



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 31 October 2017

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 31 October 2017

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	1
TOPICAL QUESTION TIME	3
Sexual Harassment	3
School Staff (Violence and Abuse)	8
GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (ANNUAL TARGET 2015)	10
<i>Statement—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform	10
PROMOTING ACTIVE TRAVEL	22
<i>Motion moved—[Humza Yousaf].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie Greene].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Neil Bibby].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Finnie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mike Rumbles].</i>	
The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf)	22
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	27
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	30
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	32
Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)	35
Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)	37
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	39
Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)	41
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)	43
Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	45
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)	47
Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)	49
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)	51
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	53
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)	54
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	56
Mike Rumbles	58
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green)	59
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	61
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	63
The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell)	65
DECISION TIME	69
VAT CHARGES (POLICE SCOTLAND AND SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE)	74
<i>Motion debated—[Ben Macpherson].</i>	
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)	74
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	77
Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)	79
Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)	80
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	81
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	83
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	84
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)	85
Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	87
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)	88
The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing)	90

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 31 October 2017

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev Eileen Ross, minister of Linwood parish church in Linwood in Renfrewshire.

The Rev Eileen Ross (Linwood Parish Church, Renfrewshire): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the invitation to come here today.

When you come through the door at Linwood parish church, the first thing that you see is a welcome mat, which reads:

“Welcome to Linwood Parish Church”.

Our church is a small congregation of mainly older people, but more than 80 people gather every Sunday. A small weekly prayer group prays for wide-ranging issues, by request from all over the world, and for particular needs. A weekly cafe and a monthly table-top sale offer a place to meet and to make friends while providing a service to the community. Church activities and the involvement of individual members support local, national and international efforts to help families, young people, adults and older adults. I could of course tell you much more, and it is inevitable that much more could always be done.

Linwood church, like many others, continues to face challenges. In recent years, the town of Linwood has seen regeneration of schools, housing, sports facilities and shopping facilities. Many people, including people of faith, have formed community groups, and countless volunteer hours are given to see good things happen for Linwood and its people. What motivates them? Unexpectedly, while I was thinking about what to say today, I found some words of Alastair McIntosh, a Scottish writer, broadcaster and activist on social, environmental and spiritual issues. He said that spirituality is “the bedrock of community” and that

“Behind many community activists is a strong if silent spirituality.”

Do you recognise that in your constituency or where you live or work? Do you think that spirituality makes a difference, and if so, how?

Belief in and a desire for the regeneration of our Christian spirituality led Linwood parish church in 2015 to join the Church of Scotland’s path of

renewal pilot scheme, which aims to help churches reflect and consider new approaches to church life. For me, the emerging pattern resonates strongly with Raymond Fung’s short book “The Isaiah Vision”. In the prophet’s vision of community restored, young and old find fulfilment and live out their days in fullness of life. People do not labour in vain but enjoy the fruits of their labour. It is a vision that encompasses babies, children and young people, people of working age and older people—a vision that surely we can all share. Living together in common humanity—a vision that is underpinned by a “strong if silent spirituality”. I wonder whether you see spirituality as the bedrock of the communities in your constituency or where you live or work. I wonder whether you think that it makes a difference and, if so, how.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Sexual Harassment

1. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to deal with sexual harassment. (S5T-00734)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I would like to explain first of all why I am answering this question, when normally it would fall to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance. The Government wants to make it clear that it is the conduct and behaviour of men that need to change if we are to end the sexual harassment and abuse of women, whether in their workplace, their social life or their home. Therefore, as the most senior male minister in the Scottish Government, I wanted to answer this question and to make it clear that it is up to men to make those changes, and that men must examine their own behaviour.

Sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace, or anywhere else, is completely unacceptable and must stop, just as the underlying attitudes and inequalities that perpetuate it must also stop. What is more, our own institution is not immune from this issue, and I want to take this opportunity to encourage anyone who has experienced any form of harassment to report it.

Yesterday, the First Minister wrote to you, Presiding Officer, seeking to work across all parties to ensure that this Parliament is doing everything that it can to make the Parliament, as a workplace, a place where there is zero tolerance of such behaviour. I therefore welcome the meeting with party leaders that is taking place later today to discuss what more we can all do to tackle those behaviours and attitudes within the Parliament. No one—staff or member of the Scottish Parliament, woman or man—should ever have to put up with harassment or abuse. I am sure that the Parliament and all parties are united around the importance of making sexual harassment a thing of the past, and that we will work together to achieve that.

Sandra White: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his reply and I especially welcome the tone and the stance that he has taken. A lot has to be learned throughout society, not just in this Parliament. I take on board what the Deputy First Minister has said about a meeting taking place, and I thank him for that information. What further discussions will be held across all the political

parties at Holyrood to ensure that there are rigorous measures in place that are consistent across Scottish politics, to ensure a zero tolerance approach to such behaviour?

John Swinney: This is an issue in which all parties will have a close and strong interest, and it is right that we unite across the chamber to send a strong message that there is no place in Scottish politics, in the Parliament or in our constituency offices for any form of harassment or abuse. As I indicated in my earlier answer to Sandra White, there will be a meeting this afternoon, which the Presiding Officer will convene, involving the party leaders. We welcome that, and I commit the Government to working closely with the Parliament to ensure that all these issues are addressed. From the Government's perspective, we discussed the issue at the Cabinet this morning, and the permanent secretary will be taking forward all measures within the Government to ensure that the same sentiments that I have put on the record here today in the Parliament are taken forward within the Government, where we will challenge our existing approaches and procedures to ensure that all staff are protected from being exposed to sexual harassment in any shape or form.

Sandra White: As has been said, it is not just in political parties that harassment takes place. It is also a criminal offence, and I hope that we can look towards that as well, regardless of where it happens. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that reporting sexual harassment, bullying or misconduct in any workplace can be extremely challenging, particularly for young or vulnerable adults? Can he tell us what we can do—in the Government, in the Parliament and as individuals—to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward in the knowledge that they will be supported and kept safe?

John Swinney: I do not in any way underestimate the significance or challenge that it poses to individuals to come forward to report any behaviour of this type. It is important that a number of things are done. First, we must ensure that individuals are encouraged to come forward and make their complaints. We must signal—I hope that my response to today's questions helps to do so—that any individual with such concerns should feel able to come forward with those complaints.

Secondly, there has to be a ready, practical and safe space in which complaints can be brought forward, so that individuals can truly feel able to raise their concerns.

Thirdly, there has to be a change of culture, so that, rather than the onus being on individuals to raise complaints or express concerns, individuals are not exposed to circumstances that might give rise to such complaints. That is my point about the

importance of men examining their own behaviour and acting in a fashion that does not give rise to any basis for complaint in the first place, to avoid individuals having to go through the very challenging experience that making a complaint involves.

Sandra White mentioned the possibility of criminal offences being committed. If an individual feels in any sense that a criminal offence has been committed, I encourage that individual to go to the police and to get the support and assistance to which they are absolutely entitled, so that their concerns can be properly addressed.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I reiterate my concern about the allegations that have emerged in recent days. Sexual harassment is wrong in any environment.

I am pleased that the Scottish Conservatives established and reinforced staff procedures to ensure that people can raise concerns directly and in confidence. The Scottish Conservatives take the issue extremely seriously, so I am pleased that Ruth Davidson has asked for the procedures to be reviewed.

How will the Scottish Government support women and men who are affected by sexual harassment to come forward? How can we get all organisations, including local authorities, to take sexual harassment seriously?

John Swinney: The member raised an important point about the need for all organisations to take the matter seriously. That is a message that, as I said in my original answer to Sandra White, the Government is taking forward through our own procedures; we very much welcome the Presiding Officer's convening of a meeting this afternoon. Individual local authorities must do likewise.

In the workplace, there are commitments that employers must meet. There must be a combination, in that good procedures must be in place to enable individuals to feel confident about reporting any behaviour about which they are concerned and, equally, we must all take a relentless approach to ensuring that such behaviour does not take place in our society.

There is no place for such behaviour, and individuals should not be exposed to it as part of their daily lives.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The media reports about sexism and sexual harassment here at Holyrood are sickening but—unfortunately—not surprising. Our Parliament cannot think itself immune from the worst excesses of the sexist and misogynistic behaviour that women and girls have experienced, inside and outside the workplace, for decades.

The initial response from the Parliament—that it would set up an anonymous phone line—was well intentioned, but the Parliament must go further. Unless we understand how difficult it is for women to come forward with complaints, given their fear that they will not be believed or supported, and unless we recognise that we are talking about a cultural problem, which requires a cultural change, we will never fully resolve the issue.

Notwithstanding that this is a matter for the Parliament, does the Deputy First Minister agree that nothing short of an independent review, informed by women's organisations and trade unions, is required? Does he agree that any such review should consider the procedures for reporting and recording incidents and the culture of the Parliament more generally, given, for example, that the running of the Parliament is currently overseen by all-male groups of MSPs?

John Swinney: Monica Lennon will understand that a number of issues that she raises are properly the responsibility of the Parliament and that it would be inappropriate for me, as a minister, to comment on those points.

It would be a good idea if, in the work that we all take forward in this respect, we work closely with the organisations in Scotland that have served our country extremely well in supporting women to come forward with concerns, whether we are talking about Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland or organisations such as Engender and Close the Gap. There is a tremendous range of organisations that serve our country extremely well in that respect, and we should all engage closely with them and ensure that we provide all necessary support.

Monica Lennon raises a wider cultural point, which I accept. I am here to answer questions and to make that point very clearly to Parliament. It is important that attitudes change within our society so that many aspects of life in our country change for the better as a consequence.

We can take hope from where practice has changed. On the issue of domestic violence, for example, more and more women are prepared to come forward, with the proper support, to report their experiences. The justice system has been changed dramatically in recent years to ensure that those issues are taken much more seriously and are acted on in every respect. As a consequence, individuals who have had a bad experience in our society—one that they should never have had—are able to secure the justice to which they are entitled. We must learn from some of the lessons of that experience in taking forward the issues that we are addressing here.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the Deputy First Minister for his comments so far and

echo much of what has been said. The problem is deeply ingrained in our society and multiple solutions will be needed—both short-term measures and longer-term approaches—to assist the culture change in our society to which the Deputy First Minister has referred.

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that one of the most important things that we can achieve through that longer-term cultural change is ensuring that every child in every school receives the highest standard of sexual relationships education, including a thorough and comprehensive approach to discussing consent and bodily autonomy appropriately at every age? Is that not one of the most important things that we can do to positively influence the behaviour and attitudes of boys and young men as well as ensure that no child grows up under the expectation that abusive, harassing or entitled behaviour is a normal part of life that they should just put up with?

John Swinney: I agree with Patrick Harvie about the importance of education around the question of consent. It is a fundamental right of every individual to be equipped with an understanding of their rights in that respect. The work that the Government is taking forward on relationship education is being significantly strengthened by the dialogue that we are having with the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, which is convened by my colleague Christina McKelvie and which has had some very valuable input into the Government's thinking on the issue. We will produce further publications in that respect.

On the fundamental point, I agree with Mr Harvie on the importance of every individual having a deep understanding of the question of consent and—more important—on the need for the question of consent to be respected fully within our society.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Like Patrick Harvie, I acknowledge the complex nature of addressing the problem that is under discussion. I also welcome the cross-party agreement that we need new steps to make the complaints process clear and fair. We must ensure that those who work in this building—wherever they are based—know unequivocally that they will be respected and kept safe.

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that harassment is worst when there are big discrepancies of power? MSPs' staff have the right to complain about MSPs to party business managers or directly to the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. However, staff told me this morning that the route to the commissioner is not clearly set out in the code of conduct, in the standards legislation or in

contracts of employment. Given that contacting party business managers—one of whom is a Government minister—may be a daunting prospect for staff, will the Scottish Government support steps to make it clear that MSPs' staff can and should approach the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland directly when appropriate and necessary?

John Swinney: Mr McArthur makes a fair point. I am sure that the parliamentary authorities will consider that issue as part of the work that is taken forward to address these questions.

The issue that Mr McArthur raises is relevant to, frankly, every organisation. If the process of raising a complaint feels more daunting to an individual than could be imagined, we must properly address the issues and make it practical and tangible for individuals to make complaints. In the work that the permanent secretary will take forward on behalf of the Scottish Government, we will look to Leslie Evans to ensure that the steps and approaches that we have in place properly take account of the sentiments that Mr McArthur has expressed.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I apologise to the three other members who wanted to ask supplementary questions, as there is not enough time for them to do so.

School Staff (Violence and Abuse)

2. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that violent attacks and abuse towards staff in schools have risen by a third in three years. (S5T-00732)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): It is not acceptable for anyone who works in our schools to be assaulted verbally or physically. Classroom assistants and support staff often work with children and young people with the most complex and challenging support needs, and it is important to recognise that the vast majority of pupils are well behaved and respectful.

While local authorities are responsible for ensuring that school environments are safe for everyone, we remain committed to working with our partners to continue to improve relationships and behaviour in schools.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the Deputy First Minister for that answer. In my view, everyone has the right to safety and security at work, but the figures reveal that thousands of support staff and, indeed, teachers regularly face attacks. What support will the Government give teachers and support staff and what action will it take to prevent and reduce such attacks in the future?

John Swinney: I agree entirely with Mr Johnson about the importance of every individual feeling safe at all times, especially in their place of work and particularly in an environment in which learning staff are there to support young people and to assist them with their education.

The Government works closely with all relevant stakeholders, and in particular with our local authority partners, in the Scottish advisory group on relationships and behaviour in schools. We work with that group to ensure that we have in place the appropriate procedures and support to encourage the creation of an appropriate context for learning that is safe for young people and for staff.

We also work closely with organisations to make sure that we have in place a preventative approach that seeks to address difficult behaviour before it presents itself as a damaging presence in our schools.

Daniel Johnson: I again thank the Deputy First Minister for his response. It is particularly encouraging that the Government is seeking to understand the underlying behaviours, because it is one thing to prevent certain action, but it is absolutely critical that we understand the underlying causes of such behaviour. What further steps does the Government plan to take to look at those causes? Will Mr Swinney undertake to report back to Parliament on that work?

John Swinney: I acknowledge the seriousness of the issue. I assure Mr Johnson of the emphasis that we place on early intervention and adopting a preventative approach.

Yesterday, I saw an interesting example of that at Park primary school in Oban. It has chosen to use some pupil equity funding resources to employ a link worker whose role is to work in dialogue with young people to address issues that they had expressed concerns about to do with how they were feeling, which might have affected their learning and their behaviour. The school provides a welcoming and reassuring environment, but it has taken the extra step of enabling a discussion to be had with individual pupils to help to resolve those issues. I cite that as one example of how schools are responding to the challenge that is highlighted by the research that underpins Mr Johnson's question.

Such issues are very much on my agenda. We want to ensure that we improve the safety and the operation of schools, and we will, of course, keep Parliament informed of developments in due course.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the Deputy First Minister and members.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Annual Target 2015)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by Roseanna Cunningham on "The Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2015: incorporating report on impact on emissions of exercise of electricity generation related functions". The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform: Last year, when I met Patricia Espinosa, head of the United Nations climate body, she spoke about Scotland's "great achievement" on this defining issue of greenhouse gas emissions. Earlier this month, she met the First Minister and again congratulated Scotland on its leadership.

When we speak to international figures we make the point, which often surprises them, that there is cross-party consensus in Scotland on climate change, and that our Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed unanimously in this chamber.

In 2015, Scotland was one of the first countries to sign up to the UN's sustainable development goals—the overarching framework to tackle poverty and inequality, promote education and health and grow the global economy sustainably. At the Paris climate conference, the First Minister and the German minister spoke about the Paris agreement being the first big challenge for the goals.

Paris turned out to be a huge achievement. The recent decision by the USA to withdraw from it has served only to prompt renewed support for the treaty from states, regions, cities and progressively minded businesses.

In April, the First Minister signed a co-operation agreement with California Governor Jerry Brown to support his under2 coalition. The coalition includes almost 200 progressive states and cities, covering more than 1.2 billion people, or 16 per cent of the global population, and almost 40 per cent of the global economy.

Next year will be particularly important for the Paris agreement. California will host a summit for the under2 coalition to help boost global ambition. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will publish its special report on limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Next year will also see a major facilitative dialogue to take stock of the collective global effort. We know that

more needs to be done—current Paris pledges could limit global temperature rise to around 3°C, but a wide range of outcomes is possible.

It is a crucial time for all countries, ours included, to show where they stand, so I am very pleased to announce that both the First Minister and I will attend this year's talks in Bonn in a few weeks' time.

This statement sets out the ever-stronger messages that we will take to Bonn. I will begin with a short formal statement on the statutory "Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2015", which was laid in Parliament this morning. The report shows that Scotland's annual emissions reduction target for 2015 was met, meaning that targets have been met for the second consecutive year. The report shows that the domestic effort target for 2015 was also met.

The report is based on the statistics published in June that show that Scotland continues to outperform the United Kingdom as a whole and to rank very highly internationally. Of the western European Union 15 countries, only Sweden and Finland have done better to date.

Scotland's success in meeting its stretching climate targets is underpinned by a comprehensive package of on-the-ground measures that promote sustainable economic growth and help tackle inequalities while decarbonising Scotland's economy.

The Scottish Government is working to finalise Scotland's climate change plan for publication in February 2018. As part of this process, we are reflecting carefully on all the recommendations arising from parliamentary scrutiny of the draft plan and the Committee on Climate Change's recent report.

The final plan will be strengthened by the bold new low-carbon commitments set out in the First Minister's programme for government, which are exemplified by phasing out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032. Over the past 15 years, we have worked hard to decarbonise our electricity supply and will now direct our renewable energy to electrification on our roads.

The programme also commits the Government to doubling investment in active travel and I am sure that members will be looking forward to discussing that in the debate later this afternoon.

We have listened to the Parliament and the Committee on Climate Change and I can confirm that the final plan will include updated sectoral emission envelopes, reflecting our new commitments as well as the most up-to-date evidence. We continue to work with stakeholders, including the external advisory group—the

members of which I thank for their valuable contributions to date—and the Committee on Climate Change, as we finalise the plan.

The UK Government published its clean growth strategy earlier this month. The strategy is the statutory counterpart to Scotland's climate change plan, in that it sets out the approach to decarbonisation over the period to 2032. However, the UK strategy and our plan diverge in terms of their overall levels of action, reflecting Scotland's more ambitious statutory targets. The strategy is an important document and we are considering it in detail to understand how it impacts on the people of Scotland, our economy and our decarbonisation ambitions.

I have already mentioned the important role that independent expert advice plays in the Scottish Government's approach to tackling climate change. On 12 October, I wrote to Lord Deben, chair of the Committee on Climate Change, to thank the committee for its 2017 progress report. This letter, a copy of which has been laid in the Parliament, makes it clear that the Scottish Government is reflecting carefully on all of the committee's recommendations as we work to finalise the climate change plan.

Scotland's climate targets, under this Parliament's Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, are already the toughest in the UK and among the toughest in the world. Unlike the UK Government, the Scottish Government has brought forward proposals for new legislation to raise the ambition of our long-term targets even further, in direct response to the Paris agreement. This reflects our recognition that Paris represents an increase in global ambition and our commitment to keeping Scotland at the forefront of the low-carbon transition.

Tackling climate change represents not only a moral imperative, but a huge economic opportunity, which we are determined that Scotland should seize. Public consultation on our proposals for a new climate change bill closed on 22 September. We have received almost 20,000 responses and are now taking time to carefully consider them all, alongside the full range of evidence available. As part of this evidence-based approach, I am aware that the underpinning scientific guidelines for how we measure greenhouse gas emissions are also continuing to evolve, especially in the land-use sectors, which are of particular importance here in Scotland.

It is, therefore, more important than ever that we have access to the most up-to-date information and expert advice. As Parliament has already been informed through my 12 October letter to Lord Deben, I have given the Committee on Climate Change the opportunity to provide any

further advice on bill targets that it considers appropriate.

In addition to our climate leadership through domestic action, Scotland plays an active and strengthening international role. I mentioned the under2 coalition of high-ambition states, regions and cities. I am delighted that Scotland's cities alliance has agreed to support the coalition and I look forward to working with our seven cities to promote their progressive position on climate change.

Scotland has been an active member of the Climate Group's states and regions alliance for over a decade. The alliance brings together some of the most economically powerful regions in the world. We are supporting the alliance's future fund to help developing countries in the network.

Our Scottish national action plan on human rights commits us to continue to champion climate justice. We continue to deliver the First Minister's pledge at Paris to provide at least £3 million each year through our climate justice fund. Following on from over £6 million hydro nation funding for water adaptation projects in Africa since 2012, we gave £1 million in 2016 to the UN to support developing countries to engage with the Paris agreement. Hydro nation funding continues, with £2.5 million supporting access to water and waste water services in Malawi.

Our new climate justice innovation fund announced its first £600,000 for six projects in sub-Saharan Africa. We will very soon announce the award of our new climate challenge programme Malawi, with £3.2 million over three years. Between 2012 and 2021, our climate justice fund will provide £21 million to some of the world's poorest people.

Climate action lies at the heart of the Scottish Government's aim of creating a successful country through promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth. It is a vital issue, which spans ambition, delivery and international partnership working, and I will be proud to relate Scotland's leadership at the forthcoming climate talks in Bonn.

The Presiding Officer: We have around 20 minutes for questions.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

It is abundantly clear from yesterday's news of concentrations of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere reaching a record high that we continue to face a major climate challenge. Nevertheless, we must pursue an agenda that will mean that Scotland will meet its commitments and be at the forefront of worldwide endeavour. I

endorse the cabinet secretary's comments on cross-party consensus in Scotland.

Having viewed the report, I know that there is a lot to be proud of, but it is deeply disappointing that emissions have gone up in the net Scottish emissions account; in 2015, they increased by almost 2 per cent on the previous year. We still face the challenge of lowering carbon levels in a variety of areas.

WWF Scotland has commented that housing is among the "weakest" areas to be dealt with in the draft climate change plan. What action will the Scottish Government take to address that in ensuring that Scotland takes a bold approach to reducing emissions?

Roseanna Cunningham: Like most countries, we have to effectively own up to the fact that we continue to emit far more than we should. One of the enormous challenges that we all face is in getting emissions down as much as possible.

Set against other countries, Scotland is doing incredibly well, and I am always surprised that not all countries have clear-cut targets, such as we have. When we set ourselves against other countries as examples, we do so against countries that have set themselves targets, but there are many countries out there that simply have not done that. In those circumstances, measuring our effort against those countries is quite difficult.

Donald Cameron asked about housing. He will know that there are significant challenges in respect of housing—not the least of which is the existing domestic housing stock. We are addressing the challenge that is faced by any Government in dealing with the need to ensure that existing households become more energy efficient. As a Government, we are addressing that challenge through the huge amount of energy efficiency money that is going into that work.

That is a challenge for individuals, as well. Those of us who are owner-occupiers have a responsibility to look to our own housing and to consider whether it emits far more than it needs to or should emit. There is also our requirement to deal with the rented sector and social housing.

There are a number of issues that Donald Cameron is quite right to point to, and which we are looking at very carefully. I hope that he will be content when he sees what is in the final climate change plan in relation to the housing sector.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement.

In the context of the Paris agreement, I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to the climate justice fund to support some of the world's

poorest people. However, climate justice is not just a global issue; it is also a local issue.

In her statement, the cabinet secretary referred to

“on-the-ground measures that ... help tackle inequalities”.

Can she identify any specific policies that will be actioned in Scotland to ensure that our approach to meeting climate change targets is inclusive—especially in the sectors that are progressing most slowly, which are transport, agriculture and buildings? Will she expand on how the shift to the low-carbon economy in the energy sector and other sectors will take into account affected workers and communities through a just transition strategy, and will she say something about the commission that Scottish Labour hopes for?

Roseanna Cunningham: I will try to cover as many of those issues as I can. If I miss any, I will undertake to come back to Claudia Beamish—I know that she cares passionately about them.

In a sense, Claudia Beamish picked up a little bit from the issue that Donald Cameron raised. One of the big concerns that we all have is to ensure that parts of our society are not left behind, as we move forward with decarbonisation. The irony is, of course, that, as climate change progresses, the poorer sections of society will be hardest hit.

We are addressing a lot of that through the forthcoming warm homes bill and the energy efficiency measures that we have discussed. I advise Claudia Beamish that there is a deal of serious conversation on that to ensure that nothing that we do on climate change makes things worse for people—in particular, in terms of fuel poverty, which is a big issue.

On transport, we made a number of commitments in the programme for government. They include commitments on active travel and on the need to increase availability of public transport, as well as on issues around cars. I appreciate, however, that being able to swap out a petrol or diesel car for an electric vehicle may be but a fond hope for many people who cannot afford a car the first place. There are huge issues around that.

However, I go back to the point that, if we do not make progress on climate change, it is precisely the most disadvantaged sections of society that will be most hit by its advance. We need to try to strike the right balance as we move through the various sectors in order to ensure that we do not make the situation worse, but we must also remind people that it will get worse if we do not take the actions that we are taking.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary is aware, the EU emissions trading system is the main mechanism to reduce

emissions in the traded sector. Therefore, it plays a key role in supporting our climate change ambitions. Will she advise how our ability to continue in the ETS will be impacted if the UK leaves the EU, and whether she is aware of any work that is being done by the UK Government to address that?

Roseanna Cunningham: Graeme Dey is correct to raise the EU ETS, which is currently the world’s largest carbon market. It means that there is a level playing field for businesses throughout the EU and it protects us against carbon leakage, which is a considerable matter that needs to be addressed. The Government therefore considers that continued participation in the ETS will be best for Scotland, in the future. It is the most cost-effective means through which the traded sector can decarbonise.

It is a matter of some concern that the UK Government has, until this point, been unwilling to discuss future participation in the ET with me or other Scottish ministers. Indeed, the EU has now intervened to protect the integrity of the scheme with legislative proposals to prevent surrender of any new allowances that will be allocated after 1 January 2018 to a member state in respect of which there are lapsing obligations. Of course, only one state is in that frame.

That intervention could have significant repercussions for Scottish businesses and could impose additional costs. There is significant market reaction. That demonstrates the risks of the UK Government’s approach to the negotiations and the real risk of a disorderly exit, which I am sure that members will agree would be a wholly unacceptable situation. I should add that Mr Russell and I have written jointly to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy seeking urgent discussions on that matter.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): We are supportive of the electrification of our roads. It will, of course, bring challenges for the transmission network due to the expansion of electricity demand. Does the cabinet secretary support a distribution system operator balancing model at a more local level?

Roseanna Cunningham: I will do my very best to establish what that actually means, and will get back to Maurice Golden. He is allowing his inner geek to come forward, in that question. It is a splendid example of a question that perhaps means that the member could not think of a better one to ask.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise how Scotland is showing its strong support for the Paris agreement?

Roseanna Cunningham: In my statement, I said how important we consider the Paris agreement to be, and how important that year's climate change talks were to the Scottish Government. Our proposals for a new climate change bill represent a direct statutory response to the aims of the Paris agreement. As I said, that response is not normal: many countries are not responding in that way.

The UK Committee on Climate Change advises that increasing the 2050 target to a 90 per cent reduction would be aligned to the Paris aim of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Our proposals will also enable the setting of a further target for net zero emissions as soon as the appropriate date to do so can be determined in an evidence-based manner. That will support the Paris aim of reaching global net zero emissions in the second half of the century. Other bodies in Scotland have also been showing support for the Paris agreement.

All three key architects of the agreement—the French minister, Laurent Fabius; the former head of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, Christiana Figueres; and the president of COP20, Manuel Pulgar-Vida—have visited Scotland and received the Royal Scottish Geographical Society's Shackleton medal for their joint efforts, and all three are well aware of how committed this country is to the Paris agreement.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the statement from the cabinet secretary. Scotland is one of the first countries to debate domestic climate legislation following ratification of the Paris agreement.

Within days of the establishment of the new labour-led Government in New Zealand, vigorous and dynamic new agricultural climate change targets were set. What can the cabinet secretary learn from New Zealand and from best practice around the world?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am aware that New Zealand has begun, under its new Government, to make some significant moves on climate change. I have to say, however, that the 2015 statistics from Scotland show that agriculture emissions are down by more than 25 per cent from baseline levels, so we have been doing a considerable amount of work ourselves. I will look closely at any other country's particular interest in sectors that look as though they might be analogous to Scotland's.

However, I gently caution David Stewart that when one looks very closely at some other countries' proposals, it sometimes transpires that they are not quite what they appear to be on the surface. That means that we are often comparing

apples not with apples but with pears—to use a horticultural expression. One has to be rather careful of that. That issue relates to the comparisons that we often make between ourselves and Sweden, even though, in actual fact, we are not both doing the same thing in terms of getting to where we want to go.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary aware that, on 21 September, Nicaragua signed up to the Paris agreement, meaning that only two countries—Syria and the United States—are not signatories? Will the Government use the Climate Group states and regions approach to work with the states in the United States to mitigate the anti-science effects of the presidency and far too many of that Government's administrators?

Roseanna Cunningham: I might have seen the same tweet as the one from which the member might have picked up that information about Nicaragua. All of us would have preferred the United States not to have taken the position that it has taken on Paris, and it is a matter of some regret that it has chosen to do that.

We work closely with the Climate Group. It is an important forum for this country, and the member will be grateful to know that, when I visit Bonn in a couple of weeks' time, I will attend a number of round-table discussions with other members in that group, particularly with California, for example, whose approach has been of interest to us. Those conversations will continue.

I perhaps should have said to David Stewart that, when I am in Bonn, I will take every opportunity to see whether I can have useful discussions not only with members of the Climate Group but with others who might be there.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of that very positive statement.

Our ability to cut carbon in future is partly dependent on the spending decisions of Derek Mackay today. The green bus fund, home energy efficiency and investment in reopening railways are just some of the infrastructure priorities that are needed to cut carbon, improve economic efficiency, and tackle exclusion and even air pollution. How will the Scottish Government budget prioritise investment that will cut emissions, rather than simply locking them in for generations to come?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am not in a position to pre-empt the budget or any statements that my colleague Derek Mackay may make in the coming weeks and months. The member will have seen in the programme for government that the active travel budget is being doubled, which I presume he has welcomed. The green bus fund is being

extended, too. Those issues were raised in his question, so I would have expected him to be happy that increased support has been given in those areas.

The Government was widely hailed for its programme for government. I think that the phrase used was that it was among the greenest programmes for government ever. Although that is a piece of hyperbole that I may want to repeat often, it is one that people should reflect upon. I hope that they will welcome everything that is in the programme for government, and in the budget process, which we are about to embark upon.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of what is generally an upbeat statement and echo her comments about the cross-party support in the Parliament. However, in light of comments from Scottish Renewables today about what it calls

“the first decline in renewable heat output that Scotland has seen since measurement began in 2008-09”,

will the cabinet secretary inform the Parliament of any additional measures that the Government will bring forward or is contemplating in the final climate change plan that will help to deliver more renewable heat in Scotland so that we can indeed meet our renewable energy targets?

Roseanna Cunningham: I should remind Liam McArthur that I said that the final plan will be published in February 2018. He will forgive me if I operate on the basis that stating in advance what is going to be in the plan is not in keeping with the publication date of February 2018.

Scotland’s record on renewables has been pretty extraordinary. We sometimes have difficulty because of decisions that are taken elsewhere, which do not help us. Nevertheless, I continue to be as upbeat as I possibly can be in the circumstances. We will continue, in so far as we are able to do, to make further advances in that area, which, as I have indicated, has been one of Scotland’s climate change success stories.

The Presiding Officer: We can have three more questions if we can squeeze them in.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Despite the ambitious approach to reducing emissions that has been outlined by the cabinet secretary, we will not be immune to experiencing the effects of climate change, which will be faced all over the world. What progress is the Scottish Government making specifically on climate change adaptation?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member is right to raise the point that there are two sides to dealing with climate change. One is mitigation, which tends to get most of the coverage; the other is adaptation, which tends to be discussed less

often. The Paris agreement makes it clear that climate change adaptation is enormously important. In the past year or so, there have been a number of important reports on Scotland’s progress in that area, including an independent assessment of the current Scottish climate change adaptation programme and the climate change risk assessment.

There was a meeting in Stirling last week, between my officials and a range of stakeholders, to begin consideration of the next adaptation programme, which is due in 2019. We have recently launched our new national centre for resilience, a national coastal change assessment and new adaptation indicators. Collaborative partnership approaches to adaptation are also emerging in a variety of different local areas, including climate-ready Clyde, Edinburgh adapts and Aberdeen adapts. There is a considerable amount of work on the ground, which is where adaptation efforts need to take place. However, the member is right to raise adaptation as an issue, because most of the focus tends to be on mitigation, and we must not forget that adaptation is becoming ever more important.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): This morning, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee took evidence on air quality management areas and low-emission zones. Evidence that was given to the committee during our inquiry raises concerns about the funding available to deliver better air quality. Given that the transport emissions mitigation budget has been cut from £179.8 million to £153 million, will the cabinet secretary assure Parliament that sufficient funding will be made available to Transport Scotland, local authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and others to implement successfully the Scottish Government’s good intentions on air quality?

Roseanna Cunningham: I just looked with some query at the transport minister, who does not immediately understand where John Scott’s information comes from. We will undertake to check that.

I ought to point out what I said earlier about the budget discussions that are about to take place. Low-emission zones are part of the programme for government. We are committed to introducing one low emission zone by the end of 2018, to rolling out the zones to the other major cities as soon after that as possible, and to having them in all air quality management zones where it is considered necessary.

We are now in a process whereby negotiations around the funding of those zones are becoming active. Last week, I had a meeting with one council, which, of course, wanted to explore that issue. It is not a secret that Glasgow is the

preferred first low emission zone. The discussions on that are also active. The low-emission zones will be funded appropriately as and when they are rolled out.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the green bus fund has been of enormous benefit to bus operators throughout Scotland, including those in the Falkirk district, where Alexander Dennis has secured through the fund multiple orders for its world-class hybrid envirobuses. Given the success of the fund, will the cabinet secretary and the transport minister consider altering the fund to ensure that it also provides for bus retrofits at the proposed engine retrofitting centre, which would truly assist greatly in future emissions reductions not just in LEZs but in towns and villages countrywide?

Roseanna Cunningham: As I understand it, the transport minister is in discussion with bus companies about that very issue. I hope that the member will liaise with the transport minister as that discussion progresses.

The green bus fund has been very helpful in accelerating the uptake of low emission buses into our bus fleet, which obviously has benefits with regard to air quality and climate change. We have been very committed to the fund, which is being extended. We are looking forward to that progress. The bus service operators grant and the low-carbon incentive, along with the green bus fund, have helped to bring almost 500 green buses into the Scottish fleet. By any measure, that is a really good figure.

Promoting Active Travel

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-08497, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland. We are a bit pushed for time. I call on Humza Yousaf to speak to and move the motion.

14:59

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): I am delighted to speak to and move the motion in my name, on behalf of the Government.

This morning, I was delighted to attend Cycling Scotland's conference, at which there were more than 200 people who were enthusiastic and inspired about active travel. Since being appointed transport minister, I have been delighted to not only talk the talk but, as we are talking about active travel, walk the walk—I was going to say "pedal the pedal" but that does not fit, although I think that members will understand where I am going with it.

This year, I was delighted to take part for the first time in the pedal for Scotland event. In fact, Cycling Scotland told me today that I am the first transport minister to have completed the challenge, which I am delighted about—I will not tell members the point at which my predecessors stopped. I did not complete the event by myself; it was a cross-party endeavour along with my Conservative colleagues Liam Kerr and Graham Simpson, who both achieved a better time than I did.

A couple of weeks ago, I was also delighted to take part in my first-ever 70-mile cycle, from Glasgow to the Kelpies and back again. I have a word of advice: if anyone ever intends to cycle back from the Kelpies to Glasgow, do not do so on a day when a storm is approaching—it took me six hours to get through the headwind.

That is enough about me and my cycling endeavours. I will come back to the motion in hand. The Government's commitment to active travel, cycling and walking is demonstrated in the First Minister's commitments in the programme for government. The headline commitment is to double the active travel budget from £40 million to £80 million. I will say more about the programme for government, but first I will speak about why investment in active travel is vital.

Active travel has obvious physical benefits—I could reel off statistic after statistic, but I will mention just a couple. Research has shown that those who cycle to work have a 45 per cent lower rate of cancer and a 46 per cent lower rate of

cardiovascular issues. One aspect of active travel that is not talked about so much is the benefits for mental health. I was delighted to visit the Velocity Cafe and Bicycle Workshop project in Inverness, which helps people who have mental health issues. One lady was afraid to leave the house as a result of her mental health condition; she was very isolated and did not engage with others. She had never ridden a bike before, but she came to the Velocity Cafe and learned how to cycle, which provided her with physical and mental health benefits. She even ended up leading one of the cycle teams. The benefits for mental health are sometimes understated, but they are important.

There is no doubt at all that active travel can play an important part in tackling climate change and reducing CO₂ emissions. It may be a small part in the wider transport picture, but it most certainly counts. Active travel can play a part in helping us to meet our ambitious climate change targets.

There is also a social inclusion element, and I welcome the Labour amendment's reference to Sustrans Scotland's report, which made for difficult but important reading for the Government and stakeholders. One of the key statistics that I pulled out of the report is that 61 per cent of those in high-risk transport poverty areas are within a 10-minute bike ride or half an hour's walk of essential and vital services such as general practitioner clinics and jobcentres. That does not mean that transport poverty can be overcome simply by cycling and walking, but active travel can be a key part of the mix.

We should not forget that, in addition to cycling, walking is an important element. It is often overlooked in considering active travel, but its benefits tick all the boxes that I have spoken about. Sir Alex Ferguson, who recently opened a walkway in Govan in my constituency, said that the best exercise that he could ever give his players was to get them walking more. If the world's greatest football club manager—after Jock Stein, that is—gives such advice, we know that it is worth listening to.

The need for a radical shift to get more of our population engaged in active travel is central to the programme for government, and I will say a little more about the First Minister's commitments in that regard.

The doubling of the active travel budget should not be understated—I am sure that it is not; it was very much welcomed by the stakeholders at this morning's conference. Our focus on active travel is a first for the United Kingdom and Scotland is leading with its financial contribution, by doubling the budget, for which it has rightly been lauded. In order to ensure that we get the best bang for our buck, we will need to take advice and listen to

contributions from members across the chamber as well as from stakeholders, academics and experts.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): With regard to the doubling the budget for active travel, and speaking as one veteran of pedal for Scotland to another and as a self-confessed MAMIL—middle-aged man in Lycra—I welcome the minister's comments about the benefits of cycling for health and for tourism. I have seen the signs of those benefits in Moray, where the popularity of cycling has increased in recent years.

It has been put to me that perhaps Transport Scotland could do more to focus on cycling and to make the most of the increased budget. Would the minister be willing to consider creating a unit within Transport Scotland dedicated to promoting cycling in Scotland while working with our local authorities?

Humza Yousaf: I thank the MAMIL—I mean the member—for his contribution. He touches on a serious point, which was raised this morning at the conference that I attended. Expertise is needed in Government, in local government, in other public agencies and even in the private sector, of course, to help to facilitate an increase in active travel. The member will know that we already have officials in cycling, but his idea for a cycling unit within Transport Scotland, which he has mentioned to me before, is being given very serious consideration.

To go back to the programme for government, we want to be the United Kingdom leaders on active travel—that is very much our ambition. Our vision is to make our towns and cities friendlier and safer places for pedestrians and cyclists. To start that process, I announced in September that all five Community Links PLUS projects would receive 50 per cent matched funding—two projects in Edinburgh, a third one in Glasgow and one each in Stirling and Inverness. All those projects will deliver high-quality segregated cycle paths. They will improve the public realm, making it as accessible as possible for everyone. The projects will put people and place first, with behavioural change and educational programmes also being delivered. They will ensure that the people of Scotland see walking and cycling as an attractive everyday option for shorter journeys.

We have also committed to appointing an active nation commissioner in early 2018 to ensure that we deliver world-class infrastructure across Scotland and projects that encourage greater physical activity levels, such as road user training and access to bike hire.

We will also promote e-mobility and the use of electric and cargo bikes for businesses and for projects that help older people, young families and

people with disabilities to benefit from our network of routes.

We will step up our work with partners and communities to ensure that active travel helps to address the challenges, which I have already touched on, of transport poverty. For example, we have already asked Forth Environment Link and ScotRail to provide us with options for providing free bike hire to those who are seeking work.

The key thread through all of our programme for government commitments and the commitments that we made before then is collaboration. Collaboration will be key with our stakeholders and vital at local authority level. On 7 November, we will host a summit involving councillors who are transport spokespeople in their administrations and chief transport officers within local authorities; the regional transport partnerships will be there as well. The summit will, I hope, align local and national priorities around active travel.

One thing that we are looking to align, and that we are examining and exploring through the active travel task force, is behavioural change. All of us realise, I think, that that will be key in getting more people engaged in cycling and walking. Behavioural change has many different aspects and I will not go into all of them, but one is the drop-off in cycling rates between primary school and high school. There are a number of different factors in that—longer journeys; teenagers wanting to walk and talk together as they go to school; their not wanting to get their hair messed up by a helmet; and so on. Behavioural change in that age group is important.

Behavioural change among drivers is also hugely important. Many of us who cycle are also car users and hear too often the unsavoury attitudes of some car users. Behavioural change will be hugely important.

Another big driver for getting people more active on our roads is making our roads safer. I have never been hesitant in putting on record my belief that more segregated cycle paths can only be a good thing and can only encourage more people to get out on the road and give confidence to those who want to cycle, whether they are young or not so young.

The same applies to road infrastructure at the national level—it is important at local level, of course, but it is also important for us as a Government. We hope to take forward the integration of walking and cycling paths in our national infrastructure—the projects to dual the A9 and the A96 will provide walking and cycling routes, for example. There is already a commitment in the programme for government to about 35km of cycle track on the A9, which is the more developed of the two dualling projects. We

are consulting with communities along those routes and will do all that we can to give people the confidence that they need to cycle and walk.

Sheriffhall in Edinburgh is an example where Transport Scotland listened to and will deliver what local communities need. Provision for users of non-motorised vehicles, including cyclists, at Sheriffhall is currently being developed, and we are in dialogue with a number of organisations such as Spokes and Sustrans. I assure members that we are taking into account the views of those groups alongside those of the wider public.

Finally, as part of the programme for government—and to touch on the point that Richard Lochhead made—we will deliver a long-distance walking and cycling route to match the north coast 500, so that people can enjoy the scenery of our beautiful country through activity. The route will stimulate local economies through increased tourism; bring health benefits through increased physical activity; and put Scotland on the map as a healthy and welcoming nation.

On top of national infrastructure, modal shift and integration of transport are clearly hugely important. Many members from across the chamber have spoken to me about the railways and what more we can do about using rail infrastructure to help to encourage active travel.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can you come to a conclusion please?

Humza Yousaf: In its first two years, Abellio has introduced 269 cycle parking spaces and there are plans for many others, as I am sure members will be aware. There are also 8 cycle spaces for high-speed trains.

Generally speaking, I believe that collaboration will be key. We will be listening to the views of members across the chamber on how best we can use the money and I am confident that the action that we take and that collaboration will mean that we will get more people cycling and walking, and that our nation will be healthier and better for it.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of walking and cycling; welcomes the 100% increase in funding for active travel from £40 million to £80 million from 2018-19 and the appointment of an Active Nation Commissioner in early 2018, and notes the work across parties, communities and policy portfolios to make Scotland a healthier and more active nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are pushed for time, so I am going to have to take time off some of the speeches. Mr Greene—you have no more than seven minutes.

15:12

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I start by doing something that I do not often do in the chamber, which is offer an apology to the minister. I woke up in a rather enlightened mood this morning and retrospectively considered my amendment. Although it contains some relevant and valid points—my colleagues will go through some of them—I would like to start by being positive.

We welcome the Scottish Government's plans to promote active travel, which is a vital component in reducing carbon emissions and in tackling health issues such as obesity, as well as in promoting affordable and accessible forms of transport.

We therefore welcome the appointment of an active nation commissioner, which seems like a sensible idea that we can support. Our only request is that the role of the commissioner be clear, and that objectives and measurable outcomes be part and parcel of the role. We also expect the new position to be charged with ensuring that every penny of the proposed active travel budget is spent sensibly and wisely on the right balance and mix of projects and investments that will, ultimately, help the Government to meet its objectives.

That is my concession: our amendment did not address the appointment, but the Government can be assured that the new commissioner will have our support in the task that lies before him or her.

In the previous Holyrood election, the Scottish Conservatives stood on an explicit manifesto promise to promote active travel in Scotland. Active travel, when properly promoted and facilitated, has countless health and social benefits, many of which will be discussed during this afternoon's debate.

Our amendment refers to a number of the issues surrounding the current plan that I would like to explore. The four main points in our amendment are on progress, funding, collaboration and infrastructure.

On the progress front, insufficient progress has been made. It is true that Scotland is a diverse country with differing travelling needs. It is also fair to say that the weather is not always kind to us, although active travel invariably means more walking and cycling. However, those things should come as no great surprise to anyone who chooses to face the elements and opt for a healthier commute to work or school.

The first cycling action plan was laid out by the Government in 2010, but at the current rate the Scottish Government will not meet its 2020 target of ensuring that 10 per cent of all journeys are

made by bicycle. Transport Scotland's reports show that cycling as a mode of travel to work sits at just over 2 per cent—we are some way off the 10 per cent target. The "Cycling Action Plan for Scotland 2013" set some admirable ambitions, but "everyday" bike rides have increased by just 0.2 per cent in a decade. At the current rate of increase, the 10 per cent target will, indeed, be met—in 300 years. I suspect that we will be taking hovercraft to work, by then.

National statistics show that people are shifting back to the car. That is worrying. The main reasons that are given are that journey distances are too far to walk or cycle and, secondly, there is the perception that there are too many cars on the road. Little progress has been made on the psychology behind modal shift, but that is not addressed in the Government's motion.

The second point that we would like to make is about funding, which will play a fundamental role in whether the policy is a success. Although we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase funding by £40 million in the coming financial year, it is important to note how we got to where we are today. In 2010, the active travel budget was £35.7 million. It had been reduced to £29 million by 2014 and to £25 million by 2015. In the current financial year, the figure for that budget represents a real-terms cut of about 8 per cent since 2010.

Although the announcement today is welcome, it must be noted that it is something of a knee-jerk reaction to all the warnings that are pointing to our being way off target. Conservatives will seek greater clarity on how targeted and effective the additional funding will be, and towards which specific projects it will be put. We will also monitor the success or otherwise of that spend. The devil is very much in the detail.

However, funding is not everything. I was pleased to hear the minister speak in his opening remarks about the important matter of collaboration: a key driver in ensuring the success of the plan will be better collaboration.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Will Jamie Greene take an intervention about funding before he moves on?

Jamie Greene: I will, if it is brief.

Bruce Crawford: My understanding is that funding for active travel has actually increased year on year, even prior to the announcement from the minister. Mr Greene's amendment seems to suggest that more money needs to go into it. If that is the case, how much more is needed and where will it come from?

Jamie Greene: I have already welcomed the £40 million increase that the minister announced.

All that I am asking for is greater clarity on where it will be spent. It is fair to say that the active travel budget has been cut year on year in the past 10 years.

Bruce Crawford: It has not.

Jamie Greene: That is according to Scottish Parliament information centre figures. I will be happy to check them after the debate.

On collaboration, the Government, Transport Scotland, local authorities and communities must work together to ensure the success of the Government's plans. Transport Scotland's "Review of Active Travel Policy Implementation: 2016 Final Report" highlights a lack of liaison in a number of cases, and states that

"The Scottish Government does not rigorously check whether schemes accord with its own or local policies, and does not commonly advocate good outcomes for active travel in local decision making ... Local interest and capacity is essential to generate effective community-led schemes".

In contrast, the UK Government has created an active transport policy that is very much community centred. Up to £1 billion of funding for cycling and walking projects has been made available to local bodies. In that way, communities can identify which projects will be most effective, rather than central Government making all the decisions.

The Scottish Conservatives have also been calling for safe travel routes to schools, one segregated cycle route in each of our cities—I hope that the minister will take that on board—and greater collaboration between Government, local authorities and the third sector.

We will be happy to support Labour's amendment, which makes a valid point about transport poverty. The Government is welcome to offer more detail on how the additional funding might target that. The Lib Dem amendment points out the importance of cycling from an early age: we are happy to support it, as well. We are unable to support the Green amendment as we do not believe that having a predefined or fixed amount dedicated to active travel in the budget is the best approach. We believe that the Government needs flexibility, so we are unable to support that amendment. I hope that I can rely on the support of other parties for our amendment.

I move amendment S5M-08497.2, to insert after "cycling":

"notes the lack of progress made in encouraging active travel, namely in cycling, where it is likely that the 10% of all journeys being made by bike in 2020 target is to be missed; acknowledges that budget cuts to active travel in previous annual budgets has had a negative impact on progress; notes its concern over reports on the lack of cohesion and contact between Transport Scotland and local authorities relating to the implementation of active

travel plans; underlines that insufficient active transport infrastructure impedes the potential success of this plan;".

15:19

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government's motion rightly recognises the work that is taking place across communities, government and political parties to develop the active travel agenda. The minister talked at length about a vision of communities being shaped around people—a vision in which we have the confidence to make healthier choices and walk or cycle for more of the regular journeys that we make every day. We share that vision. It is a vision for better health, and for a more active population who live less sedentary lives and who exercise and are out and about more in the community.

For the places where we live and work, it is about more liveable communities, better pedestrian access and cycling facilities and more footfall in our town centres. For the environment, it is about better air quality, modal shift away from cars and a reduction in vehicle emissions.

However, the active nation that we want to build must also be a fairer nation. Members will be aware of the research by Sustrans into the concept of transport poverty. There may be different measures of transport poverty, but there is widespread acceptance that being unable to access or afford transport limits people's choices and their opportunities in life. Unfortunately, right now, the Scottish Government's big idea when it comes to transport is to cut air passenger duty, which will benefit the wealthiest frequent-flyer few, but do nothing to tackle transport poverty. The cost of that tax cut is projected to be more than £190 million. That is money that could and should be invested elsewhere—especially in other transport initiatives.

Over the past 10 years, the Government has also failed to regulate Scotland's bus services, refused to back Labour's call for a fares freeze on the railways, and will still not rule out raising the eligibility criteria for the free bus pass. It has to be said that instead of addressing transport poverty, the Government too often makes decisions that make it worse.

The Sustrans report on the issue contains an analysis of factors including income, car ownership and access to services through public transport. The analysis placed more than 1 million people in

"datazones where there is a high risk of transport poverty".

As the minister said, active travel can address those risks because it provides an affordable alternative to other, more expensive, modes of transport. The Labour amendment addresses the issue of transport poverty head on, and calls on

the Scottish Government to set out the specific measures that will be taken to reduce transport poverty.

We welcome the increase in funding from £40 million to £80 million, but the Scottish Government and the minister must ensure that the budget is used to tackle transport poverty. Transport Scotland's statistics show that people from the least deprived areas are 20 per cent more likely to own a bike than are those from the most deprived areas. The Scottish Government should also consider ensuring that tackling poverty and inequality forms part of the remit of the new active nation commissioner.

Previously, funding that was allocated for active travel has been match funded by local authorities, but council budgets are under sustained pressure: since 2011, £1.5 billion has been cut from local government budgets. The Fraser of Allander institute anticipates further cuts to non-protected areas of spending, ranging from 9 per cent to 14 per cent by the end of this session of Parliament. Local authorities have told me—they may also have told the minister—that if things continue as they are, councils will be unable to match the funding.

Humza Yousaf: Neil Bibby will have noticed that I said that we will accept the Labour amendment, because of the wider issues on transport poverty. What he says about local authorities does not necessarily always ring true. Glasgow City Council, which has a new administration in place, has committed 10 per cent of its budget over the course of its administration, and the SNP-led City of Edinburgh Council is doing the same. Some local authorities are leading by example. Does Neil Bibby agree that other local authorities should look to them to see what more they can do?

Neil Bibby: There are good examples of local authorities, including Labour and SNP local authorities, that prioritise active travel. However, specifically on the increase in funding from £40 million to £80 million, local authorities have told me and, I am sure, the minister that the match-funding criteria will put at risk their bidding for potential funding. I encourage the minister to look at that; I hope that he will. Good projects must not be dropped because councils cannot afford the match funding that is required.

Councils should be properly supported to play their part in the active nation agenda, because they will be responsible for clearing streetscapes to make them more accessible and for delivering the active travel projects on the ground, and they will be responsible for upkeep of, and investment in, local road networks.

Let us make no mistake; investment is needed. Just last week, the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland said that there is a £1.6 billion backlog in road repairs that will be impossible to clear within existing budgets. That figure does not include pavements. That will concern motorists, of course, but it also concerns cyclists, because potholes are more of a nuisance and a risk to their bikes and to their personal safety.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of integrated transport. The Government's aspiration is that by 2030 walking and cycling will become the most popular modes of travel for short journeys. For longer journeys on public transport, more and more passengers will come to expect secure bike parking facilities at bus and train stations, and that more buses and trains will carry bikes. Modal shift towards cycling for many people is about behavioural change, but it is also about ensuring that there are adequate facilities that help people to make the choice to cycle. That was one of the key points in the cycling action plan.

There will be a consensus around many of the issues that we are discussing today. We share the aspiration that Scotland should be an active nation. What is important is that the debate about active travel does not take place in isolation. There is a link between active travel and addressing the health inequalities and transport poverty that we see in our society. The Labour amendment makes that clear and it demands action.

I move amendment S5M-08497.4, to insert at end

“; further notes with concern research by Sustrans Scotland, which found that 1.1 million people in Scotland occupy datazones where there is a high risk of transport poverty, and calls on the Scottish Government to set out how the increased active travel funding will specifically be used to reduce transport poverty.”

15:26

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The Green amendment sets out our long-standing ambition, which is shared by many people who want safer, healthier streets, for 10 per cent of the transport budget to be spent on walking and cycling. We know that 25 per cent of all journeys are by foot or bike, but currently the Scottish Government spends 1.6 per cent of that budget on walking and cycling.

It is important to get it right, for a number of reasons. I am sure that the minister will recognise the rising cost to the national health service of air pollution, for instance, and inactivity, as we have already heard in the chamber today. It will be interesting to hear the feedback from the cabinet secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, on low-emission zones, because we certainly need to

make progress on those, not simply for reasons of health but also to reduce congestion and make our roads safer.

Members of the Scottish Green Party have been working hard on a new policy, developed in consultation with disability groups, traffic engineers and walking and cycling campaigners, with the aim of aligning Scotland with more progressive European Union countries, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, in respect of transport. It is thanks to decades of investment in active travel in those countries that they have some of the fittest and happiest populations in the world.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

The concern with the development of the Greens' transport policy is that putting 10 per cent of the transport budget into walking and cycling could put public transport at risk. Could John Finnie address that issue?

John Finnie: It is all part of a package. Mike Rumbles is a member of a party that is happy—like all the other parties in this Parliament—to spend £6 billion on two roads, despite the backlog of repairs that we heard about from Neil Bibby. The Scottish Green Party is not against spending on road infrastructure, but we would maintain and perhaps upgrade some roads, rather than have the vanity projects that the other parties seem very keen on. It is an overall package that needs to be considered.

I want to talk about safety and about my colleague Mark Ruskell's member's bill to have a default speed limit in built-up areas of 20mph. The consultation was well responded to, with more than 2,000 people responding and 80 per cent supporting the measure, which has been overwhelmingly welcomed by families, schools and community groups. That is simply because people want the streets where they work, live and play to be safe and pleasant places. People have suffered the blight of pollution and danger caused by high traffic levels, key to which is planning policy. A planning bill is coming up later in the year, and I am sure that that will be a factor.

I want to pick up on a comment that Bruce Crawford made. The increase in the budget is welcome, but this is about the overall percentage of the transport budget that is spent on active travel. That went from 1.1 per cent in 2013 to a commendable figure of almost double that in the following year, but last year it was down to 1.6 per cent. Progress is welcome, but perhaps in summing up the minister can clarify whether that will be maintained in terms of the programme for government aspect.

In the short time that I have left, I want to talk about how difficult it is to calculate spend on

walking. Local authorities are mainly responsible for the infrastructure in that regard, and although grants are available they are used for a wide range of sustainable transport projects, so it is difficult to get an exact figure for spend on walking.

There is always conflict. I have had representations from the Ramblers about the metalling of multi-use paths, which is seen as an intrusion into green space.

Spend on cycling is also a complex issue. Indeed, the annual survey that Spokes undertook was discontinued in 2015, due to the increasing complexity of compiling it.

We use the Scottish household survey's figures on the proportion of journeys that are undertaken on foot and by bike, and there is some encouraging news. There are improvements in the figures on cycling to school, and the number of child casualties has plunged. The distance that is travelled by bike is on an upward trend and—if I may be parochial for a minute—in the Highland Council area 2.5 per cent of people report that their bike is their main mode of transport. That is the second-highest percentage in Scotland; across the Highlands and Islands the proportion is 1.9 per cent, which might surprise members.

Today, the minister announced funding for what we call the "mad mile": a stretch of road across a green-belt area in Inverness, which will mean that at peak times motorists will get between two points 12 seconds quicker. Such an approach is not sustainable. I alluded to the A9 and A96 upgrades; it will be interesting to hear how they contribute to active travel.

We will support the Labour amendment; it is commendable that it addresses transport poverty. We agree that the money that is being spent on replacing APD could certainly be much better spent.

The Lib Dem amendment talks about equipping people with skills. We should also equip people with knowledge, because people's attitudes are such that there are tensions between the various groups. I plead for courtesy for pedestrians, for cyclists, for motorists and for people on horses, so that tensions are removed.

The speed of vehicles is a challenge in rural areas. If we can get goods off heavy goods vehicles and on to rail—there has not been positive news about that in the past couple of days—it would be a big help.

I finish by commending a constituent, Mr Robert Phillips, who is a fine example to us all. He commutes by kayak daily between Holm Mills, on the outskirts of Inverness, and the city centre. That option is not available to all of us, but we need to have a wee look at what we can do.

I move amendment S5M-08497.3, to leave out from “, and notes” to end and insert:

“; further welcomes the work across parties, communities and policy portfolios to make Scotland a healthier and more active nation; recognises that the latest Scottish Household Survey figures show that active travel rates remain low; believes that meeting the Scottish Government’s target of ‘10% of everyday journeys to be made by bike, by 2020’ will be missed without a rapid shift in resources, and calls on the government to commit at least 10% of the transport budget to walking and cycling by the end of the parliamentary session.”

15:32

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

The Scottish Government’s announcement of a doubling of the active travel budget in this year’s programme for government is welcome.

Boosting the number of people who cycle would be a win-win for Scotland, as the Scottish Government recognised as far back as 2009, when Stewart Stevenson was transport minister. Back then, 1 per cent of all journeys were made by bike. Stewart Stevenson said at the time that the Government’s target was for 10 per cent of journeys to be made by bike by 2020. He said:

“This is an ambitious target but one I believe is achievable.”

We are now just three years away from the year when the target is to be reached, and how have we done? The percentage of journeys made by bike has moved from 1 per cent to 1.2 per cent—or 2 per cent, according to some figures—in the past eight years. In this area, as in many others, the warm words of Scottish ministers have not been matched by the reality.

It is more than time to move up the gears. As well as increasing the share of the transport budget that is spent on cycling and active transport, the Scottish Government must ensure that safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians is built into the transport system and that, from an early age, people feel confident to cycle. Countries across Europe have shown that that is possible.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that the case for increasing the uptake of cycling is compelling. Uptake is increasing in schools, and a practical way of encouraging that is by ensuring that every schoolchild has the opportunity to benefit from cycle training—hence our amendment to the Government’s motion. We are not prescriptive about how each child should be given that opportunity, but we are clear that it should happen. I would like the minister to address that in his summing up.

Increasing cycling has a huge potential to benefit people’s health, tackle obesity and ease congestion, and it will contribute to Scotland meeting its climate change targets. Cycling can

also help to boost our economy, because lifestyle is taken into account by people and companies when they make choices about where they live and locate to. However, despite the surge of interest in cycling in recent years, which has been driven in part by sporting successes, participation in cycling remains a minority pursuit. We need action to increase investment in both cycling and walking and to improve dedicated cycling infrastructure to ensure that people are confident that they can ride their bike safely. We must also put cycling at the heart of our planning processes.

I return to the Government’s target of getting 10 per cent of all journeys made by bike. All parties in the chamber support that target, but I have to say that the Scottish Government simply has not shown the strong, effective and sustained leadership that is required to meet the target. I note that the current transport minister has not been in his job for that long, relatively speaking, and I am hopeful that we will get sustained leadership in the field. It was recently confirmed that the proportion of journeys that are made by bike is now lower than it was in 2011. At this rate, we will never achieve the Government’s target. I disagree with Jamie Greene, who said that it will take 300 years—at this rate, we will never achieve it.

Meanwhile, what of the Government’s other transport priorities? The Government’s wish to halve air passenger duty would cost up to £125 million in lost revenues, and its aim to abolish it entirely would cost up to £250 million. There is some dispute about the figures, which Labour also mentioned, but the effect would be the same. Just think of what could be done with even a small part of such resources if they were directed towards active travel instead.

What do we need to do to make cycling a more effective option for most people? We need not only to invest more in dedicated cycling infrastructure but to ensure that people feel confident that they can cycle safely. I have mentioned that issue a few times, because it is really important. Research in 2015 found that only 62 per cent of Edinburgh residents felt safe riding a bike during the day, and the figure fell to just 34 per cent after dark.

Presiding Officer, I am conscious of the time, so I will keep this short.

We need real action, rather than warm words, from the Scottish Government to tackle those issues. That does not mean just moving up a gear. We need to see real leadership from the Scottish Government if we are ever to get even close to achieving the 10 per cent target that has been set for journeys by bike.

I move amendment S5M-08497.1, to insert at end:

“; further notes that less than 2% of children cycle to school; considers that equipping people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to cycle from an early age is essential to encouraging them to continue cycling as they get older, and believes that every schoolchild should have the opportunity to benefit from cycle training.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Apart from Mr Rumbles, all the opening speakers ran over their allocated time, which will have an effect on speeches in the open debate.

15:38

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The advantages of active travel are well documented: it has positive implications for the nation's health and economy as well as staggering benefits for the environment. There are also advantages for our happiness, which is something that we do not talk enough about in the chamber or in life generally. For me, one of the absolute treats of living in Edinburgh for three days a week is the fact that, for the first time in 20 years as a working woman, I can walk to work. Come rain or shine, I put my trainers on and walk to Holyrood, and that sets me up for the day. Twenty years of sitting in horrible Aberdeen traffic has made me very grateful for that.

All those wonderful benefits are obvious, and I hugely welcome any Government investment in active travel. Indeed, I welcome the investment by those local authorities that Mr Yousaf mentioned in his earlier intervention. More people walking and cycling will not happen if there is not more investment and innovation in existing projects, whether they are brand new or improvement based.

Safety is a major reason why many people who want to walk or cycle still do not, and a lot of safety concerns could be addressed through infrastructure. Safe routes to school are tremendously important. Every child should be able to walk or cycle to school safely if they do not qualify for school transport. I was quite evangelical about my children walking to school—even if they sometimes were not. However, I was lucky because, if I stood outside my house, I could pretty much watch them until they reached the school gates.

I admit that I was previously quite judgmental about parents who I knew did not live that much further away than I did rocking up at the school gates in a four-by-four. Walking to school from an early age is good for a child's health and development, particularly when we trust them to do it alone or with friends. However, now that I am an elected member, I get many emails from

parents who feel that it is not safe enough to let their child walk or cycle to school. Narrow or non-existent pavements are a common theme; another is large commercial vehicles going through residential areas.

All the same, every local authority must ensure that a child has a safe route to school, with crossings and assistance at crossings, if required, and pavements lining the route. I would argue that, for cycling, we are nowhere near where we need to be in that regard, particularly in rural locations. Cycle paths or marked-off paths on pavements for bikes are rare in rural towns and villages, and I hope that a large part of the active travel money will be used to address that. I would also like local authorities to build cycling provision into every new pathway or to take it into account when maintenance of existing pavements and pathways is undertaken, whenever that is possible.

On my recent visit to the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which is under construction, I was pleased to see that routes have been provided for cyclists that join up existing paths over and under the new highway.

I think that it is great that Sandra White has in the past highlighted parking on pavements as a concern, and I am glad to hear that stopping that practice in the forthcoming transport bill is under consideration. Cars parking on pavements and across cycleways are a scourge for cyclists, wheelchair users and people with young children who are trying to get to their destination. My inbox is full of complaints about that.

I agree with much of what Transform Scotland said in its submission to us for the debate, but I feel that it is heavy on improvements to urban environments and does not address rural issues in the same way. I agree 100 per cent that low-emission zones are an important priority and that encouraging more cycling and walking in cities is not just desirable but essential, but we must be aware that much of the traffic is commuter traffic from rural areas, including mine. In Aberdeenshire, links between towns and cities are still sorely wanting for people who want to be active and those who want to leave their car at home but encounter difficulties in doing so.

There is only one train station in my constituency, and it is on the edge of it. Anyone who wants to cycle or walk part of the way into a work or study place in Aberdeen city will have to cycle or walk wholesale or take the buses, which in my view are still far too expensive.

I once cycled into work at the college that I worked at. The Formartine and Buchan cycle path was wonderful—it got me to Dyce on the edge of the city in no time at all—but, from there, cycle path provision was intermittent and I had to join

busy highways. The route was counterintuitive to the direction that I was travelling in. That is a complicated way of saying that I was sent all over the place in my attempt to get to the city centre. The traffic was terrifying, and I never attempted the journey again. My journey round the Mounthooly roundabout was like a chapter in a Stephen King novella. Given that I live only 3 miles from the Aberdeen city boundary, one would have thought that cycling to work would be a breeze, but I never did it again, and I am not one of the people we need to convince to give it a try. We must ensure that the experience is a good one and a safe one.

A joined-up approach is needed. We need to link the urban and the rural, and we must always think about why people would not opt to walk or cycle. I would say that safety is right at the top of that list.

15:43

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): As anyone who has ever heard me speak in a parliamentary debate on more or less any subject will tell you, I am a great believer in the benefits of physical activity as a way of improving public health. The principle behind active travel—getting people out of their cars and encouraging walking and cycling—is one that members across the chamber whole-heartedly support. The preventative agenda should be at the forefront of all our ambitions.

As has been mentioned, early intervention by promoting cycling to and from school is extremely important. To do that, we need to deliver safe routes to school. Speaking as a parent, I would be only too happy to let my youngest child cycle to school, but there is no way that I will let her do that if it involves cycling on busy main roads.

I think that most children, given half the chance, would be quite happy to walk, run, cycle, scoot or skate to school, but that can happen only if parents are confident that it can be done safely. Creating safe travel zones around schools—which can be done anywhere, whether in towns, cities or villages—to give kids a safe route to school must be a priority. We must make that objective a priority when schools and the surrounding areas are planned.

In East Ayrshire, the park-and-stride initiative gets parents to drop children off a few hundred yards from the school entrance at identified drop-off and pick-up places, so providing a safe route to the school.

There are a number of known barriers to cycling and we need to address them all if we are to achieve the increases in active travel that we want to see.

The first barrier is distance. Most people will never be persuaded to set off at 5.30 am—Richard Lochhead and Liam Kerr aside—clad in hi-vis Lycra to cycle to work. Public transport therefore has a key role to play in making active travel sustainable. We need bike storage space to be provided on trains—I am sure that Liam Kerr will talk about that in more detail—and access to hire bikes at railway stations. Active travel hubs, such as the one at Kilmarnock railway station, are great examples of what can be done.

We need to be able to split travel between biking and public transport, so that people can cycle to the station and use secure bike storage there, or they can use the space made available on trains so that they can take a train to the city and then walk or cycle to the office.

Mr Yousaf alluded to the need to share the road with other users. The relationship between cyclists and drivers can sometimes be an uneasy one and it is important that we continue to develop a network of cycle lanes that give cyclists safe routes.

Active travel must be a priority when planning infrastructure. I recently asked the cabinet secretary whether there were any plans to build a cycle route in conjunction with the building of the Maybole bypass on the A77. Apparently, there are no such plans. That is short-sighted; it shows a lack of co-ordination between Government departments. Surely looking at having a cycle route joining Ayr and Stranraer is desirable from health and tourism perspectives. The integration of active travel initiatives with other infrastructure projects must be a sensible approach.

There are also financial barriers. Statistics show that households with higher household incomes have greater access to bikes, which is why it is so important to increase the provision of hire bikes, or even to offer the free loan of bikes.

A few weeks ago, I attended the launch of Brodie's bike project at the University of the West of Scotland in Ayr. The project, set up in memory of UWS student Brodie Eaton, who passed away while studying at UWS, provides students living in halls of residence with access to bikes and safety equipment free of charge.

Identifying all the reasons that limit people's ability to cycle and walk should be a priority.

Delivering a sustainable long-term shift towards more active travel in Scotland is a complicated task within the even more complicated task of addressing Scotland's long-running issues with preventable illness, poor diet and inactive lifestyles. There is a danger in formulating policy based on a need to hit the headlines by meeting self-imposed targets, rather than concentrating on bedding in cultural change for the long term.

The Scottish Government's ambition is that 10 per cent of journeys be made by bike by 2020. That is a lot of good, round headline-worthy numbers, but there is little sign of progress towards that goal, with only 2 per cent of journeys being taken by bike in recent years.

The move towards an active travel nation will not happen overnight. It may well be that we will achieve a long-term shift by focusing on today's school pupils and students, who are still forming their travel habits, coupled with a long-term integrated infrastructure strategy.

We on the Conservative benches welcome the Government's direction of travel, if members will excuse the pun, but it is the delivery on the ground that matters. Cross-portfolio working is required here, as was highlighted in the questioning of minister Aileen Campbell last week during her announcement of the diet and obesity consultation. The transport minister has yet to demonstrate that kind of initiative or understanding of the issues and opportunities that we have. Although we welcome the plans, the jury is still out.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to members that all these extra little 10 seconds add up and will mean that someone towards the end of the debate is penalised.

15:48

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I welcome the Government's motion, the £80 million pound investment and the appointment of an active nation commissioner.

It is worth repeating that walking or cycling to work is active travel and it is good for our health and our environment. As the minister said, the positive impact that walking and cycling can have on physical and mental health is undeniable. The NHS states that regular walking alone has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, stroke and some cancers. We know that the stats for cycling are similar. Furthermore, it has been proven that walking improves an individual's overall wellbeing and even helps to fight depression.

Research indicates that walking is as effective as antidepressants in treating mild to moderate depression and, in some cases, more effective, and has positive rather than negative side effects into the bargain. That is fantastic—although, of course, antidepressant drugs are a necessity in some instances.

It is quite easy for us to incorporate more walking into our days, probably easier than to

incorporate cycling, as other speakers have mentioned. It baffles me sometimes to see the number of cars parked outside primary schools in the morning as a result of parents dropping their children off. I know that people are busy and everyone is prone to do that now and again. For some people, however, it is a very regular occurrence and part of the daily trip.

I am sure that I am not the only MSP in the chamber to have a mailbox full of constituents' complaints about various parking scenarios in their constituencies. For example, together with the local council I am dealing with parking at Coatbridge college campus, where far too many cars park. We are encouraging the college and others to look at ways in which they can encourage their students and employees to use the walking routes that are available. There is an onus on organisations to promote walking as an alternative.

It is all very well to say that everyone should walk and cycle, but we need to change the culture, as speakers from all parties have said. The daily mile is a good example—I have spoken about it in debates in this chamber before—and I know that most schools across my constituency engage with it. Before the previous debate on the subject, I spoke to some young people about the daily mile and they seemed to really enjoy it. We hope that that embeds them in the culture of walking.

I want to mention another couple of groups in my constituency. The first is the Muirhead district pensioners' club, which has started a walking club that is available to all members of the community. It is going very successfully, and the club won an award for it. The St Monica's ramblers club in Coatbridge was formed 25 years ago and dedicated itself to organising walks every fortnight and getting people active across Lanarkshire. They do everything, from walking country parks to scaling Munros.

Beat the street operates across North Lanarkshire. My office staff and I signed up for it and, in total, 104,000 miles were completed—obviously not just by me and the office but across the whole of North Lanarkshire.

In the Chryston area, jogscotland encourages people to get out and jog a couple of times a week and get fresh air. Although those examples do not directly equate to walking as active travel, they do promote it through their endeavours and through the leaders of those programmes talking to the people who participate.

A good example of the middle ground is the New College Lanarkshire students who created the Dunbeth Park walk this way route, the subject of my members' business debate last year. The route is for students to use in their lunch time and

for students and employees to use on their way to college or other work nearby.

It is coming to the end of my time, but I quickly want to pick up something that Neil Bibby and Mike Rumbles mentioned about the affordability of cycling. I am teaching my wee boy, who is three and a half, to ride his bike. I am lucky in that I can afford to do that. I can get my bike and we are able to travel to the locks in Coatbridge and use that area for him to practise in. I wonder about people who are not in that position. We need to look at projects that can encourage cycling so that young people have the opportunity to look at walking and cycling. In North Lanarkshire, the balanceability project teaches children to cycle.

I will stop there as I have made my point.

15:54

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

This is a really important debate. As co-convenor of the cross-party group for cycling, walking and buses, I take a keen interest in active travel and its integration with public transport. We should not forget the rail cross-party group as well.

I welcome the recognition in the Scottish Government motion of the collective effort that has gone into pushing forward active travel. The Labour Party also welcomes the Scottish Government announcement of the doubling of the active travel budget. However, we must all acknowledge that Scotland is still far from the target of 10 per cent of journeys by bike by 2020.

I am very supportive of the Scottish Labour amendment, as it recognises the issue of transport poverty and calls specifically for action on that.

It is fantastic to see the community links plus award flourishing since Alison Johnstone, Jim Eadie and I, as fellow co-conveners of the cross-party group on cycling in the previous session, proposed it to the Scottish Government. The development of the first winning project—Glasgow City Council's south city way—is under way. Floating bus stops, which I look forward to seeing, and cycle parking racks outside community centres have been the first steps in developing opportunities for healthier and greener travel on a major commuter belt. This year's five winning entries in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling and Inverness will be invaluable models for placemaking. However, to address transport poverty, the award must have inclusive criteria and so must the action on developing the new funding, if that is to reach more deprived communities.

This summer, I visited Amsterdam specifically to experience for myself the difference in the cycling culture there. Being in an older city is no excuse for not taking that approach. In Scotland, many

local authorities and community groups are proactively involving residents in the way forward. The Spokes event that is to be held jointly with Midlothian Council, East Lothian Council, West Lothian Council and City of Edinburgh Council representatives on 9 November is a good example of that approach. I have with me the flyer to give that a plug.

It is, of course, not only road layout and placemaking that make cyclists and pedestrians become equal road users. There is a wide range of ways in which we can become empowered and can feel that it is safe to take up active travel. One way is through the protection of civil law. Our country is one of the few in Europe that still does not have some form of strict or presumed liability to protect vulnerable road users. I am a keen supporter of presumed liability, and there are people across all the parties and far beyond who agree with it. I am clear that the time has come to acknowledge its value and to consider acting further on that.

Education for all road users is, of course, essential. As an ex-primary school teacher, I have always been uncomfortable with how little on-road cycling education there is as part of the bikeability scheme. I am delighted that the figure has radically improved recently to 42 per cent.

I am also delighted that walking is now part of the remit of our cross-party group, along with cycling and buses. I have asked myself—and I ask everyone in the chamber and beyond—whether walking really has as much exposure as cycling in the active travel quest.

On social justice and transport poverty, Ramblers Scotland has briefed on a new study that demonstrates that people living in the most deprived areas are more likely to take journeys by active travel and predominantly by walking. That can be helped by the pedestrianisation of streets, the maintenance of pavements and paths, and making planning decisions that put pedestrians first.

We must not forget rural active travel. There are still significant gaps in the national walking and cycling network. One such gap is in my region. Crawford community council is keen to create opportunities for villagers and to develop cycling and walking opportunities for tourist links, which would help local accommodation businesses. However, there are integrated transport link problems. There must be more active enabling of tourists to use trains and buses with their bikes. It is several years since I asked Keith Brown, when he was the Minister for Transport and Veterans, to consider the hook-on carriages model. I understand that that model is highlighted in one of our briefings. It is very successful in the South

Tyrol, where large dedicated carriages are used. Will the minister explore that model further?

Finally on transport poverty, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee took evidence this morning on air quality, which affects our communities' health. The development of active travel will be key in addressing that. As the five third sector organisations that put together a joint briefing—that is heartening in itself—said, achieving active travel nation vision and growth in walking and cycling will be delivered only through collaboration between the business, transport, health, planning, economic regeneration and environment sectors.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I am very sorry, but you must conclude.

Claudia Beamish: Let us do it together.

15:59

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, because I am a trustee for the Peffery Way Association. Our goal is to create an off-road path suitable for walkers, wheelchairs, buggies and bikes that will link Dingwall, Strathpeffer and the communities in between.

Like many people in the chamber and all over Scotland, I very much welcome the commitment in the programme for government to double active travel funding for walking and cycling to £80 million a year. That is the "rapid shift in resources" that the Green amendment says is required to hit the target for 10 per cent of everyday journeys to be made by bike.

John Finnie: Does Maree Todd share my concerns about the lack of maintenance on many roads and bridges throughout the country as a result of the expenditure on two main roads in particular?

Maree Todd: I have had some concerns about that and I have raised them with Sustrans and am raising them with BEAR Scotland as well.

We might not be matching the level of funding in leading European countries, but we are way ahead of the other nations in the UK. We spend a whopping annual £13.50 per head here, compared with £6.50 in England outside London and only £3 to £5 per head in Wales. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure previously acknowledged that

"the funding available for cycling has been limited and spread thinly."

We are doing a great thing in Scotland.

The benefits of walking and cycling are extremely well researched and documented. Cycling and walking for short journeys in local communities can help to provide an answer to pressing issues that we face in Scotland, including air pollution, town and city congestion, ill health, obesity and the rising cost of physical inactivity to the national health service. Walking and cycling are also a cost-effective method of transport for short journeys and can be an enjoyable and fun way of travelling if the environment is safe and accessible. The physical benefits are obvious, but the benefits to mental health are also huge. There is evidence that walking and cycling reduce stress, depression and even dementia.

Although nearly everyone walks at least some of the time, only about 1 per cent of trips are made by bike. The Government wants that to rise to 10 per cent. The big barrier to cycling is safety. If we want to get more than just the dedicated few Lycra-clad men cycling, we need to do more than paint a line on a road; we need to build dedicated infrastructure that segregates cyclists from traffic. Data from Denmark shows that only 30 per cent of cyclists feel safe mixing with traffic but 70 per cent feel safe on segregated paths. That is why everyone is so excited about the extra money. It will undoubtedly deliver new infrastructure and that will increase active travel.

Another great statistic from Denmark shows that new cycle paths typically generate a 20 per cent increase in cyclists from day 1. "If you build it, they will come," we might say. An example of that in my region is the three distilleries pathway on Islay. It is a brand-new pathway that runs from Port Ellen and takes in the distilleries of Laphroaig, Lagavulin and Ardbeg. The path runs for 5.5km and is fully accessible for walkers, cyclists, pushchairs and wheelchairs. The idea behind it was to enable visitors to go to the distilleries and sample the goods without drinking and driving but, now that it is there, loads of locals use too.

In Inverness, thanks to high-profile cycle route developments like the Millburn Road shared-use path and the golden bridge, the number of cycle commuters more than doubled in the last few years to 8 per cent. Earlier this year, I was delighted to see Inverness receive funding to develop cycle-friendly infrastructure as part of the Sustrans community links plus design competition, as Claudia Beamish mentioned. Inverness is a growing city, and building cycling into the transport system could fundamentally change the way that we live in future. I welcome that.

I will mention some of the economic benefits that I expect from the Government's investment. Scotland is, of course, a fantastic destination for cycle tourism. In the Highlands and Islands—the region that I represent—we boast some of the

most scenic cycle routes in the country. Cycle tourism brings great benefits and value to the Scottish economy. According to Sustrans, it was worth £345 million in 2015. There are already some brilliant long-distance routes in the national cycle network. Plans to link destinations such as Skye and Ullapool to Inverness are really welcome and will integrate the incredibly successful Hebridean way with mainland links. That is a fantastic plan for increasing green tourism in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And that is a nice place to stop. Thank you very much.

16:04

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Any moves by parties and communities to encourage active travel, particularly in relation to cycling, must be welcomed. It is in that spirit that I make my comments today.

First, as we have heard, the Scottish Government set out in its 2010 cycling action plan an objective to achieve a 10 per cent modal share for cycling by 2020. However, the 2016 “Transport and Travel in Scotland” document showed a decrease in cycling as the main mode of travel to work from 2.6 per cent in 2014 to 2.2 per cent in 2015. National statistics show that commuters have switched back to the car from cycling, with 8 per cent of those who cycled to work a year ago now driving. Nearly one fifth of those people say that that is due to there being too many cars on the road. That is what we need to focus on.

I note in passing that, at the moment, the answer to that issue seems to be an arbitrary 20mph speed limit that is observed by virtually no one; is all but unenforceable; mirrors a scheme that Manchester has just abandoned, apparently due to minimal impact on speed or accidents; increases emissions; and does nothing to make cycling a better commute.

In that regard, I want to develop a point that Mike Rumbles made. I cycle to Parliament and have been road cycling for about 30 years. I have been knocked off my bike on Parliament Square by a bus and on Tottenham Court Road by a car, and I have collided with a lamppost when a tourist stepped in front of me on the King’s Road. However, I would still rather ride in London than try to negotiate my current route, which involves travelling from the McDonald Road junction on Leith Walk down London Road and trying to take that right-hand turn on Abbey Lane as two opposing lines of traffic vie to see how close to me they can get their wing mirrors.

The Scottish Conservatives’ document “Global Challenge, Local Leadership”, calls for one segregated cycle route in each of Scotland’s cities,

and safe travel routes to schools. Maree Todd is right to say that we will never encourage significant numbers of people to cycle to work or school if they are being asked to cycle only on unsegregated roads. According to the report by Sustrans, Cycling Scotland and others, 42 per cent of primary schools provide on-road cycle training. However, that is a wasted resource if parents do not feel comfortable letting the kids ride. John Finnie made some positive remarks on school cycling, but if we really want people to cycle, we have to make it safe and comfortable for them to do so—of course, when I say “people”, I mean people of all abilities, including children and those who are less confident, as the Liberal Democrat amendment rightly says. Perhaps the minister can expand in closing on the extent to which cycling can be designed into roads and junctions.

Secondly, members might recall that, in May this year, I held a debate on bike capacity on trains. Currently, nearly all long-distance ScotRail trains are class 170 Turbostars, with four official bike spaces. From summer 2018, ScotRail will introduce what are colloquially called Intercity 125s. However, despite ScotRail’s 2015 promises that the 125s would have a capacity of “at least 20 cycles”, the minister conceded in his opening remarks that there would be only eight spaces.

Following my debate and a great deal of pressure from various groups such as Spokes, Transport Scotland recently reached an agreement with ScotRail to increase the number of spaces that are available at intermediate stations from two to four. Along with the six spaces in the power cars, that will be 10 spaces in all, which is a long way short of “at least 20”. Although increasing intermediate capacity to four takes us back to the existing class 170 capacity, in practice, the situation will be worse because, on a 170, three bikes can squeeze into the two cycle spaces, and that flexibility is lost on the high-speed trains, as the storage is on hanging hooks, which are, themselves, a challenge for those of lesser stature or strength to use. That is not good news for Aviemore, Montrose or Stonehaven, which are great jumping-off points for cycle tourism.

Finally, the minister mentioned the programme for government, which states, on page 59, that

“dedicated carriages for cycles and other outdoor sports equipment on rural routes in the north and west”

will be introduced. If that means what it implies—that there will be an additional coach on those routes—that is positive. However, we have no details. What is meant by “the north and west”? Does that include the North East? Where is the rolling stock coming from? What services, in particular, are we talking about? What does success look like in relation to usage? I asked the

Scottish Government those questions and more in September, but I have not yet had an answer—I have no doubt that I will receive it soon.

Spokes says in its latest newsletter that, if the reports of the extra carriage are true,

“then all concerned, and especially Minister Humza Yousaf, will be heroes!”

Humza Yousaf: Am I not a hero already?

Liam Kerr: You are my hero, Humza.

In the closing speech, the Government can be a hero by answering the questions that I have asked and delivering the news that we are all waiting for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On that note, with the declaration that Humza Yousaf is your hero, we will move on. Live that down, Mr Kerr.

16:10

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): From Superman to reality.

On Friday last week, I was delighted to join people from Stirling Cycle Hub, together with the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown, and others to celebrate the third anniversary of the city’s fabulous rental bike scheme, nextbike. Nextbike is being delivered through Forth Environment Link, and 37,000 cycle journeys have been made since it started, with more than 24,000 in the past year alone. It is a truly remarkable success story in my constituency and one that I am delighted that Transport Scotland is set to build on.

The cabinet secretary has announced a further £270,000 of investment into Stirling Cycle Hub’s nextbike scheme—that is an awful mouthful—which brings the overall Scottish Government investment into the organisation to more than £1 million. I understand that that further funding will secure five smart screens across the Forth Valley area that will provide advice to the public about walking and cycle routes, as well as tips on bike maintenance. Perhaps more important, it will increase to 50 the fleet of e-bikes that is available to rent by the public. It is the first large-scale electric bike scheme of its kind in Scotland—a remarkable achievement by those involved in piecing it together. I understand that, today, there are more than 2,000 registered and active users of the scheme. That number includes many who have opted to leave the car at home so that they can engage in that exciting and accessible mode of active travel.

Stirling Cycle Hub’s aim is clear: to turn Stirling into a cycling city in which cycling is appealing, accessible and rewarding. The development and growth of the service among those who live in the Stirling area is in large part due to support from

Transport Scotland, Sustrans and Stirling Council. The project has greatly improved the cycling culture in Stirling. The numbers speak for themselves. Since opening up to the public in 2014, the service has seen a 300 per cent increase in usage, clearly signalling a shift in local attitudes to cycling. Stirling Council has recently been awarded £2.7 million by the community links plus scheme to create a world-class active travel network in our city.

I may have mentioned a couple of times in the past that I represent what I consider to be one of the most beautiful and inspiring constituencies in our country. That includes a vast rural setting of lochs, mountains and highland glens—a perfect destination in which to enjoy outdoor life on foot or by bike. I was privileged to take part in the opening of the Strathyre to Kingshouse pathway and cycle track in rural Stirling. The project received investment from the Scottish Government, which was match funded by Stirling Council and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. The 3.5km route allows residents of Strathyre and Kingshouse to cycle or walk on a traffic-free track between those communities, as well as giving access to other existing routes in the area.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority has also worked with Transport Scotland and Sustrans across my constituency to create many more opportunities for active travel. Through that partnership approach and an uplift in active travel funding in recent years, 20km of projects have been delivered in places such as Drymen, Tyndrum, Strathyre, Callander, Croftamie and St Fillans, with a total capital value of £3.5 million.

While I am on matters to do with the rural aspect, Roseanna Cunningham would never forgive me if I did not mention the three saints way. The route can already be walked in part but, once completed, it will connect Killin on the most westerly edge of my constituency to St Andrews on the north-east coast of Fife. That expansion makes the route comparable with the north coast 500 that has been mentioned by other members.

Despite the curmudgeonly tone adopted by some members during the debate, the projects that I have discussed today show Government action and represent real improvement. In 2011-12, the active travel budget was £17.5 million. In 2018-19, it will be £80 million. Let us celebrate that and other real achievements that have been made on the ground. I wish that I had had time to address the real issue of transport poverty, which Labour raised in its amendment. I welcome the amendment and the tone with which Labour members have discussed transport poverty, because we must make real progress there, too.

16:15

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): As Labour's spokesperson on public health and a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I want to focus my brief comments on the important health benefits of active travel, which are significant. I am pleased that the minister highlighted that being active can have a positive impact on our mental health and wellbeing. It can also reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attack, cancers such as bowel cancer, and dementia. Walking and cycling are the ultimate low-emission options for local transport, as they reduce air pollution, which is the cause of thousands of premature deaths every year.

Despite those benefits, only about two thirds of adults in Scotland currently meet the moderate to vigorous physical activity targets set out in guidelines, and a quarter describe their activity levels as low or very low, which is why increasing active travel is so important. With two thirds of journeys less than 3km being taken by car in Scotland, there is no doubt that there is scope to deliver that increase in active travel if we break down the barriers to walking and cycling.

One of those barriers is unquestionably the activity gap that exists in Scotland. Physical activity levels in more prosperous areas are higher than the levels in our most deprived communities; as we have heard from Neil Bibby and Claudia Beamish, those communities already suffer from high levels of transport poverty. The recent Scottish household survey found that there was an 18 point gap in the percentage of adults participating in physical activity, from sports to walking, between the richest and the poorest communities. Sixty-nine per cent of people from the poorest backgrounds have taken part in some sort of physical or sporting activity, compared with 87 per cent from the most affluent. The survey found that someone was three times more likely to go cycling if they lived in the most affluent areas. The activity gap was especially large when it came to walking. Seventy-seven per cent of people in more affluent areas were likely to go for a 30-minute walk, compared with 57 per cent in our most deprived areas. If we want to increase walking and cycling for travel or recreational purposes, there needs to be a particular focus on breaking down the barriers to activity in some of our most deprived communities, starting by routinely measuring participation rates within those communities, which is not currently done.

It is not just among the least well-off groups that barriers to cycling and walking exist. Roger Geffen, the policy director of Cycling UK, said that UK cycling conditions

"disproportionately deter young people, older people, women and people with disabilities from cycling".

Issues such as safety and accessibility must be tackled, both in cycling and in walking, if we are to prevent those groups of people from being excluded.

As we have heard, that will take investment. Studies from across the world show clearly that barriers to walking and cycling are broken down and cultural shifts towards active travel take place if we invest in the necessary infrastructure. The drastic expansion of segregated cycleways in Seville saw the proportion of journeys made by bike increase from 0.5 to 6 per cent. Research from Denmark found that new cycle tracks increase bicycle traffic by 20 per cent from day 1. The cuts to councils, which need to match fund active travel projects to secure Sustrans support, mean that the roll-out of cycleways has been far slower here. If we are serious about achieving a step change in active travel, we need to be serious about ending the cuts to council budgets.

We need to empower local communities to deliver bold and creative solutions that increase cycling and walking. I will briefly highlight one example, which Fulton MacGregor referred to earlier. When I chaired Dumfries and Galloway Council's economy, environment and infrastructure committee, I had the privilege of being involved in a fantastic initiative called beat the street, which prompted a significant increase in cycling and walking in towns across the region. For members who are unfamiliar with it, the scheme operates as a game. Participants collect points on a card or fob by walking, cycling or running across the town, swiping their card or fob when they reach scanners, which are usually attached to lampposts. Points are counted on a leader board and there are cash prizes available for the winning teams, which often represent community groups. It is an inclusive and community-focused initiative that is targeted at people of all ages and all levels of fitness, and the levels of participation are exceptional.

In 2016, beat the street came to Stranraer, and nearly 4,000 residents—39 per cent of the population—took part. Of those, 80 per cent said later that they had continued with the changes that they made. The proportion of adults reporting frequent active travel increased from 57 per cent before beat the street to 62 per cent six months later, and the number reporting no active travel decreased from 16 per cent to just 2 per cent.

The figures were similar in other towns. In Dalbeattie, more than 1,625 people—a third of the population—took part. In Annan, 3,285 players took part; that amounts to nearly 40 per cent of the population, which is the highest percentage anywhere in the world. In the past few months, the scheme has been rolled out in my home town of Dumfries, where nearly 8,000 people have signed

up for 83 teams. That is a clear example of the benefits of creative and locally led interventions. I whole-heartedly commend the scheme, and I hope that it will be rolled out in other communities as a result of the increase in active travel funding.

16:20

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I will focus on walking, just as I did the last time I spoke in a debate on active travel. The motion and the amendments make only two references to walking, while there are nine references to cycling, although walking is substantially more accessible than cycling. I suggest to colleagues in Parliament that the best way of improving active travel is to encourage people to walk.

Let us have a wee think about some numbers. The “Prescribing & Medicines: Prescription Cost Analysis” report for 2015-16, which is the last year for which I have been able to find numbers, shows that of the top five drugs, by number of items dispensed, the combined total of prescriptions for numbers 1, 3 and 5 totals 8.78 million. Those drugs are all for use by people who have respiratory conditions, who would benefit greatly from taking quite gentle exercise—or more serious exercise, if they are capable of it.

How much do those prescriptions cost? I do not quite know, but the average cost of a prescription is £10, and those drugs are at the top end; they are among the more expensive drugs. We are therefore considering a figure for annual prescriptions of those three drugs alone that exceeds the active travel budget.

What is the cost of a pair of trainers? One can get a decent pair of trainers—although not a classy pair—for about 30 quid. Add a pair of thick socks and a pair of thin socks, and you are ready to go. Let us put our doctors in a position in which they can prescribe walking and the equipment to do it, in order that we can improve the health of the nation and promote active travel.

I also have a few words to say to colleagues in the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, because it is not only the Government that can do things. Paragraph 11.18 of the Scottish Parliament members’ expenses scheme guidance states that members are required to provide a letter of justification if they take a taxi journey that costs more than £20. I suggest that we add to that a requirement for members to provide a letter of justification if their taxi journey does not exceed 1 mile, because it is the short taxi journeys that we should be replacing.

From the outset, we have been paying members of the Scottish Parliament 45p a mile if they use a car, but only 20p a mile if they use a cycle. How

about turning that around so that we pay them 45p if they use a cycle and 20p if they use a car? I know that that sounds a little bit whimsical, but the reality is—

John Finnie: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I will give way if the member is brief.

John Finnie: Thank you. I will be brief. Would Stewart Stevenson like to explain to me how—much as I would like to do so—I can cover on a push bike the area between the north of Shetland and the Mull of Kintyre, where there is a dearth of public transport?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have only a minute and a half in which to explain that.

Stewart Stevenson: The bottom line is that we have to challenge the existing norms and have a debate on the subject. I have a similar problem, albeit that it is on a smaller scale.

I am glad that I now have as my greatest fan in Parliament Mike Rumbles, who mentioned me three times in the first minute of his speech. In 2009, I said that it would be challenging to reach a 20 per cent target for cycling—I think that it is fair to say that I got that one right. However, we can, in general, be ambitious on walking. I have done 4km today, which is 5,650 steps—I prefer counting distances in kilometres, because they sound bigger than they do in miles—and others should be doing something at least as big as that.

Liam Kerr told us that he cycles, which is good. My last bicycle cost me a fiver, and I am not going to pay more than £25 for my next one, because I will get it when I next go to a rural roup.

I conclude, Presiding Officer, in my very few remaining seconds, by saying that we all have, in our own feet, the tools to promote the agenda. We, as MSPs, should be seen walking and should encourage others to walk. It delivers health, wealth and community benefit.

16:25

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to take part in today’s debate on promotion of walking and cycling as active travel, particularly as someone who regularly cycles to work and for pleasure. It is vital that we acknowledge the correlation between active travel and protection of the Scottish environment when we discuss these issues.

However, it is clear from the past seven years that the SNP Government has failed to engage adequately with the population to encourage a satisfactory level of active travel across Scotland. With almost no progress to show from the active Scotland outcomes framework, the only track the

Government is currently pedalling on is one that will lead to it missing its own its targets.

Active travel plays a crucial role in reduction of air pollution, which in many areas is exacerbated by people travelling by car for short commutes to work. The number of sites where air pollution levels are regularly broken has risen from 33 in 2016 to 38 in 2017, according to Friends of the Earth Scotland. We also know that an estimated 2,500 deaths are attributed to air pollution.

Bruce Crawford: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: I am sorry. I do not have time.

By making realistic commitments that are properly funded and supported, the Government can reduce air pollution and increase healthy outcomes by encouraging and facilitating greater uptake of cycling in our towns and cities.

A commitment to further investment in children's cycling proficiency training, alongside provision of further designated cycle routes across the country, will be additional catalysts for greater active travel and bring us closer to achieving the modal shift that we need in order even to come close to achieving the ambitious target of 10 per cent of all journeys being made by bike by 2020. The Scottish Government has substantially increased the active transport budget, but it remains less than 4 per cent of the overall transport budget.

I welcome the Government's cycling action plan, which was established to provide funding for communities, local authorities and other relevant bodies to work towards 10 per cent of all adults cycling to work by 2020, but that will be a difficult task. In 2014, the figure was 2.6 per cent, and it dropped to 2.2 per cent in 2016, according to statistics from Transport Scotland. Given the disappointing 0.2 per cent increase in everyday bike journeys in the past decade, without concerted efforts it will take 300 years for the Scottish Government to reach the 10 per cent mark. It is a very admirable target, but can the Government really achieve it?

The Scottish Government needs to invest wisely. As Claudia Beamish mentioned, there should be no excuses made for old street layouts. If Copenhagen and Amsterdam can integrate active travel so successfully, so should we. We need a modal shift. We need to change attitudes and remove barriers to people using their bikes or their feet to get to work. Even simple things, such as an accelerated roll-out of more bike stands, would remove the barrier that is created by people having to carry their bikes up flights of stairs. From experience, I know that electric mountain bikes are way too heavy to carry up any stairs.

We should look at successful active transport schemes across the world—and, indeed, closer to home. The UK government is providing £1 billion of funding to local bodies in England through its cycling and walking investment strategy. As a result, it has seen an increase in cycling rates in places where it has increased dedicated funding. The Scottish Government should look at the successes south of the border, learn lessons and improve on the progress that has been made by our neighbours.

Conservative members understand the benefits of encouraging active travel in Scotland. Through the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's "Global Challenge, Local Leadership: Environment and Climate Change Position Paper 2017", we are committed to working with local authorities and third-party partners to improve our cycle-path network. Furthermore, we are committed to supporting safe travel routes to schools, in order to encourage active travel from a young age.

Although it currently appears that the Scottish Government is pedalling for an unrealistic target, which is akin to a riding a bike without a chain, a properly targeted and funded budget could—I hope it will—provide for greater success in promoting active travel and the benefits that come with such action. I and my Conservative colleagues will support that aim.

16:29

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to speak today about the importance of walking and cycling, and I have decimated my speech because I know that my time will not be too long.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have your five minutes.

Emma Harper: Thank you.

As a member of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, I am well aware of the public health benefits that promoting active travel will bring. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to doubling the active travel budget from 2018. That commitment has been hailed by Cycling UK's chief executive as an

"unprecedented level of investment into active travel from a national government"

As an MSP with a healthcare background, I understand that active travel is very important from a public health perspective. The best way to achieve the health-enhancing potential of physical activity is for people to incorporate that activity into their daily lives. By replacing time that is spent commuting by car with physically active forms of travel including walking and cycling, physical activity becomes embedded in participants' daily

routines. It is therefore welcome news that cycling and walking—and scootering—continue to increase steadily every year as the main mode of getting to work.

The doubling of the active travel budget will allow major capital infrastructure projects to be funded in urban and rural settings. However, it is important to recognise that active travel faces different challenges in rural areas from those in urban areas. Experience in Dumfries and Galloway shows that, for it to be successful, active travel must be relevant to people's lives and appropriately executed.

In rural areas, it is hard to use cycling or walking as a means of getting to work. If I had to cycle to work, it would be a 150-mile round trip from Dumfries to Stranraer or Ayrshire for meetings or surgeries. My colleague Daniel Johnson and I recently discussed getting to work. He said that he lives five minutes from his office, to which he walks. Doing the same would be quite a challenge for many MSPs. However, I am, in order to support my active travel, making an effort to walk to my office from home as much as possible, and to walk to Parliament when I am in Edinburgh.

In Dumfries and Galloway, walking and cycling as leisure activities are already very popular and well established. We have more than 450 miles of signposted cycle routes, as well as many off-road cycle trails and world-class mountain biking trail centres. With our network of picturesque roads, road cycling has massive potential. I am pleased to say that Dumfries and Galloway is one of the local authority areas in which there is an active travel strategy already in place. We are lucky to have a well-developed and accessible path network that encourages walking and cycling as daily activities, although there is still potential for improvement. To realise that potential, the right infrastructure needs to be in place to provide user-friendly, signposted and safe links for residents and visitors.

Earlier this year, I attended a great event in Parliament that was sponsored by my colleague Angus MacDonald MSP, and hosted by an organisation called Cycling Without Age. During the evening, I learned about the organisation's new initiative to get older people out in the fresh air. It is a great scheme that has health benefits for the pilots and passengers of trishaws. A scheme has been started in Falkirk, and I have been linking with stakeholders who are local to me to explore the potential for a similar scheme in Dumfries and Galloway.

Investing in safe cycling infrastructure will be vital to ensuring the success of such schemes, so when the programme for Government was announced, I wrote to the transport minister to explore ideas for investment in the south-west. I

am particularly interested in the Government's plans for a long-distance walking and cycling route equivalent to the north coast 500, and I have written to the Government to recommend including the coast of the south-west of Scotland, maybe from Troon to Gretna, as well as routes inland.

Finlay Carson: Does Emma Harper acknowledge that the south-west 300 is already an established route that is in a lot of the tourist information?

Emma Harper: Absolutely. I recognise that the south-west 300 has been established, but it has been identified primarily for cars. I am talking about walking and cycling. We are talking about a coastal development that would encourage tourism in the south-west of Scotland.

I look forward to working with the Scottish Government to develop significant infrastructure that will be so much welcomed in South Scotland, and which will reflect the social value of active travel and promote more walking and cycling for the people whom I represent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I call Mike Rumbles to close for the Liberal Democrats.

16:35

Mike Rumbles: This has been a largely consensual debate because we all want the Scottish Government to succeed in its aim of increasing the number of journeys that are made by walking or cycling.

I will mention two contributions that took my eye. Gillian Martin said that living in Edinburgh three days a week, she can now walk to work. I agree entirely—I normally bus and walk two miles a day to and from work, and I feel the benefit of that. I think that we could all feel benefit from doing that.

Liam Kerr made some excellent points about the availability—or otherwise—of bike spaces on our rail network. He finished by saying that if the Minister for Transport and the Islands delivers the extra bike spaces as promised, he will be his hero. I would like to have the minister as a hero as well. [*Laughter.*] I did not say that he is my hero; I said that I would like to have him as a hero.

All the parties are largely agreed on what should happen. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so I say to the minister that he is in the driving seat on this one. He is doubling the budget, which everyone has welcomed, but will his Government's target be achieved in the next three years? We are supposed to move from 1 or 2 per cent to 10 per cent of journeys being made by bike. Everyone knows—I will mention Stewart Stevenson again—that that will not be achieved. Perhaps Stewart thinks that it will still be achieved,

but it will not without dramatic action. I am not convinced that we are going to get the dramatic action that would be necessary, but I will be delighted if the minister can prove me wrong.

The Liberal Democrats will support the motion and all the amendments except the Green amendment, simply because we are worried about the impact that the proposal in that amendment might have on our public transport network. No one wants to put our public transport system at risk because of such a dramatic change in the budget. The Liberal Democrats are focused on outcomes and not necessarily on inputs, on which the Greens seem to be focused.

Presiding Officer, I am pleased to finish early so that other members can speak. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is very gallant of you, Mr Rumbles.

I call Alison Johnstone to close for the Liberal Democrats.

16:37

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am closing for the Greens, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am so sorry. Did I call you a Liberal Democrat? [*Laughter.*] That is twice I have done that. I will give you an extra 30 seconds. That is my penance. [*Laughter.*]

Alison Johnstone: Thank you. It was quite traumatic.

As the debate has shown, when we discuss active travel, we discuss so many issues, from mental health to poverty. I prefer to call it walking and cycling but, as my colleague John Finnie pointed out, some people do their active travel by kayak. The speeches that we have heard highlighted how investment in walking and cycling can help us to improve so many aspects of life in Scotland. It is essential that these activities, which are the solutions to so many of the challenges that we face, are invested in—and properly. We know that the cost of heart disease and diabetes alone takes £40 million annually from the national health service, but that is just under half of the amount that physical inactivity is costing us.

As members have heard, the Health and Sport Committee has been undertaking its sport for everyone inquiry, and the testimonies that we have received have made it clear that time and cost are two of the biggest barriers to people becoming physically active. That is where walking and cycling are extremely important. When they are safe and attractive options, they save people time and money and, as we have heard from colleagues, exercise becomes part of their daily routine. We might chuckle when we hear of folk

driving to the gym to sit on a stationary bike for half an hour, but that is not an option for everyone. Some people cannot afford that gym membership and 50 per cent of people in Glasgow, for example, do not have access to a car. Let us do what we can to make physical activity possible for everyone.

So many car journeys in Scotland are short and could easily be undertaken on foot or by bike. Thirty per cent are between 1 and 2 miles and 11 per cent are under 1 mile. As we have heard, however, the national percentage of journeys made by bike was 1.2 per cent in 2016. I will probably not join in with calling Humza Yousaf my hero if he manages to increase that to 10 per cent of all journeys by 2020, but I will say that it will take heroic hard work to go from the 1.2 per cent that we have at present to 10 per cent in three years. A Transport Scotland official told the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee this morning that it is going to happen. I really hope that it does and that we are all congratulating the minister on that in 2020.

Things have to change. We will support the Lib Dem amendment, but I point out that the bikeability training still relies on volunteers, and we have to do more to ensure that those volunteers are supported.

Claudia Beamish was right to point out that presumed liability has an important role because, wherever high levels of cycling have been achieved, presumed liability is part of civil law. Only the UK, Romania, Malta and Cyprus do not have such a law. It really is time to look at that issue again. When I held a members' business debate on the issue in 2013, there was cross-party support for that, so let us look at it again.

We whole-heartedly support pedal on Parliament's eight-point manifesto. There is probably nothing in it that the transport minister could disagree with, and I am sure that the same is true for members across the chamber. I am sure that members will wish to join me in congratulating Spokes, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. It is the Lothian cycle campaign, but it has been involved in bringing many policy issues to the Parliament. It has led the way on many issues, such as the ability of people who live in tenements to store their bike outside and the building of a strategic network of major motor-traffic-free cycle routes, for which there is a clear need. That is our party policy.

We are seeing some movement, but with initiatives such as the bears way and the Edinburgh east-to-west route, there is still a lot of disagreement and dispute. I took part in a cycle ride to show support for the east-to-west route in Edinburgh, and that is the only time in my life that I have had people shouting "Shame on you!" at me.

They did that because they had been convinced that business in the area would grind to a halt, but we know from international research that cycling has a really positive impact on business. Footfall increases, neighbourhoods are safer and shops do really well. It is important that we get that message out to people.

Let us look at what is happening in Edinburgh at the moment. The Broughton *Spurtle* has been speaking about the proposals for Picardy Place, which is five minutes' walk from here. There is to be a huge gyratory that will be very pedestrian unfriendly and simply a challenge for cyclists. We can and must do better.

The World Health Organization says that, by 2030, the Dutch will be the slimmest nation in Europe and that every other nation will be facing an obesity epidemic. That is no accident. It is because, as we can see, movement and activity are part and parcel of everyday life there. The British Heart Foundation has shown that air pollution can make existing heart conditions worse and that it is linked to increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Active travel is an area where there is win after win after win if we invest in it properly. I am sorry that the Conservatives and the SNP find our amendment too radical and ambitious, but we will continue to call for 10 per cent of the transport budget to be spent on active travel, because we need to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hope you noted that I gave you your extra 30 seconds.

Alison Johnstone: Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hope that I get this right: I call Rhoda Grant to close for Labour.

16:43

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): It has been a good debate and there is a lot of agreement across the chamber that active travel must increase. It has obvious benefits. It improves air quality and is good for the environment, it improves physical and mental health, and it saves people a lot of money.

The subject of our amendment is transport poverty. Neil Bibby pointed out that bike ownership is higher in more affluent areas than in the most deprived communities. We might ask ourselves why, because surely bike ownership is cheaper than car ownership. I believe that the reason is down to the infrastructure in deprived areas. There is also an issue with the affordability of bikes, because good bikes cost a huge amount of money. However, there are good schemes that recycle bikes and provide them to people affordably, so that might be a way of overcoming

one of the obstacles. However, what about the issues of looking after a bike, the cost of upkeep and having somewhere to store it in those communities?

Fulton MacGregor talked about the cost of children's bikes. It is important that children learn to cycle when they are young. It is a skill that will stay with them, but they need to learn while they are not afraid of balancing. As well as the cost of a child's bike, there is the issue of getting access to a safe area to learn. That all costs money. Claudia Beamish talked about how we should spend the additional money that the Government has given, and maybe a priority area for that new spending is work in more deprived areas, encouraging young people to learn to cycle and giving children access to bikes and safe places to learn to cycle.

Gillian Martin and Brian Whittle talked about children's active travel to school, both walking and cycling, and about some parents' fears for their children's safety. Safety is an issue that has popped up throughout the debate, although nobody has totally focused on it. One safety issue that has been touched on is the conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and cars, and the minister said in his opening speech that there would be road user training as part of the expenditure.

John Finnie talked about courtesy between different road users, but there can be conflict between pedestrians and cyclists, especially because we now have many more shared paths. Although they are quite often signposted, areas that are not shared paths are not signposted, which can put pedestrians in dangerous situations. A constituent wrote to me ahead of the debate to ask me to highlight an incident that he had seen involving a community cafe that opens up on to a pavement that is not a shared route for cyclists and pedestrians. He said that some of the elderly users of the cafe are in danger. Indeed, one was knocked down and hurt leaving the cafe, which has now put up signs to warn pedestrians to be careful because cyclists are using the pavement.

We need better signposting, not just for the areas that are shared cycling and pedestrian routes, but to make very clear to cyclists that an area is not appropriate for cycling. That was pointed out to Inverness councillors, who experienced what it was like to be deafblind and walk down the street—deafblind people cannot see a bike or hear a bell. Signposting is also needed for people who rollerblade and cycle. I almost saw an accident between someone cycling and someone rollerblading, but luckily both managed to stop in time. We need to teach all road users how to use the roads safely.

There has been a lot of talk about cycling in the debate, but we also need to talk about walking, which is just as important. It is free, it is easy to do

and it has the same health benefits. Colin Smyth talked about the health benefits that we could all accrue from walking.

We need to win over hearts and minds to increase active travel, as well as the minds of planners and transport strategists and the like, who need to make active travel safe and attractive. Only in that way can we win over the hearts of those who could be encouraged into active travel.

16:48

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the Government for providing the opportunity to discuss the issue, particularly in light of the consultation on diet and obesity that was announced last week. Active travel has the potential to mitigate some of the most damaging and burdensome aspects of Scotland's obesity problem. Having spoken about that from a health perspective on numerous occasions since I was elected last year, I am acutely aware that we need to act, rather than simply talk and strategise.

Encouraging more people to walk and cycle, whether they do it to commute or simply for personal pleasure, will also help cut carbon emissions, deliver more pleasant communities and support sustainable economic growth, while encouraging better health and safer travel for all. Each and every one of the objectives outlined in Transport Scotland's "A Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030" is an important metric for the health of our society, and the plans laid out in the Transport Scotland proposal provide actionable goals for improvement.

However, we should also be mindful of the fact that work by Government alone will not deliver the objectives of an active travel nation. Personal responsibility plays a crucial role too, as does the work of the third sector. Charities such as Paths for All, Cycling Scotland, Sustrans and Ramblers Scotland, to name but a few, work incredibly hard to promote those salient and important issues. For example, Cycling UK's play on pedals project supports every pre-school child in Glasgow to learn how to ride a bike.

I will briefly turn to some of the points that were made by members across the chamber in an excellent debate, which was replete with travel jokes and cycling puns.

In particular, I draw attention to Jamie Greene's measured opening speech for my party. It is appropriate that he set out a number of concerns, despite his general tone of consensus and support for what the Scottish Government is trying to do on active travel. We will support the Government motion.

Brian Whittle talked about imaginative schemes in his region, such as the park-and-stride initiative for schoolchildren in East Ayrshire and the active travel hub at Kilmarnock railway station.

Liam Kerr talked about the difficulty of cycling in Edinburgh and contrasted his experience here with his experience of cycling in London. He also spoke about cycle tourism. As someone who travels on trains to the west Highlands relatively frequently, I am particularly aware of the difficulties that cyclists have when they travel on trains.

Finlay Carson, who I am delighted to say that I saw cycling to the Parliament this morning, spoke about the need to change attitudes—

Bruce Crawford: Will the member take an intervention, in relation to Finlay Carson's speech?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Persistence rewarded.

Bruce Crawford: During his speech, Finlay Carson suggested that the UK Government is doing better than the Scottish Government when it comes to cycling. I therefore wonder whether Donald Cameron agrees with the head of Cycling UK, who said:

"Once again, we're seeing Scotland setting the bar high, and this time on Active Travel. Cycling UK would urge England, Wales and Northern Ireland to look to their own public health and environment commitments, and follow in Scotland's tyre tracks."

Donald Cameron: I have no issue with celebrating Scotland's achievements, but I note that in England and Wales a lot of money has been spent on cycling.

Claudia Beamish spoke about the importance of collaboration between agencies. Rhoda Grant spoke about road safety, and John Finnie made the important point that, in the context of travel to school, the number of casualties has plunged. He also talked about how important road safety is in rural areas.

Mike Rumbles spoke of the need for leadership and action, in light of the fact that we will almost certainly miss the 10 per cent cycling target.

Gillian Martin made two important points. First, she talked about mental health and described the happiness that she feels because she walks to the Parliament three days a week and is no longer stuck in traffic. She also made the point that it is often assumed that in rural areas there is no problem with cycling routes, because there are tracks and roads and so on; it is assumed that cycling is easy, simply because it is not taking place in an urban setting.

There are concerns. I do not have much time to lay them out, but it is evident from the statistics that 98 per cent of the Scots who were driving to

work five years ago are still driving to work. It is clear that there is a lot more to be done. We are seeing a worrying trend in the number of commuters who switch back from cycling to driving.

We need to get more people walking, not just to work but out and about on some of Scotland's excellent walking routes, such as the Great Glen way. The Great Glen walking and cycling routes go past my front door; it is an area that John Finnie knows well, because he grew up there.

We broadly welcome the Scottish Government's motion, but we must be mindful that insufficient progress has been made in 10 years and we need to do much more to ensure that what we speak about today is not lost in the ether. We need to drive forward an agenda that gets more people walking and cycling, above all because those simple things will have a dramatic effect in improving some of our nation's greatest ills.

16:53

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): I am delighted to close today's debate on behalf of the Government. I was also delighted to hear Stewart Stevenson get "roup" into the *Official Report*; it was at a farm roup that I got my first bike as a child. I thank Stewart Stevenson for getting the word into the OR.

It is important that Humza Yousaf opened the debate and I am closing it, because that illustrates how getting people active does not fit into just one ministerial portfolio—as I have often said, life does not neatly fit into one ministerial job. That is why it is important that, in a country of 5 million people, we collaborate and innovate where we can for the benefit of the whole country.

The increase in funding for active travel from £40 million to £80 million is therefore important. It gives us all an opportunity to ramp up momentum in getting the infrastructure right and nudging people towards taking active travel options. The investment aids my commitment to build an active and healthier Scotland; it also helps Roseanna Cunningham with her climate change efforts and Maureen Watt with her mental health brief. It helps us to create the fairer country that we all seek—I absolutely recognise the points that many Labour Party members made about transport poverty.

Brian Whittle might consider that we are not joined up, and he is often critical of this Government in the context of the fairness and equality that he seeks, but I wonder whether his passion for creating a fairer country leads him to be as critical of his UK Government colleagues down south, who are peddling and perpetrating many of the inequalities in our society.

The debate is rightly interlinked with essential input from planning, housing, third sector organisations, local authorities and—most important of all—our communities. We need to see our communities empowered and enabled to make the spaces and places that they live in as good as they possibly can be. Those points were made by Neil Bibby, Mike Rumbles, John Finnie, Gillian Martin and others.

Mike Rumbles: Does the Scottish Government believe that every school child should have the opportunity to benefit from cycle training? I am not talking about being prescriptive, but about giving them the opportunity to benefit.

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. They should have that opportunity, and we will support the member's amendment. I take cognisance of the points that he made about confidence and other issues.

Although it is right to challenge the Government to do more and focus on other things that we should be doing, it is fair to say that the large thrust of the debate has been consensual, with recognition of the fact that we should use the opportunity of the increased funding to consider approaches that are impactful and cognisant of existing local infrastructure projects; that encourage the behavioural change that people have sought to bring about; that focus on education in the early years to establish good, healthy habits; and that recognise the particular needs of our rural communities.

We have a good basis on which to build. Cycling has increased as a main mode of travel to work for adults in Scotland. The distance travelled by cycle has also increased, the bikeability scheme has increased its number of participants and the amount of on-road cycling training that is delivered in our schools has increased. We see, through the hands up Scotland survey, that 50 per cent of our children are travelling to school actively. To those who have been critical of our funding, I say again that, although I recognise the need to critique our approach, our spend on cycling and walking is almost quadruple what we inherited in 2006-07.

Much has been said—particularly by John Finnie—about so-called vanity projects. However, in the not-too-distant past he recognised the importance of the Government's commitment to rebuilding the infrastructure of this nation. I hope that he remembers that. He once said:

"Where opposition parties have spent years grumbling, the SNP is the only party to take action".

John Finnie: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely.

John Finnie: On the issue of modal shift, does the minister recognise that the spend on the

Highland main line is not comparable to the spend on the A9 or the spend on the route between Aberdeen and Inverness? Unless that is properly addressed, we will see movement from rail to road, which I presume is not in the Government's interest.

Aileen Campbell: We are seeking to bring about a positive modal shift and we have rebuilt the infrastructure of our country. As John Finnie said:

"Where opposition parties have spent years grumbling, the SNP is the only party to take action".

Of course, we recognise that we need to do more to improve active travel. Liam Kerr and Maree Todd raised the issue of segregated routes, and Humza Yousaf, in his opening remarks, outlined the community links and the projects that recognise the importance of making segregated paths as accessible as possible. It is important to note that those projects have been oversubscribed in the past.

Finlay Carson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Aileen Campbell: I cannot. I must make some progress.

Members mentioned confidence and the need to reach out and encourage cycling among other groups. I agree that, although it is good to hear from so many middle-aged men in Lycra—MAMILs—we need to dispel the myth that people need to wear Lycra to cycle. It does not help to normalise cycling—for example, cycling to work—if people feel that they must have that special gear. That is why projects such as the bikeability scheme, pedal for Scotland, the cycle-friendly employer award and operation close pass are crucial. It is also why, in the first two years of the rail franchise, 1,269 cycle spaces have been developed at 44 stations, with ScotRail intending to roll out a further 800 cycle spaces at stations, and why the bike & go hire scheme is being rolled out across 12 stations. Work is also continuing to use the opportunity of the high-speed rail network to further embed cycling. I do not know whether that makes us heroes in Liam Kerr's eyes, but we will always seek to do what we can.

Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting the internationally renowned planning expert Brent Toderian, who attended the recent Paths for All annual general meeting. Given how many members talked about the importance of walking, Paths for All should be credited with helping to bring about the current increase in recreational walking. I mention Brent Toderian because his ethos is to create multimodal cities and multimodal citizens and to

"make walking, biking and transit delightful."

He believes that

"If you design a city for cars, it fails for everyone, including drivers. If you design a multi-modal city ... it works for everyone, including drivers."

Rhoda Grant articulated the need to ease that tension.

Many members mentioned fantastic local projects, such as beat the street, ramblers clubs and Crawford's endeavour to link into the walkways around it. We must allow such assets and capacity in our communities to flourish to bring about the shift that we all seek.

Brent Toderian recently tweeted about Halloween. He asked whether, when our children go out guising tonight, they have spaces and streets that are designed well enough to encourage safe walking. He asked whether they are encouraged to walk regularly beyond the opportunity that they have tonight. We need to plan good-quality places so that the next generation can pursue active lives. This debate is just the start of that dialogue. What is important is that, across the political parties in the Parliament, we have agreement that promoting active travel is the right thing to do and that we will continue on that basis.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, minister.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-08497.2, in the name of Jamie Greene, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08497, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Presiding Officer, my terminal is not working.

The Presiding Officer: Could you move to another terminal? [*Interruption.*]

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I do not think that Mr Arthur's vote would have made a difference. If there is any doubt, I ask him to check afterwards that his vote was recorded. I do not think that it would have affected the outcome. I think that it should have been recorded, because 113 members voted.

The next question is, that amendment S5M-08497.4, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08497, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-08497.3, in the name of John Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08497, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-08497.1, in the name of Mike Rumbles, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08497, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: Yes.

The Presiding Officer: We are agreed.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Yes! [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-08497, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the promotion of active travel in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: Yes.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the importance of walking and cycling; welcomes the 100% increase in funding for active travel from £40 million to £80 million from 2018-19 and the appointment of an Active Nation Commissioner in early 2018; notes the work across parties, communities and policy portfolios to make Scotland a healthier and more active nation; further notes with concern research by Sustrans Scotland, which found that 1.1 million people in Scotland occupy datazones where there is a high risk of transport poverty; calls on the Scottish Government to set out how the increased active travel funding will specifically be used to reduce transport poverty; further notes that less than 2% of children cycle to school; considers that equipping people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to cycle from an early age is essential to encouraging them to continue cycling as they get older, and believes that every schoolchild should have the opportunity to benefit from cycle training.

VAT Charges (Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-08226, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on unfair Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service VAT charges. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue continue to be the only territorial forces in the UK unable to reclaim VAT; believes that this costs £35 million annually, and has totalled £140 million since 2013; notes what it sees as the detrimental impact that paying this VAT has on frontline services in communities in Edinburgh Northern and Leith and across Scotland; acknowledges the view that the UK Government should change its rules to allow this VAT to be reclaimed, similar to the action that it took to enable Highways England and academy schools to reclaim VAT, and further notes the argument that the UK Government should fully reimburse the reported £140 million taken away from Scotland's frontline emergency services since 2013.

17:07

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing debate time on the current unfair situation in which Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are the only police and fire services in the whole United Kingdom that are unable to reclaim VAT. I also thank members who have supported the motion so far, including many Scottish National Party, Green and Labour MSPs. Unfortunately, no Lib Dems or Tories have signed the motion. However, I hope that our Lib Dem and Tory colleagues will take the opportunity that is afforded by today's debate to show their support for Scotland's police and fire services, and to help to get back their VAT.

As I have mentioned, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are the only territorial police and fire services in the whole UK that are unable to reclaim VAT from the UK Treasury. That anomaly needlessly costs our public services £35 million a year, which unfairly deprives Police Scotland of about £25 million and our Scottish Fire and Rescue Service of about £10 million. There is no justification for that discrepancy: it is totally unjust.

Although the Scottish Government is protecting the police budget in real terms and has increased the operational resource of the fire service this year, paying the VAT charges means that the UK Government is needlessly depriving Scotland's police and fire services of extra resources—

resources that would be better spent on front-line services in communities in my constituency and across Scotland.

Some people have previously argued that the Scottish Government was aware that there would be VAT implications when the Scottish Parliament passed the Police and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012. However, the SNP never accepted or agreed with the position that our police services and fire services should be unfairly treated as a result of their mergers in 2013. There was no good reason to accept the glaring disparity then, and it should not be accepted now. The anomaly that penalises Scotland's emergency services did not make sense in 2012, and it does not make sense now. The UK Government's rules on VAT have needlessly disadvantaged communities across Scotland. They should, and must, be changed.

The chair of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Pat Watters, described the injustice of the current situation in the Justice Committee as follows:

"When the people of Scotland have to provide for major emergencies, it costs them 20 per cent more than it costs anywhere else in the UK. ... It is not right that it costs the people of Scotland 20 per cent more to get the same protection as elsewhere in the UK. That cannot be right".—*[Official Report, Justice Committee, 27 May 2017, col 25.]*

There can be no reasonable arguments for the UK Government to maintain that discrepancy.

Furthermore, there are no legal reasons why the current rules and position cannot be changed. Through section 76 of the Finance Act 2011, the UK Government has amended VAT rules to allow academy schools to reclaim VAT. Some time after the mergers of the previous police forces and of the previous fire services, Highways England was granted the ability to reclaim VAT by the UK Government by way of the Finance Act 2015. The BBC is also exempt from paying VAT. All that the UK Government needs to do to rectify the unfair anomaly is legislate similarly to how it already has for academy schools, Highways England and the BBC. It would be a very simple process for the UK Government if it were to decide to do the right thing and treat Scotland's police and fire services equitably.

Moreover, recently some people have erroneously tried to excuse the UK Government's indefensible position by referring to European Union legislation on VAT. However, as the UK Government well knows, individual member states have latitude on how they implement the sixth VAT directive: how individual countries operate VAT refunds is principally down to national legislation.

Considering all that, the UK Government should and must use the forthcoming UK budget to end the unfair disparity for Police Scotland and the

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service when it comes to reclaiming VAT, and it should give Scotland's police and fire services parity with other forces in the UK, with academy schools, with the BBC and with Highways England. Because the UK Government could have made such changes several years ago, it would only be right for it to refund Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service the £140 million that they have already paid in VAT, which has been taken away from Scotland's front-line emergency services since 2013.

All that is being asked for is an equitable solution from the UK Government. For that reason, in good faith, I hope that all speakers in today's debate will join me in pressing the UK Treasury to change its rules. That includes Scottish Conservative MSP colleagues.

The Sunday Post reported on 8 October that 13 Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament in London had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting a change in the VAT rules for Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. I hope that Tory MSP colleagues will clarify that today, and that Tory MSPs will also do the right thing by Scotland and by their constituents and join me and many others in pressing the chancellor to treat Scotland's police and fire services with equity, parity and fairness.

The Tories like to think that they are the party of law and order. If that is to hold any credibility whatever, they need to support Scotland's police and fire services on this matter. As MSPs, supporting our police and fire officers means much more than words. It means standing up for them as much as we can. That is what this debate and this issue is all about. It is not about grievance; it is about fairness. It is not about party politics; it is about making sure that our police and fire services are treated with parity—that they are treated the same as every other police and fire service in the UK.

The UK Government has said several times in recent years that it will respect Scotland and treat it with equality. However, when it comes to charging our police and fire services VAT, it has yet to deliver. I genuinely hope that as MSPs together we can change the UK Government's mind. It should and must change its mind and it should and must change its rules, and change them very fast.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Murdo Fraser, to be followed by Rona Mackay, for speeches of up to four minutes.

17:14

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Ben Macpherson on securing the debate. However, I have to say very gently to him that the subject is a rather unusual one for a members' business debate. The issue that he has raised is not new—we have debated it in Parliament on many occasions—and it is hard to see that there is a specific constituency interest that he or, indeed, any other member has in it.

Ben Macpherson: Like any other constituency in Scotland—whether rural or urban—my constituency has policing needs. This is about ensuring a more effective and efficient service for the whole of Police Scotland and the whole of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. As constituency and regional MSPs, we all surely have an interest in ensuring that our services have the resources that they need and deserve.

Murdo Fraser: Perhaps I can forgive Mr Macpherson because he was not a member of the Scottish Parliament when the legislation was passed to create the single police service and single fire service. Therefore, he might not be aware that the issues that he has referred to were thoroughly debated at that time, before the legislation was passed. The situation that we have today has arisen entirely because of the actions of the SNP Government. It went into this with its eyes fully open but is now calling for others to sort out a problem that it created.

I will spend a few moments educating Mr Macpherson on exactly what the legal position is. Section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 allows certain locally funded bodies to reclaim VAT on purchases of goods and services.

Ben Macpherson: Will Mr Fraser take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I have already taken one intervention. I have four minutes; Mr Macpherson had seven minutes. He should listen and learn from what I am about to tell him.

Those refunds exist in order to stop VAT becoming an additional burden on local taxes. Because police forces in England and Wales are part funded by the council tax, they have the right to reclaim VAT. However, because both Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are not part funded through local taxation, there is no justification for a VAT refund. The legal position is therefore quite clear. It is quite clear today, and it was quite clear back in 2012, when the new bodies were created. Correspondence that passed between the Scottish Government and the Treasury at that time, which is in the public domain, puts that beyond doubt.

I appreciate that both Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service would prefer it if the £35 million that they pay in VAT could be reclaimed. That is an issue for the Treasury, and I know that the chancellor and his colleagues are aware of it, but we should not be in any doubt that the SNP Government went into the reorganisations with its eyes fully open, and that it is living with the consequences of its actions.

In debate after debate in the chamber when the mergers were being proposed, Opposition parties and other witnesses raised the question of VAT, but the Scottish Government's response at that time was that there would still be savings to be made from the mergers, even with VAT being taken into account. The Scottish Government was aware of what would happen when it went down that route. At the time, the Treasury even proposed to the Scottish Government alternative routes to try to avoid the problem. It proposed, for example, channelling funding for Police Scotland through local authorities, but that reasonable suggestion was rejected by the Scottish Government at the time. Even Unison the trade union made it clear in evidence that the SNP went into the mergers with its eyes fully open and fully aware that the right to reclaim VAT would be removed. Therefore, any reduction in funding, to which Mr Macpherson so objects, is entirely the fault of his SNP Government, and no one else.

Ben Macpherson: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I have already taken an intervention. Just listen.

In his opening speech, Mr Macpherson said something quite inaccurate. He said that the only police and fire services in the United Kingdom that cannot reclaim VAT are those in Scotland. That is not the case. If he had done his research, he would know that the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence police cannot reclaim VAT.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Territorial.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Stevenson said the word "Territorial". Mr Macpherson did not use that word in his opening remarks, as the *Official Report* will surely show.

Ben Macpherson rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, Mr Macpherson. Mr Fraser, you have to close, please.

Murdo Fraser: Rather than indulging in whataboutery, Mr Macpherson needs to accept that his Government got this wrong.

Despite all the bluff and bluster from the SNP, it is a fact that it created the problem and that it is looking for others to try to bail it out of that

problem. Once again, it will be the Conservatives at Westminster who are asked to sort out the SNP's mess.

17:19

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank my colleague Ben Macpherson for bringing this crucial debate to the chamber, and I welcome the chance to take part in it.

When Ben Macpherson lodged the motion, he received an onslaught of criticism on Twitter, which I was copied into. I did not respond to any of it, because I prefer not to enter antagonistic dialogue on social media.

However, as with Murdo Fraser's speech, the main thrust of those who support charging Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service VAT—which has resulted in a loss of £140 million over the past four years—appears to be, "We told you so," and that we were warned before setting up merged services.

My overriding thought on those comments has always been this: does that make it right? If anyone's answer is yes, I ask them to explain why it is acceptable that Scotland is the only devolved nation to be hit with those punitive charges. As Ben said, everything that Police Scotland or the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service buys costs 20 per cent more than it would cost in the rest of the UK. That is simply outrageous and unacceptable. Its only effect is to starve our vital services of £35 million per year that would enhance law and order, justice and the safety of the public in Scotland.

The UK Government's hypocrisy on the issue has been astounding. It rightly praises the tremendous work that our emergency services do, while starving them of much-needed resources. It has point-blank refused to reverse the VAT charge, despite there being a clear precedent for doing so. As we have heard, Highways England and academy schools are examples. It is a spiteful and disgraceful way for a national Government to act and there is no excuse for it.

Now would be the best time for Ruth Davidson to use her growing popularity with Westminster and the British establishment to do something useful for Scotland, for once. Will her motley crew of Tory MPs stand up for Scotland? Of course they will not. Why break the habit of a lifetime? I will certainly not hold my breath for that.

It is good to see that Labour has come on board, albeit grudgingly, to ask the Tory Government to hand back our money. Better late than never. It is shameful that, until now, Labour has stood side by side with the Tories and the Lib Dems to Scotland's detriment.

I am proud of the work that the great forces of our emergency services do to keep us safe and well. Last month, I attended the annual review of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. While discussing the challenges and the ever-growing demand that the service faces, the much-respected chairman of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board, Pat Watters, stated simply, "We will make it work," because that is what the emergency services do and always have done, against all odds.

We need the excessive VAT charge to be dropped. It serves only to hamper the efforts of our police officers and firefighters. The people of Scotland deserve better, so I ask the Westminster Government to see sense and end the petty and punitive charge.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should always refer to colleagues by their full names, because that helps the official report.

17:22

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Ben Macpherson for bringing the debate to the chamber. I speak on behalf of Scottish Labour as deputy justice spokesperson. We support the aim of this members' business debate, which is to protect the finances of our police and fire and rescue services. The VAT placed on our emergency services is a barrier to them recruiting more staff and providing greater protection for our communities and constituents.

Labour backs the call for Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to be exempt from paying VAT, as they were prior to the creation of the single services. Nonetheless, the Scottish Government must also acknowledge that it was aware during the progress of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill that VAT would apply. The bill passed without much progress being made on the issue and, five years on, we still have no solution. It is long overdue that a remedy be found, and one must be found soon.

It is reported that between April 2013—when Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service started as single, national services—and March of this year, £140 million was paid in VAT to the UK Treasury. Using the lowest tax bill of £23 million for Police Scotland and £9 million for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Labour's analysis shows that we could have hired and trained an additional 547 police officers and 223 firefighters.

We support the reintroduction of the VAT exemption and will continue to press the UK Government to act on it. Our 2016 Scottish Parliament election manifesto made that clear

commitment, and we also lodged amendments during the passage of the Scotland Act 2016 to exempt Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service from VAT. Today, we remain committed to ensuring that unfair tax bills are not forced on our emergency services.

We know that the solution is to change the Value Added Tax Act 1994 at Westminster. That is the key to protecting the finances of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and I urge the Scottish Conservatives to press their colleagues in Westminster to make those changes and allow our emergency services to recruit more officers. I also point out that, if the VAT that has been paid to date is refunded, as we agree that it should be, it would be good to get a commitment from the Scottish Government that that funding will be ring fenced for reinvestment in police and fire services alone, and will not be used to prop up other areas of deficit in its budget. I would be grateful if the minister could make some comment on that in her closing speech.

The upcoming budget is an opportunity for the UK Government to correct the situation. I support the calls, which unite most of the chamber, for the reintroduction of the VAT exemption for our emergency services.

17:26

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Ben Macpherson on securing the debate. I also congratulate Scottish Labour and the Greens, who support the Scottish Government's position of exempting Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service from VAT liability.

I asked to take part in the debate because I chaired the Justice Committee when it dealt with the bill that produced the national services and because I chaired the first Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, and I have pursued the issue of the VAT penalty ever since.

It is true to say that, at the time of the abolition of the local services, the Government was warned of the consequences for VAT. Whether or not we agree with that, it is fair to say that warnings were given. That is as far as it goes. The reason that was given concerned the principle that, because local authorities, as the paymasters, were exempt from VAT, their police and fire and rescue services were also exempt. However, in my book—and, I am sure, in Murdo Fraser's book—a principle is a principle and should be applied without fear or favour. Let us put to one side the pre-existing Northern Ireland arrangements, under which its single forces are exempt from VAT. As with the £1 billion hand-out to secure the support of the

Democratic Unionist Party's support for Theresa May's floundering Government, Northern Ireland is always treated differently—in some regards, for good reason.

However, the UK Government was in a bit of a bind when it set about promoting academy schools in England as a favoured policy. What was it to do with the problem of VAT liability as those schools moved from local authority funding—just like the Scottish police and fire services—to central Government funding? Were they just to cough up VAT like the Scottish police and fire services would have to do? Of course not. With the stroke of a Treasury pen, the VAT rules were amended PDQ and thus, from 1 April 2011, a new VAT refund scheme was introduced for academies under section 33B of the 1994 act. The scheme, confined to England, permits academies to reclaim the VAT that is incurred on purchases, imports and acquisitions that relate to their non-business activities.

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 came into force in 2013. Glance at those dates. On 1 April 2011, academy schools, which are nationally funded, were suddenly granted VAT exemptions. Two years later in Scotland, no exemptions were given to the police and fire services in Scotland. There is no principle in operation here; there is only expediency for the favoured Tory policy of academy schools and punishment for Scotland for daring to do something different and deliver national police and rescue services. What other explanation can there possibly be?

Ironically, one of the driving forces—no pun intended—behind the amalgamation of the eight constabularies was Tory cuts and the unavoidable need to make efficiency savings by streamlining the services and avoiding the duplication that was involved in a situation in which there were eight chief constables, eight deputies, eight chief fire officers and so on. The policy has had its ups and downs, I admit, but it was right for a population of just more than 5 million people, and it has allowed us to retain front-line officers. After all, the Metropolitan Police serves more than 10 million people.

In England and Wales, the Government has spent its resources on some 43 constabularies with accompanying—and not cheap at the price—commissioners, and has reduced the number of officers by the hundreds. Scotland is punished for streamlining and for trying to be efficient and ensure that we have more front-line officers. English services retain VAT and spend money on commissioners and 43 constabularies. Believe you me, in some instances they would quite like to follow the Scottish example. The situation is ridiculous and indefensible, and I commend Murdo

Fraser for dancing on the head of the proverbial pin.

17:30

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I join others in congratulating Ben Macpherson on securing the debate. The issue is important, as is the language that surrounds it. It may surprise some people—although not many who know me—that I did not necessarily support a single service. However, as the former convener of the Justice Committee said, we were driven to create a single service by cuts from Westminster. Where I would disagree with Christine Grahame is that there were not just eight versions of each post—there were nine versions and sometimes 10.

We now have a strategic model that deals with top-level issues such as cross-border crime, organised crime and trafficking. There is also a significant local model, although it is not necessarily as robust as I would like it to be. As another member mentioned, some officers are directly funded by local government, unless that has changed since the last time that we looked at the issue. However, there is local input and, most important, there is local scrutiny.

I am very keen to see the application of the highest level of devolved resource management. I was proud to serve in Lothian and Borders Police initially, and then in Northern Constabulary, which had the most advanced system of devolved resource management, to the extent that the two police officers from Barra were responsible for their own overtime bill. Who better to judge when they needed to work extra hours? That is proper local policing and there is nothing in the strategic model that would stop that. Sadly—and I mean sadly—it became a constitutional issue. I am glad that it seems to be less of a constitutional issue now.

My MP for a while was Mr Danny Alexander, who was Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Thanks to all the good people sitting in the chamber—but not me and my Green colleagues—as a senior member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank he was recently granted privileges and criminal immunity, but there we go. He was very busy on VAT, and I do not mean just in relation to academy schools. He grabbed a crucial issue in the local area, and chased and secured VAT exemption for ski lift passes.

As has been alluded to, this Parliament has oversight of community safety, which is the responsibility of our police and fire and rescue services. We could go on for ever talking about examples, although I suggest that we do not—the Presiding Officer would not let us anyway. However, I will just say that the National Crime

Agency, which was set up when Theresa May was Home Secretary, does not have local funding, is a nationwide body and, as I understand it, is exempt from VAT.

There are recruitment challenges in our rural communities for the police and fire and rescue services. In the Justice Committee today, we heard a fascinating statistic: 20 per cent of police time is taken up dealing with domestic abuse issues. We all have wider obligations. There are rules, laws, democratic accountability and public opinion, but there is also political will. If there is a will to resolve this issue, I am sure that we can resolve it.

I ask Mr Fraser and Mr Kerr to forget where the motion came from. I ask them to forget the Scottish National Party for once—I ask them not to be obsessed with it—and think about their obligations in relation to the 20 per cent more that could be done, such as improving community safety and providing additional resources for our police and fire and rescue services. I ask them to fully support the motion. First and foremost, let us get it right henceforth, and we can maybe talk about the back money after that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A few members still want to speak, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Ben Macpherson.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): My speech will draw on a number of sources, one of which is the House of Commons paper on police funding that was published in February 2016 and discusses all the police forces. However, I will start with a letter of 26 February 2016 from David Gauke, the UK minister at HM Treasury, to the convener of the Justice Committee. It specifically says:

“As you may be aware eligibility for VAT refunds for public bodies is subject to strict criteria, as set out in UK legislation, for the two main VAT refund schemes.”

This is the bit that cuts to the heart of the matter:

“The first, under Section 33 of the VAT Act 1994”—

referred to by Murdo Fraser and others—

“allows local authorities and bodies whose funding is reliant on local taxation to reclaim irrecoverable VAT.”

That is the relevant scheme; the second one does not apply in this instance.

The first and obvious exemption is the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which was established in 2001 as the successor to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is almost wholly funded by the UK Treasury, with a top-up of £22 million a year at the current rate from the Northern Ireland Assembly, and it is permitted to reclaim its VAT.

If we look at page 12 of the Justice Committee's report on the draft budget 2015-16, we see that 329 Police Scotland officers are funded by subventions from local authorities. Therefore, local authority funding is involved in the provision of Police Scotland services.

Let us go on a bit further. We have heard a little bit about section 33 of the 1994 act. Let us have a look at it. It is maybe just as well to point out that the original act—including section 33, which is the one that matters—was amended in 2012 by paragraph 217 of part 3 of schedule 16 to the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. There are some very interesting and odd things in section 33 of the 1994 act. It has two lists: one for England and Wales and one for Northern Ireland and Scotland. I will give members a flavour of some of the things that are on the Northern Ireland and Scotland list. It includes

“a police and crime commissioner, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and a police authority and the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District”.

They are on the Scottish list, yet Police Scotland is not. The British Broadcasting Corporation, which is based in London, is also on the Scottish list.

I do not need to go on. The whole thing is a legal and practical guddle that is unsustainable politically and, in the light of David Gauke's letter, almost certainly unsustainable in legal terms.

In bringing this debate to the chamber, Ben Macpherson has given us the opportunity to visit some of the detail that is before us. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is the clear example that shows us why we should get our VAT back.

In four minutes, one can touch on a few things, Presiding Officer, but there are a few things that need to be looked at again.

17:38

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I join members in congratulating Ben Macpherson not only on securing the debate but on the passionate way in which he prosecuted his argument. As members have said, the debate is timely, not least given the financial straits in which our Police Service and our Fire and Rescue Service find themselves at the moment.

To be clear, the Scottish Liberal Democrats strongly support a resolution to the impasse on VAT. That was set out in our manifestos for the

2016 and 2017 elections, and my colleague Alistair Carmichael has written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to prosecute the point. As we have heard in the debate, there now appears to be cross-party support for such a resolution. It is also pertinent to point out that the Scottish Liberal Democrats strongly opposed the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, which centralised police services and fire and rescue services.

Prior to the 2012 act, as Murdo Fraser reminded us, police and fire services were controlled by local authorities and were able to reclaim VAT. The Scottish Government was aware of that at the time—there seems to be no dispute on that point—and the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, was warned repeatedly of the tax implications ahead of centralisation. On that issue, as on so many other issues, the bold Kenny was not for listening. Doing the wrong thing for the right reason was the mantra of the day.

Over time, the efficiency savings that Mr MacAskill and his ministerial colleagues told us would undoubtedly be delivered have simply not materialised. As a consequence, the financial plight of the SFRS and of Police Scotland in particular has become more acute. Although I disagree with John Finnie on some things, he is absolutely right to point us in the direction of where we should go now in pursuing a resolution.

Last year, my colleague Willie Rennie wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, Derek Mackay, to draw attention to proposals that, at that stage, had the backing of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. They would have involved changing the governance structure of the services from non-departmental public bodies to a shared local government body, which would have allowed the centralised structure to be maintained but would at least have enabled exemption from VAT.

There may be other options, and there may be changes in the way that the UK Government applies the VAT regulations that may allow a solution to be sought at this stage. Nevertheless, there is a mess that I would still argue was largely a result of the Scottish Government's decision to press ahead with the 2012 act, and it is police officers and staff, and their counterparts in the SFRS, who are now paying the price. We ask those men and women to carry out difficult and often dangerous tasks on our behalf, and it is a price that they can ill afford to pay.

I thank Ben Macpherson for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I look forward to the Scottish Government and the UK Government reaching a resolution without further delay to allow these vital services to be properly funded in the way that we would all wish them to be.

17:42

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank my colleague Ben Macpherson for bringing to the chamber a debate on this important issue. I sense that there are a few points on which members across the chamber disagree, so I will focus first on the points on which we can all agree.

First, Police Scotland and the SFRS play a vital role in protecting our communities. It goes without saying that every member in the chamber values our emergency services, and we are grateful for the hard work and dedication that are shown by the men and women who work for them. Secondly, Police Scotland and the SFRS pay around £35 million annually in VAT, which has totalled £140 million since 2013. Thirdly, Police Scotland and the SFRS are, uniquely, the only territorial forces in the UK that are subject to VAT. None of that is disputed.

What is also not disputed is the challenging fiscal environment that we are currently in. We have had several years of Tory austerity, and we have more ahead of us—and we now know that Scotland will be one of the parts of the UK that will suffer most economically as a result of our withdrawal from the European Union. It has been tough, and it is about to get tougher. Scotland has faced cuts to its budget from Westminster totalling £2.9 billion over 10 years. That means that, every year, the Scottish Government is given a more and more difficult job to do in sustaining the high quality of public services that people in Scotland deserve.

The Finance and Constitution Committee, of which I am a member, has been told on a number of occasions that Brexit will result in budgetary pressures worsening significantly in Scotland. Our police and fire and rescue services cannot afford to be needlessly denied £35 million per year, and that funding will be crucial to keeping a high quality of service through the financial difficulties that Brexit will cause in the future.

Every economist whom we have had in front of us at the Finance and Constitution Committee predicts that the economy will shrink because of Brexit—they disagree only on how much it will shrink by. That will undoubtedly put pressure on the public purse.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to end the glaring disparity in the way that VAT affects emergency services across the UK. If I am to believe the *Sunday Post*, even the 13 Scottish Tory MPs in the House of Commons have written to the Chancellor to seek an end to what is in effect discriminatory treatment of the Scottish emergency services as far as VAT rules are concerned, yet not one Tory member of this Parliament has signed the motion.

We have heard that the UK Government could choose to deal with this anomaly as it did with Highways England, academy schools and various other bodies. It is happy to change the VAT law when it suits itself, so it seems that it does not suit the UK Government to change the VAT laws for our emergency services. That same Government that hands out tax cuts to the rich is more than happy to continue taking £35 million every year from essential front-line services in Scotland.

Last month we asked the Scottish Tories in this chamber to put their constituents before their party and call a halt to the roll-out of universal credit. So far, they have failed to do so. I ask them today to stand up for our police and fire services. Will they?

17:46

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to have been called to speak in the debate and am grateful to Ben Macpherson for securing it. It allows Parliament the opportunity to correct some of the significant misconceptions and misunderstandings that have crept into the issue and are inherent in the motion. That might be the reason why, the last time I looked, only half the SNP MSPs had supported it—the rest, I presume, had taken the time to inform themselves of the veracity or otherwise of some of the claims.

It is important at the outset to make it clear to Ben Macpherson that Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue are not, in fact, the only forces in the UK that are unable to reclaim VAT. The member's researchers seem to have missed that the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police are also in that category.

Stewart Stevenson: They are the only territorial forces that are unable to reclaim VAT

Liam Kerr: I say to Stewart Stevenson that Ben Macpherson did not say that in his speech.

John Finnie: One of the services that Liam Kerr mentions is, of course, funded by the Ministry of Defence, and the other takes its income from a commercial contract with the rail companies. Should not that influence the situation?

Liam Kerr: The key point that I am making is that when Ben Macpherson sets up his opening speech by saying that Police Scotland is the only force that cannot reclaim VAT, his argument is grounded fundamentally on a misconception. It cannot reclaim VAT because it is a centrally funded service.

Ben Macpherson: Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: I do not have time. I am sorry.

One might say that those are examples of what would happen when Police Scotland and the fire service were created, and that is the crux of the

matter. Organisations that are part-funded locally can reclaim VAT, the idea being that VAT should not be an extra burden on local taxes. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Kerr. Mr Stevenson, please stop muttering loudly—that is how I describe it—from your seat.

Liam Kerr: Police forces in England and Wales can reclaim VAT because they are part-funded by council tax, as police and fire services in Scotland used to be.

Maree Todd: Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: I just do not have time. I am sorry.

When the services were centralised, the VAT refund—appropriately—ceased to apply. That was all explained by the UK Government to Kenny MacAskill in 2012. I have the letters here that explain about academy schools, if Ms Todd would care to read them. They will help her to understand what is going on. The then Scottish Government's proposed savings from the single force's creation were predicated on VAT not being provided for: that is, they budgeted for it and went ahead anyway.

The debate is not at all about fairness. It is about the Scottish Government making a decision that it now regrets, and creating a narrative to the effect that if the UK Government will not change the entire tax system to sort out the Scottish Government's mess, that is somehow unfair. *[Interruption.]* Then, in an utterly brass-necked move, it asks for all the money that has been paid since 2013 to be given back. That is money that it told the people of Scotland was budgeted for and costed, and would ultimately produce savings. It is an extraordinary piece of spin that is designed to distract from SNP failures.

The SNP is responsible for ensuring that our services have the resources that they need, but the SPF has warned that Police Scotland is becoming a response-only service; thousands of officers have been taken off the streets and lack of information technology is threatening the safety of officers and staff. Papers that have been circulated to senior fire service management say that the current model is not financially sustainable. Longer response times have been blamed on firefighter cuts and Audit Scotland has warned that the fire service faces a financial black hole.

Enough of the Westminster grievance. Let us remember the words of an SNP member at this year's conference. She said:

"I am angry. Mr Matheson, this isn't a Tory government in Scotland, this isn't a Labour government in Scotland. This is my party in Scotland and you are letting down your officers."

She is right. Sort it out.

17:50

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): I also congratulate Ben Macpherson on securing the debate and welcome the opportunity to respond. In the time that is available, I hope to be able to deal with various points that have been raised.

I begin by restating that the SNP Government believes that it is completely unacceptable that our police and fire services face a combined annual VAT cost of approximately £35 million per year, which other territorial services in the UK do not have to bear. Since the establishment of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2013, the total amount of VAT that cannot be reclaimed is about £140 million. If the situation continues throughout the current parliamentary session, the total cost to the Scottish public purse will be about £280 million. To put that figure in context, that is more than the resource budget of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for a whole year.

Murdo Fraser: For the avoidance of doubt, will the minister confirm that, when it went down the route of creating the single police and fire services, the Scottish Government was fully aware that the consequence would be as it is today in respect of the ability to reclaim VAT?

Annabelle Ewing: Although we were aware of the arguments of the UK Government, we did not accept those arguments, nor did we accept the principle when we were already seeing exceptions being made to the rules, and moving goalposts being provided for the BBC, for example. I will come on to the intricacies of the legislation in a moment.

The Treasury windfall of £140 million could be invested in our police and fire and rescue services. It would make a huge difference to their ability to respond to the needs of the people of Scotland for emergency front-line services. We have been in discussion with the UK Government for more than five years on the issue and so far, sadly, it has rejected all requests for an equitable solution.

When we considered the creation of Police Scotland and the SFRS, we focused on the wider benefits that would be attained by moving from eight regional police and fire bodies to single national organisations. We introduced new and more streamlined bodies in order to reduce bureaucracy and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of those key public services, so that they could meet the challenges of the 21st century. However, the core functions and purposes of both bodies remain as they were before reform, and funding continues to come from

the public purse, as is the case with respect to territorial police and fire services across the rest of the UK.

As Mr Fraser has just said, we were indeed aware of the implications of VAT for our reform propositions. Equally—as I have said—that was not a position that we either accepted or agreed with, and we have continued to lobby UK ministers and seek fairness of approach in respect of other changes that they have made before and since. I will come to those in a moment.

Ben Macpherson: The minister has spoken about how she has recently been in correspondence with the UK Government about the matter. As the Scottish Conservatives were not able to clarify the point, can she tell us whether 13 Scottish Conservative members of Parliament have written to the chancellor to request a change in the rules?

Annabelle Ewing: That is not clear to me, because I have not seen the letter that was apparently referred to in *The Sunday Post*. We might be able to find that out in the fullness of time. Listening to the statements that are being made in the chamber by Tory MSPs, I am not encouraged to believe that those MPs are doing the right thing by their constituents and supporting key front-line services in their constituencies.

I turn to the VAT legislation. Other territorial police and fire services are able to reclaim VAT through section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994. Since 2013, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have moved to being wholly funded by the Scottish Government, rather than being funded in part by local authorities.

Notwithstanding that that funding process does not precisely meet the highly constraining criteria that are set out for section 33 status, that has not proved to be an impediment for other bodies that are currently covered by section 33, such as the BBC. Indeed, the BBC does not meet the criteria that are set out, including having the power of precept over local taxation, but notwithstanding that, it has been given the ability to reclaim VAT, and it has had that since before the creation of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2013.

We also know that the UK Government has the power to make changes to VAT rules by way of a finance act to suit its policy objectives, and we know that it has exercised that power. For example, changes were made to section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 in 2011, following the introduction of academy schools in England and Wales, and we welcome the more recent change in 2015 to allow VAT to be reclaimed by search and rescue charities. We note that the UK

Government also made changes to section 41 of the 1994 act to allow Highways England to reclaim VAT from 1 April 2015. It was acknowledged that the existing legislation would not permit the recovery of VAT by Highways England. What did the UK Government do? It simply changed the rules to suit its policy objectives.

It is clear that the UK Government has both the ability and the political will, where it suits it, to change VAT legislation. As we have seen, the BBC was already allowed to reclaim VAT before the establishment of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and since 2013 the UK Government has changed the rules to allow Highways England to reclaim VAT.

Why does the UK Government refuse to change the rules for Scottish front-line emergency services? We have heard about the cost of that: every piece of kit or equipment costs 20 per cent more for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland than it does for any other territorial police or fire service.

It might also be of interest to members to note that in the on-going project to introduce a new emergency services mobile communications system—a vital project that will ensure that police and fire services and other emergency services across the UK have a modern communications system that will allow them all to work together effectively—only Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will be subject to payment of VAT that cannot be reclaimed, which will involve an additional £50 million over the life of the contract. That cannot be right.

In conclusion, I urge the Conservatives to use their influence with their chancellor to stand up for their constituents and for policemen and policewomen and firemen and firewomen in their constituencies, and to ensure that, finally, we can bring this anomaly to an end. It is not fair, it is not equitable and it does not make sense because the goaldots have been moved for other bodies.

Finally, I thank members from the Labour Party, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats for supporting the call to end the VAT grab. I call once again on the UK Government to do the right thing by Scotland's front-line emergency services.

Meeting closed at 17:58.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba