



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 10 June 2020

Session 5



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Wednesday 10 June 2020

CONTENTS

	Col.
TRANSPORT (IMPACT OF COVID-19)	1
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION	32
Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/148)	32
Plant Health (Official Controls and Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/152)	32

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)
- *John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
- *Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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:

- Robbie Drummond (CalMac Ferries Ltd)
- Alex Hynes (Scotland's Railway)
- Gordon Martin (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers)
- Robert Samson (Transport Focus)
- Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland)
- Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 10 June 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Transport (Impact of Covid-19)

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning and welcome to the 14th meeting in 2020 of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

The first item on the agenda is the impact of Covid-19 on transport in Scotland. The committee will take evidence from transport sector stakeholders. I welcome Alex Hynes, managing director of Scotland's Railway; Robert Samson, senior stakeholder manager for Transport Focus; Paul White, director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK; Gordon Martin, regional organiser for the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers; Robbie Drummond, managing director of CalMac Ferries Ltd; and Paul Tetlaw, policy forum convener for Transform Scotland.

I remind witnesses that I will cue you in after a question. If you want to add something to what another witness says, you should type "R" in the chatroom, so that I can bring you in at an appropriate time. Be careful, because even though you might not be able to see me, I can still waggle my pen, so I ask that you keep your answers succinct.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): My question is for the operators of transport, although others will wish to comment, so it is directed first to Alex Hynes.

We are in a situation in which public transport, in using the 2m rule, is probably running at 10 per cent to 25 per cent of normal capacity. I have also been looking at the issue this morning in the COVID-19 Committee, at which we have just been discussing 1m versus 2m separation. The World Health Organization recommends using the 1m rule, but it is clear that the time that can be spent within 1m of another person is much less than it is with 2m distancing.

First, how is distancing affecting capacity? Secondly, what might the effect be if we were to change the rule from 2m to 1m? Your answers will help us to make a balanced judgment on the appropriate separation distance. I suggest that Alex Hynes start, and that Robbie Drummond follow, but the convener is in charge.

The Convener: It sounds as though you are in charge, Mr Stevenson. We will start with Alex Hynes and then go to Robbie Drummond.

Alex Hynes (Scotland's Railway): Good morning, committee. As Mr Stevenson said, the capacity of public transport systems has been limited by the imposition of the 2m distancing requirement. That is why we are advising customers to make only essential journeys on our services.

As you might expect, we have evaluated our network under the 2m rule and have found that capacity could be as low as 15 per cent on a typical train. That is why we have developed our five rules for safer travel, which are our advice to the public for when they need to make essential journeys on our services.

Stewart Stevenson is absolutely right to suggest that a reduction in the required distance would result in an increase in the number of seats that we would be able to provide for customers, but that is clearly a matter for the Government. We are not public health experts: we will follow Scottish Government guidance, as we have done so far. Our people have been doing an outstanding job of making sure for the past 12 weeks that we continue to keep people who are making essential journeys moving across Scotland safely and reliably.

Robbie Drummond (CalMac Ferries Ltd): We say in our written submission that constraints of physical distancing of 2m reduce the passenger capacity on our vessels to about 18 per cent, and the capacity on our car deck to about 91 per cent. It is important to say that the figure would be different on smaller ferries, on which we operate differently, so they would be less impacted.

It is clear that physical distancing has a major impact on the capacities that we can carry, which is why it has been so important for the guidance on essential travel to be clear. I, too, pay tribute to the fantastic work of our front-line staff, who have been maintaining that essential travel.

Robert Samson (Transport Focus): Social distancing very much reduces capacity. However, we have undertaken a weekly omnibus survey since the beginning of May, in which 73 per cent of people agreed that they would not travel on public transport if social distancing measures were not in place.

The expectation is that the distance—whether it is 1m or 2m—will be clearly defined for passengers, so that they can manage their expectations and have in place tools to make an informed choice. The distinct message from passengers is that they expect social distancing measures to be in place for some time.

Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK): Safety is paramount on buses, as it is on other transport modes, so we follow Government guidance. However, the 2m rule impacts on bus capacity by reducing it by more than 75 per cent. It is interesting to look at the WHO's views and at examples of other countries. Spain, for example, has recently completely relaxed its social distancing rules on public transport.

We have to consider two aspects. The first is social distancing at bus stops and in stations. Buses can be marked out and can operate at reduced capacity, but what happens at bus stops and stations to maintain social distancing? Secondly, supply and capacity of buses at the moment are limited, so we might see an increase in the number of people who must make necessary journeys but who will be left at the stop because of the capacity limits of a vehicle, which is not good.

Stewart Stevenson: It is interesting and right that Paul White has introduced the question of how we social distance in getting on and leaving vehicles, and while waiting for transport to arrive. There are clearly two aspects to that: some waiting will be done in the open air, on open platforms, at country bus stops and so on, where we know that transmission is more difficult, but other waiting areas are enclosed spaces.

I would like to go round the houses to hear how people manage social distancing to prevent transmission of disease as they leave their homes and mount various modes of transport. It is up to you, convener, to see whether other people want to comment—we could perhaps simply go back to Alex Hynes. You are in charge.

The Convener: We will push forward a bit more on that subject. Would Paul White like to come back on it?

Paul White: Certainly. There are a couple of things to say on that. Bus stops are not generally part of the remit of bus operators, but are down to the local authority. We can take some steps with new technologies to help people to understand how busy their buses might be in order that we might reduce demand on capacity.

Work is under way on practical solutions to bus lay-out and possible separation for keeping people safe. However, separation at bus stops is very difficult, as is prioritisation. For example, if a vehicle's capacity is reduced to 25 per cent and there are too many people at the bus stop, who should board? Should it be the person at the front of that queue, the person who is a key worker, or the person who has accessibility issues? Who boards the bus when the capacity is so limited? That is an issue for urban areas, but also for rural

areas, where the next bus might not be for a longer time—an hour, perhaps. Nobody wants to stand outside or wait inside for a bus station for that long.

Alex Hynes: Clearly, ScotRail's five rules for safer travel are very important, especially the requirement to wear face coverings and to maintain 2m physical distance. We have been taking steps across our network to help customers to maintain that distance. At our largest stations, we have put down floor markings and have marked where there are queues next to ticket vending machines to guide people to maintain the 2m distance. We are also in the process of rolling out hand-sanitizer points in our larger stations.

We are also having to take out of use some facilities, such as small waiting rooms, in which it is not possible to physically distance, and we are closing toilets regularly for deep cleaning. We are doing everything that we can to help customers who must make essential journeys to follow the five safe rules for travel.

Gordon Martin (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers): Good morning. First and foremost, I reiterate what Mr Hynes and Mr Drummond said about the fantastic job that is being done by the staff in these very difficult and unprecedented times. Many of those staff members are RMT members, and I join others in commending them for the work that they are doing in these times.

With social distancing and all the other stuff, and the restrictions that it will place on people's ability to freely travel, it is important that the unions be fully engaged with in relation to risk assessments and so on. With regard to face coverings, although the RMT's position is to support passengers in wearing face coverings—on trains in particular—there will potentially be an issue with policing that. It is not the job of our members to police that, and I do not know what additional measures Scotland's Railway or other operators intend to put in place to ensure that our members do not end up in the firing line.

The Convener: I apologise to Paul White. I caught your wave and I saw your "R" in the chatroom, but I am afraid that there are a lot of witnesses and a lot of questions, so I am going to have bounce it out. I take this opportunity to ask everyone not to wave, because I see only one picture. If you want to come in, type "R" in the chatroom, and I will do my utmost to bring you in.

Robert Samson: Paul White and Alex Hynes made very sensible points, and the five rules need to be followed. However, passengers also need reassurance about other issues. Given the amount of touching points that there are on a transport journey, trying to reduce them and giving

reassurance about the cleanliness regime that bus operators and all transport operators are putting in place are also issues.

Another issue that came across very strongly in our survey is provision of hand sanitizer. It is good that ScotRail will have hand sanitizer at its top 20 stations, through which about 90 per cent of its passengers pass. That will be reassuring for passengers.

10:15

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Good morning, panel. I want to go a wee bit further in exploring people's willingness to use public transport. Mr Samson mentioned the considerable research that his organisation has undertaken. I am grateful that it has been shared with members.

My colleague Richard Lyle has a series of questions on face coverings, so I will not address that, but will ask about the impact that the current arrangements might have on long-term use of public transport. How does the panel think such concerns might be addressed?

Robert Samson: Our survey shows that about 40 per cent of people are wary about coming back to public transport. A greater proportion—about 50 per cent—are willing to walk or cycle, and people who are able to work from home will be doing so. People who have access to a car will use their car. Returning to public transport presents a problem in the longer term. No train or bus services are commercially viable just now.

There is, however, an opportunity, amid this crisis. Back in 2012, we produced a paper about the fares system on the railways and how it needed to be looked at and made easy to understand and use, with good smart-ticketing products for passengers. There is an opportunity during this situation to attract people back, and to build trust in the public transport network through an easy to understand and easy to use fares system.

Not many people are using the system just now, so it is a matter of attracting people back and looking at the total system. There will, for example, be more need for products such as flexible season tickets, as we go forward. Annual, weekly and monthly season tickets might, to an extent, have had their day. We are considering new products now. There is an opportunity to attract people back for the longer term through further review of the fares system.

Paul White: It is difficult to be entirely sure about the long-term impact on public transport, but it is likely that we will face a long-term reduction from pre-Covid patronage levels. That will have a

huge impact on bus and coach transport. Coaches provide vital rural services, including home-to-school transport, although the majority of their business in rural areas is coach tourism, which has been impacted incredibly by Covid. Coach operators are really struggling, so there might be an impact in respect of who is available to tender for supported services and for provision of home-to-school transport.

We are also facing a reduction in the momentum that was gathering pre-Covid for introduction of bus-priority measures through bus partnership funds and the "Road to Zero" strategy for transport. That could have a longer-term impact. How do we keep the momentum going there?

There has, rightly, been a locking-in of the benefits of active travel, with new bike lanes and more walking and cycling. There is, however, likely to be an increase in car congestion as we come out of the current situation and people move from public transport to cars. The worry is that public transport will be squeezed in the middle and will lose the momentum that we have seen.

We have a fantastic evidence base. One of the things that has come out of this is that we know the speed and reliability that we can get from buses that are free from congestion. We should be working to maintain that, as we move out of this situation.

Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland): I support what Robert Samson and Paul White have just said. To broaden the context a little, I will say a bit more about overall risk.

I understand where we are at the moment, and I understand people's concerns. However, if we consider public transport alongside other modes of transport, taking into account risk, we know from statistics that travelling by train is 20 times safer than travelling by car in terms of the likelihood of dying in an accident, and that it is hundreds of times safer in terms of the likelihood of being seriously injured. Similarly, travelling by bus is much safer than travelling by car. There is that broader context to consider.

If, as Paul White said, we see a great expansion of car use, we will also have the other downsides of that—local air quality will deteriorate and people will, perhaps, take less exercise, which will cause obesity and the diseases that are associated with that. I want to affirm that, although we might have a short-term issue, we must also look at the broader risk context.

The other thing to say about where we are with the health crisis is that it will pass: history tells us that such events pass. We must look beyond the crisis and consider what sort of transport system

we want to build for the future, and we need to plan for that now.

John Finnie: I am conscious of time, so my follow-up question will be brief. Mr Martin made some important points about the safety of the staff, and I am grateful to Mr Hynes for setting out the position regarding hand sanitiser; I hope that its use will be expanded. Will the other operators comment on the availability of hand sanitiser on their modes, please?

Robert Samson: The omnibus survey that I mentioned showed that about 87 per cent of people expect transport operators to provide hand sanitiser, where possible. Some buses have it on board, so it is possible to provide it. It is better to have it on buses rather than at bus stops.

We have not looked at Caledonian MacBrayne, but I imagine that it is feasible for it to provide hand sanitiser for passengers' use as they board or alight from ferries. The availability and use of hand sanitiser can reassure people as they come back to public transport.

Paul White: We are doing a risk assessment of various measures, including the provision of hand sanitiser. There are concerns about whether, as people board, they will congregate around anything that is provided and will be closer to one another than the 2m distance that is specified in the physical distancing guidelines. There are also concerns about flammability and slip risk. However, the Confederation of Passenger Transport is conducting a risk assessment with input from several member operators, so the matter is being considered.

The Convener: As no one else wants to comment on that, we will move on to the next set of questions, which Richard Lyle will ask.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Good morning, panel. My first two questions are for Alex Hynes and Robbie Drummond. To what extent do you think that passengers will comply with the expectation that they will wear a face covering on public transport vehicles and in stations? Do you agree that that should be made mandatory?

Alex Hynes: The guidance in Scotland has said for many weeks now that people should wear a face covering on public transport, and we have enshrined that in our five rules for safer travel. There are no legal powers and it is not the law that people must wear a face covering. However, we have seen throughout the lockdown that the vast majority of the Scottish public have followed the guidance that Government and the public transport operators have provided. We can see that in the number of journeys that we have been carrying across Scotland's railway, where there

has been a high level of compliance by the public, which is fantastic.

We will do everything in our power to encourage those customers who have to travel because their journeys are essential to wear a face covering. We are exploring the feasibility of the free issuing of face coverings to customers for an initial period in order to get people into the habit, and we are involving our people as well, through the safety representatives. We recognise that, if customers see our staff wearing face coverings, they are more likely to wear them. We need to make sure that we educate our customers in the five rules for safer travel and that we encourage people to follow them. However, it is not mandatory; there is no legal basis for that.

Our people are at the heart of planning our restart preparations. We have a partnership working sub-group in our task force, and we have been talking to our safety reps in unions such as the RMT several times a week since the coronavirus outbreak started. It is not the job of our staff to police—that is the police's job—but we will be strongly encouraging our customers to follow the guidance, and that has been our experience to date.

Robbie Drummond: To build on what Alex Hynes said, our experience to date has been that customers have adhered to the Scottish Government's guidelines. It is important to stress that the main mitigation measures against virus transfer are physical distancing and personal hygiene, but we will continue to encourage staff and passengers to use face coverings where they feel that that is appropriate. When talking about safety, the key thing is to continue to communicate with customers about how we can operate safely. We will continue to make that a real focus.

Richard Lyle: My next question—

The Convener: Hold on—sorry, Richard; Robert Samson wants to come in on that.

Robert Samson: I have a quick point to make about face coverings. In our survey, about 58 to 60 per cent of people thought that face coverings should be a requirement.

The Convener: Thank you. Richard, I did not mean to cut you off. You may go on with your next question.

Richard Lyle: People might have already answered aspects of the three questions that I wanted to ask. My next question is for Gordon Martin, although Alex Hynes has touched on it. Are transport staff expected to take action such as reminding passengers of the expectation that they wear face coverings when they see passengers not wearing them? If so, do staff have any concerns, and do you have any concerns, about

their taking such action? Would you be happy to enforce the mandatory wearing of face coverings?

Gordon Martin: [*Temporary loss of sound.*]

The Convener: Hold on, Gordon—you are still muted. I think that you might have touched the microphone, which remuted it after it had been unmuted. Please do not touch anything; we will organise it all for you.

We are still not hearing you.

Gordon Martin: Can you hear me now?

Richard Lyle: Yes, you have unmuted it yourself. Well done.

Gordon Martin: I had technical problems a few minutes ago. I seemed to have been locked out of the meeting, but I am back in, as you see.

It is absolutely not the job of our members to police that. Our members have concerns; they wish face coverings to be worn by passengers, but it is absolutely not their job to police it. The RMT is concerned that members will end up in difficult situations involving frustrated passengers. That is a real difficulty, and we believe that the operators—ScotRail and others—will have to put in additional measures to counter that concern.

With regard to staff wearing face coverings, if and when that is appropriate, we expect ready supplies of personal protective equipment to be available. For example, if staff on a train have to assist a disabled passenger to get on or off, we would expect full PPE-grade face masks rather than just face coverings to be available.

Richard Lyle: Alex Hynes and Robbie Drummond, do you intend to put up signs saying that passengers must wear a face mask before boarding your transport?

10:30

Alex Hynes: Our five rules for safer travel make it clear that we expect customers to wear a face covering. That is what the Scottish Government's guidance says, and it is what ScotRail's guidance says. If, as we anticipate, parts of the economy and society are unlocked in the coming weeks, we will press that message on radio and TV to grow the level of awareness of the five rules for safer travel. If members have not already seen those rules, they are excellent and simple to understand. If everybody follows them, we will get to keep our people and our customers safe.

Robbie Drummond: CalMac's operating model is designed to ensure physical distancing. The guidelines currently say that face coverings are encouraged, and we will play our part by encouraging our customers to wear them. However, the use of face coverings is not

mandated, and until that is the case, all that we can do is to encourage the wearing of them as best we can through all our different channels.

Paul White: The thistle card lets drivers know whether someone has any hidden disabilities or particular needs. If the wearing of face coverings becomes mandatory, we should maybe consider having a national card that would allow drivers to be aware of reasons—medical or otherwise—for people not to be wearing a mask or facial covering of some sort.

Richard Lyle: Alex Hynes touched on the subject of my third question when he said that ScotRail will supply face masks in the first instance. Does the panel support the call for face masks to be provided free, or at cost price, to passengers prior to their using public transport? If so, who should be responsible for the funding and provision of masks?

The Convener: I would like to come to Gordon Martin first. What is your view on the funding and provision of face masks?

Gordon Martin: If we expect people to wear face masks, it is only right and proper that they should be supplied. What constitutes a face covering? I have seen different things in different press reports. People find it a confusing issue. If we want people to use public transport, it is only right and proper that face masks should be provided by the operators or the Scottish Government, or by a mixture of both.

Robbie Drummond: We provide face masks for all our staff, as people would expect, but we expect our customers to bring their own face coverings. The free provision of such items is a matter for the Scottish Government to determine.

Alex Hynes: It is important to note that the guidance is that people should wear a face covering, not a face mask. Face coverings include scarves and the sort of thing that people can make at home. We will do everything that we can to encourage all our customers to wear a face covering. We are looking at vending options and, initially, the potential free issuing of coverings. As Robbie Drummond said, we are doing that in concert with the Scottish Government and other public transport operators across the country as part of the transport transition plan.

The Convener: There might be mixed messages here. I am not quite sure what I am hearing: some people are talking about full surgical face masks, while others are talking about face coverings. Clarity is needed.

Rachael Hamilton has a supplementary on the issue.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Paul White mentioned that

we would need to consider exemptions from the requirement to wear face coverings. That is very true. I recently received a briefing from the Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership, which noted that, in response to a survey that it conducted, 55 per cent of its members said that they would have breathing difficulties if face coverings became mandatory.

That is just a comment; I will move on to my question if you would like, convener.

The Convener: Yes, that would be helpful.

Rachael Hamilton: I begin by thanking everyone who has been running our transport network during the pandemic.

My question follows on from Stewart Stevenson's initial question. It is clear that any significant reduction in capacity will result in a substantial fall in income for operators. Alex Hynes said that, with a 2m distancing requirement in place, trains might have only 15 per cent of current capacity. Similarly, Robbie Drummond said that ferries would have a capacity of only 18 per cent. I would like to hear from panel members about what they believe that the financial viability of operators will be in the short, medium and long term.

Alex Hynes: We have seen a catastrophic loss of patronage as a result of coronavirus, as people have followed the guidance, and our revenue is down by around 95 per cent. For that reason, we have entered into an emergency measures agreement, which temporarily transfers the costs and revenues of the railway in Scotland back to the Scottish Government in order to secure rail services across the country for essential workers. It also secures the employment of our people, given that the rail industry is a very large employer—indeed, ScotRail is one of the largest employers in Scotland. It is quite clear that the current crisis has been really bad for business.

When it comes to rebuilding, we need to ensure that people feel confident in using the rail network in Scotland. While the 2m requirement exists, and in the absence of a vaccine, it is clear that that will be challenging, and we are worried that we might lose traffic from the railway.

However, I think that, if there is a shift towards more private car use, people will quickly remember why they left their car in the first place and chose to travel by train. Over the past decade, train travel has been the fastest growing mode of transport in Scotland, because it is relatively affordable, reliable and convenient. Those fundamental reasons for choosing rail will not have changed.

In addition, over the next 10 years, after we have dealt with the public health crisis, we have the climate change crisis to deal with, and the

railway will be a big plank of the Scottish Government's decarbonisation plan.

Robbie Drummond: CalMac is in the same position. As passengers have adhered to Scottish Government guidance, our revenues have dropped by more than 90 per cent. We have contract variation in place with Transport Scotland in recognition of the financial consequences for ferry services, and we have an assurance that that will allow us to continue to provide our services into the long term.

Looking at how we get out of the situation in the longer term, we want to work with island communities and marketing organisations to encourage patronage and to get people back on the ferries and back to the islands, where tourism plays such an important part. There is an opportunity to encourage staycations and build that tourism market into the future, and we want to support our communities in doing that.

Paul White: Unsurprisingly, our industry is very much in the same boat as rail and ferries. Revenue has dropped severely, and the Government is supporting bus services through a support grant that retains the two funding streams from concessions and the bus service operators grant at pre-Covid levels.

As we move through the lockdown phases and more people look to travel, the current network will not be enough to sustain those travel patterns, so we are currently speaking to the Scottish Government to see whether support can continue for longer in a different form to support a growth in bus services.

The CPT represents the coach industry as well as the bus industry. Coach tourism falls between the cracks. It is not provided by a bus company or operator, or in a traditional tourism venue, so there is little support available to it. That industry is in dire need of help; if it does not receive it, as Robbie Drummond pointed out, the tourism offering in rural Scotland will suffer. It is not a pretty picture.

Alex Hynes was correct to mention climate change. We have the low-emission zones and the transition to zero emissions, and the current period of loss making will not do anything to help us to move that on at the speed that is required.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I wanted to come in on Richard Lyle's question earlier. An issue that concerns me is the difference between the law and the guidance on face masks. As Richard suggested, if we tell passengers that they must wear a face mask, that will cause confusion and could cause difficulties. Until we go down the route of making the wearing of face masks compulsory in law, if we tell passengers to wear a face mask, it is important that public

transport operators make it clear that it is only guidance—a request. I am concerned that, if we go hard on the language, that could cause trouble, which we need to avoid.

The Convener: As you rightly said, that was a bit of a throwback to a previous question. I am sorry that I did not bring you in earlier. Does Alex Hynes want to come in briefly on whether the wearing of face masks should be in law or guidance and how to phrase it to ensure that people comply?

Alex Hynes: Without wanting to repeat myself, I will say that the advice is to wear a face covering. It is not necessarily a face mask, although it might be. That has been made clear for a number of weeks by both the Scottish Government and public transport operators in Scotland including ScotRail. Clearly, as for every rule, there are exceptions—children under 5 and people with asthmatic conditions—but we will keep the rail network open and safe for our passengers and staff only if the vast majority of customers wear a face covering and follow the guidance. Over the past 12 weeks, we have generally seen a high level of compliance with the guidance from the Scottish public and we will do everything that we can to encourage our customers to do likewise.

The Convener: That question has now been answered extensively.

Mike Rumbles: That was not my point.

The Convener: I am tempted to move on to question 7, which Rachael Hamilton wanted to ask.

Rachael Hamilton: You are doing a sterling job, convener, and I would not stop Mike Rumbles queuing in there.

On the commercial viability of the operators, there has been some investment from the Scottish Government, but does the panel believe that it is sufficient to support and maintain the provision of current service levels?

Paul White: Government support is probably sufficient to maintain current service levels in certain areas of Scotland but, as we move through the phases of the release of lockdown, it will be insufficient. That is why the CPT and bus operators are in discussions with the Scottish Government to work out a different funding package, which will allow services to ramp up. Given that vehicle capacity is reduced by as much as 75 per cent, we will need to provide a greater number of vehicles; 100 per cent of the pre-Covid network would provide only 25 per cent of the post-Covid capacity, so we need to ramp that up, which brings with it vehicle costs, fuel costs and driver costs. That is why the current Government

support that we receive will not be sufficient as the process moves on.

10:45

Alex Hynes: The Scottish Government stepped in swiftly and decisively with the emergency measures that we had to put in place to secure rail services in Scotland and the employment of our people. That cannot be faulted. We are working closely with ScotRail, Network Rail in Scotland and Transport Scotland on our rail recovery task force. We are doing that with strong representation from the trade unions and have a partnership working sub-group for that task force. We have already commenced restarting our operations, but the important work of recovering our revenue is in the planning phase. We therefore have a solid basis on which to build and we are developing our plans to get back to some level of normality when the time is right and the Government guidance allows it. However, for now, the rail network is for essential journeys only and customers must follow the five rules for safer travel.

The Convener: Robbie, do you have anything to add to that, or is your message virtually the same?

Robbie Drummond: I do not have much to add. The cost of running ferry services is covered under our contract, and Transport Scotland is meeting those costs. If the economy has not recovered to a certain extent in a year or two, the challenge will be whether we are still able to operate the contract in the same way. It will be a challenge to ensure that the tourism market returns.

Gordon Martin: It is clear that, although we are in the midst of a health emergency, an economic emergency will follow. The early signs of that are already here with furlough and probably significant redundancies in the pipeline across all sectors of industry. However, I expect Scotland's railway operators, CalMac and other operators to remember the hard work and dedication of their staff throughout this health emergency and not to make them casualties of the economic tsunami. It is going to be very difficult, and Alex Hynes is right that we cannot go back to the motorways being clogged up for two or three hours at the start and end of the working day. The only solution to the environmental or green issue is public transport. A longer-term, holistic view must be taken on all this so that we do not throw the baby out with the bath water.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Good morning, panel. I am sure that you will take our best wishes and thanks to all your staff for keeping going during this very difficult time.

I will ask about longer-term issues. What financial support do you think that operators might require from the Scottish Government for the provision of bus, rail and ferry services? Has the crazy situation that we are in thrown up ways in which you can make savings and work differently in the longer term? If it is applicable to you, can you highlight in your answers any particular challenges in providing services in remote, rural and island communities? What discussions have you had with the Scottish Government on not only the immediate situation but the longer term?

Robbie Drummond: As I have said, we are covered under our contract for the financial consequences of Covid-19. However, our senior team is already looking at how we can operate more efficiently. Are there ways in which we can do things differently and improve the customer journey by making it smoother and easier? How can we operate the rest of the business in a much more efficient way? We will be undertaking work to see whether there are ways in which we can do that.

Paul White: We will be looking for efficiencies in how we operate. Most bus operators would like to think that they are running as efficient a service as is possible and that there is little in the way of savings to be made.

On Government support and our asks, we are looking at models such as the one that has been introduced in England in which the Government covers the difference in revenue—the cost-cover model. Whether that would include any element of profit that allows for investment in the fleet or to meet LEZ standards is part of that discussion.

For our coach members, we have proposed a model for many of the small family businesses that are based in rural Scotland that would allow them to mothball their fleets in effect until 2021, when the summer tourism season might start again and we might see growth in tourism, to allow them to survive until then. Otherwise, they face closure. As previously mentioned, that would have an impact on home-to-school transport and other such vital, socially necessary services in rural areas.

Alex Hynes: Obviously, ScotRail has been in receipt of subsidy since before Covid. All other things being equal, Covid will mean that there is a greater draw on the public purse. Therefore, as railway managers, we need to do whatever we can to get back our rail market when the time is right. We need to make sure that we are behaving as a good and efficient operator, so that the economic impact on the public purse is minimised. We are working on that.

With regard to rural and remote communities, we are continuing to develop our scenic products. We have continued to roll out our new intercity

trains, despite coronavirus. We have exciting plans for cycle carriages, which we will be rolling out later this year, to build on the active travel boom and on tourism centres such as Fort William.

We in the rail industry need to do our bit to operate as efficiently as possible. As an example of our doing that, we have an aspiration to reduce the costs of rail enhancement schemes, which are undertaken by Network Rail, by around 50 per cent by reducing the time and expense of developing those projects. All the while during the coronavirus outbreak, even though construction on enhancement projects has been paused, we have been working in the background on the projects that we will be delivering in the next few years, such as the Levenmouth branch, and we stand ready to play our part in the economic stimulus that will inevitably follow the end of the public health crisis.

Paul Tetlaw: I have a suggestion for a more efficient transport network. Greater integration of the transport modes much surely be a way forward. That would include both ticketing and physical integration, so that the different modes act as a whole and the public transport offering is seen as a whole and not different parts.

It is very important that public transport continues to be funded—and fully funded—because it is a social justice issue. Thirty per cent of households across Scotland do not have access to a car—the figure is much greater in the big cities—and those people have suffered the most during this period. Car drivers have been able to drive for food shopping, and testing centres were set up for car drivers, without a thought for those without a car. A big social justice issue has come out of this crisis. We should learn from it, just as we should learn about the importance of public transport because of it. Of course, there is also the Government's transport hierarchy, in which sustainable transport modes, public transport and active travel, sit at the top.

I go back to what Alex Hynes said earlier. We will pass through this phase of the health crisis, but the climate change crisis has not gone away and will be ever more pressing. We have learned that the Government will listen to the advice and warnings of scientists and health experts and that the public will respond to that, so we should equally listen to the warnings of scientists and health experts about climate change, poor air quality and obesity, all of which are big threats to our society.

Gordon Martin: As Paul Tetlaw has said, and as I and others touched on earlier, social justice is vital, as is the green agenda with public transport. Speaking as a trade union official on behalf of staff, I think that it is also vital that staff do not

become victims of any cuts, and that operators such as ScotRail and CalMac work closely with the unions so that we can, if need be, jointly approach the Scottish Government on issues.

Alex Hynes has touched on the matter of railway enhancements. At this time, that work has been banned by the Scottish Government despite the best efforts of Network Rail on behalf of the supply chain and those of the RMT on behalf of the workers to keep that workstream going, because it is important to keep people in employment and not get them thrown on the dole.

Another issue is that ScotRail has said that it cannot commit to pay talks at this time because of the emergency measures agreement—no one else has done that. It is simply not the case in other train operating companies. I am not aware of any that is using that agreement as a means to deny people a pay rise, or even pay talks.

Maureen Watt: When you say that construction work has been “banned”, I think that you mean that it has been stopped, rather than “banned”, along with construction work in other areas.

Paul White has been talking a lot about the particular challenges that coach operators face. For example, the committee received a long evidence paper from Maynes Coaches—a familiar sight on our roads in the north-east, on the patch where I grew up and on the convener’s patch. Some coach operators do school work, which might become completely different in itself if we go to a blended model of schooling. As for those operators that solely focus on the tourism industry, we have seen a big one of those that operated in Scotland go to the wall.

Have coach operators been eligible for support schemes? Paul White talked about the mothballing. Can you go into that in a bit more detail so that we can understand the matter fully?

Paul White: I will be brief. Kevin Mayne is passionate because, as is the case with many coach operators, his is a family business that goes back generations, so he is keen to make that case.

Coach operators have been eligible for some schemes but, in general, the definition of their operation has not fitted neatly into the categories and their applications have often been denied. Because of their membership of CPT, we might be able to help change those decisions.

11:00

If you are a coach operator, the summer season is when you make your money; it might be 60 or 70 per cent of your business. There is no summer season this year. Some operators will face an 18-month winter season of very little money coming

in. The other aspect of their work is local authority payments for supported services such as home-to-school transport. That is a bit of a postcode lottery, with some local authorities paying 100 per cent and some as little as 30 per cent. The whole sector is facing no or minimal revenue for an extended period.

We will continue to work with Fergus Ewing to look at whether there could be sector-specific support for that industry. One thing that we have proposed is the mothball model, which allows operators basically to take their vehicles off the road, because they will not be used, and to receive a payment. I think that that model has been introduced in fisheries for certain fleets. Without support, we will see many of those family businesses not survive, unfortunately, and that will have an impact.

Maureen Watt: I remember that, back at the beginning of this crisis, local authorities agreed with the Scottish Government that they would continue to pay school bus operators the full amount to keep them going as needed. I am surprised to hear that some authorities are not paying it all and are paying just 30 per cent.

The Convener: That is definitely something to note.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I will pick up first on Gordon Martin’s comment about his concern over the impact of the lockdown on railway enhancement works. Can he elaborate on why that is a particular concern in the railway industry, rather than just in the wider construction industry? Is it to do with regulatory and safety issues?

Secondly, I want to ask Alex Hynes about ScotRail having, in effect, put on hold this year’s pay talks. It appears to be the only rail operator to have done that.

Gordon Martin: Railway enhancement works have been lumped in with construction sector, building site-type activities, while rail renewal works have been deemed to be critical infrastructure and are going ahead pretty much as planned.

The problem is that railway enhancements fall under the same rules and regulations as the rail industry. On the railway, it is not easy to put things back a week or two. A lot of planning goes into those works; it is about getting access to the infrastructure to do the work. In addition, with enhancements being out of reach to our members, several companies have indicated to me that they wish to start talks in the next few weeks about potential redundancies.

We have worked very closely with Network Rail and the rail systems alliance Scotland. We have

site control mechanisms in place that are second to none when compared with those in any other industry, with full input from me and RMT safety representatives. It is our contention that enhancement work should be freed up, because the work needs to be done. It will enhance the railway in the north of Scotland, the central belt and the south of Scotland, and it will keep our members in work. If enhancements continue to be paused, the problem that I see is that that will lead to redundancies. The Scottish Government's ambitious targets for the railway will not be met, because skilled railway workers will go to work on high speed 2 and other projects south of the border.

The Convener: Before we move to Alex Hynes, I will make an observation, living close to a railway line as I do. Surely this is the time to make repairs to infrastructure, provided that that can be done safely. There are fewer trains running on the tracks, so that gives railway workers safer and more frequent access to the tracks, which might well be limited during other periods. Perhaps Alex Hynes can respond to that; if necessary, Gordon Martin can come in afterwards.

Alex Hynes: On the first point about rail works, recognising our critical national infrastructure status, we have been undertaking essential maintenance and renewal work throughout the Covid period. Because of the good work that we have done with Gordon Martin and our teams, we have been able to do that essential work safely. In fact, there are good examples where we had daytime access to the tracks that would normally have had to wait till night time, when trains do not run. Our compliance with the maintenance work bank is better now than it was before the lockdown.

We have been working in partnership with the trade unions, particularly the RMT, on rail enhancement works. We will be ready to recommence construction of rail enhancements in Scotland as soon as we get the green light from the Scottish Government.

Pay talks are a regular event in the railway. We are not refusing to undertake pay talks. However, because of the emergency measures agreement, there is an added dynamic to the normal situation, with the Scottish Government paying the costs of the railway. We therefore need to consult the Scottish Government more than we would ordinarily do before doing a pay deal with our people. It should be remembered that, because of the emergency measures agreement and our actions over the past 12 weeks, our people's terms and conditions and salaries are safe and secure. We have not had to furlough anybody and we are continuing to work in partnership on all matters, including pay talks.

Colin Smyth: Based on what we have heard, I am still not entirely clear why ScotRail appears to be the only operating company that has put pay talks on hold. Maybe I can come back to that.

I move on to staff safety, and my first question is for Gordon Martin from the RMT. Do you have concerns that transport operators are not following best practice in ensuring staff safety, including through the use of PPE? I will widen the question out to the operators. Are you providing PPE, and if not, why not?

Gordon Martin: It is fair to say that the main operators, CalMac and Scotland's Railway, which is split into Abellio ScotRail and Network Rail, are working fully with the unions and with me, as lead officer at a number of companies. This is a new virus and we are learning about it all the time, but there are concerns among ScotRail's public-facing and station staff. There has been a big reduction in the number of station staff since Abellio took over, which puts more pressure on the remaining staff to keep themselves and their passengers safe. At this time, the only passengers are essential workers, but we hope that that will change over the next few weeks and months, which would mean that things were getting better with this dreadful virus.

The fact remains that the purpose of PPE is to protect the staff or the workforce, so it must be readily available. Our position is that, where it is available, it must be worn when appropriate and when social distancing and other measures cannot be complied with. The company must supply PPE, and the staff must wear it to keep themselves safe.

Robbie Drummond: As Gordon Martin has said, we have developed, in conjunction with the unions, detailed operational hazard plans as to how our staff should operate during this process. Where appropriate, we provide PPE to our staff, particularly where customers require assistance, which is where PPE is of most use. The message is that we have taken the issue very seriously, reviewing what is safe for our staff in conjunction with our colleagues and the unions.

Richard Lyle: I want to pick up on a point that Alex Hynes made, in case everyone missed it. Mr Hynes, did you say that you have not furloughed anyone, so you are, in fact, saving the UK Government money? A simple yes or no will do.

Alex Hynes: We have not furloughed anybody.

Richard Lyle: That is a simple yes—you are saving the Government money. Thank you.

The Convener: That was a nice political point, Mr Lyle.

Does Alex Hynes want to answer on any of the PPE issues?

Alex Hynes: Looking after the safety of our people has been at the heart of our approach. They have done an extraordinary job of keeping rail services running safely and reliably. We have been working really well with the trade union during this period.

There is a clear requirement to minimise the risk faced by our staff. The things that we have been doing include removing non-essential tasks altogether. For example, we are not currently providing drinks on board, or reservations. We have eliminated any non-essential tasks, particularly where physical distancing is difficult, to reduce the risk to zero. For other tasks that need to be undertaken on the railway, our approach is very much task specific. Whether people are cleaning, maintaining or driving a train, working as a conductor or selling tickets, in each case we have sat down with the safety reps, who are elected by our people to represent their interests, undertaken task-specific risk assessments for all those tasks and provided PPE that is appropriate to the task.

That has been on-going since lockdown began and it continues. The more we learn about this disease, the more we tailor our approach to make sure that we are following best practice and reducing the risk level to one that is as low as is reasonably practicable. That is what we have done in the past 12 weeks, and we will continue to do it for the foreseeable future.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am interested in issues around the funding that the Scottish Government has put in place for the spaces for people programme, which allows local authorities to develop temporary walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure. There are calls for that infrastructure to be made permanent. I am interested in what outcomes the panel would like the programme to deliver.

Paul Tetlaw: We have all learned during this period how much more pleasant the places where we live become when there is less traffic. Many more people are walking and cycling, many more families are out together and people are enjoying birdsong that they could not hear before. That is especially the case in our towns and cities. We absolutely must not miss this opportunity and let things go back to normal.

The temporary measures that the Government has funded and that local authorities are putting in place are to be welcomed, but they must not just be temporary; they must be a stepping stone to permanent measures. We can learn so much from some of our northern European partner countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark. The reason why so many more people cycle in Copenhagen, for example, is that the infrastructure is there. The weather is not

necessarily better—it rains there, believe me; I have cycled in the rain and the wind there. It is about the infrastructure.

The temporary measures absolutely should be made permanent so that we all have a better place to live in, work in and spend our leisure time in—and to be healthier in, into the bargain.

11:15

Colin Smyth: I will follow up Paul Tetlaw's point about the £30 million for the spaces for people temporary measures, which has been taken from the £50 million places for everyone fund. That leaves just £20 million for permanent schemes. Is Paul Tetlaw concerned about that money, which obviously comes from funding for permanent measures, being spent on temporary measures, no matter how welcome those are?

Paul Tetlaw: We really have to look at the percentage of transport spending that goes into active travel. That is what we are talking about. Our aspiration is to greatly increase the amount of active travel, and it is not really fair to pinch the money from one active travel budget and put it into another. We need to see the overall active travel budget increase.

Paul White: I entirely agree with Paul Tetlaw. It is fantastic to see sustainable travel being locked in with the spaces for people measures. My ask is for public transport—which is also at the top of the travel hierarchy—to be consulted in that process. There was minimal consultation with bus operators about a scheme in Aberdeen. The operators were given a day's notice to reregister services that were meant to travel along a route that was going to be fully pedestrianised. That was unhelpful.

My other ask is for the work to introduce infrastructure priorities for bus through the bus partnership fund to be brought alongside spaces for people. Active travel is stealing a march, whereas we are concentrating on the short-term issues. We must not lose the long-term aspects.

Robert Samson: There is public appetite for active travel. Where cycling and walking are possible, 27 per cent more people consider cycling and 40 per cent more consider walking, so there will be a long-term benefit if the temporary measures can be made permanent. We also work in concert with the national transport strategy's hierarchy, in which active travel is at the top of the pyramid. Encouraging active travel by making temporary measures permanent wherever possible could be a win-win to come out of this crisis.

Emma Harper: We talk about moving money from one budget to another or stealing money from one active travel fund to put it into another,

when we really need to focus on the fact that the measures are being implemented to deal with the public health crisis and to save lives—that is their whole point. I support the idea that now is a time when we can exercise and tackle obesity.

Alex Hynes mentioned adapting carriages for cycles, which was interesting to hear about. I would like to hear a wee bit more about how we are adapting the infrastructure—trains or buses—to cope with more bicycles. We know that more people are riding their bikes to work. What is being done to accommodate more cyclists on trains, or even on ferries?

The Convener: I am slightly worried about time. I ask Alex Hynes to be brief.

Alex Hynes: Since the start of the Abellio ScotRail franchise, Abellio has invested £475 million in new and upgraded rolling stock. That means that there are about 25 per cent more seats now than there were just five years ago, so there is more space for everybody. However, we recognise that the people who want to use active travel modes, particularly cycling, also want to use the rail network more, which is why we are investing in dedicated cycle carriages, which we hook on to the back of service trains. We will use them initially on the west Highland line, recognising Fort William's status as the mountain biking capital of the United Kingdom. If that trial is successful, we can emulate it in other parts of the network to give our customers a better experience and allow for growth in active travel and in cycling specifically.

Robbie Drummond: We will do anything that we can to encourage active travel, which we hugely support. However, for us, cycling tends to be more of a leisure activity than something that is used for commuting. We have encouraged cycling through investment in cycle tracks and we will continue to support that, because we think that it is important.

The Convener: I am sorry, but I am having a slight technical issue—we are all entitled to have such issues occasionally—and have lost my chat room, so I cannot see whether anyone else wants to come in on the discussion. I will therefore move on to the next question. *[Interruption.]* It seems that Paul Tetlaw wants to come in. I will let him do so briefly while I reset my information technology.

Paul Tetlaw: Thank you. I will follow up on Robbie Drummond's comments about cyclists on ferries. I accept that they are mainly leisure cyclists, but the leisure cycling market is extremely valuable to rural communities and the islands. It is well understood that cyclists spend a lot more money when travelling through places because they travel more slowly and do not bring all their food with them. They also use local

accommodation, so we should not overlook the value of the leisure cycling market. Clearly, CalMac ferries and ScotRail have a big role to play in assisting that market.

The Convener: I ask Emma Harper to nod if she is satisfied with those answers. I see that she is. We will move on to question 14 on our long list of questions.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): We might have touched on this subject already. Many Governments are only now slowly lifting restrictions on travel, so there is limited evidence available on how people are choosing to travel after lockdown, although there is some evidence from China that suggests that there were problems there after the lockdown restrictions were eased. Clearly, any significant switch from public transport to car, as we have seen in China, could have major effects on road traffic levels. Does the panel expect a significant shift from public transport to private car? If so, what impact might that have on public transport operations?

Paul Tetlaw: As other speakers have said, we have been on a good path towards encouraging people to switch modes and walk, cycle and take public transport more. If we now lurch backwards from that, there will be all sorts of consequences. There is the obvious congestion issue, but there are also health impacts from poor air quality in our cities and people taking less exercise. It is well understood that people who use public transport are likely to take more exercise. They are likely to walk to the bus or train and walk at the other end of their journey.

We need to take a long-term view on the challenges that we will face in the future—for example, climate change, local air quality and health issues—so we must have in place strategies to ensure that we get the transport hierarchy to which we aspire. Measures will be necessary and must be taken. They include reallocating road space to create more space for buses and having dedicated bus lanes and priority for buses at traffic lights so that the bus is seen as being competitive with the car in terms of journey times. It is also about reallocating road space for more active travel. We must not lose sight of those necessary measures.

I repeat that the short-term issue—historically, it will be short term—will pass, and we must get back to where we were on transport priorities.

Paul White: Before the lockdown was introduced, operators were anecdotally reporting a growth in car use and a reduction in patronage, so it follows that we will see that as we move forward. Some people travel by public transport by choice and some by necessity, but I am not entirely sure how that is split.

It is important that we do not lose momentum in the on-going workstreams on the national transport strategy and the introduction of bus priority measures—otherwise, as I said, public transport will be squeezed out. Once people are lost to the car, it is a difficult fight to get that modal shift back.

Angus MacDonald: Given the comments that we have just heard, what action, if any, should the Scottish Government take to protect public transport operations, particularly bus services, from a significant increase in road traffic and a subsequent increase in congestion, which we do not want to see?

Paul White: As I mentioned, in the context of spaces for people, public transport operators should be consulted when road space allocation is being considered. On the bus partnership fund, which focuses on bus infrastructure measures, we could fast track the guidance that local authorities require to allow them to consider projects. We could also use this time when there is less traffic on the roads to introduce some temporary—moving to permanent—bus priority measures. That would be helpful.

The Convener: Stewart Stevenson has a supplementary question.

Stewart Stevenson: I think that my question relates to what we are discussing, but you will correct me if I am wrong. A category of people who travel but whom we have not heard about is people who cannot do part of their job at home, but do not have a fixed timetable for travelling to their work location. What options do we have to try to redistribute some travel so that we use the empty slots in parts of the day? What scope is there for operators to start to fine tune the fares that are applied at peak times so that, on the railway network, for example, they no longer apply—for the sake of argument—before 7.15 in the morning?

Equally, I understand that Governments, both at Westminster and in Scotland, might be able to effect such things through public policy and interventions. I do not want to open up a huge discussion about that, but I would like to know whether operators are thinking about it.

11:30

Robert Samson: Our survey shows that four out of 10 people who have a choice between using public transport or a car are more likely to use a car in future. That is in the short term. If we combine that with the bus passenger survey that we have conducted in Scotland for the past six years, with more than 20,000 responses, we can see that the main cause of frustration for passengers who are late on a bus journey is traffic

congestion, which is likely to increase as a result of more people driving on the roads.

Stewart Stevenson mentioned fares. The crisis gives us an opportunity to look at the fares system. We could look at flexible ticketing and changing work patterns and make public transport by rail, bus and ferry more attractive. That would encourage people back to public transport when the crisis is over.

Alex Hynes: One of our five rules for safer travel is to avoid the main commuting times while the 2m restriction applies, because we are not able to guarantee physical distancing. The benefit of avoiding the main commuting times is that people can buy an off-peak ticket, so there are already price incentives for customers to move their journeys if they have a choice. However, most customers will have a choice only if their employer is prepared to be flexible. We are engaging with businesses and business representatives across Scotland to make sure that they understand the five rules for safer travel and to encourage them to enable their workforce to go back flexibly, rather than in the way that they worked before.

The Convener: Angus, do you have a follow-up question?

Angus MacDonald: No. That is fine, convener.

The Convener: The next set of questions will be from Peter Chapman.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): In the transport transition plan that the Scottish Government published recently, there is a requirement to produce a fair and sustainable restart. What needs to happen to ensure that?

Transform Scotland published a report on 4 June that sets out a number of key recommendations, among which are that

“pre-lockdown service frequencies”

should be

“restored as quickly as possible”

and that

“fares should not be increased and consideration should be given to extending concessionary travel to groups other than the elderly or disabled”

What do you have to say about those proposals and how they would see a fair and sustainable restart to our transport system?

Alex Hynes: Rail fares in Scotland are regulated by the Scottish Government and there have been no changes to the fare regulation limits. Off-peak fares in Scotland rise more slowly than inflation, so they are getting cheaper in real terms.

At the moment, our network is for essential journeys only. We are planning the restart very carefully. We will adjust our timetable again next Monday to operate around 60 per cent of the services and about 70 per cent of the capacity. We need to make those increases in advance of the demand. We are working closely with the Scottish Government to make sure that our customers get the service that they need and expect for essential journeys.

You make a great point on sustainability. Of the journeys that are made on the rail network in Scotland, 75 per cent are already green. We look forward to the Scottish Government publishing its decarbonisation action plan, which will see the decarbonisation of the passenger railway in Scotland by 2035. Throughout lockdown, we have been continuing to work behind the scenes on the rail industry's response to that. When we see the decarbonisation action plan from the Scottish Government, the rail industry in Scotland will be ready to respond to the climate change crisis, once the public health crisis has gone.

The Convener: I ask Robert Samson whether he wants to comment. I am not sure whether he caught all of the question.

Robert Samson: I did, and I have a quick point on it.

Across every transport mode, when we ask passengers what their top priorities are for improvement, the answer is the value for money of the product. That is linked to the fare and the quality that is provided, and it is also linked to the point that was made about the climate change agenda, which will still be here after the current crisis is over.

We have to attract people to and keep people on public transport, so it is absolutely essential to have value for money and to look at fares across the board to ensure that they are fair. Just now, the message is to avoid public transport if possible and the people who are using it will be making essential journeys and will be key workers. The fare system has to be transparent for them now and there should be no increases over the short term.

The Convener: Mr Chapman, I do not know whether you want to follow up on that, but perhaps Robbie Drummond feels that he ought to comment on off-peak travel. Is there any off-peak travel on ferries?

Robbie Drummond: No. Our fares are set by Transport Scotland and there is no peak or off-peak travel. It is probably worth making the point that the road equivalent tariff has significantly reduced the cost of travel by ferry from where it was three or four years ago.

Peter Chapman: I ask Robbie Drummond to give us an idea of how he intends to ramp up his service going forward. There will be a huge demand to get more and more people on to the islands if we start to unlock the tourism industry. How do you hope to cope with that and how will you ramp up services in the meantime?

Robbie Drummond: You are absolutely right. Concern is being expressed by the communities about how the capacity will cope with any increase in demand when the restrictions are lifted. We are in conversation with Transport Scotland about introducing more services. We would look to provide something that approximates or gets close to the winter timetable, which would be a significant uplift in what we are doing at the moment. We will seek to introduce that in the next three to four weeks. The activity now is to consult with communities to ensure that that meets their needs and to consult with our staff colleagues and the union to ensure that we can deliver what we have said we are going to do. That is how we are looking to deliver more capacity.

If the demand approximates to the normal winter demand, which facilitates islander and commercial travel, we will have to cope with that. If demand starts to get towards what we might see in a shoulder period, that will introduce certain capacity restrictions for us.

Paul Tetlaw: I want to make a comparison between Scotland and England. We are talking about rebuilding confidence in public transport, and Robert Samson's survey has shown that people are nervous about going back to it. I mentioned the social justice issue and the people who have no option but to use public transport. I was particularly alarmed by some messaging that I saw south of the border in which there was almost a demonising of public transport, but I am happy to say that I have not seen that in Scotland—I have seen much more balanced messaging here. When I look at the transport transition plan and see the language in it, I am encouraged. I think that we are starting from a better place in rebuilding both confidence in public transport and patronage.

The Convener: I am not sure that being convener allows me to ask many questions; it is more about trying to manage everyone else's expectations. You might heave a sigh of relief about that. However, I have a question for Robbie Drummond.

With the break in services and reduced services, what steps have you taken to ensure that the reliability of the ferries is improved so that, when transport to the islands is required to pick up, they will be more reliable? Surely this has been a time for maintenance.

Robbie Drummond: That is a very good point. We have been doing maintenance of vessels. Where our on-board crews have been able to carry out such activities, that is what they have been doing, so we have increased some maintenance activities. We have not been able to put vessels into dry docks because those have been restricted. Where we have been able to do things safely, we have done them, but that has been focused on essential works, so we have not been able to accelerate—[*Inaudible.*]

As we have said to the committee before, when we get back into operation, we are going to introduce new and innovative ways of making sure that our vessels are resilient. We are looking at in-service maintenance, vibration analysis and so on. We are investing significant sums to make the vessels as resilient as they can be.

The Convener: If the ferries start to break down when services pick up, there will be serious concerns, but I am sure that you will be able to cope with that.

Emma Harper has an important question that I would like to ask of most of the witnesses. I will start with Alex Hynes. I know what the question is. Emma, would you like to kick off?

Emma Harper: It is an important question. Paul Tetlaw talked about re-establishing public transport and about people who are required to use public transport because they do not have a car. People who have accessibility and mobility issues and visually impaired people also need to be able to use public transport. What measures have been put in place to ensure that new vehicle layouts, service patterns and ways of working are in continuous development? What engagement have you had with people who might have good advice to give our train operators, for instance?

Alex Hynes: People who have different needs, particularly people with reduced mobility, disabilities and hidden disabilities, already play a big part in helping to design our products and services. We have a dedicated accessibility forum where we get people together and consult them on the changes that we are making.

We continue to invest heavily in accessibility, for example. On our rolling stock investment of £475 million, we continue to make accessibility improvements. During lockdown, we withdrew two fleets of trains that did not meet the latest accessibility standards because they had slam-door operation. Those trains have now been withdrawn from service. When customers return to the railway, and we are able to welcome them for non-essential journeys around the rail network, they will see a network that is more modern than the one that we left behind.

In Scotland, we operate a turn-up-and-go service. We have at least two people on board every train to help people who need a little bit more help. Our mobility assistance service is still working normally. Customers do not have to book. They can turn up and travel, although we encourage people to book for that added layer of confidence.

Mobility assistance is one of the tasks that we have had to risk assess again in the light of Covid. Our people on the front line have to wear a face mask while undertaking tasks, because physical distancing is not possible. The needs of all our customers are at the forefront of our thinking and we continue to engage with organisations such as the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland to ensure that Scotland's railway remains open for essential journeys, irrespective of customers' individual needs.

11:45

Robbie Drummond: It is important to us that passengers who need assistance can access our services and that their journey is as smooth and easy as possible. We consult a wide range of bodies about the sorts of measures that we could put in place. We have a comprehensive boarding process. Customers can phone up in advance and make sure that we are ready to give assistance or they can just turn up and we will still be able to give them assistance. As Alex Hynes indicated, we have reassessed those procedures because of Covid-19 and some of them have been redesigned, but we are still able to offer full assistance to our passengers who require it either when they phone in advance or just when they arrive at our ports. We are confident that we are doing everything that we can to make a journey easy and accessible for passengers who need that support.

Paul White: Very much like the other modes, we have been assessing the risk attached to various aspects of accessibility and mobility assistance. Robbie Drummond pointed out that bus stops are not the responsibility of the operator, so that probably needs to be looked at in terms of prioritising people with accessibility issues to be at the front of a queue if a bus is nearly full. There are concerns around a wheelchair space being within 2m of a bus driver, so that is another aspect of the risk assessment work on which we are engaging with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland.

Robert Samson: We have sent a checklist to all bus and train operators about giving reassurance to passengers, including those with accessibility concerns. We have gone back to all the train operators, and I am pleased to say that ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper are fully compliant with

what we have asked in terms of reassurance for passengers who have accessibility concerns. We have still to do the final check with the bus operators. We will share all those results with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland. There is a high level of reassurance during this period of Covid-19.

Gordon Martin: I am looking forward to the brave new world as outlined by Mr Hynes a second ago, because disabled campaigning groups regularly approach RMT about mobility problems, whether it be unstaffed stations or parts of the network that are covered by driver-only operation, where there is no guarantee that a ticket examiner will be able to assist. I know that passengers can phone ahead for assistance, but what kind of country do we live in in 2020 when disabled people have to phone ahead to ensure assistance to get on and off a public transport service? In my view, that is simply not good enough.

The Convener: Thank you. That is probably as far as we can go on that subject. I hope that what has been said has answered Emma Harper's questions. In bringing this agenda item to a close, I thank all the witnesses for giving evidence virtually to the committee. I think that we virtually survived, which was a good thing. To anyone who did not get in to ask or answer a question, I virtually apologise. I am sorry if I did not get you in. I thank the witnesses very much.

Subordinate Legislation

Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/148)

Plant Health (Official Controls and Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/152)

11:49

The Convener: The second agenda item is consideration of the two negative instruments that are detailed on the agenda. No motions to annul been received in relation to these Scottish statutory instruments. However, I believe that Stewart Stevenson wishes to comment on them.

Stewart Stevenson: I want to comment on the Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020. The regulations have a mix of some fees going down, a number of fees remaining the same and one case of a fee going up by 8 per cent. Given the current move away from international sourcing of foodstuffs and, of course, the raw materials that create foodstuffs—seeds—I suspect that we are in a very different world from the world for which this instrument was developed. My simple ask is that we consider writing to the Scottish Government to ask it to provide more information about the parts of the regulations making increases.

Reading the material in front of me, I am not clear that I understand what the effect in the changed world might be of the fees that we are increasing. It might be appropriate to ask the Government to lighten my darkness and, I suspect, that of colleagues. However, that is not a barrier to my supporting the SSI proceeding according to the normal timetable.

The Convener: Thank you, Stewart. Because that matter has officially been raised, I declare that I have an interest in a farming partnership that might use some of the seeds that are described in the SSI.

Does the committee wish to follow Stewart Stevenson's suggestion of writing to the Government in relation to the instrument to ask why those rises are appropriate?

Rachael Hamilton: I would like Stewart Stevenson to clarify why the briefing that we received does not explain why the seed percentage increase is being implemented. It seems that all the moneys were not collected last year, and the briefing gives a statement about why there has been an increase.

Stewart Stevenson: It was purely for clarity. My interest is not so much the why as what the effect might be in the changed circumstances of the increases. However, my suggestion is a matter for the committee and the convener to decide on.

The Convener: There seems to be general agreement to ask the question that Stewart Stevenson suggested. Does the committee agree that it does not want to make any formal recommendations in relation to the two instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The clerks will draft the letter suggested by Stewart Stevenson. I thank all members for their help in this morning's meeting. It has not been that easy trying to chair it and I apologise again—actually physically now—to any of you who felt excluded from the meeting. I did my best to keep you all involved. I now close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 11:53.

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