise in self-congratulation. The truth is that it routinely misses targets and fails to deliver

flagship schemes while cutting funding, as other speakers will undoubtedly attest.

16:17

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I welcome the debate and the motion. I do so as somebody who has had a driving licence since they were a teenager, but who has decided since then not to own a car. I speak as somebody who loved riding a bike when I was a child and at university, but who has not had a bike since then. However, I walk every day and very often run.

I want to focus my remarks on the pedestrian experience and how important active travel is for pedestrians, particularly in urban environments such as my Edinburgh Northern and Leith constituency.

For those who are able, the benefits to health and wellbeing of walking are well known and well understood, as the motion highlights. I walk to work every day and utilise the wonderful Lothian Buses. I know that we will discuss bus travel in the Parliament at other points. The benefits of taking in the environment, hustle and bustle, vibrancy, and beautiful landscapes of a city such as Edinburgh is a real joy. In such areas, of course, the experience of walking is different from what it is in other areas. I respect that, but I want to focus on what it is like in the capital city.

As I walked to work this morning thinking about what to say in this debate, I thought about the fact that, decades ago—in the 1970s—there was a plan to have a six-lane inner-city ring road in the city.

It would have devastated our capital city's aesthetic value. Much of the Pleasance, Tollcross, Haymarket, the Dean valley, Stockbridge, Inverleith, Canonmills and the top of Leith Walk would have been changed or demolished to facilitate that inner-city ring road and our world heritage status might never have been realised.

I highlight that plan not just because my family was involved in the campaign against it but because it is important to learn lessons. We should learn from the fact that the car's importance, particularly for those with accessibility issues and those who live in parts of the country where the distances between things are longer, is much greater. At that time, the car was thought of as being the absolute future. Infrastructure for the car to be utilised by as many people as possible was at the forefront of people's minds. The city council at the time sought to impose that six-lane inner-city ring road on the people of Edinburgh against their wishes. Indeed, the party that was in power in the city at that time has never been back in power. Although the comparison is not the

same, we should keep in mind that we always want to take people with us.

Thankfully, the car did not win the day and we maintained the integrity of the city for walkers and everyone to enjoy. However, as we implement our active travel ambitions, we need to take people with us. I appreciate the point in the motion about ensuring that we undertake transformation at pace. However, I caution that the pace should not be too fast. There is a job to do in order to persuade people. Part of that job relates to the narrative and part of it relates to perception. The more that people feel that the agenda is about encouraging them to act differently and giving them the facilities to do that, rather than being about reducing car use, the more progress we will make together.

Brian Whittle: I am really appreciating Mr Macpherson's speech. Does he agree that it is okay to go quickly but that it is not just about stopping people doing things, but is about ensuring that, in preventing people from doing one thing, we give them the alternative of doing another thing? Does he agree that the change should be made as simple as possible?

Ben Macpherson: That is absolutely true. Part of that is considering the different stakeholders involved and ensuring—as I know that the minister does—that there is engagement with organisations that represent particular groups of people, such as Inclusion Scotland, which represents the needs of disabled people and the Federation of Small Businesses, which represents the needs of small businesses.

I see all that in my constituency of Edinburgh Northern and Leith. In particular, I see considerations around the tram works, which we are all delighted are complete—the trams open tomorrow, which is a great thing for Leith and I welcome it. However, there is a real challenge on Leith Walk to accommodate five modes of transport. I respect the decisions that councillors made in that regard and I respect the officials for seeking to implement the policies that were decided, but as a pedestrian, because of the new cycle lanes, Leith Walk is a very different experience. I say that because there is a need for nuance and consideration between the different modes of active travel and how to get that right. We also have to consider the needs of businesses to receive deliveries and to function properly.

We have made great progress. The investment is welcome. If we can make the narrative as positive as possible, it will be all the better. Let us work together on this journey towards active travel to make people's experience of getting from A to B as pleasant as possible, learn the lessons of the past and ensure that the health benefits are realised in a way that respects the needs of

different communities and how they facilitate their businesses. The needs and challenges of different people in the way that they travel should always be kept in mind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Thank you, Mr Macpherson. I call Rona Mackay, who will be the last speaker before we move to closing speeches.

16:24

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Time is running out before the damage that we are doing to our planet becomes catastrophic, and active travel is a huge part of how we mitigate that damage.

All speakers here today have highlighted the positives of active travel, but, as we have heard, the negatives are when consultation and inclusivity are not part of the planning when setting out strategies. I will talk about that later.

I am proud that Scotland leads the UK in its active travel investment. It is punching above its weight, as usual, especially following devastating Tory cuts in England. At £58 per head, Scotland is not only a UK leader on active travel spend but a European leader as well. That compares with a spend of just £1 per head in England outside London.

The Scottish Government has massively increased investment in active travel, with almost £190 million in 2023-24, which is a major step towards the commitment of 10 per cent of the transport budget by 2024-25. That confirms active travel's important role in meeting the Scottish Government's priorities of equality, opportunity, community and building a fairer, greener Scotland. The minister's announcement of the transformation fund is extremely welcome.

The route map of how we get there contains more than 30 interventions. Some of them are being delivered in the short term, including the groundbreaking policy of free bus travel for under-22s. Other actions will take longer, and some will prove more challenging than others and will need a mix of infrastructure, incentivisation and regulatory actions.

A key milestone is the introduction of low emission zones in four of Scotland's cities—the first of which, in Glasgow, is already in force this month—which will enhance the quality of the environment and improve public health. Of course, changes to our daily life are difficult for everyone, and there will be bumps along the way. However, the importance of low emission zones and reaching our climate change targets cannot be overemphasised. Since the first low emission zone

for buses was introduced, in 2018, in Glasgow, air pollution levels have dropped dramatically.

We know that active travel is good not only for the planet but for our health and wellbeing, both mental and physical, as John Mason said. It can combat obesity, heart disease and other serious illnesses related to inactivity. The Government has delivered a significant step-up in investment in spaces where people can walk, wheel and cycle safely, and it has ensured that there are more spaces that put people, not cars, first. As someone who has started to walk much more since getting a puppy this year, I already feel the benefits of regular walks in the countryside.

My local authority, East Dunbartonshire Council, first published its active travel strategy in 2015, and it has progressed significantly since then. However, it is true that several well-intentioned initiatives, such as cycle lanes in Bearsden and shared space in Kirkintilloch, were not planned inclusively with road users, residents and disabled people, and that caused much concern. That was almost 10 years ago, and I am confident that the council has learned those lessons as it goes forward with its active travel strategy.

The council's current policy focuses on reducing car dependency. In East Dunbartonshire, rates of car ownership are higher than the Scottish average, and modal share for active travel, particularly cycling, is low. However, there is real merit in the adage that Mark Ruskell used: "If you build it, they will come." Where there is more infrastructure for active travel—such as cycleways safely separated from the road—there are higher rates of active travel.

For example, in the Netherlands, where active travel infrastructure is comprehensive, 30 per cent of all journeys under 5 miles are cycled, and 36 per cent of people list the bicycle as their most frequent way of travelling. However, as Evelyn Tweed pointed out, the infrastructure did not happen by accident—it involved long-term planning, much investment, attention to all aspects of how it would affect everyday life and, of course, public transport investment. In Seville, where extensive cycling infrastructure has been constructed recently, rates of cycling have skyrocketed, with an elevenfold increase in the number of cycling journeys following the creation of a comprehensive 120km network of cycling infrastructure.

The East Dunbartonshire travel survey clearly illustrates an opportunity to increase active travel in the area. However, the survey identifies that the main barriers to active travel are safety, convenience and carrying things.

The Scottish household survey found that 70 per cent of East Dunbartonshire's residents

agreed that climate change is an urgent problem and that two thirds believed that their actions and behaviours contribute to climate change. John Mason spoke of parents driving children to school, which reminded me of when I used to drop off my son. I am ashamed to say that I was one of the many people sitting in cars outside schools. In that regard, things have improved dramatically now.

The "Hands up Scotland" survey on school travel provides modal share data for school travel in East Dunbartonshire between 2012 and 2021. It found that walking and cycling increased marginally to 45 per cent and 2.5 per cent while car use decreased by 3 per cent to 23 per cent. There is still a long way to go.

East Dunbartonshire has an ageing demographic, which must be taken into account when considering active travel. I agree with many of Ben Macpherson's points: everyone must be taken into consideration, and those who are able to should benefit. We must take everybody's circumstances into account.

The picture is evolving nationally and globally. Unless we embrace active travel—which, of course, must be supported by the correct investment to provide the infrastructure that is needed—we will continue to destroy the planet for future generations. I certainly do not want that on my conscience, and I suspect that none of us does.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Mackay. We move to closing speeches. I call Sarah Boyack to close on behalf of Scottish Labour.

16:31

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The debate has been mostly constructive. It has been really good to hear about the mix of national targets and ambitions and the strong local insights, including the focus on individual communities and what is happening where we live. This is about making sure that we have the national targets and the funding while ensuring that the roll-out is as good as possible.

As everyone who has spoken in the debate has said, active travel is central to our health and wellbeing. Keeping people active will potentially help us to address poor health and the increasing number of people who are obese. Colleagues have cited powerful statistics.

Active travel is critical if we are to give people affordable and safe routes to services, schools, education, retail and work. Having a joined-up approach is key to our sustainable travel ambitions and to ensuring that Scotland can meet its net zero targets and tackle the climate crisis. In

addition, as Mercedes Villalba said, we need that approach to support our nature recovery. Her points about air pollution were really important.

As we move towards the summer holidays, active travel should also be part of our tourist offer, not only for people who live in Scotland but for those who come here, given the beauty of our country and the hospitality that it offers. I was thinking about that as I travelled to Parliament this morning.

If we are to deliver on all our ambitions, we need investment and expertise across the country, in all our councils. That has been one of the criticisms throughout today's debate. Councils need the knowledge, the staff and, critically, the funding to make things happen—and not just in existing communities. As our amendment says, we need to ensure that, from day 1, active travel options such as walking and cycling are included where there are new developments, including housing developments. There must also be investment in buses. If we are to give people an alternative to using cars, those options must be there from day 1.

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: If it is a quick intervention.

Christine Grahame: It will be extremely brief. That is exactly what they are doing in Midlothian—I mentioned the large housing development in Shawfair.

Sarah Boyack: Thousands of houses are being built all over the country as we speak. They must all have active travel links. We have many houses that are not connected because, as Ben Macpherson said, a lot of our towns and cities were built with car use in mind.

We must have not only ambition but investment.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I need to get on. I have taken a couple of interventions.

We thought that the Scottish Government's motion is a bit self-congratulatory, and it does not address the key issues that put many people off cycling. It is good that addressing that has been one of the themes of today's discussion.

Ensuring that children have safe access to cycling is partly about planning and partly about our road infrastructure. However, it is also about ensuring that there is cheap or free access to bikes, and many community groups are working hard to provide that.

During Covid, short-term investment made it easier to accommodate the increase in the

number of people walking and cycling as they worked from home and used their local communities for exercise or just to get out into a safe environment. However, we need on-going investment in our communities right across the country.

Claire Baker's point about coming on to and then off cycle spaces is really important. We need to ensure that, when we retrofit existing roads, that work is done as well as possible, because we need the infrastructure at the local level.

Potholes, which have been mentioned quite a few times, are dangerous for cyclists. I have had several crashes as a result of potholes. It is particularly hard to see them at night, especially when the lighting is not good.

As Claire Baker said, there are particular issues relating to the condition of our paths and networks. That is a critical point for disabled people. If people are to walk as part of their everyday lives, we need to ensure that our pavements are safe for people with crutches or walking sticks and those whose sight is not perfect or who have no sight at all. Recently, when I was recovering from a broken ankle, I tested out the pavements and found that they were not good enough in a lot of our communities. We need to think about infrastructure repair and maintenance.

As our amendment notes, it is important that we think through the different experiences of different communities. It is important to bear in mind Beatrice Wishart's point that crowded roads put off women in particular. I know from talking to InfraSisters, which is a campaign group in the Lothians, that there are routes that women simply do not feel safe using. They will not use those routes for major parts of the year, so we need better lighting, particularly during the winter months, when people cannot cycle home safely at night at the moment. Some routes are not ideal for walking, either.

I go back to the point about money. Our cash-strapped local authorities need to be given the resources to invest in our existing roads and pavements, which are not as safe as they should be, and in new infrastructure, which is critical. There should be more dedicated cycle spaces and routes to make people feel safer and to encourage them to walk and cycle for more of their journeys. The Scottish Government needs to address that key issue if we are to deliver on the ambition to reduce car travel by 20 per cent. It would definitely be worth the minister reading the really good report by the cross-party group on sustainable transport. We need to provide safe, affordable and reliable choices.

We recently debated buses. That issue also relates to the move to active travel, because

people should be able to walk part of their route and get a bus for another part of their route. People should have better options for getting into our towns and cities. There should be park-and-ride services on the edge of cities, faster bus routes into town and better routes for cyclists. If someone in Edinburgh or Glasgow goes on to Google Maps, they might find that, for a lot of routes, it would be faster to cycle—it would definitely be faster than using the bus—and, given the parking situation, cycling could get them as close as driving would.

We need a culture shift, and we need to ensure that employers help to deliver that shift. We need to think about public sector employers. For example, cycling is definitely encouraged in the Scottish Parliament, but there is not a lot of space for bikes downstairs, so there needs to be the infrastructure now and in the future.

Members across the chamber have talked about the superb amount of work that has been done by people who work in our communities to give people access to active travel. For example, in my city, Edinburgh & Lothians Regional Equality Council, which is a voluntary organisation, gives people from ethnic minority communities access to walking and cycling, as well as confidence and social opportunities. At the weekend, I visited the Bike Station, which gives people access to affordable bikes and teaches them repair skills and how to look after their bike—I found that very useful. It also has a bike library, which enables parents to pass on a bike when it is not big enough for their kid any more and get a new one. Such projects are crucial.

There is much more that we need to do. It cannot be on-off. The target of spending 10 per cent of the transport budget on active travel is critical. We have been debating cycling in this Parliament for more than two decades, so it is not a new issue.

There will be a shift when we move to using electric vehicles, which will be really expensive to buy. Electric bikes are slightly more expensive, but electric cars are more so. We need active travel opportunities to be in place now. We need interchanges for buses and trains, and we need decent routes that people can use—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack, could you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Sarah Boyack: This issue needs to be addressed now, not 10 years hence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

16:39

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Notwithstanding John Swinney's contribution, there has been much positivity during the debate. Members have queued up to recognise the benefits of active travel, such as the lower likelihood of conditions such as diabetes and hypertension; the mental health benefits; cleaner air; the promotion of environmentally friendly behaviours; and benefits for the community such as reduced traffic congestion. In a persuasive submission, Sustrans added that there is a reduced cancer-related mortality risk from regular cycling and a reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease. Friends of the Earth Scotland flagged the economic argument, saying that a major investment in public transport could create around 22,000 direct jobs and 416,000 indirect jobs. Mercedes Villalba raised the point that active travel can save money.

The case for more active travel has been made. As Graham Simpson said at the outset, we all back greater investment in active travel. However, the debate has introduced some caveats to that positivity. It has come across that there are questions about how prepared the Scottish Government is to actually deliver its commitments. I must say that the issues started before the debate, with the minister inserting into the motion a rather snarky false equivalence with the rest of the UK, which he then doubled down on in an intervention on Graham Simpson. Then, Fiona Hyslop, in an otherwise useful and interesting contribution, particularly on planning, randomly started having a go at the UK Government.

The unamended motion talks about the Government's commitment to reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030, but it fails to mention that the Scottish Government has no idea how that will be achieved. Russell Findlay flagged that car kilometres have actually gone up in recent years. Brian Whittle flagged that the Government has started with reducing cars before dealing with high-quality neighbourhoods and public transport, which might go some way to explaining the rise that Mr Findlay referred to.

All that was brought home recently in committee. As we heard from Graham Simpson, the CPG on sustainable transport produced a report on the issue in November, with five recommendations. However, exactly one month ago, when I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition how the Scottish Government intends to meet the target to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent, she said that she will not have any detail until the draft climate change plan is produced in November.

At the moment, therefore, there is no idea, no plan and, I am afraid, no chance. That is why our

amendment, which demands that the Scottish Government set out in detail how it plans to achieve the 20 per cent reduction, is so important.

John Swinney: Does Mr Kerr not think that the chances of achieving that objective might be helped by the £20 million transformation fund going directly to local authorities and regional transport partnerships? That is the very wording that his silly amendment tries to delete.

Liam Kerr: Of course money will help, but the Government cannot do this without a plan. The problem is that the Government, of which Mr Swinney was Deputy First Minister for so long, comes to this chamber with no plans, and that is why it will fail.

John Swinney rose—

Liam Kerr: I want to make some progress, please.

John Swinney: Will Liam Kerr give way for a second time so that we can have a debate?

Liam Kerr: How long have I got, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can get the time back, Mr Kerr.

Liam Kerr: I will give way.

John Swinney: Mr Kerr's reaction to my point illustrates one of the dilemmas. The Conservatives come here unprepared to increase tax but wanting more spending. They come here demanding that we empower local authorities and then demanding that we tell local authorities what to do. Does that not just tell Parliament that the Conservatives are hypocrites on these issues?

Liam Kerr: That rather confused intervention from Mr Swinney can be responded to very simply by saying, "Cut the waste, come back with a plan and then maybe we can actually deliver a 20 per cent reduction."

Many members, including Beatrice Wishart, brought up the very modest rise in cycling. She and others flagged the state of the roads—there are not potholes but craters, according to Russell Findlay—and asked how on earth we can encourage people to cycle and walk when the roads are in that state. We cannot. The evidence for that came in Christine Grahame's contribution. She said that she tried cycling but was knocked off and lost confidence. That was a powerful contribution, and it is an all too common situation.

Christine Grahame: I am delighted by Mr Kerr's concern for my wellbeing. However, it was not a pothole but a motorist.

Liam Kerr: Forgive me—I thought that I had said that. I was talking about the dangers on the road, but I thank Ms Grahame for the clarification.

What the minister said in his opening speech was that, if we want to increase active travel, it has to be easier and safer to walk, scoot or cycle to school, and he rightly suggested some modifications. However, one of the biggest challenges that we have heard that councils face in helping to deliver active travel schemes is the fact that those can be big-ticket items at a time when councils have never been more starved of resources—as the Labour amendment, which we will vote for, makes clear.

It was flagged to us in the submission from Sustrans, which was highlighted by Brian Whittle, that councils not only lack central Government funding but have difficulties in securing the match funding that is required in order to be shortlisted for projects. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, could we have less sedentary commentary, please?

Liam Kerr: Then, as the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee found, there is a jarring disconnect that can happen between ring-fenced spending and properly funding public services. We heard examples throughout the afternoon, but in the North East Scotland region, Angus Council has a £60 million black hole in its finances. It is currently considering whether to spend tens of millions of pounds of ring-fenced Transport Scotland money to turn old railway tracks, where people have been walking for decades, into footpaths; meanwhile, it cannot afford to lift trees that fell and blocked the Crombie country path 19 months ago in storm Arwen.

That is hardly surprising, given that, as per my intervention earlier, the Scottish Government does not know how much money it needs to deliver on active travel. The minister's response to my question, "How much is needed to achieve what we need?" was, "The sky's the limit," which is extraordinary, given that the Government has quantified that £33 billion is needed to decarbonise buildings. When it wants to, the Government can quantify what is needed. Therefore, the Government needs to put in the work that Evelyn Tweed said is needed to achieve what we all want.

My final point is one that I do not think featured enough today but was brought up by Beatrice Wishart and a couple of others. It is easy to talk about active travel and more public transport use in central belt cities, but it is not so easy to do so in rural Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire or Angus. If the Government wants to support active travel and behaviour change, it must address the issue that

CLOSER set out in its submission: that urban residents were significantly more likely to engage in active travel than rural residents and that those groups should therefore be considered separately in relation to outcomes and policy decisions.

We absolutely back the sentiment of today's debate, and we associate ourselves with the positive comments of the minister and the aims and objectives, but we must recognise the challenges that are inherent in achieving those: the challenges to councils as delivery partners; the challenges from Government aims that are not backed up by plans and funding; and the challenges of ensuring that we treat different groups of people, such as rural dwellers and those with protected characteristics, in a bespoke manner. That is what the amendment in Graham Simpson's name seeks to do, and that is why it should be supported.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patrick Harvie to close on behalf of the Scottish Government. If the minister were able to take us to decision time, that would be most helpful.

16:48

Patrick Harvie: I begin by thanking members for contributing to the debate today, in particular those including Graham Simpson, Mercedes Villalba, Beatrice Wishart and Mark Ruskell who chose to use part of their contribution to offer their best wishes to Kevin Stewart in light of his announcement today. I hope that the whole chamber will join together in wishing him very well in recovering from the issues that he has been facing.

It is clear that there is a broad consensus on the benefits that active travel can bring, even if not all members are quite willing to accept the reality that it now comes with a higher level of political commitment and a higher level of funding than ever before. I will not have time to address every member's contribution, but let me start with those who moved amendments.

Graham Simpson started with a personal example of how active travel can end up supporting local businesses of one kind or another with a bit more cash going into their tills. That is something that we need to recognise—it is not just a change of culture on our roads but something that can benefit small businesses when they see that greater footfall from active travel. He also reflected on the fact that we need to see a change in driver behaviour in many parts of the country.

However, Graham Simpson's amendment deletes a significant amount of the motion, including the recognition of the level of funding that we are putting in, such as the active travel transformation fund, so we will not be able to

support it. I know that the Conservatives do not necessarily like hearing fair comparisons with funding in the rest of the UK but, even in the Scottish context, it is a higher level of commitment to active travel by some margin than Scotland has previously seen and the Scottish Government is determined to continue that.

I will certainly look into the specific local projects that Graham Simpson mentioned, but it is relevant that the clear commitment to providing long-term increased investment—such as the active travel transformation fund—direct to local authorities will help them to have confidence and increase their capacity and skills to deliver active travel projects.

Mercedes Villalba also offered support for our active travel objectives. I share her view of the need to address, for example, congestion and air pollution. I hope that we are all able to welcome the groundbreaking progress that has been made in putting in place the first low-emission zone. It will be, and should be, only the first.

Mercedes Villalba also restated many of the multiple benefits from active travel: reduced greenhouse gas emissions; improved road safety; the nature recovery that comes with quieter streets and cleaner air; public health and much more. Her arguments on the costs of transport are also important. Let us recognise that, although active travel is the cheapest way of getting about, if the cost of the repair that somebody faces having to make to their bike is much more than the cost of tomorrow's bus ticket, it might force them back on to a more expensive and less accessible form of transport.

We need to ensure that we are addressing access to bikes as well. The Scottish Government is doing that. Members know that the free bikes pilot was implemented to develop the best models of giving free bikes to young people, because one size will not fit all. We are also working with Bike for Good on the option of a bike subscription model and, later this year, with Cycling UK, we will launch an open fund to support bike share schemes, because there are multiple ways of giving people access to bikes, not just ownership.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister acknowledge that electric bikes are a good way of getting folk into bicycling who might need a bit of nudging to get outdoors? Will he also acknowledge that the bicycle was invented in Kier, near Dumfries, which hasnae been mentioned the day?

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that we can all recognise the member's community's claim to fame on that.

Although e-bikes are not my first choice, they are one of the many ways in which we can increase the range of bikes and active travel

vehicles that people can access. Not only do e-bikes have potential to change the way in which people move about but e-cargo bikes also have huge potential to change the way in which goods move about.

The Labour amendment finishes with a point that we cannot support. It slightly unreasonably cherry picks the data to compare active travel to school with figures for the previous year, which the same report recognises was strongly impacted by Covid. The pandemic had a particular impact on school travel, so it is not reasonable to make a comparison with that year. The fact is that we now have higher levels of active travel to school than pre-pandemic. We are determined to continue making progress with the improvement in that long-term trend.

Mercedes Villalba: Will the minister clarify whether he is saying that he is unable to support the amendment, which notes the findings in a report, because he does not like the findings?

Patrick Harvie: It is certainly not because I do not like the findings. The amendment slightly misrepresents them. The report said that the impact of coronavirus on schools

In 2020 and 2021 ... was a substantial additional factor",

so it is not reasonable to present that as though it is a reduction in active travel to school more generally.

Several members, including Evelyn Tweed and Beatrice Wishart, mentioned the urban-rural issues. It is true that the easiest way to get emissions reductions alone is through busy routes in urban areas, which can achieve high levels of modal shift. However, it is not enough to imagine that urban areas see active travel and cycling as only for transport and emissions reduction and rural areas see them as only for recreation. That is not a reasonable way forward. It is not true and it does not recognise the demand for active travel in rural areas and smaller towns. I hope therefore that members will welcome the successful bids for the active travel transformation fund from rural and remote areas, including Shetland.

Several members mentioned either their local infrastructure projects or local charities that are doing excellent creative work to encourage active travel. I will be happy to visit as many of those as I can. I am a particular fan of the bike bus movement because it is one of the most joyful ways of encouraging and demonstrating the appetite for active travel.

John Swinney talked about the perception of safety and I recognised his description of that. It was one of the things that held me back from getting back on a bike in Glasgow. He was also right to say that, on climate action, we are

approaching the stage at which the challenging tasks that are ahead of us need to be done if we are to get back on track with climate targets. There are those who will the end but do not will the means; we need to challenge that.

Active travel can sometimes be polarised and opportunistically opposed. Sometimes it even gets caught up in culture wars nonsense such as conspiracy theories about 20-minute neighbourhoods and low-emission zones. We need to challenge that perception.

Ben Macpherson commented on how Edinburgh might have changed for the worse as a city if it had done what others did in indulging too much in the road-building obsession of the 1960s. That is what the active travel debate should be about. It is not just about one particular bike lane on one particular route; it is about a long-term vision of the kinds of cities, towns and communities of all sizes that we want to live in in 10, 20 or 30 years. I hope that we can bring that positive vision forward. It will require on-going investment, which is tough, particularly in times of heightened pressure on resources. It will also require a willingness to challenge and change the status quo. Our approach to delivering active travel is preparing the ground for the record investment that we are committing to that will lead to healthier communities, generate jobs, reduce costs on household budgets and revitalise local economies.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I am coming to the end of my speech and I need to wind up.

It will also revitalise local economies in many places that are still in recovery from the Covid pandemic.

For us to ensure that we have a fit-for-purpose delivery model for active travel to meet those challenges and capitalise on the opportunities, we have undertaken a review of our whole approach in the delivery models. The transformation fund is a vital first step in that, and further changes that will follow will require not just support and funding from the Scottish Government but strong leadership and a strong approach to working collaboratively with our delivery partners.

I will finish by reflecting on what Mark Ruskell said about how much of the progress that we are making is possible only because of a movement of people demanding change and looking to reclaim their places for people instead of for vehicles. That is entirely true. On its own, the Scottish Government cannot deliver that without the community leadership that we can empower around the country. I encourage members to continue to engage with their local communities. Together we can ensure that the transformation of

active travel reaches across Scotland and that the benefits are felt in every city, town, village and household. To do that, we will need that joined-up approach and the Scottish Government, local authorities and communities will need to work together to address all the issues that members have mentioned, and a great deal more besides.

Once again, I thank members for their contribution to the debate and I encourage them to take the opportunities that the Scottish Government active travel funding brings to their communities by working with them to create leadership and bring forward excellent projects that we can fund for the future.

Environmental Standards Scotland (Appointment of Board Members)

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-09329, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on the appointment of board members to Environmental Standards Scotland.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's consideration of the appointment of two additional board members to the board of Environmental Standards Scotland at its meeting on 21 March 2023; welcomes the committee's recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Professor Christopher Spray and Morag Sheppard as additional board members to the board of Environmental Standards Scotland, for a period not exceeding four years in accordance with schedule 1, paragraph 2(4) of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, and approves the appointments as required by schedule 1, paragraph 2(2) of the Act.—[*Màiri McAllan*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-09328.2, in the name of Graham Simpson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09328, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on active travel transformation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:00

Meeting suspended.

17:02

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-09328.2, in the name of Graham Simpson, be agreed to.

Members should cast their votes now.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 47, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-09328.1, in the name of Mercedes Villalba, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09328, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on active travel transformation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 47, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-09328, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on active travel transformation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I voted no, but the app did not connect.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 29, Abstentions 29.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that active travel can bring significant benefits for people's health, the economy and the cost of living, and is critical for tackling the climate emergency and delivering on the commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20%; welcomes the Scottish Government's record budget for active travel in 2023-24; recognises that this is by far the highest investment in active travel per head across the UK; welcomes the new and additional £20 million Transformation Fund going directly to delivery partners to deliver new infrastructure at pace; commends the work of local authorities, regional transport partnerships and active travel delivery partners in turning that record level of investment into changes on the ground; notes the publication of the new Cycling Framework in supporting the wider 2030 Active Travel Vision, where walking, wheeling and cycling are the most popular modes of transport for shorter everyday journeys, and looks forward to the opportunity presented by the UCI Cycling World Championships coming to Scotland in August 2023 to encourage more people to choose active travel.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-09329, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on appointment of board members to Environmental Standards Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's consideration of the appointment of two additional board members to the board of Environmental Standards Scotland at its meeting on 21 March 2023; welcomes the committee's recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Professor Christopher Spray and Morag Sheppard as additional board members to the board of Environmental Standards Scotland, for a period not exceeding four years in accordance with schedule 1, paragraph 2(4) of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, and approves the appointments as required by schedule 1, paragraph 2(2) of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Adam Smith (Birth Tercentenary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S6M-08819, in the name of Michelle Thomson, on the tercentenary of the birth of Adam Smith. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament celebrates the tercentenary of Adam Smith's birth; commends his work in a breadth of areas including engineering, economics, chemistry, political economy, philosophy, literature and medicine; considers that Smith's ideas were of global importance and continue to have a huge impact on society today; notes the role that Scottish universities played in exchanging the ideas across many disciplines; believes that Smith was a leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment during the 18th century; understands that the Scottish Enlightenment was an outpouring of intellectual and scientific principles by Scottish theorists, with their work gaining global recognition in asserting the importance of human reasoning, including empirical methods of enquiry; commends the ideas of Smith and believes that their impact on a breadth of areas continues to be globally significant 300 years after his birth; recognises the works of Adam Smith and what it sees as their continued significance to date, and notes the view that it is important to continue to celebrate the life and works of influential Scottish figures.

17:10

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I give these opening remarks with some trepidation, as I know that many esteemed academics will be speaking about the tercentenary of Adam Smith this week. I congratulate the vigour with which Professor Graeme Roy and Roger Mullin have pursued celebrations at the University of Glasgow and in Kirkcaldy respectively. Indeed, the inaugural event by Glasgow university was held in the Scottish Parliament, which is fitting. As Smith expressed in his "The Theory of Moral Sentiments", this place should ideally be where

"To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections, constitute the perfection of human nature".

Many people in Scotland recognise the name Adam Smith, yet too few of those and the tourists who walk past his statue on the High Street of Edinburgh, Panmure house or his grave at the Canongate know of his lasting impact. Although we do not know the exact date of his birth, we know that Smith was baptised on 5 June 1723 in Kirkcaldy old kirk.

Smith studied logic, metaphysics, maths, Newtonian physics and moral philosophy at Glasgow university. After a short spell at the University of Oxford, he returned to Glasgow university, where he became a lecturer then

rector. He then moved to Panmure house in Edinburgh, where he died in 1790.

He was a leading figure in the Scottish enlightenment, which produced a remarkable outpouring of ideas spanning a wide range of areas including engineering, chemistry, political economy, philosophy, literature, medicine and many other areas of intellectual life. The Scottish universities, not least Glasgow university, were central to that in providing a home for the exchange of ideas across disciplines.

Smith was greatly influenced by Francis Hutcheson, the Glasgow university professor and philosopher and, alongside his friends David Hume, Joseph Black, James Hutton, Dugald Stewart and Robert Burns, they took Scotland to the world. It is no coincidence that, in the 1760s, Voltaire, whom Smith visited many times in France, noted:

“We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilization”.

The Scottish enlightenment asserted the importance of human reason expressed as ideas and a rejection of any stance that could not be justified by reason. Arguably, our current political world has much still to learn. Of course, he is best known as one of the founding fathers of economics, with his ideas still permeating economic theories today. Some would say that, to understand his political economy, you must first have read and understood his “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”. That articulates that we are, above all else, social beings and that our morality—or, in today’s language, our empathy—is guided by that fact.

Although reason is important, it is trumped by the themes that are set out in “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”: prudence, justice, beneficence and self-command, all of which are underpinned and developed by conscience or morality. Again, there is much in his book to guide us in Parliament. I will quote again. He said:

“We are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it.”

As put more colloquially by Robert Burns, we are all Jock Tamson’s bairns.

Smith went on:

“The prudent man is always sincere, and feels horror at the very thought of exposing himself to the disgrace which attends upon the detection of falsehood”.

His three natural laws of economics—the law of self-interest, the law of competition and the law of supply and demand—were laid out in his lectures at Glasgow university. Many of those concepts are fundamentally misunderstood and have been misappropriated, not least by the Adam Smith Institute in London.

By the time he wrote “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” in 1776, Smith had seen corruption and unfettered imperialism mixed with power held in the hands of just a few. The requirement for balance between competition, capitalism and a free market, known as “the invisible hand”, points to what we would now regard as an acute need for sustainability in economic growth.

He also had commentary to make about sensible trade, citing the example of wine making in Scotland: just because we could, that does not mean to say that we should, if the bottom-line cost of said trade is not commercially viable. He was also clear about the damage that is caused by tariffs. I suggest that some Brexit-supporting Conservatives reread that particular section in “The Wealth of Nations”.

In my closing remarks, I will return to Professor Graeme Roy and draw from an article that he wrote in December 2022. He said:

“Crucially, Smith is a ‘political economist’ and not just interested in understanding economic trends. He seeks to make the case for the institutions and structures in our society—such as the shape of markets—to be cohesive, fair and resilient. As we face complex intergenerational and global challenges, be it the climate emergency, rising inequality, or the cost-of-living crisis, there is much we can apply from Smith’s writings to today”.

Roy finished by saying:

“In today’s often toxic political culture and binary policy debates, a recognition that the big global policy challenges that we face require careful thought and, above all, respectful discourse between different sides of an argument—

the use of reason, one could argue—

“is perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from one of Scotland’s most famous sons”.

I look forward to the next 300 years of global influence. Thank you, Adam Smith.

17:17

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I very much welcome Michelle Thomson’s motion celebrating the tercentenary of the birth of Adam Smith, who was a man who was such a profound influence on the Scottish enlightenment and on political economy across the world—a point that I also highlighted in my own parliamentary motion. I entirely associate myself with Michelle Thomson’s remarks, particularly her last point about having discourse in respectful terms. That is a very important lesson.

I vividly recall how, when I was taking up my first teaching post in economics, I was handed a copy of “The Wealth of Nations” and told to inspire my young charges, who were just 14 and 15—which is, in fact, the age at which Smith started

university. I was told that if they did not immediately come to terms with the principle of taxation, I should tell them about Smith's abduction by Travellers when he was aged four, or that an asteroid is named after him, or about the making of a pin. That, I was told, would capture their imagination.

It was advice to ponder as I embarked on a teaching career that inevitably involved inspiring young minds to recognise one of the true greats in Scottish history, who had written "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations" and "The Theory of Moral Sentiments". Those books were probably not bedside reading for most 14 and 15-year-olds, but that was precisely the challenge that made economics come alive for me.

Winston Churchill famously said that

"Of all the small nations of this earth, perhaps only the ancient Greeks surpass the Scots in their contribution to mankind".

Considering the immense wealth of talent and innovation that have been generated by this nation over the past few centuries, it would certainly be difficult to pinpoint a single person to top the list, but there is a robust and valid case to argue that that individual should be Adam Smith. His influence is profound and it is felt across so many aspects of life, from economics and politics to philosophy and education—the list could go on, and I am sure that other members will refer to some of the details.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): As a graduate of the University of Glasgow and having studied economic history in the Adam Smith building, I was very struck that—as was set out by Michelle Thomson—his strengths were in political economy rather than in what might be seen as modern economics. Reference to the political side of the political economy is really important.

Liz Smith: I entirely agree with Fiona Hyslop. That is exactly my background and university degree. It is the political economy that I think is so important. He was very far ahead of his time when he wrote about political economy, so Fiona Hyslop is quite right in that regard.

One of the reasons why he was a pioneer of the Scottish enlightenment was that he transformed intellectual and scientific thinking as well. He is widely cited as the father of modern economics, but there is far more to what Adam Smith wrote about than just that.

He has always been a very relevant scholar in my own life. His writings were frequently referenced in my economics degree and during my teaching career. As an MSP, I find some of his thoughts particularly important in my responsibility for the finance and economy brief.

Not only am I his namesake, but he came from Kirkcaldy, where my family originated. Who knows—perhaps I should do a bit more digging on the family tree.

The economic argument that was made by Smith was that the tax system should be based on equity, certainty, fairness and efficiency, which are still the central debating points around taxation in the modern day. He argued for free market intervention with low Government intervention; he was a champion of the principles of economic growth and wealth creation; and he was an advocate for the division of labour and the concept of the invisible hand—which he actually took from Shakespeare—which determines that an economic system that encourages individualism, enterprise and the freedom of production and consumption is to the benefit of all citizens in society.

I suspect that members might argue about some of that these days, but in the light of what the Scottish Fiscal Commission is telling us, certainly at the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and some of the comments about the taxation agenda, we should be listening very carefully to what Adam Smith said.

I very much welcome this debate from Michelle Thomson. Smith is a colossus of our political economy and thinking, and I very much support the motion in her name.

17:21

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I pay tribute to Michelle Thomson for bringing the debate to Parliament on the tercentenary of Adam Smith's birth. I also pay tribute to the University of Glasgow and others who have organised events to mark the tercentenary.

I spent a couple of minutes this morning on the wonderful Scotland's People website, and it took me no time at all to dig up Adam Smith's birth certificate—that is what they call it on the website, but I think there is some debate about whether it is his birth certificate or his baptism certificate. It named his parents as Margaret Douglas and Adam Smith senior, and the place and date of his birth as Kirkcaldy on 5 June 1723.

The reason why I mention that is not only to promote research into Scottish ancestry as an opportunity to generate more tourism revenue but to demonstrate how easy it is to reach back and touch the events of that time, which are documented in that way. That speaks to the enduring importance of Adam Smith to this very day.

As has been mentioned, Adam Smith is primarily recognised for his generation of

economic theory and for positioning economics, probably for the first time, as an academic discipline. Liz Smith reeled off many of the theories for which he was responsible, which underpin so much of economic thinking to this day.

“The Wealth of Nations” articulated the theory of absolute advantage—later developed into the theory of comparative advantage by Ricardo and others—which challenged the mercantilism of the day and opened up free trade. That continues to benefit Scottish exports to this day, and the benefits are, frankly, very much in line with the work of the Scottish Government and our export growth plan, “A Trading Nation”.

Of course, Smith was also a very significant philosopher and part of the Scottish enlightenment, working with Hume and others. His first work, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”, is absolutely critical. It underpinned his later economic theories, the theory of sympathy in particular, which seeks to explain the source of mankind’s ability to form moral judgments. No big ask!

He stated that conscience arises from dynamic and interactive social relationships through which people seek “mutual sympathy of sentiments”. He set out the theoretical basis to understand why people behave as they do, not just in the economic sphere but in their wider interactions with their fellow citizens.

An understanding of market drivers was combined with the theoretical underpinning of the importance of trade as a good thing for the most part. Smith also recognised the importance of wider considerations of the impact of individuals’ actions on others. That shows that Smith’s work was the forerunner of the conversations that we have today about the concept of the wellbeing economy, which reaches out to encompass sustainability, the fair work agenda and much else, in recognition that consideration of economics and wealth creation goes much wider than just economic theory.

I hope that the series of events that have taken place over the past days have given many people, including me, the opportunity to learn more about Smith’s work. I hope that that continues not just for its own sake but to raise Smith’s international profile. He is a truly international figure who is widely recognised and revered across the world. These events will serve not only to further Smith’s memory but to raise Scotland’s profile and, as a consequence, increase the prospects for Scottish trade and exports. I think that Smith would approve of that.

17:26

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank Michelle Thomson for bringing this debate to the chamber. In her speech, she expertly highlighted the breadth of Adam Smith’s work and the significant impact that it has had in Scotland and around the globe, which continues to the present day.

The project at the University of Glasgow to commemorate the tercentenary of Adam Smith’s birth aims not only to celebrate his work and its enduring legacy but to support a better understanding of the breadth and plurality of his work and of how the interlocking questions of economics and morality still apply hundreds of years on.

Adam Smith is recognised globally as a pioneer in exploring the relationship between politics, economics and social responsibility. His legacy can be found in almost every economic work. Although we recognise the influence of his time at the University of Glasgow, his roots are in Fife, particularly in Kirkcaldy. He was baptised in Kirkcaldy 300 years ago this week and, yesterday, a baptismal celebration was held at Kirkcaldy old kirk. His education began at home, and he returned to Kirkcaldy to spend a lot of his time after he had been at the University of Glasgow and toured Europe as a tutor to the third Duke of Buccleuch. Later in his life, he moved to Edinburgh as a result of his post as commissioner of customs in Scotland—his residence, Panmure house, is not far from Parliament.

However, for many years, Kirkcaldy was Adam Smith’s home, and many of his ideas developed from his formative experience there. Kirkcaldy was a booming economic centre, and trade and commerce were evident everywhere. From Kirkcaldy old kirk to the newly refurbished Adam Smith theatre, his legacy is stamped on the town. Through the Adam Smith heritage trail, visitors are encouraged to follow in his footsteps and explore Kirkcaldy, as well as the history of Adam Smith, by taking in the heritage centre and Adam Smith Close or viewing the first edition of “The Wealth of Nations” that is on display at the Kirkcaldy galleries. The heritage centre and the close, which opened in 2016, have been important in raising the profile of Adam Smith in Kirkcaldy. Although many people were familiar with his name, perhaps not many beyond those in academia were aware of his huge global significance or the part that Kirkcaldy played in his work.

Alongside the events at the University of Glasgow, and others around the world, a number of events are taking place in Kirkcaldy to celebrate the tercentenary. The annual Adam Smith festival of ideas is bigger than ever this year. It includes an academic programme, a birthday party, which

will be in the Town Square, and the established food festival, which is being held this weekend. There will also be a series of lectures—the first was delivered by Sir Michael Marmot, and subsequent speakers include Larry Summers and Robert Peston, who will deliver the annual Adam Smith lecture on Friday. It is not all politics, though—Alexander McCall Smith will be in conversation tomorrow night, and Arabella Weir, along with Elaine C Smith, will be presenting “Two Doors Down”. The Adam Smith Global Foundation is delivering an academic programme on Thursday and Friday, with lectures on themes including culture, philosophy, education and economics.

I cannot talk about the legacy of Adam Smith without referring to Kirkcaldy’s other great son when it comes to politics and economics. I will explain how Gordon Brown has done so much to promote the continuing relevance of Adam Smith to the lang toun. He has been a driver behind the recognition of Adam Smith in Kirkcaldy.

The impressive list of speakers who have delivered the Adam Smith lecture in Kirkcaldy is worth highlighting: Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who is the internet founder; Sandi Toksvig; Professor Michael Sandel; UNICEF’s executive director, Henrietta Fore; and Kofi Annan, to name a few. It was quite a coup for Kirkcaldy to have Kofi Annan visit the town.

The Adam Smith Global Foundation has built its reputation on the status of its lectures, but it cannot be denied that Gordon Brown’s commitment to the legacy of Adam Smith and its relevance to Kirkcaldy has made a huge contribution to the event’s success. I also recognise the active support of the *Fife Free Press* in promoting many events over the years, particularly in this significant year, as there is much to enjoy and there will be something for everyone this week.

17:30

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): As a Langtonian, it is an absolute pleasure to be speaking in this debate to celebrate the tercentenary of Adam Smith’s birth. I offer my sincere gratitude to Michelle Thomson for securing this important debate.

Today, we acknowledge the lasting works of Adam Smith and their on-going relevance in the modern world. His legacy serves as a beacon reminding us of Scotland’s historic contributions to global thought and of the importance of continuing to celebrate influential Scottish figures.

Adam Smith was a multifaceted figure with an intellect that flourished in the fields of engineering, economics, chemistry, political economy, philosophy, literature and medicine. His ideas not

only held global importance during his time but continue to reverberate through the centuries, influencing society today.

I will take a moment to pay tribute to Adam Smith’s deep connection to Kirkcaldy. Like me, Adam Smith was born and raised in the lang toun. In fact, my constituency office, just off the High Street in Kirkcaldy, overlooks Kirkcaldy old kirk, where Adam Smith was baptised 300 years ago. It is a constant reminder of the legacy of a son of Kirkcaldy—and, indeed, of Scotland—whose life and works have profoundly shaped the world we live in.

Adam Smith lived in Kirkcaldy for a great proportion of his life and his legacy is felt throughout the area and beyond. His legacy has brought enrichment to locals and tourists of Kirkcaldy and Fife alike. The lang toun is full of historical monuments to Smith’s life, including the old kirk, Adam Smith Close and the Adam Smith heritage centre. That is a rare example of the once-common rig buildings in Kirkcaldy on the Esplanade, which was said to have fostered inspiration for Smith’s work, “The Wealth of Nations”. A more recent building is the Adam Smith theatre, which is set to reopen.

This year, to celebrate his 300th anniversary, Kirkcaldy will be putting Adam Smith firmly in the spotlight and honouring his legacy at various events across the town. I am so pleased that the organised events have attracted so many people from across the country to experience Adam Smith’s home town and the contributions that he made to it.

Fife College’s scholarship programme also launched a new Adam Smith 300 enterprise scholarship on the day of Adam Smith’s 300th anniversary. Aimed at supporting students who are taking steps into setting up their own business, it will include financial support as well as mentoring support and guidance from Business Gateway Fife. That is great news for students and a fantastic way to celebrate this milestone.

It is important to recognise the pivotal role that Scottish universities have played in fostering Scottish figures, including spreading Adam Smith’s transformative ideas. It was at our Scottish universities that Adam Smith’s spirit of curiosity and formidable intellect were cultivated, along with several other Scottish economists and philosophers. Our world-leading Scottish universities have provided space for ideas to flourish—ideas that would forever change the course of Scottish and global human society.

As we commemorate this momentous occasion, let us remember that it is crucial to continue to celebrate the life and works of influential Scottish figures. Their legacy serves as a reminder of the

invaluable contributions that Scotland has made to the world. Adam Smith, an intellectual giant, a man of unquenchable curiosity, a product of Scottish enlightenment, is a shining testament to that.

Adam Smith was a leading light in the Scottish enlightenment, in which extraordinary intelligence and thinking of the 18th century forever altered our understanding of the world. The Scottish enlightenment, with Adam Smith at its vanguard, was an outpouring of intellectual and scientific creativity by Scottish theorists. That work gained global recognition for its assertion of the importance of human reasoning and the use of empirical methods of inquiry. That was a seismic shift away from dogma and authority to a world where the application of reason, observation and experiment became our guiding principles.

The great thinkers of the Scottish enlightenment, including Adam Smith, have influenced the culture of Scotland in several areas, including architecture, art, music and philosophy. The influence of that movement spread beyond Scotland, moving and disseminating ideas. Of course, Scotland has changed in important ways since Adam Smith's death. Although his ideas continue to be of global significance, 300 years after his birth, countries all over the world have faced unprecedented economic challenges that, time and time again, have tested the relevance of modern economic policy.

However, despite the changes and challenges that we have faced, Adam Smith's light continues to shine brilliantly in disciplines that are as diverse as engineering, economics, chemistry, political economy, philosophy, literature and medicine. We must continue to celebrate his inquisitive nature, unequivocal mind and inclination to question the world. As policy makers and decision makers, it is crucial to champion those values as we strive to build a society that is economically prosperous as well as socially equitable and just.

In the spirit of Adam Smith, let us continue to pursue knowledge and understanding, question, analyse and innovate. As Smith himself said,

"science is a great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition."

17:35

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Michelle Thomson for securing the motion for debate in the chamber. The debate is timely for the many reasons that she mentioned. There have been an incredible amount of impressive contributions so far—I feel as though I have been back at school in the past half an hour. I had planned to say many of the things that have already been said, so I will try to be brief.

The year 1776 is one of those years in human history that can, quite properly, be described as remarkable, as three seminal texts in the English language were published. The first was the declaration of independence in America; the second was the renowned historical work by Edward Gibbon, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"; and the third was "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations"—the first work about political economy, which we know now as "The Wealth of Nations"—by Adam Smith. Rightly, it is known throughout the world as a seminal work, as it established the doctrine of free trade and the concepts of modern liberal economics that we practice today, which we have already heard about.

I also have a personal connection to the text. In book 3, chapter 4, an ancestor of mine gets a mention. Adam Smith is speaking about the heritable jurisdictions that exist across the world. He wrote:

"It is not 30 years ago since Mr Cameron of Lochiel, a gentleman of Lochaber in Scotland, without any legal warrant whatever, not being what was then called a lord of regality, nor even a tenant in chief, but a vassal of the Duke of Argyll, and without being so much as a justice of the peace, used, notwithstanding, to exercise the highest criminal jurisdiction over his own people. He is said to have done so with great equity, though without any of the formalities of justice; and it is not improbable that the state of that part of the country at that time made it necessary for him to assume this authority, in order to maintain the public peace."

That is a direct and personal connection for me. In my short speech, I will not focus on "The Wealth of Nations". I would like to concentrate —

Ivan McKee: I cannot resist this. The member mentioned three seminal text texts from 1776, including the declaration of independence. I invite the member to say more about the positive benefits of independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give Donald Cameron extra time.

Donald Cameron: I am very tempted by that red rag to a bull. Instead, I will concentrate on "The Theory of Moral Sentiments", which Ivan McKee mentioned. Smith considered the work to be his masterpiece. It was his first major work, and, as Michelle Thomson said, he saw his role as a moral philosopher to be complementary to his views on economics. He also writes about sympathy with the feelings of others, saying that, rather than simply being self-interested, we are deeply concerned with the wellbeing of humankind.

As one might expect from an enlightenment figure, Smith was a humanist: he believed in the dignity of the human being and in government intervention to help those who are in need. "The

Theory of Moral Sentiments” is the counterweight to the individualism of the proto-capitalist framework that was to come in “The Wealth of Nations”. As Vernon L Smith famously said in a lecture about Adam Smith’s two major works, together, those explain:

“why human nature appears to be simultaneously self regarding and other regarding.”

In closing, I thank Michelle Thomson for a worthy debate that is in honour of a worthy titanic figure in Scotland. I look forward to hearing further contributions from across the chamber.

17:39

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am afraid that I do not have a connection to Adam Smith like the one that Mr Cameron has just outlined, but the fact that I stand here as the granddaughter of a steelworker in the same Parliament as him is something that Hume, Hutton, Burns and Adam Smith would possibly welcome.

I recently attended, for the first time, an event in Panmure house. I was invited by the chancellor of Heriot-Watt University to a reception to welcome Zambia’s distinguished representative President Hakainde Hichilema to Scotland. The speeches at the event emphasised the connections of our countries, the political and global challenges of climate change, equalities, feminist equality, climate justice and the economic challenges of the global south. It was poignant to hear that in the salon of Adam Smith’s house, whose portrait adorned the walls. The portrait was painted many years after his death, so we have to use our imagination to determine how accurate it is.

When in that salon, one cannot help but pause and imagine the many discussions, arguments and resolutions of the great thinkers of the enlightenment. Indeed, it seems that that wisdom, intellect and vision has seeped into the very walls where Adam Smith lived from 1778 until his death in 1790.

It has been argued already in the chamber that “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”—Adam Smith’s opus—is as relevant today as it was on first publication. Like Michelle Thomson, I was also delighted to attend the event at this Parliament to hear about the University of Glasgow’s Adam Smith business school’s plan to commemorate the tercentenary of one of Scotland’s leading thinkers, economists and perhaps the key figure of the enlightenment, by enabling us all to engage more closely with Smith’s work and to explore his writing not as an historical artefact but as ideas that speak to us still today. There will hardly be an economics student in the past 300 years who will not have heard of,

or, indeed, in most cases—like me—have read at least parts of “The Wealth of Nations”.

In *The Herald* today, Dr Craig Smith, Adam Smith senior lecturer in the Scottish enlightenment at the University of Glasgow, reminds us of Adam Smith’s other great piece of philosophical writing, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”. That has recently been re-examined by scholars, having previously gone out of fashion. Dr Smith says:

“It’s a book that is, in many respects, as accurate today as it was then in telling us how we feel when we see somebody being injured, or how we feel when we see somebody stealing something from someone else.

“So there’s a focus on the emotions, on the psychology of sympathy and empathy and impartiality—not putting yourself in favour of or above somebody else.”

Michelle Thomson referred to that latter aspect. Dr Smith concludes:

“All these are things ... are still part how we think or feel about morality today.”

That should certainly inform the members of this chamber as we pass law that impacts on people’s lives and as we seek to live up to the standards that are expected in public life.

I congratulate Michelle Thomson on securing the debate, and the University of Glasgow’s Adam Smith business school for embracing the opportunity that the tercentenary presents to celebrate and discuss Adam Smith’s legacy through the “Smith around the world” lecture series, which spans Sydney, Beijing, Tokyo, the West Indies, Barcelona, Canberra, Mexico City, Toulouse, Hong Kong, Oxford, Nairobi and London. The fact that the walls of the Panmure house salon have extended so far across the globe is the most fitting tribute to this luminary of the enlightenment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who want to participate in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Michelle Thomson to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Michelle Thomson]

Motion agreed to.

17:44

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): As shadow minister for further and higher education, I am extremely honoured to be contributing to today’s debate celebrating 300 years since the birth of the father of economics, University of Glasgow alumni and professor, Adam Smith.

I thank Michelle Thomson for bringing this motion to the Parliament. I will try to contribute a little bit differently to the debate. Unlike my colleague Donald Cameron, I have no direct connection to Adam Smith, although I have cited his work in my studies.

The Scottish enlightenment was a period of incredible intellectual and cultural growth. It was the catalyst for establishing the importance of reason, scientific inquiry and individual rights. It laid the groundwork for the industrial revolution and the rise of modern capitalism. Scotland became a centre of intellectual and cultural excellence, and there was a lasting impact on Scotland's identity and reputation.

Adam Smith's work "The Wealth of Nations", which has been mentioned many times today, is widely regarded as one of the most important works in the history of economics and helped to underpin modern capitalism. We often forget how much of our thinking, as politicians, is inspired by the ideas and works of Adam Smith. For me personally, I understand his work to have emphasised the benefits of the free market and limited Government interventions. Here and around the world, I and many other students and researchers, past and present, have cited his work. In my PhD, I focused on his work on human capital. However, I respect the fact that we may all interpret his work differently, as has always been the case.

Debate and discussion were central to the Scottish enlightenment. As some members might be aware, the enlightenment was a movement that was centred around ideas and debate of those ideas. I believe that it was my colleague Murdo Fraser who highlighted that, in the birthplace of the enlightenment, protesters were able to cancel the screening of the film "Adult Human Female" for a second time. That has sparked discussions about whether censorship has captured Scotland's world-class institutions, which were once bastions of free speech.

The United Kingdom Government has similar concerns about universities in England and has recently introduced the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which will extend legal responsibilities to universities and student unions to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom while promoting those important values. As the Prime Minister has rightly stressed,

"A tolerant society is one which allows us to understand those we disagree with, and nowhere is that more important than within our great universities."

It is my hope that, as a result of today's discussion about the Scottish enlightenment and influential Scottish figures such as Adam Smith, we can all reflect on the values at the heart of that time and what they mean for today's Scotland.

Today's debate marking 300 years since the birth of Adam Smith has provided us with a unique opportunity to reflect on the values that were the catalyst for modern economics and the underpinning of modern Scotland's identity and culture. The Scottish enlightenment was a time characterised by the spirit of open inquiry and the free exchange of ideas, which is almost contrary to the direction in which we seem to be headed as a society now. I hope that debates such as this will act as a turning point for a return to a Scotland that stands for logic, reason and debate.

17:48

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): As others have done, I commend my colleague Michelle Thomson for securing the debate and for her excellent remarks commemorating this tercentenary. Adam Smith's ideas have shaped the world as we know it, and the Scottish enlightenment, of which he was a leading part, was characterised by Scottish thinkers and the intellectual leadership of Europe. It was a movement of ideas and, importantly, the disputation of ideas.

As we have heard this evening, Smith is most famous for his book "The Wealth of Nations". Like Mr Cameron, however, I will focus my remarks on his other book, "The Theory of Moral Sentiments", which was published in 1759. That book very much put Mr Smith on the map. It brought him fame, and students from other universities—even in other countries—left their courses to come and study under him in Scotland. Further, it was considered by Smith to be his superior work.

I want to read out a passage from that book, although I will not do so in its entirety as it is quite long. In it, he talks specifically about systems and plans for how we govern, using an analogy involving chess pieces. He says:

"in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it."

I will paraphrase the rest. He says that, if the principles coincide, the "game of human society" will go on easily but that, if they do not, it will go on miserably.

In other words, he says that Governments are most successful when they work with people rather than against them. I agree with that, and I sense that there is a bit of agreement with that sentiment in the chamber, too. It is important for us all to ponder that as we go about the work of this legislature.

Like Pam Gosal, I understand and have taken on board Smith's belief in free speech and how that relates to society—and particularly to modern

society at the moment. I think that his idea of free speech was tempered by respect for others and also by empathy for others. He might not understand our modern idea of empathy, but it is certainly based on sentiments that he wrote about in his book.

The Scottish enlightenment teaches us that we need to be free to think, to debate and even to offend, and that we need to base our thinking—our critical thinking—on facts and also on science, which is a sentiment that Smith expressed very much. I think that there is immense value in robust debate—that clash of competing opinions that benefits society and Governments.

Smith and the enlightenment continue to inspire us. They inspire us to pursue knowledge and to create an environment that encourages the free exchange of ideas, because that is how we progress.

17:52

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow Ash Regan, who gave an excellent speech. It is impossible to overstate the impact of Adam Smith's thinking on the modern world. He is probably the most universally influential Scot of all time. I will focus on one aspect of the many strands of his philosophy.

Smith believed that, with the right measure of regulation, society is empowered. He believed that the market is an engine for prosperity when it is legally framed. That is the definition of a free market that I strongly believe in, because it is a model that is based on what works best and what works for people. However, truthfully, I do not think that we have many regulators that we could hold up as being all that good at what they do. Most of them are paper tigers: they are pretty much toothless.

We are a regulatory body—Scotland's Parliament—and we can and should draw inspiration from Smith's thinking, especially when it comes to how we as parliamentarians scrutinise the executive, introduce new laws and regulations and amend existing ones. I do not think that we are even half as effective at that as we could be. Some of that is related to process, but much of it is derived from the culture of this place. Everything feels truncated and lacking in thoroughness. Too often, things are treated at a level of just surface depth.

People are rightly critical of the quality of the laws that we pass here, and they are even more critical about the lack of enforcement and accountability. They are concerned that our scrutiny of the Executive is not as robust as it ought to be. We in the Parliament do not set the bar high enough on what constitutes good

government. It is often said that we have not developed a Holyrood back-bench culture and that there are not enough free thinkers in this place. That is a far cry from the great figures of the enlightenment.

All of that is highly relevant to Adam Smith and his legacy. We do not spend nearly enough time debating contesting ideas in this chamber. The structure of our debates militates against it, and there is seldom enough time to properly engage with the more serious and often complex issues that we face. The much-missed David McLetchie said of this Parliament that we appear to have just two options—to ban something or make it compulsory. We rarely get to the root causes of the issues that we face. We often end up talking to ourselves about symptoms and not root causes.

Facing up to our failures as a Parliament and objectively judging the outcomes or the effectiveness of the regulations that we put in place is not easy. Of course it is not. It is much easier to stick to self-congratulation or stay safely within the debate briefs that we have been handed. However, up pops Adam Smith to bring us back to root causes, unintended outcomes and the whole issue of human nature—not human nature as we would like it to be, but human nature as it is.

This is Smith in "The Theory of Moral Sentiments" talking directly to us in Parliament. Of course, he did not know that he was speaking to us, but he was. He wrote:

"To judge of ourselves as we judge of others ... is the greatest exertion of candour and impartiality. In order to do this, we must look at ourselves with the same eyes with which we look at others: we must imagine ourselves not the actors, but the spectators of our own character and conduct".

We really should let our inner Adam Smith out. We are quick to pass the buck and to blame, but do we really imagine ourselves to be

"not the actors, but the spectators of our own character and conduct"?

Two years into my service in the Parliament, my answer must be that we can and must do better. Reform of the Parliament is now fundamentally essential.

In a members' business debate last week, Michelle Thomson said something comparing me to a potato. However, I will be as generous as I normally am and pay tribute to Michelle Thomson for bringing this debate to the chamber. I understand that artificial intelligence was beyond answering the question—I got that. I do not often agree with her on substantive issues, or maybe I find myself agreeing with her frighteningly increasingly—from her perspective, not from mine—because she is undoubtedly one of the free

thinkers of the Parliament, and we need more free thinking.

Adam Smith speaks to us as clearly today as he did to those of his day. Let us use his anniversary to reflect, to

“look at ourselves with the same eyes with which we look at others”

and to be the free thinkers that Scotland needs as never before.

17:58

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): I begin by extending my gratitude to Michelle Thomson, not only for lodging the motion but for so eloquently setting the scene for the debate. I also extend my gratitude to members across the chamber for their considered insights.

Colleagues have highlighted some of the many achievements of Adam Smith. As we have heard, he was a great moral philosopher and political economist and one of the key figures in the Scottish enlightenment. It has been an informative debate. I did not know, for example, that Smith had an asteroid named after him or that he went to university aged 14 to 15. I certainly did not know that Liz Smith might be a descendant.

We should be proud of the impact that Adam Smith has had and continues to have on Scotland and the rest of the world. It is entirely appropriate that we take time today to celebrate Adam Smith 300 years after his birth in Kirkcaldy. Celebrations are happening right across the country, not the least of which will be those at the University of Glasgow, where he was a student; the recipient of an honorary doctorate; later, a staff member; and eventually the rector. At a speaking engagement there this morning, I was told that he wrote “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” at the university.

I also want to celebrate the role that Scottish universities had—and continue to have—in the exchange of ideas, in driving innovation on a global scale and in contributing to social justice.

During the 18th century, the Scottish enlightenment put our country at the heart of global intellectual discourse. It is fitting that we are speaking in Edinburgh—a city that was at the heart of that revolutionary time when there was a constant exchange of ideas between medics and philosophers, engineers and economists, and writers and researchers. That interdisciplinary approach provided a fertile breeding ground for the theories and discoveries that would shape Scotland and the rest of the world for years to come.

As many speakers have noted, Smith was one of the key figures in the Scottish enlightenment.

He lived at a time when Scotland was leading the world in thinking, innovation and invention—traits that continue to this day. One of the greatest contributions that he and the enlightenment made to the world was the new emphasis on bringing talent together from across disciplines and crossing the divide between the theoretical and the practical for the public good.

Debates on the influence of Smith’s work often point to the many ways in which he has been misunderstood. In 2017, the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, acknowledged that Smith is one of the most misquoted and misinterpreted economists in human history. He is often held up as a believer in unrestrained free markets, but a detailed examination of his work arguably shows someone who was in favour of properly functioning markets that enable a just society to flourish.

In “The Wealth of Nations”, Smith said:

“No society can be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”

As an academic put it to me this morning, Smith was neither right wing nor left wing; he was Adam Smith.

The idea of social justice continues to be reflected in Scotland today. What a fine legacy that is for this colossus to have left behind. However, Smith’s contributions would not have been possible without the education system or universities, which enabled him to flourish. For centuries, our universities have played leading roles in nurturing the best minds in the country and providing opportunities for discussion, debate and reflection.

As we have heard, Adam Smith was educated at the University of Glasgow—an institution whose business school now bears his name—and we have our university system to thank for helping to shape him into the father of modern economics that he is widely recognised to be.

Donald Cameron: Will the minister give way?

Graeme Dey: I am about to finish.

Our universities continue to bring together students and staff with different perspectives and life experiences. The policy of free tuition and widening access has made the opportunity open to more of our young people than ever before, a fact of which I suspect Smith would be proud.

Smith’s was also the time that saw the dawn of what we now recognise as the scientific method—the gathering of evidence and the challenging of previously accepted theories, and the idea that people should think for themselves rather than believing what they have been told. I am not sure what he would have made of the role of social

media and modern society in the context of thinking for yourself, which extends to the espousing of wild conspiracy theories as fact.

Stephen Kerr: The minister heard impassioned pleas from Pam Gosal and Ash Regan on the vital issue of freedom of speech, especially on the campuses of our esteemed universities. Will he take the opportunity to make a categorical and unequivocal statement in support of the right of freedom of speech on the campuses of Scotland's universities?

Graeme Dey: Freedom of speech matters, as does respect for others. Often, the tone in which we conduct debates is just as important as the debates themselves.

The attributes that Smith advanced remain those of the Scottish research sector today. Scotland has three universities in the top 200 in the 2023 *Times Higher Education* world university rankings. Each of our 19 higher education institutions conducts world-leading research across a breadth of disciplines and almost half of it is undertaken with international collaborators. That interconnectedness of people, cultures, facilities, data, knowledge and ideas is the means by which we have the chance to solve some of the world's most difficult problems, from the climate crisis to child poverty.

As the motion rightly notes, we should be proud of Adam Smith's legacy and the continued role that Scotland's universities play in leading the exchange of ideas. I am confident that we will continue to nurture more great thinkers in Scotland's future—a future based on the wisdom of Adam Smith and the Scottish enlightenment.

Meeting closed at 18:04.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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