



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 4 September 2019

Session 5



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RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

23rd Meeting 2019, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Syeda Ghufuran (Network Rail Scotland)

Alex Hynes (Network Rail Scotland)

Liam Sumpter (Network Rail Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 4 September 2019

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Interests

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the committee's 23rd meeting in 2019. I ask everyone to ensure that their mobile phones are on silent, please.

Agenda item 1 is declarations of interests. I formally welcome Emma Harper and Angus MacDonald to the committee. Before I ask them to declare their interests, I record my thanks and, I believe, the committee's thanks, to John Mason and Gail Ross, who worked extremely hard on the committee since the start of this parliamentary session. Gail Ross was particularly helpful to me as the deputy convener. I thank her for the work that she put into that role.

I ask Emma Harper to declare her interests first.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Good morning, everybody. I am very pleased to be joining the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, and I look forward to contributing to its work.

I do not have any financial interests to declare, but I am progressing a proposed member's bill on livestock worrying—the protection of livestock (Scotland) bill—which would prevent attacks by out-of-control dogs. My proposed bill might become part of the committee's work programme.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): It is good to be back. I served on the former Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for a number of years in the previous parliamentary session.

I own a non-domestic property in the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar area, which is situated on an estate that is likely to be the subject of a hostile buyout attempt by the local community in the near future. Other than that, I have nothing to declare.

Deputy Convener

10:02

The Convener: Under item 2, the committee's task is to choose a deputy convener to replace Gail Ross, who previously held that post. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible to be nominated. I invite a member of that party to nominate one of their number for the post.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is my very great pleasure to nominate my esteemed colleague—all my colleagues are esteemed—Maureen Watt for the post of deputy convener.

Maureen Watt was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Congratulations on your appointment as deputy convener, Maureen.

Rail Services and ScotRail Remedial Orders

10:03

The Convener: Item 3 is rail services in Scotland. Today, we will take evidence from ScotRail on its rail performance issues and its recent response to a remedial order on passenger satisfaction, and get an update on its progress on a previous remedial order in relation to a breach of performance levels.

I welcome the panel: Alex Hynes, managing director of Scotland's railway; Syeda Ghufraan, engineering director, ScotRail; and Liam Sumpter, route director, Network Rail Scotland. Does Alex Hynes want to give an opening statement of no more than three minutes?

Alex Hynes (Network Rail Scotland): Yes. Thank you, convener. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee.

As we sit here today, Scotland's railway is in a much healthier position compared with the position that it was in when I appeared before the committee in March. Of course, it has not all been plain sailing and we have faced some difficult days but, overall, the direction is positive for track and train.

The completion of the driver and conductor training and the successful introduction of the new timetable in May continue to improve our reliability and provide more seats in key areas that were affected earlier this year, particularly Fife and the Borders.

We now have 64 of our 70 fantastic brand-new Hitachi trains in service, and we are much better prepared for extreme weather than ever before. Our investment to cope with hot weather paid off during the summer. Last summer, more than 1,000 trains missed their punctuality target due to hot weather. Using the same measure this year, that figure dropped to 200 trains.

However, the recent flooding—a month's worth of rain fell in just three hours—caused significant disruption in the central belt and on the west Highland line. I am proud of the way in which all our staff across Scotland's railway pulled together, their dedication and commitment, and their working around the clock to keep our customers moving and get the railway back open again.

Our improved performance has been reflected in the latest national rail passenger survey, which measured 85 per cent overall customer satisfaction with ScotRail.

That is all a step in the right direction, but we know that there is more to do. The £4 million investment that Abellio is making through the passenger satisfaction remedial plan will build on the progress that we have made in recent months. That is combined with Abellio's £18 million investment in the train service performance remedial plan. We are therefore confident that we are beginning to deliver the service that our customers expect and deserve. Through the plan, we have launched a new WhatsApp service for our customers to make it even easier to get in touch with us.

Customers should experience a comfortable and clean journey. That is why we will undertake more frequent deep cleans to provide the high level of cleanliness that our customers expect.

We will also invest in new and improved devices for our front-line people to improve access to live disruption information so that we can keep our customers better informed when things go wrong.

We know that challenges remain. Despite an otherwise really strong performance during the Edinburgh festival fringe, we let our customers and colleagues down on the final weekend. We will, of course, share what we will do to minimise the risk of that happening again.

Overall, we are delivering more for our customers. Compared with the situation at the start of the ScotRail franchise, under Abellio, we deliver 115,000 more seats and 200 more services every day, and we employ 500 more staff—all for less subsidy. That is a strong record on which to build.

The Convener: Thank you. Before we move to questions, I introduced you earlier as managing director of Scotland's railway. That is a change of job title from when I have introduced you in the past. Will you briefly explain that? It is not going to be a complete rebranding everywhere we go, is it?

Alex Hynes: It is not. On 24 June, Network Rail reorganised itself to provide a much greater level of devolution to each of the five regions, one of which is Scotland. I now wear two hats: I am the managing director of ScotRail and the managing director of Network Rail in Scotland, and we felt that the title "managing director of Scotland's railway" better reflected my new responsibilities. Previously, I was not responsible for capital delivery or the long-term planning of Scotland's railway, but I now am. That is a great opportunity for us to be even better at pulling track and train together and to do a better job for the people of Scotland.

The Convener: Is that the replacement for ScotRail Alliance?

Alex Hynes: ScotRail Alliance still exists—it is the partnership between the two organisations. It is just my job title that has changed.

The Convener: We will move to questions.

Angus MacDonald: Good morning, Mr Hynes. In your opening remarks, you mentioned the challenges that the wet weather brought this summer. I want to look at the particular issues relating to the Winchburgh tunnel in August. As we know, it flooded twice, and that seriously disrupted services between Edinburgh and Glasgow. How could that happen, given that the tunnel, including its drainage, was significantly upgraded in 2015?

Alex Hynes: Perhaps Liam Sumpter would like to lead on that item.

Liam Sumpter (Network Rail Scotland): Good morning, everybody. As Angus MacDonald stated, the Winchburgh tunnel was redesigned as part of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement project four years ago. As part of that, the project team installed brand-new drainage there, which was an improvement on the previous drainage. It also installed pumps that, in the event of flooding in the tunnel, would remove the water quickly.

As Alex Hynes said in his opening remarks, we had extremely heavy rainfall in a very short time in that location. Under normal circumstances, we would expect the infrastructure in that location to be able to cope with that, given its relative newness, but a particular problem occurred with the first big flood. A development company near the railway had not maintained the ditches that protect the railway as well as it should have done and, as a result, water cascaded on to the network far quicker than the drainage and the pumps could cope with.

When the railway floods, the rulebook states that we cannot run trains if water is above the level of the railhead at all, principally because we do not know what is happening under the water level and whether the track is moving or remaining stable for the passage of the trains. When the Winchburgh tunnel flooded, the water was 2 feet above the railhead, so the situation was clearly nowhere near safe enough for us to be able to consider running trains.

We are working with local landlords and the development company concerned to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and that we protect the railway from that happening ever again. We will also review the capability of the drainage in that tunnel and every tunnel on the Edinburgh to Glasgow route, to ensure that that sort of disruption cannot happen again.

Angus MacDonald: Have the drains that caused the problem at Winchburgh been cleared or is that work still to be done?

Liam Sumpter: The ditches on the third-party land and the drains in the tunnel have been cleared. As I said, we are reviewing the capability of those drains, given that so much development is going on in that part of the country. We do not want the problem to happen again, so we are considering whether we can improve the drains even further. During the flooding, we had help from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, for which we are extremely grateful. The team introduced some more powerful pumps. We are considering whether we can install such pumps permanently, to provide an even greater level of resilience.

Angus MacDonald: ScotRail was able to provide only a limited bus replacement service during the disruption that was caused by the flooding at Winchburgh. Why was that? What are you doing to ensure that full bus replacement services are made available during periods of disruption in future?

Alex Hynes: We now have five routes between Edinburgh and Glasgow, all of which are electrified. With the closure at Winchburgh, our primary objective was to keep customers moving by train. We were able to offer customer journeys on the Airdrie to Bathgate line, and we put more carriages on those services, to make the trains even longer than they already are. I am a daily commuter on the Edinburgh to Glasgow line, and I am pleased to report from having experienced those arrangements at first hand that they worked very well.

If customers are not able to take alternative train services, we provide rail replacement services. Sometimes, immediately after an event has happened, we struggle to procure a replacement service, because vehicles are being used elsewhere. In the case that we are talking about, our priority was to give people an alternative rail journey rather than a bus journey.

Angus MacDonald: A non-electrified diversionary rail route via Dalmeny, which avoids the Winchburgh tunnel, was not used during the disruption. Why could not that route be used? Are there plans to electrify the route? Could other diversionary routes be considered, such as the Edinburgh suburban and southside line?

In the recent past, there was talk of a new chord via the Dalmeny line, but the idea seems to have come off the table. Why is that proposal no longer on the radar? Is there any possibility of its being considered?

Alex Hynes: We were not able to use the diversionary diesel line in this case, because electric trains cannot use diesel routes, and all our diesel trains are allocated to diesel routes.

You have highlighted a good opportunity for us to build resilience into the train service in future. With my Network Rail hat on, I can say that Network Rail will build the rail enhancements that the Scottish Government chooses to buy. Transport Scotland has a rail enhancement budget of around £200 million to spend during control period six. My Network Rail team is spending a lot of time advising and assisting the Scottish Government to enable it to make the right choices for that money.

10:15

The Scottish Government recently published a list of priority projects for rail enhancement on the Scottish rail network. One of the projects is the Edinburgh Waverley western approaches project, which addresses the capacity, track, signalling and electrification of the railway west of Waverley towards Haymarket and out towards the bridge. We are increasingly finding that the rail infrastructure in that part of the world is constraining our operation. It is very difficult for us to add any further services to that part of the network. Our strategy is to make the current services longer. However, you are right that, in the long term, we need to spend some serious money west of Waverley to give us a bigger and better railway for higher performance and customer satisfaction, and to give us more options when we lose some routes due to exceptional circumstances.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I hope that I am not encroaching on anyone else's area of discussion, but you have talked about the pot of money in the Scottish Government that is spent, presumably through Transport Scotland, on infrastructure upgrades, and you mentioned a process in which it is advised by ScotRail on how that money might best be spent. I assume that there are more potential upgrade projects than there is cash available. Who makes the decision and what is the process to ensure that the money is spent in the right parts of Scotland, which means—by default—letting down other areas that will not get money spent on them during that control period?

Alex Hynes: The strategy and planning team in Network Rail undertakes that work. Transport Scotland and Network Rail identify between them a pipeline of potential projects—at the latest count, there were about 118 projects in that pipeline. Mr Greene is right that the amount of funding is not enough to allow all those projects to happen. We evaluate the projects and ensure that the Scottish Government understands the costs, timescale and benefits of each of them. We provide that information to Transport Scotland, which puts it through its business case evaluation process.

Ultimately, it is for Transport Scotland to decide what rail enhancements are built. Having decided what is to be built, Transport Scotland hands the project back to us and we go and build it.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Good morning Mr Hynes. You might be aware that I visited the site on the west Highland line where there was a landslide and the embankment collapsed. I congratulate everyone on their hard work in resolving that. Can you explain what mechanisms are in place to identify frailties on that line? It was perhaps just good fortune that the landslide was as accessible as it was. How do you build in resilience? I met one of your engineers who deals with hydrology and I understand that such issues are scoped out. Can you explain a bit more about that?

Alex Hynes: Yes. Running a railway such as Scotland's is quite a formidable task, which is why we employ lots of very clever engineers to understand the safety and performance risks of operating the railway in such a challenging environment—as you and I have seen, Mr Finnie.

Safety is our first priority. We spend a lot of time recording measurements of the track and embankments. In the latest control period—the five-year funding period—we have had 22 per cent extra to spend on the operation, maintenance and renewal of the rail network in Scotland. About a third of that is specifically focused on making the railway more resilient to the more extreme weather that we are seeing.

One of the things that we are pioneering in Scotland is the fitting of remote condition monitoring equipment. We put probes into the embankment that can detect movement before it is visible to the human eye, we use drone technology to undertake inspections and we are also making more use of the Network Rail helicopter to give us the data that we need to manage the network as well as we can.

A huge amount of effort is going on behind the scenes to keep our railway open, safe and more reliable, and more of that work will be happening in the coming years because we now have the budget to make our railway more resilient to the new weather that we are seeing. The railway was built in Victorian times, when the weather was less challenging.

John Finnie: I asked your staff at the site how the issue had been identified and I was told that it was down to local knowledge—a rail worker who knew the vulnerabilities went out and inspected the site—so there is still an important role for humans as well as a role for all that technology.

Alex Hynes: Absolutely. Both ScotRail and Network Rail are employing more and more people. The head count on Scotland's railway is

growing strongly because we are creating a bigger and better railway for Scotland and, of course, we need people so that we can do that. You are absolutely right—the local person's actions helped us to avoid a potentially more serious event, because clearly our worst-case scenario is that a train meets a landslip.

John Finnie: As was touched on in the response to Mr MacDonald, the role of properties adjoining the railway remains a challenge. In this instance, I understand that the local landowner was particularly helpful, as were the local quarries—everyone pulled together. What steps are you taking to engage with adjoining properties across your network?

Alex Hynes: The most important point is that we do not just survey the railway; we also need to survey the land around the railway. In many cases, we do not own that land and in some cases, there are huge stretches of hill above the railway. You may have seen on the latest episode of the More4 documentary, "The World's Most Beautiful Railway", the remedial work that had to take place to protect the railway at Loch Eilt following a landslip there. We spent most of our money on someone else's land to protect the railway. The issue is becoming a bigger part of our work and the key to cracking that nut is to have better information, which means that we need to survey other people's land as well as our own.

John Finnie: You mentioned using WhatsApp to advise the travelling public about problems with the track. What other communication methods do you have in place? People can be frustrated enough when they find out that there is a problem, but not knowing that there is a problem is also frustrating.

Alex Hynes: We continue to invest heavily in improving customer information. Every single station on Scotland's rail network—with the exception of Dunrobin Castle—now has real-time customer information. We continue to invest in technology at our Paisley and Dunfermline customer information and security centres and, as part of the customer satisfaction remedial plan, we are putting more staff into those locations so that we can improve our ability to provide up-to-date, accurate and reliable information to customers, particularly at weekends. We are working on a whole host of activities with the purpose of providing a reliable railway and managing things better when there are delays.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): A number of us travelled to Skye over the weekend—the amount of water coming off the hills was spectacular but worrying. How much remedial work will you need to do because of land shifting above the railway? Rather than just waiting for a landslip to occur, you can

take away some of the earth before it causes a landslip.

Alex Hynes: A lot of remedial work is needed; hundreds of millions of pounds will be invested over the next five years on that issue. We attack the problem by using risk assessment. We ask what the changes are of those events happening and what the potential consequences are. For example, if a train hits a landslip on a high-speed line, that has a more severe consequence than if it happens on a low-speed line. We use those decision criteria to decide where best to spend the money to ensure that we provide safety, performance and resilience.

The Convener: Stewart Stevenson has a supplementary question.

Stewart Stevenson: It is just a wee point of clarification. Can we have confirmation that Dunrobin Castle station is privately owned?

Alex Hynes: That is correct. I believe that that is why it does not have the customer information system. Nevertheless, I still think that it should have a customer information system.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, indeed.

The Convener: That is an interesting point.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): On Saturday 24 August, the Twitter traffic increased substantially, with some interesting posts and videos regarding the problems at Waverley and Haymarket. Will you explain the reasons behind the breakdown in services that passengers experienced at Waverley and Haymarket stations that evening, given that the likelihood of high passenger numbers as a result of the Edinburgh festival and the rugby international at Murrayfield had been known about for months?

Alex Hynes: The Edinburgh festival presents us with challenges every year, and planning for it is a huge focus for my team and me in the run-up to the event. This year, we delivered our biggest ever Edinburgh festival plan—we were able to do that because the ScotRail rolling stock fleet is the biggest that it has ever been. We now have 1,000 carriages in our fleet. Throughout the Edinburgh festival, we were able to provide more than 20 per cent more carriages this year compared to last year. However, on the day in question, that clearly was not sufficient. You will recall that it was the final weekend of the festival, which is the busiest, that there was also a rugby event at Murrayfield and that the weather was rather good that day. We took many people into Edinburgh and, clearly, the number of people who wanted to travel back at the same time created pressure on the system. We had three circumstances in which customers

pulled the passenger alarm, which meant that the trains were brought to a standstill.

As the event caused so much customer pain, we have done what we call an incident learning review. Once we have finalised that review, I will publish the learnings from it. The learnings will not only affect the railway; they will affect major event management in the city of Edinburgh. These events are getting bigger and bigger, and I am not sure that it is wise for us to host the rugby at Murrayfield during the busiest weekend of the Edinburgh festival. I have already started a conversation on that with Scottish Rugby. It is clear to me that we have to manage the risk in a different way. I am disappointed about what happened on the Saturday night, because the rest of the festival plan worked perfectly.

Richard Lyle: There were scenes of people being pushed, squeezed and sardined into trains. Surely, with the technology that you mentioned a moment ago, you should know how many rail tickets you have sold and what your capacity is. Your staff should have held people back, as I saw happening on the excellent television programme about Glasgow Central, where people were advised where to go. What action is the ScotRail Alliance taking to learn from that significant disruption and to improve planning for future major events, which generate increased service demand?

Are some of your delays a result of other operators on the line? I was at a station in Manchester and saw about six different carriers going through it. That was in England, but how many operators do you have to share the lines with in Scotland?

Alex Hynes: On major event planning, our objective is to get better and better at managing such events. Our ability to cope with them will improve because the rolling stock fleet continues to grow, so we can provide more capacity and seats for our customers.

We operate a walk-up railway, and that presents some logistical challenges. One of the things that we need to think about is whether we put in quota controls on those very, very busy days. Is it wise to keep Haymarket and Waverley stations open at the same time, for example? We are thinking about all these things. The Edinburgh festival is only going to get bigger, so we might need to adapt our operation accordingly.

Of course, Scotland's railway is not an island. There are other train operating companies, cross-border services and freight. As I have previously advised the committee, every delay on the network is allocated to either ScotRail, Network Rail as the infrastructure manager or another train operating company—Caledonian Sleeper, Virgin

west coast, LNER, TransPennine and so on. The railway is a system and all those players play their part in the system.

10:30

The Convener: The next question is from Jamie Greene.

Jamie Greene: My Hynes, I am going to move the conversation on to the remedial plans. Some of my colleagues will talk about the customer satisfaction plan—the second plan—but I would like to focus on performance. My colleagues have questions about rolling stock and driver and conductor recruitment, so perhaps we could leave those aside while I focus on some of the other aspects of the remedial agreement.

You submitted a plan in February of this year with 19 specific points to be addressed. Will you give me a general update on your progress and say which of the 19 you are meeting and which you are perhaps struggling with?

Alex Hynes: Of course. We have a dedicated project manager for the train service performance remedial plan and we have a weekly meeting with Transport Scotland to go through our progress on the delivery of that plan. I am pleased to report that all the actions in the remedial plan have either been delivered or are on track to be delivered in line with the plan, so there are no remedial plan activities that are at risk of not being delivered.

As well as delivering the inputs of the remedial plan, we need to deliver the outputs in terms of a more reliable service to our customers, and I am pleased to report that we are also on track to deliver on the trajectory of public performance measure—PPM—recovery. Both the inputs and the outputs of the plan are being delivered in line with the £18 million investment that we are making.

Jamie Greene: Let us look at some of the numbers. Where are we in terms of the performance metrics? The PPM is reported in two forms. Will you update the committee on the periodic measure and the moving annual average figures, and how they compare with this time last year?

Alex Hynes: The moving annual average is currently 87.5 against the target of 92.5, so we are on the wrong side of 90. The moving annual average has improved in recent months from its low point, which happened earlier in the year.

Jamie Greene: It is 87.5. When do you think you will hit 92.5?

Alex Hynes: I have previously advised the committee that our objective is to hit 92.5 as soon

as we can. Our projection is that it will be at the end of 2021.

Jamie Greene: Are you confident that you will meet your target within the terms of the current franchise?

Alex Hynes: Yes.

Jamie Greene: Are you heading in the right direction?

Alex Hynes: Yes. As I said in my opening remarks, train service performance continues to improve on Scotland's railway, and a huge amount of work is happening in both ScotRail and Network Rail, with other operators—particularly on weather resilience, as we have described—to get up to 92.5 as soon as we can.

Jamie Greene: I will ask just one final question, because I know that we have other questions on the remedial plans. You mentioned in response to the convener some structural changes in the alliance, or whatever it is referred to as at present. Will you expand on that a little? You talked about a change in the way that Network Rail works with its regions and you seemed to imply that some additional functions or capital responsibility had been given to ScotRail. Why has that happened? What effect will it have on how ScotRail is run?

Alex Hynes: Network Rail is the infrastructure manager—it runs the track, the signalling, the bridges and the major stations—and it delivers major capital projects such as the Aberdeen to Inverness upgrade. It is also responsible for the long-term planning of the railway on behalf of the Scottish Government. The ScotRail franchise procures the delivery of the train service on that infrastructure.

Andrew Haines, the new chief executive officer of Network Rail—you met his predecessor, Mark Carne—joined last year and his view was that Network Rail's functions were overly centralised in London and Milton Keynes. His priority was to devolve more power from the centre to each of the five regions that have been created in Network Rail, one of which is Scotland. The logic is that decisions that are made closer to the action will be better decisions than those that are made more remotely.

On 24 June, I became responsible for capital delivery—the major enhancement projects—and the long-term planning of Scotland's railway, which has been welcomed by Transport Scotland and the ScotRail Alliance. The reorganisation of the Network Rail side of the alliance brings more of the levers of the railway system to Scotland, so that we can make better decisions for the people of Scotland.

The Convener: There are a few supplementaries. I will bring in Colin Smyth and then Stewart Stevenson.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, convener. I will double check the projections for hitting the 92.5 per cent target. In answer to a topical question on 26 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, told Parliament:

“ScotRail's forecast for achieving the 92.5 per cent target is that it will do so by the end of reporting period 13, in 2020-21, and it believes that it is on track to achieve that.”—[*Official Report*, 26 March 2019; c 7.]

Reporting period 13 is to March 2021, but you have said today that you will not reach the target until the end of 2021. Do you know why the cabinet secretary said March 2021?

Alex Hynes: It depends on whether a railway year or calendar year is used—proceed with caution when talking about period dates. Our target is to deliver the 92.5 per cent as soon as possible, and our position is that we are projected to deliver it by the end of 2021.

This is not an exact science; it is a projection. Some of the risks that we manage are not in our direct control. The biggest incident on Scotland's railway yesterday was a trespasser on the Forth rail bridge—that is a good example of such a risk.

Colin Smyth: I am curious as to why the cabinet secretary would say March 2021, which is the end of period 13, but you are now saying the end of 2021, which is December.

Alex Hynes: You would have to ask him that.

The Convener: I am sure that Colin Smyth will get a chance to do so when the cabinet secretary comes to the committee, which will be next week, I think.

Stewart Stevenson: On the issue of further devolution, it is clear that timetabling has to be co-ordinated across the Great Britain network; we cannot timetable in Scotland alone. Given that the majority of trains in Scotland operate solely on the Scottish network, what is the opportunity for further devolution of timetabling, in particular to shorten the period over which timetabling decisions can be made? I understand that making big system timetable changes can have quite a long lead time; little ones are clearly another matter.

Alex Hynes: That is a great question. The devolution of timetabling is on the agenda for the future. You will remember that the timetable south of the border collapsed in May last year, which led to a number of changes including a review of the whole timetabling process. Timetabling was specifically not part of the first series of Andrew Haines's reforms at Network Rail, because it was

regarded as too risky to devolve. The priority was to ensure that we have a robust process for planning the timetable and that it is executed well, and subsequent timetable changes have gone rather better.

Having said that, the devolution of timetabling remains an aspiration. As Stewart Stevenson points out, most of the passenger trains on Network Rail's infrastructure in Scotland are ScotRail trains, so there is an opportunity for us to operate things slightly differently here. ScotRail and Network Rail are doing a little pilot that enables ScotRail to have access to the Network Rail train planning systems. That means that, if ScotRail wants to change its timetable and there are no impacts on any other train or freight operating companies, it is able to do that. A great example is on the approaches to Queen Street station, where ScotRail is the only operator. If ScotRail wants to make some tweaks to the timetable, we now have the ability to do that quickly and easily here in Scotland.

In due course, we want to reduce the planning timescale so that we can be more agile and responsive to market demand. That will make major event planning more straightforward, for example. That is a future development, and I hope that I will be able to report to the committee that further devolution has happened in that area.

Maureen Watt: It must have been sometime between 2011 and 2014 that the Government and the industry agreed that the commuter trains used for the 40-minute journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow were not suitable for journeys of two hours plus from the central belt to Aberdeen and Inverness. For all that time, we have been waiting for refurbished trains that are better and more comfortable. The refurbished trains were due to begin entering service from the central belt to Aberdeen and Inverness from May 2018, but my understanding and knowledge are that many of the high-speed trains are still running in the classic format. How much longer will the patience of our constituents in the north be tried?

Alex Hynes: We are going to recreate an intercity network for long-distance travel in Scotland. In order to do that, we have procured the best high-speed train that was ever built on the United Kingdom network—the intercity 125 high-speed train. We introduced high-speed train services last year, and that is an area in which, sadly, we have been let down by our suppliers. Those trains are owned by Angel Trains, which let a contract with a company called Wabtec. Wabtec's performance on the upgrading of those trains has been woeful.

Syeda Ghufuran, who is sitting to my right, spends an awful lot of her time with Angel Trains and Wabtec, getting them to perform and deliver

that fantastic and iconic train to us. It will enable the creation of an intercity network in Scotland, which will enable us to provide more speed, frequency and comfort. It will be helpful if Syeda gives an update on where she is with Angel Trains and Wabtec.

Syeda Ghufuran (Network Rail Scotland): As Alex Hynes said, I am working very closely with the leasing company, Angel, and the supplier, Wabtec, which is refurbishing the trains in Doncaster, to get them to deliver the trains as soon as possible. We now have seven refurbished trains in Scotland, and the eighth one is expected in the next week.

We are working closely with Wabtec to ensure that its facility in Kilmarnock helps it to refurbish more coaches. That facility is now live and is refurbishing coaches, which will also accelerate the delivery of the refurbished trains. Along with that, Wabtec has looked at its resource management plan and employed more resources to allow faster delivery of the refurbished trains.

10:45

Maureen Watt: With all due respect, we had the same discussion six months ago. What has changed since the last time you were here? How much more quickly are the refurbished trains coming online?

Syeda Ghufuran: We are expecting two per month from October onwards. Wabtec met the most recent date that it promised to meet—the seventh train was delivered on target. Other trains are being refurbished at the facility for other operators. The fact that that process is coming to an end will allow Wabtec to put more coaches through refurbishment and deliver on the promise that it made to deliver more trains to Scotland as soon as possible.

Maureen Watt: What is your end date? When do you expect all the fully refurbished trains to be in service on the Inverness and Aberdeen lines?

Syeda Ghufuran: We expect all 26 intercity trains to be delivered by the end of June 2020.

The Convener: I have a quick follow-up question on an issue that I have asked about previously. Unfortunately, in the classic mode, the HSTs could leave on the track stuff from the toilets that should have been contained in the system. Is that still happening? If so, that would go against the agreement that you reached with your workforce. Will you clarify that, please?

Alex Hynes: We have made a modification to the classic HSTs here, and we are continuing to work to reduce that risk. Syeda Ghufuran will explain what we have done.

Syeda Ghufuran: On the classic trains, we have fitted a GPS-enabled control unit that does not allow passengers to flush toilets when the train is at a station or at key bridges where the track workers mostly work. We have also engaged with Network Rail to enhance the deep cleaning of the track so that the workers do not have to work in conditions in which waste has been deposited.

As soon as we get the refurbished trains, the classic trains are taken out of service. The first classic train has already gone down to Doncaster to be refurbished. By the end of this year, we hope to minimise the use of classic trains on Scotland's network.

The Convener: I might have misheard you. Will you clarify whether the GPS unit stops waste being dropped on bridges, too?

Syeda Ghufuran: Yes, it does.

The Convener: Does it stop waste being deposited over waterways? Does it prevent effluent from going into all the waterways in the Highlands?

Syeda Ghufuran: Yes, that is right.

The Convener: Stewart Stevenson will ask the next question.

Stewart Stevenson: I want to close off the issue of the 385s. I heard that 10 per cent of them are still to arrive. When will delivery of them be completed?

Alex Hynes: It will be between now and the end of the year. We need all 70 of them for the December timetable change and in order to deliver further improvement for the newly electrified routes. One of the fantastic things that the trains will enable is the retirement of our class 314 trains over in the west, which are among our oldest and least reliable trains and which do not have toilets on board. The new Hitachi trains will provide a double win—they will benefit not just the customers who experience them, but the customers who will no longer have to travel on the 314s.

Syeda Ghufuran works very closely with Hitachi not just on the delivery programme but on making sure that the reliability of the new trains continues to improve. I am delighted that the 385 train that is operated by ScotRail is already at number 2 in the league table of new train introductions when it comes to technical reliability, and we want to be in the top spot in that table. It will be helpful for Syeda to explain to the committee the work that we are doing with Hitachi to improve the technical reliability of that train.

Syeda Ghufuran: We have the next three units here in Scotland. They are going through the

acceptance programme and we hope to have them introduced to service next month.

Alex Hynes touched on the fact that we have improved the reliability of the doors and the communications systems that the drivers use to operate the trains, and a lot of investment is being undertaken with Hitachi to ensure that the 385 is the best-performing train in Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson: You said that you need to get all the 385s in order to be able to implement the December timetable change. What period of time is there between the acceptance process that follows the completion of delivery and the timetable change? Is it one week, two weeks or four weeks? I want to get a sense of how much slack there is. Given the record of non-delivery, we should take an interest in that.

Syeda Ghufuran: As I explained, the three trains that are going through their acceptance process are already in Scotland and are going through their fault-free running and commissioning activities. The next three will arrive next month and will go through the same process. Before the December timetable change, we will ensure that all trains are accepted.

Stewart Stevenson: Forgive me for being quite specific, but I want to pursue this. How soon before the timetable change will you have a sufficient number of 385s, if not necessarily all of them, to support the change? As Alex Hynes said, you are dependent on the 385s to make that change effectively. How much slack is there?

Syeda Ghufuran: I am confident that, by the first week of December, we will have all the 385s in Scotland ready to be deployed as part of the December timetable change.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the timetable change in the middle of December?

Syeda Ghufuran: Yes. It is on 15 December.

Stewart Stevenson: The other issue that I want to raise is recruitment and training of new drivers and conductors. How have the numbers changed, particularly in the case of drivers, given that there are more vehicles to drive and that, as I understand it, it takes a year or thereby to train a driver? Are you on schedule with that? Are you getting in the staff that you need?

Alex Hynes: The short answer is yes. The recruitment of 55 additional drivers as part of the train service remedial plan is on track as planned. You rightly point out that it takes rather a long time to train a driver, which is because of the highly skilled nature of the job and because the safety competence that we need to ensure that our drivers have is specific to particular types of train and route. Therefore, in a depot such as Edinburgh, where drivers drive many routes in all

directions and many different types of train, it can take up to 18 months to bring a colleague off the street and train them to be a fully productive driver.

We have about 200 drivers in training across ScotRail. In fact, we probably have the largest driver training programme of any train operating company in the United Kingdom. That is a function of a number of things. One is that we have many more services to deliver for our customers in the future. We have not stopped improving the number of seats and the frequency and we have not stopped the rolling stock introductions. We have more service enhancements to come, including many in the north-east in December, for example. We have also decided that we want to reduce our reliance on overtime working to zero at every depot across Scotland's railway, and that is driving our recruitment and training. We have a three-year manpower plan for drivers and conductors and we are in the process of producing a five-year workforce plan for ScotRail. That recognises that a lot of our driver and conductor recruitment comes from internal sources—for example, we might pinch trainee conductors from hospitality—so we need to ensure that we have a good flow of our colleagues through the organisation.

We have spent a lot of time going through our manpower planning processes in forensic detail to strengthen them in order to ensure that the issues that we saw earlier in the year are never repeated and to improve resilience and train service performance.

Stewart Stevenson: I have a quick final question. Given that drivers have to be trained on routes and on each individual bit of equipment, how long does it take for their validation to lapse? In other words, if someone has not driven a 320 for a year, do they have to requalify, or at least go back to the training? Similarly, if someone has not covered a route for a year, do they have to requalify?

Alex Hynes: In rostering our drivers, we move them round the train types and routes to ensure that their knowledge does not lapse. I can give a good example of the issue that you raise. We have just finished engineering work on the £330 million Inverness to Aberdeen project, which is on time and on budget and which will deliver huge benefits for our customers in the north-east come December. Clearly, the infrastructure has changed. At the end of the engineering project, we made sure that every driver in that part of the world had the opportunity to do two comfort runs, as we call them, recognising that there had been some minor changes to the infrastructure.

You are right—the competence of our drivers on the route and the traction is a key area of focus for our driver team managers.

Maureen Watt: Listening to the radio and other media outlets in the morning, the perception is that most of the cancellations happen in the early morning. To what extent is that a result of crew members not turning up for work? What sort of control do you have over sickness absence rates?

Alex Hynes: The number of services that we cancel as a result of a lack of available train crew is now very low. We promised the committee that we would fix that problem by the May timetable change, and we have done that. The remedial plan—the £18 million investment that Abellio is putting in—has largely remedied that issue.

An issue that we sometimes have at the start of the day is the late completion of engineering work. One of the things that we have done over the past nine months has been to strengthen our processes around safe, reliable and on-time handback of the track from engineering work to operation. That is a key focus for Liam Sumpter and his team. It is worth saying that the number of overruns and PPM failures that are caused by that has dramatically reduced in recent times. Liam has plans to further improve our performance in that area.

Liam Sumpter: That is a really frustrating thing to happen at the start of our day, because all our units and drivers are in the right place to start their journeys. If passengers are up at 5 o'clock or 5.30 in the morning to get an early train, it is even more frustrating to be delayed in that way.

Network Rail recognises that we cannot allow our engineering work to overrun. We have introduced some new processes that speed up the taking of access at the start of the engineering work, which means that we can guarantee that the work will be completed. As Alex Hynes said, we have reduced the number of delays associated with that dramatically, to the extent that it has been six weeks since the most recent such incident, which was a very minor delay in the morning. That is part of the work that we are doing to help ScotRail's services get off to a good start in the morning.

Emma Harper: I have a quick supplementary. We have discussed intercity rail links and north-east connections, but I am interested in the plans for the south-west of Scotland. I get complaints about the lack of faster lines, which affects our ability to recruit doctors to the region. Given all the new drivers who are coming on board and the increase in conductors, I am interested to hear about the plans for the routes between Stranraer and Ayr and between Dumfries and Glasgow. How

can we bring about an improvement for the south-west?

Alex Hynes: In recent years, we have delivered some good train service improvements in the south-west. For example, we doubled the frequency of train services between Dumfries and Carlisle a few timetable periods ago. South of Ayr, the train service is operated by diesel trains. We know that there is a UK-wide shortage of diesel trains, which inhibits our ability to expand the train service in that part of the world.

That said, as the train fleet gets bigger, that gives us more service enhancement options. One of the questions that we need to ask ourselves, particularly in the light of yesterday's announcement by the Scottish Government on decarbonising Scotland's railway by 2035, is whether we want to electrify the line south of Ayr. That is something that we need to think about as a country. That would enable the improvements that Emma Harper's constituents are looking for.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): Good morning. I want to move on to the second remedial plan. Abellio was issued with a second remedial plan notice by Transport Scotland on 8 February 2019 for failing to meet the customer satisfaction targets that are set out in the franchise agreement. I want to explore that.

One of the issues was a decline in customer satisfaction with train cleanliness. I note that, among other things, you are planning to initiate deep cleaning of all carriages on a 120-day rotation, rather than the current 180-day rotation. I assume that there will be a need for more cleaning staff. Is that part of the plan? How many extra folk do you reckon that you need?

11:00

Alex Hynes: Train cleanliness is the second most important driver of customer satisfaction after train service punctuality. It is an area that we have focused on heavily in recent months, because it is one of the key things that the service quality incentive regime measures. As we know, the regime in Scotland is one of the toughest service quality regimes anywhere in the UK. In August, when we published our latest SQUIRE performance, I was pleased to report that our results had improved by 43 per cent.

Train cleanliness is a key area of focus for us, which we continue to invest in. For example, given the volume of customers on the main Edinburgh to Glasgow route and the requirement to light clean those trains more frequently, we have implemented travelling cleaners on them. As part of Abellio's £4 million investment in the customer satisfaction remedial plan, we have committed to retaining those travelling cleaners—whom we put

in at our own expense—until the end of the franchise.

Mr Chapman rightly says that, in addition to daily cleaning during and at the end of the day, we do what are called planned heavy cleans. We are going to do those more frequently in the future. Syeda Ghufuran, as the engineering director for ScotRail, is responsible for the train-cleaning operation. As well as making sure that Wabtec and Angel deliver, it is her job to make sure that we provide safe, clean and reliable trains for ScotRail. She will explain what we are doing on cleaning.

Syeda Ghufuran: As Alex Hynes explained, we have recruited additional cleaners as part of our pit stop teams, which travel on the trains and do cleaning while the trains are in service. We have also recruited additional cleaners at new locations such as Millerhill, which is a new depot where the 385s are stabled overnight. In addition, in remote locations such as Tweedbank and Lanark, we have plans in place to recruit additional cleaners to help with overnight cleaning. We are continually growing our train presentation team to ensure that the standards are met.

Peter Chapman: It appears that the cleaners who travel on the train have been a huge success. Have you any plans to introduce that on other routes?

Syeda Ghufuran: We are looking at using them on the Glasgow suburban routes as well, because the passenger satisfaction results showed that passengers were not satisfied on those routes.

Peter Chapman: The remedial plan also highlights the creation of an 18-strong customer action team and a 12-strong team of complaints specialists. I understand that those are not to be new posts but are to come from existing ScotRail staff. What impact will the creation of those teams have on the tasks that the staff carry out now?

Alex Hynes: I have two points to make, the first of which is about the customer action team that will go live shortly. Essentially, if we have major disruption, particularly in the Glasgow area, which is where the ScotRail headquarters is, we will have a dedicated team of train managers who can be sent into the major stations to support our front-line colleagues. They will help our front-line employees, support customers with information and generally provide better customer service and visibility. That is part of our remedial plan.

In addition, again in Glasgow, we employ a team of highly trained professionals who process our customer contacts, including the administration of the delay repay guarantee. Working with that team, we have identified an opportunity to bring those staff to the customers. Rather than customers claiming post-event when

things go wrong, the team helps them through their claim on iPads at the time. That is great for customers. It is us being proactive and doing the work for them. It means that we can pay the money back as soon as we can. It also helps to prevent backlogs from occurring later at the shared service centre.

It is worth saying that, on top of the fact that ScotRail employs 500 more people than it did at the start of the franchise, Abellio's UK headquarters is in Glasgow, where it provides employment for nearly 200 people. That is a function of Abellio operating the ScotRail franchise. It is not just the ScotRail activity that is getting bigger and providing more well-skilled and well-paid jobs for Scotland, but the existence of Abellio's UK headquarters and shared service centre is also providing employment for Scotland.

Colin Smyth: According to your remedial plan, this year you are projected to remain below the customer satisfaction target that is set out in the franchise agreement. The projection is 84 per cent for 2019-20. This year, you hit 79 per cent, but the franchise agreement says that the target is 88.5 per cent.

The franchise states:

"If Overall Satisfaction does not meet the Overall Passenger Satisfaction Target in any two consecutive Franchisee Years, such shall constitute a continuing and material Event of Default ... and the Authority shall be entitled to terminate this Agreement by serving a Termination Notice on the Franchisee."

Can you confirm that the remedial plan says that, in effect, you will be in default of the franchise?

Alex Hynes: I am sorry—where are you quoting from?

Colin Smyth: I am quoting from the text of the franchise agreement, which says that if you do not hit the target on customer satisfaction for two years running, that constitutes a material event of default, which would allow the franchise to be terminated.

Alex Hynes: That sounds correct. The way in which the contract works is that it puts many thousands of obligations on ScotRail, the vast majority of which have been delivered. In the event of targets in the franchise agreement not being hit, there is a process of remedy and escalation, with varying consequences. You are right that, in extremis, failure to hit targets can be an event of default and Transport Scotland could issue a notice of termination if our performance fell below certain levels. However, it is not going to, because we are investing £22 million of Abellio's money in improving train service performance and customer satisfaction to give our customers the service that they expect and deserve.

Colin Smyth: Your remedial plan projects that passenger satisfaction for 2019-20 will be 84 per cent—that is what you think it will be—but the franchise agreement says that it should be 88.5 per cent. That means that you are projecting that you will fail to meet the franchise agreement next year. That will be two years running that you will have failed to meet the franchise agreement. If you fail to meet the agreement two years running, that is an event of default. Is that not the case? You are projecting that you will fail to meet the franchise agreement.

Alex Hynes: In effect, the remedial plan becomes the way to improve service to bring it back up to target—that is the way in which the process works. Clearly, we do not want to be in default of the franchise and we do not want it to be terminated. What we want to do is to deliver a great service for customers. Rather than terminate the franchise, the answer is to invest to fix the problem, and that is what we are doing.

Colin Smyth: There is no point in setting a franchise target if we are saying that you do not need to meet it. Even in the third year—a year after you would be in default of the franchise—you are projecting that you will reach customer satisfaction of in the region of 88 per cent, which is again below the franchise agreement level of 88.5 per cent. To be fair, Transport Scotland has suddenly reduced the franchise target for future years to 87.5 per cent, which, coincidentally, is slightly below the level that you are projecting to reach in 2020-21, which is 88 per cent. You are projecting that you will fail to meet the franchise agreement for three years running. At what point would the franchise get terminated? If you are simply projecting that you are constantly going to fail to meet the franchise agreement, what is the point of having franchise targets at all?

Alex Hynes: Our primary focus is to deliver a great service for our customers. What triggered the remedial plan was an overall satisfaction score in the national rail passenger survey of 79 per cent, which was not acceptable to anybody, including me and my team. That score has already recovered to 85 per cent, which is higher than the GB average. We have the most satisfied customers of any of the large operators in the UK, and we are going to drive that score up even further. The reason why Transport Scotland has adjusted the target is nothing to do with helping the franchisee, ScotRail; it is because Transport Focus changed the methodology on which the national rail passenger survey was created.

The Convener: I will let Colin Smyth push the issue one more time, after which I really must let other committee members in.

Colin Smyth: I am sure that it is a coincidence that Transport Scotland has changed the target to

87.5 per cent and that you are projecting that you will reach a level of 88 per cent, which is just above it and no more. However, you must accept that you are in default of the franchise, because you have failed to deliver on that target for two years running—or, at least, you are projecting that you will fail to deliver on it for two years running.

Alex Hynes: I think that the way it works legally is that we are not in default, because we have agreed a remedial plan. That is why we are investing £22 million in improving train service performance and customer satisfaction, which I think is what our customers want.

The Convener: I will bring in Richard Lyle.

Richard Lyle: Let us get away from the doom and gloom. I think that we actually have a good train service. I like to travel on a train. Alex Hynes and I have discussed the fact that people do not want their train to skip stops, they want a seat and they want to pay a decent price, but I want to ask him a question that I do not think that anyone has ever asked him.

We have other forms of transport in Scotland—buses, planes and ferries. Have you ever done a comparison between ScotRail's performance and that of those other modes of transport when it comes to delays? I can see a big fat no coming.

Alex Hynes: I personally have not done so, but one of the things that, as a railway person, I often reflect on is the transparency of our performance information and how tight the targets are. We measure every train every day. A train has to arrive at its destination within four minutes and 59 seconds of its scheduled time, having called at all stations. That is a pretty challenging target—it is a great target to have. How many car journeys achieve that objective over the same distances? That is why people are so positive about the rail network in Scotland. It is why the Scottish Government continues to invest record amounts. I would not dream of using my car during the week. Rail travel is by far the most civilised form of travel, and we are going to make it even better.

Richard Lyle: It would be interesting to know how many planes have been delayed in France over the past couple of days as a result of a technical hitch.

Alex Hynes: Plane companies measure their performance time to 15 minutes' delay, I think.

The Convener: That is an issue that Richard Lyle's parliamentary researcher might be able to follow up. I am not sure that we will get the answer in this committee.

Emma Harper: I will stick with Richard Lyle's objectivity and infectious positivity. I am interested in the introduction of technology as part of the remedial plan. Technology can aid with

communication in situations in which there might be disruption to people's journeys. What practical difference do you expect the creation of one new customer information post and the roll-out of new smartphones for staff to have on the passenger experience across the network?

Alex Hynes: There are two issues there. Every station in Scotland apart from Dunrobin Castle has a real-time customer information system. The information that drives those systems is pushed out from the two customer information and security centres that we have on Scotland's railway—one at Paisley and one at Dunfermline. Recently we invested heavily in both those facilities in order to improve the accuracy of the information and the speed with which it is sent out. As part of the remedial plan exercise, we identified an opportunity to improve the delivery of information to the customer information system at weekends. One of our customer information desks had two people on it from Monday to Friday but only one person on a Saturday. We will double that shift to ensure that, in the event of two incidents happening at the same time, for example, we can process the information more quickly.

11:15

That is the work that we do remotely through those facilities, which are the most advanced customer information and security centres anywhere on the UK rail network—they are fantastic. In addition, we have thousands of front-line colleagues and there are at least two people on board every train. Clearly, providing face-to-face visible customer service at all times, and particularly during periods of disruption, is a key focus. Therefore, making sure that all our people have a smart device that they know how to use in order to access information is a key part of our plan. The majority of the £4 million investment that we are making—around £2 million of it—involves the cost of issuing every member of staff with a new smart device and then training them how to use the apps and the information on those devices to deliver better customer information. That is at the heart of our plan. We want to ensure that our front-line staff—who, in the main, are absolutely fantastic—have the tools to do the job and to look after our customers at all times.

Emma Harper: In your opening statement, you mentioned the WhatsApp service. Do you have any evidence that that service, which disseminates information during busy periods or periods of disruption, has been taken up? Are people using that service?

Alex Hynes: That is a great question. We launched the service only on Monday, but we are already getting some useful customer insight. In ScotRail, we have an award-winning Twitter team.

ScotRail is fantastic in social media, and we have recently recruited more people to that team to support the enhanced hours of operation. They now start at 5.30 in the morning and operate until midnight. Pretty much, when trains are running, our social media team is in operation. Primarily, they use Twitter and Facebook. Young people, in particular, are comfortable using that sort of social media. We are already recognising that people who are using the WhatsApp channel generally tend to be a little bit older than the people who are using the social media channels. Already, we are making our fantastic team more accessible to all different parts of society.

Emma Harper: Will you continue to monitor the uptake and the engagement to ensure that the approach is working?

Alex Hynes: Absolutely. We monitor our social media all the time. We get daily data on it. We monitor customer sentiment in real time. Every morning at about 10.30, an email goes out to every manager on Scotland's railway that says what our customers said about us on social media that morning. That gives us immensely powerful customer insight, and we use that information to improve the service that we provide.

John Finnie: I will make a brief comment about social media before I ask my question. You might be aware, Mr Hynes, that, over the weekend, one of my constituents complained that there was a fault at Inverness that had resulted in three of the ticket machines not working. The staff got in touch with my constituent quickly and said that the issue had been partially resolved, as two of the machines were working and work was under way to get the other one sorted as soon as possible. My constituent remained unhappy, although I thought that that was a first-class response. How does that sort of thing filter in? At the previous meeting, you gave us an example of someone who had a perfect journey on the train but, because something had gone wrong when they got off the train, their reflection on the whole episode was negative. Is there any way of analysing that sort of thing? I would say that, overwhelmingly, people's experience of the railway is positive.

Alex Hynes: There are a couple of points there. I remember that incident. We have been working hard on the reliability of our ticket vending machines, which has improved hugely during my time on Scotland's railway; that is one of the reasons for the improvement in our SQUIRE performance—the last time that we delivered the results, they were 43 per cent better than the previous time.

We are getting better at handling customer feedback when customers have issues or suggestions. We went live with WhatsApp on

Monday and people with reduced mobility are asking whether they can use that channel to book their assistance; that is an example of what people are asking. We have very precise measurement, so if I were to check my email now, I could tell you the social sentiment—positive, negative or neutral—for ScotRail this morning.

John Finnie: Does there not have to be deeper analysis in some respects? Someone might be negative about one aspect rather than the whole experience.

I make a link back to my questions about identifying the fault on the west Highland line, which was done by a human, notwithstanding all the measurement. Can you give an assurance that the expansion of social media, welcome as it is, will not mean that we have no human presence at stations? Some people want to see the whites of the eyes in order to understand, rather than mess about on a phone as you and I might be comfortable doing.

Alex Hynes: Customers tell us that they love our people. Our most important task is to make sure that our people are well informed, visible, helpful and friendly, which is why we employ 500 more people now than we did on the first day of the franchise.

Jamie Greene: I will pick up on some less exciting but still quite important things that have not been mentioned, one of which is the decision to scrap the bike-and-go scheme. It is disappointing that take-up was low, and I appreciate that that was a commercial decision. Why do you think that the scheme was so unsuccessful?

Also, you have not mentioned what is being done to improve the delay repay programme. There may still be a lack of awareness about the process for passengers to get refunds—some surveys have pointed that out—and there has been conversation recently about how many steps people have to go through and how many pieces of information have to be provided, which seem to be unacceptable to some.

Alex Hynes: Abellio closed the bike-and-go scheme, not just in ScotRail but in its other UK operations, because of very low usage. That does not mean that it is not committed to cycling and active travelling; we continue to invest huge sums of money, with a dedicated cycling manager, a cycling forum and better station and on-board facilities for cycle storage. In due course, we will deliver a carriage to be used to convey cycles on scenic lines during the summer, which is really exciting—for example, there will be a dedicated carriage for bikes on the west Highland line to Fort William, the mountain bike capital of the UK. We

are completely committed to cycling, despite the closure of the bike-and-go scheme.

On delay repay, you referred to the *Which?* report, which took a worst-case scenario on the number of steps that customers have to take to claim. The scheme is dead easy and guarantees that we will get people's money back to them quickly if their journey is delayed by 30 minutes or more. We administer it by remembering customer details and ticket details so that, on subsequent events, the customer has to add only the journey detail. A worst-case scenario for a single claim has a number of steps, but that is done to make future claims easy by remembering customer details.

As part of the remedial plan, we will publicise the scheme more widely. The number of claims is increasing for a given level of disruption, which is evidence of rising awareness of the delay repay scheme. The teams that we will send to major stations during major disruption will help to improve the claim rate. As we set out in the remedial plan—you have a copy of that document—we will also distribute, I think, 115,000 handy credit card-sized pieces of information, which commuters in particular will be able to keep in their wallets, so that they know exactly how to make a claim.

Jamie Greene: If I buy a paper ticket at the station—I have not bought it online, so I have not registered and you do not know who I am—and my train is delayed, at what point will a member of staff tell me that I am eligible for a refund? Will that information come up on a screen? Will it be announced? Will the conductor mention it? Will there be staff at the other end of my journey to give me a form?

Alex Hynes: Essentially, the delay repay right is triggered if a train is delayed by more than 30 minutes. Our staff will announce that information, it will be on customer information screens at stations and, of course, we will publicise it through our social media channels. You will also see more staff physically handing a reminder to customers when those events happen.

Peter Chapman: In the plan, the commitments on personal safety and security relate only to passenger awareness raising, rather than tackling issues of concern at stations and on trains. Rightly or wrongly, the level of concern about our personal safety as we travel is increasing. What practical measures are you taking to improve passenger safety at stations and on trains?

Alex Hynes: Our approach focuses on two issues, one of which is to improve the actual safety and security of Scotland's railway; the other is to improve the perception of the safety and security of Scotland's railway.

Scotland's railway is safe and it is getting safer. We are investing more resources in ensuring that the rail network is safe and secure. A good example is our investment in body cameras for our front-line staff. Using the cameras is voluntary—some people use them and some do not. They are being used more frequently. The quality of the video and the audio is seriously impressive and of prosecution standard. By using such technologies, we are enabling our people to feel confident and ensuring that the technology is visible. We are also making sure that we prosecute people properly when they put our staff or customers at risk. That is right up there as a priority, and is the job of our security manager.

By analysing the customer data that we get from the national rail passenger survey, we found that the main issue is the perception of security. Therefore, in the coming months and years, we will be communicating a lot to make sure that our customers are more aware of the fact that we have the two fantastic closed-circuit television facilities at Paisley and Dunfermline, where staff watch the network remotely 24/7. You will see us providing a lot more information about that, so that customers can feel more secure when using our network.

Peter Chapman: I can see the body cameras being a huge advantage for you. Why are they not compulsory for your staff to wear?

Alex Hynes: Some people do not feel the need to wear them, and I think that some people are uncomfortable with the concept. At the moment, wearing the body cameras is voluntary, and we do not have any plans to make their use permanent.

Peter Chapman: What percentage of your staff wear them?

Alex Hynes: When new technology is rolled out, there are always early and late adopters. We cannot easily measure the percentage of staff who are wearing them, because body cameras are not classified as personal equipment. Essentially, we make a number of body camera devices available at each of the booking-on and booking-off locations across Scotland's railway networks, so we measure the use of the devices rather than whether individual staff have had equipment issued to them personally—they are not issued to everyone.

Peter Chapman: Your plan has a budget of about £3.9 million. I think that you said that one of the big expenditures is on smartphones. Where else will the money be spent and what will it provide?

Alex Hynes: There is a table in the plan that sets out the expenditure by commitment. The money funds things such as the additional staff in the control centres and the additional train

cleaning resource. It is mainly around investment in additional people.

Peter Chapman: That is fine.

11:30

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I have some specific questions on the SQUIRE fund, which you touched on earlier. Over the past nine quarters, the average penalty that you have been hit with for missing targets on things such as cleanliness of stations, cleanliness of trains, litter, passenger information displays and public address systems has been over £1 million per quarter. How much money is currently in the fund?

Alex Hynes: The total amount in the fund from the start of the franchise to today is in the region of £14 million. About £11 million of that has been spent, so there is about £3 million remaining in the fund. It is a dynamic total.

My main focus is to reduce the SQUIRE penalties. I am really pleased with the team's performance on that front: we are 43 per cent better at the latest results. When there are moneys in the fund, we will ensure that we use them to fix the issues that our customers and front-line colleagues want fixed. For example, our investment in body cameras was funded from the SQUIRE fund.

Mike Rumbles: I have mixed feelings about the SQUIRE fund. As passengers, we want to see that fund reduced along with the penalties that you receive, although there are also benefits, such as the cameras that you mentioned. In my area, for example, we have been interested in ensuring that there is disabled access at Inch station and other stations on the Aberdeen to Inverness line that currently do not have disabled access. I understand that the fund can be used for purposes like that. Is that the case?

Alex Hynes: Yes, it can be. The high cost of ensuring accessibility at stations is one of the challenges that we face. The amount of money left in the fund would not be sufficient to build a new station footbridge that was compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, for example. However, the fund can be used for minor accessibility issues, such as handrails and ramps, which can make a big difference to people with reduced mobility.

Mike Rumbles: Indeed they can. That is one of the things that the fund can be used for and I am glad that you are aware of that issue. Everyone's intention should be to reduce the fund to the absolute minimum so that you are no longer being hit with penalties, because after all it is about the service that we require. I notice that although the average amount of the penalties over the past

nine quarters has been £1 million, the amount in the last quarter has reduced to £750,000. Is that figure projected to reduce much further?

Alex Hynes: I will not rest until that number is zero.

Mike Rumbles: That is fine.

The Convener: My final question is a request. I am sure that you would be disappointed to come away from a parliamentary committee without talking about skip-stopping. I asked you a question on skip-stopping at our previous meeting and you did not have the figures to hand. I am sure that this time you have the figures to hand on skip-stopping on the whole network, but rather than ask you to go through them all now, could you write to the committee to let us know the skip-stopping events that have happened on the network in the past three months? If possible, could you provide a breakdown of where those events happened? For the people who are affected, skip-stopping is a real issue. I am happy to move on if you undertake to provide that information promptly.

Alex Hynes: I am happy to meet that request. It will show that we do not skip-stop ordinarily on Scotland's railway any more—we do it only as a last resort. As a result, the number of times that skip-stopping happens is down by 80 per cent.

The Convener: Perfect. We can look at the figures when they come in. Thank you for that and for coming to give evidence. Members of the committee will be coming to the control centre on 16 September. I was looking yesterday at how I will get there. It is a question of six hours on a train with two or possibly three changes or four hours in my car. I am likely to go by train so that I will be on time for the event. We look forward to seeing you then.

11:35

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

Petition

Access to Broadband (Rural Scotland) (PE1703)

The Convener: Under item 4, the committee will consider petition PE1703 from Hugh MacLellan, on behalf of Laid grazings and community committee, on access to broadband in rural Scotland. Do any members wish to comment on the petition?

Richard Lyle: I support the comments that are made in the petition. The petitioner cites the village of Laid as an example of somewhere that does not have broadband. However, the briefing paper says:

“The Scottish Government’s response indicates the new fibre cable through the village of Laid was installed as part of the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme”.

Can we ask BT whether the cable can be accessed or whether it just runs through the village and no one can use it? I would like to know more.

The Convener: I think that that information is in the paper. My understanding is that the cable is there but that it is not commercially viable for others to use it.

Richard Lyle: Surely the question is, why not? A cable is like a gas main. If a gas main runs through a village, surely people can access it. If a cable runs through a village, why can they not access it? I see some members shaking their heads.

The Convener: I will not even attempt to answer whether it is commercially viable, but I take that point, and perhaps we can suggest an outcome.

Stewart Stevenson: My starting point is that the petition should be kept open. We should not contemplate closing it at this meeting, because, although that kind of telecoms is a UK Government responsibility, in practical terms the delivery vehicle is the Scottish Government. The £600 million for the reaching 100 per cent programme to support rural areas is exactly the same amount of money that the UK Government spent on wiring up the whole of the rest of the UK. There is a commitment to do it.

The appropriate time to consider closing the petition will be when information becomes available about when people in those areas—and, I hasten to add, in premises like my own—will be able to ask for and receive delivery of the fibre-

enabled service or, even better, direct fibre to their premises. Until that information is available, it would not be appropriate to close this perfectly proper and reasonable petition.

Jamie Greene: I have a few comments to make. The first is that it is entirely appropriate for this committee to consider the petition, given the committee’s remit. I agree with Mr Stevenson that the petition should be kept open, in the light of the lack of clarity about some of the timetabling. However, I believe that the cabinet secretary who is responsible for the matter will give evidence to the committee, which may provide further information that will help the petitioner.

I also think that the petition should not be closed at the point at which that information is available. It would be far more beneficial if the petition were closed when some of the real-time information was available around the accessibility of superfast broadband to households and businesses. Within the wording of the petition, there is some debate about what constitutes “superfast” and whether “before 2021” means by 2021 or by the end of 2021. There might therefore be some issues to consider around the wording of what the petition is calling for. Nonetheless, it seems quite appropriate, sensible and wise to keep it open until the committee has further information.

11:45

Colin Smyth: I am keen to keep this petition open, as I think that there is an important principle here. Rural communities are, more often than not, the ones that are forced to play catch-up when it comes to the roll-out of broadband. Indeed, whatever the initiative is, rural communities are always left behind, and they are often the economies that face the most challenges. If we are serious about inclusive growth, the 2021 date for the roll-out of R100 should be seen as the very last date, and rural communities should not be expected to fall behind cities. Communities in rural areas deserve to be heard when they are at a competitive disadvantage compared with cities in the roll-out of broadband. I am, therefore, keen to keep the petition open as the R100 plans are developed.

John Finnie: Members might be surprised to learn where there is good connectivity and where there is not. Mr Stevenson touched on that, and I think that it would be appropriate to write to the relevant UK Government minister, given that it is a UK matter. The Scottish Government has built a severe rod for its own back on the issue, and I would like to hear what the UK Government minister with responsibility for this issue has to say.

Mike Rumbles: We have already heard from the cabinet secretary that the Scottish Government has moved to the end of 2021 the date by which R100 will reach every business and household, but I notice that the petition is asking for that to happen before 2021. That is 12 months' difference. For a lot of businesses, 12 months is an important period. I am sure that businesses throughout rural Scotland are looking forward to receiving that level of broadband coverage, but the issue of when they can expect it is crucial. That is a major issue that we need to delve into further. Can the target be brought back to what the original target was—that is, before 2021?

I am keen to keep the petition open.

Maureen Watt: There are a number of community broadband initiatives. Could some work be done to find out whether those have been explored and, if not, why not?

Mike Rumbles: I thought that we heard previously that a lot of those initiatives are now not being taken up because of the commitment. Why would a community invest a huge amount of money in such projects when they know what is coming down the track, even if there is still a question about when it will arrive? That is why those initiatives have stalled.

The Convener: On the cabling that goes through the village, it is clear that R100 bidders will be given access to it. That is my reading of the papers.

I will summarise what I am hearing from around the table and ask whether members agree with my proposal for taking the issue forward. The cabinet secretary will announce the preferred bidders at the end of September, which means that there will be a time, probably towards the end of October, when it will be appropriate for this committee to ask him to explain what is happening in relation to the R100 project and when it is going to be delivered. A lot of the questions have been around delivery times, which is what the petition is concerned with. My proposal is to keep the petition open and to decide what further action to take once the cabinet secretary has come before us—which will be roughly at the end of October, although that depends on when we can find a slot for him to attend a meeting. Do committee members agree to that proposal in principle?

Richard Lyle: I do not disagree, but my point at the very start was that, if there is a BT cable running through the village, we have to ask BT why it is not supplying superfast broadband to every house and business. BT is on the radio all the time, saying, "Get superfast broadband. Get extra into the room" and all that jazz. Let us ask BT why the petitioner cannot get superfast broadband.

The Convener: I suggest that we ask the minister that question on access, because it is not just this community that is affected—it is lots of others.

Richard Lyle: We have to ask the company.

Mike Rumbles: That is a red herring. I have said before that the cable comes past the front door of my house at Kildrummie but I cannot access it. The situation is the same. It is very simple: there is no access off the cable. It is a completely different matter, and I am afraid that it is a red herring.

The Convener: I suggest that we take up those matters—along with the concerns of everyone else with cables near their house—with the minister who is responsible when he talks to the committee about the R100 programme. It will be a problem across Scotland.

Richard Lyle: With respect, we are not getting the full answer if we do not ask BT. Over the years, many companies have had hundreds of millions of pounds to invest in different types of cable such as copper and fibre—you name it—under the pavements. We should ask BT what it is doing about the situation that Mike Rumbles has highlighted.

The Convener: Do other members of the committee share Mr Lyle's point of view? I am very happy to put the matter to a vote, if Mr Lyle would like that.

Richard Lyle: Surely not, convener. I am asking that we seek information from a company that is making millions of pounds from people for their broadband. Why can those people not get access to a cable that goes through their village? Surely, you will not put that to a vote.

The Convener: I have made a suggestion to the committee, and you seem to be the one member who is not happy with it. Are other committee members happy with my suggestion to keep the petition open and pursue the matter with the cabinet secretary when he comes before us?

John Finnie: I do not think that Mr Lyle's request is unreasonable. It is about technical information. Mr Rumbles has given us an example, and I know someone whose property abuts the line to the Faroe Islands but they cannot get into it. It is not unreasonable to ask about the technicalities of the location, which might inform our decision.

Mike Rumbles: Surely, we already know about that. We have gone over that ground in committee over many months. The reason that we cannot get access to lines that run in front of our households or whatever is that those are major cables, with no green boxes immediately around. The cable runs

past properties but there are no distribution points. It is as simple as that.

The Convener: The case is being laid out, and the Scottish Government's response is quite detailed. It says that the cable was laid as part of the digital Scotland superfast broadband programme and was spread out over the community for 4km. I fear that we would probably get the same answer from BT as we have got from the Scottish Government.

Stewart Stevenson: I make the technical point that, although fibre cable is a quarter of the price of copper cable, putting a tap—the technical term—on to fibre cable is very expensive. It is much more expensive than putting one on to copper cable. The minimum cost when there are about 50 households is £4,000 per household. The reason that it has not been done is that funding has not yet been provided to do it—it is not about anything other than that.

If we want to know more about the technology—how to put the tap on and what the constraints are—we can ask about that, but it will not be particularly helpful in informing the committee's decision making. At the end of the day, it is up to us to ensure that the Government provides the funding and the programme that gets it done.

Richard Lyle: I am sorry for continuing to labour the point, but, if a cable has been laid and people are saying that they cannot access it, we have to ask what the cause of that is. We cannot wait for a cable to come up in a year's time or whatever—there is a cable already there.

I am sorry, Stewart, but I never take no for an answer. I want to know why. We should be asking why people like Mike Rumbles and others cannot get access to something that passes right by their front doors. I am not going to shake my head; I am going to ask why.

The Convener: I suggest that we move forward by agreeing to my suggestion of taking the matter up with the cabinet secretary.

Richard Lyle: I will write to BT myself.

The Convener: It is entirely appropriate for you to do so, Mr Lyle. Let us discuss that afterwards. I suggest that we take up the matter with the cabinet secretary. When we question the cabinet secretary on the issue, we will raise the matter of local broadband cables and how R100 will be delivered by cables that have been laid by other providers. Is the committee happy to move forward on that basis?

Members *indicated agreement.*

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

Common Agricultural Policy (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2019

11:56

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is the sift of one Scottish statutory instrument on EU exit. The Scottish Government has allocated the negative procedure to the SSI. Is the committee content with the parliamentary procedure that has been allocated to the instrument by the Scottish Government?

Jamie Greene: I am content, and I have no comment on the specific instrument. However, I have a question for the clerk regarding the process. In the notes on the consideration of the procedure, paragraph 9 of the paper by the clerk says:

"Scottish Ministers have discretion about whether instruments made under Schedule 2 of the 2018 Act should be subject to the affirmative or negative procedure"

unless they are in a specific category, in which case they are subject to the mandatory affirmative procedure. However, paragraph 10 goes on to say that

"the lead committee"—

which is our committee—

"has the opportunity, in advance of its consideration, to recommend to the Scottish Government that the parliamentary procedure allocated to the instrument should be changed."

I presume that means that we would have the ability to suggest that the instrument should be subject to a different procedure, whether that was affirmative or negative.

However, I am unsure about what is meant by "in advance of its consideration" when we are considering the instrument at a committee meeting such as today's and the decision is to be taken at that meeting on the basis of the papers that we have been given the previous week. At what point do we have the ability to consider the instrument and perhaps make a recommendation to change the procedure?

The Convener: The answer to that is now. That is why this is item 5 and the discussion of the instrument is a separate item. The clerk can explain that further.

Steve Farrell (Clerk): What the convener has said is correct. We send instruments out in advance, and, in the email that we send, we ask whether members have any concerns. So, there is

an opportunity to note that before the instrument reaches the formal committee meeting. If a member objects to the procedure that has been recommended, now is the time to say that, and we can delay consideration of the next item to allow members to review the matter further.

Jamie Greene: I see. That is very helpful.

The Convener: Do we agree that the procedure for the instrument is correct?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Common Agricultural Policy (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2019

11:59

The Convener: Item 6 is consideration of one negative instrument as detailed on the agenda. No motions to annul or representations have been received in relation to the instrument. Is the committee agreed that it does not wish to make any recommendation in relation to the instrument?

Members *indicated agreement.*

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

**Common Fisheries Policy (Amendment
etc) (EU Exit) (No 3) Regulations 2019**

**Animal Health, Invasive Alien Species,
Plant Breeders' Rights and Seeds
(Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations
2019**

**Trade in Animals and Animal Products
(Legislative Functions) and Veterinary
Surgeons (Amendment) (EU Exit)
Regulations 2019**

**Import of and Trade in Animals and Animal
Products (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) (No 2)
Regulations 2019**

**Pilotage and Port Services (EU Exit)
(Amendments) Regulations 2019**

11:59

The Convener: Item 7 deals with consent notifications relating to five UK statutory instruments as detailed on the agenda. The instruments are being laid in the United Kingdom Parliament in relation to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. As members have no comments to make, does the committee agree to write to the Scottish Government, confirming that it is content for consent to be given for the UK SIs that are referred to in the notifications?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes today's committee business.

Meeting closed at 12:00.

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