



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 8 January 2020

Session 5



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RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Hugh Gillies (Transport Scotland)

Jim Grieve (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership)

Alison Irvine (Transport Scotland)

Ewan Kennedy (City of Edinburgh Council)

John Mitchell (Fife Council)

Douglas Robertson (Stagecoach)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament
Rural Economy and Connectivity
Committee

Wednesday 8 January 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]

Decision on Taking Business in
Private

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning, and welcome to the committee's first meeting in 2020. Happy new year. I ask everyone to ensure that their mobile phones are on silent.

Agenda item 1 is to decide whether to take in private agenda item 3, which is on the committee's future work programme. Do members agree to do so?

Members indicated agreement.

Queensferry Crossing (Public
Transport Strategy)

10:02

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is an evidence session on the effectiveness of the Queensferry crossing public transport strategy. I welcome John Mitchell, service manager for sustainable transport and parking in Fife Council; Jim Grieve, partnership director in the south east of Scotland transport partnership, or SEStran; Douglas Robertson, managing director of Stagecoach East Scotland; Alison Irvine, director of transport strategy and analysis in Transport Scotland; Hugh Gillies, director of roads in Transport Scotland; and Ewan Kennedy, transport policy and planning manager in the City of Edinburgh Council.

Alison Irvine will give a brief opening statement. Do not worry about pushing buttons, as the sound is controlled by others. If you push the button, you will turn the sound off, which is not a good thing.

Alison Irvine (Transport Scotland): Thank you for inviting us here today.

The Forth replacement crossing project included a managed crossing strategy to make use of the existing bridge and the new bridge. The supporting public transport strategy was developed for the existing bridge. It created a dedicated public transport corridor for buses, taxis, pedestrians and cyclists, and demonstrated our commitment to sustainable transport.

Of the 19 interventions that were identified in the public transport strategy, nine have been delivered and have contributed to a successfully operating public transport corridor. Demand for bus and park-and-ride services is increasing, and journey times for public transport have improved.

The Scottish Government has made significant investment in the interventions. The fact that not all of the interventions have been implemented is not a failure. The strategy sets out short, medium and long-term interventions, and there is a clear route for those to be progressed or considered further, as appropriate.

We continue to work in partnership. Transport Scotland established the Forth bridges forum to ensure that local stakeholders remain at the core of the management and operation of the Forth bridges. The forum continues to meet quarterly, and one of its objectives is to develop and support schemes and measures to encourage and increase active and public transport across the Forth. The forum is a place for partners to come together to discuss progress and prioritisation of interventions.

We will use our evaluation of the Queensferry crossing project to aid consideration of the public transport interventions that have not yet been progressed or delivered, and will determine whether they are still appropriate or whether we should consider something different.

Our process for identifying future investment involves the second strategic transport projects review, which will make recommendations to ministers for future transport investment priorities over the next two decades to support the vision of the new national transport strategy.

The Convener: Thank you, Alison.

We have quite a big panel today. If anyone wants to make a contribution, they should catch my eye or the eye of the questioner, and we will bring them in. The big secret is not to look away once you start speaking, because there may come a time when I need to attract your attention in order to ask you to allow someone else to come in. The other thing that I always tell people is that, if you all look away at the same time when a question is asked because no one wants to answer it, the last person to look away will be the person who is called.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Good morning. Before I ask my substantive question, I would like to ask the Transport Scotland officials a question that is based on the statement that we have just heard.

This committee has maintained—as the predecessor committee did—a keen interest in the project that we are discussing today, which is a significant one. Throughout that period, Transport Scotland has followed a consistent line, which is this:

“Any increase in demand to cross the Forth was to be met by public transport.”

That has not happened. Instead, there have been 1 million more car journeys. What has gone wrong with that headline approach that you were taking?

Alison Irvine: As you know, the Queensferry crossing does not have any additional capacity compared with the Forth road bridge—both have two lanes, and so on. However, the Queensferry crossing is more reliable and resilient, and that has, obviously, helped to improve the efficiency of that corridor.

As you have set out, the project was a replacement for traffic using the Forth road bridge, as set out in the Forth Crossing Act 2011, and we have always had that focus on promoting public transport across that corridor, in line with the ambitions that are set out in the new national transport strategy, which emphasises the need to reduce the need to travel unsustainably, in order to meet our objectives on climate change and so

on. Very early findings at this stage of the one-year-after project indicate that we are already making progress towards the transport planning objectives that we have set and, as I said earlier, we are seeing early signs that the public transport strategy is encouraging more people to travel by sustainable modes.

The motorway has not yet been in full operation for two calendar years, and it is important that we do not leap to conclusions about the rate of traffic growth. However, obviously, the data that you mentioned—which was in the press just before Christmas and compares the figures for 2014 with those for 2017-18—is correct, and that is not the direction that we would like the figures to go in. That said, the emerging data highlights the fact that the current levels of flow on the crossing are less than were forecast in the “Design Manual for Roads and Bridges” stage 3 indications. Obviously, the evaluation work that we will do on the data—given the scale of the project, there is quite a lot of that, as you can imagine—will give us a bit more of an understanding of what is behind the changes in the traffic flow.

John Finnie: I am grateful for your acknowledgement that the figure of 1 million extra car journeys is accurate. However, I note that you said that flows were less than anticipated. Does that mean that, potentially, there could have been more than 1 million extra car journeys? That would certainly not help with climate targets.

Alison Irvine: The appraisal work that supported the progress of the scheme through the various parliamentary acts—the environmental statements and so on—was based on the traffic demand forecasting that was available at the time. Although the levels that we have information about just now do not indicate that we are moving in the direction of travel that we want to move in, they are still less than was forecast. There could be a number of reasons for that, and we will explore that issue as part of the evaluation.

John Finnie: I am sorry, but that does not make sense. Either I am misunderstanding you or you are not making yourself clear enough. As I said earlier, Transport Scotland said:

“Any increase in demand to cross the Forth was to be met by public transport.”

However, if the current levels are less than projected, that means that you were expecting there to be more than 1 million extra car journeys.

Alison Irvine: The objective of the public transport strategy was to maintain at 2006 levels the level of service of operations across the Forth. In the appraisal work that was undertaken to support the scheme as it went through its various parliamentary processes, we made a forecast of

the traffic flows. The scheme was designed as far as possible to be able to accommodate that.

The Convener: Other members want to come in, Mr Finnie.

John Finnie: I am conscious that I have strayed into Richard Lyle's territory.

The Convener: I am sure that you can come to a compromise on that later. A few members want to come in on that issue, so I will bring them in now.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is accepted that the new bridge is less likely to be shut due to weather. I understand that the number of vehicles crossing is in broad terms 60,000 a day. Therefore, 1 million extra vehicles could equate to there being 15 days when the new bridge was open but the old bridge might not have been, because 15 times 60,000 is about a million. Has the number of vehicles that cross each day risen, or is the figure of 1 million extra vehicles attributable to the fact that the new bridge is operational for more days than the old one? Alternatively, is it a subtle combination of both?

The Convener: I am conscious that Stewart Stevenson may be referring to his previous plans and giving you the answer, Alison, but do you want to come back in on that?

Alison Irvine: As Mr Stevenson outlined, it is quite complex. At this point in the evaluation, we are only at the stage of considering the information that we have, so I do not want to prejudge anything or give a definitive response—I apologise for that. However, as Mr Stevenson has pointed out, there is increased resilience of the route, and there is an increase in public transport flows across the Forth road bridge. Hand in hand, those two things are encouraging. That is not to say that the increases in flows across the Queensferry crossing or throughout our transport network are necessarily the direction that we want.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): My understanding is that at least two large housing estates have been built on the north side of the Forth—one in Dunfermline and one in Kirkcaldy—and that most of the residents of those areas are commuters across the Forth. When we were looking to make more use of public transport, were we aware of those huge increases in house building on that side of the Forth and that they would contribute to an increase in car and public transport usage?

Alison Irvine: Yes. The transport models that were used at the time to develop the rationale for the project will have included the development plans that were relevant at the time. I cannot give you the specifics, but my understanding is that that would have included the development around

Dunfermline and the ones in West Lothian and west Edinburgh. The models were based on the best information that we had.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I want to press you on the details. We are talking about conjecture that has been reported in the media; it is probably better to hear straight from you. Are we talking about additional cars making the crossing or just additional journeys made by the same number of cars? From one of your earlier answers, it sounds as though you always knew that there would be more traffic crossing the Forth as a result of the new bridge but, actually, in the first year, there was less than you expected. It would be helpful if you could quantify that and give some numbers.

Alison Irvine: I do not have that level of detail or a breakdown of whether it is cars or heavy goods vehicles. The numbers that we have are vehicle based. The statistics use the average annual daily traffic flows, and those are the figures on which the press article quantified the figure of 1 million extra vehicles.

Jamie Greene: I am sorry to press you on this but, in essence, you always knew that there would be a higher flow across the Forth, but it is turning out to be less than you thought.

Alison Irvine: The traffic demand predictions that were made when the legislation was introduced forecast an increase in demand. The Forth road bridge had two lanes and the Queensferry crossing has two lanes and a hard shoulder, so the same amount of capacity is available. However, the forecasts take into account the changes in demand that are likely to occur as a result of economic growth, development and so on.

10:15

The Convener: My understanding is that the Queensferry crossing has two lanes and a hard shoulder and that the hard shoulder could be used for traffic flows at times of peak traffic. Is that the way that it was designed?

Alison Irvine: As far as I am aware, the Forth Crossing Act 2011 is not predicated on the hard shoulders being used for running traffic. There are two lanes of running traffic on the Queensferry crossing and two lanes on the Forth road bridge.

The Convener: Are you saying that the hard shoulder on the Queensferry crossing will not be used to alleviate traffic problems unless there are road works?

Alison Irvine: That is certainly the intention.

The Convener: Okay. Fine. I understand that. That may be an interesting point for people to pick up on.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): In light of the comments that have already been made, what have been the challenges and benefits for cross-Forth travel as a result of the opening of the Queensferry crossing and the use of the Forth road bridge for active and sustainable travel? What impact have those changes had on your individual organisations? Maybe Douglas Robertson from Stagecoach and others can answer that question.

The Convener: This is a chance to give Alison Irvine a break.

Douglas Robertson (Stagecoach): Stagecoach operates a wide network of cross-Forth bus services, which covers many towns in Fife and Perth. The buses go to Edinburgh city centre, Edinburgh airport and West Lothian and through the M8 corridor into Glasgow. In the first full financial year from the opening of the Forth road bridge as a public transport corridor, we saw a 12 per cent growth in passenger numbers on those services, which equated to 460,000 additional passenger journeys. In the second year to date, we have seen further growth of 14 per cent, which means an additional 270,000 passenger journeys. In the past quarter, growth in demand has risen to 17 per cent. We are therefore seeing growth in demand for services, and that growth is accelerating over time.

We introduced service improvements before the opening of the Queensferry crossing in anticipation of an increase in demand. That resulted in our increasing the number of journeys across the Forth by 14 per cent. In July 2019, we increased service provision further, and we have increased provision since then. There has been a 58 per cent increase in the number of journeys across the Forth since the opening of the Queensferry crossing.

We have heavily invested in the frequency of services. We have the park-and-ride sites at Halbeath and Ferrytoll and the wider network across Fife. Those services now offer departures every four minutes at peak times and every five minutes at off-peak times from Ferrytoll into Edinburgh city centre, and there has been an improvement in the frequency of services to Edinburgh airport.

We are therefore seeing a big step change in the demand for cross-Forth services. In the year before the Queensferry crossing opened, we carried 4.5 million passengers a year across the Forth. Based on current trends in the movement of passengers, it is likely that next year we will carry 6 million passengers across the Forth.

It has been a fantastic success story from our side, because we have improved the services that we offer. We have not necessarily cut journey times drastically, but we now have much more consistency in service provision, because crossing the Forth road bridge in general traffic caused our longest delays. Previously, from one day to the next, there could be differences of 30 minutes in journey times, but journey times are much more consistent now. That, along with all the other measures that are in place, has resulted in thriving demand for public transport. Demand on the Queensferry crossing has increased, but the demand for public transport is also going up, including for our bus services.

Richard Lyle: The number of passengers has gone up from 4.5 million, and you project that the number will be 6 million. You are therefore helping to reduce the number of cars crossing the Forth.

Douglas Robertson: Our understanding is that the modal shift is not within public transport, but from private cars to public transport.

The Convener: Do John Mitchell and Ewan Kennedy want to come in on that point? It must impact on you, as well.

John Mitchell (Fife Council): From a Fife perspective, we have had success with the Halbeath and Ferrytoll park and rides, with the use of those facilities increasing. On active travel, from a cycling point of view, crossing the Forth road bridge from Fife was a growth area. We do not have the exact details on that with the road layout changing—that information is with Transport Scotland—but active travel from Fife has certainly been growing.

Ewan Kennedy (City of Edinburgh Council): I will add to rather than repeat what has been said. In the city of Edinburgh, we are keen to explore the role of active travel in an integrated sense. The connectivity is there for a cycle trip from Fife into Edinburgh, but that is a lengthy trip, and it will not necessarily be attractive to everybody. We are keen—we are discussing this, particularly through STPR2—to think about the role that active travel can play in both parts of that end-to-end trip. By that, I mean the combination of someone perhaps cycling to a park and ride or a bus station and using public transport for an element of the trip. If the trip was into Edinburgh city centre, for example, options for people to transport their bikes with them could be considered. Such things definitely happen elsewhere in the world.

Likewise, from a walking perspective, we are thinking about the first mile, which is doable by foot—that is a 20-minute-type journey—and the integration of the pedestrian and cycling networks around key nodes, and fully utilising the existing crossing for such integrated trips and for cyclists

who are capable of and keen on taking the end-to-end trip. It is important to think of the end-to-end trip in the round and the different ways in which it can be undertaken.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I want to follow on from what Douglas Robertson said. I was going to ask this question later, but it fits neatly here. You said that bus passenger numbers have gone up from 4.5 million and are projected to reach 6 million. Can you tell us what the capacity is for bus transport across the Forth? What would you like to achieve?

Douglas Robertson: There is capacity for growth in the vehicles that we have in the existing network. For the future, we are looking towards not all the destinations being in the city centre. We are working on the CAV Forth project, which is on connected and autonomous vehicles and will provide a link between Ferrytoll and the west of Edinburgh. The important thing is that it will be a brand-new public transport link. If we ignore the autonomous part for now, it will be additional capacity and will create public transport links that do not exist now.

There is almost a never-ending capacity for public transport, because of the range of destinations. There is certainly ample capacity to increase public transport, even on the core Fife to Edinburgh network as it stands. We will potentially face an issue when facilities such as park and rides reach capacity. How will we provide additional capacity in park-and-ride sites or change the travel patterns? Last year, we tried to push demand back from park and rides to towns such as Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes. Instead of people driving to Halbeath or Ferrytoll, we provide more frequent services from the town centres. We are managing capacity issues at the park and rides in that way. We would like more people to be picked up from towns rather than a motorway park and ride.

Mike Rumbles: That sounds like a good-news story for bus travel because, in the rest of Scotland, bus patronage is falling. It sounds to me that there is a real opportunity to increase it even further. What could be done to publicise the efforts that bus companies are making to increase bus transport? Are those efforts as well publicised as you would want?

The Convener: Before Douglas answers that, I will say that some members want to talk specifically about park-and-ride opportunities. By all means we can talk about general publicity now, but I would like to focus on park and ride later in the session.

Douglas Robertson: We are very clued up on the fact that we need to market the services. Our budget this year for marketing the express

services is about £0.25 million, and that is just for Stagecoach in Scotland. That marketing has been key to driving some of the increase in demand, as there is a better understanding of what services are on offer.

Mike Rumbles is right that it is a fantastic good-news story for the bus industry in Scotland that we can generate that level of increase in demand, as part of a package of measures that improve bus services as a whole. Maybe we have not shouted about that as loudly as we can do, because we have just made the improvements and this year we want to see how they feed in. However, we will be shouting about it more.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): My question is for Douglas Robertson, too. You spoke about travel times on the buses being much more consistent and said that you see less difference between bus travel times on a daily basis. At peak times, when the Queensferry crossing is pretty congested and your buses have a clear run across the old bridge, how do travel times on the bus compare to those of somebody in a private car? Have you done any work on that? Can you highlight that you compete very well on travel times, or am I assuming too much?

Douglas Robertson: I must admit that we have not done that. We have considered doing that work and then marketing on the basis of the comparison times, but we have not done it to date.

Alison Irvine: To answer that specific point, journey time between different origins and destinations across the Forth will be part of our evaluation work. I do not have the figures in detail now but, as Peter Chapman alluded to, the difference in time that is offered by use of the public transport corridor versus being in car traffic on the Queensferry crossing means that there is a significant benefit to bus. That is exactly what we wanted to achieve by designing the bus priority measures that have been put in place.

Peter Chapman: If that is the case, it is a huge selling point to get more folk on to the bus. If you can reliably say, "We can get you into central Edinburgh on the bus quicker than you will get there in your private car," that is a huge point to sell the bus.

The Convener: I was just thinking that, in peak times, there will be different answers to that question. When everyone is travelling into Edinburgh before 9 o'clock in the morning for work, and then travelling out in the evening, I would think that it is fairly slow for buses as well as for cars, but maybe I have that wrong.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The issue of evaluations has been touched on twice. The 2018 Audit Scotland report highlighted the fact that Transport Scotland had planned to carry

out evaluations of the project at one year, three years and five years. That means that the one-year evaluation report was due to come out at the end of 2018. Why did that not happen? When can we get the more detailed evaluation that has been referred to?

The Audit Scotland report also said that Transport Scotland should set out its plans for the enhancement of cross-Forth public transport. When will we see those plans? It has been a year and a half since the Audit Scotland report called for them.

10:30

Alison Irvine: The starting point for the one-year evaluation report was February 2018, when the motorway regulations came into force. One year after that date was February 2019, so the period between those dates is the one that we are evaluating. Given the scale of the project and the information that we are seeking to analyse, and given the need to conduct primary research, our evaluation will take quite some time. We are working on it now. I anticipate that we will have full sight of the evaluation report in the spring of this year and that we will publish it as soon as possible thereafter.

The intention is that we will use the information from the evaluation report, which will be shared with the Forth bridges forum and other stakeholders, to inform any future consideration of interventions in the public transport strategy. It will also feed into STPR2. On the basis of that work, we will be able to address the Audit Scotland recommendation and to produce an updated plan for the public transport strategy for the Forth crossing.

Colin Smyth: You mentioned the Forth bridges forum, but I note that Transport Scotland previously created a body called the Forth crossing public transport working group. The committee last took evidence on the issue in November 2017. How often has that working group met since the committee's last evidence session, and what action has been taken as a result of its work? What is the difference between the working group and the forum that you have referred to?

Alison Irvine: The working group last met in October 2017, after which we all had a clearer understanding of the route for each of the recommendations that had been set out in the public transport strategy.

A number of groups now exist, including the Forth bridges forum, one of the objectives of which is to consider public transport improvements across the corridor; through the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city deal, the discussions on

which cover transport; the regional transport working groups that we have set up to support the strategic transport projects review 2; and the bus stakeholders group. A number of forums are considering transport in the round and in the vicinity of Edinburgh.

The Convener: Did I hear that right? Are you saying that the working group has not met for just over two years? Lots of other groups have met, but that one has not done anything since 2017—is that correct?

Alison Irvine: The transport working group that Mr Smyth referred to has not met, but the Forth bridges forum has continued to meet quarterly.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sorry, Colin—please continue.

Colin Smyth: It would be helpful to know what the difference is between the membership of the two groups, so you could perhaps provide that information as a follow-up, rather than today. It would be helpful to know why the working group that was set up by Transport Scotland to drive forward the public transport agenda has not met since October 2017. Is there a particular reason for that? Do you regard that group as moribund because it no longer has a purpose?

Alison Irvine: As you can imagine, we have just put in place a fairly major piece of transport infrastructure, alongside public transport corridor interventions. We need to spend some time in seeing how those perform before we rush into any further judgments on what we would do with the public transport strategy.

Information on the make-up of the Forth bridges forum is available on the website that supports its work, but I would be happy to provide the committee with more details if those would be useful.

Colin Smyth: Do you see a purpose for the working group? Will it meet again in the near future?

Alison Irvine: In the first instance, we intend to take our current evaluation work to the Forth bridges forum that has been set up. Depending on the outcome of that, we will take a view on whether we want to reconvene the working group.

The Convener: I thought that some committee members had follow-up questions but, if no one else wishes to ask one, we will move on to our next main question, which is from Angus MacDonald.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): We touched on this issue at the start of the discussion. The environmental statement that accompanied the Forth Crossing Bill predicted that it would create only limited additional greenhouse gas

emissions. In light of the increase in vehicle traffic, has any reassessment of the climate impact of the Queensferry crossing been conducted since its opening? If so, what does it show?

Alison Irvine: The environmental statement was based on forecast flows, as set out in the DMRB report that I referred to earlier. We have not seen an increase on those forecast flows, so there is no need or requirement for us to revisit that work in the environmental statement. We will obviously keep that under review, because we have a commitment to evaluate the project at one year, three years and five years. We are still collating the detail and there is quite a lot of information—it is not that we are complacent.

The Convener: John Finnie wants to come in. Angus MacDonald can come back in afterwards, if he wants.

John Finnie: Is there not a baseline figure that informed the impact assessment and all the assessments that you have spoken about? You spoke about a forecast figure. If you know what you started with and where you are now, surely you can calculate what has happened in between, albeit that we are early in the process.

Alison Irvine: I am sorry, but I did not quite catch what you said.

John Finnie: I asked about the figure for the climate impact of the previous crossing compared to that of the new one, and the combined effect now that we have the two crossings. Surely there is a baseline figure that you can work from.

Alison Irvine: There is a baseline. In the DMRB stage 3 report, the forecast flows across the crossing were compared with a do minimum option, which is a technical term and is, in effect, the baseline scenario. The environmental impact is based on the difference between the two. That work is being carried out and all the information is set out in the DMRB reports.

John Finnie: What are those reports?

Alison Irvine: All the information and the assessment of the environmental impacts are set out in the various environmental reports that were used to support the scheme as it went through the statutory processes. The current traffic flow levels have not gone over what was forecast, so there is no need as yet to revisit any of the environmental work.

John Finnie: We understood from Mr Gillies that everything is up for reassessment as a result of the Scottish Government declaring a climate emergency. Is there no re-evaluation of all the calculations that took place or the projections as a result of that?

Alison Irvine: As part of the evaluation work, we will compare what was forecast with what has happened. We will look at the detail behind it, to understand what could drive any differences, which could be a range of things to do with changes in the economy or the ways by which people travel or the times that they travel. I do not have that level of detail now, but those are examples of what we will look for in the project evaluation work that we have said that we will do at one, three and five years. For this specific project, that is the vehicle that we will use to learn lessons about how we evaluate or forecast.

John Finnie: Thank you for that answer. For the avoidance of any doubt, when do the one, three and five-year periods run from? For example, do they run from completion or the sign-off?

Alison Irvine: We have taken as the starting point the point when the motorway regulations came into force, which was February 2018. Therefore, one year after opening was in February 2019, and then we do the maths to get the three and five years after.

John Finnie: Should we expect to have something next month, then?

Alison Irvine: As I said, I expect to get sight of the completed evaluations in spring this year, and we will share that with members of the committee and publish it thereafter.

Angus MacDonald: Given that we have declared a climate emergency, should the timeline be reviewed?

Alison Irvine: There is a difference between the process of reviewing what transport interventions we might make and the process of reviewing the evaluation and performance of a project that has already been developed. The one, three and five-year time periods that are set out in well-respected evaluation guidance are right for a project that is being evaluated.

Through the strategic transport projects review, we are considering—through the lens of the new priorities that are set out in the national transport strategy—what our future investment programme should look like. As such, they are two different things.

The Convener: Although Alison Irvine does not look like she is struggling, before we move to the next question, I remind panel members just to catch my eye if they want to come in on anything. I note that a few members of the panel have not had as much chance to chip in as others.

Jamie Greene: Unfortunately, my question is probably aimed at Alison Irvine as well, so I apologise in advance.

I want to double check the timelines. John Finnie has raised interesting points. A lot of the answers that we have had have been non-specific, because we do not have all the data that we need. Although the bridge arguably opened to traffic in August 2017, according to your timeline, we are using February 2018 as the trigger point for the one, three and five-year reviews. As such, one year after opening was February 2019, which was about a year ago. Why have we not had full sight of the one-year review, a year after the one-year review period ended?

Alison Irvine: That is a reasonable question. The one-year period ended in February 2019, but we then needed to gather the data on how the network performed. Although a lot of that is automatic and involves going through the various counters that we have on the routes, a lot of it is primary research, which takes time to undertake. There are also aspects such as accident statistics, which take time to work their way through the system to give us the correct information to evaluate. It is a big project that has wide-ranging impacts, and it is only right that we take the time to consider the information that we have to ensure that it is robust, and that we present the right information so that we can learn any lessons that we might need to take on board in relation to future projects.

Jamie Greene: Will it take between 12 and 15 months to analyse the data at the end of the three and five-year review periods as well?

Alison Irvine: I expect that it will be of that order of magnitude. As we get further into the evaluation process of a project—particularly a project of such scale—we begin to look at different things. There is some fairly basic operational information in the first-year evaluation, but there is not particularly good information on the underlying structural changes that we might expect as a result of the project in relation to, for example, economic growth projections. The aspects that we focus on for the three and five-year periods will change the way in which we need to consider things.

Jamie Greene: The bridge has now been open for two years. What is your gut feeling on the performance of the bridge in relation to its meeting its objectives? Ultimately, that refers back to what the 2011 act said that the bridge should do, which is to increase not capacity, but reliability, across the Forth. Overall, is the bridge meeting its objectives, are we heading in the right direction in relation to the bridge doing what it is supposed to do, and is it providing good value for money?

Alison Irvine: Mr Gillies will answer that one.

Hugh Gillies (Transport Scotland): Now that I have a chance to speak, I will explain why we

have answered our questions in the manner that we have, and put that into the context of how Transport Scotland has presented its officials. Why has Alison Irvine been doing all the speaking today, why did Michelle Rennie give evidence during the construction period, and why am I speaking here now?

Corporately, Transport Scotland is responsible for the project on behalf of the Scottish Government. The project started with the decision to build and moved on through the design process and on into delivery and then the two-year transition period of opening and settling down. It now comes across to me in Transport Scotland, as I am the custodian of the trunk road network and am therefore responsible for the day-to-day, safe and efficient operation of the trunk road network in Scotland.

10:45

Reflecting on the bridge and its opening, clearly, there is discussion around congestion and so on. That will all be flushed through and understood better in the one-year-after report. What I can say is that the bridge has delivered against one of its primary objectives: giving resilience in terms of disruption due to adverse weather. Yesterday, for example, the Forth road bridge was closed to vehicular traffic just after 10 am and the closure did not come off until 5 am this morning, but the Queensferry crossing remained open to all traffic yesterday. There have been more than 30 occasions when high-sided vehicles would have been prohibited from going over the Forth road bridge but have been able to go over the Queensferry crossing. Wind shielding was put in to give that resilience, which was one of the Queensferry crossing's objectives, and it has delivered benefits in that sense.

Jamie Greene: The downside, as many members have articulated, is that there seem to be more cars on the roads, which is surely causing issues for you right across the trunk network. Are there any other examples of major trunk road projects in Scotland where you are seeing more vehicles than you anticipated that the new road would have to accommodate?

Alison Irvine: As you would expect, Transport Scotland does evaluations of all our transport projects, and those are routinely published on our website. What we have established with the Queensferry crossing is that, to date, the traffic flows are less than we forecast, rather than more than we forecast, although that does not step away from the fact that the traffic flows are increasing, which is not the direction that we want to achieve. We have heard from Douglas Robertson and others of the success of the public transport strategy in terms of increasing bus flows

in particular across that corridor and the increasing use of park-and-ride provision, which is what we seek to do in terms of our managed crossing strategy.

To answer Jamie Greene's question about meeting objectives, therefore, the findings that are emerging at this point in time suggest that we are en route to meeting all those objectives. I am sorry to hark back to this, but the whole purpose of the evaluation is to analyse robustly the information after one year, three years and five years to establish whether we have indeed met the objectives that were set out.

Jamie Greene: That is very helpful. It sounds like we will have a better oversight in spring this year through the one-year review, which will further inform the committee.

I have a specific question on the STPR that is relevant to public transport on the Forth crossing. Can Hugh Gillies or Alison Irvine explain why the cross-Forth public transport improvements are reliant on inclusion in the second STPR, given that the Forth crossing project itself, including its public transport elements, is included in the final report of the first STPR?

Alison Irvine: That question falls to me to answer as well. The public transport strategy has a range of measures—19 in total—that involve short-term, medium-term and long-term measures. As I said in the opening statement, nine of the interventions, which are mostly the short-term interventions, have been delivered. Of the medium-term objectives, a lot of them are in progress. I am sure that you can hear a bit more detail on them, if that is where you want to go, from Ewan Kennedy, John Mitchell and Jim Grieve.

In terms of the more strategically significant question, it is only right that we reassess where we are in terms of what we are offering through the new priorities that we have set out in the draft national transport strategy. The mechanism through which we are doing that is STPR2. The first STPR, which was published in 2008, was not a funded programme; it was a series of recommendations for ministers to consider. Those recommendations that have not been taken forward from that first STPR will be reconsidered as part of the second review.

Given the significant changes that we are seeing within transport regarding the way in which people are travelling, the way in which people perceive how they want to travel and what kind of society we want to have, it is only right that we undertake that review. We have therefore set up a mechanism through the STPR process, which includes the people who are sitting beside me at this table, in order to be able to do that.

Colin Smyth: Members will have specific questions on each of those nine projects that have not been completed. You said that, when the strategy was agreed in 2009, those projects were not funded. Is that largely why they have not been delivered?

Alison Irvine: The projects that are set out in the public transport strategy are short-term, medium-term and long-term. I am not the budget expert at the table but budgets do not go that far in advance and, to go back to the points that I made to Mr Greene earlier, it is always appropriate to review the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves before committing to any major transport intervention. That is a robust and credible way of developing our transport system.

The Convener: We will move on to the next question, which should open up the discussion to other members of the panel.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): My question is about active travel so it might be for John Mitchell. We have talked a little bit about active and sustainable travel. How do we encourage people to shift the way that they choose to get across the Forth? Does Fife Council have something in place to encourage alternatives? You have talked about park and ride already, and I believe that a park-and-ride facility in Rosyth has been proposed but it has not been started yet. Can you give us a bit of an update on that?

John Mitchell: The Rosyth park-and-ride facility has been outline designed and we are renewing planning approval through the low-emission zone funding from Transport Scotland with a view to concluding the planning and the environmental and ecological study. We are looking at land negotiations and putting it forward as part of STPR2 to source funding as part of the public transport strategy. It was part of the previous STPR and we have proposed that it should be part of the city deal, but it has not had funding as yet. We are progressing with that.

We are keen on active travel and have promoted it in Fife extensively. The focus now, particularly with Sustrans, is on segregated off-road access to all the public transport interchanges, whether it be rail or bus. It is not always easy to give people that level of assurance when using those modes, especially given the layout of our towns and their narrow streets, and so on. We have focused on providing safe, off-road routes to the park and ride interchanges. It has been successful on some routes where we have managed to secure that, and certainly on those towards the Forth crossing. There has been a 25 per cent increase of people using the routes to the Forth crossing, albeit, as Ewan Kennedy

said, it has been among the more extreme cyclists.

Personally, I wonder how we change people's mentality. We have seen behavioural change through the smarter choices, smarter places programme run by Paths for All, and we pursue that as a local authority. We are also trying to use incentives. We are talking about making a generational change from the ground up with kids at school and bikeability training and taking that mentality into the home to encourage adults to be more active. We have to provide the right infrastructure and networks so that people can access all those public transport interchanges, but equally, we all have to change our mindset about what is acceptable and how we go about our day-to-day business. It is not an easy fix.

That is a long answer to your question, but that is how we are focused on accessing rail and other public transport interchanges. We are doing a study with the local rail development fund through Transport Scotland on how we can improve access to all those key public transport interchanges, particularly for crossing to Edinburgh. The work is on-going; it is not a quick fix.

Jim Grieve (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership): I underline what John Mitchell has just said. As you know, SEStran is the custodian of the regional transport strategy. We have just started a process to rewrite that to take account of changing circumstances. The new national transport strategy, rapid economic growth in the area and the proposed low-emission zone in Edinburgh will all have an influence on the regional transport strategy.

We are also updating our regional park-and-ride strategy. As John Mitchell indicated, perhaps one of the best ways to encourage people to use active travel modes is to provide safe facilities. In the past with park and rides, we have probably focused more on car and bus or car and rail, but active travel is now very much part of our consideration. We want to ensure that we make full use of a park-and-ride site as a hub for changing mode and that we provide safe, segregated facilities. We also want to demonstrate that, very often, the quickest way to get from home to work in congested circumstances could involve changing mode. By illustrating that, we will encourage people to use alternative modes.

The Convener: Do you have a follow-up question, Emma?

Emma Harper: Yes. I know that a collaborative process needs to take place, which means that it is not just up to Fife Council or whoever. When I worked in California, the equivalent of the national health service there had a car pool office, which

gave people points for taking the bus, walking, cycling or car pooling. I used to work four 10-hour shifts instead of five eight-hour shifts. Working for four days and staying at home for a day is an example of what can be done through collaboration with employers. Is any such work being done? The big employers, such as the NHS, could incentivise people by adopting a points-based system that rewards workers for using sustainable active travel.

Jim Grieve: I can respond to that, at least to some extent. SEStran operates a car share scheme, which is called TripshareSEStran. It focuses on the bigger employers—the universities and NHS organisations. Obviously, its purpose is to encourage people to share cars. If we look ahead to a future strategy, there could be opportunities to have lanes for multiple-occupancy cars. Such facilities have been in place for a number of years and, with the climate emergency and so on, there will be much more of a focus on them.

Maureen Watt: I want to press John Mitchell on the park and rides. Halbeath and Ferrytoll are already at capacity—if people are not there early in the morning, they cannot get in. You did not put a timescale on the completion of the Rosyth park and ride. Is it not urgent that that project goes ahead? What discussions have you had with Stagecoach? Mention was made of more routes from the town centres being put on. Is that because the park and rides are full and there is no word on when the Rosyth park and ride will come on stream? Will we stop when we have the facility at Rosyth or will there be other park and rides in Fife?

John Mitchell: We have promoted the park and ride at Rosyth for some time. The funding side of it is the issue. We are liaising with Transport Scotland to seek funding through the STPR, the city deal or the Forth crossing public transport strategy. The Rosyth situation is down to funding.

I would say that the Halbeath and Ferrytoll park and rides are full from the tail end of the summer until October. The rest of the time, Halbeath is between 65 and 85 per cent full. We are working closely with Stagecoach to work out how best we can manage that. There are issues with people staying overnight, perhaps to access the airport or because they are on a longer-term business stay. That still takes traffic off the bridge. We are actively involved in considering how we can manage that in collaboration with Stagecoach.

We are not in any way behind on the Rosyth scheme; we are really focused on it. It is a great scheme that is near an industrial business opportunity. Therefore, we are very optimistic about it from a city deal perspective as well as from the perspective of people leaving Fife, and

we are keen to access that business opportunity. Our main issue with the Rosyth park and ride is the source of funding.

11:00

Douglas Robertson: We have had discussions with council officers recently about potential service provision for the site at Rosyth. It is almost definitely a much higher level of provision than would have been the case when that was initially discussed.

The changes that we have made have helped to manage the capacity and use of the park-and-ride site, but there are also bigger benefits. We know that demand to come to Edinburgh was increasing from towns such as Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy and Leven, so the enhanced service provision is meeting that demand. Park-and-ride capacity is not the overriding concern.

The period from after the school summer holidays through to the October holidays is the busiest time for the park and ride sites. More senior people use bus services to the airport and in and out of Edinburgh at that time of year, after they may have been tied up with childcare during the school summer holidays. We have managed that. By working with Fife Council, we have added additional spaces to Halbeath park and ride in recent months, so we are working closely with the council to manage demand.

Maureen Watt: My question is for Mr Kennedy. Why has there been very little progress in developing a bus priority corridor between the Forth road bridge and the key destinations in Edinburgh?

Ewan Kennedy: There are primarily two corridors of interest within the public transport strategy: the A8 corridor and the A90 corridor. Am I on the right track here?

The Convener: The right road, anyway.

Ewan Kennedy: We are looking at a combination of measures for the A8 corridor: a park and ride in West Lothian, bus priority on the A89 and bus priority on the A8. In 2015, West Lothian Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and Transport Scotland did a joint piece of work to configure what that might look like, broadly speaking. In 2016, a very comprehensive transport assessment was undertaken in west Edinburgh to consider the future of a national development site and the growth of Edinburgh airport. That was published in 2016, and it included the outputs from the 2015 study.

That piece of work became a material consideration when we were discussing the Edinburgh city region deal. As part of that deal, there was an agreement for a west Edinburgh

public transport investment project. A total of £36 million is being provided, with £20 million coming from Transport Scotland and £16 million coming from the City of Edinburgh Council. That is being taken forward under the governance of the Edinburgh city region deal that Alison Irvine referred to earlier, through the transport appraisal board.

There are three stages to the delivery of that project. We are in stage 1, which is to go into the final configuration of that core package of measures. We are about to appoint consultants to undertake that piece of work, which will develop that core project.

We are also mindful of the Scottish Government's announcement of the bus priority investment fund. In that context, we will develop an enhancement of that core package, which could form a further bid to enhance that scheme. That core package should be delivered in the next three to five years—it will probably be closer to three years. The development work on the enhanced package will be in line with the programme and timescales associated with the investment fund.

Turning to the A90 corridor, we have a range of short, medium and longer-term aspirations. We are fairly well advanced on our short-term plans, which revolve around improvements to urban traffic control systems—those are about to be implemented. In the medium term, we have identified locations along the corridor where it would be possible to reconfigure junctions and increase the opportunities for bus priority.

I am keen to emphasise to the committee that, given the scale of in-car commuting into Edinburgh and the problems that that causes, we are in the process of preparing our new city mobility plan, which will go to committee next Thursday. That has been prepared within the context of the climate emergency and the city moving to a net neutral carbon position by 2030. At the moment, as a whole, in-car commuting into the city is in the order of north of 60,000 per day—that is the journey to work, at the morning peak.

As the A90 and the other corridors come into the city and start to focus on an increasingly narrow area, the impact of congestion is hugely magnified. As we touched on earlier, the opportunity to continue to afford bus priority as we come into the city becomes increasingly difficult. We take the view that there is little more that we can do on corridor improvements beyond what has already been done and that we need to start tackling the fundamental issue of people and how they make the choice to travel from their starting point.

That is the point that I was making earlier: we need to think about the end-to-end trip and what is influencing people to choose to drive rather than take public transport or a make a journey that involves a combination of public transport and integrated active travel. How do we go about making that latter option as attractive as possible? We are thinking about journey times, as well as the reliability and service quality of the journey into the city. That is at the core of the thinking that we are doing on our mobility plan and in our discussions with Transport Scotland and other colleagues, particularly through the city region deal governance. We want to work out how, collectively, we can influence and design the public transport/active travel option to make it as attractive as possible.

Maureen Watt: Does that take into account low-emission zones?

Ewan Kennedy: Yes. The four cities—Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen—have been charged with delivering low-emission zones. Edinburgh has configured a scheme and has consulted on it. We are waiting to move to the next stage, which would be the final definition of the zone, with a view to taking that through due process. We have primary legislation in place. There is a set of regulations that support that primary legislation, which is currently out for consultation. We continue to move forward with that project as quickly as we can.

Alison Irvine: To pick up on the points that John Mitchell, Ewan Kennedy and Jim Grieve have made about the public transport strategy and the timing of it, it is worth emphasising that there were short, medium and long-term interventions and that the strategy is progressing as planned.

The collaborative approach that we have taken to date has not been without its challenges, but it has been relatively successful. We have rolled it out through the city deal work and through our work on the STPR to ensure that all voices are heard and to tackle some of the significant challenges that we know that we have from a transport perspective.

Maureen Watt: Mr Kennedy, what impact have the increased traffic flows on the A90 corridor had on businesses and residents in west Edinburgh? What consultations have there been with them? You have set out some of the plans, but what is happening to the businesses and residents? Have you had feedback from them?

Ewan Kennedy: There is a very active group of community councils in west Edinburgh, particularly in South Queensferry, Kirkliston, Davidson's Mains and Cramond, and we meet them regularly. It is understandable that there is considerable concern—to realise that, you only have to stand by

the A90 of a morning and see the traffic that is coming down it and passing through those local communities as it heads towards the city. It is a huge issue.

I think that it is fair to say that there is an understanding that the solutions to the problem lie at a more strategic level. With the levels of congestion that we have, there is only so much that we can do to provide the required level of priority to public transport. We welcome the efforts to make public transport a more attractive option, but the opportunities to do more become increasingly limited once you get to the stretch to the east of Barnton junction. If further measures were to be taken—the introduction of bus lanes, for example—the local disruption in local communities as a result of displaced traffic and the knock-on effect back to the bridge would not be acceptable.

We recently provided an answer on a motion on that question to the transport and environment committee. The local communities supported the position that that type of intervention was not a solution. We need to look at the issue on a more strategic level and to think about the end-to-end journey, park and ride, and how to provide a better choice at the point at which people decide whether to drive or to take an alternative way in.

Maureen Watt: So a combination of all those measures will be necessary. In the longer term, there will probably need to be a bus priority lane, coupled with a severe reduction in the number of single-person car journeys.

Ewan Kennedy: That is an excellent point. I would like to come back on what I said. I was not saying that bus lanes should never be applied to Queensferry Road; I was saying that they should be applied at a point where they deliver the benefit that we seek to achieve, which is to give priority to public transport. We need to get to a situation in which the bus, as it came into town, would be able to have continuous access to such measures. If the bus hits a queue much further out and does not benefit from the bus lane, there is no net benefit.

Mike Rumbles: It is rather depressing to hear what Ewan Kennedy has said. As a layperson, it seems to me that it is a chicken-and-egg situation—we will not reduce the number of vehicles coming in and the congestion that those 60,000 vehicles cause, and get commuters to use public transport, until they say to themselves, "It is easier for me to use public transport than bring my car in."

You say that you cannot do anything more and that it is more of a strategic issue, but what is going to happen? Nothing real will happen until something changes.

The Convener: I see that Jim Grieve is nodding enthusiastically.

Jim Grieve: In the revised national transport strategy, the priorities have changed, with the climate emergency now being the top priority. Active travel is much more of a focus, and there is more focus on bus travel than there was before. Through the STPR process, that will influence what the interventions will be. I think that there will have to be a drastic change in approach. We will need to allocate more road space to buses to make that move and force the change.

11:15

Mike Rumbles: Ewan Kennedy just made the point that he cannot envisage that happening.

Ewan Kennedy: I come back to the point that we need to think about the end-to-end journey. In Edinburgh, we have been putting bus priority into the city since 1979. If you look at all the major radials from the city, you can see that we have sensibly put in bus lanes where we have been able to do that—by “sensibly”, I mean in such a way that they actually deliver on the objective that we seek to achieve, which is to give buses priority. There are many locations in the city that I could point to where we have considered bus lanes but have decided not to put them in, because the bus operators have told us that that would slow their buses down.

Mike Rumbles: That is the point that I am making. I am not criticising what you have done—what you have done is great—but I am hearing that, at peak time, we have 60,000 cars coming in on the A90 and you are saying that you have done as much as you can and that it is for the strategists to say, “We need to do something and the solution is more bus lanes,” or whatever it is. I am getting two different inputs here and I do not quite follow what is going on.

The Convener: Maybe Douglas Robertson will cut through the issue by giving us a bus operator’s point of view.

Douglas Robertson: Bus lanes are not necessarily the answer. For instance, a couple of years ago, I saw modelling that had been done on the A8 past the airport, which showed that if one lane of the A8 was converted to a bus lane, the traffic jam would go so far up Maybury Road that it would block Barnton. In other words, that would not solve problems; it would just move them around the network. We probably need a more joined-up approach. There has traditionally been a bit of disjointedness where you pass over local authority boundaries. A more regional transport partnership should help to get round some of the issues that that causes.

However, there are 60,000 cars going into Edinburgh; on top of that, I think that it was mentioned that there are 60,000 people commuting by car within Edinburgh every day. That is a big number. Looking at the situation purely from a bus operator’s perspective, everyone recognises what a good job Lothian Buses does in Edinburgh, but there are still 60,000 people commuting by car within the city, despite the network that Edinburgh has with Lothian Buses. That shows that we need to do more than just offer the alternative; we need to push behavioural change. That is the point that we are going to come to; we can move so far, but we need more than just the carrot to achieve the changes that we need.

The Convener: We will move on to the next question, from Peter Chapman, because it stems from that whole discussion.

Peter Chapman: My question is for SEStran, so it is primarily targeted at Mr Grieve. Can you provide an update on the delivery of the Edinburgh orbital bus rapid transit project? That is listed as a long-term project in the public transport strategy. Where are we on that?

Jim Grieve: I can certainly give you some history on that, but I am not so clear on the position going forwards.

The Convener: I am always nervous of hearing about the history of something, because committee members will want to add to it. I ask that it be a short history.

Jim Grieve: I will be brief. We did two studies almost 10 years ago: the first was a feasibility study and the second was a more detailed study on what needed to be done. The cost was estimated to be around £128 million. The proposal was to provide bus segregation along the route—without that, it would not be a viable option for attracting people to public transport.

We are keen to resurrect the proposal. A bus fund was mentioned earlier. Perhaps a bid could be made for funding from that to update the latter study. As I said, once the proposed low-emission zone for Edinburgh is in place, in addition to the overall increase in traffic that we heard about earlier, it is bound to have a displacement effect on the bypass. It is essential to update that piece of work soon. We would be more than happy to do that, if we are given the appropriate funding.

Peter Chapman: Basically, you are saying that nothing has moved on. This is a history lesson; you are not talking about what will happen going forwards.

Jim Grieve: Yes, it is. As you may know, the proposal was to provide a dedicated orbital bus route from Queen Margaret University in the east

side of the city all the way to Newbridge. That would provide access to the airport and all the businesses in the west of the city from the east.

Peter Chapman: How long ago was the figure that you mentioned provided?

Jim Grieve: The figure of £128 million was provided in 2010.

Peter Chapman: It is well out of date.

Jim Grieve: It is.

Peter Chapman: What improvements have been made to the delivery of real-time public transport information on cross-Forth routes since the opening of the Queensferry crossing? Do you have a better message for us about that?

Jim Grieve: Not particularly. From 2014, we invested in a real-time passenger information system and kitted out all Stagecoach and First Bus buses operating in the region. However, the technology moved on and Stagecoach changed its system in 2015 or 2016. We were able to incorporate and sustain that system through a back-office facility. Technology has moved on again and the bus companies are providing real-time information themselves.

We are now focusing on the smaller operators and have equipped several with the necessary kit, which is part of ticket machines. That provides the necessary locational facility for real-time updates.

We are also working alongside City of Edinburgh Council, which is updating its real-time passenger information system. We are working on sharing a content management system that will allow us to continue to provide real-time information on television screens—we have close to 400 TV screens throughout the region, which provide real-time information via the internet.

As you might imagine, the technology scene is fast moving and we struggle to keep up with it. From the end of this financial year, we are hoping to share the council's content management system in order to provide real-time information on TV screens.

Douglas Robertson: We have real-time information available on all our services via mobile applications. We are also developing a link where our real-time information will feed directly into Traveline Scotland, so that it will be available through the national data set. Ultimately, that information will be available to any developer of any other system; in the short term, it will be available on the Traveline Scotland portal. Real-time information is available in the cross-Forth services right now; that will expand in future.

Jamie Greene: I have a supplementary question. We have had a lengthy conversation about getting people out of their cars and on to

buses, which is great for Stagecoach and Lothian Buses, but can someone on the panel reassure me that sensible conversations are also happening in relation to other modes of transport, such as existing or new rail or tram services?

John Mitchell: We are using funding from the local rail development fund to improve access to rail services. There is a revolution in rail—our plan is to have an extra 1,200 seats by December 2020, which will help the cross-Forth strategy.

All our stations are busy, and we need to look at opportunities. For example, Inverkeithing station is a hub. Tickets are slightly cheaper, journey times are shorter and more services are available. It also serves an area that, at times, can be difficult to access. We are considering how to improve access to all the rail interchanges in Fife, from active travel to parking—ideally through active travel, rather than parking—and other areas. We will complete that work in the spring or summer, with a view to informing the strategic transport projects review and bidding for funding to see how we can improve rail development.

Ewan Kennedy: I mentioned earlier that we are working towards our new city mobility plan. We are also working on a new city development plan. Both plans are going out to consultation at the same time.

Last year, we did a piece of work that involved thinking about and starting to define where corridors of mass rapid transit in the city should be—in the context of the issues that we face in the here and now and the future growth of the city—and how those corridors might sensibly point back out towards the region.

That work, which was completed at the back end of the summer, has informed our city mobility strategy and growth strategy and helped to influence the choices report on as to where new development might occur.

In a nutshell, that work has identified four new mass rapid transit corridors. The first two would link together and run from north Edinburgh through the city centre and head down to south-east Edinburgh. In essence, it would be a second north-south tramline.

There would be another two corridors in west Edinburgh, which could be a combination of tram and bus rapid transit. The west corridors and, in particular, the southern corridors, would point out towards West Lothian and potentially to Fife. In the south, they would point down towards Midlothian and potentially East Lothian.

As well as being a key input to our city mobility strategy and our growth strategy, it is also sensible to input that work into the STPR2, and we are sharing it with Transport Scotland as part of the

process. As we have alluded to, that is being progressed collaboratively under the governance of the city region deal, particularly through the transport appraisal board.

I note Mike Rumbles's point, and we are endeavouring to improve the joined-up approach among all the parties in order to progress a comprehensive approach to planning, particularly at the regional level.

The Convener: Thank you. That brings us to the final question from Richard Lyle.

Richard Lyle: My question is to Douglas Robertson. I note that Stagecoach is a leading partner in the CAV Forth project. Will you provide a brief overview of the CAV Forth project. Will it increase cross-Forth bus usage?

Douglas Robertson: I will answer the easy bit first: yes, it will encourage additional bus use across the Forth. As I said earlier, it will provide a new public transport link from Fife into the south side of Edinburgh Park. Although the railway currently provides links into the north of that area, Fife does not have direct links to the south side of the area, so the new service will provide the links that have been called for over the years.

On the project as a whole, a lot of technical work is going on to do with the CAV technology and making the vehicle autonomous. That is being done by many techy people who are much smarter than I am, but I follow the progress.

The vehicle that will be provided will look very similar to an existing bus. It will not be futuristic-looking— an existing vehicle that was built by Alexander Dennis at Falkirk will have technology added to it. There will be a safety driver on board, who will sit behind the wheel and take control should the autonomous system require driver assistance.

It is very much a learning process for all the parties that are involved—the technical companies, the manufacturers, us as an operator and Transport Scotland.

A key point is that we recognise the importance of the people on board. We are not looking to get rid of a member of staff from each vehicle, because the public appreciates the human interaction and assistance that they provide. One of the major benefits that we expect from the project is our improving the safety of the vehicles.

An interesting thing with the project as a whole is that we are doing a lot of research, including societal research with bus users, other road users and bus drivers on the impact of the autonomous vehicles. In addition to the new public transport link, quite a large amount of learning will come out of the project.

11:30

The Convener: I always like to be proved wrong in the first meeting of the year. That was not the final question; the final question will come from the deputy convener.

Maureen Watt: Sorry about that, convener.

Hugh Gillies said that the Forth road bridge had been closed due to high winds 30 times in the past year or since the new bridge opened—whichever it was. Excuse my ignorance, but did all the vehicles that would have used the bridge transfer on to the Queensferry crossing? If that happens, how does it affect your journey times, Mr Robertson?

Hugh Gillies: There are some restrictions on particular vehicles that are not allowed on motorways. All vehicles that are prescribed to use a motorway can revert on to the Queensferry crossing. Those that cannot—that is, cars driven by learner drivers, mopeds and the like—will have to find an alternative.

Buses have reverted to using the Queensferry crossing on those occasions. They tend to be supercoaches and express coaches—Douglas Robertson knows his fleet better than I do—and they do that rather than take the diversion down to Kincardine and back round, which is, I think, 30-plus miles. That is beneficial. We know, through discussions with bus operators and, more recently, with the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association, that they are benefiting from the ability to use the Queensferry crossing at such times.

I hope that that answered your question.

Maureen Watt: Thank you.

The Convener: I think that that was the final question.

I thank all the panel members for coming in to give evidence this morning.

11:32

Meeting continued in private until 12:23.

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