



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 29 April 2025

Session 6



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NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Martin Bignell (Rail Freight Group)

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

Sarah Boyd (Lothian Buses)

Duncan Cameron (First Bus Scotland)

David Frenz (Stagecoach)

Graham Kelly (Caledonian Sleeper Ltd)

Joanne Maguire (ScotRail Trains Ltd)

Liam Sumpter (Scotland's Railway)

Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 29 April 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:16]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning, and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2025 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

The first item on the agenda is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private item 3, which is consideration of the evidence that we will hear on Scotland's train and bus services, and item 4, which is consideration of the committee's work programme?

Members indicated agreement.

Train and Bus Services

09:17

The Convener: Our second item of business this morning is an evidence-taking session on the current state of Scotland's rail and bus sectors. Today, we will hear from two panels, the first of which comprises representatives of bus operators, and the second, representatives of rail operators and owners and rail freight companies.

I am pleased to welcome Paul White, director, Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland; David Frenz, operations director, Stagecoach; Duncan Cameron, managing director, First Bus Scotland; and Sarah Boyd, managing director, Lothian Buses.

We will move straight to questions, and I have—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry—I failed to do this last week, too, so at this point I should say that Monica Lennon has sent her apologies and Sarah Boyack is attending the meeting as her substitute. I am not going to welcome you to the meeting, Sarah, because this is your second week in a row here and you are becoming a bit of a fixture on the committee. You are always welcome, though.

The first question is an easy one to warm you up. The continuing reductions in bus services and passenger patronage over the past few years have been a problem. How can we reverse those declines and get more people on to buses as well as more bus routes?

Who would like to start off? Actually, I will give you all a chance to answer, just to make sure that you are all on point. Paul, do you want to start?

Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland): Certainly. Thank you, convener.

Getting people on to buses is a *raison d'être* of CPT. In fact, we looked into the challenge a little bit in a report that we did last year with KPMG entitled "Trends in Scottish bus patronage". I believe that the report has been shared with committee members. I can send it to you again, if that would be helpful, but it looks at barriers to patronage growth, some of which are societal factors that we cannot do much about such as changes to shopping habits, online shopping, and hybrid working. However, the main detractors to bus use include worsening journey times, car availability and ownership and congestion.

The report found that it was not fully within bus operators' control to grow patronage; it requires a partnership effort with local authorities and the Scottish Government. For me, the key things that we can do include taking buses out of congestion, where possible; looking for priority access;

improving punctuality; shortening journey times; and improving reliability. All of that is possible if we can have bus speeds that are constant and quicker, but that will mean looking at our handling of road works, for instance, and our investment in bus priority measures. If we do that, operators will be able to consider issues such as fares, frequency and availability, because the fact is that operating costs fall as journey times improve and patronage increases. Indeed, that is the virtuous circle referred to in the national transport strategy.

That is backed up by, for example, the Transport Focus survey results, which were published earlier this year and were referred to by Robert Sansom at last week's committee meeting. Some of the drivers of passenger opinion are the most important issues here—and by that, I mean reliability and punctuality. In other words, is the bus going to be there when I expect it to be there, and how long is it going to take me to get to my destination? Is that journey time constant? I think that if we are to grow patronage—and then look at reducing costs—improving bus speeds and tackling congestion will be key.

The Convener: David, do you want to answer the question? I would also suggest that the reason for the decline in bus patronage in rural areas is reliability. Do you want to address that, too, David?

David Frenz (Stagecoach): As far as rural patronage is concerned, I can talk only about Stagecoach in east Scotland, and, in fact, we have just introduced a service change in the Carse of Gowrie to increase frequency through there.

I would echo the points that Paul White made about how we make bus more attractive and get that modal shift. For me, it is all about reliability and punctuality, and it starts with us as the operator ensuring that we have enough drivers and vehicles. In that respect, I think that, for all of us, the picture is much improved from what it was a few years ago.

The question, then, is: what is the difference between somebody jumping in their car to go to work or the shops and their getting on a bus? I think that it all comes down to journey times, so we need to see where we can get priority. In fact, I was on the coach this morning from Ferrytoll over to Edinburgh, and at certain parts of the journey, the coach was driving by parked cars and congestion while at others, it was in the same queue of traffic. We can make bus and coach the option for people if we can show them that they will get to work quicker, but there is also the value for money element.

The Convener: Duncan, do you want to add anything? Last week, we heard people asking for green and pleasant buses to travel in.

Duncan Cameron (First Bus Scotland): First of all, I would reinforce the points that have been made. Journey times have been declining for years, and traffic congestion is going in the wrong direction, so to get more people on buses, we need to prioritise them—full stop. That means bus priority measures to speed up journeys, as David Frenz put so well.

Yes, bus passenger numbers have been declining—there is no getting away from that. However, there are some green shoots, and we are seeing some passenger growth on our own networks where we have made investment. However—and I think that this is what you are alluding to, convener—we do think that it is important to invest in new fleet; indeed, over the past three or four years, we have been investing considerable money in that, and now 40 per cent of the fleet is net zero.

That said, although improving the attractiveness of bus travel is important, there is no getting away from it—the situation with journey times is continuing to decline. Journey speeds in Glasgow are now close to journey speeds in London. What that means is that, just to maintain the same level of service and frequency, we need to invest in more bus drivers and vehicles, never mind the fact that, because the journey time is longer, the option is unattractive to customers and the cost to the operator is greater. Some of what we would have invested in new vehicles or in keeping prices as low as possible now has to be invested in additional journey times, as we have had to do in Glasgow over the past month—and will have to do so again in June, just to improve punctuality. Without bus priority measures, the situation with journey times will continue to decline.

The Convener: Surely, Sarah, it is the opposite for you at Lothian Buses in Edinburgh—or is it not?

Sarah Boyd (Lothian Buses): A report of the preceding five years that Transport Scotland published in 2019 showed an overall drop in passengers across Scotland. However, Lothian was different during that five-year period, with a small percentage growth each year.

Last year, we carried 116 million passengers, and we are back to 94 per cent of our pre-pandemic numbers. Of course, the dynamic is different now, with different travel patterns and so on; all the impacts of the pandemic, as Paul White alluded to, have been felt everywhere.

I will not labour the point, but I do want to echo what my colleagues have said: reliability is everything. When people choose to use the bus, a whole bunch of factors have to come together for it to be a really good seamless experience. It is not just the quality of the journey, the customer

experience, affordability and all the rest of it; you have to be able to rely on it, know that you are going to reach your destination—for whatever reason that is—and be able to plan ahead. We know from our customers just how important all of that is.

The Convener: Thank you. The next questions come from Mark Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I would like to ask you about the streams of funding that are available not just for bus priority measures but for investment in what I guess you could call community bus services and facilities, particularly in rural areas. We had the bus partnership fund; it was paused, and has now gone. There is now a new bus infrastructure fund, which wraps in not just what that bus partnership fund did but the community bus fund, too. However, it is only about £10 million. Do you think that that is adequate, and how do you think that that spend should be prioritised?

Paul, you are nodding the strongest. Do you want to come in first?

Paul White: The pausing of the bus partnership fund was hugely detrimental to the bus sector. For the first time, we had a large pot of money—£500 million—and a multiyear commitment to delivering bus priority, and I think that we managed to spend something like £26 million, or 6 per cent, of the budget before it was paused. Some things were delivered—the bus gates up in Aberdeen, for example—but a lot of plans were developed and then paused.

That has now been replaced by the bus infrastructure fund, which we welcome, and we will do our best to see that it is delivered and spent appropriately. However, we have lost the multiyear commitment—it is a one-year fund. I am not sure that the quantum of the fund has been made public yet, but I believe that it is going to be around the number that you mentioned, so it is far smaller. Steps such as that, and the revision of the commitment to cut car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030, are very damaging when you are looking at improving bus services.

We also need commitment from all parties. Because the bus partnership fund was a multiyear fund, the Government could say, “Well, we’re delivering this, but what are bus operators delivering?” and the operators could look ahead and think about investing in fleet, say, or improving frequencies. With a single-year fund, the dynamic is very different. It is as if you are saying, “This is a year’s worth of money, and we are not sure whether there will be money next year. What are you going to deliver?” In such circumstances, operators are going to be a bit more cautious about investing in fleet or improving frequencies,

because the fund could be paused and cancelled the next year. As a result, you do not get any improvements in bus running speeds, but you have spent the money as if they were going to be delivered. It is just a step back, and we would welcome the return of a multiyear commitment.

Mark Ruskell: As for the community bus fund, that particular strand was about improving facilities, primarily in rural areas, and also building partnerships. Do you have any thoughts on that? I think that the fund has been integrated into this new fund, but we are not sure what the balance is.

Paul White: I believe that the community bus fund has been integrated with the new fund. There are some examples of where that money was used well, and other examples on which we managed to get some details and which show that the fund probably did not fully deliver to the benefit of bus passengers. One of the schemes introduced through the fund was a library bus; you might think, “That is useful and good”, but is that really the purpose of the scheme?

Any money that goes on improving bus services, be that through investment in infrastructure or directly to local authorities for community bus schemes, is a positive, but I would like to see the quantum increased and an agreement to retain that funding for a number of years.

09:30

Mark Ruskell: Turning to Sarah Boyd, Duncan Cameron and David Frenz, I am interested to hear from the operators of particular projects. You have already talked about congestion and the need for priority infrastructure. Are there particular projects that you feel that these funds will—or will not—deliver?

Sarah Boyd: Absolutely. We are having good on-going discussions with the four local authorities that I work with, and I can think of projects in both East Lothian and Midlothian that, if we can deliver them, will undoubtedly make a difference to passengers.

Mark Ruskell: Can they be delivered within this fund or—and I go back to the point that Paul White was making—is there a need for multiyear funding? Are some of them deliverable within this financial year?

Sarah Boyd: We will endeavour to deliver them within the financial year; indeed, we are working with local authority colleagues to try to ensure that that happens.

Paul White is absolutely right. The flexibility that comes with multiyear funding gives the scope to deliver everything intended in a project while allowing for contingency, too. That is the important

point. Twelve months can go by very quickly and, before you know it, you might be delivering only part of a project and not getting the full benefit from it.

Mark Ruskell: Duncan?

Duncan Cameron: Perhaps I can add some colour to what has already been said, but I want to reinforce, first of all, the importance of multiyear funding. I do appreciate that this might well be a United Kingdom-wide issue, though.

We have participated in the Glasgow city region bus partnership's bid for the new bus infrastructure fund, as well as the north east bus alliance's bid and we have found that, because the money needs to be spent within a very small window, a lot of the projects that we have applied for are design survey work. However—and this confirms what Paul White said—we as an operator are not then in a position to take that forward. Until a spade goes in the ground and there is a bus lane, or until some further bus priority measures are introduced, we are not in a position to return that to our customers.

A better approach would have been the previous multiyear fund. When the bus priority scheme was launched in Aberdeen, we said that there would be no financial benefit back to First Bus and that we would be reinvesting everything back to the customer—and we did so, because we saw the end result of that scheme. It is really important we see these things through.

I want to try to stay on a positive footing here. In Glasgow, a lot of work was being undertaken up until the bus partnership fund was suspended, and something like six bus corridors had gone through gateway reviews with Transport Scotland. As a partnership, we are still meeting to discuss those matters and try to progress them, and I very much hope that they will happen as further opportunities come to land them.

Of course, this is not just about funding. Sometimes it is a matter of political will, and sometimes it comes down to planning decisions. Decisions are being taken on the avenues project in Glasgow, and money is being allocated to that. It could just be a matter of the priority being given to bus travel against other modes in those decisions, but we are certainly continuing to push those opportunities where they arise.

David Frenz: I want to build on Duncan Cameron's comments about the work that we did prior to the bus partnership fund—that big element of funding—being paused and cancelled. We saw the fund as a sea change in our ability to implement bus priority measures. As you will appreciate, being in east Scotland, we work with a number of local authorities; as part of the Fife bus partnership and the Tayside Bus Alliance, we

identified corridors across that whole area where we felt that, if we could get bus priority, we could get faster journey times and build patronage that way.

With everything that has happened, we have had to refine that process slightly. We are now picking a couple of corridors—one on Dunkeld Road in Perth, for example, and another on Lochee Road in Dundee—and focusing on those, on what we can do and on whether there is still something that we can achieve in this calendar year. We will continue to work with local authorities and the bid teams on that, but obviously the move is restricting the wider scale of what we had been looking to do on bus priority.

Mark Ruskell: Thank you.

The Convener: The next questions are from Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Last week, the Scottish Government abandoned its commitment to reduce car travel by 20 per cent by 2030. What impact will that have on bus patronage? You have talked about congestion. What opportunities do you have to deliver better choice for people?

Paul White might want to kick off on that.

Paul White: I touched on that earlier. From the outset, the target was always a very ambitious one to deliver, but it was a useful way to focus the minds of operators, authorities and everyone else in looking to deliver measures to cut car use. When you ask people to cut car use, it is key that there is an attractive alternative in place. You would, hopefully, encourage local authorities and operators to work together to ensure that the bus is part of the alternative, alongside active travel, rail, wheeling and walking. As a catalyst for prioritising sustainable and active travel, the target played a useful role.

Taking away the target does not mean that that work should halt. We at the CPT and, I am sure, my operator colleagues will be working with local authorities to see what is still deliverable on that. As I said, the root has to be that, if we are saying that there will be less car access to city centres, or if we are looking to cut car use, or even just saying to people that, if they have a journey to make, they should look at the options and consider whether the car is not the option for that particular journey, there must be an attractive, reliable and affordable alternative in place.

There are steps that we can take to deliver that. I do not want to beat the same drum over and over again, but we can look at freeing buses from congestion. There are other things that we can look to take forward on better bus stop infrastructure, better travel information and ticketing. There is a range of things that we could

take forward, and I am hopeful that the cancellation or revision of the target does not result in that work stopping.

Sarah Boyack: At last week's committee meeting, we got feedback on the issue of having buses that people can use. One thing that has come from young people about the bus pass is that you need a bus to use the pass on. Get Glasgow Moving was in touch about its better buses for Strathclyde campaign, through which it has been working with local communities. One issue that comes up is the lack of access to hospitals. As a sector, how do you work with local authorities and key public sector organisations to ensure that you have bus routes that people can use to get to hospitals, for example?

We talk about choosing the car, but a lot of people cannot use the car or do not have one to use to get to a hospital. How do you increase the number of services where you obviously have people who want to use those services?

Duncan Cameron might want to come in on that.

Duncan Cameron: I go back to much of what has been said already. Over the past five years, all operators in the bus sector across Strathclyde have seen declining patronage and the cycle of decline that Paul White alluded to. Because journey speeds have declined and resources have had to be allocated elsewhere to maintain punctuality, services to hospitals and other destinations have lost out as a result. The sector, and myself as an operator, work closely with the national health service and local authorities, and we are working hard to reverse that.

One example of bus priority that might well come to the city centre of Glasgow and which we have presented to the Glasgow bus partnership would involve us reinvesting the savings in three new services, one of which would be dedicated to serve hospital locations. We are committed to working with partners to overcome the issue.

To add to what Paul White said on your first question, the removal of the target is a huge missed opportunity. I do not necessarily see it as an immediate threat to bus passenger numbers, but I see it as a huge missed opportunity. If we want to create a more sustainable society and economy and achieve net zero as quickly as we can, we need complementary policies. That is not just about bus infrastructure; it means policies on land planning to support the mode of bus and ensuring that the transport hierarchy is always applied.

There have been occasions in the Aberdeen and Glasgow networks where bus space has been taken away for cycling and walking, which is correct and is following the transport hierarchy, but bus has then been placed on the same level as

the car, which is not following the transport hierarchy. I reiterate my point that important supporting policy decisions can be taken alongside bus infrastructure spend.

Sarah Boyack: David, how does your company provide new services to give people those choices?

David Frenz: It is worth touching on the 16 service through the Carse of Gowrie that I mentioned earlier. We have increased the frequency through the Carse. The service previously ran from Arbroath through to Perth and terminated at Perth royal infirmary. We have now increased the frequency of the 16 service between Perth and Dundee. However, as a result of the time that it takes to get from Perth city centre to PRI and back, we were not able to provide that extra frequency to the hospital—we were not able to include it in the loop. We have had to be sensible and look at what we can do from a service point of view. There are services in Perth city centre—the 1 and 2—that are our most frequent and that travel past the hospital. We advertise that as a direct link to the hospital from Perth city centre.

Engagement on such issues is not just about working with local authorities or institutions; it is about listening to the customer. If there are new journey options that we can introduce, we will look at doing that. It is about engaging with customers and listening to local authorities. We meet with the local authorities every couple of months, and they pass on the feedback that they get. Ultimately, we have a finite level of resource, and we try to use it as best we can. We have to consider where the majority of customers who use services want to go and prioritise that. That does not mean that we cannot look at being a wee bit smarter in what we do with our services.

Sarah Boyack: Sarah, your numbers have actually gone up, and you have the fastest-growing population in Scotland to deal with and thousands of new houses. How do you deliver new services to give people the opportunity to use the bus rather than the car?

Sarah Boyd: For us, it is about strong connections. We might not have a direct service from everywhere to everywhere, as that is not possible. However, we need a strong network with high-frequency services and with good access to journey planning, which is another key part.

We have new developments outside Edinburgh, and people travel to hospitals from other parts of the Lothian region, so it is important that there is easy access to information so that it is simple to travel on the network. When we have data to suggest that lots of people are making the same connections, we can look at whether something

can be done to provide a direct service. However, there is considerable additional cost associated with that, so there needs to be the right number of people travelling for the business case to be built for that.

Sarah Boyack: When you do that, you will generate more income, so it is a kind of win-win. Is your company having strategic discussions with other partners?

09:45

Sarah Boyd: Yes. We take a holistic view of the whole network. That allows us to run buses late at night, early in the morning, on Sundays and all those areas where you might be looking at supported services. In the Lothian model, the money is reinvested in the company.

Sarah Boyack: One thing that we heard in the feedback last week was that you have a model that works.

To what extent is there capacity to do that in other parts of Scotland to get the numbers up at that kind of scale? That might be a question for Paul White.

Paul White: If the question is whether Lothian Buses is at an advantage because it is a municipal operator, I would just clarify that it is not the only operator that has seen patronage increase. The most recent Scottish transport statistics showed that bus patronage increased by 13 per cent from the previous year. Of course, part of that is because of recovery from Covid—we are still on that. It is difficult to differentiate what is Covid recovery from patronage growth that is being generated by other means.

Lothian Buses, which is a CPT member, runs a fantastic service, as do other CPT members. I hope that Sarah Boyd will back me up on this and will not correct me, but I think that Lothian has the benefit of some other factors. For example, Edinburgh does not have a suburban rail network competing against bus, as is the case in Glasgow. The City of Edinburgh Council also has a fair network of bus lanes—although there could always be more—and car parking charges are quite high in the city centre, as you have probably noticed. There are factors that probably help the fantastic team at Lothian to deliver a fantastic service. To just say that, if we transplant that regulatory model to another area, we will have the same results is to neglect the other factors in the provision of services in Edinburgh.

Sarah Boyd: I suppose that I am thinking about everything that we can do to get that passenger increase. Thank you.

The Convener: Before we leave that issue, Sarah Boyd or Duncan Cameron might be able to

help me with something. If you are expanding for whatever reason and you have to buy a new bus, roughly what is the cost of that new bus and what is the lead time for getting it delivered? You have probably negotiated special deals that you do not want the others to know about but, roughly, what is the cost for a bus and how long does it take to arrive?

Sarah Boyd: You have alluded to the sensitivities that go with this. It depends on whether it is a diesel bus or an electric bus. There is a huge difference.

The Convener: Okay. Let us say a Euro 6 single-deck bus—what does it cost, roughly?

Sarah Boyd: It is roughly £300,000—it is between £280,000 and £300,000. The lead time usually varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. In our experience, electric buses are taking longer to bring to market than diesel ones did.

The Convener: Okay, as you answered on diesel, Duncan Cameron can answer on electric. How much is an electric bus and what is the lead time?

Duncan Cameron: You are talking about nearly £300,000 and a lead time of six months. The point on the electric fleet is that the premium really has not come down by any considerable amount. For that differential, the industry has previously had the support of capital funding. Going forward, we will have to continue to fill that gap with investment.

The Convener: So a substantial investment is involved in buses, which is what I was trying to get at. Thank you.

The next question is from Bob Doris.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. When we passed the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, we hoped that it would increase patronage and improve bus services. I think that history has taught us that Covid was one of the factors in it not delivering what we wanted it to deliver. In the view of the bus industry, what are the other reasons for that? I will go to Duncan Cameron last, because I have a very specific question to ask about the situation in Glasgow and how it relates to the 2019 act.

Why did the 2019 act not deliver? How could we make it deliver?

Paul White: Is there a particular aspect of the 2019 act that you want to—

Bob Doris: The bits about buses, funnily enough. I will ask Mr Cameron a follow-up question about the provision for bus services improvement partnerships. I think that the industry would say that those are far preferable to

franchising, regulation and so on, which I am very sympathetic to. My initial question is about how the 2019 act can empower the industry to provide a better service. Which provisions in the act have worked and which ones have not worked? What could have been done differently?

Paul White: The 2019 act was about increasing the toolkit of regulatory models that were open to local authorities to pursue. The main ones were bus services improvement partnerships, a franchising model and municipal operation.

Not long after the 2019 act was enacted, Covid came along, which brought about a pause for a number of years. Everything has to be looked at through that lens. For example, guidance has not yet been published on the delivery of the franchising model or the BSIP model, although there is Government guidance on the municipal model. We are expecting guidance to be produced on the franchising model and the BSIP model at some point in spring or summer 2025—in other words, in the not-too-distant future. It has not been possible for us to work with local authorities to deliver any of those measures in the 2019 act, because the legislative process with regard to the secondary legislation and the production of guidance has not been fully completed.

There are other aspects of the act, such as the provisions on smart ticketing. The smart ticketing consultation—I am sorry; I meant the bus open data consultation—was published two or three weeks ago.

It is very difficult to say what the act could have done differently, because we have not been able to fully deliver the content of the act.

Bob Doris: So is it reasonable to say that the jury is still out in relation to the provisions of the 2019 act, rather than that it has not been successful? I do not want to paraphrase you, but we will have to consider the evidence that we have heard. Roughly speaking, is that your position?

Paul White: Yes. As we have not had the ability to deliver a bus services improvement partnership, we cannot say that that model has not worked and that we should therefore look at a franchising model or models elsewhere. We can draw comparisons with English examples and take some learnings from those. However, with regard to the delivery in Scotland of the models in the 2019 act, it is fair to say that the jury is still out.

Bob Doris: Sarah, you were nodding while Paul White was commenting. Do you have anything to add?

Sarah Boyd: It is important to remember the extent to which the pandemic had an impact right at the point at which the legislation came in. We were at 10 per cent of our previous passenger

number level. Lothian Buses had 1,800 people furloughed. Two of our three city depots were completely closed. We did not get all three open again until September 2020. The impact was enormous. It has taken us until now to get back to 94 or 95 per cent of the level that we were at before the pandemic.

With regard to where we are now with the 2019 act, we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with local authorities. We have had the bus partnership fund and the bus infrastructure fund. The importance of such things cannot be underestimated, but we have not really had a chance to deliver on a lot of that yet. What happened with the bus partnership fund was disappointing, but I hope that we now have an opportunity to move on, to have good, strong dialogue with local authorities and to deliver for passengers.

Bob Doris: You said that you are disappointed about the changes in relation to the bus partnership fund. Has the removal of that fund and its replacement with a fund that is diminished in value and which is not multiyear prevented you from undertaking strategic thinking or has it simply delayed strategic action? Those are two different things. Is strategic thinking still being undertaken? Is it simply the case that you cannot act on the ground until you are clear about what the budget lines look like?

Sarah Boyd: Lothian Buses had teams working with local authority colleagues on projects that we were hopeful would be delivered. That work is ongoing. As I mentioned earlier, there is a really good discussion under way with Midlothian Council, and I hope that we will deliver that project.

Bob Doris: That is very helpful. David, do you want to add anything before I go to Mr Cameron?

David Frenz: Yes. I support what Sarah Boyd has just said. Before Covid, with the introduction of the bus priority funding, there was real enthusiasm in Stagecoach about the direction that we were moving in and about the difference that that funding could make to bus journey times and the offshoots that would come from that. Those discussions continued through Covid. It is only in the past 12 months or so that a bit of a blocker has been put on those measures, but they are still happening. We are working with local authorities to put forward ideas. It is a case of getting a bit of impetus put back into that process.

Bob Doris: That is very helpful, and it brings me on nicely to Mr Cameron. The reason I have kept you waiting until now is that I have a significant constituency interest in some of this stuff.

I was having a look to see where we are with bus services improvement partnerships in my

area. Of course, First Group and First Glasgow would say that there has always been a strategic relationship with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and local authorities, and that that was the case before the 2019 act came into place. Earlier, you mentioned the Glasgow city region bus partnership, which did not require BSIPs.

For fairly obvious constituency reasons, I am interested in the plans for strategic bus corridors and, in particular, those for Dumbarton Road, Great Western Road and Maryhill Road. Where are we with those? Did the development of those corridors not require any of the powers in the 2019 act? Could that happen in partnership anyway?

Duncan Cameron: The £500 million that was provided as part of the bus priority fund, or rather the bus partnership fund, probably drove an overhaul of what had previously been a voluntary partnership and the setting up of the Glasgow bus partnership. That funding has stopped. Along with the newly appointed independent chair, George Hazel, SPT, Glasgow City Council and the other bus operators, which we work closely with through the Glasgow Bus Alliance, we have been a key partner in taking the partnership forward.

We are keen to have a voluntary legally binding partnership, because we believe that it is important that all the partners can have confidence in one another in relation to partnership commitments. We believe that the fact that those arrangements have not been legally binding is one of the reasons why we have struggled to get stuff across the line. I am confident that, with the 2019 act, we can find a way to do that. One of my UK colleagues—our head of policy—is giving the partnership significant support in moving towards that. That is happening in the background.

A number of working groups have been set up, one of which is on infrastructure and ticketing. That is picking up the key corridors that you mentioned. As you rightly said, we had six corridors, which were, in effect, on the shelf. A lot of work was done through consultancy engineers to progress to the strategic business case stage with Transport Scotland. We will continue to progress that work.

I also make the point that, although bus priority is hugely important, for the reasons that I have referred to, such as the deterioration in journey speeds over the past 10 to 15 years, there is still a lot of good work taking place. The proportion of net zero buses in the Glasgow fleet is probably among the highest in the UK. In recent years, First has invested more than it has made in profit. We now have 200-plus zero-emission buses.

In addition, as was mentioned earlier, the operators have got together on integrated ticketing—the Glasgow tripper ticket can be used

on any bus service in Glasgow. As a result of the operators getting together and finding a way to make that a mobile ticket, we have grown the use of that ticket by 300 per cent. Within the confines of the partnership, a lot of good progress is still being made, but bus infrastructure is an important issue.

Bob Doris: Is it reasonable to say that, should more money become available, partners could be fleet of foot in deciding how that should be prioritised for bus infrastructure, because a lot of the heavy lifting on that has already been done?

Duncan Cameron: Absolutely. The money has already been spent on appraisals.

10:00

Bob Doris: I do not drive, I do not cycle and I have a young family. I am heavily dependent on buses—First Glasgow buses, predominantly—so the three bus corridors that I mentioned have a profound impact on me and my family's ability to get around. The Maryhill Road corridor is particularly important to us, but the Great Western Road and Dumbarton Road corridors are important, too. When you discuss those corridors with partners, what input into those discussions do the travelling public—as an MSP, I have a separate influence that I can bring to bear, but I am talking about members of the travelling public who might have a similar travelling profile to me—have?

Duncan Cameron: I go back to the Aberdeen example. We reached out to partners, including Bus Users Scotland, on returning the benefits on journey speeds. Greig MacKay, who I know the committee has met, is already part of the Glasgow bus partnership and contributes to those discussions. Those benefits would be considered and consulted on with passengers and political representatives such as yourself.

Bob Doris: Thank you.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The concessionary fare schemes are immensely popular, and I think that they are here to stay. However, some people have argued that part of the moneys invested in the concessionary fare scheme could be moved to supporting other service provision. What are your views on that?

Sarah Boyd: The concessionary fare subsidy is a subsidy to the passenger. To me, it is something that helps to keep fares affordable for everybody. It is a huge part of our business model. I do not mean this to sound selfish, but from the perspective of someone who represents an urban network, which Lothian Buses predominantly is, I would hope that concessionary fares are not looked at as being something that could be

changed in order to bring about change elsewhere in Scotland. Concessionary fares are very important. I absolutely recognise that change may well be needed, but I would hope that any change will not detract from concessionary fares.

Paul White: The concessionary schemes are of great benefit to those who have access to them. I stress that they are payment for service providers. As Sarah Boyd said, they are a subsidy for the passenger. However, in terms of our sector, a delivery partner for a scheme that—

Kevin Stewart: They are a subsidy for the passenger, but also a subsidy for the company.

Paul White: No—I disagree, Mr Stewart. The schemes are based on the premise that the operator should be no better or worse off for participating. That is why the reimbursement rate for carrying an older or disabled person is 52.1 per cent of the average single fare, and not 100 per cent, for example. The rate is reduced to ensure that, when our work for Transport Scotland is completed, the operators have taken into account the type of journey that the passenger has made—whether it was a return journey, for example—and what the operating costs were. A whole series of factors go into ensuring that the operator is no better or worse off and is delivering for the passenger.

Kevin Stewart: The simple reality is that, but for the concessionary fare schemes, some routes would not exist, so companies would not be able to attract other passengers and therefore would not be making a profit.

Paul White: I am not criticising the schemes, and I am not saying that, as a commercial intervention in the market, they have not shaped the network. They clearly have shaped the network. Operators will have looked to serve areas where people board with a concessionary pass. However, whether the schemes should be amended and the budget moved to a different scheme or subsidy is a purely political decision and, as a delivery partner in the schemes, it is not a decision for me. If I look at some of the work that is going on in England on bus support, my ask would be that the quantum that is given to the sector should not be reduced in any reform. However, there is no CPT position on whether the concession schemes should be amended.

David Frenz: I echo the points made by Sarah Boyd and Paul White. The feedback that we get on the concessionary schemes from the customer is really positive, particularly on the over-60s scheme, which has been around for a number of years now—almost 20 years, in fact. We also get feedback from younger people and children on the benefits of the under-22s scheme, what it has allowed them to do and where it has allowed them

to travel to and from. My view is that we would very much like those schemes to remain in place. Elements of the schemes should not be diverted to other funding for buses, because the feedback that we have from customers—particularly from the under-22s—is that the schemes have been a real game changer for them.

Duncan Cameron: I reiterate the point that the schemes have always worked on the principle of a no better, no worse scenario for the operators. As I think has been alluded to, making changes could have consequences.

I also reiterate David Frenz's point that the under-22s scheme has obviously been a huge success for young people, and I am sure that it has positively affected other areas of the economy as well. I think that all operators have a huge opportunity to make it a strategic pillar in encouraging people to travel more sustainably from the age of 22 and beyond. As an operator, we would love to understand the data around the point at which people leave the scheme, so that we could start to consider bringing in attractive fares as a bridge to the commercial product. We are continuing to work on that. We see the under-22s scheme as a huge strategic ally in keeping people on the bus later in life.

Kevin Stewart: Let me play devil's advocate a little bit here. Surely supporting service provision by means other than Government moneys would be a good thing. There has been quite a lot of talk today and at our meeting last week about the advantages of bus priority measures in increasing patronage. If the Government was to invest more in those schemes, for example, which is likely to increase your profitability, would your company—I will ask the others about this as well—use some of that increased profit to increase service provision?

Duncan Cameron: Are you asking about investment going into non-concessionary scheme funding, such as bus priority measures?

Kevin Stewart: Yes.

Duncan Cameron: Yes, we would, as we have done in Aberdeen and have proposed to do in Glasgow—we absolutely would. Bob Doris asked about partnership, and the fundamental principle behind partnership is that everyone plays a part. We have gone into such discussions. If resources were saved through the speeding up of journey times, the saving would be returned to the passenger. As Bob Doris quite rightly asked about, this has to work for the passenger, which is obviously important. That may well involve bringing in services that do not currently operate, or making services that do operate more frequent. It might even involve initiatives like those that we introduced in Aberdeen to make fares more affordable. So, yes, there is a range of ways in

which we would reinvest, but increasing service provision is certainly one of them.

Kevin Stewart: It would be fair to say that bus priority measures are not particularly popular in Aberdeen. Do you think that if you were to continue to enhance support for increased service provision as a result of those bus priority measures, the public would become more accepting of them?

Duncan Cameron: I think that it is fair to say that we have learned a lot from what has taken place in Aberdeen over the past 18 months. I go back to the KPMG report that Paul White cited. For every £1 spent, £4.55 is reinvested into the economy. I am not sure that we have done a good enough job collectively helping business forums to understand that and see the importance of the bus as a mode. I think that timing is important. It is also important for people to see that there is a benefit sitting alongside any change, and I agree that it is important that that benefit is impactful.

Kevin Stewart: What is the view of Stagecoach of supporting service provision through increased profit?

David Frenz: We signed up to that. That was one of our commitments when we joined the Tayside Bus Alliance and the Fife bus partnership. That was one of the things that we said.

Sarah Boyd: The Lothian Buses model is already different in terms of how it operates right now. Underpinning the point that you are making about improving reliability is that that enables someone to make intelligent travel decisions to go from two cars to one car, or one car to no car and so on. Anything that is a genuinely attractive proposition that you would choose to do yourself is absolutely welcome.

The Convener: I think that Sarah Boyack has a follow-up question.

Sarah Boyack: It is just a quick question on the use of the under-22s scheme. What work is the sector doing to keep those passengers on the bus when they hit 22? I know that quite a lot of young people are not having driving lessons now because they are really expensive. What is the sector doing to market the opportunity to people who have left further or higher education or are in employment? Are you doing partnerships at regional levels with employers to persuade young people to stay with the bus? Is there an opportunity not only to reduce emissions but to generate more income for the sector?

David Frenz: I will jump in. We currently have a partnership agreement with the University of St Andrews. We offer staff and students highly discounted fares for travel from anywhere, really, into the university. We have seen the benefits of

that for students who move to work for the university and for staff as well. Once young people leave school or higher education, they will move into work, so our focus is on working with businesses to try to retain some of those passengers, for example by setting up business-to-business ticketing. We do not want the under-22s to enjoy bus travel and to use buses, but then to disappear back into a private car or whatever when the element of free journeys is removed. We want to try to retain them, so our focus is around building those partnerships with the businesses that they are likely to work for.

Sarah Boyack: Paul, is there an opportunity for doing that right across the country with the bus sector, the business community and the public sector?

Paul White: Yes, I think so. Islay Jackson from the Scottish Youth Parliament made some excellent points at last week's committee meeting around young people, their use of buses and the importance of the bus to them. The scheme is still quite young, so as evaluation of it continues, I hope that the travel patterns and the views of those ageing out of the scheme are evaluated properly, because that information will be quite helpful in shaping the sector's response.

It will be for my operator member colleagues to look locally or regionally at the best local or regional solutions and whether they are working, as David is doing. Working with further education or businesses or having a general fares offer will be things that we discuss as we get more information about the scheme. It might be that we look to work with Transport Scotland on data so that we know the areas where lots of people might be ageing out of the scheme or where there are particular issues of increased car use. I agree that it is important that we consider what happens as people hit 22 years old.

The Convener: I just want to say we are halfway through the session, but we are not halfway through the answers. I say to David, Duncan and Sarah that I know that it is always attractive to say that you are better than each other. However, I want to get all the questions in, so where you agree, it would be helpful to me if you could just say, "Agreed," rather than building on it too much. That is probably a cack-handed way of putting that.

The next questions are from Mark Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell: I want to get the witnesses' thoughts on flat bus fares, given that a flat bus fares pilot will be launched in Scotland at some point—before April next year, I think. Sarah Boyd, can we start with you, because Lothian Buses pretty much already has a flat fare?

10:15

Sarah Boyd: We do have a flat fare. It will be important for us to understand what the exit strategy for a flat fares pilot would look like. It has been announced, but very little is known about it, so I am keen to understand more about it.

Mark Ruskell: Paul, what are your thoughts on flat bus fares and on anything that we can learn from England, where they have been introduced?

Paul White: There has been an evaluation of the first year of the Department for Transport's £2 flat fare scheme. It is difficult to look at patronage growth because it has been introduced at a time of Covid recovery so the question is how you pull the impact of that out. The evaluation suggests that the patronage growth has not been marked, and that it rates as a low value-for-money measure, with a cost benefit ratio of 0.7 to 0.9 for every pound invested. That is a good measure to consider.

We have probably taken a different route with free travel for under-22s. We talk about Government financial constraints and how to best spend what is a limited budget to support the bus sector, and I am not sure that a further fares offer is the best use of the money.

Mark Ruskell: Do you think that it could help to address the cliff edge for folks who are turning 22 and who are subject to full-price fares?

Paul White: It is another fare offer and another commercial intervention in the market. In the narratives that I have seen, even in the Scottish Trades Union Congress report that was published yesterday, there is criticism of the commercial market. On how much public sector money is coming compared with commercial revenue, the STUC would say, "Look at the growth in public sector support for the bus sector compared with commercial revenue. That must mean that the commercial sector is failing." However, in reality these are schemes—the under-22s scheme for example—that take commercial revenue and replace it with the Government paying the fare rather than the passenger, so it looks imbalanced.

It would be possible to have free travel until 22 and then a £2 flat fare from that age until people hit the age of 60, but that is a lot of public sector money. When you look at Transport Focus data, you see that cost is certainly a factor for passengers, but it is not the lead factor. People want access to the bus, they want a reliable bus and they want a quick bus. Thereafter, cost is something that my operator member colleagues would be able to look at as the service was delivered, rather than fully focusing on cost to the detriment of money that could be spent on bus priority measures.

Mark Ruskell: Do David or Duncan have thoughts on the pilot? Do you welcome it? Do you want it in your area, or should it go somewhere else? How should the pilot be run?

Duncan Cameron: I will reiterate a couple of Paul White's points. First, having a pilot means that the circumstances are controlled, so that we can understand the benefit, unlike what happened in England. Secondly, the feedback that we get from customers—bus users—and the transport survey is that the main objective should be to speed journeys up; it is not about the fares that are charged.

Mark Ruskell: Do you want a pilot to be introduced in an area where journey times are being speeded up through bus priority measures? Does it make sense to bring all these interventions together? I think that that was your earlier point.

Duncan Cameron: The only risk is that, in introducing a pilot at the same time as a whole host of other complementary measures are being introduced, you are not able to measure the pilot. I would suggest that a pilot should be run in a clean environment where you could measure the benefit.

David Frenz: I agree with Duncan.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to ask about speeding up journey times. I am a regular bus user and something that frustrates me is how long it sometimes takes at a bus stop for people to get off and on. Are there any ways that that could be sped up?

Duncan Cameron: Yes. The time that it takes for people to embark or disembark at the bus stop is something that is more under the operators' control than journey times are. We are in the process of investing in brand-new ticket machines, which will come in this year. The ticket machine effectively now does everything: it has real-time information and all the commercial offering. There is a lot of data there, and the investment in those new ticket machines with much greater data capacity will speed up the transaction time. That is certainly within the operators' control, and that is what we are doing.

Douglas Lumsden: Does anybody else have anything to add on that?

Sarah Boyd: Making the boarding experience seamless and quick is one of the things that helps to make the option attractive, and things such as contactless payment have played a huge part in enabling the customer's boarding experience to go well.

Douglas Lumsden: I agree. The apps have made the experience a great deal better; it is just what happens at the bus stops that really gets on my nerves.

We have often heard that antisocial behaviour on buses is on the rise. Is that true or is that just a bit of an urban myth?

David Frenz: From our point of view, it varies from area to area. I am the operations director for east Scotland, so I can talk about our operation in parts of Fife, Perth and Kinross and Dundee, and I would say that the rise in antisocial behaviour, whether that be on bus or around bus stations—we must remember that bus stations are typically open until late at night, so they are places where people gather—has been generally proportionate to the increase in the number of passengers travelling. That is the situation in the east of Scotland; I cannot speak for everybody.

Douglas Lumsden: Do you see any link between free bus travel for under-22s and the rise in antisocial behaviour?

David Frenz: Antisocial behaviour has risen in proportion to the rise in patronage. However, a lot of the antisocial behaviour that we see does not necessarily happen on buses; it can occur in and around bus stations and involve vandalism and so on.

Douglas Lumsden: And, obviously, there was a fatality—

David Frenz: In Elgin, yes.

Paul White: Criminal and antisocial behaviour is on the rise in general. The under-22s scheme is a catalyst for more young people to be on or around buses, so we have seen a rise in instances of criminal and antisocial behaviour on buses. We are looking to collect data on the number of incidents, so that we have a baseline that we can measure. We are doing work with Transport Scotland to try to mitigate that rise. It is certainly a real thing.

Douglas Lumsden: Duncan Cameron, is there anything that you can do about repeat offenders?

Duncan Cameron: Yes, as you would expect, we are working with agencies and Transport Scotland. The issue is a challenge across society, and we must work together to ensure that the consequences are appropriate.

Douglas Lumsden: Do you think that we should remove the entitlement to free bus travel if it is being abused?

Duncan Cameron: I would say that, if the offence warrants it, then we should do that.

Douglas Lumsden: Sarah Boyd, do you have a view on the issue?

Sarah Boyd: It is important to remember that we are talking about a minority of young people, and that the under-22s scheme is absolutely incredible and has enabled some superb travel

patterns to be taken up by our young people. However, if you are the person involved in an incident on the bus—the driver, the victim or another passenger—the experience can be horrendous.

You asked about repeat offenders. It is heartening to see the work that is being done to pull agencies together to ensure that the scheme cannot be abused in the very bad ways that it has sometimes been. We should not underestimate the impact of that antisocial behaviour, even if, as I say, only a minority of young people are involved.

Douglas Lumsden: Are you having to take more steps to protect drivers?

Sarah Boyd: Yes. We track incidents, splitting them at the level of age, so that we have proper evidence. We are working closely with the union. I know that the unions have put a plan together, and everything that is suggested in that plan makes absolute sense. Antisocial behaviour is a societal issue; it is not just happening on buses. It is important that all of us come together to ensure that the scheme is viewed as something that is a privilege and should not be abused.

Paul White: It might be helpful if I give you an overview of some of the work that we are doing on the issue. We believe that there should be a deterrent for repeat or serious offences. That would involve hotlisting cards in order to remove the right to travel, but we see that as very much an extreme end point. I echo what Sarah Boyd says about the scheme being fantastic and the fact that most people who use the scheme behave perfectly.

Alongside that establishment of a deterrent, we are working with Transport Scotland to develop some kind of education module for schools to help young people understand the behaviour that is expected at the bus stop and on buses and the impact of their actions. We also chair a working group with Transport Scotland, Police Scotland, Unite the union, the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers and some other stakeholders to consider how to mitigate antisocial behaviour. That group has a meeting tomorrow, at which we will learn about the transport safety officers who operate in areas of England. They are clearly marked as safety officers, and they board buses in order to defuse incidents or take other action.

We are doing a lot of work not to demonise young people in any way but to help educate them, which we hope will deal with the issue.

Douglas Lumsden: Sarah Boyd mentioned capturing data. Do we have enough data on the issue?

David Frenz: Yes, similar to what Sarah Boyd said about Lothian Buses, we have a tracker.

Every antisocial behaviour incident is assigned a reference number and we follow that through, whether with the school or with the police, and we can provide closed-circuit television evidence and so on.

Duncan Cameron: We do the same thing.

The Convener: Before I bring in Mark Ruskell, I note that one of the suggestions last week was that there are issues with a lot of young people getting on the bus at the same time, and that it is more difficult to classify behaviour as antisocial if everyone in a group is making lots of noise and lots of things are going on. Are you clear in your mind that antisocial behaviour has increased with the introduction of concessionary travel for young people?

I can see Sarah Boyd, Duncan Cameron and David Frenz nodding. Mark Ruskell, over to you.

Mark Ruskell: Duncan Cameron and David Frenz, your companies offer services in England as well as Scotland. Are there any differences between England and Scotland in terms of antisocial behaviour?

Duncan Cameron: I would recognise that antisocial behaviour is a societal issue. There are six business units in FirstGroup—the other five are in England and Wales—and, right across the six, we are seeing increases in antisocial behaviour.

Mark Ruskell: However, England does not have a concessionary travel scheme for under-22s.

Duncan Cameron: That is correct. I can do some work and submit a response to you in writing. My point is that antisocial behaviour is on the rise. I am not sure how the rates compare between ourselves and England.

Mark Ruskell: Right, but you cannot say that the under-22s scheme creates antisocial behaviour, because you are saying that the same problem exists in England.

Duncan Cameron: That is correct, other than, as David Frenz said, where we have seen growth in under-22 passengers there is—

Mark Ruskell: Yes, if there are more people on the buses, there might be a proportionate rise in antisocial behaviour.

Duncan Cameron: Yes.

Mark Ruskell: David Frenz, do you have a comment on that?

David Frenz: Like Duncan Cameron, I do not have the figures to hand from our English colleagues, but I would also make the point that antisocial behaviour in and around buses has always been there. It is not a new thing.

Mark Ruskell: It has always been there—okay.

David Frenz: Yes. I have worked for Stagecoach for 17 years, and I was in Manchester for six of those, and I can assure you that it was an issue there as much as it is up here.

The Convener: I get to ask the next question—I was not telling you all to hurry up so that I could get my question in, but there we are.

Ever since I have been dealing with transport in the Parliament we have heard of a mishmash of timetabling that means that, for example, people cannot get a bus to get a train to get a ferry. There seems to be a lack of co-ordination and integrated travel. Are you addressing that? If the answer is yes, could you give one example of what you are doing? I do not think that the issue has ever been effectively dealt with.

David Frenz: The introduction of the Levenmouth railway line is one example of what we are doing. We worked with ScotRail and the local authority there to ensure that the network of services, including buses feeding into the train network, worked well, and we worked together so that they aligned effectively.

The Convener: Are you going to roll out that approach across the rest of the country?

David Frenz: We will see.

10:30

Duncan Cameron: My example involves not timetabling as much as ticketing. We participate in the SPT ZoneCard scheme that covers rail, bus, subway and so on.

The Convener: We had an integrated ticketing scheme for the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—but did it not seem appropriate to roll it out to the rest of Scotland? I do not think that Sarah Boyd can answer that, but Duncan Cameron can.

Duncan Cameron: I would argue that the SPT ZoneCard is an integrated ticketing scheme. I am not aware of one covering the whole of Scotland. Obviously, the COP26 ticket applied only to COP26.

The Convener: I am just trying to express the view that, if you were leaving your house in the morning on a journey across Edinburgh and onwards to an island, it would be much easier to do that if there were an integrated ticketing system. Sarah Boyd, do you want to comment on integrated ticketing and travel connections?

Sarah Boyd: Within the Lothian area, we participate in the one-ticket scheme, which allows the multi-operator approach that you are talking about.

We should bear in mind that, when the conversation started, there was the idea of having one piece of plastic in your hand that you would use on multiple operators, which would have a cost associated with it, but things have changed, and there are now many contactless schemes in place, so I think that there is a need to look at what we are trying to achieve through our approach to the issue. There might be odd journeys involving huge numbers of connections, but the question of how best to support that has a different answer, given where technology has gone.

The Convener: I think that, when we took evidence on the Transport (Scotland) Bill, we heard that not everyone has access to contactless payment, and that prepayment cards such as the Oyster card were useful for a group in society who were not able to tap in and pay that way.

Bob Doris: I want to put something on the record, given Mr Cameron's comment about the SPT ZoneCard scheme. The recent revisions to the scheme and the redrawing of the boundaries had a devastating impact on many of my constituents, and they will no longer be using the ZoneCard because of that. I took up the issue with SPT and, although I will not explore the issue in this meeting, I know that any of my constituents who are watching us today would want me to put on the record the absolutely devastating impact on them.

The Convener: I will just leave that as a comment and bring in Sarah Boyack, who will ask the next question.

Sarah Boyack: The other joined-up thinking issue concerns not tickets but timetables, in terms of linking different types of services. How can you make that information accessible to people? What work is being done with the different sectors, so that people have opportunities to use different services?

Duncan Cameron: There are two examples in the Glasgow area. First, as an operator, we publish information about all modes on our app, because we believe that, given that a number of people will make multiple journeys, we should make it as easy as possible for them to do so. Using the app, I can leave my flat in Glasgow and know in real time when my bus is going to take me to the subway station for onward travel. Another example would be the fact that, because of operators and SPT working together in the Glasgow bus partnership, the on-street publicity is now much improved, and there is one standard presentation, which means that the information is much more easily understood by the customer.

The Convener: Douglas has a question, and there are a few follow-ups, I think.

Douglas Lumsden: I want to ask about zero emission buses. The Scottish Government has stopped its capital funding for that. Will that have an impact on what you purchase, or are we now in a position in which Government support is no longer needed for that? I see Paul White's hand going up.

Paul White: Yes, I will jump in.

Phase 2 of the Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund, or ScotZEB, and its predecessor, the Scottish ultra-low emission bus scheme, or SULEBS, played a very helpful role in kick-starting the work of operators in delivering a zero-emission fleet. With the delivery of ScotZEB 2—the vehicles will arrive this year—25 per cent or just over of the Scottish fleet will be zero emission. In comparison, 4 or 5 per cent of the fleet in England is zero emission. That shows you the head start and the good work that has happened here.

I would also refer to the Just Transition Commission report on sustainable transport that was published a few weeks ago. It says that, for every pound of Government funding through ScotZEB 2, there was more than £3 of investment from operators. If the Government has invested £140 million-odd in supporting decarbonisation, the commercial sector's investment will be more than £400 million.

I have concerns about what the ending of ScotZEB funding will mean for those areas of the country that have not started or do not feel able to start their decarbonisation journey. I am thinking about rural areas and small and medium-sized enterprises. My colleagues here represent urban areas in the main and maybe that is a different topic. However, CPT's smaller members and our coach operator members who have ambitions in that regard do not feel that they are yet able to realise those on their own two feet.

I chaired a decarbonisation task force ahead of ScotZEB 2 delivery. We probably need to look at reconvening that with Transport Scotland to consider whether there is a business case for investment in decarbonisation to the timescale that the Scottish Government would like.

I think that that will happen, but if we want to accelerate that, at least for the larger operators, we need to have a real look at the data. I am not sure where we are at the moment suggests that we will retain the lead—it is not a competition—that we have over England currently.

Douglas Lumsden: Why is it that smaller operators did not feel that they could be part of the ScotZEB scheme? What was holding them back?

Paul White: A lot of those operators might be in rural or semi-rural areas, operating marginal services. As was mentioned, the cost of zero-

emission vehicles means that it is just not feasible for them to do so. There is the additional aspect of charging infrastructure, which must be considered, and whether they own their depot or what their depot looks like. Does the charging infrastructure issue make it feasible for them to go zero emission?

For rural services, the length of route will be an issue. Are the vehicles that are available of the type that they would use on those routes and for the distance of those routes?

A number of factors meant that, although some small operators are involved in ScotZEB 2's most recent round, only a small handful of vehicles were purchased. Many CPT Scotland members who have spoken to me about their ambitions have told me that they cannot do it by themselves.

Douglas Lumsden: From an operator point of view, will you still continue to invest in net zero transport, Duncan Cameron?

Duncan Cameron: Yes. We have invested in vehicles in Aberdeen and Glasgow this year. Those fully funded vehicles come at a premium, of course. We are investing in fully funded electric vehicles. We are also investing in some repowers—we are removing the diesel engine of a mid-life vehicle and replacing it with a battery.

When I was asked the question earlier about the cost of an electric vehicle, I said that a premium still exists. We look at the total cost of ownership model. That is the total cost over a projected 15 years, taking account of the fuel savings, the cost of two batteries and so on. We then try to bring down those costs.

Paul White referred to site infrastructure. We are using that in a business-to-business charging model, which helps the circular economy but also brings in revenue to bring down the total cost of ownership.

In the absence of funding, we are absolutely committed to making that investment. As an operator, we have stated that we are on a journey to net zero by 2035. In the absence of funding, we just need to be a bit more creative in how we get there than maybe we were previously.

Douglas Lumsden: You have had 25 zero-emission hydrogen buses sitting idle in Aberdeen almost for a year now. I know that this is not a First Bus issue, but is there any end in sight to that situation?

Duncan Cameron: I am not in a position to provide a date on which they will be back on the road.

As history has probably shown in recent years, electric vehicles are further forward as our net zero solution or at the forefront as a net zero

solution. We continue to work with Aberdeen City Council and very much hope to see those vehicles on the street as soon as possible.

Douglas Lumsden: A lot of public money went into buying those vehicles, but has First Bus taken a financial hit as well?

Duncan Cameron: An agreement is in place between First Bus and the council. There are supporting clauses in the contract should fuel not be available, and that has helped us to mitigate the additional cost of bringing in vehicles from elsewhere to continue our services.

Douglas Lumsden: The penalty clauses in the contract come into effect if fuel is not made available to you.

Duncan Cameron: Yes.

Douglas Lumsden: I presume that you are not allowed to share what those figures are.

Duncan Cameron: I am not sure about that. I do not have them on me. If I am allowed to share them, I can certainly submit them in writing to you.

Douglas Lumsden: Okay. I should probably declare that I was a member of Aberdeen City Council at the start of this session of Parliament.

The Convener: I am sure that, if you ask Aberdeen City Council about that, it will, in the spirit of openness, tell you.

Kevin Stewart has the next question on this topic.

Kevin Stewart: I hope that the hydrogen bus situation in Aberdeen can be resolved sooner rather than later.

Folk like a subsidy. As Paul White rightly pointed out, funding was provided to kick-start the investment in zero-emission buses, to get things going, but public finances are tight.

I am interested in what Duncan Cameron said about sharing facilities and charging infrastructure with other companies and making a bit of money out of doing that. When it comes to business plans and moving forward with shared facilities, does that ability to make a bit of profit out of others help in the decarbonisation journey? I put that to Duncan first.

Duncan Cameron: Under our total cost of ownership model, we are trying to generate revenue from some business-to-business charging. We have been working closely with Police Scotland, DPD and other providers that use electric vehicles but do not have the infrastructure at their sites or elsewhere—it might be that their vehicles do not follow a fixed route like a bus does and they need multiple charging points throughout the day. The revenue from providing that service

has helped us to bring down the total cost of ownership much closer to a neutral point. With regard to the total cost of ownership, there is still a premium attached to EVs compared with diesel equivalents, but that service makes the gap less than would otherwise be the case.

Sarah Boyd: Lothian Buses bid into the ScotZEB 2 fund but was not successful. We had hoped to work with partners within the fund to share the infrastructure that we have had to put in place at our central depot anyway.

Fifty-two per cent of our fleet could go electric tomorrow. For the remainder, the range is not sufficient for vehicles to operate without introducing huge efficiencies, extra vehicles, extra hours and all that kind of thing.

We should absolutely be looking at opportunity charging in strategic locations, and at whether that is best placed in other people's facilities and whether that can be shared across modes.

I appreciate what Kevin Stewart said about funding to kick-start investment, but support is needed to achieve net zero overall.

10:45

David Frenz: I will make two quick points. Sarah Boyd mentioned vehicle range. A big proportion of our services are express services, such as St Andrews to Glasgow and St Andrews and Dundee to Edinburgh. Some coaches are available that have substantial range, but a big consideration for us in moving from diesel to electric is the range of coaches, because we would need to use coaches on those services.

On the point about allowing other businesses to charge their vehicles on our sites, we are not quite as far along on that journey. We have electric vehicles and charging points in east Scotland, but exploring that is a plan for the future.

Kevin Stewart: Would it be fair to say that, on those longer distance routes where EV maybe is not an option, hydrogen would be an option but that there would have to be continuity of supply?

David Frenz: Yes. Others' experience is that the real challenges are infrastructure and the availability of fuel.

Kevin Stewart: On the continuity of supply, that would probably require a regulatory change to hydrogen transportation and storage. Do you have any comment on that?

David Frenz: No.

Kevin Stewart: I see that no one else wants to comment on that either. That is me, convener.

The Convener: Two other members want to ask questions. Please limit your questions to a

couple of members of the panel rather than the whole panel.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): Good morning. Obviously, good progress has been made in decarbonising some of the fleet in Scotland, but achieving net zero is not only an end in itself; it is about helping to support a just transition to net zero. Does your industry see itself as having a role in helping to ensure that we deliver a just transition and, if so, how are you doing that?

The Convener: Pick your two people to ask, Michael.

Michael Matheson: Paul White.

Paul White: There is a question about a just transition for bus users as well as the bus companies.

It is difficult to accelerate the delivery of zero-emission vehicles at the same time as looking at other aspects of improving bus services, be that a reduction in fares or an increase in rural services, because that is burning the candle at both ends. That is asking for more spend while looking at cuts to revenue.

There is an aspect to that question, which I am sure is not your full focus, that is about a just transition for operators, and we need to look at the timescale and support for that. For bus passengers it is important that, while we make the transition to net zero, it does not impact service availability or fares.

I am not sure that that fully answers your question, but we have a role to play, working with Scottish Government partners, to look at how we achieve that. This crosses over to Mr Stewart's earlier question. The Scottish Government has just done some work on mapping freight routes across Scotland so that it can look at charging that helps the freight sector off the motorway network or whatever it might be. We should also look at mapping express bus services so that if there is public service charging, it fits not just freight but bus. That would help to limit the cost and make the transition fairer for those SMEs that might struggle.

Duncan Cameron: I think that I will interpret your question slightly differently, if I may. For me, bus has a huge part to play—a much bigger role than people realise—in delivering Scotland's net zero commitment. It is the most popular form of public transport, so when we talk about prioritising it as a mode we need to do that much more in terms of bus priority and infrastructure. It is not just about the vehicles being net zero; it is the journey towards net zero where we get more people on bus and truly apply the transport hierarchy.

Michael Matheson: Okay, perhaps I should ask you about this in a slightly different way. A just transition is about creating economic and social benefit here in Scotland. What economic and social benefit do we get in Scotland when you procure electric buses from China?

Duncan Cameron: There may well be a Chinese partner involved, but jobs are still created in terms of maintaining the vehicles and employing bus drivers and so on.

Michael Matheson: Yes, but that does not create any capacity in the manufacturing sector, does it?

Duncan Cameron: No, not when the buses are procured directly.

Michael Matheson: So, if industry sees itself as having a role in delivering a just transition, it is not doing it very well if it is procuring buses from China rather than using Scottish and UK manufacturers so that they can expand their capacity in order to deliver a just transition to net zero.

If we achieve net zero, but we do not have any jobs to show for it, that is not a just transition. Does your industry think that it has a role to play in ensuring that it is generating economic value in the country by using some of the subsidy that you get from the Scottish Government and Scottish taxpayers to manufacture buses here—in Scotland or in the UK—to ensure that you play a role in delivering a just transition?

Duncan Cameron: I know that Paul White wants to come in but just before he does, yes, as an operator we do. That is why we have bought from Scottish and UK manufacturers so far, as well as from China.

Paul White: I appreciate your point, Mr Matheson. I spoke to Alexander Dennis, a Scottish manufacturer and one of CPT's members about this topic. You are right to point out the benefit of a strong manufacturing sector in Scotland. There is an economic and social value to any zero-emission bus or to the bus sector in general that we should not underplay. I would point to the KPMG report, "The economic impact of local bus services" that was published in September 2024 and which talked about the strong economic impact of the supply chain, the taxes, wages and investment of staff, the economic and social activities of bus passengers, and the impact of bus passengers interacting with local economies through commuter and shopping spend, as well as health benefits reducing costs in the health sector. There is a huge economic and social value in any bus, never mind any zero-emission bus, but I appreciate that you are making a point specifically about the manufacturing sector.

The Convener: Mark, can I ask you to ask one question to just two people, not five questions to the same two people? Well done, to the deputy convener.

Mark Ruskell: I will ask one person one question. I want to go very briefly to David Frenz. I sense that there is a bit of anxiety around EV coach range at the moment, but Ember is running electric coach services from Edinburgh to Fort William four times a day and the same up to Dundee. Are we not at a point where EV coaches are there and available and it is only a matter of time before all operators take them up?

David Frenz: Yes, I think that I said that there are coaches out there. The consideration is the cost of operating them. I do not know Ember's schedules or their running boards and how they operate, but presumably there is charging available at one end, whereas the nature of our express services is that they go from St Andrews to Edinburgh, drop passengers off and come back out to St Andrews. There is not necessarily that same availability of being able to opportunity charge, as we touched upon earlier. That is not to say that we are not considering it, but we must think about cost, range and when we can charge. The minute that you start to add charging time into a bus schedule, you potentially increase the amount of resource that you put in, just to maintain the same timetable effectively. I appreciate that Ember is out there, using electric coaches, but we would have to consider how to go about it from an operational perspective.

The Convener: Okay. I will ask one very brief question. Is your fleet all Euro 6 diesel?

Sarah Boyd: All our fleet were Euro 6 compliant by the end of 2022. We also now have some electric buses in the fleet.

Duncan Cameron: Same answer.

David Frenz: No, sorry—

The Convener: Are those the buses in the rural areas—the ones that do not come into low emission zones?

David Frenz: Yes.

The Convener: That has gone on slightly longer than I anticipated. Thank you for your evidence and for helping us this morning. I will briefly suspend the meeting to allow a change of witnesses. Committee members, please be back in your seats for 11 o'clock. Thank you.

10:55

Meeting suspended.

11:01

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. On our second panel we have Joanne Maguire, managing director, ScotRail Trains Ltd; Liam Sumpter, managing director, Network Rail Scotland, representing Scotland's Railway; Graham Kelly, commercial and procurement director, Caledonian Sleeper Ltd; and Martin Bignell, Scotland and north of England representative of the Rail Freight Group. We will move straight into questions and I get the easy one to warm you all up before the difficult ones that the committee has for you.

I will make a comment. There has not been a significant improvement in ScotRail's or Caledonian Sleeper's performance since they were nationalised, despite ScotRail running fewer services. We are now at the point at which the public performance measure that caused Abellio and Serco to be replaced is not being met by the current operators. Can somebody explain that to me? Joanne, do you want to start on why you are doing worse than Abellio and are running fewer trains?

Joanne Maguire (ScotRail Trains Ltd): Good morning, and thank you for the question. In the last three years of public ownership, we have seen lots of opportunities to contribute to Scotland. We know that nine out of 10 of our trains meet their punctuality target, but there is a lot more to be done. We have also focused on a broader contribution. The panel may have seen that we recently produced an independent report from Steer that said that we are contributing £4.1 billion to the Scottish economy through operating ScotRail trains. We know that the landscape of the timetable that we are operating and our customer profile have changed significantly since the days of Abellio, which were pre-pandemic. We know that there is a lot more to be done on performance, but we are operating nine out of 10 trains on time.

The Convener: A cynic would say that Abellio could also have produced that report, to get them off the punctuality target that is not being met. They were achieving a better figure than you are at the moment and running more trains, so there was more scope for it to go wrong. I am not sure that you have answered the question, except to say that there is more to do. I do not know. What about Graham? Do you want to add anything to that?

Graham Kelly (Caledonian Sleeper Ltd): From a train performance point of view, Caledonian Sleeper just now is at its highest level of performance since the franchise operated as its own train operating company. We are running at 87.9 per cent right time against a target of 80 per

cent, so we have a strong operational performance with very strong occupancy figures.

The Convener: Is that better than Serco?

Graham Kelly: That is better than through the times with Serco and we have seen operational performance progress year on year. We are in a strong place with operational performance.

The Convener: Okay, so you are refuting my comment, and Joanne is accepting it. Is that right?

Graham Kelly: Our operational performance figures are as they are and they are publicly available. That is not to say that we do not also focus heavily on how we can make that better. We want to ensure that we deliver services to our guests at the highest level that we can. Certainly, comparing where we are now with where we have been in the past, we are at our strongest levels of operational performance.

The Convener: You have certainly worked out how to do dynamic pricing to an exceptional level, which means that the cost for travelling on a sleeper at short notice is very high. Anyway, we will leave that and maybe come back to it.

Bob Doris has the next question.

Bob Doris: It is really a follow-up question, so that we can have a debate about the performance figures and how they relate to the historical figures. Any further comments that Joanne Maguire wants to give on that would be helpful.

What are the main reasons for cancellations or delays? This is not our first rodeo, and we keep being bounced between staffing issues, timetabling issues or engine issues, and there is the question of what sits with Network Rail and what sits with ScotRail. We hear about Scotland's Railway, but we want to hear who is responsible for the delays and cancellations and who is responsible for fixing that situation? What is causing the delays and cancellations and what are we doing to fix the situation?

Joanne Maguire: It is fair to say that the Scottish train performance measure is a shared target between Network Rail in Scotland and ScotRail. I am sure that Liam Sumpter will want to comment on this. Following up on the performance review, between December and March—the most recent period—the figures were better than those for the previous year.

The two significant challenges for ScotRail regarding performance are our fleet and our train crew. What are we doing to fix it? With regard to fleet, we were delighted to get permission to—

Bob Doris: Joanne, I hate doing this, as it is not my style of questioning but, before we identify what you are doing to fix things, can you quantify the extent of the challenge? What percentage of

cancellations on Scotland's railways sits with ScotRail? I am talking about cases that are not to do with a points failure or engineering works; it is where the train driver has not turned up or there is another issue with ScotRail as an organisation, which is a public body that we are trying to scrutinise. I want to find out the extent of the issue. I am not trying to create an issue that does not exist but, for every 100 rail cancellations, how many are directly ScotRail's responsibility, and how has that figure varied over time?

Joanne Maguire: We can come back to the committee with the exact numbers, but the majority of cancellations, or performance failures, from ScotRail last year related to train crew shortages and fleet.

Bob Doris: I will bring in Liam Sumpter in a moment. We do not know the extent of the issue with ScotRail, but you are going to tell me how you are going to fix it anyway. I am genuinely not trying to be sarcastic; I am just trying to understand the situation. Maybe you can continue with your answer that I interrupted—my apologies for that.

Joanne Maguire: Not at all.

On train crew, we are currently recruiting and training 160 drivers a year, which is more than any other train operator in the UK. Part of that is about playing catch-up because of the lost years due to the pandemic, when we were not able to run the driver training programme. There was also a significant volume of retirements in our driver population in year 1 of public ownership.

On fleet, there are two key elements. There is a longer-term plan, and we have been pleased to get Government backing to begin the process to replace our intercity fleet. However, we are also investing £7.5 million in upgrading our fleet to improve performance. For example, that relates to wheel slippage in autumn, when we traditionally see poor performance.

Bob Doris: It would be nice if you could get back to the committee with some numbers on that.

Joanne Maguire: We can certainly send the committee the numbers.

Bob Doris: Liam, can you assist us? I apologise if this is in our briefing paper for today and I have missed it but, in the past, we have had data on performance from the Scottish Parliament information centre. For example, we were told that 60 per cent of trains were cancelled because of an engineering issue, which would sit with Network Rail, and that 40 per cent of issues were because of something else. I apologise that I do not have that information, but can you assist me, Mr Sumpter?

Liam Sumpter (Scotland's Railway): I hope that I can. Good morning, committee. I have some

of the data that Jo Maguire referred to. In the year ending 31 March, 46 per cent of all train delays were due to infrastructure—and so due to Network Rail—and 49 per cent were due to train operations, of which 44 per cent were ScotRail related and 5 per cent were due to other operators that caused delay to ScotRail.

Last year, 2.2 per cent of all ScotRail trains were cancelled throughout the course of the year, which is an order of magnitude better than any other train operator in the country. South of the border, the average is around 4.5 per cent of trains, so the figure here is considerably better. Of that 2.2 per cent, I think that I am right in saying that 0.9 per cent was due to Network Rail and 1.3 per cent was due to ScotRail. Obviously, we had real challenges with train crew at the start of the year, which probably enhanced that score and made it much larger than it ordinarily would be.

Bob Doris: That is helpful. It would be helpful for the committee to know how that has changed over time, so that we can see the movement in performance. If you can add anything else now, that would be welcome.

Liam Sumpter: I can tell you that the figure ebbs and flows. If you look at the story of Scotland's Railway over the past 10 to 15 years, you find that, broadly speaking, the Scottish train performance measure has been around 90 per cent for that period. Sometimes, it has been as low as 87.4 per cent and sometimes it has gone up to 91 per cent. It was a little higher during the Covid years but, broadly speaking, the railway has been operating at 90 per cent for that timeframe.

Depending on what has happened in any given year, there have been ebbs and flows between the infrastructure and the train operator. On the infrastructure side, if we have a year where we get really bad weather with lots of named storms, the delays associated with Network Rail will likely be a little higher and those associated with train operators will be lower. In years where there are industrial relations disputes on the train operator side, that will usually cause a spike in train operator-related delays.

The figures ebb and flow. Over the time since Covid, we have seen relatively consistent levels of improvement on the categories over which we feel that we can have a direct influence—in particular, those associated with pure infrastructure and non-track assets, such as the points failures that you referenced. We have seen an improvement in them, but train delays that are associated with weather or external incidents such as trespass, fatalities and fires, are very spiky, and they are dependent on what happens in any given year.

Bob Doris: That data is helpful. I have been scribbling it down and I will look back at the *Official*

Report of the meeting. On the 46 per cent of delays that related to an engineering or Network Rail matter, what improvement plan does Network Rail have in place? Obviously, there is extreme weather, for which you cannot be held to account, but it is about how quickly you get the network back up and running—that is what we are looking at there. From a Network Rail point of view, how does your improvement plan seek to proactively reduce delays?

Liam Sumpter: I referred to the 46 per cent of delays that were attributed to Network Rail last year. Those cover weather and external events as well as infrastructure and how we manage the network generally. That has improved year on year—there was a 7 per cent improvement from the previous year, and the figure was 7 per cent better than our target. That shows that we are making headway in that regard.

We have a plan, but it is not just our plan; it is a joint plan. We have been working with Jo Maguire and her team to develop a genuinely joint plan. One benefit of the way in which we work together in an alliance is that we have really strong knowledge of and interest in each other's deliverables. We have a joint plan to improve, which will take us through the next few years. As part of that joint plan, a lot of investment is coming from the Scottish Government into the infrastructure. Over the five-year funding period, of which we have just finished the first year, we plan more than £4 billion of total investment, with £2 billion of that on renewal—it is about renewing infrastructure generally.

One interesting point is that, of that £2 billion, we have put £400 million towards improving our resilience in the face of climate change. We know that delays associated with weather have been spiky and cause a lot of disruption—around a fifth of all the Network Rail delay, and sometimes more, is due to weather. Therefore, £400 million has been dedicated to making our infrastructure more resilient to weather over the five-year period. We do things such as improving drainage to reduce the number of sites that are prone to flooding when there are high levels of precipitation. Around nine or 10 years ago, we had 260 such sites across the railway. Over the past nine or 10 years, we have got that down to just under 50 sites.

That £400 million of investment goes towards reducing flooding sites and the possibility of earthworks sliding on to the railway. It is also about making our railway more resilient by removing trees so that, during storms, they do not fall on to the overhead wires. There is also the whole pantheon of activity to try to improve train performance across every single one of our categories. As I said, that is a joint plan on which

we work together with ScotRail. Together, we can move performance forward.

Bob Doris: Thank you.

The Convener: The deputy convener has some questions.

11:15

Michael Matheson: Good morning. Joanne, your PPM target is 92.5 per cent. What did you achieve in 2024-25?

Joanne Maguire: In 2024-25, overall in Scotland, we were at 89.7 per cent.

Michael Matheson: How does that compare with what has been achieved over the past five years?

Joanne Maguire: We should discount the pandemic years, because we know that running fewer trains makes it easier to operate the railway. In the previous year, we were 0.2 per cent above the 89.7 per cent figure, and the year before that, we were at 89.4 per cent, so we are consistently just below 90 per cent, within a 1 per cent tolerance. The work that we are doing jointly is to get us to the target of 92.5 per cent—there is a five-year plan to get us to that. Relative to the rest of the UK, ScotRail and Scotland's Railway perform well.

Michael Matheson: When did the five-year plan start?

Joanne Maguire: It is set against the five-year control period for Network Rail, so it began last year.

Michael Matheson: What do you need to happen to get that 3 per cent this year?

Joanne Maguire: The plan is that we will not reach 92.5 per cent this year, but we will make a marked improvement on the year before. With regards to ScotRail, there has already been a significant step forward, in that we have secured a two-year pay deal. We are therefore looking forward to a summer that will be free from pay-related industrial action, which will remove the need for a temporary timetable, giving greater certainty for our customers and opportunities to drive revenue and performance. We have already made a significant step forward on that. From this autumn, we will start to see the incremental increase in our driver numbers coming through, which is starting to pay dividends against the investment in the 160 drivers per year that we have been bringing on.

Regarding our fleet, as I mentioned, we have secured £7.5 million of improvements. There is a balancing act as to how many trains we can withdraw at any time to do improvement works as

against trains being withdrawn for maintenance. We will start to see the output of some of that towards the end of this calendar year. Unfortunately, those are not quick wins, but we know that we are on an improvement journey, and the backing for the two-year pay deal has been significant in that.

Michael Matheson: I have a couple of quick questions. You do not expect to reach your PPM target this year, but you expect a marked improvement on where you were last year. What would be a marked improvement?

Joanne Maguire: Our target for this year for ScotRail in real terms would take us to a 17 per cent year-on-year improvement. As I say, we have a level of confidence especially with regard to our train crew, because we have secured the pay deal. The overall target for the year is 90.73 per cent, which is an increase of around 1 per cent.

Michael Matheson: At which year in the five-year plan do you expect to reach the PPM target?

Joanne Maguire: We are pulling together an improvement plan regarding that but, for me, the earliest year in which we would hit that target would be year 4 of the five-year control period.

Michael Matheson: Sorry, but I am a wee bit confused. What do you mean by an improvement plan? I thought that you had a five-year plan.

Joanne Maguire: We have a plan for five years, but we review it every year, based on our performance, and we look to improve that further.

Michael Matheson: So you supplement that with an improvement plan?

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

Michael Matheson: Okay. Right now, your prediction for achieving the PPM target is that, at the earliest, it will be in year 4 of the five-year plan.

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

The Convener: I want to clarify that, to make sure that I do not have the dates wrong. Am I right in thinking that year 4 of the five-year plan will be 2028?

Joanne Maguire: Yes, so this is the start of year 2—

The Convener: I am glad that you are having to think about it as well, because you have got me thinking.

Liam Sumpter: We have just started year 2, so year 4 will be the beginning of 2028, in March.

The Convener: So it is the beginning of 2028, or the winter of 2027. The Government always likes—[*Interruption.*] Yes—weather timetables.

I think that Sarah Boyack's question meshes into that issue, so I will bring her in now.

Sarah Boyack: I appreciate that, convener.

My question is about the infrastructure and how you keep it going. There was a comment earlier about the £400 million that is being invested in making the infrastructure climate resilient. At the weekend, I met a train driver, and he was saying that, when you carry out repairs and maintenance on the lines and the areas beside them, landslips can happen. For example, when you remove trees, it removes the resilience of the land beside the railway. I just wanted to flag that up.

Moreover, the rail unions have said that there has been a lack of investment in on-going infrastructure maintenance, and staff are being laid off by the major subcontractors. There seems to be a disconnect between the huge amount of money that you are putting in to make the network resilient and the fact that staff are losing their jobs. What are you doing to keep the set of skills and the knowledge that those staff have and ensure that the long-term future and safety of the rail infrastructure are not going to be compromised, because of short-term savings? The two things feel as if they are at odds with each other.

Liam Sumpter: Starting with the very first thing that you mentioned, I would say that it is absolutely the case that removing a tree will have an impact on the ecology of the earthwork in which it is, because it is not there to suck up water and so on. However, I think that some of the best engineers that we have in UK rail are in Scotland, because we are so used to dealing with such challenges and take account of these things when we remove trees.

Every time we remove trees, we carry out a full ecological survey, and we find that most of the time it is the right thing to do. However, there are certain types of embankment where that is a bigger risk. That is particularly the case in Kent and south of London, where there are lots of clay embankments and the impact will be bigger. Here, we are very clear about when it is or is not appropriate to remove trees.

As for the second issue that you raised, I do not think that I quite recognise the characterisation of the situation that you have been given from elsewhere. The funding for Network Rail over this control period is in line with the funding in the previous control period; in fact, it is basically the same. What we have done is to shift some of the emphasis and, as I have said, to invest more in climate change resilience than we had previously done. For example, we have reduced the amount of track renewals, and we are doing more targeted refurbishment of specific components instead of

replacing the whole system. That enables us to spend more money on climate change resilience.

With regard to maintenance, around two years ago, we had a programme called modernising maintenance, as a result of which we reduced the overall cost of maintenance in Scotland by around £12 million per annum. We stopped doing some of the maintenance activity that our expert engineers told us did not add value and instead concentrated on the activity that did. Since then, the reliability of our infrastructure has improved; last year, for example, the number of failures caused by the infrastructure improved by 9 per cent, which outperformed our best expectations.

Moreover, we lead the whole country with regard to the amount of work in our engineering backlog—that is, the work that is done on time. Around 2.7 per cent of our work is in the engineering backlog; I should say that there will always be work in the engineering backlog, because of other priorities that might emerge on the day, but it is a very good position to be in. I would also point out that our safety record has been very strong in the last year since we implemented the changes. Modernising maintenance has, by all measurables, been a success thus far, but we continue to review whether it is right to undertake it or whether it is right to do something differently and to tweak it.

My point is that the level of investment going into the infrastructure is at least on a par with the previous five-year period, and the results are demonstrating improvements in that space. Furthermore, we have not made anybody compulsorily redundant within Network Rail in that timeframe; we have an agreement with our trade unions that we will not do that, and we have not needed to do it.

Sarah Boyack: The issue was subcontractors, not Network Rail, making staff redundant.

Liam Sumpter: I do not recognise that, and it is not what I am hearing from our supply chain colleagues.

It might have something to do with some very specific examples. There was a type of activity called the high output programme, which involved heavy track renewals. We are not doing as much of that nationally, because we have found more efficient ways of doing it locally, and we have increased the amount of work that we have done locally to compensate for the loss of that big high output programme.

We have worked with some of the organisations that used to provide the workforce that did that work to try to accommodate them within Network Rail. If we can retain their skills, we will do so. The reality, though, is that the vast majority of them do not live in Scotland, and I think that, actually, there

was only one person who wanted to join us and whom we have been able to take on. More of them lived south of the border, because this was a national programme that moved around the country.

Sarah Boyack: Okay—that is good. I will feed that back.

The issue that I was raising about chopping down trees was not about the principle—after all, they do get too big—but about the resilience of the infrastructure afterwards and ensuring that it is not vulnerable to extreme weather. I must be unlucky, because I have had several train journeys cancelled, either because of landslips or because electricity has not been available for the train at the time. For me, there is definitely a resilience issue that needs to be addressed.

Liam Sumpter: I think that you are referring to the stability of the embankment once you have removed the tree, which is part of that resilience issue; I am saying that removing trees does not cause additional landslips in Scotland. We have landslips anyway, because some of our railways are set against some very steep parts of Scotland, and we are investing very heavily in earthwork resilience.

If you travel through an area with lots of earthworks and embankments, you might notice poles that are usually yellow or white sticking into the earthwork. That is something that we have implemented in the past five years; the poles are called tilt meters, and each of them, in effect, tests the resilience of the earthworks. When there is movement in the earthwork, an alarm goes to our control centre, and we can send somebody out to see whether there has been an embankment slippage. Hopefully, they can repair the slippage before it becomes a big one or, if they cannot, we might stop the trains in order to carry out a repair.

We have installed hundreds of these tilt meters across the country, so that we get an early warning sign if any of our earthworks start to fall. Generally that happens only during extreme weather events with high levels of precipitation—convective rainfall events are usually the cause. We know that these things will happen; we monitor them; and we take the appropriate action if they do happen.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you.

The Convener: The next questions are from Mark Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell: I want to come back to Joanne Maguire and ask about the changes to ticket office opening hours. What assurances can ScotRail give that the changes will not result in fewer staff being available at stations or stations effectively being unstaffed for longer periods?

Joanne Maguire: In our review of ticket office opening hours, we took into account many more factors than we were required to, but one of the driving reasons for the change was the fundamental shift in how people buy tickets from us. Prior to making these changes, we were selling less than 15 per cent of our tickets through our ticket offices, and, in fact, more than half of our tickets are sold online currently. So, we carried out internal and external consultations, and we looked at how many tickets were being sold.

I can give you some key headlines of the change programme. There have been no redundancies associated with the changes, and no ticket offices have been closed; we have looked at amending opening hours. Moreover, staff have retained their own terms and conditions. What we have is—

Mark Ruskell: I am sorry, Joanne, I do not mean to interrupt, but I go back to my very specific question, which related to concerns that the unions have. Will the changes result in fewer staff being available at stations or stations being unstaffed for longer periods? That is the issue that unions, disability groups and others are concerned about—it is the staffing at stations. I am well aware of some of the reasons for the business model changes with regard to ticket sales, but it would be great if you could address that point.

Joanne Maguire: Prior to the change, more than half of the stations that we operate were unstaffed to begin with. We have not reduced anyone's working hours; we have maintained the number of staff hours that we have. What we have done is bring staff out from behind the glass and on to the platform or to other stations where there is a need for assistance.

We have worked closely with disability representative groups and our trade unions throughout this process. We might have staff moving between different stations, but, across our stations, we still have the same number of staff hours every day. Staff are being deployed where they need to be—that is, where we are selling tickets.

Where we have a station that might have been unstaffed prior to these changes or where the hours might have reduced, we have a help point on every platform. When you press the button at that help point, you are connected to a ScotRail employee, who is either in our closed-circuit television centre in Dunfermline or in Paisley. They can identify you on the platform, and they will ensure that you get whatever assistance you need.

11:30

Mark Ruskell: So, in effect, some staff who are currently working at fully staffed stations will move to staff stations that are unstaffed at the moment.

Joanne Maguire: They will move around, yes. We have said that we will consistently keep this under review, and we are involving the trade unions in those reviews.

Mark Ruskell: What do you think is the underlying concern from trade union groups? We have heard evidence of concerns that there could be female staff, in particular, working alone at stations, and there is obviously a background concern about antisocial behaviour and what happens if you have a more dispersed workforce at stations. How are you addressing those concerns, and how are you addressing some of the concerns from disability access groups that an automated help point does not suit everybody's needs? Indeed, it is difficult to access—or even to find, if you have a disability such as sight loss or other issues.

It feels as if this is an unresolved issue. I have heard you making the business case on several occasions in public and private meetings that we have had, but there are still these unresolved issues and concerns. How are you taking those on and resolving them?

Joanne Maguire: When we embarked on this under public ownership, some unfortunate comparisons were made with work that had been planned south of the border in relation to the closing of ticket offices. We have worked really hard with our trade unions and stakeholder representatives to convince them that this is not a case of closing ticket offices; it is a case of deploying staff to where need is greatest.

We have invested in our staff numbers over the past three years, and we have put a lot of measures in place to combat antisocial behaviour and tackle safety concerns. We commenced our travel safe team as a pilot in the west, and we then launched a team in the east in January to put more staff on to the network to work with passengers and ensure that it is safe. Our revenue protection teams are driving down ticketless travel, which we know can be a source of antisocial behaviour, and we have also tripled the number of body-worn cameras available to staff to more than 1,000, because, again, university research shows that body cameras can prevent antisocial behaviour.

We are also double staffing late-night trains in antisocial behaviour hotspots, because statistics show that the staff who find themselves on the receiving end of most antisocial behaviour are, in fact, our on-train staff. We remain absolutely committed to the view that one assault on a

member of staff or a passenger is one too many. I am sure that I do not need to rehearse the societal problems that we are grappling with when it comes to antisocial behaviour, but with Government backing, we have put a significant number of measures in place, including closing our vacancy gap and investing in, not reducing, staff numbers.

Mark Ruskell: If you were a lone female worker at a station, would you personally feel convinced that, with all the measures that you have just outlined, you would feel confident about being in the working environment that had been established?

Joanne Maguire: In going through the change process, we had one-to-ones with every member of staff and carried out risk assessments with them. Our staff book on and off every day, so we know when they arrive for work and when they finish their shift. They keep in constant contact with us. We also have one of the most extensive CCTV networks in the UK.

Where there are any individual staff, we will work with them. However, we are investing significantly and working very closely with our trade unions, which we have a good relationship with, to do everything that we can to ensure that our staff are safe at work.

Mark Ruskell: So you would feel comfortable working at a station as a lone worker with the measures that you have in place.

Joanne Maguire: With all of the measures that we currently have in place, yes.

Mark Ruskell: Okay. Thank you.

The Convener: Joanne, I was just thinking about the figures that you gave me. I think you said that over 50 per cent of people buy their tickets online—

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

The Convener: —and that 15 per cent buy their tickets from the ticket office.

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

The Convener: That suggests that around 35 per cent of people buy their tickets on the train. Is that what you are suggesting? I am not sure how else they could get their tickets. Can you explain it to me?

Joanne Maguire: Between 10 and 15 per cent of sales are through our ticket vending machines, or TVMs—we love acronyms—at stations. Whether the station is unstaffed or staffed, people will buy their tickets in that way, and they will also buy them through third parties—for example, Trainline.

The Convener: About 15 per cent of tickets are bought in that way.

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

The Convener: Is that figure increasing or decreasing?

Joanne Maguire: The use of TVMs has not increased significantly, but online sales are increasing.

The Convener: What about the person selling the ticket on the train?

Joanne Maguire: That figure has broadly stayed the same, and we are committed to keeping a second person on every train.

The Convener: If a station has an unmanned ticket office, it will have a ticket vending machine—I assume that that is what TVM stands for.

Joanne Maguire: Not every unstaffed station has one on the platform, but you will always be able to buy a ticket from the person on the train.

The Convener: There is no penalty for doing that—no increase in price.

Joanne Maguire: No.

The Convener: Thank you. That clears it up. I love figures, and Liam Sumpter has given me a whole lot of percentages that I will digest later.

The next question is from Kevin Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: We have already touched on disability access in Mark Ruskell's questioning. Hats off to your staff—they do a good service, particularly conductors, when folk do not appear at platforms. How do you ensure that there is availability of and provision for passenger assistance when it is required? How can you do a little bit better in ensuring that those folk are timeous? I have seen—and I am sure that others have seen—a disabled passenger getting a little bit anxious because they are not being boarded quickly enough, as they see it.

Joanne Maguire: We can always improve on everything that we do, and we have worked hard to make our network as accessible as possible. Liam Sumpter might want to comment on the network, because a lot of good work is being done by Network Rail Scotland to improve the accessibility of what is essentially Victorian infrastructure—think about the step gap, for example, between the train and the platform.

Kevin Stewart: I will ask Liam Sumpter some specific questions about that soon.

Joanne Maguire: On accessibility, from a ScotRail perspective, we have our station staff but we also have a second person on every train who can help a passenger on or off the train when they

arrive. Passengers can pre-book assistance or they can turn up and get assistance either using the help point or when the train arrives.

There is always more that we can do, and we work hard with our stakeholder groups to take constant feedback. We are proud of the work that we already do, and, as I say, the commitment to having a second person on the train is significant in that.

Kevin Stewart: I think that it is significant, and I have often seen a hospitality steward on the train, when there is one, helping as well. As I said, hats off to your staff, but there is room for improvement. Folks who are not used to travelling can become a little bit anxious if they are not boarded quickly or it is quite near the time for departure.

I want to move on to the infrastructure aspect, which Joanne has mentioned, although my questions are probably for Liam. Quite a number of folks have called for level boarding. As Joanne said, we have Victorian infrastructure, and, on the journeys that I take, I hear the announcement at Dundee, for example, to watch out because there is a large step to the platform. We also have the likes of Dunkeld and Birnam station—not on a route that I normally take—which I understand is due to have its platforms upgraded. What can be done swiftly to resolve some of these problems? Has Network Rail done any analysis or any stocktake of how much it would cost to bring our stations up to modern standards for level boarding?

Liam Sumpter: Thank you for that question on an issue that is really important to us. We want to make sure that Scotland's railway is open to everybody, but the reality is that there are some challenges. As you referenced, some of our platforms are Victorian infrastructure and there are large gaps between train and platform, whether in height or in distance from the face of the platform. Lots of our stations are inaccessible in the context that it is difficult to get from one platform to the other, and so on.

With that in mind, we have our accessibility for all programme, which aims to improve the availability of accessible stations across Scotland. That programme is one of the very few items that is reserved to the UK Government from a funding perspective. Over five years, from six years ago to one year ago, we invested £23.2 million in improving accessibility at a series of stations, including Uddingston, Dumfries, Port Glasgow and a few others, to make those stations fully accessible to passengers. We have now embarked on the next control period of funding, and we are working with the Department for Transport to put another series of stations through that programme—we are looking at Dumbarton central, Inverurie and Falkirk Grahamston, to

name just a few that we are focusing on. As I say, that work is funded by the UK Government through the Department for Transport—there is a programme for that, which covers the whole of Great Britain's railways.

In Scotland, with our highly skilled project team and our supply chain, we have been able to deliver those projects for a reasonable price, but that is not always the case. Elsewhere, there are some really expensive schemes. The UK Government has an overall pot for that work, and it is fair to say that that pot has come under strain and stress over the past few years.

We are now in a position whereby, broadly speaking, a third of the stations in Scotland are fully accessible. Over half of stations are accessible to an extent, and we are trying to push that proportion up, but the reality is that it will take quite a long time. The amount of money involved in some of the schemes is significant and can depend on the state of the infrastructure, how big the gap is and how much additional work needs to take place. It can also depend on things like the proximity to landowners and nearby residents if we need to build an accessible footbridge over the railway, which can have a huge impact on the cost. Of course, things like platforms and accessible footbridges come at a cost because the cost of the materials, such as concrete, is going up due to global pressures on construction and stuff like that. All of those things have a contributory impact that pushes the cost of the projects up.

We are working with our own team and with Transport Scotland to determine what the right priorities are and with the Department for Transport as a funder. We are also doing other things at stations to improve accessibility—

Kevin Stewart: Before we move on to that, I want to see what we actually know at this moment and get an estimate of what the current financial cost would be of dealing with the two thirds of stations that are not fully accessible. Do you have a register? Do you have an estimate of how much it would cost, at today's prices, to make all those stations accessible?

Liam Sumpter: I do not think that I can give you that answer, but I can tell you that, over the five years that I mentioned, we spent £23.2 million on six or seven stations. If we were to scale that work up, we would be talking about hundreds of millions of pounds.

Kevin Stewart: You said that the UK budget for such work has been restricted. Has that budget gone up or down in the current control period?

Liam Sumpter: I do not know whether it has gone up or down. It might be subject to what comes out of the on-going UK Government spending review. The scale of the budget for those

five years was something like £260 million for the whole of Great Britain, and we spent £23.2 million of that. My expectation is that the budget would be broadly in line with the figure for that five-year period, but I would need to take that question away and confirm to you what the figure is.

Kevin Stewart: Sure. The original question was about level boarding, which has been asked for by many stakeholders. Is it fair to say that that is not likely to become a reality until many of these stations are fixed?

11:45

Liam Sumpter: I think that it is fair to say that, yes. There are some real engineering challenges and we are working through them, tackling the busiest stations as a priority. We agree those priorities with Transport Scotland and with our colleagues at ScotRail, and we will work through them as fast as the funding can flow.

Kevin Stewart: Basically, we, the stakeholders and you will have to lobby the Treasury quite hard to ensure that this fund that it still holds the purse strings for is enhanced to make level boarding a reality across Scotland. Would it be fair to say that?

Liam Sumpter: It is fair to say that the more that the Scottish rail industry can do to recommend to the UK Government the benefits of that scheme, the better.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you.

The Convener: I have a quick question on integrated multimodal ticketing, which is an issue that I seem to remember looking at when we considered the Transport (Scotland) Bill. Was that in 2019? I cannot remember.

Michael Matheson: It was.

The Convener: My memory has not gone completely wrong. Stewart Stevenson used to bring that issue to my attention on every possible occasion.

How are we getting on in working towards integrated multimodal ticketing? Are we going to make that possible? I assume that, with 50-something per cent of tickets being sold online, you are probably some way towards achieving that. Is that right?

Joanne Maguire: In the past 12 to 18 months, Transport Scotland has led work to bring all the transport providers together to look at the art of the possible on multimodal ticketing. We already do good work in some areas—an example of that is the rail and sail tickets that we sell for journeys that involve ScotRail and CalMac Ferries services. However, we do not have a timescale for multimodal ticketing.

The Convener: Can I buy a train ticket to catch a ferry? We will get on to the issue of whether the train meets the ferry, but if I were to go on to the ScotRail website, could I buy a ticket that I could use on the services of another nationalised operator, such as CalMac?

Joanne Maguire: Yes, you can buy a rail and sail ticket.

The Convener: Does CalMac sell tickets for your services?

Joanne Maguire: As things stand, we sell CalMac's products, and we work with it to join up the timetables.

The Convener: I am not sure that I understood that answer. Does CalMac sell your products?

Joanne Maguire: I do not believe that it does. We sell what is called a rail and sail ticket.

The Convener: I am sure that you will twist CalMac's arm following this meeting to make sure that that happens. Would you accept that integrated ticketing needs to go beyond just rail and sail tickets if we are to get people to use public transport?

Joanne Maguire: Yes. We know that, in many areas of Scotland, it is necessary for people to use more than one mode of transport to get to their end destination.

The Convener: People might need to catch a bus, a train and a ferry.

Joanne Maguire: There are some bus companies that we have great partnerships with, and there are others with which more work needs to be done.

The Convener: Is that work being done?

Joanne Maguire: It is. For example, we have recently done some positive work in the Borders to align our timetables with those of the bus providers down there, because we know that there are connectivity challenges in that area of Scotland.

The Convener: The next questions come from Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: My questions follow on well from that discussion. The issue is not only about ticketing; we also need to think about co-ordinating timetables, particularly when it comes to access to rail services. In our session with the previous panel, we spent a lot of time talking about how delayed and slow bus services are. Trains are a lot faster, but there is the issue of how people access stations. Could more be done by way of co-ordination across rail and bus services that would work to up the number of people who use the railways in Scotland?

Joanne Maguire: We have a strategy that, believe it or not, did not exist a few years ago called “A Railway for All”, which looks at how people start their journey—how they travel to the station—right through to the end of their journey. We are working with bus partners and ferry partners to improve connectivity. It is sometimes easier to do that with other publicly owned organisations, which we can work more easily and more closely with. We know that there is a lot more to be done in aligning timetables and making sure that there is a flow of connectivity when there are delays on either side.

Sarah Boyack: How big a priority is that? You said that discussions are on-going, but from the point of view of passengers, you are dispatching trains when you could fill up those trains more and generate more income for the sector.

Joanne Maguire: As I said, that is a significant priority for us. As I mentioned, we have had some recent success in the Borders. I give credit to the community groups down there, which keep us focused on improving connectivity in the area. We are looking at other areas of Scotland where we know that we need to do better when it comes to lining up services.

Sarah Boyack: It would be good to get feedback on numbers and what difference that could make in the future, particularly in relation to connections with bus and ferry services. I can see why it is complicated to do, but that would be a big benefit to everybody.

Joanne Maguire: For sure.

The Convener: Douglas Lumsden has some questions.

Douglas Lumsden: On Saturday afternoon, I was on the train from Aberdeen to Dundee, and it was like a party train—I think that everyone was drinking, except me. I am not blaming the staff in any way, but the alcohol ban does not seem to be workable or enforceable. Do you think that it should be removed?

Joanne Maguire: The alcohol ban is a matter for the Scottish Government to make a decision on, and we know that it is not a straightforward decision. ScotRail’s position has always been that we cannot enforce the ban. Because it is not a matter of law, our staff cannot enforce it. Our position is that, if staff are on a train, they cannot intervene and ask people not to drink. There is no statistical link between antisocial behaviour and the consumption of alcohol on trains, but whether the ban remains in place is a policy matter for the Scottish Government.

Douglas Lumsden: But, as you have said, it is not enforceable. I am just trying to understand what the point of it is. It even takes revenue away

from ScotRail, which could be making money from the sale of alcohol through its catering service.

Joanne Maguire: As I said, we understand that the decision about alcohol on trains is not a simple one. There is a broader challenge in relation to alcohol and society across Scotland. We do not enforce the ban.

You are quite right to say that we do not retail alcohol. Over the coming months, we will look to improve and build on our on-train catering offer. The issue of alcohol on trains is a challenge that remains, but it is a decision for the Government, not for us.

Douglas Lumsden: What discussions have taken place with the Scottish Government to get over the point that ScotRail is not enforcing the ban? It is rare to see someone from the British Transport Police on a train. What discussions have there been with the Scottish Government to say that the ban is not working in any way, given that you have the figures to show that antisocial behaviour is not a factor at play here?

Joanne Maguire: As we said, statistically, there is no link between antisocial behaviour and the consumption of alcohol on trains. We are fortunate in that we have a cabinet secretary who has been hugely supportive of rail as part of her very broad transport portfolio. Through Transport Scotland, we have had conversations about how we ensure that the environment in which we operate is as safe as possible to inform a decision about the ban, but, as I said, ultimately, that is a decision for the Government.

Douglas Lumsden: Last week, we heard from the trade unions, which told us that they do not support the ban, because they feel that it could generate conflict for their members. I am trying to work out what the timetable is for the ban to be reviewed. From your discussions with the Scottish Government, when do you think that a decision will be made? Do you have any idea?

Joanne Maguire: We are not aware of what the timescale might be. As I said, we work through Transport Scotland, which shares information with the Government.

With regard to the trade union concerns, we absolutely support our staff, which is why we do not ask them to enforce the ban, because we know that there is no legal reason for it.

Douglas Lumsden: There is no alcohol ban on the Caledonian Sleeper. Are there any issues with alcohol on those services, Graham?

Graham Kelly: It is important to note that the services that are provided by ScotRail and those that are provided by the Caledonian Sleeper are very different services. The vast majority of alcohol that is consumed on the Caledonian Sleeper is

alcohol that is sold on the train. We control that sale. Our staff are trained in the control of the sale of alcohol, and if they believe that there are any guests on our services who are getting to the point of having consumed too much alcohol, they will refrain from serving them any more alcohol.

Douglas Lumsden: With regard to antisocial behaviour, you have the travel safe team. Do you have any evidence that that team is making any difference? Do you intend to roll that out further across the network?

Joanne Maguire: We do a lot in relation to antisocial behaviour. ScotRail and the travel safe team work very closely with the British Transport Police. In January, we increased the number of travel safe officers, and we now have a team who book on at Haymarket, who are starting to cover the east of the country. We are expanding the travel safe team, and we are going to consider expanding the scope of the team further north.

Douglas Lumsden: How big is that team just now?

Joanne Maguire: We have a total of about 35 travel safe officers.

Douglas Lumsden: They would not try to enforce the alcohol ban—that is not their role.

Joanne Maguire: It is not; we do not enforce the alcohol ban because, as I said, there is no legal backing for us to enforce a ban.

Douglas Lumsden: Thank you.

The Convener: Before we leave that issue, I note that it was suggested last week—unless I misheard it—that, rather than having a blanket ban, it might be more appropriate to have a ban on certain trains to certain venues/events. I am not sure that I can remember which concerts were suggested as the ones that you could drink on the way to and which ones you could not. I am not even going to list them. Would you support a policy of a more focused approach—with certain trains on which alcohol would not be allowed, whereby it could be policed properly—rather than a blanket ban?

Joanne Maguire: That option has been looked at and, in fact, was in place pre-pandemic. There were certain events, times of the year or destinations for which a ban could be put in place. It could be one way to resolve the challenge.

The Convener: Joanne, I will not be rude by suggesting that I know that that was in place; I am asking whether you would support it.

Joanne Maguire: Yes, ScotRail would support that.

The Convener: ScotRail would support that, so it is an option for the cabinet secretary. The next question is from Bob Doris.

Bob Doris: It is a brief question. I have a constituency interest in relation to the issue, because people are always saying to me that the Maryhill line has not been electrified, therefore it is not a core part of the ScotRail network. Of course, it is a core part, and it is valued.

The electrification works on the East Kilbride line are currently coming to completion. I believe that there are no further electrification works in the pipeline, and I know that there are other potential solutions to decarbonising Scotland's railways. Are there any further planned electrification works following those on the East Kilbride line? What would those alternative solutions look like? In the absence of any further work being taken forward, is there a skilled workforce that might also fall into abeyance until we should decide to pick up and run with electrification somewhere further down the line? Liam Sumpter, are you best placed to answer that?

Liam Sumpter: I would hope so. Thank you for the question. In Scotland, we are really proud of our decarbonisation journey. As we sit here today, 77 per cent of all journeys taken on ScotRail are on lines that have been electrified. That is really great progress so far. Last year, we completed the electrification of the Barrhead to Glasgow line and, as you quite rightly say, we are on the ground right now working on the East Kilbride line. That is due to be completed this year so that ScotRail can operate electric services from East Kilbride to Glasgow by the time of the December timetable change. That is on time and under budget as it stands.

There are additional electrification schemes already in the pipeline. The ones that are currently happening on the ground or are in the development process are those in Fife and the Borders. With both of those schemes, we are doing preparatory electrification work ready for the next stage of funding.

On your point about skills, a large number of the East Kilbride team are already moving over to the Fife project to do the preparatory and design work. In thinking about electrification, it is sometimes easy to think that the work is just about putting up the wires. That is the tangible stuff that people see, but there is so much design work that needs to go into it, and we are already transferring some of those skills over to the Fife project.

Bob Doris: I am not asking about new rolling stock; other folk might do that. I should first point out that it is encouraging that there appears to be a strategy for retaining the skilled workforce and for a rolling programme of electrification. There will

be other electrified lines right across Scotland, but my local line never seems to be in the mix, and it is unlikely to be in the mix. I keep telling commuters that it is an absolutely valued part of the Scottish rail network, but, until we see the rolling stock solutions come out, it is hard to say more about that and a decarbonised railway. Do you want to say anything more about the parts of the country where it is clear that, in the short or medium term, there will be no electrification?

Liam Sumpter: The rolling programme of electrification, as we refer to it, is really important for the retention of skills. In Scotland, we deliver electrification for considerably less than it is being delivered south of the border, and we are improving that year on year. With every project, we come up with new innovations and new ways of doing things, so we are driving down the cost of electrification. That means that we can do more of it, because the value-for-money equation is more balanced.

12:00

We continue to work with the Scottish Government through Transport Scotland and, of course, with our colleagues in the train operating companies—most notably ScotRail—on what our priorities are. That work is an on-going tripartite workstream, whereby we look at what the next priorities are and which lines we should electrify next to benefit the maximum number of people and the Scottish economy as a whole. We hope that the rolling programme can continue so that we can continue to deliver value projects over the course of the next 10 to 20 years and decarbonise the whole of Scotland's railway.

On prioritisation and specific lines, it is a job for Transport Scotland, largely speaking, to determine what the right priority is. Our role is to provide as much data as we can to support it and then to deliver what is specified.

Michael Matheson: Liam, it sounds as though the German approach to electrification is paying off, if the cost of electrification in Scotland is reducing because of a rolling programme. Can you remind me what the cost is per kilometre for electrifying a line? If I recall correctly, it used to be around £1 million. Is it still around that price?

Liam Sumpter: I do not think that it was ever as low as £1 million, because it is currently about £2 million, and we have been improving it. We have got it down from £2.7 million to £2 million over the course of the past five years.

Michael Matheson: Is that because of the on-going rolling programme that allows you to keep the skills together?

Liam Sumpter: That is a fundamental part of it. We have the same people, who, as they work through the process of electrification, think about ways in which they could do it a little bit better. There are various ways of lowering the track or increasing the height of structures—key parts of the cost base—that we can do slightly better each time because we find slightly better ways of doing it. Retention of skills is absolutely critical to our ability to do that.

The Convener: Douglas, you can come in with a brief question, because we need to get on to Martin Bignell, who has been sat waiting patiently.

Douglas Lumsden: Are there plans in place for electrification of the east coast rail line, or is that beyond the 20-year plan?

Liam Sumpter: It is both. I am sorry to answer in that way. The rolling programme of electrification covers a variety of different lines, but we anticipate that we will be able to electrify—and we can electrify—from the central belt through to Aberdeen, using the east coast north line. The prioritisation of when and how we do that is a matter of on-going discussion between us, ScotRail and Transport Scotland, and the prioritisation will be determined eventually by Transport Scotland.

When we do these electrification programmes, it is really important that we do them in harmony with the replacement of the fleet. There is no point in putting wires up if we do not have electric trains, and there is no point in buying electric trains if we do not have the wires. It is really important that we do those things together, and Transport Scotland determines the exact order. However, I anticipate that electrifying to the north-east via the east coast line is very much on the agenda for completion within the timescale that you have set out.

Douglas Lumsden: Do you mean within 20 years?

Liam Sumpter: Yes, we anticipate that it will be within that. Again, whether that happens is not my decision, and there will be funding decisions to be made. However, we can certainly deliver that programme, and we think that it is an important one.

The Convener: Martin Bignell, the time has come when you get to answer some questions. However, before we go to questions, do you want to clarify something on the grants that are available for rail freight?

Martin Bignell (Rail Freight Group): Yes, convener, and thank you, committee. You might have noticed some comments in the committee papers about the available grants—in particular, the freight facilities grant and the mode shift revenue support grant. This financial year, there is

money in the pot in the Scottish budget for the freight facilities grant. The document suggests that the mode shift revenue support grant is also available. Technically, it is a UK Government scheme. It does exist, but it is not currently funded in Scotland. That budget line was taken out of the budget last year and this year.

The Convener: In fairness, Martin, it was in the budget, was it not? It was about £750,000.

Martin Bignell: Yes, it was. It ran at about £700,000 a year.

The Convener: It was in the budget last year, but it is not in the budget this year. Thank you for covering that. I think that Sarah Boyack has some questions on that.

Martin Bignell: Sorry, convener, but it was not in the budget last year, either.

The Convener: Oh, sorry. Yes—it was in the budget the year before, so it is two years now that it has been out.

Sarah Boyack: My question follows on quite well, because it is about how we invest in the new technologies for our rail networks—whether in hydrogen or electrification—and the barriers that we need to overcome. That definitely came up from the Rail Freight Group when it came into the Parliament just a few weeks ago to talk about how we join up the infrastructure, ferries and rail, and how we enable the sector to make better use of our railways. Strategically, the central belt to Inverness and the port of Cairnryan were mentioned. There are blockages right across the country where we need investment in the opportunities to decarbonise our transport and take a lot of heavy goods vehicles off very busy roads, which would be good for a number of reasons. Martin, do you want to come back in on that issue?

Martin Bignell: Thanks for the question. There are a couple of points in there. Ultimately, the use of decarbonised traction is a commercial decision for individual freight operating companies. Some of them operate diesel traction only, some operate a mix of diesel and electric traction, and some companies are investing in what they call bimode or trimode traction—you will start to see that on the network later this year and into next year—which is, in effect, an electric battery and, in some cases, a diesel engine, as well, to allow freight operators to operate services that are under the wires. Quite often, origins and destinations are not on routes and corridors that are wired, so I am very pleased to hear about rolling electrification, which will give operators the confidence to invest in electric traction and decarbonised traction.

On infrastructure, one thing that would really help with the strategic investment that you spoke

about is an industrial strategy on the production of sustainable aviation fuel and hydrogen, carbon capture and different industrial investments, not least on Grangemouth and what might be done there. The Scottish Government obviously has thoughts about that. Our comments at the session that you referred to linked to the fact that, to get the best out of those opportunities, you have to look beyond the isolated location of a plant or facility and what investment might achieve, and to look more broadly at how that plant or facility might be served by transport.

Some of those commodities will be fairly singular in their point of consumption, or their destinations might be widespread and they might be quite high volume and be suited to rail transport. Some might be hazardous products. In thinking about how you invest in the industrial architecture—you might include the green freeports in that—can you translate the aspirations for those locations into the connecting infrastructure as well? That might involve looking at the plans for upgrading the infrastructure and for creating gauge cleared routes, and it might involve looking at the electrification of routes to some of those locations. Then, when they are developed, there is a much greater opportunity for our sector, which is obviously completely commercial and private sector led, being able to put in place commercially viable services to support those investments.

Sarah Boyack: How do we actually make that strategic investment happen? It is needed right across the country—north-south up to the Highlands, and linking into ferries—so how do we make it happen so that there is commercial investment and we get more use of our railways for freight, which would be a win-win all round?

Martin Bignell: It comes down to having more of a high-level strategy, because the issue cuts across the transport plans in Scotland, land use planning, industrial policy and perhaps port policy, and involves quite long-term thinking. Some of those investments, whether they are in the infrastructure or at the investment locations, are, by definition, fairly long term—they are investments over 10, 20 or 30 years. Our sector operates in a world that is very much demand driven and responds to commercial needs in a much shorter timeframe, so it is quite difficult for the freight sector to take the approach that there might be with passenger trains, where you can design a service set around the rolling stock, a piece of infrastructure and a plan to create a service group. Instead, we almost have to say, “This is the destination where we want to get to. To enable that to happen we need to have a corridor that has the capability, the gauge, and perhaps the electrification”. If all of those things are in place, when it comes to the customers of

these locations engaging with the transport solutions, freight operators are in a much better position to configure services that are ultimately commercially viable and are competitive with what is inevitably a road-based alternative. However, that happens in a much shorter timeframe.

Sarah Boyack: Are there round tables or intergovernmental dialogues on the go? The cross-party discussion that we had was really supportive of the freight rail industry, but it felt as though there was a long list of things that need to happen strategically and in different locations?

Martin Bignell: That is certainly something that we need to work a little harder at. The infrastructure and the long-term planning are very much in the gift of the Government and relate to what it wants to do. We have quite a close relationship with colleagues at Network Rail and we work very collaboratively with Transport Scotland. In some ways, the projects that you are talking about sit even higher than that because, by their nature, they involve taking a very long-term view of Scotland's industrial strategy and working down from there.

Some of the locations are fixed: if you think about ports, they are not going to move—they will always be in that place. By and large, similarly, we all live in locations that are not going to move. There are some fixed points in there, so the question is how we join that up with a wider strategy over the long term.

Sarah Boyack: Does anyone else have a view on that?

Liam Sumpter: I will offer a bit of a view. We are really lucky in Scotland, because Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government have been so supportive of rail and, in particular, of rail freight. My five-year control period settlement includes a series of 87 deliverables in the high-level output specification. Many of those refer directly to freight, so I am charged with improvements that relate to infrastructure that benefits passenger operations but also freight operations. We have a freight growth target, a freight performance target and various other measures within our plan that require us to work closely with the freight industry to help develop the opportunities for freight across Scotland.

We have a dedicated freight team, and we are really integral in those discussions with the freight community, whether they are with the freight operators themselves, the Rail Freight Group or, indeed, potential end-use customers. There is a really clear focus from Transport Scotland that flows all the way through to us. We work very closely with the freight industry to make these things happen.

Ultimately, there is a certain amount of money that is available to improve the infrastructure, and it is up to the Government to choose its priorities. We can provide really good options, such as improving journey time or improving connectivity, which can help the freight industry to make decisions based on an improved infrastructure in which it can have confidence.

Sarah Boyack: Have you got a summary of that list of proposals for where infrastructure will be changed and improved? That would be useful for the committee to see what is happening strategically, particularly given Martin Bignell's comments about the need for a link to the industrial strategy. When you are doing innovative work on things such as hydrogen fuel cells, we would like to know how you join up the dots on all of it so that we can see what will happen next.

Liam Sumpter: Yes, I am sure that we have something that you might find interesting that we can share after the committee meeting. We have various strategies in this space, so we will pick something and send it to you.

Sarah Boyack: That would link in quite nicely to the climate update, which will happen next month. I very much appreciate that. Thank you.

The Convener: I have a couple of quick questions. Martin Bignell, you talked about the modal shift grant that had been lost. I think that it was £700,000-odd, but I cannot remember the exact figure. Was that a significant loss and could you quantify it?

Martin Bignell: It was significant in its immediate impact 12 or 18 months ago, when it was first announced that it would be cut, because as a revenue support grant, it supported traffic that is running today. That is primarily intermodal traffic, which is about 60 per cent of Scottish traffic, and about 70 to 80 per cent of which is cross-border traffic, so it is very long-distance traffic. It has quite a large bearing on the net tonne kilometres that the industry likes to measure. I suggest that it also has a bearing on Liam Sumpter's targets for freight growth because it makes up quite a proportion of that.

When that support mechanism was taken away or not funded within Scotland—it still exists south of the border—some of those flows veered towards being less commercially viable. In the intermodal sector in particular, the commodity is very transferable: it is not like a train full of aggregates—you could put a container on the back of a truck tomorrow. Therefore, you lose those flows quite easily.

12:15

The economics started to flow, and it is quite interesting to see that, in the past 12 months or so, although there has been an increase in intermodal traffic across the UK, the maritime intermodal traffic up to Scotland has decreased. I cannot tell you whether that is a direct consequence of losing that grant support north of the border, but we have definitely seen a divergence between what is happening here and what is happening in other parts of the UK.

The Convener: I think that what you are saying is that it will have resulted in more lorries on the road carrying freight and that it would have reduced the amount of freight on trains.

Martin Bignell: Yes, it probably has. I could not pin it down exactly. We are in a dynamic market and lots of things happen. We are at the mercy of the pricing of road haulage and so on, so it is always a bit variable, but certainly it is difficult to think that it has not had an impact, if I can put it that way.

The Convener: One of the things about freight trains is making sure that they leave on time—that is an area that we heard about—and that they are fully laden when they go. My understanding—I might have got this wrong and you can tell me if I have—is that a container going on a train can travel up fully laden at 48 tonnes. Is that right?

Martin Bignell: It can travel at 44 tonnes—well, the container weight—

The Convener: I am not talking about the weight that is allowed on the road because I am going to come to that. I am asking what weight can travel on the train because I thought that there was a proposed scheme to allow containers to be fully laden on trains and that they would then be transferred for a short distance to a dispersal terminal so that they could be broken down and then pushed out at a lower level. I seem to remember that it was 48 tonnes for 48 miles.

Martin Bignell: That is a proposal; it is not a legal limit. The road legal limit is 44 tonnes.

The Convener: I understand that.

Martin Bignell: The weight of the container on the train, if it is going to go on the public road at the other end, will be kept to that limit.

The Convener: Sure, but if the train is to be fully laden and carrying as much freight as possible, you want to get in as much as you can, and if there is a short transfer on the road, surely it would help if the limit was increased from 44 tonnes to a slightly greater tonnage to allow the freight to get to a terminal. I am thinking about people across Scotland who want to move their

stuff on rail rather than road. Would you support that principle?

Martin Bignell: It is not something that is supported by all of our members, although I know that it is supported by several of them. Ultimately, that is a road regulations issue and it is a national decision.

The Convener: Okay. I just like to see everything running at full capacity rather than not running at full capacity and that includes the trains because it means that I—and everyone else—meet fewer lorries on the road.

Martin Bignell: Weight is one thing, but cube is another. The things that we consume are often fairly lightweight goods, so it is sometimes about not the weight but the volume. That is why you see a lot of 45-foot containers and even the 50-foot containers that operate only within the UK—I saw one yesterday. That maximises the length and the cube within the container, so that you can get more pallets in it.

The Convener: That is another dimension to add to it. Kevin, do you want to ask a supplementary question?

Kevin Stewart: My question is for Liam Sumpter but with a wee supplementary for Martin Bignell. It is about the investment in rail freight facilities. In my opinion, which is shared by many, Raiths Farm, to the north of Aberdeen is a white elephant. A lot of that investment came from planning gain—planning consents. How do we ensure that future investments to enhance rail freight facilities, whether using public money or moneys that come from elsewhere, are the right ones? How do we engage with the rail freight industry?

My supplementary question for Martin Bignell is: do you feel engaged and listened to?

Liam Sumpter: Thank you for the question. In the past five to 10 years, Network Rail has got a lot closer to the freight industry. We have not always demonstrated that care for the industry, but we absolutely do now. We work very closely with the freight industry, as I have already set out, and with Transport Scotland. That is why so many items in the high-level output specification refer directly to freight, because that encourages us—not that we need encouraging; it encourages us further—to work with freight. The decisions about what we should do are generally taken by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, and we will fulfil the obligations that it requires of us in respect of delivery.

A lot of the work that goes into that is done by my strategy team talking to colleagues in the freight industry and eventual end users. We make sure that the business cases that we put together

are sufficiently robust so that we do not see that transition into white elephant status. Once something has been built it is for the freight industry to work with us to make sure that we can grow it, the proof of concept is strong enough and we can deliver a sufficiently reliable railway experience for those users so that they can have confidence that the product will get to where they want it to get to on time. There is a variety of different things there. Martin Bignell might want to add to that.

Kevin Stewart: Martin Bignell, do you feel engaged and listened to?

The Convener: Please be brief.

Martin Bignell: Yes, we do—right at the end of the session. We are improving, although we are always at the back of the agenda, which is quite humorous in a way.

We have seen a marked improvement within Transport Scotland, Network Rail Scotland and Network Rail more broadly across the UK, particularly with the freight growth target starting to come in. That has aligned incentives and interests, and placed obligations on the infrastructure provider to consider us and what our needs are.

That also reflects on how passenger services are tackled in Scotland. We are quite fortunate here that there is a willingness to tweak passenger timetables to create paths for freight and so on. That is the net result of some of the targets. In the context of Government policy and how it influences Network Rail, which helps us, it is those mechanisms that really help.

The Convener: I have three or four quickfire questions that are going to be directed at one person each, I hope. We are really short of time, so I ask everyone to be as succinct as possible in their questions and answers. Michael Matheson, you have the first one.

Michael Matheson: I want to return to the issue of new technologies for decarbonising the rail network, but particularly on the passenger side. Large parts of the rail network are not electrified and are unlikely to be electrified in the next couple of decades. What approach is ScotRail taking to identify other technologies that could be deployed that would help to reduce the carbon output of existing diesel sets? How are you going about achieving that in a way that helps to deliver economic benefit to Scotland through job creation and the development of technology in Scotland?

The Convener: Linked to that question—I did not know that that was going to be the question—Bob Doris has a question specifically on a type of decarbonisation. Could you just throw that into the mix as well?

Bob Doris: The deputy convener has raised a very important question. This is for Joanne Maguire to comment on, if she is able to. Earlier on I mentioned that it was clear that not all parts of Scotland's rural network will be electrified but it must all be decarbonised. I also made the point that in my part of the world, if a line is not on the list for electrification, questions are asked about the long-term future for that line. I specifically mentioned the Maryhill line—Glasgow through to Anniesland. I have had repeated commitments that it is core and of value to ScotRail. There are also other technologies out there, including hydrogen fuel and battery electric.

I would like something on the record from ScotRail today to say that just because every part of the rail network is not electrified does not mean that it is not of equal value for passengers, including passengers in my constituency of Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn.

The Convener: There you are, Joanne Maguire. A very quick answer, with some leeway.

Joanne Maguire: I will take the challenge. On decarbonisation and our fleets, over the next 15 years, around two thirds of our fleets will need to be replaced as they will no longer be suitable for use. A great example of the work that we have done in terms of decarbonising Scotland's railway and replacing a fleet is the joint work that was done between ScotRail and Network Rail in order to build the business case for the replacement of the intercity fleets, which, when the new fleet is procured, will improve not just intercity routes but the Borders and Fife routes, which are the two other main diesel routes.

We are exploring other technologies, some of which are very new. We are conscious that we are spending significant amounts of public money, and we are making 30-year decisions, because that is the likely lifespan of any new fleet. We are looking at hybrid trains. A bit like a hybrid car, there might be hybrid options where parts of the journey are under electric wires and parts in areas that cannot be electrified would be battery operated.

I am trying to be succinct. Coming back to jobs, we are looking at opportunities to set up contracts to ensure that, for example, the maintenance of any new fleet remains with ScotRail and would not be outsourced. That is one of the ways in which we are ensuring that we are keeping jobs related to the fleet within Scotland. I do not know whether you want me to enlarge on it. I am conscious of time, convener.

Michael Matheson: I would come back on that. I understand what you are saying about the potential for battery electric, but that will only take you so far. You will still have to use diesel. What are you doing to look at reducing the carbon

output from any units that you have in the future that are using diesel? Are you doing that in a way that can help to create economic activity here in Scotland?

Joanne Maguire: A significant part of the current on-going procurement process takes into account the opportunity to reduce the significant diesel emissions that we have from our current intercity fleet. That will be a key part of the decision-making around procuring any replacement fleets.

On jobs in Scotland, ultimately policy decisions are led by Transport Scotland. We will work with Transport Scotland and we have had a clear message from it about how we can create jobs in Scotland. However, we do not have a definitive answer on it just now.

The Convener: Mark, do you have a question for Graham Kelly?

Mark Ruskell: Yes. I also have one for Joanne Maguire and Liam Sumpter, too.

The Convener: Well, we will see.

Mark Ruskell: Graham Kelly, I just wanted to ask you about the extent to which Caledonian Sleeper is going after the short-haul aviation sector market. If you are, what changes are you looking to make around procurement of carriages, couchettes or a different offering, or does the offering that you have work fine as a business model?

Graham Kelly: Thank you for the question. Naturally, one of our competitors is the short-term aviation market and we want to show the advantages of using the sleeper service as a viable alternative to that. In our more recent marketing campaigns, we have focused on driving the unique selling points that we offer by moving away from just the train journey itself towards the wider benefit of using the sleeper: the service is taking you from city to city; we are not requiring you to get up very early in the morning to go and get one of those horrible red-eye flights; and we are not making you take a hotel room the night before you need to be in the city centre of either London or cities in Scotland. There is a real focus around how we promote the benefits of our service.

Naturally, we are thinking about what may come next and how we could grow our service. We are at the very early stages of that. However, where we have an opportunity and where we are able to gain support and funding from the Government, we would be delighted to look at how we can expand the service and at what is the right product for taking up any more of the gap in the market.

Mark Ruskell: Joanne Maguire and Liam Sumpter, you will be aware that there are strong

business cases that are building up across Scotland that are outside of the control period for investment in reopened stations and, in some cases, reopened halts, including Newburgh. Joanne Maguire, does reopening these rail halts and stations provide a long-term revenue opportunity for ScotRail?

Liam Sumpter, do you think there is the capacity within the sector to develop that supply chain and pick up some of the smaller opportunities that exist beyond the control period?

The Convener: Sorry—well done, Mark Ruskell, for rolling two questions out to two different people. I ask you to be very brief, because I am conscious that we have other things to deal with and it has been quite a long session.

Joanne Maguire: No problem, convener.

We are always looking for new revenue opportunities, but there is a balancing act with any impact that that might have on journey time. Where we have commuter-led lines, we are working with lots of local transport partnerships that are building the cases for reopening stations and lines or creating new ones. Yes, any revenue opportunities are welcomed by ScotRail but, as I say, there is a broader decision to be made. That was my attempt to be succinct.

12:30

Liam Sumpter: I will try to be equally succinct. Yes, we have a really good relationship with the supply chain, and we have developed some great opportunities in that space. We work very closely with any interested parties who want to develop the railway and new stations. I was recently at Rangers Football Club to talk about the possibility of having a station at its location. We are really open to it. If the funding comes, we can find the best ways of doing it. We just need the money and then we can deliver it.

Mark Ruskell: Thank you.

The Convener: Douglas Lumsden, please put your question not to two people but to one person.

Douglas Lumsden: It is just for Graham Kelly. When I look at the sleeper service between Aberdeen and London for next month, there is hardly any availability at all. You spoke about growing the service. What do you actually mean by that? What would that mean for that connection? Would it mean more trains or longer trains? What are you talking about?

Graham Kelly: From the Caledonian Sleeper point of view, we are currently constrained by the length of platforms. Just now, we are the longest passenger service operating in the UK and the platforms in the stations that we operate within

would need to become longer for us to make the current services longer. What does that mean in our heads? Where do our thoughts go? Our thoughts are around what more services would look like, what that would bring, what that would mean in terms of what we do with the existing set of rolling stock and what any potentially new rolling stock would offer in supplementing key routes to allow us to maintain the overall length of the train but be able to provide more capacity where there is demand for it.

The Convener: That was your one question, Douglas Lumsden, and we avoided getting on to zonal pricing or flexible pricing when there is high demand. I am sorry that we did not get there.

Michael Matheson: Dynamic pricing.

The Convener: Dynamic pricing—I could not get the word out. Thank you, deputy convener.

We have come to the end of our session. Thank you all very much for giving evidence. I am sorry, Martin Bignell, to have kept you waiting to the end and, Graham Kelly, only to give you a small chance to come in at the end, having had a bit earlier.

12:32

Meeting continued in private until 12:52.

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