OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 26 February 2025

Session 6

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CONTENTS

Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. I invite members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

International Development and Humanitarian Aid

1. **Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how its work on international development and support for humanitarian aid is being used to ensure the safety and security of those who are fleeing war and persecution. (S6O-04346)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Through its humanitarian emergency fund, the Scottish Government continues to respond quickly and decisively to overwhelming humanitarian crises across the world by providing much-needed financial support that enables the operations of agencies and charity organisations in conflict regions to deliver services to reduce the threat to the lives and wellbeing of communities that are affected by conflict and persecution. The Scottish Government works with our standing humanitarian emergency fund panel and the Disasters Emergency Committee to ensure that the prioritisation of funding is based on urgent need and is established on the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality in support of peace in regions that are affected by conflict.

Maggie Chapman: Yesterday's announcement by the United Kingdom Labour Government that it will slash its aid budget by £6 billion and spend that money on so-called defence is an outrage. More than 300 million people around the world are in dire humanitarian need right now. The UK's colonial past creates a particular moral responsibility to those who are still paying the price of imperial exploitation, and we should not give money to those who profit from genocide. Does the cabinet secretary agree that now is the time to step up and tackle global poverty, conflict, insecurity and climate precarity, and will he commit to seeking new ways to use our public money for peace rather than war?

Angus Robertson: I welcome the UK Government's commitment to increased defence spending at a time of such acute need across Europe. Having said that, I am deeply disappointed at the cut in overseas aid, which involves the lowest percentage of UK finance being spent on aid in a quarter of a century. Globally, we all need to step up to support the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting our partner countries through international development and climate justice funding while responding to global humanitarian crises as a responsible, compassionate and good global citizen.

Film and Television Production

2. **Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working to increase the number of film and television productions created in Scotland. (S6O-04347)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We are committed to the growth of our screen sector, with more Scotland-originated productions showcasing the incredible talent that we have in Scotland. We support Screen Scotland, our dedicated public agency for screen, through grant-in-aid funding. In 2025-26, we will increase its budget by £2 million to £11.25 million overall. That will allow it to continue its excellent work to nurture locally originated content, develop skills and training opportunities and education for the next generation, and increase inward investment.

We continue to urge the public service broadcasters and Ofcom to ensure greater support for Scotland-based productions. I recently met Ofcom and the BBC to set out our clear expectations for fairer investment and representation in Scotland.

Foysol Choudhury: A recent report claimed that the BBC show "The Traitors" was classed as a Scottish commission despite most production staff being based outside Scotland. Such practices concentrate jobs in London and south-east England, forcing Scots to leave for better opportunities or to quit the industry entirely. Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government is incentivising production companies to choose Scotland, and will he update us on the discussions that he has had with stakeholders on the made-in-Scotland rules?

Angus Robertson: I commend the content and tone of Foysol Choudhury's question. We need to recognise that the direction of travel in relation to Scottish productions, especially for public service broadcasters, has been to increase their number, which is a good thing.

Having said that, there are rules to make sure that we get the maximum value in support of our screen sector in Scotland. Foysol Choudhury raised a very specific case, which has prompted me to hold meetings directly with Ofcom and the BBC to ensure that the rules, and the spirit of the rules, are upheld. I am delighted—as, I assume, Mr Choudhury is—that there is cross-party support for that. I hope that the BBC and Ofcom are listening very closely to what Foysol Choudhury has said and to what I have said.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions. I will try to take all of them, but they will need to be brief.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): A related area where Scotland has strength is the production of advertising. A number of agencies, including in my constituency, have reported to me that there are concerns about both Scottish Government advertising and private advertising being procured out of Scotland. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could engage on that issue. He will know that I have written to him on it in recent times.

Angus Robertson: I acknowledge that Edinburgh Northern and Leith is a centre for the creative industries and that some very prominent and successful advertising agencies are based there.

I am entirely focused on making sure that, right across the screen sector—whether it is advertising, television or film—we get maximum value in relation to the industry heading in the right direction. The most recent studies have shown the industry to be worth about £635 million in gross value added a year, and it has the potential to become a billion-pound industry by 2030.

I would encourage advertisers, those who commission TV programmes and those who want to film for the big screen to do so in Scotland as much as possible.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The proposed development in Stirling would create one of the largest film studio campuses in Scotland, which would be a game changer for film and television productions. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the project becomes a reality and has the potential to filter down to the wider supply chain, paving the way for a major economic benefit throughout the region?

Angus Robertson: I again commend the questioner for the tone and content of the question. Alexander Stewart has hit on some of the latest good news that we have in the screen sector. Over recent years, we have gone from having very limited studio capacity in Scotland to having significant studios right across the country.

The project in Stirling is, indeed, a game changer. That is why I visited the site and why Screen Scotland is intimately involved in supporting the development of the site. I have very high hopes that it will be but the latest good news story in the general direction of travel for the screen sector in Scotland, which we should do everything to support.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): The BBC has described IMG Media, the production company behind more than 1,000 multi-hour episodes of Scottish-qualifying snooker programmes from the BBC, as a Scottish production company. IMG is based in Chiswick, west London. It rents a cupboard within BBC's Pacific Quay base in Glasgow. Now, those thousands of hours of TV are regarded as Scottish. In a world where we cannot even see the Scottish national football team on national terrestrial television, what engagement has the cabinet secretary had with regard to the BBC defining such output as Scottish?

Angus Robertson: I will answer in the same way as I have answered other colleagues who have shared a concern that I have, and that the Scottish Government has, that the letter and the spirit of the rules in terms of commissioning in Scotland should be upheld. I met Ofcom and the BBC to stress that there is growing unease about certain decisions supporting certain commissions and the apparent lack of Scottish involvement in them. It has become problematic, which is why I have held those meetings. I know that it has been the subject of evidence sessions at committee, and I know that the BBC and Ofcom know that that questioning will continue.

Local Authorities (Support for Arts and Culture)

3. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is giving to local authorities to maintain arts and cultural programmes. (S6O-04348)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Local authorities are accountable to the public who elect them and have the financial freedom to operate independently. I am in contact with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' spokesperson for community wellbeing, Councillor Maureen Chalmers, whom I met last month. I will

work with culture conveners throughout 2025 on how local and national organisations can work together to support and promote culture.

Colin Beattie: Arts and culture are a key part of the identity of my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh. The Brunton theatre in Musselburgh holds a special place in that town's heart. How might last month's announcement of Creative Scotland funding help to secure the future of the Brunton theatre?

Angus Robertson: I pay tribute to Colin Beattie for the leadership that he has shown on the issue. I recognise how disappointing East Lothian Council's difficult decision to close Brunton theatre is. As I have previously advised, it is the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets, and it is also necessary to ensure that the building is safe.

I welcome the fact that the Brunton has already managed to continue to operate through other locations across East Lothian and the excellent recent news that it was successful in its application to Creative Scotland's multiyear funding programme, with an award of £130,000. I look forward to seeing its plans for the use of that funding.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): As the cabinet secretary may be aware, the community in Peebles is very concerned about the future of the Eastgate theatre, which is a wonderful local arts venue.

Creative Scotland is moving towards a three-year funding model. What provision can be put in place, in addition to long-term funding, where individual creative or arts venues face unexpected or short-term financial shortfalls, particularly when councils—which have been underfunded by the Scottish National Party Government for a number of years—are forced to reduce or withdraw funding that they give directly or through alliance?

Angus Robertson: I acknowledge the challenge that organisations in the culture sector still face, notwithstanding the record increase in culture spending, which I commend Parliament for voting for yesterday. Mr Hoy voted against that.

In answer to his question, I point his attention to the fact that there have been a number of announcements about the Scottish Government's provision of funding in addition to multiannual funding, for resilience and the development of different organisations. If he wishes to write to me about that issue specifically, I would be happy to enter correspondence with him on the matter.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): It is welcome that a number of cultural organisations will see their funding increase. However, there is a general concern that money that is given by one hand could be taken away by another through increased rents, given the knowledge of the increase in their funding. Does the cabinet secretary agree that all providers of premises to cultural organisations, including local authorities, should not seek to take advantage of any uplift and should therefore limit the proposed increase in rents and other building costs?

Angus Robertson: Frankly, the biggest concern that I have about one hand taking away while the other is giving relates to the Labour Government's increase in employer national insurance contributions. I have made my point, and I will underline that point, because that is the biggest single challenge.

On local authorities and the provision of rentable property, I am delighted that Parliament passed the budget, which will provide local authorities with extra resources that may go some way towards obviating the challenge that Mr Bibby identifies. I point out to the chamber that Mr Bibby abstained on the question of whether local authorities should have more money and, indeed, whether the culture sector should have its record increase in funding.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary will have heard this morning—as I did—at the museums and galleries strategy symposium, concerns about the future of local museums. Further to Craig Hoy's point about the Scottish National Party's cuts in funding for local authorities and the non-statutory nature of the funding of museums, what more can the cabinet secretary do practically to ensure the survival of important local collections, which are vital assets in our communities?

Angus Robertson: The provision of funding through Museums and Galleries Scotland helps in the provision of support for museums and galleries right across Scotland. I am sure that Mr Kerr did not want to inadvertently mislead Parliament by suggesting that the amount of funding for local government is going down. As a result of the budget that was passed yesterday—which he voted against—funding for local government is going up.

If Mr Kerr wishes to draw any specific issues to my attention, he knows that I am a big supporter of protecting museums and galleries the length and breadth of Scotland. If there is any way in which Creative Scotland or other parts of the Scottish Government can intervene to protect our cultural infrastructure, I am happy for them to do just that.

Dumbarton Castle

4. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has for Dumbarton Castle. (S6O-04349)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As the lead public body for the historic environment, Historic Environment Scotland is responsible for the plans and care of Dumbarton castle. I will ask Historic Environment Scotland to write directly to Jackie Baillie with the answer to her question. As I said to members in December, I am happy to take up the invitation to visit Dumbarton castle with Jackie Baillie, and I confirm that the arrangements for that visit are in hand.

Jackie Baillie: I will not rehearse the importance of Dumbarton castle in the history of Scotland. I am pleased that the cabinet secretary will join me on a visit to Dumbarton castle.

However, since I last raised the issue in the chamber, I have had a productive meeting in the constituency with Historic Environment Scotland, friends of Dumbarton castle, and West Dunbartonshire Council. We discussed the range of improvements that the castle requires, and Historic Environment Scotland agreed to set out a strategic plan for the future, including addressing repairs and conservation, attracting more visitors and returning some of the collection for display. Can the cabinet secretary set out a timetable for the plan to be implemented?

Angus Robertson: I praise the ingenious way in which Jackie Baillie has invited me to publicise a plan from an arm's-length organisation that I do not manage on an operational basis. However, I will reflect on the very encouraging update that she has given to Parliament. I look forward to her and Historic Environment Scotland briefing me more when we visit Dumbarton castle. I do not need to rehearse the history of Dumbarton castle—I know how important it is. I look forward to working with Jackie Baillie and other members, including regional members of the Scottish Parliament who represent Dumbarton, on making sure that the castle is presented and supported in the way that she and everybody else would expect.

Creative Scotland (Funding for Cultural and Creative Programmes)

5. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the announcement by Creative Scotland that it will provide multiyear funding to deliver cultural and creative programmes. (S6O-04350)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As I outlined in my statement to Parliament on 30 January, Creative Scotland's multiyear funding provides a basis for Scotland's cultural sector to look to the future with optimism. A total of 251 cultural organisations will receive funding from 2025-26, and a further 13 organisations will have the possibility of joining from 2026-27.

Creative Scotland has been able to support every organisation that met the funding criteria because of the level of funding that the Scottish Government has been able to commit. I reiterate my congratulations to all the organisations that have secured financial support.

Emma Harper: Will the cabinet secretary share how the Scottish Government, through Creative Scotland, will support smaller festivals that take place away from the central belt and are created by the community, such as the Stranraer oyster festival, Kirkcudbright festival of light and the Big Burns Supper?

Angus Robertson: I completely agree with Emma Harper about the importance that she places on supporting festivals in all corners of the country. That is why I initiated a strategic partnership for Scotland's arts festivals, thereby ensuring that we can support them to flourish.

Through the conversations that I have had across the culture sector, my focus has been on turning intent into delivery. The budget reflects that intent by providing £4 million of additional support for Scotland's arts festivals, which includes a £3 million expansion of the expo festival fund to enhance the work that has been undertaken by existing expo fund recipients and to broaden the scope of the fund across the country.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The loss of festivals in Dumfries and Galloway has had a big impact on the region, especially when funding streams such as the winter festivals fund have been removed by the Government. In his role as chair of the strategic partnership for festivals, will the cabinet secretary meet me and representatives of festivals in the region, including the Big Burns Supper, to discuss how we can best support re-establishment of some of the important festivals in the region?

Angus Robertson: I am happy to give a brief answer. Yes—I would be delighted to meet Colin Smyth to hold such discussions.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Scottish Opera has received backing from the international touring fund, which is very beneficial in supporting its activities abroad. However, only events outside the United Kingdom qualify for ITF funding, which seriously restricts the viability of performances before audiences in London and elsewhere in the UK. Will the cabinet secretary say what work is being undertaken to widen the fund's scope to enable Scottish Opera to perform in other UK nations?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government is providing an uplift of £1 million in funding across our five national performing companies in 2025-26, which includes a boost to the international touring fund. That investment takes our core funding to its highest level since 2011-12.

The Scottish Government continues to engage regularly with Scottish Opera and the other national performing companies on evolving consensus on how the shared international touring fund can best be utilised to contribute to their touring ambitions and enhance the reputation of brand Scotland on the global stage. My officials recently met all five national performing companies and welcomed their views on the purposes of the international touring fund, which officials are taking forward in their discussions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a brief question from Stephen Kerr.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): My question relates to the review of Creative Scotland by Dame Sue Bruce. When will the cabinet secretary be in a position to spell out in detail the exact remit of that review? We know that the review report is due to be published in the summer, but will he also spell out a timetable for the review?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary to answer that, in so far as it is relevant to the opening question.

Angus Robertson: I am reminding myself of the original question, which was on multiyear funding. Nevertheless, Dame Sue Bruce will, no doubt, in addition to looking at the impact of multiyear funding on the creative sector, be looking more broadly—as I have asked her to do—at the workings of Creative Scotland. I have already outlined the timescale for that, but I would be happy to write to Stephen Kerr on the scope and remit of the review, on which I am being advised by Dame Sue Bruce.

Virtual Libraries

6. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports virtual libraries. (S6O-04351)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government funds the Scottish Library and Information Council's public library improvement fund, which supports both the physical and the virtual library offers. The fund has supported multiple local authorities to access equipment, training and resources to take library services online. In Mr Coffey's constituency, the "On the road to digital success" project provides digital access and assistance to communities across East Ayrshire. The Scottish Library and Information Council is committed to blending the digital and the physical spaces to create an offer that is responsive to evolving needs.

Willie Coffey: The digital revolution makes it possible for anyone on earth who has a connection to access all the richest material and knowledge that we have ever gathered in human history. Virtual libraries play a key part in opening up that access. Does the Scottish Government see a continuing role for such libraries, so that our wonderful Scottish resources and archives of the written and spoken word, music and art can be digitised and made accessible for the benefit of everyone from my constituents in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley to people in the furthest corners of the globe?

Angus Robertson: Yes—we are supportive of digitisation efforts to ensure that Scotland's cultural assets are accessible to domestic and global audiences. I will give just two examples. The National Library of Scotland is already undertaking extensive work to digitise its collection, with a third of it now being in digital format. That includes thousands of maps, moving images, books, newspapers and journals. Historic Environment Scotland provides access to extensive digital resources, which range from curated online exhibitions to interactive online maps that show archaeological and historical sites, as well as modern and past land use across the country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 7 and 8 were not lodged, so that concludes questions on the constitution, external affairs and culture portfolio.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. As ever, members who wish to ask a supplementary should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question. Again, there is quite a bit of demand for supplementaries, so brevity in both questions and responses would be appreciated.

National Strategy for Community Justice

1. **Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its national strategy for community justice, including the delivery of the sustainable housing on release for everyone standards across all local authorities. (S6O-04354)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The third update to the delivery plan is in development and will cover April to December 2024. Local authorities have a legal duty to provide assistance to people,

including prison leavers, who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness.

In November 2024, a refreshed version of the sustainable housing on release for everyone—SHORE—standards was completed, which aims to ensure that the housing needs of people in prison are addressed at an early stage. Work to embed those standards across all Scottish Prison Service establishments and local authorities is on-going and includes a pilot project involving South Lanarkshire Council and HMP Addiewell to improve access to housing on release for people on remand.

Collette Stevenson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that information. The SHORE standards require prison and local authority staff to work together to support new prisoners to manage their tenancies, prevent the accrual of debt and avoid homelessness on release. Those are important interventions that help to reduce reoffending.

However, I supported a constituent who did not receive the support that he should have received under the SHORE standards. After his housing benefit was stopped as a result of his sentence, he left prison with an avoidable £3,000 of debt, which included rent arrears for a council house that he did not want. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on developments in the past few years since my constituent experienced those issues in relation to the SHORE standards, including the on-going work to ensure that relevant support is provided to help prisoners to deal with tenancies to avoid them racking up avoidable debt?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will need to have shorter questions.

Angela Constance: I am very sorry to hear of the problems that Ms Stevenson's constituent experienced, and I thank her for raising them in the chamber today.

The SHORE standards provide that the SPS, local authorities, housing staff and relevant third sector organisations should work together to support persons in custody to end or sustain their tenancy, as appropriate. As I mentioned earlier, work is on-going to embed the SHORE standards across the prison estate and local authorities to ensure that there is consistency in how people are supported, from the point at which they enter custody to the point at which they are released.

Partners should work collaboratively with individuals from five days after entry to custody to inquire about housing circumstances and, thereafter, to plan for suitable accommodation and provide on-going support as part of the case management approach.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I know that the cabinet secretary agrees that, as part of the strategy, we need to improve throughcare services. The Wise Group recently advised me that one of the big issues for offenders who leave prison is the fact that they will have lost their place on their general practitioner's list. That is one of the stumbling blocks in getting them resettled back into the community.

Will the cabinet secretary consider finding a way round that, perhaps by freezing the place of offenders on GP lists, so that it will be much easier for them to see their GP when they leave prison?

Angela Constance: The short answer is that I will give that very serious consideration. Work is being done to improve the connectivity between prison healthcare services and the healthcare services that people are entitled to on release. I will pursue the matter and will keep the member updated.

Child Sexual Abuse Images (Online Availability)

2. **Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the justice secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding action to counter the reported proliferation of child sex abuse images online. (S6O-04355)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The issue that the member raises is a deeply concerning one. We are raising awareness of how to stay safe online and are providing support to help young people to navigate online spaces and use screen time in a safe way and to help parents and carers to ensure that they have the information that they need to guide young people and recognise risks.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise and I have formed a new online safety task force to operate alongside the strategic group, which will identify actions to address online harm. As part of that work, last month we wrote to the United Kingdom Government to urge it take more action to protect children. We also supported the establishment of the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group to increase cross-sectoral working to address the risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Roz McCall: The minister will be aware that more than 3,000 crimes involving images of child sexual abuse have been recorded by Police Scotland over the past five years. In the past two years alone, those reports have reached record levels—more than 700 such offences have been recorded in each of the past two years. Last year, Childline delivered to young people 903 counselling sessions relating to blackmail or

threats to expose or share sexual images online, which was a 7 per cent increase on the figure for 2022-23.

The Scottish Government needs to take a bold stance against perpetrators of such crimes and to provide sufficient deterrent to ensure that would-be perpetrators think twice. What specific actions is Police Scotland taking to keep our children safe from harm?

Siobhian Brown: I recognise the concerns that have been raised about the increase in crimes related to indecent images of children. It may be helpful for me to highlight some of the things that Police Scotland is doing in relation to the recommendations from a strategic review of its response to online child sexual abuse, which was published in February 2020.

Progress has been made; the key achievements include the introduction of a single corporate name for online child sexual abuse and its use as a standard flag on common computer applications and databases, alongside the introduction of a national crime recording system. Dedicated analytical capacity has also been provided to examine online child sexual abuse. Clearer internal strategic governance has been put in place, and strategic threat assessments of online sexual abuse have been produced, increasing responses to investigation.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): What response has the minister had from the UK Government to the letter that was sent in January on improving online safety for children, including through legislation?

Siobhian Brown: We have not yet received a response to our letter to the UK Government ministers. I hope that we will receive one soon and that we can meet to discuss the issues outlined in our letter.

Keeping our children safe online is an issue that both Governments have concerns about. We want to work constructively with the UK Government to tackle this growing threat to our children's wellbeing. One issue raised in our letter was the European Union's Digital Services Act, which provides increased protection—more than is provided by the UK-wide Online Safety Act 2023.

In the meantime, Scottish Government and UK Government officials have met to discuss the issues raised in the letter.

Football Matches (Pyrotechnics Use)

3. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Police Scotland's work to tackle the issue of uncontrolled pyrotechnics at football matches. (S6O-04356)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The misuse of pyrotechnics is a serious issue that will require collective and concerted effort to eradicate. Police Scotland, football authorities and Scottish Government officials have been working in partnership to develop a cohesive response to the issue. That includes joint participation in the pyrotechnics at football short-life working group that was established by Police Scotland and me. I look forward to hearing about the progress that the group makes.

In addition, we provided stop and search powers under the Fireworks and Pyrotechnics Articles (Scotland) Act 2022. We are exploring options, including for how existing available measures such as football banning orders could be utilised to greater effect, and whether further measures are needed.

The Scottish Professional Football League Trust is developing a pyrotechnics education programme to be delivered through clubs to those with football banning orders or club bans for pyrotechnics misuse.

John Mason: I thank the minister for that answer and for her letter to me of 11 February on similar subjects.

In the letter, the minister particularly mentioned prevention. Some of her answer just now suggested that there may be greater punishment after the event. Can we not do more to search for and stop pyrotechnics going into football grounds in the first place?

Siobhian Brown: The stop and search powers came into effect in relation to possession in June 2023. We have asked Police Scotland and the pyrotechnics working group to give full consideration to the matter and to establish the effectiveness of the powers under the legislation. However, it is important to recognise that no single action will provide an easy resolution to the problem of pyrotechnic misuse at football matches.

Emma Caldwell (Public Inquiry)

4. **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the establishment of the Emma Caldwell public inquiry. (S6O-04357)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The First Minister and I met the Caldwell family on 21 January to hear their views on next steps, including on the appointment of a chair for the public inquiry, and on ways to progress the criminal investigation of the initial police inquiry.

The Scottish Government will ensure that the inquiry is set up and properly resourced to carry out its important work. Once a chair has been appointed, we will work alongside that chair and Emma's family to set and agree the terms of reference for the inquiry. We will continue to liaise with the Crown Office to understand the implications of the criminal investigation for the setting up of the inquiry.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer and I know that she is absolutely committed to ensuring that fresh scrutiny is brought to bear on the case, given the gravity of the issues raised. Although, as a lawyer, I understand the legal hurdles that are still extant, can the cabinet secretary nonetheless give some indication of when the chair will be appointed, so that progress can be made in the meantime?

Angela Constance: I thank Ms Ewing for her question and for her interest and support. After discussing the chair appointment with the family, we are in agreement that the most important thing is that the person who leads the inquiry has the confidence of the family. I assure Ms Ewing that discussions are progressing and that we will continue to listen carefully to the family's views. I will update Parliament when a decision has been taken.

Police Scotland (Mental Health Illness Absences)

5. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the number of police officer and police staff working days lost due to mental health illness has risen in recent years. (S6O-04358)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Although this is an operational matter for the chief constable, I welcome her commitment to the wellbeing of police officers and staff. Police Scotland has made a £17 million investment in its employee assistance programme, which will focus on mental health support.

Police Scotland has signed up to the mental health at work commitment and standards, and the 2024 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland report on front-line wellbeing recognised that Police Scotland is good at supporting officers at points of crisis.

Police Scotland currently provides a comprehensive range of services to officers and police staff. That includes a 24/7 employee assistance programme and direct access to occupational health services to support mental wellbeing.

Willie Rennie: That is certainly welcome, but the reality is that the number of staff days lost has increased significantly. Since 2019, almost half a million days have been lost because of mental ill health. Keeping communities safe starts by supporting those at the heart of policing, which I am sure that the cabinet secretary would agree with. Despite all the promises, why is mental health plummeting? Will the cabinet secretary at least agree to having regular staff surveys and a mental health first aider installed in every police workplace?

Angela Constance: I recognise that, every day, Scotland's police officers and staff are dedicated to keeping our communities safe and supported. Very often, officers and staff run towards and place themselves in front of danger to protect the public.

The issue of regular staff surveys has been discussed with the chief constable in our regular meetings, and she is very committed to those surveys. When I next meet the chief constable, I will discuss Willie Rennie's suggestion about mental health first aiders being readily available.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the interest that the Criminal Justice Committee has taken in officer and staff mental wellbeing. Although it is clear that a lot of progress has been made in that area, will she outline any further detail on access to support for officers and staff that is of a more specialist nature and that goes beyond the early preventative role?

Angela Constance: There are two points to make in relation to Ms Nicoll's question. There is the support that is absolutely necessary when officers find themselves in danger in protecting others or are witnesses to very traumatic circumstances. In that regard, there is the trauma risk management programme.

I am also mindful of the point that His Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary made when he spoke about the day-to-day demands on the job and how they can have an impact on the mental health of serving police officers. That is why the £17 million investment in and focus on mental health support and access to enhanced occupational health services are of particular importance.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Between 2020 and 2024, non-sexual crimes of violence were up 10 per cent, sexual crimes were up 11 per cent and crimes of dishonesty were up 16 per cent. As at June 2024, the number of police officers had fallen to its lowest level in 17 years, while many aspects of the estate and resources continue to decline.

If we accept that fewer officers dealing with rising crime using older resources—all matters that are within the ambit of this Government—will

lead to harder workloads, greater stress, mental health challenges and more burn-out, what is the Government's specific plan to make life easier for our officers?

Angela Constance: The Government has a very robust approach through the £1.62 billion that will be invested in policing in Scotland, following the passing of the budget yesterday.

I am pleased that the latest official statistics show that, as of December, police officer numbers were at more than 16,500. The deputy chief constable, Alan Speirs, confirmed last month that police officer numbers were at 16,614.

We will also be wrestling with the demands that are created by the rise in employers' national insurance contributions.

Although I do not dispute the changing nature of crime that Liam Kerr has highlighted, which requires being very focused, I remind him that the statistics that were published earlier this week show that there has been an overall 1 per cent decrease in recorded crime over the past year and that this country remains a safer place under our Government.

Antisocial Behaviour (City Centres)

6. **Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it and its partner organisations are taking to tackle antisocial behaviour in city centres. (S6O-04359)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): We support Police Scotland and local authorities to invest in prevention, early intervention and diversionary activities to reduce antisocial behaviour. In 2025-26, we have increased police funding to a record £1.62 billion. Our budget makes an additional £3 million available for Police Scotland to work alongside the retail sector to tackle shoplifting and other retail crime.

At national level, we fund initiatives and local multi-agency response work to target issues relating to violence reduction; such issues are also tackled through our cashback for communities programme.

I commissioned the independent working group on antisocial behaviour because I am committed to ensuring that there is a strong response to antisocial behaviour that puts victims and communities at the centre of support. Yesterday, the group published a wide-ranging report, and I am considering its recommendations along with our lead partners, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Police Scotland.

Kevin Stewart: In Aberdeen and other cities, there has been a rise in the number of masked individuals zooming around on e-bikes, often clearly engaged in illegal activity. Although the actual numbers might be small, their visibility is great and is creating serious concern for ordinary folk. What measures are being taken to tackle that menace?

Siobhian Brown: We support Police Scotland and its partners in dealing with the misuse of vehicles, including e-bikes, and any nuisance and danger that is caused by it. Enforcement is a matter for Police Scotland, and local policing teams are best placed to identify misuse and to work to prevent future incidents. The police can enforce the law in relation to illegal riding on pavements using road safety, public disorder and dispersal powers, which include being able to seize vehicles, if appropriate.

Police Scotland seized 281 dangerous e-bikes between January and September 2024. Seizing vehicles as part of hard deterrence and enforcement action is happening nationally, with stepped-up patrols warning illegal and reckless bikers that their vehicles will be seized.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions. I will get in as many as I can but they will need to be brief.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Towns and villages across the south of Scotland also suffer badly from this issue. I routinely hear from shopkeepers about the fearlessness of violent thieves, many of whom are young people and many of whom have travelled from cities specifically to target smaller communities. The verdict from workers is always the same: the people responsible simply do not fear consequences, because there are none. What plans does the Scottish Government have to finally strike some fear into those reckless and dangerous individuals, so that they know that their actions will have consequences?

Siobhian Brown: The offenders will be reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. Although there has been an increase in the number of reports of theft by shoplifting, the detection rate has also increased, with charges being brought in for around 50 per cent of reported incidents. Police Scotland will continue to work closely with retailers through the Scottish partnership against acquisitive crime strategy to deter, prevent and investigate all reported crimes.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): If the minister wants evidence of such behaviour, she need only walk to the Meadows, where there are tyre tracks left by masked individuals who were driving all-terrain vehicles in the early hours of Thursday. We need new standard operating procedures and equipment, because, without those, the police are incapable of intervening. Will

the minister engage with the police so that those things can be put in place?

Siobhian Brown: Yes—I have engaged with MSPs and the police on the issue this week.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members that my wife is a police sergeant in Moray.

The cabinet secretary and the minister will surely be aware that a freedom of information request by *The Northern Scot* has shown that, between 2019 and 2024, antisocial behaviour at Elgin bus station has increased by 900 per cent. Of course, Elgin bus station was the location of the killing of bus driver Keith Rollinson a year ago. Does the minister agree that the multi-agency work in Elgin must be on-going in order to get that number back down again? Does she accept that, if we had more officers available on the beat in Moray, they would act as a deterrent for antisocial behaviour at the bus station?

Siobhian Brown: Yes, and I absolutely agree that multi-agency work will be needed in Elgin.

Cashback for Communities

7. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the cashback for communities programme. (S6O-04360)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): During the current phase 6 of the programme, which runs to March 2026, we are providing funding of up to £20 million to 29 partner organisations, with the projects aiming to reach around 34,000 children and young people.

In 2023-24, we supported more than 15,000 young people to reduce their involvement in the criminal justice system and improve their wellbeing or move towards a positive destination.

The annual impact report, which was published last December, shows that the programme exceeded all its targets. Key outcomes included 4,300 young people reporting reduced involvement in antisocial or criminal activity; more than 8,300 reporting improved health and wellbeing; and more than 64,000 volunteering hours to support local communities.

Bill Kidd: With phase 6 funding ending next March, will phase 7 funding be in place in this parliamentary session? If so, when will the new application process open?

Siobhian Brown: We are working with stakeholders to consider a seventh phase of the cashback for communities programme, and we will announce plans for that later this year.

As I said, the current phase of the programme is set to end next March, so the plans will be in place by then. Through various projects, the programme supports young people who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system and the communities that are most affected by crime. Since its inception, the programme has committed £130 million to supporting around 1.3 million young people across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

Crimes involving Animals (Justice System Handling)

8. **Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve the way the justice system handles crimes involving animals. (S6O-04361)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): A range of legislation is in place in Scotland to address crimes involving animals. That allows for relevant police and prosecutorial action to be taken, and it provides significant sentencing powers to the court. When sentencing, courts have wide discretion to consider the facts and circumstances. For example, that includes taking into account the harm arising from a dog theft such as the impact on the dog's health and wellbeing as well as the distress caused to the owner.

Under the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020, the Scottish Government is progressing a review of the requirement for any additional animal welfare, animal health or wildlife offences.

Maurice Golden: This morning, I launched my proposed dog abduction (Scotland) bill at Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home, with the wonderful Cooper, who is available for rehoming. The bill seeks to deter and punish those who are involved in snatching people's pets. Does the minister agree that it could also help to ensure more clarity and certainty in law for police and courts when advising the public, investigating cases and bringing prosecutions?

Siobhian Brown: I have met Maurice Golden to discuss his bill. I appreciate that the theft of a much-loved pet can be a traumatic experience for owners. It will be for the Parliament to consider the details of Maurice Golden's recently introduced member's bill. This morning, I was listening to conversations about the police in that regard, so I take that on board.

The Scottish Government notes that the bill has been introduced, and we will consider carefully its content.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. At the previous justice and home affairs portfolio question time, I asked about police dog Zara being put down by Police Scotland, and the

minister promised to write to me about the lack of insurance for police dogs. I use my point of order to gently remind the minister that I still have not received a response, and I have followed up the matter with her.

Presiding Officer, is there any guidance that ministers should respond to commitments to update members between one portfolio question time and another on the same topic? It would be useful to have a timeframe, particularly given that the same question might have been raised today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I appreciate your point, Mr Ross. It is not a point of order and therefore is not something on which the chair can rule.

I will allow a brief pause to allow for a changeover of members on the front benches before we move to the next item of business.

Scottish Enterprise Funding (Arms Companies)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

14:50

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): I was very proud to be part of the Scottish Government under First Minister Humza Yousaf when he spoke up so movingly on the plight of the Palestinian people, who were being subject to collective punishment for the brutal atrocities that were committed on 7 October. The suffering that they have endured at the hands of Israeli forces has been horrific. Ordinary citizens, half of them children, have been subject to bombardment for months and deprived of food, water, electricity and medical care in some of the worst war crimes of the 21st century.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed; schools, hospitals and homes have been bombed into rubble; lives have been cut devastatingly short; and more than 1 million people have been displaced. Now, in front of the world, the Trump Administration is calling for widespread ethnic cleansing. There are International Criminal Court arrest warrants out for the architects of the crisis and on-going investigations for breaches of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The Scottish Government has rightly spoken strongly against the killing and against Donald Trump's plan. The Scottish Government has been clear in its support for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza—something that was supported by the Parliament back in 2023. Yet, since the assault began, the Scottish Government has given more than £1 million to companies that have armed Israel and that have enabled that destruction.

We could debate the shameful role of the United Kingdom Government, which has approved those arms sales to Israel, and I expect that there would be a lot of unity among MSPs from across the chamber. Foreign policy is not devolved to Scotland. Scotland cannot control what the UK Government does on the world stage, but we can control where our public money goes and which companies and industries we choose to support.

The principle of our motion is very simple: if a company has profited from the sale of arms and weapons to countries that are complicit in war crimes and genocide, it should not receive public

money from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has said that no public funding should be going to supply arms to Israel but, since 2019, at least £8 million in Scottish Enterprise grants has been awarded to 13 companies that are involved in arms dealing and manufacturing. A number of those businesses have directly supplied weapons and equipment to Israel during its assault on Gaza.

The Scottish Government must put its money where its mouth is and stand up for human rights. This morning, Oxfam and Amnesty International joined the calls for that funding to be stopped, with Oxfam describing the Government's position as "morally incoherent".

In 2019, the Scottish Greens secured a commitment from the Scottish Government that all Scottish public bodies would conduct human rights checks on companies, including arms companies, before funding them. In November 2023, *The Ferret* revealed that, despite Scottish Enterprise having conducted 199 human rights checks, not a single firm had failed, despite some having armed states that have been widely accused of war crimes, including Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Amnesty International has called the current human rights due diligence process "inadequate", and it states that the process is

"failing to ensure that Scotland upholds its international obligations".

If companies that are arming war crimes are not beyond the pale, who is? The Scottish Government might say that its hands are tied but, following the invasion of Ukraine, it rightly introduced measures against companies that trade with Russia. Why is Israel different?

When we invest public money in our economy, we have a responsibility to use it to shape the future that we want to see and invest in the kinds of organisations that share our vision for a fairer and greener future. It should go without saying that companies should not be profiting from human suffering or the war crimes that we have seen in the past 15 months. It is not honest for the Scottish Government to dismiss that by saying that the grants do not go directly towards weapons or munitions manufacturing. What is the moral distinction between funding the bomb and funding the bomb factory?

The Scottish Government is still choosing to give public money to companies that profit from the sales of arms and technologies that are currently being used by the Israel Defense Forces to commit human rights abuses in Gaza. BAE Systems, Raytheon and Leonardo have all received grants from Scottish Enterprise, and all three have been involved in arms sales to not only Israel but Saudi Arabia, which has used them to inflict a humanitarian crisis on the people of Yemen. In 2019, the Court of Appeal found those arms sales to have been granted illegally.

Many of the companies are reporting mega profits. BAE, which reported £3 billion-worth of profits last year alone, is profiting from human suffering. Our public money is increasing suffering and misery instead of building a fairer and better world, but it is not at all clear to me that mega corporations that rake in that kind of profit need public money at all. BAE, for example, is already the biggest arms company in Europe, and Raytheon is the second biggest in the world. Scottish public money would be better spent on supporting small businesses, co-operative businesses, social enterprises and rural businesses. Scotland's small clean energy, nature restoration and organic food businesses could have made very good use of that money.

The Scottish Government has called clearly for an end to all United Kingdom arms sales to Israel, but Scottish public money is still being granted to companies that are complicit in the manufacturing of arms that are used by Israel. The Scottish Government must urgently overhaul the human rights due diligence process so that every penny of public money that is handed out by Scottish Enterprise goes towards making the world a better, fairer place in which human lives and human rights are respected.

Many of my colleagues in the chamber have backed calls for a ceasefire and condemned the destruction in Gaza. I hope that they will join me in saying that enough is enough and calling on the Scottish Government to end all public funding to companies that are complicit in the arms trade with Israel.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern that at least £8 million of Scottish Enterprise grants have been awarded to 13 companies involved in arms dealing and manufacturing since 2019, including £700,000 to Leonardo and £500,000 to Raytheon Systems; further notes that a number of these businesses have directly supplied weapons and equipment to Israel during its assault on Gaza; understands that, despite this, no company has failed the current Scottish Enterprise human rights due diligence checks; believes, therefore, that the current due diligence process at Scottish Enterprise is failing to ensure that Scotland upholds its international obligations, and calls on the Scottish Government to end all public funding to companies complicit in the arms trade with Israel.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As ever with these debates, we have next to no time in hand, so members will be expected to stick to their time allocations.

14:58

The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead): Given the backdrop to this important debate, it is important that we recognise that much that will be discussed today unites us all. The debate provides an appropriate opportunity for the Parliament to reiterate its unwavering support for the ceasefire in Gaza and to call for every effort to be made for it to be extended. The Parliament should be proud of the humanitarian assistance that the Scottish Government has provided to the people of Gaza—Lorna Slater referred to that—and it should join us in calling once again for the recognition of a Palestinian state and two-state solution.

Our debate comes in the week when we mark the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is a time to remember those who have sadly lost their lives as a result of Russian aggression and, as the First Minister said earlier this week, a time to reaffirm that Scotland stands as part of a united front that supports Ukraine's independence and seeks to secure peace and deter any future Russian aggression.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I absolutely agree with the minister's words on Ukraine. On 3 March 2022, the Scottish Government sent a clear instruction not just to arms companies but to all businesses in Scotland to stop trading with Russia, and it asked them to show solidarity with Ukraine. Given that no equivalent instruction has been sent in relation to Israel, can the minister explain why the Scottish Government apparently thinks that Israel's assault on Gaza is less severe or significant than Russia's assault on Ukraine?

Richard Lochhead: I ask Ross Greer to be patient for a little bit, because I am about to come to the point about consistency in the way in which we approach due diligence on human rights issues.

The atrocities on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent unspeakable events in Gaza with the loss of so many lives, as well as the war in Ukraine, are tragedies on an unimaginable scale. We must be united in our efforts to condemn the aggressors and support those who strive for peace. Those events also act as a reminder of how fragile peace can be, of the uncertainties in our world and of the continuing threat to the precious democratic freedoms that we hold so dear.

The Government has consistently called for an end to all arms sales to Israel from UK companies, including Scottish ones. We do not believe that public funding should go towards supplying arms to Israel. We should reaffirm and reinforce that position today.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): If Iran is still able to arm and to produce arms for export, surely it is unfair to stop Israel defending itself.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back for the intervention, minister.

Richard Lochhead: I have already outlined the backdrop against which the debate is taking place and said that we should unite on many key principles, which I hope John Mason will support.

Although it is currently the responsibility of the UK Government to issue licences for arms exports, we should be clear and united in our calls for the UK Government to use its powers to stop arms exports to Israel and to protect the lives of those who have suffered so much.

As the Scottish Government's amendment states, the focus should be on extending the ceasefire, securing the release of the remaining hostages and ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches the people of Gaza. It also outlines support for a two-state solution and calls on the UK Government to officially recognise the state of Palestine in order to break the political impasse that has condemned Israelis and Palestinians to successive cycles of violence.

The Green motion does not address the wider backdrop against which this debate is taking place. The Government believes that such issues should be aired and voted on today, but I appreciate that the Greens have been consistent in their support for a recognised Palestinian state, too.

I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the support that Scottish Enterprise provides to companies that are involved in the defence sector in Scotland. Scottish Enterprise operates a human rights due diligence process when it awards any funding, including funding to companies in the defence sector. It does not provide funding for the manufacture of weapons or munitions, in line with the Government's long-standing policy. We have fulfilled the commitment, to which Lorna Slater referred, that was given back in 2019.

The due diligence process is designed to ensure that public funds are not directed to companies that engage in activities that contravene international law or human rights standards. The checks involve an assessment of each company's operations, with cross-referencing against a number of independent resources. Any awarding of grants follows careful scrutiny and assurances that the companies in question meet the required ethical standards and have passed the due diligence checks.

The Scottish Government funding that is given to many of the companies that are being discussed in the context of this debate is largely directed towards the diversification away from core defence activities. We must also acknowledge that Scotland benefits from being home to highly skilled industries that contribute to national and international security at the same time. However, I appreciate the concerns that have been raised and the calls for Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence checks to ensure that it takes into account a product's end use, so we will support the Labour Party's amendment to ensure that the due diligence process is always as robust as it can be.

Our amendment speaks to the values that the Government holds. As I said, it calls for peace in Gaza, for humanitarian aid to be provided and for a lasting two-state solution. It urges the UK Government to suspend arms exports to Israel and it sends a clear and unequivocal message that the Parliament does not believe that any public funding should go towards the supply of arms to Israel.

I move amendment S6M-16571.3, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"reiterates its unwavering support for the ceasefire in Gaza, for the calls for all efforts to be made to ensure an extension of the ceasefire, for humanitarian aid to reach people in Gaza, and for the remaining hostages to be released; recognises and supports the humanitarian assistance that the Scottish Government has provided to the people of Gaza; calls for recognition of a Palestinian state and a two-state solution; recognises that Scottish Enterprise does not provide funding for the manufacture of weapons or munitions; notes that Scottish Enterprise operates a human rights due diligence process in the awarding of any funding; recognises that responsibility for issuing licences for the export of arms is reserved to the UK Government; calls for the suspension of arms exports to Israel, and does not believe that any public funding should be going to supply arms to Israel."

15:04

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I echo Richard Lochhead's comments about welcoming a peace solution, if it holds, in the middle east.

Sometimes, motions—including the one today—force members to pick sides, so let me tell the Greens whose side the Scottish Conservatives are on. We are on the side of the young engineering apprentices who work in a legitimate industry that is a vital part of Scotland's economy, and on the side of the aerospace and defence industries, which are investing in creating the skilled engineering jobs that are needed to develop new defence technologies.

We are not on the side of the Greens, who used a protest outside Parliament to intimidate young apprentices as they attempted to attend an outreach event to promote the importance of development of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills in the Scottish economy.

Ross Greer: Will the member give way?

Craig Hoy: I do not have time.

The Scottish Greens say that they defend the planet, but we must sometimes ask which planet they are defending. Today's motion begs that question, again.

We all know that international actors can be unpredictable, which is why Scotland, as part of the UK, must remain at the cutting edge of aerospace and defence manufacturing. Whether it is in renewables, defence or the automotive industry, the future of this world is engineered, and it is entirely legitimate to use our engineering capabilities to deliver what is needed to defend ourselves and our allies from the malignancy of nations such as Russia, or the evil of terrorist forces such as Hamas.

The Green MSPs wear badges saying that they stand with Ukraine, including on equipping it. However, what is President Zelenskyy asking for when he travels the world? Ukraine cannot defend itself with warm words alone: rather, it is asking the UK for the military equipment that is made by the very manufacturers that the Green Party is protesting against. Ukraine needs cutting-edge military capabilities: that is, weapons and munitions—Scottish-engineered ones, I hope. Green MSPs need to get into the real world or—I warn them—they will be living in a far more dangerous one.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I do not have time.

The Greens will be living in a world in which we would see more Russian aggression on former satellite states and more unwarranted attacks on freedom and life, such as those that Israel experienced at the hands of Hamas.

When the Greens say that they stand with Ukraine, it means nothing unless they end their dogmatic and depressing campaign against the legitimate defence industry that is operating in Scotland today. If their issue is with how the hardware and technology could be used overseas, they should take their case to the UK export control joint unit, not to the young Scottish men and women who seek to forge engineering careers. I warn them that protests at careers fairs and outside Scottish factories of Leonardo UK or Raytheon UK mean only that the jobs that they support might go overseas to countries that do not have such tight export controls as we have.

The Scottish defence sector does not just ensure that the world is a safer place—it also contributes to our economic security and stability. The aerospace, defence, security and space sectors employ 35,000 people in Scotland, account for £3.2 billion to the economy, and deliver 1,500 much-needed apprenticeships. However, the signals that are being sent to the industry are far from positive or progressive.

I ask this question of ministers: who decreed that Scottish Enterprise will provide funding only to help firms to diversify towards non-military applications for their technology? Why will it not specifically support defence skills and jobs that could then be used in other areas?

We cannot afford to lose that sector. We must therefore work with the industry to ensure that the Scottish Government supports further and higher education and skills that could sustain the sector now and into the future. Scotland could, and should, be proud of its aerospace and defence industries and the many people who work in them.

It is sad that the Green Party has seen fit to introduce such a malign form of political debate into the Parliament.

I move amendment S6M-16571.1, to leave out from "with concern" to end and insert:

"that Scotland is home to a wide range of defence, aerospace and security companies that collectively play a vital role in supporting the UK in its endeavours to assist in its international duties to maintain peace, including via its membership of NATO; understands that the defence, aerospace and security sectors support more than 30,000 jobs, including 1,500 apprentices, and contribute £3.2 billion to Scotland's economy; welcomes Scottish Enterprise funding that supports these vital sectors and the jobs and investment that they provide; reiterates Israel's right to defend itself, and acknowledges that policy decisions regarding the arms trade are reserved to the UK Parliament."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson to speak to and move amendment S6M-16571.2.

15:08

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): This is an important debate, but we need to approach it with maturity. In all honesty, I agree with things that have been said already by all sides, so it is important that I step through all that.

I very much welcome Richard Lochhead's approach to the debate, which must be about principles. I will set out mine. The debate must be about Gaza. I do not think that we can look at what has happened in Gaza and in any way condone or support it, at this point. I say that as someone who was clear, after the atrocities of 7 October, that Israel had the right to defend itself. However, what has happened in Gaza is truly horrific, so I do not think that we can be seen to be using our public money to support it.

However, unfortunately—this is where Craig Hoy is right—we cannot separate those issues and those of the defence sector from the real and present danger that we face in this country. We live in unparalleled and unprecedented times.

Lorna Slater: Will Daniel Johnson take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: I am afraid that I do not have time. I need to make some progress.

We have to understand what that will take. Keith Brown made some of the points very well yesterday in the budget debate. However, we also need to recognise that there is a wider economic impact from such companies, which we cannot ignore and from which we get benefits. I will therefore step through the motion and each of the amendments.

I very much welcome the Greens' giving us the important opportunity for a full and frank debate. I also completely agree with them on the seriousness of the situation that we face in Gaza. Some people may argue that the matter is not for the Parliament and that the export control mechanisms are all that should be looked at. That is not good enough: we cannot say that our politics should just stop at the border. We need to ensure and be confident that the money that we spend is in line with the values that we espouse. The Greens are right to bring up those questions, and that is reflected in our amendment.

Likewise, the Scottish Government is correct to outline the processes that are in place. I very much welcome the Scottish Government's emphasis on the two-state solution, because it is, above all else, vital that we look at how we can bring that back. Ultimately, that is the only way that we can have peace and stability in the middle east.

However, we also need to look at what has been supported. I have spent much time at Babcock at Rosyth and BAE Systems in Scotstoun. The investment in the skills academy at Scotstoun is about providing skills for the people who will build the warships that will keep our sea lanes—and this country—safe. Those skills will have effects beyond that, too.

We have to support the activity and investments of Scottish Enterprise and the other enterprise agencies: we cannot ignore them—albeit that they are difficult.

My issue with the Conservative amendment is that it would completely remove Gaza from consideration. That cannot be right. However, the Conservatives are absolutely correct in that, given that the US has made it very clear that we cannot

rely on its resources to defend this country, and given that we have Ukraine—war in Europe—on our doorstep and might well be asked to put boots on the ground in order to protect the peace, we have to have the industries and the capability to build the ships that we need, the radar for the aircraft that will keep our skies safe, and communications equipment so that troops on the ground who might well be asked to keep peace in Ukraine can do so with the equipment and resources that they will need. That is what the defence sector in Scotland provides.

I move amendment S6M-16571.2, to insert at end:

"; acknowledges that across the UK, arms export licences have been suspended for items with a clear risk that they may be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law; calls on Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence checks to ensure that they take account of where products' end use is, and that they fully comply with legal obligations under the Export Control Act 2002 and international law, and recognises the contribution of the defence sector in Scotland and the role that Scotland-based businesses have played in defending democracy and freedom."

15:12

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to Lorna Slater for making time for this important debate. It brings me up against an aspect of my life that I do not often talk about in the chamber—my Quakerism. I have spent a great deal of my adult life campaigning against aspects and aims of the arms trade. That said, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine added to my thinking on the matter layers of complexity with which I am still grappling, because I believe that, in order for peace to be sustained throughout the world—including that region, in particular—we need to arm Ukraine. It is a nuanced issue for me, and I will unpack some of it later.

However, I absolutely agree with the spirit of the Green Party's motion on what is happening in Gaza. What the people of Gaza have endured over the past 16 months is unimaginable. Homes have been destroyed, communities have been shattered and loved ones have been lost.

When, last month, the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas finally emerged and was announced, it represented a huge moment of hope after many months of darkness and despair for the entire region. It meant that the work of flooding Gaza with the aid that it had desperately needed and been deprived of for months could begin in earnest. I reiterate my party's support for that ceasefire, which is so vital to the wellbeing of the Palestinian people. We want the ceasefire to continue and all hostages to be released.

As we have heard today, it has been troubling in recent weeks to hear Donald Trump's unhinged calls for the Palestinian people to be relocated entirely out of Gaza and for that land to become the so-called riviera of the middle east. It goes without saying that those plans are not only ludicrous but would cause chaos in an already unstable region, and would amount to a flagrant violation of international law.

Instead, we need to redouble our efforts to build a lasting peace, regardless of how remote that possibility feels right now. That begins with the recognition of a Palestinian state that is based on 1967 boundaries and a two-state solution, which is the only way to deliver the dignity and security that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve.

I turn to arms exports. As early as April last year, Liberal Democrats called for the UK Government to suspend supply of arms exports to Israel. For many years now, Liberal Democrats have called for tougher controls on the export of armaments to ensure that they are not used for potential human rights breaches and atrocities. We support the introduction of a presumption of denial for all Governments that are listed in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—FCDO—human rights and democracy reports as human rights priorities. As such, we accordingly believe that arms exports to Israel should be halted.

In respect of Scottish Enterprise funding, we need to ensure that the current human rights due diligence checks are as robust as possible. It is worth remembering the origins of the checks that this chamber now insists on. A cross-Government human rights due diligence test was introduced only after my party helped to uncover what went on behind a deal that Nicola Sturgeon personally signed with China Railway No 3 Engineering Group during a meeting at Bute house. No due diligence whatsoever was done. It was discovered that CR3 had been blacklisted by the Norwegian state pension fund for gross corruption, and was found by Amnesty International to have connections to human rights abuses.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will Alex Cole-Hamilton take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Do I have time in hand, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): No—there is no time in hand.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am afraid that I cannot take an intervention, on this occasion.

Scottish Liberal Democrats helped to force the introduction of new rules. However, in 2022, they then uncovered that at least 49 public bodies in

Scotland were still unaware of the Scottish human rights tests, following those deals. That is a very strange and outrageous place to be, and the bodies included Crown Estate Scotland, which has just run the massive ScotWind auction. We therefore have concerns about how robust the due diligence checks are, in practice.

However, we must also recognise that defence is a reserved matter. It is for the UK Government to set the rules on arms exports, and to ensure that the system is robust and that we are meeting our international obligations. It would be inappropriate and ineffective to create a backdoor system to arms regulation in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Cole-Hamilton, you need to conclude.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Although I understand that that is not the aim of the Greens' motion, I fear that it would be the outcome.

15:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Politics is about the particular, and it is right that, in this motion, we are calling for something specific, tangible and measurable, and entirely achievable. There is no excuse for not answering that call. However, political integrity is also about the broader picture, the deeper truths and the longer pages of history.

The anguish of Palestine did not begin in October 2023. It was not then that people were first ripped from their land or first had their homes bulldozed, their trees uprooted, their pathways blocked, their writers disappeared and their children killed with swift or slow violence. By that measure of history, we, in the global north, have failed. Yes, some of us have failed worse than others; we can weigh the complicity of Washington, Westminster, Brussels and Berlin. However, knowing what we know and seeing what we see—and we do see it, unless we choose to turn away—why do the words for what is done, apartheid and genocide, stick so timidly in our throats? When international law is broken so brutally and blatantly, and when our constituents protest, without violence, at the pain of Palestine and for peace, food and lives, why do our police, prosecutors and courts single them out for such exemplary punishment?

We cannot blame the public this time. Labour and the Democrats both know that. Thousands of voters chose independent MPs because this mattered more to them than anything else. Donald Trump was elected because Democratic voters stayed at home, and the issue that kept them there more than any other was Gaza.

Twenty years ago, Desmond Tutu and Jimmy Carter were both talking about Palestine and Israel. They were not afraid to speak of what they saw, to recognise its reality and to call it by its name. In 2006, Carter said of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem:

> "There, apartheid exists in its more despicable forms, that Palestinians are deprived of basic human rights."

Tutu recognised that it is not enough to have the right sentiments. We need to take the right actions, too, and that means boycott, divestment and sanctions. In 2014, he said:

> "Those who continue to do business with Israel, who contribute to a sense of 'normalcy' in Israeli society, are doing the people of Israel and Palestine a disservice. They are contributing to the perpetuation of a profoundly unjust status quo."

Now, that status quo is even more unjust. The death of a child is a grief that we can know about and understand; it is one that we have probably shared or seen. We have held our arms out to the broken and wept for their loss, but tens upon tens of thousands? Can our minds and hearts stretch that far? Is it the very scale of the agony that makes us turn away? Perhaps it is.

Perhaps we could just follow one family—or what used to be a family, now just a woman and her husband—walking back through Gaza after the ceasefire. They are not going home. They have no home left to go to. They are not looking for its remains in the rest of the rubble. They are only looking, in the bleak annihilation, for the bodies of their two children.

That is why people stand in burning rage or silent vigil in city squares across the world. That is why they march or climb or paint or speak upon whatever platform they can find until they are silenced. That is why we are here this afternoon. We are here for accountability, for integrity, for justice and for peace.

We are here for Palestine.

15:21

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP): I thank the Green Party for bringing this important debate to the chamber. Let me say from the outset that I support its calls to end all arms sales to Israel and agree that not a penny of public funding should be going to arms companies, including those in Scotland, that supply weapons or munitions to Israel.

Some have suggested that we are at the beginning of a new world order. I suggest that it more closely resembles disorder than order. We are living at a time when one of our closest allies—which was on the same side as us in world war 2—was, on Monday this week, in the United

Nations, on the side of dictators in Russia, North Korea and Belarus. It seems that, whether you choose to invade Ukraine or kill 18,000 children in Gaza, you can now do so with impunity. In the absence of any rules-based order, anarchy will ensue. I suggest that anarchy and chaos in a world with more than 12,000 nuclear warheads poses a real existential threat to humanity.

For those who still believe in a rules-based order—as I suspect all of us in the chamber do—now is the time to ensure that we are, at a minimum, complying with international law and supporting its equal application across the world. That is only one reason why I support calls to halt all arms sales to Israel.

Let me remind members that Israel is a nation that is currently headed by a man who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes including using starvation as a method of warfare. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also wanted for crimes against humanity including murder, persecution and other inhumane acts. How can we possibly claim to be a bastion of democracy and a standard bearer of international law and human rights when we are supplying weapons to the man who the highest court in the world has demanded face trial for war crimes? We must choose accountability, not complicity.

I just touched on what I think is the legal case for why we should end arms sales to Israel. Let me end my contribution by mentioning the moral case. The Conservative amendment mentions Israel's right to self-defence but nothing about the Palestinians' right to self-defence. There is no right to self-defence for those such as my wife's 95-year-old grandmother, who was kicked out of her house in 1948 alongside more than 700,000 other Palestinians. Their homes were given away by the British and their land occupied by Israel. There is no right to self-defence for those who have lived under armed occupation for decades and who continue to see the eradication of their land and the erasure of their culture and their identity as a people.

Is there anyone who sincerely believes that Israel's retaliation to those horrific attacks on 7 October 2023 has been proportionate in its self-defence? Was Israel defending itself from five-year-old Hind Rajab when it massacred her with 335 bullets? Was Israel defending itself from two-year-old Laila al-Khatib when an Israeli sniper shot and killed her while she was eating dessert with her grandparents? Was Israel defending itself from four-day-old twins Ayssel and Asser when killing them in an air strike while their father was registering their births?

That is not self-defence—it is slaughter, and our arms companies, our Governments and our nations must play no part in it.

15:25

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): One of the things that I most regret in a debate that I suppose it is perfectly reasonable that we should have is that, despite the affection and respect that I have for Humza Yousaf, we inevitably find ourselves in different positions on the issue when we would probably, as we have in the past, prefer to work together to find solutions.

I do not know whether it is necessary, but perhaps I should, since some people write to me on these matters, declare that one of my sons married into the Jewish community in the autumn of last year. That has absolutely no bearing on my thinking on these issues, although that has been suggested to me by a number of people. As everybody here knows, I grew up with the Jewish community. I have met many people who have family and friends in Israel, and I understand the need for the state of Israel. I also believe that it remains the case that there are more Muslims in Israel than there are Jews in the whole of the European continent put together—I wonder why that is. It is because we exterminated them all.

I find the motion to be miserable, but I applaud Richard Lochhead's amendment. I am sorry that the final line of his amendment means that I cannot support it, but I think that it seeks to bring a measure of reason to what is a very difficult discussion on a subject that, at times, it is impossible to be reasonable about.

I remain a critical friend of the state of Israel. I have previously said in the chamber that it is possible, at times, to not support or associate oneself with the actions of the state of Israel while, at the same time, recognising and demanding that it should have the right to defend itself. If we are looking for a long-term solution in some of the actions of recent weeks, we should note that not even the Nazis paraded the coffins of children around while cheering on the dead bodies that they were passing around the street. The de-Hamasification of Gaza will ultimately be the only route to a more lasting peace, but that debate is possibly beyond the one that we are having today—it is, to quote Lorna Slater, perhaps a "morally incoherent" debate.

Ross Greer: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: Perhaps, in a moment.

The reality, of course, is that the number of arms that this country is involved in directly supplying to Israel is minuscule, yet Mr Greer, on a megaphone, encouraged people to shout,

"Jackson Carlaw, you can't hide, you're committing genocide"

at me and a whole lot of 16-year-old apprentices who were here on 21 February last year to attend

a reception celebrating their contribution as apprentices. To be jostled, spat at and personally accused of committing genocide was absolutely reprehensible, and I do not see how any of that assists in any way in the argument before us.

The fundamental concern, ultimately, is that people chant

"From the river to the sea",

which is the policy of Iran. The policy of Iran is to eliminate the state of Israel. If we were to deny Israel the arms to defend itself, which others can argue about in different contexts and in a different way, we would, frankly, risk encouraging Iran—which is, after all, currently on the retreat with the defeat of Hezbollah in Lebanon and elsewhere—in the view that it can move against the state of Israel and potentially proliferate an even greater conflict and an even greater war. For that reason, to me, it remains fundamental that Israel be allowed to defend itself.

I will finish with the words of Lorna Slater at First Minister's question time last week, because I think that they are apposite. She said:

"Disinformation is playing an increasingly dangerous role in our communities and our global politics. Promoting lies and misinformation at home and abroad can have serious consequences for all our communities ... Does the First Minister agree that political leaders everywhere must stand up to disinformation?"—[*Official Report*, 20 February 2025; c 16.]

If only.

15:30

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the motion from the Greens and will vote for it if we are given the opportunity to do so later today. I also welcome the indication from the Scottish Government that it will support the Scottish Labour amendment

"to review ... due diligence checks".

It is fitting that we are debating the funding of companies that supply arms and munitions that are used in human rights abuses in Gaza. The Parliament has previously voted for a ceasefire, and I hope that, today, a clear message will be sent in support of international law, and that it is unacceptable that Government agencies should give financial support to companies that supply arms that risk being used as part of multiple and repeated contraventions of international law, which have been, and are, taking place in Gaza and the West Bank.

With regard to the specific companies to which the motion refers, we know that Leonardo manufactured 30 Aermacchi M-345 aircraft for the Israeli Air Force, and that Raytheon supplies smart bombs for the IDF—weapons that are among the most lethal targeting technologies to have been used on Gaza's so-called safe zones. We know that those companies are among a string of US arms firms that have seen dramatic jumps in their stock prices from the onset of the war. Indeed, executives of those firms have described the past 14 months as a business opportunity.

Not a single company has failed any of the 199 human rights checks that Scottish Enterprise has conducted since 2021, nor indeed any of the 178 checks that were conducted between 2019 and 2020. That includes companies, for example, that the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights has named for potential complicity in unlawful air strikes in Yemen.

The test that the UK Government applies in relation to arms export licences is whether the use of a component is likely to lead to the abuse of human rights or to be used in a way that is in breach of international law. We know that the targeting of civilians and of facilities such as hospitals, the bombardment of Gaza, the illegal settlements in the West Bank, the use of white phosphorus and the blockade of essential supplies are among the breaches of international law that have taken place in Gaza and the West Bank.

According to responses to freedom of information requests from Amnesty International, in the due diligence process that Scottish Enterprise carries out, the level of checks that it performs on a company is measured only against

"the level of financial support it receives, rather than the company's involvement with or links to human rights abuses."

That due diligence process seems to go against the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights and neglects consideration of the end use of components, which is the central issue. I listened with interest to Richard Lochhead's contribution in that regard.

I very much hope that, as a result of the debate and the focus that it has brought to the issue, the Government will ensure that there is a full review of the due diligence processes that are used by Scottish Enterprise. The Parliament must be clear in the message that we send that we will honour international law and that we stand in support of human rights and with the people of Palestine.

15:34

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, although it is a shame that we do not have more time this afternoon to spend on this important topic, which is arguably the most important topic of our time.

As other members have done, I condemn the Israeli Government's actions and military operations since 7 October 2023, and indeed a lot of what it did in the region before then.

The attacks on 7 October 2023 were, of course, brutal and horrific, but the devastating, horrifically immoral and unethical, and totally disproportionate military response by the Israeli Government and the IDF will scar this time in history for many decades to come. That response has had a devastating impact on the people of Palestine. According to the UN, 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in that time. That is the equivalent of half my constituents. Mention has been made of the fact that the numbers involved are hard to relate to. We are talking about the equivalent of half the people in one of our constituencies, and tens of thousands more have been injured.

All those events are subject to legal consideration. I pay tribute to the Scottish head of legal for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, who has been documenting the situation throughout the current period. As was articulated by my colleague Humza Yousaf, who is sitting in front of me and who has shown tremendous leadership on the issue not just domestically but internationally, we must hope that we see a time when international law is upheld. International law—along with humanity, negotiation and mediation—is the only mechanism through which a resolution can be achieved to the most challenging issue not only of the 20th and 21st centuries, but of times past.

The ceasefire is welcome in providing a breathing space, but President Trump's proposals are—it is hard to put this into words—unconscionable. In the 21st century, we have a President of the United States who is proposing ethnic cleansing. How can we even contemplate that? It creates such a sense of hopelessness.

However, we have seen on the streets of Scotland the solidarity that there is with those who are suffering. I pay tribute to all my constituents who have shown solidarity with those who have been affected. I also pay tribute to all those in my party and the Scottish Government, and across the political spectrum, who have been calling for a ceasefire since the period of conflict began and who have condemned the disproportionate actions and the immorality of Hamas and the IDF.

It has been clarified that the funding that is provided by Scottish Enterprise does not go towards the manufacture of munitions, but I understand why there is a focus on making sure that Scottish Enterprise stringently abides by that position.

Lorna Slater: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude.

Ben Macpherson: As the MSP for the area where the Leonardo facility is located, I will continue to engage with the company to make sure that, in future, it has no direct engagement with the IDF, which is engaging in abhorrent acts to our fellow human beings elsewhere in the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

15:38

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I have been moved by the thoughtful contributions by members on all sides of the chamber. I, too, pay tribute to all the people who have been needlessly killed in the tragedy of war, which intensified in Israel and Palestine after the horrific pogrom of 7 October 2023, and in the brutal and disproportionate campaign of retaliation against the Palestinian people that amounts to collective punishment. It was welcome that the British Government suspended the processing of arms export licences to Israel in September last year.

It is also important that, at all levels of government, we uphold our international obligations. Prior to my election to Parliament, I worked as an account manager at Scottish Enterprise, and I agree that Scottish Enterprise should carry out appropriate due diligence checks so that we can be sure that state aid is not used to facilitate defence sales to states that are suspected of committing war crimes. The process should be reviewed to minimise the risk that products that are manufactured in and exported from Scotland might be used in breaches of the law of armed conflict.

We should also consider the products that the UK Ministry of Defence and UK defence contractors import from Israel. We should look to reduce those imports in favour of strengthening our domestic industrial base.

The motion that is before us fails to acknowledge the importance of the aerospace, defence, maritime and security industries in Scotland. They support highly skilled, well-paid and unionised advanced manufacturing jobs and they have a central role in our national defence and the collective defence of the NATO alliance. All the state aid that is in question today has supported projects that do just that.

The state-of-the-art applied shipbuilding academy at Scotstoun in Glasgow, for example, received a grant of £360,000 from Scottish Enterprise. That new facility will allow apprentices to gain hands-on experience with mock-up ships, as well as giving them access to cutting-edge

STEM innovation labs. The shipbuilding academy is intended not only to be an asset of BAE Systems—a company that I worked for—but to be a facility that will be open to the entire shipbuilding industry in Scotland and to its wider supply chain. It will guarantee a thriving shipbuilding industry in this country for years to come.

Crucially, the applied shipbuilding academy will bolster national capabilities and support the continued growth of the largest manufacturing industry in Glasgow and in the west of Scotland, which supports more than 3,200 jobs. The shipyards in Govan and Scotstoun in Glasgow have operated since 1864 and 1906 respectively. In that time, they have never exported any naval ships to the state of Israel. Green members should be careful not to demonise shipyard workers in an industry that is synonymous with Glasgow and critical to our national security. As the member for Eastwood mentioned, the abuse of apprentice shipbuilding workers outside the Parliament last year was shameful.

Before Christmas, I visited Govan shipyard—I note that it is in the constituency of the Rt Hon member for Glasgow Pollok—for the steel-cutting ceremony of HMS Sheffield. I encourage members to visit the Glasgow shipyards and see the work that they are undertaking for the Royal Navy. That work is critical to our national security in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday,

"European countries must do more for their own defence"

in the face of increasing aggression from Russia and other expansionist regimes, which have scant regard for national sovereignty or international rules of co-operation to preserve peace. Now, 35 years on from the end of the cold war, is the time not to weaken our defence industry—the logical end point of the Green motion—but to strengthen our defence capabilities and industrial base. Although the Scottish Government should ensure that there is no link between Scottish Enterprise grant funding and defence exports to Israel and other states that are suspected of war crimes, Scottish Enterprise should absolutely be playing its part in bolstering our aerospace, defence, maritime and security industries, which support thousands of jobs and underpin our sovereign defence capability.

15:42

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Two events in the past week say more about the conflict in the middle east than any speech or motion today does. The first was the sickening sight that was paraded on our television screens of the tiny black coffins of Kfir and Ariel Bibas, who were nine months old and four years old when they were kidnapped and murdered by Hamas. Their lifeless bodies were paraded around the streets by gun-toting masked men. How very brave of them. How very brave of those men, brandishing their guns and covering their faces—they were too afraid to show the world what a monster really looks like. The deaths of Kfir and Ariel, along with that of their mother, Shiri, added to the number of 1,200 Israelis killed on or after 7 October 2023.

They say that the smallest coffins are the heaviest—how true. The coffins are even smaller and heavier yet in Gaza. In the past seven days alone, six babies have died from the conditions that they found themselves in. Night-time temperatures are plummeting in Palestine, and the tiny hearts of those babies gave up. That is no surprise, as they are living in tents and the healthcare system has collapsed. They are added to the grim total of 50,000 killed in Gaza.

What do those people have in common? They are children, they are innocent, they did not elect Netanyahu and they did not join Hamas, but they are all dead. Today's debate might be an economic one, but nowhere in the motion is any of that horror acknowledged. There is no call for peace. There is no acceptance of the horrors of 7 October. Fundamentally—but unsurprisingly—there is no mention of Israel's very right to exist at all. One has to question that.

I have made myself clear in the past, but if I was not clear enough, I will do so again. I am neither pro-Israel nor pro-Palestine, as many would hope me to be. I am pro-both. The reason for that is that I am pro-peace. I believe that we are all human. No one chooses to be kidnapped from their homes, just as no one chooses to have their child shot by a sniper.

The fact that successive UK Governments—Conservative and then Labour—support Israel's right to defend its very existence, to the tune of less than 1 per cent of Israel's entire defence imports, is something that is up for valid debate, whatever our views on that. Let us be honest—the United Kingdom shares some responsibility in this whole sorry saga, which stretches way back to before the Balfour declaration. Whether we like it or not, the defence industry exists, not just in Scotland or the UK but across Europe and the world. It is a £100 billion industry in the UK.

What does the Green Party want to do about it? What is it suggesting? Is it the mass expulsion of all those companies—Leonardo, BAE, Babcock, Raytheon and Thales? Does the Green Party want to simply shut down the arms industry? If that is the case—if that is its ideological view—that is fine. However, if that is the case, as has been mentioned, how do we arm Ukraine? How do we arm our partners?

We cannot have selective morality when it comes to the arms industry and pick and choose the political campaigns that we do or do not support. We must be honest with people on that.

I will make this final point. Let us be honest with one another—the motion is deep rooted in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement; the masks slipped early on in some of the contributions that we heard. The motion says, "let us not do business with Israel on arms," but what it wants to say is, "let us not do business with Israel at all." Let us not pretend otherwise. [*Interruption*.] I do not know why you are applauding, Ross Greer, because it is that sort of movement that led to the situation in 1930s Germany and the Holocaust, and you should be ashamed of it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members.

Jamie Greene: I close by asking members to put their hand up if they are uncomfortable with what has happened and with the actions of the IDF in the past year and a half. I will be the first to put my hand up. However, I also ask members to be honest with the world and to put their hand up if they question Israel's very right to exist.

15:47

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): I will begin by acknowledging the concerns that have been raised during the debate. The issues before us—the role of public funding and the gravity of what has happened in Gaza—are important and I take them very seriously.

I recognise the deep emotional and ethical considerations that have been expressed today, and I thank members from across the chamber for contributing so powerfully to the conversation. Very few of us in here can even begin to imagine the depths of the horrors that we have touched on this afternoon.

The events of 7 October 2023 and the situation that has occurred in Gaza since then are devastating. Far too many innocent men, women and children have lost their lives. Images are imprinted on my mind of small, lifeless bodies—in many cases, the same size as or smaller than my toddler—that have been recovered from rubble, each of them precious. They are just as precious as the small, lifeless bodies of the Bibas family toddlers, who were returned to their families in black coffins. I was struck by something that Humza Yousaf said recently, which captures it better than anything else that I have seen. He said:

"Every child in this world—Israeli, Palestinian, or any other nationality—deserves to grow up loved, safe, and happy. There can never be any justification for kidnapping or killing children."

Ben Macpherson and Maggie Chapman talked about the impossibility of grappling with the sheer numbers who have been killed. I visualise my daughter and imagine the pain of her death thousands of times over.

It is those children, both Israeli and Palestinian, who are the reason why Scotland stands firm in our commitment to peace and human rights. We have consistently called for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza and recognition of a two-state solution—the route to lasting peace in the region. That is why the amendment lodged by the Scottish Government reiterates our support for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid, while also recognising our position that we do not believe that public funding should be spent on the manufacture of weapons or munitions.

Despite that, I understand and recognise the questions that have been posed about the process that Scottish Enterprise operates in relation to human rights due diligence in awarding any funding. That is why we support the line in the motion that calls on us to review and ensure that the most robust checks are in place with regard to products' end use. I understand Lorna Slater's position that we have a responsibility to use all our public funding in line with our values and in line with international law.

Although the fact has been covered already that the export and sale of arms are reserved matters, the limitations of Scotland's devolved powers do not prevent us from being vocal and active in calling for an end to arms sales that contribute to the killing and suffering of civilians.

I urge members to support our amendment, which reflects our unwavering commitment to a two-state solution for lasting peace in the middle east and to no public funding for the supply of arms to Israel.

Humza Yousaf talked about a new world order—or, rather, disorder, as it is. It poses a stark choice for us as a Government and for each of us as parliamentarians. We are accountable for our actions. The choices that we make will lead to either peace or greater disorder.

For the sake of the children, I call on us all to stand side by side in their defence.

15:51

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): In January 2024, six-year-old Hind Rajab and six members of her family were fleeing Gaza city. Their car was bombed by Israeli soldiers. That initial bombing killed her uncle, her aunt and three of her cousins. Hind and one cousin survived. They called the Red Crescent for help while they

were still under attack. The Israelis then murdered the surviving cousin, leaving Hind, a six-year-old, trapped in a car for hours on the phone to the Red Crescent, surrounded by the dead bodies of her family members. She and the paramedics who were sent to rescue her were then murdered by Israeli soldiers, who attempted to cover that up. Their crimes were not covered up; they were reported on widely and have been proven beyond dispute.

Hind Rajab was one of tens of thousands of people who have been murdered by the soldiers of apartheid Israel.

The Green motion today is simple. Companies that are arming a country that is clearly and proudly committing war crimes and crimes against humanity should not receive a penny of Scottish public money. That is not a new proposal. I met the minister to discuss actions in that area last year, I have raised it at First Minister's question time, as have other Scottish Green MSPs, and I exchanged letters with Humza Yousaf about it during his time as First Minister.

It is an area in which the Scottish Government can take action. The vast majority of what we are discussing is reserved, but how the Scottish Government and its agencies spend their money is for them to decide on. The Scottish Government would not fund companies that produce pornography, for example, so those kinds of policy decisions can clearly be made.

The Government must understand why, from the outside, it looks more than just a bit hypocritical to have such similar rhetoric when it comes to the crimes that Israel and Russia have committed but for its actions in regard to those countries to be so different. There is an unequivocal call on businesses to cease trade with Russia, but there is not even a call against or a ban on public procurement or grants for the companies that the United Nations has identified as being complicit in Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.

The policy distinction that the Scottish Government is trying to draw between the funding of the manufacture of weapons and munitions and the funding of other activities by those companies is a semantic one. There is no moral distinction between funding the manufacture of bombs and funding a bigger bomb factory, as the Scottish Government did when it funded the expansion of Chemring's Scottish facility.

I admit that I am struggling with the Labour amendment, because there is so much in it that I agree with and welcome and that I am glad that Labour has brought to this debate. However, I struggle in particular with the first line about the UK Government's suspension of arms export licences to Israel, because, in reality, only 30 of around 350 of those export licences have been suspended.

I also struggle with the amendment because the leader of the Labour Party—the UK's Prime Minister—explicitly endorsed Israeli war crimes against Palestine. He endorsed the cutting off of water and electricity and the collective punishment of Palestinians. He will not even recognise the state of Palestine.

However, I welcome Labour's proposal to review the system of human rights checks, which no arms dealer has failed since their introduction. I am glad that Katy Clark put on record the reality of what companies such as Leonardo and Raytheon, which have facilities in Scotland, manufacture and what that equipment and those weapons do to Palestinians, Yemenis and Kurds in Turkey.

The Conservatives have given what we would expect—a robust defence of arms dealers, regardless of what they do and who they do it to—but I cannot help but feel that they would not have done that if we were talking about Russia, and if we had swapped out references to Israel for Russia or the references to Palestine for Ukraine. That brings us back to the hypocrisy.

I certainly will not take any lessons from the Conservatives about standing in solidarity with Ukraine, given that Lorna Slater and I have been sanctioned by the Kremlin—indeed, that happened on the same day that Craig Hoy accused us of having sympathy with Russia.

Craig Hoy: Will Ross Greer give way?

Ross Greer: No, thank you—Mr Hoy had his opportunity.

I respect Jackson Carlaw and the contribution that he has made a number of times in this Parliament, but what I really struggle with today is that he left me with the impression that he thinks that the past 15 months were a price worth paying for Israel's existence, because there was not a shred of empathy for Palestinians in his speech—not a shred of it—which I find to be absolutely tragic in these circumstances.

Jamie Greene asked us what our end goal is in this debate. Our end goal is for not a penny of Scottish public money to go to arms dealers who are funding a genocide and equipping countries that are committing genocide. It is that simple. We simply want international law to be adhered to.

That takes us back to the difference between rhetoric and action, which is where my frustration lies with the Scottish Government's actions. The Scottish National Party's MPs at Westminster have raised many of the most critical questions of both the previous and the current UK Governments, such as the fact that the latter has

suspended less than 10 per cent of arms export licences to Israel. However, at the same time, the Scottish Government met Israel's ambassador—it would not have met Russia's ambassador—it will not ban companies that the UN has identified as complicit in an illegal occupation from receiving grants or contracts in Scotland and it continues to give public money to arms dealers.

Any human rights check that Raytheon can pass is not worth the paper on which it is written. I cannot understand the position that a number of members have taken today. They say that they do not believe that we should be funding companies that could be involved in a breach of international law. How much more evidence do we need, colleagues, that those companies are involved in breaches of international law? The state of Israel could not have made more explicit what it is doing, and we know who equips it. It is Raytheon. It is Leonardo. It is BAE Systems. It is all the others.

Today is our opportunity to show that solidarity means action, not just words. To stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine and with the victims of any genocide anywhere in the world, we must cut off the supply of public money to the arms dealers who are fuelling these horrific crimes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow for a changeover of front-bench teams, should they wish to do so.

Rail Fares

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16572, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on cheaper rail fares. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:59

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I acknowledge up front that bringing ScotRail into public ownership has been a welcome move by the Scottish Government that has put the public interest at the heart of our rail services.

However, the cost of rail travel is now the critical issue for travellers. It is time for the Government to intervene, to use its power and to act in the public interest to deliver a more affordable service. We all see from our inboxes that rail travel is now too expensive for too many people, and that ticketing is complex and confusing. The fact that rail fares are even higher in England is cold comfort to our struggling constituents, who want to see action here in Scotland.

The return of peak fares in September last year has seen day ticket prices more than doubling in some cases. A peak-time return from Perth to Glasgow Queen Street station will set a passenger back £40.10, compared with an off-peak ticket costing £20. Meanwhile, people heading from Stirling to Waverley station will pay £19.90 on a peak journey, compared with £12.10 for an off-peak one.

Those are prices before ScotRail's above-inflation increase to ticket prices of 3.8 per cent. That increase in ticket prices will outstrip percentage increases in many pay packets next month, including those of staff who work here in the Parliament. Unless the Scottish Government revisits the decision to increase rail fares, passengers between Perth and Glasgow Queen Street, for example, will pay £41.62. Tickets that are already too expensive will become even more costly at a time when household budgets are already stretched. Those are eye-watering amounts of money for commuters to be shelling out. Peak-time ticket costs are an unfair tax on working people, and they must be scrapped.

Although I acknowledge that some better deals are now available, such as flexipasses and season passes, those all require commuters to dig deep into their pockets up front. In a post-Covid world in which patterns of work are no longer fixed, investing in a season pass will not be an attractive, convenient or affordable option for many people. However, for many, it will be the only option that

they have, if they want to get the train. Of course, flexipasses are not even available on all routes, which means that some passengers are barred from cheaper fares simply because of where they live and the journeys that they make.

The cost crisis has not happened overnight: the price of public transport has been steadily rising for years and years. Over the past decade, we have seen an increase of nearly 70 per cent in the cost of public transport, compared with an increase in motoring costs of only around a third. There is a widening gap between people who drive and those who do not or cannot drive, which will structurally build in car dependency for people in the working-age population who are ineligible for concessionary fare schemes. Working people on low incomes will continue to find their monthly outgoings being dominated by transport costs as much as, if not more than, they are by energy costs.

Bus services might be a cheaper option, and I welcome the constructive agreement that we have reached with the Scottish Government on a future bus fare cap pilot scheme. However, buses do not always provide the fast connection that is needed to get to a place of work or for longer-distance travel. For people with caring responsibilities, especially women, spending hours on a bus—or, indeed, on multiple buses—at either end of a day does not fit with family life. When that is paired with a complex and unintegrated ticketing system, the cost for women of travelling by public transport adds up. It is unclear what progress has been made towards delivering an integrated ticketing system that would go at least some way towards reducing the complexity and cost of journeys in Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I reassure Mark Ruskell that integrated ticketing is happening, but does he recognise that 75 per cent of public sector journeys are on buses? Is it the position of the Greens that the majority of subsidies should go to rail travel at the expense of bus travel?

Mark Ruskell: No—it is not an either/or. The cabinet secretary would do well to reflect on the fact that many people use multiple modes of transport and that integration is therefore critical. It is disappointing that the Government always seems to see rail travel as being second to bus travel, when we need to invest in both. They do very different things.

For many people, the choices are stark. They either get the train and save time, but spend more money, get the bus and spend less money but waste time, or drive, if they are able to, and spend less money but waste more time sitting in traffic jams. Those are the real-world choices that are faced every morning by households, and none of those options properly serves the people or the economy. Public transport should be seamless and accessible, and it should be an affordable choice. I am concerned that rail is increasingly being seen as a premium form of travel for the few, rather than mass transit for the many.

It seems odd that, having successfully opened a new rail route to Levenmouth with the objective of tackling economic disadvantage, the Government is now allowing fare increases that will price many people out of the restored train services that communities fought for.

During our time in Government, the Scottish Greens worked to secure the removal of peak fares through the pilot scheme, which resulted in a shift in ticket prices for peak-time commuters and an average saving across all tickets of 17 per cent. Over the scheme's duration, passenger numbers increased by nearly 7 per cent, and 4 million extra journeys were switched away from private cars. Awareness of rail as a viable travel option also increased, with 80 per cent of people who participated in the scheme stating that they were now making more trips by rail.

The Scottish Government has scrapped the pilot scheme, having cited a limited increase in passenger numbers and lack of modal shift towards rail travel. However, we all know that modal shifts take longer than a year-long pilot, and that multiple interventions are needed to support it. Few people would be tempted to change their job or sell a car based on a short-term pilot to reduce rail fares, so long-term certainty is important.

The cabinet secretary's amendment indicates that the Transport for London off-peak trial's results mirror those of the Scottish scheme, and cites them as proof that our scheme somehow did not work. However, TFL's pilot ran only on Fridays for 13 weeks: it could hardly be called a trial at all.

The spiralling rail travel costs issue is not going away, and it goes way beyond what can be agreed in budget negotiations in a single parliamentary year. We need a real vision for Scotland's railways from the Government, but above-inflation increases to complex rail fares that discriminate against workers should have no place in that vision.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that rail fares in Scotland must be cheaper; regrets the decision by the Scottish Government to end the off-peak all-day pilot in September 2024, despite an increase of passenger demand by 6.8% and an average 17% cost saving to passengers; understands that expensive and complex ticketing deters passengers from choosing to travel by train; acknowledges that, in order to fulfil the Scottish Government's ambition of reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030, rail services and public transport must be cheaper and more accessible, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to reverse the

3.8% increase to rail fares coming into effect from 1 April 2025, to permanently remove peak-time rail fares, and to simplify public transport fares, through the introduction of integrated ticketing, as soon as possible.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): The Government agrees that we must make public transport accessible, affordable and reliable in order to encourage more people to travel by bus and train.

The off-peak all-day trial was bold and pioneering. It was possible only due to this Government's having brought ScotRail under public sector control and it was definitely worth trying. However, the pilot did not achieve its original aim of encouraging more people to travel by train. The analysis shows that there was only a limited increase in passenger numbers—6.8 per cent—during the pilot. Consequently, insufficient levels of income were generated to justify continuing the pilot, which mostly benefited existing passengers who have above-average incomes. Similarly, the recent fare reduction trial by Transport for London did not see passenger numbers increasing.

Only yesterday, Ross Greer warned in the budget debate that politics should not be a

"bit of a game"

in which

"we are all just here to get one up on one another".—[*Official Repor*t, 25 February 2025; c45.]

However, the Green Party's motion does exactly what he warned against. On day 1, they support the budget; on day 2, they want to drive a coach and horses through the transport resource budget and blow a £51 million hole in it.

A rail fare freeze, which the Greens did not ask for during budget negotiations, would leave us having to find an additional £11 million.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I encourage the cabinet secretary to check the record in reference to what we proposed during budget negotiations. She knows that the Scottish Greens have made a range of proposals to fund every policy that we have put forward in the Parliament.

Our motion is consistent with our party's policy over a long period of time. We are trying to be constructive, so the cabinet secretary is disrespectful in accusing us of playing political games when we are simply abiding by our party's values.

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry, but I asked my officials to check whether introducing a 3.8 per cent increase and rail fare freeze were part of budget discussions, and I was reassured that they were not. If he adds the additional £11 million to the £40 million that off-peak all-day fares would cost, he can see how it becomes unaffordable.

Passenger journey numbers on our publicly owned train services have increased by 4.5 per cent for each four-week period this year, when compared with the same period last year, when the trial was running. The ability to move people, goods and services around Scotland and beyond is a key building block in growing the economy, leisure and tourism, and in making our nation more prosperous.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I have limited time.

The 2025-26 transport budget focuses on that, but it also focuses on funding actions that will help to cut carbon emissions. Decisions on how much is needed to support rail travel are carefully calibrated—we need to balance the necessary revenue contribution from passengers, which equates to around 35 per cent of train operator costs, against the already significant level of public investment that is required from the transport resource budget to operate ScotRail.

I am very mindful of the costs to rail passengers and am seeking to keep fares affordable and accessible. That is why the increase in rail fares in Scotland from April will be only 3.8 per cent, which is below the United Kingdom Labour Government's increase of 4.6 per cent.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I have limited time.

We are seeking to keep fares down for regular passengers and commuters through the 20 per cent discount on all ScotRail season tickets—weekly, monthly and annual—until the end of September 2025. I have also permanently improved the value of a flexipass to allow 12 single journeys to be made within 60 days for the price of 10. That provides passengers with a 32 per cent saving, compared with the cost of six any-time return tickets, so the Glasgow to Edinburgh return fare becomes £21.25. Super off-peak return fares have also returned, so there are even cheaper fares on offer for people who can travel at less-busy times.

Last month, ScotRail announced the extension of a digital tap-and-pay trial, which means that passengers who use the app will be charged the best-value fare automatically, based on the day and time when they travel. If they make the same journey regularly, Monday to Sunday, their fare will be capped at the weekly season ticket price.

Paul Sweeney: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is about to conclude.

Fiona Hyslop: I apologise to Mr Sweeney.

Those price and fare innovations are designed to encourage people to switch from car to train and to simplify journey planning. They are the thoughtful and well-planned interventions that we need, whereas the poorly timed proposals in the motion sadly seem to be more about defeating the Government than about having a rational and creative debate about funding and support for rail travel in Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-16572.3, to leave out from first "fares" to end and insert:

"and bus fares must be affordable to encourage the use of public transport; welcomes that rail passenger numbers, since the off-peak all-day pilot ended, have continued to grow, with demand in each four-week period being an average of 4.5% more than the same period in 2024, when the trial was in place; notes that the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 includes provision for a pilot of a £2 bus fare cap; recognises that the results of the off-peak all-day pilot mirror the results of Transport for London's similar trial, which also saw no significant increase in travel as a result of lower fares; further recognises that reinstating off-peak fares all day from 1 April 2025 would cost up to £40 million of resource funding, which would require a commensurate reduction elsewhere in the Transport portfolio's resource budget; recognises that not implementing a fares rise in 2025 would require an additional £11 million, which would require a commensurate reduction elsewhere in the Transport portfolio's resource budget, and believes that any further consideration of off-peak fares all day should take account of the Transport Scotland and Transport for London research, be part of future budget planning and must also consider progress on bus affordability, availability and reliability across Scotland."

16:11

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): We know that an efficient transport network that delivers value for money for taxpayers is essential for economic and social development across Scotland. However, under the Scottish National Party, public transport has become unreliable and far too expensive. Unless considerable action is taken, our public transport network will only continue to decline.

Given the topic of the debate, we would be forgiven for thinking that the Scottish Greens had pushed for cheaper rail fares in their budget negotiations with the SNP. However, a few seconds ago, the cabinet secretary assured us that those discussions did not take place, so it is notable that rail fares were not mentioned in the negotiations. In return for supporting the SNP's Scottish budget, the Greens secured a number of transport concessions—such as a year-long regional trial of bus fares being capped at £2 and free interisland ferry travel for young island residents—that fail to deliver for hard-working Scots and allow the Greens to continue their attack on road users.

I think that we can all agree that cheaper rail fares in Scotland would contribute to net zero goals, provide better connectivity and help the ailing economy. In the cabinet secretary's recent draft transport plan, there are boasts that ScotRail has been brought into public ownership and that

"6 new stations have opened up across Scotland since 2020."

However, there were 34 per cent fewer passenger journeys in 2022-23 than there were in 2019, which suggests that many people have shunned ScotRail.

Fiona Hyslop: I think that Sue Webber would acknowledge that there has been a great deal of hybrid working, with people who have been working from home not using any form of travel. Does she recognise the figures that I have just given? There has been a 4.5 per cent increase between 2024 and 2025, whereas the figures that she quoted are from back in 2022-23, when we were recovering from the pandemic.

Sue Webber: I am certain that, if we had fair and less expensive fares, passenger numbers would be even greater.

Despite the reduced number of passenger journeys, ScotRail is increasing its ticket prices by almost 4 per cent in the forthcoming financial year. That is on the back of an 8.7 per cent increase last year, which means that there will be a more than 12 per cent increase over two years. The price rise will affect all services that are operated by ScotRail, and it will mean that an any-time return ticket from Glasgow to Edinburgh will now cost £32.60. We heard that a flexipass might reduce the cost to £21, but that is still an eye-watering price.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Sue Webber: No—sorry. We are short of time.

Unsurprisingly, only one fifth of passengers think that ScotRail delivers good value for money. Polling found that 46.4 per cent of Scots thought that rail fares were too expensive.

The SNP's nationalisation of ScotRail has been a failure by any and every measure. Nicola Sturgeon promised passengers that Scotland's rail service would improve with Government ownership, yet things are manifestly worse than they were when ScotRail was under Abellio. Taxpayer subsidies, ticket prices and complaints have all soared while the number of services and the number of passengers using them have plummeted.

The just transition paper looks like another ploy to make the SNP look as if it is doing something while doing little—except squandering more public money. There are no projects, no priorities, no timescales and certainly no costings. The Scottish Government receives more money per capita for public services than the rest of the UK. It is high time that the SNP showed more common sense and used that money to give the public the vital services that they deserve at a cost that they can afford.

I move amendment S6M-16572.1, to insert at end:

"; notes that the operation of ScotRail has cost £600 million more compared to when it was in private hands, and that rail fares also increased by 8.7% in the 2024-25 financial year; calls on the Scottish Government to deliver value for money for taxpayers, which is a significant concern for rail users; urges the Scottish Government to increase access to ScotRail by opening new railway stations, in areas such as Winchburgh, Cove and Newtonhill, and calls on the Scottish Government to consider how a nationalised rail service can provide for all people in Scotland."

16:16

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Scottish Labour agrees that rail fares in Scotland must be more affordable and that rail travel must be an attractive alternative to car use. We are committed to the removal of peak fares as the first step in making rail travel more accessible and affordable, so that we can deliver a rail service that works for passengers and increase patronage.

I recognise the need for investment in ScotRail. We need to make progress on rolling stock replacement and we need a long-term investment plan for upgrading rail infrastructure, which will require the Government and private businesses to work in partnership. However, increasing the burden on passengers at this point in time places downward pressure on passenger numbers as the gulf in affordability between rail travel and the alternatives grows. The ending of the pilot removal of peak fares came between two ticket price increases, so passengers were hit with three price increases in just over a year. Before drawing comparisons with the rest of the UK, the cabinet secretary might want to reflect on the inflation-busting 8.7 per cent increase in prices that we had in Scotland last year.

Greater reliability is key to increased patronage and revenue, but, if prices continue to rise—particularly in the face of service performance issues—people will just be unwilling or unable to pay them. Household budgets are challenging, and the reality is that the car is, far too often, the more affordable option. If we are serious about reducing car use and related emissions, the approach of making other travel options more and more expensive by comparison is counterproductive.

The plethora of restrictive cheaper deals is confusing and complicated, and pressing ahead with ticket office closures does not help passengers to navigate the system. The process of how and when peak periods are applied is inconsistent and unnecessarily complex. The cabinet secretary has been keen to highlight the flexipass as a money-saving option for passengers, but it does not apply to all stations or routes. Indeed, two of Scotland's cities—Stirling and Perth—were added to the scheme only recently.

The Government's amendment suggests that, since the pilot ended, passenger numbers have continued to grow. However, the reasons for that can be questioned. For example, are fewer service reductions taking place? Is that comparison really like for like? Can we expect that trend to continue in the face of ever-increasing fares?

Transport Scotland's analysis of the peak fares pilot is one of the most inconclusive that I have read. Data was routinely not collected, particularly at busy stations, which suggests that the 6.8 per cent increase could be an underestimate. The costs are not exactly clear, but, if the top figure of £40 million is accepted and the Scottish Government said that it required a 10 per cent increase to be cost neutral, almost 7 per cent is not far off. Although the pilot ran for a year, it was not actively promoted, so how would someone who did not regularly use the train know that the offer was available? The majority of the pilot also took place during a period of industrial dispute and a reduced timetable—hardly favourable conditions.

Post-pandemic, there is an argument that peak fares are increasingly unfair. Workers who have to physically attend work—those who are in retail or service delivery—must still travel at those peak times while the "middle-class passenger" whom the Transport Scotland report identifies as benefiting often has more flexibility to work at home and avoid travelling at peak times. It is time to remove the inconsistent and unfair application of varying prices that makes people pay a premium for travelling to work by rail.

Although we are focusing on rail fares today, the Government's amendment also mentions bus provision and asks us to consider progress on buses. However, the progress that it has made is extremely limited. Rather than improving services for passengers, the Scottish Government has overseen a reduction in routes. The number of bus routes has plummeted by 44 per cent since 2006, although many were critical for rural and peripheral urban areas. Before the bus partnership

fund was paused, in 2024, it had allocated hardly 5 per cent of the £500 million that was intended for infrastructure improvements. The zero emission bus challenge fund is now scrapped, and there is glacial progress on franchising.

The bus and train services that are being delivered to the public are far from good enough. Getting them right would mean more people using public transport and a reduced reliance on cars. However, to achieve that, the services must be reliable and affordable.

I move amendment S6M-16572.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises that ScotRail requires investment and sustainable funding, but believes that passengers should not carry the burden of this while services are underperforming."

16:20

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to reply on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. We believe that rail needs to be affordable, that ticketing is too complex and that new stations are needed to connect more communities. We are ambitious for rail in Scotland.

It is regrettable that the debate comes less than 24 hours after the Scottish Parliament passed the 2025-26 budget. As the Greens, the Government and others have acknowledged, my party approached the budget talks constructively. We secured big changes for the communities that we represent and for Scotland as a whole, and we are willing to sit down and talk through ideas. That is why it is hard to understand the timing of the debate. Less than 24 hours after tax and spending plans were agreed, it is not serious or credible to ask the Parliament to back a package of changes that would cost £50 million this year. There is no indication of where that money should come from.

If the proposal is that the money should be moved around in the transport budget, that could mean taking money away from buses, ferries, walking and cycling improvements and fixing potholes. I have a particular interest in the delivery of infrastructure upgrades for areas that are less well connected—the rural and island communities, who need working, reliable ferries and progress on fixed links. I imagine that all parties would be willing to look at proposals if they were brought back to the table for the next budget, in which policies could be properly costed, funding identified and priorities balanced.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to get cars and lorries off the roads, moving passengers and freight on to our railways as part of a package to tackle the climate crisis. Getting more people and goods on to trains will reduce congestion, improve air quality and help to tackle the climate emergency. It means connecting more communities, too. In government, we paved the way for the Borders railway and a station for Laurencekirk. However, the Conservatives' amendment overlooks Newburgh, in Fife, where my colleague Willie Rennie has fought tirelessly for a new station.

In the long term, we need to decarbonise our planes, ferries and cars. Right now, we should also do what we can to ensure that, where public transport is available, it is a safe, feasible and convenient way to get from A to B. I know that there were concerns about the previous peak fares pilot and whether the Government did enough to get behind it. There is a question about the extent to which it was hampered by the pay row that culminated in the chaotic emergency timetable that plagued services last summer, when cancellations and overcrowding were rampant. The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers was among those who questioned the methodology that was used to evaluate the trial. Thousands of real-world experiences illustrate the barrier that the return of peak fares represents for commuters.

On greater affordability, reforms to ticket incentives and discounts could drive up passenger uptake. Complicated rail fares are also a barrier to passengers. We have tiered super off-peak, off-peak and peak fares, which are further complicated by their use at differing times along parallel routes. Passengers find it difficult to know which ticket will best get them from A to B, and the terms and conditions are often complicated. Although cheaper fares might be available, calculating them and finding time to research alternatives is another barrier to rail travel. It is also difficult to be 100 per cent certain that a ticket is the right one until a rail staff member confirms that. Passengers would rather avoid the stress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

16:24

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): For a moment, Presiding Officer, imagine yourself in the shoes of my constituent. You need to get to work. It is rush hour. You check the train price—it is way more expensive than off peak and there is no flexipass option. You prefer the train: it is the right thing to do for the climate and it is less stressful than driving. You can catch up on emails or you can take a moment for yourself, and you do not have to worry about parking. It should be the easiest choice, but when rail fares keep rising, how are you supposed to afford that choice?

People in my region face that cost benefit dilemma weekly. A worker in Elgin has to pay £24 for a peak return, which is 52 per cent more than if they were travelling off-peak. A nurse in Oban going to training in Glasgow will pay £54, which is more than a third more than the off-peak alternative. How about a tourist staying in Aberdeen who wants to go to Inverness? To make a day trip worth it, they will have to pay £70, which is £32 more than the off-peak fare. In all those cases, Presiding Officer, you would hardly begrudge them driving, if they have the option, or not travelling at all.

Let us imagine the alternative. With affordable fares, more people travel, which means busier high streets, more customers in shops, cafes and businesses, and more access to jobs. If rail is reliable and affordable, people can take up work further afield without the financial pressure of running a car. There is also more tourism, as visitors can choose trains over rental cars, spreading tourism and spending beyond the central belt. More people using rail means more revenue to invest in infrastructure improvements. The bottom line is this: if we do not get more people on to public transport, we will not hit our climate targets. Audit Scotland has already said that Scotland is unlikely to meet its goal of cutting car use by 20 per cent by 2030. Why? Because we are not making rail a real alternative to driving.

Nowhere is that picture more stark than in the Highlands and Islands. Right now, the Highland main line is still mostly single track. That means that a journey from Inverness to Edinburgh can take more than three and a half hours, which is the same amount of time as in the Victorian era. Driving is faster. If we are serious about growing our economy, creating jobs and tackling climate change, we need to make fares affordable and improve journey times. Instead of supporting that, the Scottish Government is doing the opposite. It has brought back peak fares, which the Scottish Greens scrapped when we were in government, and it is hiking fares by 3.8 per cent in April.

The Government asks why more people are not choosing the train. The real question that it should be asking is: why are we making it harder for them? We need real action: no fare increases this year; a permanent end to peak-time rail fares; simple integrated ticketing across all public transport; electrification and dualling of the Highland main line and other lines so that trains can compete with driving; and investment to move freight on to rail.

Climate action is not about telling people what to do; it is about making the right choice—the easiest choice. Let us stop punishing the people who want to take the train and treating rail like a luxury when it should be the obvious affordable option. Let us get this right—not in five years, not after another price hike, but now.

16:28

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I will start with a bit of consensus. I think that everyone agrees that we want rail travel to be affordable. We want to encourage more people to use public transport, and most of us in the room want public services to be in public hands and for the public good, not for the benefit of private shareholders.

We want those things because they bring tangible benefits to people in our society. We need those things because people have to travel and we face a climate crisis. In order to deliver on those shared objectives, we have to make choices based on the available evidence. The SNP Government moved to nationalise ScotRail. We walked the walk while others just talked about it on a loop. Too many people felt that, in private hands, the service was not delivering for them as described, and that our public transport was lining the pockets of unaccountable shareholders. That was not a just or sustainable situation. The SNP Government therefore began a project to deliver a public transport system that is for the benefit of the public and accountable to the taxpayer.

It is absolutely true that people are struggling with the cost of living. That limits the choices that are available to individuals and families. People who are struggling often do not perceive public transport to be affordable. That is why the Scottish Government has kept the price rise as low as practicable while ensuring that we can maintain services and continue to invest in infrastructure. Through that investment, the Borders railway has come back, the Levenmouth infrastructure has opened up, and the Airdrie and Shotts lines, which run through my constituency, have been electrified.

I sympathise greatly with a number of the points that Green colleagues have made. We want many of the same outcomes, but we have to demonstrate that the policy is financially viable, affordable and deliverable. The SNP's ambitions—as a party and as the Government—could be fulfilled if we did not have the restrictions of being in the union, but we have to live within the parameters that are set by the UK.

The removal of peak fares pilot was possible only because the Scottish Government took action to nationalise ScotRail. However, it was only a pilot—it was a trial to see how the policy would impact on behaviour. It was successful in that it saved Scots hundreds of pounds during times of economic hardship, but the review showed that the benefits mainly went to existing rail

passengers with medium to higher incomes. We did not see the 10 per cent increase in passenger numbers that would be required to ensure that the policy was economically viable and could continue. Without the policy self-financing, subsidies would cost the public as much as £40 million a year.

Claire Baker: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: I am sorry—I have only a short time left.

The pilot showed minimal impacts overall on car travel. Only 0.1 per cent of car journeys moved to rail during the pilot, and that was heavily concentrated in the central belt. The numbers simply have to improve to make the project viable and sustainable.

In 2025-26, the Scottish Government will invest £1.5 billion in rail services, rail infrastructure and maintenance of the network. We also need increased passenger numbers and reduced car journeys to make the project a viable long-term solution.

16:32

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I will use my speech today to talk about the role of public transport in general, but first let me address the motion that is before us and the specific issue of train travel.

I welcome the Greens' motion. Quite rightly, it calls for public transport fares to be cheaper and more accessible, as well as for the introduction of integrated ticketing, which was promised more than a decade ago.

A survey for *The Herald* found that almost half the public—46.4 per cent—thought that rail fares were too expensive, and that more than 40 per cent rarely travelled on ScotRail. The latest Transport Scotland figures show that the level of satisfaction with public transport in general, despite a modest rise last year, is still lower than it was pre-pandemic. I suggest to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport that charging the public more than £30 for a return fare between Scotland's two largest cities is unlikely to help to improve those figures, particularly when it is extremely difficult to purchase a flexipass at Edinburgh Waverley station.

However, if we want more people to travel via public transport, we have to make it both easy and accessible. That is not rocket science. In addition to keeping costs low, we should be doing sensible things, such as introducing smart travel cards that let passengers use all types of public transport with a single-access card. That would tick both boxes—easy and accessible.

Fiona Hyslop: The member has raised an important point about integrated ticketing. The advice that we received from our smart ticketing advisory board is that the increasing use of mobiles means that the idea of having everything on a card is probably more for the past, and that digital ticketing on phones with a common platform needs to be the way forward.

Maurice Golden: I accept that, and I take the point on board, but some people will still require a card.

Our train stations should be accessible and appealing to visit. The new Dundee station is a good example of that, but the nearby Broughty Ferry station has many issues to address. When the train arrives, only one door opens, which causes problems for everyone, but particularly for people with mobility needs. That causes delays, and subsequent connections in Dundee are missed. A refurbished cafe unit has sat empty for years, and an underpass that is used to access the south platform resembles a scene from "The Walking Dead". That is not good enough.

We need a total package to improve the usage of public transport. We also need to improve access by extending the Borders railway to Carlisle and by opening new stations in places including Winchburgh, Renfrew, Cove and Newtonhill. Likewise, let us put some life back into the railways by reopening stations and lines, such as Aberdeen's links to the central belt, in order to serve more communities. Let us dual the main Highland line, and let us get that direct line from Perth to Edinburgh. Again, those things are about making travel easier and more accessible.

Cleaner, more reliable and more affordable public transport does not just happen. It takes effort to provide options that people actually want, to make them accessible and to persuade people to use them. I want to see that happen in Scotland.

16:36

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my voluntary registration of trade union interests.

Last month, the Accounts Commission teamed up with the Auditor General to publish a hard-hitting report on the Government's wish to reduce car use in Scotland by 20 per cent by 2030. They gave evidence to the Public Audit Committee just this morning. What they found was that there had been no consultation on the setting of that target, that there is no clear or costed plan to meet that target, that there are no measurable milestones towards that target, that there are no equality impact assessments and that the Scottish Government's arrangements for monitoring and

scrutinising progress are insufficient. In fact, the failings are of such a magnitude that they conclude that it is

"not possible to see how the national target of 20 per cent will be achieved",

and that it is

"impossible to understand which interventions will have the most impact on the target or deliver the best value for money."

It is little wonder that their key message is that there is a "lack of leadership".

In the same report, the ScotRail peak fares pilot is considered as a test case. The cabinet secretary hides behind the evaluation report, but she should listen to this conclusion from the Auditor General:

"The evaluation report does not outline the impact ... reinstating peak fares will have on car use or acknowledge that it can take time to sustain positive behavioural changes, such as encouraging modal shift from car to rail use."

As the RMT union has pointed out, that the evaluation report does not assess the impact on passenger use at peak times is "a glaring omission".

Let me say this to the Government: you cannot claim to be committed to cutting car miles when you are driving up the cost to passengers of train miles. You cannot welcome COP26 to Glasgow, declare to the world a climate emergency, raise the hopes of the people and then hope that no one will notice that you have reneged on nearly every one of the undertakings that you gave and all of the goals and targets that you set. The 2030 emissions reduction target—dropped. The climate change plan—delayed. The spending commitment to active travel—axed. The bus partnership fund—discontinued. Spending on rail—down. Spending on trunk roads—up. I say to the cabinet secretary that these are contradictions that cannot be left unchallenged, that these are conclusions that cannot be denied and that this is a calamitous climate catastrophe that cannot be ignored.

One of the reasons why I am a democratic socialist is that I believe that ownership is power. The Government is the sole shareholder of ScotRail and it has the power to embark on a bold and radical course of action. If the Scottish Government chooses not to act—chooses not to exercise that power for the common good—and if that requires this Government to be led by this Parliament this afternoon, then so be it, because, in the end, it is our duty to reverse these proposed hikes in rail fares, to abolish these peak train fares once and for all and to stop the cuts to ticket offices.

We understand that the Government's present course of action does not reduce inequalities but widens them, and that needs to be noted. We must understand that we need not just words, but deeds. We need clear, urgent action and we need a compelling vision. I, for one, will be voting for the Green motion and for the Labour amendment to achieve that this afternoon.

16:40

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): First, I welcome the news that the feasibility study into extending the Borders railway will get going, after some foot dragging from the Tory and Labour UK Governments. I hope that, when the feasibility study reports to the by then re-elected SNP Scottish Government, it will study the recommendations carefully.

The Scottish Government's programme of rail modernisation has, among those of all parties, been one of the success stories of devolution, not just—

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: I am sorry—I dinna have time. Four-minute speeches are quite short.

Rail modernisation has been one of the success stories of devolution, not just in the Borders but across the country. The system has been built on and expanded hugely over the past decades. The investment programme, which has included £20 million for building the Reston railway station in Berwickshire, has led to a huge increase in passenger numbers. It is that kind of investment that drives people to choose the railway to travel, because it leads to improved and faster services, cleaner and smoother travel, and modernised and reliable rolling stock.

I appreciate the point that we all want to pay less for our train and bus tickets. If the Scottish Government had the required financial resources, it could repeat or extend the off-peak trial. However, it seems from the Government's amendment that that

"would cost up to £40 million of resource funding"

and, while our resources are subject to someone else's diktat, I believe that we need to get the biggest bang for our buck.

I look forward to the refreshed rail decarbonisation plan that will be published this year, continuing the Scottish Government's commitment to electrification across a huge swathe of our rail network.

On ticketing, customers travelling to or from Stranraer were able to take advantage of a two-for-one ticket offer from 18 November last year, with a £17.30 return for twae folk. However, there are challenges with the station's current location at

the end of the pier, and some people have mooted a reopening of the Station Street station near the town centre or a newer platform closer to the town centre. I would appreciate hearing from the cabinet secretary whether the two-for-one ticket offer boosted passenger numbers and whether there have been any discussions to review the location of the station, although I know that that is a Network Rail issue and is reserved to the UK.

Locally, there are challenges in parts of my South Scotland region. Lockerbie station relies on TransPennine Express, which is owned by the UK Department for Transport, for the vast majority of its services. ScotRail does not serve the station and has never served it. I have pursued that issue separately. Lockerbie is an important railhead for Dumfries and Galloway—it is particularly important for the whole of Galloway—but it is clear that we are being dealt a service that seems to be hitting the buffers with depressing regularity.

The ticket price of £24.70 from Lockerbie to Edinburgh or Glasgow might be challenging for many, but a look at the train service in the past week alone shows that ticket pricing is not the only problem. Last Friday, 16 of the 34 services at Lockerbie were cancelled completely and only 11—less than a third—turned up on time. The day before, 10 of the 36 services were cancelled and eight were more than half an hour late. On Sunday, only five of the scheduled 30 services turned up at the station on time.

Sue Webber: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: I am sorry, but I am not gonnae take any interventions. I am looking at the seconds that I have left.

It does not matter what the rail fare is if the trains do not turn up. I know that it is not the Scottish Government's fault as TransPennine Express is not part of its remit. Nevertheless, I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could advise me whether she will contact her counterpart at the UK Department for Transport and prod them on how the service could be improved so that people in D and G can rely on the transport that they need to get to the capital city, to Glasgow and wider areas.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): As we move to the winding-up speeches, I advise members that we have a little time in hand.

16:45

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I am really glad that we are having this debate today. Unlike the cabinet secretary, I do not think that it is a poorly timed debate—it is a debate that is urgently needed. Scottish Labour's amendment aims to strengthen the Green motion. It is important that we highlight the need for investment—sustainable investment—so that ScotRail can improve the efficiency and performance of its services.

Members across the chamber have talked about the need for reliability, affordability and accessibility, which are crucial. Given the climate emergency, our public transport services need our immediate attention. In his devastating critique, Richard Leonard said that there is no way that the Scottish Government will achieve a 20 per cent reduction in the number of car kilometres by 2030, given what is happening with our bus and rail networks.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: I would be delighted to take a sharp intervention.

Fiona Hyslop: If the issue is so immediate and so important, why did the Labour Party not put forward any of its ideas? Why did it abstain on the budget, which we voted on only yesterday, and come here today to demand urgent action?

Sarah Boyack: The cabinet secretary has previously said in the chamber that, if more money was available, she would reintroduce the removal of peak fares. An additional £5.2 billion was made available to the Scottish Government. We are not in government and it is not possible to amend individual budget lines. Last month, we made it clear that we wanted peak fares to be removed. A 10 per cent increase in usage was needed to generate enough income to enable the reduction in fares to pay for itself. We came so close—we achieved a 6.8 per cent increase in usage. I ask members to consider how many more users we could have attracted if there had been effective advertising and promotion of the opportunities of more affordable journeys on reliable trains. Reliability is crucial.

We also need to take a more joined-up approach to our rail services and to think about how people access them. That includes getting a bus to access rail services, as well as walking, cycling or being able to park at a station. As Claire Baker argued, we need joined-up provision if we are to persuade people to use our railways. The proposed changes are realistic, and they would give us a more desirable system.

The issue of simplifying the ticketing process via integrated ticketing has been raised by members across the chamber. We need to simplify transport fares and ban peak-time fares and the proposed 3.8 per cent increase in rail fares. Several members talked about the cost of rail travel. A return from Glasgow to Edinburgh costs more than £30 in peak hours. That is simply not affordable for people, and it will not persuade people to shift from their cars to travel by train.

The Scottish Government has clearly ignored the public's and the trade unions' evident desire for cheaper rail fares, as well as the campaigning for action to reduce our carbon emissions. The Scottish Government has missed nine of the past 13 climate targets. Rather than going into reverse, we need to accelerate progress if we are to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030, which is now less than five years away. As Richard Leonard said, there has been a lack of leadership and a lack of action. We have had three price hikes in just over a year, and that is disproportionately punishing those who are choosing the train over the car.

If the end goal is increased use of Scottish rail services, public transport journeys as a whole must become a more desirable option. That means that we need to have those services in the first place. Yesterday, members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee discussed the issue of subsidies for bus travel. I totally support the over-60s bus pass, which I introduced when I was the transport minister, and the under-22s bus pass. It was really interesting to dig into the detail. One of the key challenges is the reduction in the number of bus services, which impacts in particular on lower-income and rural constituents. Work needs to be done on that. Many people do not have access to rail services because there are none in their areas, and the same applies to bus services. We need more effective public transport, which will be good for our economy and is also critical for interconnectedness. We need to see progress on that.

When Scottish Labour was in government, we increased the number of stations, we approved new railway lines—Larkhall to Milngavie, Airdrie to Bathgate and Stirling to Alloa—and we made progress on the Borders railway. Those new routes with better connections made it easier for people to travel by train.

We should agree to make it easier and not harder for people to travel by train, and we should have bus services that connect with the railway sector. We need to focus on sustainable funding and investment in our rail services so that passengers do not bear the burden of the shift. Services are not as effective or as accessible as they could be and they are often cancelled. We need to make sure that the infrastructure is reliable, especially in the context of the climate emergency. An effective, popular Scottish rail service that benefits our constituents and our planet must be a goal for all of us, and we need investment in that now and in every year going forward.

I challenge the cabinet secretary on the cuts that we have seen. The cuts to buses and rail fare hikes are not good enough. I say again that the Scottish Government has had an extra £5.2 billion this year and we should have seen something a lot better.

16:51

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): It has taken me a long time to get the Greens to see sense, and it has finally happened. The motion from my good friend Mark Ruskell could well be his application to join the Scottish Conservatives—although that might not be a good career move. Everything in the motion has been our policy for years. My attempts to get various transport ministers to deliver cheaper, simpler fares and integrated ticketing may not have succeeded yet, but I live in hope. Fiona Hyslop knows that I am always here to help.

Earlier today, the Public Audit Committee looked at the Auditor General's report "Sustainable transport: Reducing car use". The report says—rightly—that

"Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas".

That makes me wonder why we would build new ferries, which pump out greenhouse gases.

The report refers to the Government's target of cutting car miles by 20 per cent from 2019 levels by 2030, and points out that, even now, with only five years to go, there is no plan to achieve that target. I would like the cabinet secretary to tell us whether the Government is still committed to that target, because it does not look as if it is. If she wants to intervene now, I will take her intervention.

Fiona Hyslop: A number of issues play a role in reducing car use, not least of which is that we must work with the other Governments in the UK on incentivisation in relation to electric vehicles. The Climate Change Committee's advice will be instrumental in our assessment of what we do to reach the target.

Graham Simpson: Well, I am none the wiser. Is anyone else? I assume from that answer that the target is scrapped—as it should be, because the Government has absolutely no chance of hitting it. The consultation paper that was published on Monday is just a way of stalling things until after next year's election.

To achieve the target, car traffic levels would have to decrease by 4.5 billion miles from the 2019 baseline, to 18 billion miles. Car traffic levels were previously at that level in 1994. That is not going to happen, and the Government should be honest about that.

However, the Government can do what we have been calling for—I am pleased to say that the Greens are now on board with it—which is to radically improve public transport. Ignoring the will

of the Parliament when we voted last year to end peak fares on the railways was a bad move. We will not get people back on the trains by making them more expensive. There has been precious little sign of things improving on ScotRail since it was nationalised but, when the Government has all the levers at its disposal, it should at least use them.

The bus system is too fragmented and confusing. I have long backed a £2 bus fare cap, similar to that introduced by the previous Conservative Government in England, rather than a pilot. We do not need a pilot, because we know that it works. Across the country, we need integrated ticketing and a smart card system, which can be on a phone. Other countries are using the technology that I have suggested to the cabinet secretary. In fact, we need only look at innovative regions in England, such as the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, to see how things can be done better.

We are way behind where we need to be. Transport Scotland has said that, to achieve the car reduction target, we would need an increase in public transport capacity of—wait for it—222 per cent. There is no sign of that happening, and it will not happen.

Sue Webber was right to mention Winchburgh in her amendment. A new station should have been planned and agreed before any of the new houses were built there. Why can we not get the simple things right?

Mark Ruskell opened the debate by saying that rail fares are “eye-watering”. He is absolutely right; others have made a similar point. I hope that Parliament backs the amendment in Sue Webber’s name, as well as the original motion, as amended. If it does, the Government will have to take notice and act on that instruction, because kicking the can down the road with yet another consultation will not do.

16:56

Fiona Hyslop: I want to make two things absolutely clear. First, I wanted the off-peak all-day trial to be successful. The SNP Government chose to extend it twice, using scarce resource funding, to make it a year-long trial. It was not just a Green policy—indeed, the decision on the second extension was made after the Greens had left government. However, the trial had limited success, and Parliament simply cannot and should not overturn a carefully crafted and agreed budget for transport this coming year, the day after agreeing to it. That budget allows for investment in services and infrastructure for rail and bus, walking, wheeling and cycling, and in road safety measures, such as the rolling out of the 20mph speed limit, which I know Mark Ruskell supports. As Beatrice Wishart pointed out, the proposals in the motion risk that investment.

Secondly, I am prepared to revisit having cheaper fares in the future, but proposals need to be properly thought through, discussed and agreed as part of budget negotiations, not outside them.

Ross Greer: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: The Government wants more people to choose to travel by public transport for work, study and leisure. That is why we will invest more than £2.6 billion to make our transport system available, affordable and accessible for all. I am pleased that passenger numbers are increasing, even after the end of the trial, by 4.5 per cent for a four-week period this year, compared with the trial period.

For the second time today, I will give way to Ross Greer.

Ross Greer: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary. She seems to suggest that Opposition parties cannot bring motions to the chamber to advocate for our own policies, if we have agreed to co-operate with the Government on the budget. This was not a Green budget; it was an SNP budget that the Greens and the Liberal Democrats were able to change sufficiently to gain our support. If the Government is suggesting that we cannot advocate for our own policies once we have voted for the budget, how does she think that the Government will find any votes at all for its final budget of this session of Parliament?

Fiona Hyslop: I gently point out that it is the day after the budget has been agreed, and it is not a small amount of funding that has been requested. It is also not a small amount of funding for some point in the future; the demand is for it to be implemented in a matter of weeks in relation to the fare increase, with a grand total of £51 million.

Our publicly owned railway is performing well. Performance on the ScotRail network continues to be high compared with that of other UK train operating companies. ScotRail’s current public performance measure is sitting at 90 per cent, but we want that to improve. I have set a higher performance measure of 92.5 per cent.

Claire Baker: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I need to make progress.

It is wrong for the Conservatives to claim that the operation of publicly owned ScotRail has cost more than when it was in private hands. That claim ignores the fact that rail employees did not get a pay rise when Abellio employed them. It

ignores the fact that the governance arrangements are reduced compared with the contractual arrangements that were required under private sector franchising, and it ignores the fact that the overall subsidy is now lower because of rising passenger numbers. It ignores the £300 million accounting adjustment under international financial reporting standards to reflect the valuation of leased assets, as I reported in person in evidence on the budget to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

The claim also ignores how much has changed in the economy—not least the significant inflationary pressures that were largely caused by the mismanagement of the economy by the Tory Westminster Government, which have had to be applied to things such as track access charges. I hope that Labour—and Mr Leonard in particular—will refuse to support the Conservative amendment, which suggests that what Scotland needs for our railways is a return to private sector franchising.

I am sure that Scotland's rail employees would welcome positive reinforcement of the good job that they do, day in and day out, and of the services that they provide, rather than constantly being criticised by some in the Parliament.

Claire Baker: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: No, thank you.

The Government has broadly kept ScotRail fare increases down for more than a decade by ensuring that they are in line with inflation—or even lower than that, in the case of off-peak fares. The Scottish Government froze rail fares for a number of years while costs increased.

In the absence of a fares rise, our only available option would be to consider service cuts, which would prevent people from accessing jobs, education, public services, friends and family networks. We simply cannot afford to create a £51 million black hole in the transport budget for the year ahead.

Sarah Boyack: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I need to come to a close.

None of that matters to some members in the Parliament. They do not reflect on what respective Westminster Governments have done to constrain our finances.

Herein lies the conundrum for the Scottish Greens. Do they support Labour and the Conservatives, who continue to talk down Scottish rail travel as being too expensive? If they continue to support that narrative, they will not encourage people to choose public transport; they will encourage them to stay in their cars.

I am disappointed that we have had to increase rail fares and that the pilot did not succeed sufficiently to allow off-peak all-day fares to continue, but I will not accept the position of the Tory Opposition, which does not even believe in public rail ownership.

We need a collective approach that can steer our public services, including our public rail service, through these most difficult and challenging financial circumstances. I want to do that and to do so collectively, which is why I call on members to support the SNP amendment, which will allow us to have the prospect of doing what members want to do but in an orderly and considered manner.

17:02

Mark Ruskell: I extend apologies from Gillian Mackay, who was to close for the Greens in the debate but is not able to make it, due to an unforeseen personal reason. So, I will attempt to close the debate.

That was a disappointing contribution from the cabinet secretary. It seems that she is saying that it is actually the fault of the Scottish Greens that rail fares have been increasing for years on years—not ScotRail, nor the Scottish Government and its budget choices, but the Scottish Greens.

To be honest, if we are being egged on to go further by the cabinet secretary, Sue Webber and Beatrice Wishart—not just to deliver a bus fare cap pilot, but to make rail fares substantially cheaper as well—I would welcome support, maybe from Beatrice Wishart in a future budget deal. The Liberal Democrats were unable to get the Newburgh rail station over the line this year, but maybe we can achieve a lot more for communities by working in a more collaborative way.

To take on board the cabinet secretary's criticism and concern, I note that there is some flexibility within the budget that the Parliament has agreed. The cabinet secretary pointed out that, previously, the off-peak all-day pilot scheme was extended as a result of in-year budget revisions. It is not clear what in-year budget revisions will look like in the coming year. Perhaps development costs for the A96 will be underspent—I hope so. Perhaps other areas of Government funding will be underspent, so that we can redirect that funding to support people who are struggling with the cost of living.

Sarah Boyack pointed out that the cabinet secretary had said that if more money became available, off-peak all-day fares would be a priority

for the Government. I am not so sure about that, any more. However, more things can be done to lower the cost of travel.

I believe that the price of the flexipass has been frozen until September 2025. I am not clear whether there has been a decision to extend the price freeze, but limited spending by the Scottish Government in that area could benefit people in terms of their travel choices every day.

A number of members expanded the debate a little to talk about other issues that are important for the travelling public. For example, Claire Baker and Richard Leonard discussed ticket office closures. Ticket office staff play a vital role in helping passengers to access the cheapest fares. Many people who require concessionary tickets or national entitlement card tickets can purchase them only at ticket offices or on the train. There is still concern about the planned reduction in ticketing hours and potential closures, and there is concern about accessibility at unstaffed stations.

Claire Baker described the evaluation report on the off-peak all-day fares pilot as probably "the most inconclusive" that she has ever read. Richard Leonard highlighted the lack of analysis of the impact of increased traffic growth as a result of off-peak all-day fares being removed.

It was slightly disingenuous of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport in her amendment to draw parallels with the Transport for London pilot. London is a very different place from Scotland: it has fully integrated ticketing and an underground rail network that spans the whole city, which is provided at low cost. As I pointed out in my opening comments, that pilot study ran only on Fridays for 13 weeks, so it is just not credible to include it in the amendment as a reason why off-peak all-day fares will not work in Scotland.

There has been discussion about flexipasses, including by Maurice Golden, who raised issues on behalf of his constituents. I point out that someone who is trying to get a flexipass and is commuting between Cumbernauld and Dalmuir or from Larkhall to Dalmuir cannot get a flexipass. There are very limited options for regular commuters. I think that that comes down to the fact that some stations do not have automated gates. There simply is not the infrastructure to deal with cheaper tickets.

I have constituents in Pitlochry who are struggling to understand whether they are eligible for flexipasses. I will have to write to the cabinet secretary on the issue. Most of my constituents who have written to me are just getting in the car and heading down the A9, because they have more or less given up trying to work out how flexipasses work.

We heard contributions about the climate and the critical Audit Scotland report from Ariane Burgess, Richard Leonard and Sarah Boyack. Unfortunately, Audit Scotland has clearly said that we are "unlikely" to meet the target of

"reducing car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030."

It has attributed that to a "lack of leadership", where national and local spending on reducing car usage is complex, fragmented and lacking in transparency. I hope that the 20 per cent plan, which has been under discussion for many years with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and councils, can finally be agreed.

I wish the Government well in those negotiations with COSLA, but some key elements of the plan will require in Parliament discussion of subjects that are currently taboo—demand management, automatic road tolls, congestion charges and a wide range of measures that are needed to raise the revenue to invest in public transport in order to make it low cost or free.

In European cities, that is normal. Demand management and investing not just in low-cost public transport but in free public transport is not a Green dream—it is a reality and it is happening in French cities right now. They are making the choice to raise revenue and to invest in making public transport free, and are not just using peak fare reductions or anything else that fiddles round at the edges through use of complex schemes.

If we are serious about reducing emissions, tackling transport inequality and making public transport the best option, action must be taken now, but it has to have a big vision behind it. That is not just about the Scottish budget this year, but is about setting out a vision.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on cheaper rail fares.

Appointment of Member of the Standards Commission for Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-16561, on the appointment of a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland. I call Claire Baker to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

17:09

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am delighted to speak to the motion inviting members of the Parliament to agree to the appointment of Malcolm Bell as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

As members might know, the Standards Commission is part of the ethical standards framework, and its role is to encourage high ethical standards in public life by promoting and enforcing the codes of conduct for councillors and members of devolved public bodies. The commission issues guidance to councils and public bodies and adjudicates on alleged contraventions of the codes that are referred to it by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

As members of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, Jackson Carlaw, Christine Grahame and I sat as a recruitment panel on 13 January 2025. The panel's unanimous decision was to recommend Malcolm Bell to the Parliament for appointment as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

Malcolm Bell, who is in the public gallery this afternoon, brings a wealth of public sector experience, having served as a senior police officer and having been an elected councillor in and convener of Shetland Islands Council. He has also held a number of public appointments, including as vice-chair of NHS Shetland. Mr Bell is a member of the Accounts Commission for Scotland and an honorary sheriff, and was recently appointed as a justice of the peace. I am confident that he will be an asset to the commission.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Claire Baker give way?

Claire Baker: I will if there is time, and if it is appropriate to do so.

Douglas Ross: I just want to add my praise for Malcolm Bell, although I hope that that does not detract from members' support for his nomination later today.

I first met him when he was chief inspector and area commander up in Shetland. He did great work as Shetland Islands Council convener and has, since his move to the mainland, continued to put great emphasis on public service. I can think of no better person to take on the role, and I commend his nomination to Parliament, as Claire Baker is doing.

Claire Baker: I thank Douglas Ross for that contribution. The panel was unanimous in its decision, and I recognise that Mr Bell will bring a wealth of experience to the commission.

I close by thanking Ashleigh Dunn, who served as a member of the commission from 2017 to 2025. I wish her the very best for the future.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees, under section 8 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000, that Malcolm Bell be appointed as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-16587, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 4 March 2025

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Renewable Future
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Wednesday 5 March 2025

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Achieving a Fair Balance in the UK's Economy
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 6 March 2025

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
followed by	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Scottish Government Debate: COVID-19 Day of Reflection
followed by	Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Energy, and Transport
followed by	Criminal Justice Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Social Justice and Social Security Committee Debate: The People's Panel Report on Reducing Drug Harm and Deaths in Scotland
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.15 pm	Decision Time

Tuesday 11 March 2025

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Wednesday 12 March 2025

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Health and Social Care
followed by	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.10 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 13 March 2025

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
followed by	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 3 March 2025, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask the minister, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-16588, on referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-16589, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Richard Lochhead is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Craig Hoy will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-16571.3, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access digital voting.

17:13

Meeting suspended.

17:16

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-16571.3, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Wishart. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Mr MacDonald.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16571.3, in the name of Richard Lochhead, is: For 63, Against 35, Abstentions 21.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Craig Hoy therefore falls.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-16571.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the app in time, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that your vote is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16571.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 85, Against 8, Abstentions 26.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna

Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16571, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scottish Enterprise funding for arms companies, as amended, is: For 83, Against 35, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament reiterates its unwavering support for the ceasefire in Gaza, for the calls for all efforts to be made to ensure an extension of the ceasefire, for humanitarian aid to reach people in Gaza, and for the remaining hostages to be released; recognises and supports the humanitarian assistance that the Scottish Government has provided to the people of Gaza; calls for recognition of a Palestinian state and a two-state solution; recognises that Scottish Enterprise does not provide funding for the manufacture of weapons or munitions; notes that Scottish Enterprise operates a human rights due diligence process in the awarding of any funding; recognises that responsibility for issuing licences for the export of arms is reserved to the UK Government; calls for the suspension of arms exports to Israel, and does not believe that any public funding should be going to supply arms to Israel; acknowledges that across the UK, arms export licences have been suspended for items with a clear risk that they may be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law; calls on Scottish Enterprise to review its human rights due diligence checks to ensure that they take account of where products' end use is, and that they fully comply with legal obligations under the Export Control Act 2002 and international law, and recognises the contribution of the defence sector in Scotland and the role that Scotland-based businesses have played in defending democracy and freedom.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Fiona Hyslop is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-16572.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16572, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on cheaper rail fares, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)

Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16572.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is: For 64, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16572.1, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16572, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on cheaper rail fares, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16572.1, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 28, Against 85, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16572, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on cheaper rail fares, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16572, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on cheaper rail fares, as amended, is: For 65, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that rail and bus fares must be affordable to encourage the use of public transport; welcomes that rail passenger numbers, since the off-peak all-day pilot ended, have continued to grow, with demand in each four-week period being an average of 4.5% more than the same period in 2024, when the trial was in place; notes that the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 includes provision for a pilot of a £2 bus fare cap; recognises that the results of the off-peak all-day pilot mirror the results of Transport for London's similar trial, which also saw no significant increase in travel as a result of lower fares; further recognises that reinstating off-peak fares all day from 1 April 2025 would cost up to £40 million of resource funding, which would require a commensurate reduction elsewhere in the Transport portfolio's resource budget; recognises that not implementing a fares rise in 2025 would require an additional £11 million, which would require a commensurate reduction elsewhere in the Transport portfolio's resource budget, and believes that any further consideration of off-peak fares all day should take account of the Transport Scotland and Transport for London research, be part of future budget planning and must also consider progress on bus affordability, availability and reliability across Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16561, in the name of Claire Baker, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the appointment of a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees, under section 8 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000, that Malcolm Bell be appointed as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to put a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions, unless any member objects.

As no member has objected, the final question is, that motion S6M-16588, on the referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S6M-16589, on the designation of a lead committee, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Northern Corridor Community Forum Evidence-based Report

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business this evening is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16389, in the name of Fulton MacGregor, on the northern corridor community forum's evidence-based report.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the publication of the 2024 Northern Corridor Community Forum's publication, *Northern Corridor Community Forum - Evidence Based Report*, which, it believes, offers a comprehensive statistical and literary analysis of the challenges facing the Northern Corridor area in North Lanarkshire, encompassing the communities of Glenboig, Gartcosh, Moodiesburn, Chryston, Stepps and Muirhead; commends the report for its detailed findings on critical issues such as housing, economic development, infrastructure, local amenities and community wellbeing; notes the report's identification of what the authors see as the urgent need for modernised and enhanced infrastructure to support these communities; understands that, while the area is open to appropriate new housing developments, there is significant concern about the unprecedented scale of private housing projects, which threaten the long-term sustainability of the communities; notes the report's call for a more constructive and collaborative relationship between the Community Forum and North Lanarkshire Council to rebuild democratic trust and ensure that local decision-making reflects the needs, desires and plans of the people who live and work in the area, and further notes the view that implementing the report's recommendations will prioritise actions to foster inclusive economic growth, improve accountability in local governance and enhance the living and working conditions for residents and workers across the Northern Corridor.

17:32

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank all the members across the Parliament who supported my motion, which has allowed it to be discussed in the chamber this evening. The topic of the debate concerns a region in North Lanarkshire that covers about one third of my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston. The several small towns and villages in the area, which include Stepps, Muirhead, Chryston, Auchinloch, Moodiesburn, Mollinsburn, Glenboig and Gartcosh, are collectively referred to as the northern corridor. The northern corridor community forum is an organisation of people in the area who share their time, skills, expertise and knowledge in an ethos of mutual support among all community organisations across the region.

Last year, the northern corridor community forum compiled a report, which sought to investigate and analyse data related to housing, education, infrastructure, amenities and transport, and how the various areas may be facing pressures in the face of rapid population growth across the corridor. This evening, I will comment on the conclusions of the report and on the sentiments of the constituents who live along the northern corridor.

To some, this debate might seem parochial, but it is the duty of every MSP to represent their constituents and ensure that their voices are heard here in their Parliament. The issues that the NCCF raises are similar issues to those on which colleagues across Scotland might receive correspondence if they represent a constituency or region that has experienced rapid population growth.

Ultimately, the report concludes that communities across the northern corridor have been and will continue to be overwhelmed by a series of negative impacts that arise from overdevelopment and associated population increases. I wish to express on the record that the report was keen to stress that the NCCF is not averse to increased housing development in the area. However, it has consistently raised its concerns over the sustainability of increased housing development and the effect that it will have on the communities, which I am sure we can all relate to.

To examine some of the concerns of the NCCF, we can scrutinise census data from 2021. It was reported that the total population of the collection of villages that make up the northern corridor was just short of 30,000 people. That makes the corridor home to more people than those reported to be living in places such as Bellshill, Kilsyth or Shotts, and it gives a population comparable with that of Wishaw or even Motherwell. However, by the very nature of being a collection of villages, unlike the previously mentioned towns, the corridor does not have a physical town centre, which means that there is a lack of town models, action plans or strategies for the northern corridor as a whole.

For members of the forum and other residents in the area, there is a feeling that their areas often fall through the cracks. On paper, their homes are part of a network of villages, and the amenities and infrastructure reflect that. The reality is that the region is now one of the fastest-growing areas in the central belt, and planning must consider the corridor as a single entity, instead of a patchwork of rural villages.

It is that point that perhaps causes the most frustration in the communities. I will not list each individual infrastructural and facility-based complaint that the forum has raised over the years; for residents, there is the draining experience of having to contact a myriad of bodies each time they feel that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. For example, one accessible train station may be acceptable for a small network of villages, but not for a rapidly

growing region of urban sprawl. The number of crossing points and roads around villages may be adequate for lower populations, but a lack of crossing points has made the corridor more hazardous for pupils and other pedestrians in the area during congested times around school hours. The number of buses that serve the area would be sufficient for a rural region, but the services are currently very much lacking for a region with nearly 30,000 people.

Those are three transport-related issues and, in order for anything to change, they would require lengthy discussions with separate bodies. They are all issues that I have advocated for on behalf of my constituents—and that is not even touching on the amount of similarly intricate cases that I have taken regarding the provision of health, education and leisure centres and facilities. It is second nature to address those issues in established towns, but not so much for areas that, on paper, appear to be a handful of villages.

Late last year, we learned that Scotland's population is rising at the highest rate since the 1940s. Higher populations will require more infrastructure, more facilities and more thoughtful planning. Although the motion concerns one specific area of one specific local authority, it is important for members from all constituencies and regions to engage in the processes to ensure that their views are heard about the direction in which they would like their communities to go. The points that I have touched on today are issues that I am sure other members have dealt with in their regions, and I look forward to hearing further contributions from my colleagues across the chamber.

I know that residents in the northern corridor will be keenly interested to hear how the Scottish Government will take on board the report and give reassurances to the communities that their views will be listened to when future planning decisions are made. Steps such as introducing provisions for pre-development community asset and infrastructure audits when an area is identified as being able to accommodate large-scale urban growth would encourage sustainable growth with minimal effects on existing communities. Likewise, introducing protections for areas that are considered by their communities to be high-value scenic assets and to be at risk from the merging of communities would safeguard areas that are prized by their residents and would ensure that they are not lost. Ways could be sought to give community boards more powers to raise their concerns. Those boards have specialised local knowledge of their communities, and their views should certainly be valued when decisions are being made.

Although the report's recommendations are specific in their nature, it all boils down to ensuring that residents of communities are given the opportunity to have a meaningful say in how their communities are developed. We all know that further development is necessary in light of an increasing Scottish population, but we must find a way to address the concerns of many people in rural areas that development will be imposed on smaller communities with little to no consultation. The Scottish Government and local authorities need to address that sentiment in future planning. I will be interested to hear the minister's response to some of those concerns, either in summing up or in writing at a later date.

The work and diligence of the members of the forum have already resulted in petitions being taken through the Parliament, correspondence with ministers, round tables, meetings with the planning improvement champion, motions recognising forum members' civic leadership, and now a debate here in the Holyrood chamber. It is fair to say that they have engaged with nearly every civic lever available to them, in the Parliament and beyond.

I again thank members of the NCCF for compiling the report, which has given a voice to people in the northern corridor who care about their neighbourhoods. The motion was lodged to recognise and commend the steady commitment that forum members have made to their community for as long as I have been an MSP, which is coming up for nine years now. The forum has far too many members for me to mention all their names, but they include Isobel Kelly, Alice Morton, Cathy McGinty and Brandon Williams.

I reiterate the need to ensure that planners take rural communities into account, especially when such communities experience rapid and unprecedented population growth in what are mostly urban areas.

17:40

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing this important debate and bringing it to the chamber. I also congratulate the northern corridor community forum, which undertook a lot of work in compiling its report, with the aim of making changes for the better in its community.

All members can support this issue and get around it. Our constituents' voices matter, whether or not they are in community forum groups such as the NCCF, many of which have put together concerning statistics on lack of infrastructure and other issues that I will come to shortly.

The NCCF's report shows that people are passionate about the areas in which they live—

they care deeply about them. Fulton MacGregor is passionate about the area that he represents, and he has raised local issues in the chamber time and time again. We can share that approach across the parties. I would love to have seen a copy of the forum's report before this evening's debate, but I was not able to find it online. I have had direct conversations with Fulton MacGregor, but I am keen to have further discussions offline, to see whether there is a cross-party way forward in which we could examine and address the issue collectively, as MSPs who represent the same area.

In preparing for the debate, I reflected on my time as a councillor in North Lanarkshire. I fondly remember discussing the northern corridor at that time, when a range of unique problems affected communities in the area. Fulton MacGregor hit the nail on the head: many such problems are down to population growth. The number of people coming into the area through new housing development undoubtedly places pressures on infrastructure, healthcare and education, and affects people's ability simply to get down to local shops, for example. We must ensure that we have the right infrastructure in place for each area.

I was struck by the transport issues that Fulton MacGregor raised, regarding accessibility to train stations and the lack of bus services in the area. Such issues are not unique to the northern corridor or to North Lanarkshire. However, the Scottish Government must refocus its efforts. Local people must be able to get into and out of the areas in which they live or work, but we must also be aware of the impact of the journey to net zero and achieving an affordable just transition, on which I am sure all members are focused.

I was pleased to hear that the forum is not against housing development, but that it wants a sensible and pragmatic approach to how such development comes into the area. It must come with the right infrastructure, otherwise it will not work. Roughly 14,000 people are on social housing waiting lists across North Lanarkshire. It is acknowledged that we have a housing issue in the area, and we must do something to address that collectively—not only local MSPs but North Lanarkshire councillors.

One way of doing so would be to explore using brownfield sites instead of encroaching on villages that have a lot of green belt. North Lanarkshire Council's area is rich in brownfield sites—I think that it has roughly half of the available brownfield sites in Scotland. We should pursue that to take pressure off villages that cannot cope with the substantial housing developments that come to their area.

Fulton MacGregor: I agree with Meghan Gallacher's point. Does she agree that the issue is that green-belt sites are more attractive to developers than brownfield sites are? Do we need to do more in that space so that builders want to build on brownfield sites?

Meghan Gallacher: Fulton MacGregor read my mind. There are ways to address that issue. For example, a system is available in England, but not currently in Scotland, that allows developers to tap into grants to treat the land on brownfield sites. The aim is to make those sites more attractive. That might help with some of the issues that the member rightly raises.

I am well over time, and I do not want to take up the full debate, so I will stop there. I conclude by congratulating Fulton MacGregor on bringing the debate to the chamber and the community forum on its hard work. I look forward to reading the report in full when I get the opportunity.

17:45

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I, too, thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber. He mentioned that some people might see the debate as parochial and niche, but his and Meghan Gallacher's points about how important it is that MSPs represent their constituents, first and foremost, and about community involvement in decision making, were well made. I concur with the sentiments of those members.

The beauty of some of our members' business debates is that we discuss the niche interests of our communities and tangible issues impacting our constituents that might not otherwise get attention. I confess that, as the MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw, I am only adjacent to the northern corridor community, but, as a former North Lanarkshire councillor, I very much remember some of that community's challenges. I pay tribute to the volunteers who take part in community forums and in the partnerships around North Lanarkshire, and to the community council volunteers who work so hard for their communities in ensuring that the voice of their community is heard in decisions that are taken about them.

We face huge demographic challenges, with an ageing population, in Scotland. We need to encourage population growth in order to maintain a tax base, protect and enhance our public services and bring the rich benefits of migration to Scotland. Those demographic challenges are real and immediate, and they demand our collective attention.

It is interesting that issues that are perceived as being particular to communities due to overdevelopment can have such a strong impact on those communities. The points made by the northern corridor community forum resonate with

me following the proposed change to the boundaries in North Lanarkshire. I might well have represented the northern corridor at one point, based on the Scottish Boundary Commission proposals that were made. That decision would have taken parts of the Airdrie and Shotts constituency into my constituency, completely ignoring the fact that a motorway runs across that area. People who rely on public transport such as train services would have had to have gone through Motherwell and back again to get to see an MSP or MP based in Airdrie, although, geographically, they are very close. That is why we have to be cognisant of what makes a community, how communities have grown together and the geographical and community-based boundaries in our constituencies.

I am very pleased that the issue has been brought to the attention of the Parliament. I was born in Motherwell and grew up in Wishaw, and I am intimately familiar with the links between those close communities and our challenges. A major infrastructure road is about to go through the centre of Motherwell, which will have an impact on residents while it is being developed. It will change some of the locations that form communities in my area, given that a major trunk road will link the M74 and the M8 through the constituency. All those things have an impact.

The most important thing is that the communities that are impacted have a voice, and not just in their community forum. I commend the work that has been done in the report and by the council, but those communities also have a voice in the Parliament, because, as elected representatives, we are able to represent our communities.

17:50

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate, and I thank members in the chamber for their contributions. I recognise the work of the northern corridor community forum in raising these substantive issues and the way in which those who are involved in the forum are working together. I echo the comments that members have made: although the debate focuses on a very specific geographical area, the issues that are raised are applicable to all our communities. We have a reflexive relationship with our communities—we are shaped by them and, as active citizens, we play a role in shaping them, which will, in turn, shape generations to come.

I turn to the substance of the matters that are being considered this evening. As members will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to endorse any particular view or position on, for example, a local development plan. It is for the planning authority to take into account all the views and evidence that have been submitted to it as it prepares its local development plan.

Our "Scottish Government Planning Guidance: Effective Community Engagement in Local Development Plans—People and planning", on good practice in community engagement, makes it clear that

"Planning authorities should involve communities in the creation of the Evidence Report",

and the report that we are considering this evening shows that communities are keen to engage.

I understand that work is on-going by North Lanarkshire Council to prepare the evidence report, which precedes the preparation of the new local development plan for the area. Therefore, I cannot comment on the substance of the report that we are discussing, as the evidence report that the council prepares will be subject to independent scrutiny later this year by Scottish Government reporters.

Meghan Gallacher: This debate has been important. We need to build more homes, as we are in a housing emergency, and one of the ways in which we can do that is by accelerating the regeneration of our towns and town centres. That would surely provide more living spaces, and there would be more areas in which developers could come in to build homes. That would create a new dynamic, taking pressure off the villages that Fulton MacGregor rightly mentioned in his opening speech. Is the minister steadfast in doing that to try to tackle the housing emergency?

Tom Arthur: Absolutely, and I recognise the sterling work that Meghan Gallacher has taken forward as convener of the cross-party group on towns and town centres. In partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Government is engaged in substantive work on that very agenda through the town centre action plan forum. Indeed, there are active discussions on the topic across the Government, because we recognise that town centres provide a valuable opportunity for achieving a number of policy objectives, not only in housing through increasing the availability of residential units but because, in increasing the population density of our town centres, we support retail, hospitality and thriving places.

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit Motherwell, in Clare Adamson's constituency, where I saw that, through a number of different funding streams backed by the Scottish Government, working in partnership with the local authority, the former YMCA building and an adjacent vacant site have been brought into use to provide valuable new residential accommodation.

That is an example of town centre regeneration making a significant contribution towards addressing the housing emergency.

I want to offer a number of observations on the extensive work that the northern corridor community forum has undertaken, as it helps to illustrate the direction that our planning system has taken in recent years. First, the communities have acknowledged that our planning system has changed considerably in recent years, with the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and the introduction of national planning framework 4, which I had the privilege of launching in February 2023. Two years on, we are seeing positive change from NPF4, with a recognition that there should be a plan-led approach to housing and infrastructure delivery rather than planning by appeal.

Secondly, the report under consideration this evening highlights the challenges with infrastructure that go hand in hand with providing new homes. The northern corridor communities have been clear that they support housing development, as we have heard, but they want, rightly, to ensure that homes are built in sustainable locations and are served by infrastructure and the facilities that people depend on day to day. NPF4's policy 15, on "Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods", supports that, recognising that places have to work for the people who live there. It is for planning authorities to work out what that looks like in different types of places, and that process can usefully be informed by feedback from communities, such as the report that we are considering this evening.

NPF4's policy 18 also requires development plans to take

"an infrastructure first approach to"

development. It states that

"Plans should ... be informed by evidence on infrastructure capacity"

and "needs", and that they should "set out requirements" for the future and "indicate" how developer contributions will be used to support delivery. That is not easy, but it is crucial that spatial strategies make best use of existing capacity as far as possible to minimise the financial impacts on both the public and private sectors. Planning authorities are working hard on that, but only time will tell how it plays out in practice.

Thirdly, the community forum report reflects the importance of place and the crucial role that people play in shaping their towns and neighbourhoods. Good planning depends on having a good understanding of what makes each place unique, and no one is better placed to explain that than local people. I welcome this debate because it highlights that it really is people who make the planning system work. Those communities have worked hard to gather views and evidence about their place, and they highlight challenges and opportunities that are at the heart of our planning system.

Local development plans have a tough job to do. They cannot please everyone, and, as the communities acknowledge, local authorities do not have limitless funding available to them for new facilities and infrastructure. Local development plans will, therefore, have to be realistic about what is possible and will need to find creative solutions to placemaking.

I thank Fulton MacGregor again for highlighting the importance of an inclusive approach to planning and placemaking. I also recognise the considerable thought, time and effort that the communities of the northern corridor have put into engaging with the planning process. Our planning system is designed to be inclusive—everyone should have an opportunity to contribute their views so that plans are based on sound information and insights from local people. I have no doubt that the community forum will continue to engage with the North Lanarkshire local development plan as it continues to take shape.

Meeting closed at 17:57.

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