



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

**Tuesday 22 April 2025**

**Session 6**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



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**Tuesday 22 April 2025**

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**NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2025, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

\*Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

Jackson Cullinane (Unite the Union)

Islay Jackson MSYP (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Kevin Lindsay (Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen)

Greig MacKay (Bus Users UK)

Gordon Martin (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers)

Robert Samson (Transport Focus)

Stephen Smellie (Unison)

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Peter McGrath

**LOCATION**

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)



## Scottish Parliament

### Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

*Tuesday 22 April 2025*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:17]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Edward Mountain):** Good morning, and welcome to the 14th meeting in 2025 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

Our first item of business is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private item 4, which is consideration of the evidence that we will hear on Scotland's train and bus services, and item 5, which is consideration of our approach to a legislative consent memorandum on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Subordinate Legislation

09:17

**The Convener:** Our second item of business is consideration of two Scottish statutory instruments. As both have been laid under the negative procedure, they will come into force unless the Parliament agrees to a motion to annul them, and no motions to annul have been lodged.

I will be seeking views on each instrument in turn. However, before I do so—and this was very rude of me—I should have acknowledged the fact that Monica Lennon has been unable to attend the meeting, and that Sarah Boyack is attending as her substitute.

### **Environmental Protection (Disposal of Polychlorinated Biphenyls and other Dangerous Substances) (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2025/78)**

**The Convener:** The first instrument—SSI 2025/78—revokes and replaces identical regulations that we considered on 11 March. The new instrument has been made because of what the Government considers was an error in its handling of the consultation responses, which it has sought to correct.

The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee has drawn the instrument to the Parliament's attention, because it did not meet the requirement to be laid 28 days before coming into force. In this case, the instrument was laid on 18 March but partly came into force on 30 March. When an instrument breaches the 28-day rule, the Scottish Government is required to provide an explanation, which is provided in annex B to the clerk's note.

Does any member wish to make any comments on the instrument? I find it odd that there were only three responses to the consultation and that one of them was totally ignored. It also seems odd that we are having to come back and do this again, which is, I think, not something that I have ever come across before.

Sarah, did you want to comment?

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I very much agree with you. It feels very odd that there were so few consultation responses and that one of them was not considered. It would also have been helpful to have a bit of a note on how the regulations impact on people's daily lives and on the sectors where they will be implemented. However, I do not object to the instrument.

**The Convener:** In fairness, this is a relaying of the original instrument and we had some indication of those matters during the previous briefing. It might have been helpful if that had been reiterated, but it was done in the first instance, although something might have been lost in translation.

As no other member wishes to comment, I invite the committee to agree that it does not wish to make any recommendations in relation to the instrument.

**Members indicated agreement.**

### **Railway Closure (Exclusion) (Hairmyres) Order 2025 (SSI 2025/81)**

**The Convener:** The second instrument for the committee to consider is SSI 2025/81. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee has made no comment on the order. Do any members have any comments on the order?

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport has confirmed that no business regulatory impact assessment is necessary, as the order has no financial effects on the Scottish Government or local government. I assume that that is because it is part of a bigger scheme rather than just the smaller scheme, but it would always be helpful to have information on that.

As no member wishes to comment, I invite the committee to agree that it does not wish to make any recommendations in relation to the instrument.

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Thank you. I now suspend the meeting to allow our first panel of witnesses to be seated.

09:21

*Meeting suspended.*

09:23

*On resuming—*

## **Train and Bus Services**

**The Convener:** Welcome back. I also welcome Sue Webber, who is attending the meeting. You will get some questions at the end, Sue, if you want to come in.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Thank you, convener, for letting me come along.

**The Convener:** If you have any questions, we will bring you in at the end.

Item 3 is an evidence session on the state of Scotland's rail and bus sectors. Today, we will hear from two panels. The first includes representatives from rail and bus passenger groups, and the second panel includes witnesses representing rail and bus sector staff. Next week, we will hear from bus and rail operators, companies and sector representatives.

I am pleased to welcome Greig MacKay, who is the Bus Users UK director for Scotland. Greig is joining us remotely. Islay Jackson MSYP is the deputy convener of the transport, environment and rural affairs committee of the Scottish Youth Parliament, and Robert Samson is senior engagement manager at Transport Focus.

We will move straight to questions. I will ask the first question, which is always a gentle warm-up for the panel. Do you perceive the continuing reduction in bus services as having any impact on passengers, especially those who are reliant on buses to access educational, work and social activities? Evidence from rural areas and areas where there are fewer buses would be useful.

Greig MacKay, will you start with that? We will check that the connection is working. I am told that a volunteer is as good as a pressed person, so off you go.

**Greig MacKay (Bus Users UK):** Good morning. There has definitely been a reduction in bus services, particularly in rural areas, as you said. That is largely due to local authority funding. Whenever there are cutbacks to be made, bus services tend to bear the brunt. There are now communities that have very limited bus services. In some cases, they have no bus services at all, particularly during evenings and weekends. That really limits people's ability to access education and employment and to socialise with friends. Even getting to medical appointments is a major challenge for people in a lot of rural communities. We need to change the pattern of travel with regard to bus services. We cannot just keep managing their decline; we need to look at funding models and how to secure those models so that

bus services are protected and we can try to grow them. That would be my initial response.

**The Convener:** Robert Samson, do you have any views on that?

**Robert Samson (Transport Focus):** We have just carried out a bus journey survey in Scotland with 3,500 passengers. It was published last month. Passengers in the central belt, such as in Glasgow and Edinburgh, are more satisfied with their bus services than people in rural areas. When you look at the results for rural areas, the reasons for the lack of satisfaction are more to do with the frequency of service. Where services are less frequent, for example, if there is an hour-long gap between services—it is sometimes 10 to 15 minutes in Glasgow—there is a greater reliance on punctuality and people want the timeliness of the service to be perfect. That comes through in our survey; rural passengers feel it more than those in the central belt.

**The Convener:** Islay Jackson, do you want to add anything? Are you a bus user?

**Islay Jackson MSYP (Scottish Youth Parliament):** Yes, I am. This year, the priority of the Scottish Youth Parliament's transport, environment and rural affairs committee is to focus on expanding the Young Scot free bus travel scheme and to improve what is already in place. We want to focus on three aspects: affordability, accessibility and reliability. Another aspect is safety, which ties into the reliability part.

About half of our committee is from the Highlands and Islands and more rural areas. Time and again, every single one of them has said that their transport services are not reliable. Buses are either really late or just do not turn up. Then, if they do turn up, they can be full and you cannot get on them, so you are stuck waiting at a bus stop in rural Inverness on your own—it is not the safest thing to happen. Cutting services is making that even worse. There is already a disparity between our rural and more urban areas. When you cut those services, you leave more young people standing at the side of a country road, unable to get to where they need to go.

Public transport is so important for us as young people because it gives us independence; we do not then have to rely on parents or guardians to drive us to our youth groups or to drive us to school, and we can take that responsibility and get to those places ourselves. When transport is cut, we have less opportunity to do that, so there is definitely a big impact on social aspects and on our education.

**The Convener:** Was any comment made about the quality of the bus stops in rural areas? Some of them seem to face into the prevailing wind and

rain. That does not work for me, but I wonder whether you have any comments on that.

09:30

**Islay Jackson:** Yes. I have heard so many horror stories about people standing at the bus stops with their toes literally on the road because there is not enough space at the bus stop. Lots of people in our membership are wheelchair users who, time and again, cannot get on to the bus because there is no level access. Bus drivers are often not equipped to deal with those kinds of situations, and it creates an atmosphere where young people do not feel that they can use the service that is there for them.

As you said, there is also the matter of prevailing winds and rain. There is often no shelter at bus stops, especially in rural areas, where there is a sign and a bit of concrete and that is it. We have definitely heard many stories from our members and from young people who we have consulted that bus stops need to be improved.

**The Convener:** I suppose that one consolation is that we do not have floating bus stops, where you can get run over by the bicycle that is coming between you and the bus stop as you cross the road to get there.

Robert, do you want to comment?

**Robert Samson:** We just published a report about what more than 3,500 persons want to see at bus stops and bus shelters. The top priorities are adequate protection from the wind and rain, and accessibility, not just from the bus shelter on to the bus but from the starting point of one's home, so that there is an accessible walking route to the bus shelter. Another priority is that the timetable information that bus shelters provide should be up-to-date and accurate.

We surveyed people, particularly women and young people, about transport at night and another thing that came out was that the bus shelter or stop must be well lit to give safety—satisfaction really dropped off a cliff when the stop was not well lit in the evening. It is about such issues, and those were the top three that came out in that report.

**The Convener:** Thank you. The next questions come from Mark Ruskell.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)):** Thanks very much for joining us. What are the views of young people on the under-22s concessionary scheme? Islay, can we start with you?

**Islay Jackson:** We have done a lot of consulting on that because it is a priority. At the start of the year, we consulted with about 150

people. We had a very short timescale, so it was not a great consultation—it was what we could do in a week. Some quotes that we got from it said that the scheme is invaluable and that lots of young people are really grateful for it. That said, there are still drawbacks and negatives because bus services are not often reliable. The scheme is there, we have the Young Scot card, but the buses are often not there to use it on. It is the same with cycle lanes. There are cycle lanes but, often, young people do not have bikes to use on them. Those young people who can use the scheme have said that it has completely changed their lives and opened up new opportunities.

**Mark Ruskell:** As a follow-up to that—I will come to other witnesses afterwards—I have a question about the cliff edge in fares. I know quite a few people who have turned 22 and who suddenly have to pay the full fare. Have the young people in your group reflected on that?

**Islay Jackson:** Yes, definitely. Our membership represents people from 12 to 25, and MSYPs are between the ages of 14 and 25. Some of our membership who are in that older age bracket have had to face significant increases in cost. Although buses are not as expensive as other amenities, such as trains, that cost is still difficult for a young person.

To put it into perspective, the minimum wage for a young person under the age of 18 is £7.55 an hour—that is what I get paid. We all have lives—most of us are at work or university, some people are looking after a family—so it is really difficult to have to pay the added cost of a bus to get to school.

It is worse when you look at other transport methods, such as trains—I get the train to school. I wrote down my train ticket costs so that I could tell you them. In an average week, it costs me £39 to travel by train—and that is just for the five days that I go to school. I am paid £7.55 an hour. However, because I go to school, am involved in the SYP and do lots of other stuff in my free time, I work only five hours a week, so I make only £37.75 a week. My school travel costs are more than I make.

I am lucky, because I have a part-time job, but many young people do not. We have this amazing scheme under which the Young Scot national entitlement card gives young people free travel and the opportunity to go places, such as to school and to a youth group. However, when they turn 22, it completely changes. If someone is still at university, they might not be able to work. If they are travelling to university when they are not working, they are losing money quickly. The Student Awards Agency Scotland funding does not pay for everything and the student loan does not cover everything, so it becomes really difficult.

**Greig MacKay:** The under-22s scheme has been massively transformational across Scotland, allowing young people to access education and employment. However, as Islay Jackson said, there are a lot of places where there are no bus services for people. It is all very well having the under-22s card, but there are no bus services in the evenings or later on on a Saturday, for example, to get them to where they want to go.

The fare structure cliff edge is a big concern. When people come out of the under-22s scheme, what ticket offerings have the bus companies got available to reduce the impact on those people of changing from travelling free at point of use to paying full fare? The bus companies are certainly looking into what fares they can offer to those aged between perhaps 22 and 25 to encourage bus use once the scheme has ended, including looking at multi-operator tickets, and even at multimodal tickets, to see what can be done with bus and train travel.

Work is definitely taking place in the background, and I am sure that when you hear from the industry later on during this process, they will be able to update you further on things like that.

**Robert Samson:** Earlier, I referred to our survey, which is a snapshot of bus passengers—people who actually use the bus. We can split the results into age groups, including the 16 to 25 age group. Those in that age group in Scotland are far more satisfied than those in England and Wales. In Scotland, 85 per cent are satisfied overall. A contributory factor to that is the concessionary fare.

**The Convener:** I will delve into that a bit more. I seem to remember that, when I started in the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in 2016, we were looking at the concessionary bus travel scheme, which cost about £193 million. I think that we are progressing now to that being £405 million this year, which is a huge chunk of money. That has come at some expense, because the network support grant has reduced from £48 million a year to about £13 million a year.

People in areas where there are buses are able to access concessionary fares, whereas people in rural areas where there are fewer buses—or no buses—are less able to access concessionary fares because operators are not getting the network support grant. Do you think that we have got that right, Robert Samson?

**Robert Samson:** There are a number of things that you must look at in that regard. You will hear from industry later about the mechanisms that they are putting in place so that when people turn 23, they keep using public transport rather than travel



by car or other modes of transport. Doing that will help revenue growth.

What comes out of our survey in relation to the network support grant is information on timeliness and punctuality. The biggest negative aspect for passengers is punctuality, which is about bus priority measures and network support. If you can fund improvements to make buses more punctual, you will benefit more passengers overall.

One of the barriers to modal shift and to bus use is the perception that buses are not punctual or reliable. If you have in place better priority measures to make buses more punctual, more reliable and more timely, you will overcome those barriers and get more people using buses.

**The Convener:** I understand that, but the network support grant is to help rural areas and areas where the commercial bus services are perhaps not as able to cover their own costs. The grant is being reduced, which means that there are fewer buses in those areas.

Concessionary travel is going up in larger urban conurbations, where, because there are more bus services, more young people are using the buses, but the rural areas do not get the grant to make the buses available. It seems that we have gone completely over the top. Greig MacKay, do you want to comment on that?

**Greig MacKay:** Again, it comes back to the funding model. The vast majority of the services in the rural environment are supported services under contract, because they are not commercially viable. Local authorities have less and less money in their transport budgets, and those services are ultimately the ones that get cut the most. The NSG is not working as well as it should do with regard to ensuring that rural bus services are protected. The whole point of that fund is to ensure that those services are there, but they are not, because the local authorities do not have sufficient money in their transport budgets. Local authorities are required to provide the home-to-school service, but they are not required to provide services above and beyond that, so, unfortunately, those are the ones that bear the brunt of cuts when money is required to be taken away from transport budgets.

**The Convener:** If you take £35 million out of the network support grant, it is not surprising that bus services in more rural and less commercial areas get cut—is that what you are saying?

**Greig MacKay:** Yes, absolutely, and we cannot allow that pattern of decline to continue. If we do, the network will shrink more and more, and we will end up in a situation in which we have more transport poverty across Scotland.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** Good morning. I would like to follow that line of questioning. The overall pot of money has not decreased; the way in which it is being utilised has changed. So, does the fact that more of the Scottish Government's bus funding is being used for concessionary travel, which means that there is less money available for the network support grant, mean that the expansion of concessionary travel has resulted in greater transport inequality?

**Greig MacKay:** Yes, to some extent. The concession card scheme has really blossomed in the more urban areas, so the bus companies in those areas have had to satisfy that increased demand and increase capacity. However, in rural areas, local authorities have not had an increase in transport budgets to ensure that the bus services that are delivered in those areas are protected in the same way, so, when transport budgets have been reduced, there has been a reduction in the frequency of buses on certain routes as well as a reduction in routes that are served.

**Michael Matheson:** If the overall budget has not changed, but the way in which it has been apportioned has, is it fair to say that the introduction of expanding concessionary travel did not sufficiently take into account the consequences in terms of the potential impact that it would have on increasing levels of transport inequality, particularly in rural Scotland?

**Greig MacKay:** I would have to agree with that.

**The Convener:** Sarah Boyack would like to come in at this point.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am thinking about the impact on the choices that people have. We have 18 million fewer trips because there are reduced services, and 20 million fewer trips because of increased journey times due to congestion. There is a question about how we can actually make the buses available for people.

I was looking at the statistics. The bus partnership fund was meant to be £500 million, but only £20 million has been allocated to date, and nothing was allocated for last year. The community bus fund, which is allocated to local authorities and regional transport partnerships, is only £7 million. Is there an issue about how we support an increase in the provision of buses rather than allowing there to be a reduction in the first place?

There is an issue of inequality, in that people who do not have cars do not have a choice, so buses are absolutely critical in terms of equality. There is also an issue about how to persuade people not to use cars.

Robert Samson, what do you think our priority should be with regard to ensuring that we do not lose bus services in the first place?

**Robert Samson:** Our survey shows that about 50 per cent of passengers have no choice but to use the bus, and 50 per cent have a choice. For those who have a choice, it is about the cost, convenience, frequency of service and timeliness. However, timeliness can be a negative aspect for many passengers if it is not delivered, whether it be the journey time or waiting time at the bus stop.

09:45

Having bus priority measures in place can improve overall timeliness, which benefits existing passengers and potentially brings in new passengers. We looked at the motivations for and barriers to bus use. You could do nothing to persuade many people who have a car—I think the report says that it is about 50 per cent—to get out of the car and on to a bus; however, 50 per cent of drivers can and would look at doing so.

In order to overcome barriers and improve the number of trips, the key drivers include ensuring that the fare systems are easy to understand, the levels of punctuality are good and the services are timely and frequent.

**Sarah Boyack:** Does that mean that capital investment for bus infrastructure is needed to make bus services more accessible and bus stops more usable and safe?

**Robert Samson:** Yes. We should be looking at bus shelters and bus stops not just as pieces of infrastructure but as assets to be managed, maintained, regularly upkept and made as attractive as possible.

**Sarah Boyack:** Greig, do you have a similar view?

**Greig MacKay:** You hit the nail on the head. When it comes to unlocking patronage, it has to be about priority. If we can speed up bus journeys and make them more reliable, we will unlock patronage, big time, not just in the urban areas but in the interurban areas, especially for long-distance bus services. Across Scotland, we rely heavily on interurban coaches to deliver bus services. If we can make such journeys more robust, especially during peak tourist season times, we can make bus services much more attractive.

You touched on the £500 million fund. I am involved in all the bus partnerships, and not much of the fund has been spent on delivering priority on the road, which is what needs to happen to make bus services more attractive and reliable. We monitor bus services all over Scotland on the traffic commissioner for Scotland's behalf, and my

bus compliance team constantly report back on how bus services are being impacted, largely due to factors such as road works and congestion. There are a lot of illegal parking cases, but there is no enforcement in some places. It means that buses cannot get into bus stops properly because of delivery or private vehicles and, in some cases, buses cannot even get into housing schemes because cars are parked on both sides of the road.

Priority is the key to unlocking patronage. We have just completed our 2024-25 stats, and service reliability is our number 1 complaint stat.

**Sarah Boyack:** As they receive funding through bus partnerships, are local authorities responsible for delivering bus priority measures?

**Greig MacKay:** Yes, it is the local authorities and RTPs that, ultimately, have to deliver them.

**Sarah Boyack:** Thank you. That is useful.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** First of all, I will stick to the bus priority measures. I do not drive, so I rely on public transport, such as buses. The convener does not like me to be too parochial, so I will not go into great depths about my own city of Aberdeen.

Bus priority measures are often severely unpopular, mainly because they are not explained and no sound reasoning is put forward for priority changes. Often, the right level of consultation that is needed to bring people on board is not done. How do we improve that and get rid of that unpopularity? How do we take folk with us in order to increase bus patronage?

**Greig MacKay:** That is a very good question. We need to make buses much more attractive as a mode of travel. Even if you look at—

**Kevin Stewart:** When you say, “make buses more attractive”, what does that mean?

**Greig MacKay:** It means that they do not look like a second-class mode of travel compared with trains. They need to be viewed on the same level as trains by the general public, and unfortunately that is not the case across Scotland. In the west especially, buses are often viewed as a lower form of travel compared with in Edinburgh or other cities. We need to change that perception of buses, and the industry is doing a lot in that respect.

**Kevin Stewart:** You say that we have to change that perception. How do we do that?

**Greig MacKay:** That is what I am about to touch on. As a result of the industry's recent, and massive, investment in electric buses, there has been across Scotland a massive improvement in the quality of the fleet. That has been a step forward; after all, for a lot of people, their

perception of a bus is something that is old, slow, smelly et cetera, but when you put them on an electric bus, they are like, "Wow, this is nothing like what I thought a bus would be."

We now have electric vehicle coaches operating in Scotland, with the likes of Ember, and Stagecoach, too, has new EV coaches. All of that is changing the perception of bus travel in Scotland. I think that a lot of people have that perception, but when they actually get on to a bus, they realise that bus travel is nothing like what it was 30-odd years ago. We have modern, very efficient and very comfortable vehicles.

However, we need the infrastructure to be in place to ensure that when somebody who is sitting in their car, constantly stuck in traffic, sees buses zooming by, uninterrupted, in the bus lane to get into the city centre, the light bulb will go on that bus travel is a good alternative—and, indeed, a lot less hassle, because you do not have to find anywhere to park. We need to change people's impressions of bus travel and show them what it actually is.

**Kevin Stewart:** Robert, do you want to comment?

**Robert Samson:** Going back to something that you mentioned, I was part of a Transport Scotland bus task force that published a report last year on community engagement, and it was all about ensuring that, when you bring in bus priority measures and change timetables, you actually engage with the community and the people affected in the first place. If you can communicate effectively what the parameters are and what you are trying to achieve, you will have a better chance of taking the community that is going to use those bus services—and that might have to be convinced to use them in future—with you. It is all about engaging with the people who will be affected, both users and non-users, at the start of the process to inform things going forward.

**Kevin Stewart:** Do you have, from your survey, any examples of good engagement with bus users in certain parts of the country and any bad examples from others? Did you ask those questions?

**Robert Samson:** That question was not asked. The survey was just a snapshot of people's journeys, and it was all about reliability, value for money from the fares, and so on. I know that you do not want to be parochial, but, according to passengers, the worst area in Scotland for value for money for the journey that they were making was Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

**Kevin Stewart:** A wee bit of competition might be helpful there, but we had better leave it at that, or I will get too parochial again.

**The Convener:** Before I bring Mark Ruskell back in with some further questions, I would like to know how we make bus travel more attractive for people—I am thinking of, say, the long trip from Inverness down to Edinburgh. Do you have a view on that, Islay? Surely it is not just about making sure that there is wi-fi. Do there not need to be other facilities, too? What are your views?

**Islay Jackson:** Speaking from a young person's point of view, and as has already been mentioned, the bus is the first option for a lot of people. A lot of young people do not drive; car prices are really high, and insurance is incredibly steep for a young person. Indeed, a lot of young people prefer the bus to the train. As Greig has said, the train seems to be the nicer option, but sometimes the bus is the nicer option, too, because if you are travelling from Inverness to Edinburgh, you might just want to sit back and enjoy that time, instead of being on the train, which will be a lot busier.

Sometimes, though, our buses are not equipped for nice journeys. Citylink's coaches are a lot bigger and have more seats; however, when it comes to more local buses, the seats are really small and tight together, and it is not the nicest atmosphere to be in. I live in Glasgow—our buses are very different from the ones here in Edinburgh and the ones up in Aberdeen.

In general, we need to make sure that the amenities that people need are there. For example, on a long journey from Inverness to Edinburgh, there has got to be a toilet on the bus. How often does that bus stop, and how long does it stop for? You do not have time to get off to go to the toilet. You do not want to sit on a bus for four and a half hours, needing to go to the toilet—that will make it horrible.

Also, people need wi-fi. Not everyone has a phone contract in which they can use their 5 gigabytes of data. Personally, I do not have a phone, so I rely on my laptop to do all my work and I need wi-fi to be able to use that laptop. We definitely need that on our buses.

The cleanliness of a bus can totally change someone's experience of using it. If you get on a bus and it is nice and clean, and it smells nice, you will have a much better journey than you would have if you were sitting with your feet on a sticky floor because someone chucked a drink on the floor and your feet were sticking to it.

**The Convener:** That is very helpful and insightful, thank you.

Mark Ruskell has some questions.

**Mark Ruskell:** Are there other approaches to running bus companies and services that we should look at? Some of the challenges with rural services have already been mentioned. I know

that a number of community bus groups are running their own rural services and they have done very well: they have increased the number of bus users and are running more regular services that are keyed in to what rural communities want. I am also aware of the spreading of municipalisation and public sector control of bus services, particularly in English cities. There is potential for that to happen in Scotland as well.

I am interested in your thoughts on whether it makes a difference who owns, controls and runs services, and on whether the experimentation with flat fares in England has worked. Is that something that you would welcome here? What is good?

It is clear that some services are declining, particularly in rural areas, and that they have been doing so for a long time. What is working and what could help to restore our services? Robert Samson, do you want to start?

**Robert Samson:** We have been involved with bus partnerships and franchising models. We asked passengers, "What model do you want to see delivered in your local town or city?" For them, it does not come down to the structure. It is about whichever is the best structure to deliver value for money; better timeliness; better frequency; and well-maintained bus shelters, bus stops and buses. What matters to passengers is the best structure to deliver on their priorities—they are quite agnostic about what that structure is.

If the franchising model could deliver that best, we would support it. If, in other areas, it was a partnership model that was best, we would support that as well. The question is what the best structure is to deliver on those priorities.

We did a piece of research in England where flat fares were introduced. We found that the value for money went up in certain areas as a consequence of the flat fare.

**Mark Ruskell:** What do you think the best structure is for running bus services? Is it community and municipal ownership or private ownership?

**Robert Samson:** It is whatever structure delivers the service that the passenger wants and delivers good levels of punctuality and reliability. To repeat what I was saying, there needs to be good value for money, an easily understood fare system and well-maintained bus infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters.

Local authorities and regional transport partners in Scotland should look at it through the passenger's eyes and ask how best to deliver what the passenger wants just now. If we deliver on that, there is a good chance of making bus services more attractive and delivering them to more people. Rather than starting with the

structure, we should start with what we want to achieve and decide what the best structure is to meet that. We are pretty much agnostic towards which structure that is—it is passenger priorities that are paramount.

10:00

**Greig MacKay:** I have to echo what Robert Samson says. Ultimately, it has to be about the passenger—that means not just the passengers that we have right now but the passengers that we want in the future, such as those who are in their cars right now.

My only caveat is that it does not matter who owns the buses. They will still be stuck in the same traffic that we have right now, unless we have priority measures. For example, Lothian Buses in Edinburgh is facing exactly the same challenges and issues as First Glasgow and First Aberdeen in respect of road works, congestion and lack of priority. If we want to tackle the improvement of bus services, the ownership model is not the priority. The priority is to make bus services more reliable and more robust, and to make them the default choice for travel. We should not be able to drive into towns and city centres as easily as we can. Public transport should be the default, whether it be rail or bus.

**Mark Ruskell:** What about fare caps?

**Greig MacKay:** The warning would be about when that ends, because there will always be winners and losers. When a trial period, such as the one that we have had in England, ends, there is a cliff edge and the fares go back to being much more expensive. Likewise, if there were a permanent arrangement, such as a fare cap across the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport region, for example, there would be winners and losers on the borders of that region, because bus services do not stick to borders. Bus services travel across local authorities and RTP areas. If you were going to look at a flat fare, you would have to look at how big that flat fare could be to capture as many bus passengers as possible.

We have just analysed our complaints statistics for the last financial year, and ticket prices are well down the list. Not just in Scotland, but across England and Wales, ticket prices are not a priority. Certainly in Scotland, that might be because a lot of our passengers access the concession card scheme for under-22s and over-60s, so if you are looking across the whole population, the number of fare-paying passengers is relatively small.

As I have said, the priorities are much more about the attitude of driver staff, front-line staff and customer services and whether the drivers and bus station staff give good customer services, or whether contact centre staff give good service

when people complain, and so on. It is also ultimately about service reliability. How reliable is that bus service? When someone goes to get a bus, does it turn up when it is meant to? Likewise, a priority is the journey time of the service that someone is on. Does it get them to their destination when it is meant to? Rather than ticket prices, those are the key priorities that come through our complaint statistics.

**Islay Jackson:** I feel as though I am just going to echo everyone else's sentiments, but I am not a transport expert. I am a transport user, and the young people who I represent are transport users. When we talk about what a good journey is, it is about a journey that made you feel safe and was accessible, reliable and affordable. Our committee looks at those same four key aspects.

When we talk about making buses and particular bus journeys more appealing to a young person, we need to look at what journeys were good journeys and why they were good journeys. For example, I was involved in start-up trial buses at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, which ran a scheme called the Trossachs explorer. It was a new bus that went through a part of the national park that had no bus routes whatsoever. That community is completely isolated from the rest of the park, and everyone relies on car travel because, again, they do not have rail lines. A young person living in that area of Scotland is completely isolated from social opportunities that are not within the immediate area.

When the national park introduced that bus route, it was amazing for locals, but it also increased tourism in that area of the park. Tourists can easily get to Balloch, which is on the southern edge of the national park, and they can get a bus from Balloch out to Balmaha, which are the more popular areas. However, the whole other side of the national park was completely isolated. Introducing that bus route and advertising it on social media, such as Instagram, which is where young people are, got more young people to use that bus and those transport routes to go to new places and take part in social events.

I do not think that who owns the bus makes the service better or more feasible for young people; how the service is advertised and explaining what makes the service good is a better approach.

**Mark Ruskell:** That was a great example. My son used that bus service a lot last summer. However, that bus service was commissioned by the national park, so although a public agency commissioned it, it was run by a private company. Is there a role for councils and transport authorities to listen to users and to commission services, or should it be left to the market to decide? That service had not run for many years,

and it took the national park stepping in to make it run again.

**Islay Jackson:** Yes. When things like that happen, we see such good, positive public engagement. When we had reduced fares on trains, more people used the trains. The statistics show that when we put in measures to make public transport more affordable, accessible and better for people, people take the opportunity to use it.

Getting a car into the centre of Glasgow is difficult—it takes ages. It is so much easier and quicker to get the bus into the city centre than it is to drive. Why would people not take it? Rather than thinking about how to make the service better, because the services are in place, the first step needs to be considering how to get more people to use the services that are already there. Making it better is one of the things that we need to do, but we also need to encourage a behavioural shift.

Young people want to be more environmentally friendly. The term that is sometimes used is that we are the “green generation”. Young people are environmentally conscious. When we have alternatives that are more environmentally friendly and that give us that green light that tells us that we will reduce our carbon emissions, young people want to take that opportunity. You need to exploit the things that make public transport appeal to young people, because that is most important.

**Michael Matheson:** I was struck by the comment that Greig MacKay made about the fact that fare prices do not rank highly when bus users are surveyed about the priorities that should be taken forward to make bus travel more attractive.

There is a limited pot of money, so if you were to prioritise funding to improve bus services and make them more attractive, would you invest in a greater expansion of concessionary travel, introduce a flat rate or capped fare or would you invest in bus prioritisation measures?

**Greig MacKay:** That is a good question. Let us say that we made all public transport free at the point of use. Would that encourage more people to use buses? Perhaps it would increase the percentage of people who use the bus initially, but that number might level off in future. Therefore, would doing that make it a default form of travel? The answer would probably be no, because journeys would not be any quicker or any more reliable.

For example, if you were commuting between Dundee and Edinburgh or Glasgow, there might be more people on the bus and there might be more buses, but all the buses are going to sit in the same traffic because they are not getting into

urban areas any quicker. Therefore, if we had a magic wand and wanted to spend money, we would get more bang for our buck if we invested in priority measures to make journeys reliable seven days a week, all year and at any time of day. That is how patronage levels can be unlocked, because when people see buses constantly going by queues of traffic it will not be long before they say, “I am not going to sit in this traffic any longer. I am going to get the bus into Edinburgh or Glasgow because it is quicker and easier, and I don’t have to think about parking and so on.”

Issues such as buses being free at the point of use or flat fares are absolutely things to think about, but the priority must be ensuring that bus services are on time and reliable—that is the key thing.

**Robert Samson:** When we ask passengers what one improvement they want in bus services, their answers relate to timeliness in terms of the waiting time at the bus stop, the journey time and the frequency of service. That is the top priority from the point of view of existing passengers. Value for money is mentioned, but timeliness is above that.

**Islay Jackson:** I have a bit less experience than others, but I know that young people want to use bus services because they are now affordable, given the free bus travel scheme for under-22s. However, as a bus user, I would say that the service can be unreliable. As I have already said, people can be left standing at bus stops because the bus is full or because the bus has not turned up. Although we are grateful for the amazing service that is there, the rest of the infrastructure must be improved to ensure that we can use it properly.

**The Convener:** I want to come back to Greig MacKay. The service works well for someone who is travelling between Edinburgh and Glasgow, but someone who is going to Edinburgh from Wick, for example, has to rely on their first bus meeting the next bus, and that bus meeting the next bus, which is the one that actually takes them to Edinburgh, all within a timescale that suits them. If we cannot make all the buses work together, the system will not work. It will work for people going from Edinburgh to Glasgow—that is simple—but do you agree that there is an issue on the more rural and exposed routes?

**Greig MacKay:** Absolutely. The issue relates to the way in which bus networks are designed. The more local networks are built around the schools network first of all, with the commercial network going on top of that and then the supported network sitting on top of that one. Therefore, when you are dealing with multiple areas, it is difficult to join up all the timetables, which leads to the issue that you raise.

If you want better integration, there would need to be much more joined-up thinking. For example, when the timetable for the service from Wick is created, thought would have to be given to the timings of the stops along the route that link in with long-distance services, allowing for some leeway in the timings, of course. However, that does not happen at the moment, because there is no prerequisite at the moment for bus companies to do it. That needs to change.

**The Convener:** Sarah Boyack will ask the next question.

**Sarah Boyack:** We have talked a lot about the fact that concerns about reliability put people off using public transport. We have focused on buses, but it is also an issue with regard to rail. How do we ensure that choices are available for people? We have talked about rural areas, but communities on the edge of urban areas are in exactly the same position with regard to not having services. What should we do to address the issues that prevent people from using bus and rail? I ask Robert Samson to talk about Transport Focus’s research on that.

**Robert Samson:** We have done research into people’s priorities with regard to bus and rail, and, regardless of the mode, passengers want an improvement in punctuality, reliability, frequency of service, safety and security in stations, the cleanliness and comfort of trains, the toilet facilities on trains and so on. There is a wide range of issues, but punctuality and reliability are at the top.

On some routes, ScotRail performs quite well in terms of punctuality, with a public performance measurement score of almost 90 per cent—not that a lot of passengers know what the public performance measure is, of course. However, when you look at some of the rural services around places such as Oban, Fort William, Wick and so on, the PPM score is about 70 or 80 per cent. Within ScotRail’s overall acceptable figure, some routes are not performing as well as others. Where that is the case, that is a barrier to using the service.

10:15

**Sarah Boyack:** Where should investment in those routes be prioritised to make them more reliable?

**Robert Samson:** Priority should be given to investing where that will give passengers reliability, day in and day out. Passengers should turn up at the station knowing that the train will arrive at 8.10 in the morning, for example, and will get to its destination. Whether it is a short journey—40 or 30 minutes—or an hour and a half, it is about giving predictability. Once there is

predictability, there are other factors to consider to improve the overall journey experience, but the top factors for passengers are punctuality and reliability.

**Sarah Boyack:** Fewer passengers are using trains and buses. Covid obviously had a big impact, although some of the stats have bounced back since then. What other things do we need to look at when it comes to the reduction in the number of people using buses and trains?

**Robert Samson:** It is about having an attractive ticketing option. For example, there is now the flexible season ticket, where hybrid workers working two or three days a week can have six return journeys on a flexible ticket. We would like to see flexible season tickets on every route in Scotland. There is a reduction in the cost of season tickets just now and we would like to see that continue.

It is about making an attractive offer for the rail network. What are the facilities on the new rolling stock that is being talked about? The biggest game changer in relation to the new rolling stock would be to have level boarding across Scotland for every platform, every station and every passenger. The new Merseyrail rolling stock has level boarding, which has reduced passenger assistance bookings by more than 90 per cent. People having independence and not needing to book passenger assist is a game changer. Level boarding is not just for people with accessibility needs; it is for older people, people with luggage, mothers with prams and buggies, and so on.

ScotRail will say that the new trains that it is bringing in are level-boarding compatible. However, there will not be level boarding for platforms outwith the standard height of 915mm from the rail. It is not enough for the trains to be level-boarding compatible; ScotRail and Network Rail must work together. To have that game changer, there needs to be level boarding for every station, every door and every passenger. That would make a big difference.

**Sarah Boyack:** Level boarding is about making it easier for people, and it would save money with regard to passenger assist, but would it make rail more attractive to new users? Have you thought about how many more journeys could be generated with level boarding?

**Robert Samson:** It makes it easier all round, but we have not looked at that in depth. When passenger assistance is reduced by 90 per cent elsewhere, that makes rail easier. Level boarding would be a game changer for passengers in Scotland.

**Sarah Boyack:** The other question is about the cost of transport. Other members may raise this issue, but the reduction in peak rail fares

increased the number of people using rail. How could a reduction in peak fares be used to maximise the number of people using rail?

**Robert Samson:** Passenger numbers went up when peak fares were reduced. The discounts that have been introduced on flexible season tickets and normal season tickets have also been attractive. However, the busiest days for ScotRail are Friday and Saturday, and those journeys are leisure driven. How do you attract people on to those journeys when they are discretionary? What affordable options are there for the leisure market, as well as for people who have to commute? It is about having attractive fares and delivering a punctual and reliable network.

Again, we need fares that make sense. For example, I had to pay £23.50 for a single journey from Motherwell to Edinburgh this morning at peak time, which is a non-reservable service, so I had to pay on the day. I know how the system works, but, after this meeting, I am going down to London, and it cost me £28 for an advance ticket from Edinburgh to London. Why is it only £5 dearer to go from Edinburgh to London than it is to go between Motherwell and Edinburgh? I know how the system works, but, to an ordinary person, that just does not make sense.

**Sarah Boyack:** Also, people will not be able to afford to do that.

**Robert Samson:** People will not be able to afford that. I am in a fortunate position, because I am here on business and I can claim the money back, but I was thinking that £23 to come through to Edinburgh is a joke. It is really quite expensive, and, for a lot of people, that is outside the reach of their pocket. We have to look holistically at what attracts people to the rail and bus networks.

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes. We need to think about a joined-up approach. You have all talked about unreliable bus services. That is partly due to road congestion, but if it costs that much to get a train, it is a very difficult choice for people to make.

**Robert Samson:** It is a difficult choice. If I was Islay Jackson's age—I wish I was—I would be getting the bus from Motherwell to Edinburgh.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is really well put—thanks for that.

**The Convener:** I will bring Kevin Stewart in briefly. Kevin, please direct your question to one person, because we would like to get to the other two witnesses.

**Kevin Stewart:** Yes. My question is to Islay Jackson. What Sarah Boyack just said adds to this point. Islay, you said that you choose to pay to take the train rather than to take the bus. Why is that? Is it about convenience or time, for example?

**Islay Jackson:** It is a bit of both, to be honest. I get up at half past 5 in the morning to get ready for school, and I need to leave the house at 7 o'clock to get to school on time. If I was to get the bus to school, I would have to leave the house at quarter to 5. I choose to do that as a young person who is studying full time and volunteering. Being an MSYP is a voluntary position and I put in quite a lot of voluntary hours. We are not MSPs—we do not run surgeries—so all our work is voluntary. You can put in as much or as little time as you want, and I choose to put in more. I also volunteer with a number of environmental charities. I am in sixth year, so I have my big end-of-year exams coming up. The results of those will determine where I go to university, or if I go to university, so I am up studying until 10 or 11 o'clock at night. That is me getting six hours of sleep, and, although that is not great, I can function on it. I do not want to be waking up at 4 o'clock in the morning to get the bus to school.

The bus takes two and a half hours to get from my house to Helensburgh, where I go to school. The issue is therefore partly about time and accessibility. However, the service is also not reliable. When I have had to get the bus to school, because the trains have been cancelled due to the weather, strikes or whatever, the bus often takes longer than it says that it is going to take. If I am late for school when I use the train, I will be half an hour late, because the train runs every half an hour, but, if I am late for school when I use the bus, I will be two and a half hours late. If get into school two and a half hours late, I miss a huge chunk of my education. That is just my experience, and there are other people who have it much worse than I do.

The train is a valuable service for me, but it is insanely expensive. My parents do not pay for my train travel—I pay for it myself. That comes out of my own pocket and, for someone who does not earn very much in a week, as I have already told you, it is difficult. I am lucky that I worked over the summer so I have some money that I can use, but lots of young people do not have that opportunity, because they are in full-time education and cannot work or because they have other responsibilities. A large percentage of our membership are young carers, so they have other responsibilities on top of education—as well as trying to have a social life. They cannot afford train travel, so the bus is their only option. There is a disparity, because the train gets me to school in 40 minutes and the bus takes two and a half hours. Young people have to choose between losing money and getting to school late, which is not a nice choice to have to make, especially when you do not have the money to make that choice.

**Kevin Stewart:** If it was a choice for me between getting up at 4 o'clock or half past 5, I would pay for the train, too.

**The Convener:** I think that most of us would join you in those thoughts.

Douglas, we have about eight minutes left for this session. Will you ask your two questions, so that I can bring in Sue Webber at the end if she wants to ask a question?

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Okay—thanks, convener. No pressure.

Robert Samson mentioned ScotRail's new rolling stock and the fact that level boarding is a feature that might encourage people to move from car to rail. What other features should the new rolling stock have to encourage more people to use it?

**Robert Samson:** Level boarding is the top one, and I think that that will be a game changer. It is also about on-board factors such as comfortable toilet facilities, accessible spaces and cleanliness that is easy to maintain. It is about having enough seats for all the passengers on the new trains—the basics, basically—and designing with the passengers in mind. We must ask passengers what they want to see in the new rolling stock, which will be with us for 30 or 35 years. We must get it right at the beginning and co-design it with passengers, bearing in mind what they want.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Do you not see catering facilities or on-board information as a priority?

**Robert Samson:** There is information on board: there are information screens, as well as audio announcements. It is about the factors of comfort and easy-to-maintain cleanliness. All those things should be standard, and we must ask passengers what they want to see. As I said, the new trains will be here for 30 or 35 years, and level boarding will be a game changer.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Islay, what would you like to see on board the trains that you use every day?

**Islay Jackson:** One of the biggest things that I really like about the train is the fact that there is an audio announcement when you reach each stop. I study on the train, so I am often not paying attention to where I am. I need to listen for the "We are now approaching" announcement, then quickly put everything in my bag and run off. When that is not there—for example when the train is delayed and the announcement tells you that you are in Motherwell when you are actually at Queen Street station—you are surprised and get all panicked.

I take the announcement for granted; when it is not there, I realise that it is such an important thing. We do not have it on all services. First Bus has started to integrate it into its buses, which is



great, but not all buses have it. It is mainly the new ones that have it. SPT's subway does not have it on its services. On the subway, with no visual cues that you are at your stop, you have to pay attention. It is not great for a commuter who is trying to get work done when they are on the subway, the train or the bus, because they have to focus on several different things, which takes their focus away from the thing that they want to focus on.

On visual travel information on the train, there are the announcements that come up on the screens, but those are not accessible for everybody. We have members who represent the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland's haggeye forum, which is for young people who are visually impaired. You need to consider all the accessibility factors, because that is what it is—it is an accessibility factor. If we want to make sure that young people and people in general can access services, those services must be accessible for everybody who is going to use them.

**Douglas Lumsden:** You said that you use wi-fi on the train. Do you find that reliable? I can sometimes get it to work, but it is not very good.

**Islay Jackson:** I am lucky that it is usually quite good on my train. However, if you ask SYP staff, they will tell you about the number of meetings that I have been on when on a train and have just randomly left. I then frantically try to quickly message someone on Teams to say, "Sorry, the wi-fi has dropped," but the wi-fi is not there so I cannot send the message. It is stressful, especially when you are doing something that is a bit more important. I am deputy convener of our transport, environment and rural affairs committee. I was elected as deputy convener during a Teams meeting while I was sitting on a train from Windermere to Glasgow. I ended up getting kicked out of that meeting, and I thought, "Oh, I have ruined it; I am never going to get the position." However, thankfully, I had got in enough of my speech that everyone was okay with it.

The wi-fi can be reliable, but often it is not. I find that it is more reliable on some trains than on others.

10:30

Even just the look of the trains is very different. The express trains from Queen Street to Edinburgh look a lot fancier than the trains from Queen Street low level to Edinburgh or the ones from Hyndland out to Helensburgh. They have completely different looks and facilities. That creates a stigma in itself, because people who travel from Hyndland to Helensburgh, which is where I travel from, are on the "not nice" train. I

put air quotes around those words, because it is not a bad train, but it does not look as nice and the wi-fi is not as good as the wi-fi on the express trains from Glasgow Queen Street to Edinburgh.

We have that disparity within that one organisation, but things are also completely different when people travel between First Bus and Lothian Buses, because there is a disparity between the different council areas. One of our members, who represents Glasgow Kelvin, said that the biggest thing that puts him off using public transport to go between council areas is that, if you get a bus from Glasgow to Edinburgh and you then get on a bus in Edinburgh, they are completely different.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I will move on to my next question, because I see that the convener is looking at me. The committee has heard quite a bit about antisocial behaviour on rail and bus networks. How significant an issue is that? I ask Greig MacKay to comment first in relation to buses.

**Greig MacKay:** It is definitely on the increase, although some of it is more perceived than real. A lot of young people are now using what we call service buses rather than school buses. After school, large numbers of children get on normal buses that operate along corridors, and other people sometimes feel intimidated by that. If language is used that is not nice or the young people are noisy, people feel that that is antisocial behaviour, but it may just be that a large volume of children came on to the bus at the same time, rather than using a school contract bus.

However, there is antisocial behaviour on buses, especially in the evenings and at weekends, which is why bus companies have had to take measures to protect their front-line staff. For example, in the Highlands, Stagecoach has brand-new coaches operating between Elgin, Aberdeen and Inverness, and it has had to put screens into those brand-new electric coaches in order to protect its drivers. Coaches do not normally have those screens. That tells you the situation that bus companies are in.

Antisocial behaviour is very much a reality on some of our bus services. Should there be increased police presence on buses? The British Transport Police focuses only on rail. Should its remit be expanded to include bus transport? I do not know, but there certainly is antisocial behaviour on bus services.

**Douglas Lumsden:** There is a perception—it may be just a perception—that antisocial behaviour has increased because of the free travel for under-22s. Is there anything to back that up?

**Greig MacKay:** Not in our evidence. As I mentioned, our compliance team are on buses

seven days a week at different times of the day and they have not seen or reported anything that we would class as antisocial behaviour, but the bus companies have definitely started to report issues, and the fact that they are taking measures such as the one that I mentioned on brand-new vehicles proves that there is a problem. They would not be implementing screens to protect their drivers if there was not a problem.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Robert, I want to ask you about antisocial behaviour on trains. Has there been any change since the alcohol ban came into place on ScotRail?

**Robert Samson:** There are still instances of antisocial behaviour and rowdy behaviour. Even with the alcohol ban in place, there are still instances of alcohol being consumed on trains. There is conflict between on-board staff and passengers and there are questions about whether staff will intervene. People who are going to break the rule will continue to break it whether there is a ban in place or not, to a certain extent.

ScotRail has a travel safe team. It provides support, including tackling antisocial behaviour, which might be related to youths or other people gathering at stations or on board trains. The team operates on certain routes. It knows the hotspots, which it is targeting, but there are still instances of antisocial behaviour on the network.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Do you think that that is on the rise, or is the level the same as it has always been?

**Robert Samson:** Our survey shows that it is just where it has always been. It has not got any better, but it has not got worse. Alcohol still has an effect on people's behaviour, and that particularly affects women and young people travelling at night.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Do you not think that the alcohol ban has improved the situation at all?

**Robert Samson:** Our survey results show that the instances of antisocial behaviour remain the same.

We support an alcohol ban in places where there is a problem, but if you are travelling up the west Highland line on a lovely summer's afternoon and looking out and enjoying the view, what is wrong with having a glass of wine or a malt as part of the journey experience?

**Douglas Lumsden:** Thank you. That is me, convener.

**The Convener:** Sue Webber wants to come in. Douglas's approach was to ask multiple questions. I ask that you just put one.

**Sue Webber:** That is fine.

On antisocial behaviour, I know that Lothian Buses has been gathering data to prove that there is an issue. However, this is not just about antisocial behaviour on the buses; it is also about people using the buses to get to antisocial behaviour hotspots, such as stations and shopping centres. I wonder whether Greig MacKay can respond on how we might want to tackle that.

Also, I have a question for Islay Jackson. Perhaps you can respond not from your experience but from the experience of other young people to whom you have spoken. When young people see other young people abusing the privilege of free travel, how does that make them feel?

Maybe we could go to Islay first, if that is okay, convener.

**The Convener:** You were getting only one question.

**Sue Webber:** Oh. Am I allowed only to put my question to Islay?

**The Convener:** You get to put your question to Islay, who gets to give the final answer.

**Islay Jackson:** I will keep it brief. We find that a lot of young people do not feel that there is a rise in antisocial behaviour. In our consultations with young people, they have said that they often feel that young people are stigmatised as the ones causing problems, whereas in reality they feel that they are the ones who are being targeted when there is abuse on public transport services.

The Young Scot "Truth About Youth" report found that more than half of Scotland's young people feel unsafe on public transport whenever they take it because staff or other passengers perceive young people as the troublemakers and then cause trouble with them. I will quote the report. A young person said:

"I don't feel safe on public transportation because men are very likely to say [something] or touch you especially as I am a young girl."

One of our national campaigns this year is to end gender-based violence, and our committee has been focusing on that. Primarily, it is young women and girls who feel threatened when they take public transport. They are often being looked at and videoed. Lots of people have said that they will be sitting in an empty carriage and someone—usually a man—will come and sit next to them. That creates a really bad atmosphere for young people.

We are having conversations in which antisocial behaviour is supposedly caused by young people, but, in reality, young people face it a lot more than the older generations seem to perceive.

**The Convener:** That neatly brings us to the end of this witness session. I thank the witnesses for giving evidence and for travelling here on various modes of transport, from buses to trains—or, in Greig MacKay's case, for participating remotely.

I suspend the meeting for five minutes to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

10:39

*Meeting suspended.*

10:43

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Welcome back. I should have said at the start of the meeting that we had received apologies from Bob Doris, who is unable to attend.

Before we continue, Kevin Stewart would like to make a declaration of interests.

**Kevin Stewart:** Thank you very much, convener. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a member of Unison.

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel of witnesses: Stephen Smellie, member of Unison's national executive council and Scottish committee, Unison Scotland; Jackson Cullinane, head of Unite Scotland's politics and campaigns unit, Unite the union; Gordon Martin, RMT Scotland organiser, National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers; and Kevin Lindsay, district organiser, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

We move straight to questions, the first of which comes from Sarah Boyack.

10:45

**Sarah Boyack:** Thank you. I, too, declare that I am a member of Unison.

I have a question that follows on from our discussion with the first panel. Although there has been a bounce-back since the pandemic, bus and rail passenger numbers are lower than they were before Covid. Those stats are quite stark. The previous panel had a lot to say about what puts people off using trains and buses. What can we do to attract more people to use trains and buses?

I am open about who goes first. Perhaps Gordon Martin could kick off the answers.

**Gordon Martin (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers):** It is evident that there has been a bounce-back since Covid, but whether it has been to the extent that we would like to have seen is open to debate—I

would like there to have been more of a bounce-back.

There are a number of factors at play. We have the working from home phenomenon, which a lot of working-class people who had never done it before Covid now do. That might involve a hybrid model of a couple of days in the office and a couple of days at home, or some variation thereof. That is one factor.

During Covid, Kevin Lindsay, Jackson Cullinane and I, and other rail union representatives, had concerns that the trains, in effect, became mobile gang huts. We raised those concerns with the companies, British Transport Police and you guys—the politicians. The same situation arose as there were fewer staff at stations, which were either de-staffed or understaffed. Rather than mobile gang huts, stations became actual gang huts for the bored youth in various areas.

Obviously, price is another contributing factor. Members of the previous panel spoke about the cost of train travel. The cost of train travel between Scotland's two major cities is astronomical. Although the dropping of peak fares on a trial basis by the Government was welcome, it was not done for anywhere near long enough, nor was it advertised well enough. Rather than properly advertising the scheme and managing it—which, I believe, is what should have been done—the Government was frightened to advertise it in case it was oversubscribed.

All those factors combined have led to a reduction in footfall. From some of the ScotRail stats, it would appear that weekend days can be busier than weekdays. A number of the factors, such as working from home and so on, fit in there as well. However, the cost on rural lines, as well as between the major cities, needs to be looked at.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a quick follow-up question on the cost issue. If you get more passengers on trains, I presume that the benefits include being able to plan ahead with a different number of rail carriages. For example, we know that getting on the last train from Fife to Edinburgh can be a nightmare, but if the provision is better planned, is that not good for the system? If the trains carried more passengers, compared with buses, that might mean that there would be fewer cars on the roads, so the buses would be more efficient, too. Is there a trade-off or a crossover here?

**Gordon Martin:** Absolutely. The more footfall, the better. What does not help—this is the point that you have just made—is the fact that the situation with rush-hour trains is all over the place. People turn up to find that the station is packed, and when a three-car set turns up, they cannot get

on or struggle to get on. I would have thought that it would make more sense for those smaller trains to run earlier in the day and to have six-car sets at rush hour, so that double the number of people could get on. That applies right across the central belt.

What we need is a bit of joined-up thinking and better planning, whereby the right staff and the right rolling stock are in the right place at the right time. For the benefit of the citizens of Scotland, the politicians and companies such as ScotRail should consider putting together all those things in an integrated train plan, which could be widened into an integrated travel plan.

**Sarah Boyack:** Kevin Lindsay, do you want to come in? I presume that there is an opportunity to have such a plan, now that ScotRail is run by the Government.

**Kevin Lindsay (Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen):** I agree 100 per cent. Gordon Martin has covered a lot of this, but we must also remember that we are running fewer trains. People do not want to wait around for half an hour or an hour. A lot of investment went into the Airdrie to Bathgate line, which provided a service every 15 minutes when it was first opened but now runs only half-hourly. Folk do not want to hang around a station at nighttime. There need to be buses to meet the trains as they come in so that there is an integrated transport system. There must be safety on trains and at stations, which means keeping booking offices open. We should be looking at putting more staff at stations to make them more secure and more of a focal hub for communities.

Gordon was right in what he said about cost. The cost of rail fares is extortionate, and 25 per cent of the cost of each ticket goes to the private rolling stock companies that keep taking money out, leasing trains back and charging more for those trains as they get older. How is that even allowed to happen? It should not be happening. We really need to look at costs.

The removal of peak fares was welcome. We campaigned hard for that and put pressure on the Government to agree to it. The Government ran that scheme, but, as Gordon said, it did so as a kind of stealth campaign that it did not want people to know about in case it was successful. The Government has said that we did not reach the 10 per cent target for an increase in passenger numbers, but it was never advertised that we needed to hit that target. The scheme grew passenger numbers by 6 or 7 per cent. We were only 3 per cent short of hitting the target, so pulling the scheme completely seemed like a premature move. We could have let it run longer to see whether it could have been successful, because it

takes time to achieve a modal shift from car to train.

We must look at investing in the railway. For every £1 that is invested in the railway, the Scottish economy gets £2.50 back. In our view, the economics are straightforward: investing in the railway makes Scotland's economy grow, improves our chance of reaching net zero and gives us an opportunity to get more people on to trains. That seems fairly straightforward to me.

**Sarah Boyack:** Stephen Smellie, do you want to come in?

**Stephen Smellie (Unison):** From a Unison and public sector worker point of view, I would say that public transport does not serve public sector workers well. Gordon Martin spoke about people working from home, which has been a factor, but we must also recognise, as has already been mentioned, that cost is a significant factor. That applies not only to rail but to bus fares. I know that it is hard to believe, but I am over 60 and have a free bus pass. For those who are not so fortunate, bus fares are expensive.

In addition, buses do not run at the times when people need them. Take shift workers, for example: getting a bus at the end of a shift in a care home or a hospital is very difficult, so people use a car if they can afford to. Services have declined. That has already been said about trains, but bus services have also been reduced in the past five or six years. If the service is poorer, fewer people will use it.

You asked about getting people back on to public transport. It seemed to me that some of the earlier discussion focused on what current passengers want. As a bus user, I could give you a long list of the things that I would like to see on buses, but the fundamental issue is how to get people who do not use buses or trains out of their cars. There are different answers to those questions, which we must explore. Public sector workers need reliable buses. We have heard about the problem of trying to get to work in the morning if a bus is held up at rush hour. That is one issue; prioritisation is another. The cost of using the public transport system must also be addressed, and buses must run at the appropriate times, including for people who do early or night shifts.

Public transport serves us badly across the country, particularly in rural areas—it is non-existent in many rural areas. There are issues across the board when it comes to how we get the number of people who use public transport to bounce back.

**Sarah Boyack:** The points about working from home are interesting. In fact, we are beginning to

see a shift away from working at home, and people might have to get to work every day.

Jackson Cullinane, do you want to respond to my initial question about how to encourage people to use buses and trains?

**Jackson Cullinane (Unite the Union):** In many respects, I would echo the points that my colleagues have already made. However, my point is that the usage of buses has been declining for some time. Obviously, Covid brought a complete dip, but, in reality, the use of bus services was declining before that. The pick-up and bounce-back, post-Covid, relates largely to the expansion of concessionary fares—to the under-22s, in particular.

The underlying problem goes back to the 1980s and the deregulation of the bus industry, when the emphasis was put on profit rather than on providing a public service. Over many years—this situation continues—the so-called unprofitable routes have been taken off and a lot of communities have been left with no bus service whatsoever or a very restricted timetable.

In addition, people who want to go from A to B might need to use different modes of public transport, but those are not integrated—they do not tie up with one another. Nothing is more frustrating for a bus driver than their rota telling them to leave the railway station a couple of minutes before the train arrives at the platform. There needs to be some co-ordination and planning. Frankly, in order to plan things in that way, there needs to be some form of public control, because if the system is operated simply on the basis that each of the various parts of the public transport system is run on the basis of profit, the people who are in control of those different parts will make judgments according to what is or is not profitable.

All the issues that have been covered, such as antisocial behaviour and the levels of fares for those who are not covered by concessionary fares, are contributory factors. However, in my view, we are talking about a long-term issue that should have been addressed years ago. I think that we now have an opportunity to begin to address it.

**Sarah Boyack:** I want to invite some more feedback on that. The previous witnesses were quite relaxed about different models of delivery. However, this year, the bus infrastructure fund is worth only £10 million. What would your priority for expenditure be, so that we can deliver the new services that are needed by people who use buses, which are simply not available? How would you get that process going again?

**Jackson Cullinane:** I recognise that it will take time, but three powers have been provided under

the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. That act provides for bus services improvement partnerships, which represent a marginal improvement on the status quo; franchising; and municipal ownership.

We have some concerns about what franchising would mean for the security of the workforce, because, when it has happened in other areas, there has consistently been retendering and the reissuing of contracts. However, neither franchising nor municipal ownership has had the focus that bus services improvement partnerships have had, including in relation to the provision of public money. In our view, municipal ownership is the favoured option, but we recognise that some kind of cash injection is needed to start up municipal bus companies. We are talking only about start-up; we are not talking about the long-term financing of municipally owned buses.

Lothian Buses is a proven successful example of municipal ownership. Under that model, revenue is generated for the local authority to reinvest in services that meet a social need. That cannot happen under the current arrangement, whereby public subsidy is used to keep a bus service running, but the profit goes back into the hands of shareholders through dividends and so on. We need to be thinking along such lines.

It could be argued that, although those three powers are available, because only one has been focused on, to the detriment of the other two, there is a democratic deficit when it comes to the ability of local authorities to come up with ideas about how they could run the bus service better.

11:00

I will give you an example right now, if you have time for me to do so. At the moment, there is a focus on community wealth building and on green transport to work policies. If, as part of community wealth building, you were to put in place a small pilot to establish a municipal bus company in an area to get people to work, that would establish that there is an alternative mode of running public transport.

I will cite an example that I often use. When I worked in industry, I used to get the factory bus to my work in the morning, and so did the vast majority of my colleagues. A municipal bus company would be beneficial not just in changing the way that we operate public transport services but in a range of other ways—the obvious benefit is that we would begin to reduce car use.

**Sarah Boyack:** Thank you. That was really helpful.

**The Convener:** It is funny—in the 10 years that I have been sitting on transport committees in the

Parliament, I have heard the exact same thing about declining bus use and how we have to integrate transport to make sure that it works. Unfortunately, it appears that it is still the same story 10 years on, and you are telling us the same story that I was told in 2016. It does not appear that we have come very far.

My question is on the concessionary travel scheme for under 22-year-olds and antisocial behaviour orders. Are the two linked? In the previous panel, we heard from an MSYP who said that it is not young people who are causing the problem. Is antisocial behaviour a problem? Has the level of antisocial behaviour changed as a result of the concessionary bus scheme or not? Is there also a problem with young people on trains? I am sure that Douglas Lumsden will refer back to his earlier questions.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I cannot comment on the buses—it is my colleagues here who represent bus workers—but antisocial behaviour on trains is caused by the young, the old, men and women, not just young people. I hate the perception that young people are the crux of every problem, and I hate that we demonise them. The whole point of giving young people concessionary fares was to get them used to using public transport. If you get used to using public transport in your early days, you will continue to use it throughout the rest of your life.

We have a fantastic situation in Scotland in that you pay for a bus fare for only 38 years of your life, which you do not get anywhere else. It is a fantastic thing to have. I would love to see that approach extended to the railways. I cannot understand why we, the people of Scotland, own ScotRail yet pay private bus companies to carry passengers. We can debate off-peak fares later, but why have we not extended to the railways concessionary fares for over-60s, and why have we not made fares off-peak, even for younger people?

Just because some people misbehave, you cannot demonise them all. On Friday night, I travelled back from Edinburgh, and the worst behaved people on the train were a group of women aged 40-plus. They were shouting and swearing to the extent that a young couple, who were probably aged under 20, moved away because they felt intimidated. Tackling antisocial behaviour is not just about young people; it is about all people. We need people to understand that a travel pass—whether you are an older person, young person or fare payer—can be taken away from you. We should look at removing the people who are causing the problem rather than removing concessionary fares from all people.

**The Convener:** If somebody who gets concessionary travel misbehaves, do you think that their concession should be removed?

**Kevin Lindsay:** There should be a scheme. We ban habitual offenders from football grounds or shopping centres, yet we allow them to continue to come on our railways and buses.

**The Convener:** Just to clarify, I get a concessionary travel on the train because I have a rail card. If I misbehave, should I also, as an older person, expect to lose that concession?

**Kevin Lindsay:** Every person should be treated equally. Surely, that is what society is about.

**The Convener:** Good. We agree. Does anyone else want to come in on any of that?

**Stephen Smellie:** I do not represent members who work on the trains, and I do not represent many bus workers. I work in local government, and I have to say that years and years of cutbacks in youth services have contributed to the issue of bored kids and young people. What do they do? They hang about the streets and train stations, which sometimes offer a bit of shelter.

It is a societal issue, not a transport issue. If we invest in young people, those issues, wherever they are—whether on the bus or in the town centre—will be addressed properly. Young people are no different from anyone else.

A note of caution in relation to removing concessionary tickets from people: we should be treating them equally, and the whole point of concessionary tickets, particularly for young people, is to give them mobility to allow them to do things and get out of their scheme and actually go somewhere else. So, I would be careful about going down the road of saying, “Well, we will take it off you,” because what will that antisocial person do? They will stay at home, on their own streets, and go into their own shopping centres. It will not address antisocial behaviour; it might temporarily remove it from trains or buses, but it will not deal with the problems. The issue around youth and antisocial behaviour needs to be addressed on a much wider scale, rather than just worrying about what young people do on buses.

**The Convener:** Gordon Martin, do you want to add to that, or has he said it all?

**Gordon Martin:** I will be very brief. Antisocial behaviour is a societal problem, and it would be wrong to target one particular group within society. We have seen that too many times, with too many different groups being picked off at different times. Concessionary fares are about broadening our horizons in life. They give people the opportunity to travel. People who live in certain areas might never have seen other parts of the country. For example, somebody living in Glasgow might never

have seen Fort William, Oban or Inverness. Surely, if we make it affordable, people will explore to see the things that other people take for granted.

**The Convener:** Mark Ruskell, you wanted to come in, and Jackson Cullinane wants to come in as well. If you ask your supplementary question to Jackson first, he might be able to answer the two questions as one.

**Mark Ruskell:** I actually want to address my question to Gordon Martin and Kevin Lindsay. It is about the changes in station staffing and whether they have implications for managing antisocial behaviour. In particular, I was thinking about situations where a lone worker is managing a station with reduced hours and reduced staffing and how that works in antisocial behaviour hotspots at particular stations. A bit of an insight on that from the rail industry would be useful.

**Gordon Martin:** As you know, RMT is totally opposed to the ScotRail plan for reducing hours in some booking offices that is now being implemented. We think that it drives and encourages the wrong kinds of behaviour, because people within communities will know that, at certain times, certain stations might be unstaffed or not properly staffed. We have real concerns about people being vulnerable, particularly women and girls, who we feel are particularly vulnerable, as the young woman you spoke to earlier indicated. That is why we oppose the plan. We oppose it on the grounds of our members' work and jobs, but also for wider society, particularly vulnerable people. As I outlined earlier, women and girls can be particularly vulnerable in that environment.

**The Convener:** Jackson Cullinane, do you want to come in? Sorry for cutting off Kevin Lindsay, who wants to come in on that question, but I promised to bring in Jackson. I have to keep my promises, but then I will come to you, Kevin.

**Jackson Cullinane:** It is correct that we should not demonise young people. The vast majority of young people are well behaved on buses, and there is no doubt that the concessionary fare scheme is a good thing. It is there to try to establish that it is normal to use public transport. It also has a benefit for low-income families in particular. However, in the surveys that we have been doing, members are reporting an increase in antisocial behaviour. Some 84 per cent of members said there had been an increase in instances of abuse against them, and the other startling thing was that 69 per cent of members, felt dissatisfied with the response when they reported such incidents—not just the response from their employer, but that of law enforcement agencies and so on. Of course, we have seen the

tragic death of a bus driver in Elgin. The issue needs to be addressed.

We do not want to demonise all young people but, to go back to the point that Kevin Lindsay made, if somebody is a persistent offender, we really need to take some kind of action to try to address that in the short term. There is a societal problem that requires longer-term and wider initiatives beyond public transport, but there is an immediate situation that needs to be addressed, I am afraid.

**The Convener:** Kevin, I cut you off; you may come in now. *[Interruption.]* Just to clarify, I should have said at the beginning that the microphone is operated for you, so you do not need to press a button. It will happen automatically.

**Kevin Lindsay:** That is fine—thank you.

I will be quick. We have made significant progress with ScotRail in getting a guaranteed second person on every train. That is welcomed, and it was a really good step forward. It took 40 years of campaigning to get that agreement, which we got in December. However, what was given with one hand was taken away with the other, because ScotRail started removing staff from stations. We need to fully staff stations and trains to make the railway as safe and welcoming as possible. We were really disappointed that ScotRail chose to close some of the booking offices, reduce the hours and move people around. We need more staff at stations rather than fewer.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I will stay on the issue of antisocial behaviour. ScotRail has expanded its travel safe team. Has that made any difference across the network?

**Gordon Martin:** It is certainly a welcome addition. I see the team quite a lot when I am travelling a bit later at night. During the week, when I am travelling home from work, I often see the team on the trains. I think that that is a welcome addition. It is too early to say, but my initial thoughts are that the team is definitely a welcome addition and positive. If anything, I would like it to be expanded.

**Douglas Lumsden:** How many people are in the team now? How does it work?

**Gordon Martin:** I do not know the total number at the moment.

**Kevin Lindsay:** There are 25.

**Gordon Martin:** There are 25 people in the team, as Kevin Lindsay has just informed me.

ScotRail has just started the team in Edinburgh, and it is a welcome addition. The members of staff travel between, for example, Airdrie and Helensburgh at a certain time. They deal with any

passenger issues that there might be on the journey and then get off and travel somewhere else.

The team is a very welcome addition. I think that more resource should be put into that, because people like to see those staff members. It gives people a bit of reassurance and comfort when they see that, as well as a ticket examiner or guard, there are additional staff, particularly later in the evenings.

**Douglas Lumsden:** The alcohol ban on ScotRail services was mentioned earlier. Has the ban made any difference on the railway? Is it sustainable? Is it enforceable? Obviously, your members are stuck in the middle at times.

**Gordon Martin:** I do not think that it is enforceable, certainly for our members, and we have made that clear time after time. It is not fair on our members to ask them to enforce it. You are asking one member of staff to potentially try to say to a football crowd or people going to a concert or whatever, "No drinking—it's not allowed." It is simply not enforceable—not through staff members, anyway.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Do you think that the ban has had a positive impact on safety on trains, or has it had a minimal impact?

**Gordon Martin:** It has not had an impact. I still hear about assaults and threatened assaults on staff members, and that is because people are drinking. You can have all the bans you want but, if you cannot enforce them, they are ignored, and this ban is being ignored.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Would you like the ban to be lifted altogether, or would you prefer to see the situation that we had previously? I think that alcohol was banned at certain times. How would the RMT like to move forward?

**Gordon Martin:** In an ideal world, you would like to see people drinking for enjoyment rather than drinking too much, getting drunk and becoming abusive, but we do not live in an ideal world. In the world that we live in, if ScotRail is going to lift the ban, that is a decision that will be made, and the ban will be lifted. However, protections need to be put place in for the workforce, whether or not a ban is in place.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Have you had discussions with the Scottish Government about that?

**Gordon Martin:** Yes.

11:15

**Douglas Lumsden:** What has the Government's feedback been?

**Gordon Martin:** It is fair to say that it is a moving feast at the moment. It is still under discussion. There is a difference of opinion on it within my union and—I am sure—in other unions. Some people are in favour of extending the ban, but if we are going to extend it, we need to be able to enforce it and police it. In the same way, if we lift it, people's behaviour still needs to be policed. That cannot be done by one or two members of staff.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Kevin, do you have a view on that?

**Kevin Lindsay:** We oppose the ban on alcohol on trains because it is absolutely pointless and it is not enforced. I will give an example. When the Taylor Swift concert was on, loads of people of all different genders and ages were drinking on trains and there was not an issue. However, if a Celtic v Rangers game or a Hibs v Hearts game is taking place—or a game involving any other football team; I will try not to discriminate—people drinking on trains could be an issue.

You could get a London North Eastern Railway train from Aberdeen and sit and drink from Aberdeen to Edinburgh. However, if you got a ScotRail train for that same journey, you could not drink. It is pointless. On a Friday afternoon, LNER has security guards and has banned alcohol sales and the consumption of alcohol between Edinburgh and Newcastle for two, three or four trains. It is dealing with the problem.

Previously, alcohol bans were introduced on the railway for high-risk events. They were managed and policed. Having a ban such as the one that we have is absolutely pointless. I do not think that it has had any impact. The majority of people who have an issue with alcohol or who engage in antisocial behaviour on trains got on the train in that state. Usually, people are not travelling for hours. They are normally on a 20-minute or half-hour journey. They are not getting any drunker. They are already drunk. We need to manage them and have station staff, along with the British Transport Police, to ensure that they do not get on the train in the first place.

We welcome the lifting of the alcohol ban in its present guise. However, we will leave it to the police and ScotRail to pick what trains alcohol should not be allowed on, based on the intelligence about the risk around each event.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Have you had discussions with the Scottish Government to put that view forward?

**Kevin Lindsay:** Yes, we have made that case to several transport ministers over the years—some of them are in this room; I can count three in here just now. Sarah Boyack is one of them. I was here before a lot of you were. *[Laughter.]*



The reality is that the present transport minister is listening, and I believe that there is an on-going debate within Government on how it can move forward. We are hopeful that a sensible solution will be found.

**The Convener:** It seems odd that we allow it on the sleeper train from Inverness, which is run by ScotRail. I do not know why we allow it there and not on other trains.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I wish the sleepers were run by ScotRail, but they are not; they are run by Scottish Rail Holdings. We have two lots of directors, who are all collecting six-figure salaries, but that is a different issue.

**The Convener:** We can go into that another time.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I was going to go down the Caledonian Sleeper route, but I will not now. ScotRail has been nationalised since April 2022, and there has been no significant improvement in ScotRail's performance since then. There are 11 per cent fewer services running than there were in 2019. Why do you think that is? What can be done to improve the service?

**Kevin Lindsay:** I think that there was a political decision not to put the trains back as they were in 2019. We were outside Bute house just after the end of the pandemic campaigning to get services reinstated. The decision not to reinstate the trains has cost less but has led to fewer people using them. If we ran more trains, more people would come, but we have to make the service cost effective.

Bringing the franchise back into public ownership was a welcome move, and we fully supported it. We genuinely believe that we should look not just at whether ScotRail but all aspects of the railway should be under public ownership.

At the moment, ScotRail still pays Abellio to do its payroll and human resource support. We talk about nationalising the railway, but we have not done that. We have taken back the ownership and the contract for running the trains, that is all. We can do much more to make it more cost effective and to allow us to invest more money back into the railway or into other things, which the Scottish Parliament could decide on.

**Gordon Martin:** Kevin Lindsay has covered a huge amount. We touched on Caledonian Sleeper and ScotRail. Caledonian Sleeper is a small train operating company that is top-heavy with management as opposed to staff, so savings could be made there. There is also duplication between sleeper and ScotRail services and savings could be made there.

We are a long way away from properly nationalising the railway. As Kevin said, the train

operating company is in the public sector but we could do much more and make many more savings and efficiencies while making the service better at the same time. That is what the trade unions are ultimately looking for.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Are there ways for the Government to make Caledonian Sleeper cheaper? We often hear that the sleeper is too expensive. Is that because it is top-heavy with management?

**Gordon Martin:** It is very top-heavy: there are about 70 managers for 200 staff, and some senior managers at director level earn hundreds of thousands of pounds for running what is, in effect, a small operation. There are definitely savings to be made.

**The Convener:** I am trying to understand something before we leave this subject. We have fewer trains, but the public performance measure was at a lower level last year than it was when that was given as the reason for the nationalisation of ScotRail. So that I can square that loop, can you explain why, even with fewer trains, we still cannot get the public performance measure up to where it was before nationalisation?

Kevin Lindsay, you are smiling, so you must have the answer. Do you want to have a go at that?

**Kevin Lindsay:** If I had the answer, I would not be working for ASLEF; I would be getting offered hundreds of thousands of pounds to be managing director of ScotRail.

A lot of the issues with trains are not just ScotRail issues; they are issues connected to the performance of Network Rail and even to the performance of other train operating companies and of freight operators. If a freight train breaks down, closing a line, that affects ScotRail's performance.

**The Convener:** I accept that point, but the problem is that we have a Government that nationalised the railway in Scotland by taking it away from Abellio, on the basis that the PPM was not up to the required standard. The PPM is now at a lower standard than the one that Abellio achieved, and fewer trains are being run, so how can we use that to judge one operator but not the other? That is all that I am asking.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I would love to be able to answer that, but that is a question to put to the Scottish Government, which made the decision. We welcomed it, but it was a Government decision. Removing Abellio was the correct decision because it was failing and because any money that the company made was reinvested in Holland, not in Scotland. If we want Scotland's

railway to flourish, every penny of profit should be reinvested in Scotland.

**The Convener:** I accept that too, but my point is that it is costing Scotland £300 million a year more to run the railways than that cost under Abellio. It is costing more, the public performance measure target is further from being reached and fewer trains are running, so I am trying to understand why that is good for Scotland.

**Kevin Lindsay:** You are using one measure.

**The Convener:** I am using three.

**Kevin Lindsay:** Scotland's railway brings £4 billion into the economy, so I would argue that investment in the railway is investment in Scotland's economy. We must get away from the mindset of saying how much that costs and we must invest in the railway, which should be there for all of us to use when we need it. We must keep building on that. Rather than thinking that it will cost us another £10 million here or £20 million there, we should build a railway that works for us all. If we invest in tracks, signals, trains and staff, the railway will grow, as has been proved in the past. We should not get stuck on comparing nationalised performance with Abellio performance, because the world has changed.

I feel as if I am defending ScotRail, and I will do that because I am passionate about the railway. The reality is that we must invest in our railway and that ScotRail's performance is not just down to ScotRail because there are a multitude of other factors—I could even go on about the ageing high-speed train fleet. There are loads of issues that contribute, so you cannot look at a single thing.

**The Convener:** I understand, Kevin. We want a better railway. All that I am trying to say is that the performance targets that we have been given are not being reached. We seem to be spending more money on the railway but getting fewer services. That is what I am trying to equate it to. Gordon, do you want to comment?

**Gordon Martin:** There are a multitude of reasons for that, and I would argue that one of them is the problems with the infrastructure. There have been serious cuts at Network Rail. It will argue that, overall, it is spending more in the maintenance budget. We can have that argument, but I know from first-hand experience that there are now far fewer boots on the ballast. It is using technology, whereas it used to use staff. Technology does not fix the faults. If there is a track circuit failure, for example, all the technology in the world will not fix it. We need staff on the ground to do a number of things—first, to keep trains operating until close of play, and then to get in at night and carry out a proper repair. That does not seem to be getting done at the moment, unfortunately.

Another factor, which is again to do with the infrastructure, is that there have been massive cuts to the renewables budgets year on year. Control period 7 has, yet again, more cuts and more redundancies. We end up with an ironic situation in which Network Rail has a big vacancy gap at the same time as Babcock Rail, which is the main infrastructure company in Scotland, is making people redundant. There is no joined-up thinking. If we had more joined-up thinking, we would definitely have a far better railway service, in my opinion.

**The Convener:** Okay—fine. I do not want to hog the discussion, so we will move on to the next question, which comes from Mark Ruskell.

**Mark Ruskell:** Kevin, you mentioned decommissioning of the HSTs and you talked earlier about the procurement of rolling stock. I am interested in hearing what you think should come out of the HST replacement process. What should we be procuring? I am also interested in hearing any thoughts that you and Gordon Martin have about how that process could be better.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I am desperately keen to see the HSTs leave Scotland. They are polluters and they are trains from another era. It was a poor decision to allow them to become the backbone of our intercity services in Scotland. They are here, but they have been terrible performers. ScotRail purchased 26 of them, but I do not think that there has been a day when more than 13 of them have been in service, so they have been poor value for money for us.

I am delighted that the procurement process has started. However, it seems to take for ever and a day. Getting a new train is not like getting a new car. You cannot just go to the showroom, pick it and then get it. I mentioned the rolling stock companies earlier. In our view, the rolling stock companies have been the biggest—I need to choose my words carefully here; I am being recorded—takers in the industry, but not many people have paid them much attention. We as the trade unions are probably as guilty of not putting a lot of focus on them over the years, but we need to consider the huge amounts of money that they are making, with profit after profit. I am not against a company making a profit, but when you are getting charged extortionate fees for old rolling stock, that cannot be right.

When the Scottish Government is looking to get a new train, it has to go to the market. It has to look to see which trains are not being used or which trains another company has finished with, and it has to consider whether they could be less-polluting diesel replacements. It cannot get new electric trains, because Network Rail has scaled back on its electrification plans. We do not have the necessary technology for battery-operated

trains to run for the required length of time, and there is still a debate about hydrogen, so there are huge issues around that.

This is not a set-up, but we will be launching a paper on procurement later this afternoon, and you have all been invited to hear how we believe that the Scottish Government should issue green bonds as an alternative way of financing new trains. We believe that there are significant savings to be made through that. I will not go into too much detail now, because my general secretary has come to Scotland to launch the paper. We all have bosses in life. However, I urge you to come along this evening. You should all have a copy of the report as well.

We need to do something different. Why do we constantly pay private companies to lease us our trains and then allow us to buy them back in 30 years' time? That is a private finance initiative. PFI was a failed model for schools and hospitals, and it is no different for the railway, so let us do something different. Green bonds can be an alternative way to approach that.

11:30

**Gordon Martin:** Kevin Lindsay has covered a huge amount of the issue. In our written submission, we encouraged the committee to engage with the Government about setting up a publicly owned rolling stock provider. With the initial PFI model, you were paying way over the odds for what you were getting and it was run into the ground. As we saw earlier, we ended up with really old HSTs coming up from England to the ScotRail network a few years ago. That is a failed model. It needs to be completely ripped up and rewritten. I am looking forward to hearing what ASLEF has to say about it this afternoon, but we have submitted written evidence that we would welcome a publicly owned rolling stock company in Scotland.

**Mark Ruskell:** Jackson Cullinane and Stephen Smellie, I will bring you in on this. As I understand it, one of the big issues to do with the municipalisation of bus companies is the purchasing of rolling stock and bus stations and bringing all those assets into public ownership. Is there a read-across to other ways to procure green bonds when we are looking at the municipalisation of bus services? I can certainly see that being a real barrier for councils or other bodies that are set up to deliver municipalisation.

**Stephen Smellie:** Jackson Cullinane talked about moving in that direction. In the next few weeks, the Scottish Trades Union Congress will produce a report on the case for public ownership of buses. We have been working closely with trade unions and with community grass-roots

campaigns, such as Get Glasgow Moving, which has done a lot of work on the issue. Jackson referred to the franchising model, which has been promoted and developed down south and in Wales. I think that the Welsh Government has committed to an all-Wales model. The advice is that, in order for that model to work, the rolling stock—the buses—and the stations and depots would need to be in public ownership. If you were going to give contracts to companies, they would run the buses, but the assets would be in public sector ownership.

Obviously, that will cost money, but, given that private bus companies have made £68 million of profit from a declining service in the most recent financial year, there is money in the system that could be utilised for that purpose. Such a model would be a first step towards public sector municipal ownership. However, it must be pointed out that, as well as the Lothians, Highland and Stirling are running buses to provide services that the private sector has not been able to provide, so that is the future. We need to move in that direction to integrate services—we have talked about integrated services and about the plan—in order to get people back on the buses and, indeed, on the trains.

On how it is financed, yes, money would be needed, but money is leaking out of the system all the time. Rolling stock companies are one example and private bus companies are another clear example. None of those profits are made without public subsidy; that is profit that is made from public money, so that is where the money can come from to contribute to public sector ownership.

**Mark Ruskell:** Jackson Cullinane, do you want to add to that?

**Jackson Cullinane:** I think that Stephen Smellie has covered it. He referred to the level of profit that private bus companies make, and I think that I hinted at the fact that bus companies' overall revenue is increasingly reliant on public subsidy. I have seen figures that suggest that, if you take all the public subsidies—all the bits and pieces, from concessionary fares to the national support grant to the direct funding that some local authorities provide, because they intervene when a bus company says that it is taking off a route—we are now at the point where 63 per cent of some bus companies' overall revenue is coming from public money.

In contrast, Lothian Buses gets public money, but it is a municipally owned company, so that money is put back in to the local authority. Indeed, a large chunk of the money that goes back in to the local authority is used to subsidise other bus routes, to keep them available to the people who

live in those particular areas. That is the type of model that we need to get to.

We accept that, in the short term, that will mean some cost in the form of a cash injection to start up the municipal bus companies. The report from the STUC will show that the level of money that it would take to do that is still being detailed, but, from the initial drafts that I have seen, it will show that the amount of money that would be required is extremely small in comparison with what is currently leaking out of the system. That initial cash injection is required to set it up.

**Stephen Smellie:** In the previous session, a question was asked about people's preferences for service models, and the answer was given that people do not really care about the service model as long as the buses turn up on time. That is not a particularly scientific response. Get Glasgow Moving did its own survey and, when it consulted people about models, the majority said that they preferred the publicly owned municipal bus service. When the issues are explained and discussed, that model makes sense to people and they prefer it. Promoting that is worth further exploration.

One of the things that is holding back change is the fact that making legislation that allows for franchising and public ownership is extremely time consuming. The legislation in Scotland is deemed to be way behind schedule compared with what they have in Wales and England. There has been a delay because the Scottish Government has not been able to properly introduce the legislation to allow regional transport partnerships to move forward on the issue. That challenge needs to be addressed quickly in order to make progress.

**Mark Ruskell:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** Kevin Stewart has a follow-up.

**Kevin Stewart:** I do. We will all be glad to see the HSTs go, but we have to get the right type. I am interested to hear what the witnesses have to say on that—Kevin Lindsay said that there are a lot of factors involved, but you are some of the folk with the knowledge around about what is required.

Beyond that, I am interested in the green bonds proposal. If we can get money away from fat-cat rolling stock companies, that suits me down to a tee. To follow up what Gordon Martin was saying about Network Rail, could we use green bonds for infrastructure improvements right across the board on our railways? That may be difficult under the devolved settlement, but I am interested to hear your views on it.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I am just desperate to see the back of HST. What comes in behind it is going to be what is available.

I am conscious that if I mention any particular type of traction or train that we favour, the private owners of the company that makes it may see that as an opportunity to hike the price.

**Kevin Stewart:** Fair play.

**Kevin Lindsay:** I would rather hold my counsel on that and let the procurement process take place in a fair manner.

As for the green bonds, we will launch that initiative this afternoon. We see it as an opportunity to finance things in a different way. It is about whether it is the political will of the Scottish Government to come forward with green bonds. When Humza Yousaf was First Minister, he said that he was going to make proposals on that—we have not seen them yet, so we have come forward with our own proposals. Two professors from Glasgow university have done work on them for us. They will be here this afternoon and will be able to go in to greater detail on that.

Using the green bonds for Network Rail infrastructure might be a bit more complicated because Network Rail in essence is owned by the Department for Transport. I am not sure about doing that.

**Kevin Stewart:** What if it was devolved?

**Kevin Lindsay:** If it was devolved, there would be nothing to stop the Scottish Government doing that. We would welcome the full devolution of rail powers to the Scottish Parliament.

**Kevin Stewart:** Thank you.

**Gordon Martin:** Similarly to what Kevin Lindsay said, it is not for us to say who our preferential bidder would be for the rolling stock. All that I would say on that is that whoever wins that contract, we want the work—and the maintenance of the contract—to continue to be carried out by our members at ScotRail, if it is ScotRail that you are specifically speaking about.

With regard to the green bonds for Network Rail, again, that is not devolved. If Scotland had become independent back in 2014—

**Kevin Stewart:** We wish.

**Gordon Martin:** —which I campaigned very hard for and voted for, we would have had to find solutions to those problems. I am sure that the politicians, such as you guys on the committee, have had discussions in Parliament about those sorts of things, but the failed model that we have at the moment has got to go.

**Kevin Stewart:** Kevin Lindsay, I appreciate that you do not want to be cornered, for good reasons, on the rolling stock. I will ask you about what you know about new technologies from elsewhere. What are your members' thoughts on using things

such as hydrogen and electric battery power in future?

**Kevin Lindsay:** I have concerns about hydrogen. The technology is not tested thoroughly enough on trains. I am not sure whether running trains is the best use of hydrogen or how cost effective it would be.

Out at Bo'ness and Kinneil, they were building a project—I think that it was in your constituency, deputy convener—and were looking at doing a hydrogen train, but they have abandoned that project because they did not think that they could get it to work. The technology is out there across the world, but I am not convinced that we will be purchasing any hydrogen trains any time soon.

If they could get electric batteries to run longer, I would be happy to look at that. All that we are looking for is a newer train that meets modern crashworthiness, because that is what was behind the tragic events of Carmont. That drove us to raise concerns about the HSTs, because they do not meet modern crashworthiness. They are old trains that have served their time, but Scotland deserves better—it is as simple as that. We need a more reliable intercity fleet.

**The Convener:** Before we go any further, Kevin Stewart, you asked the question that Mr Lumsden wanted to ask, so I will bring him in on hydrogen. We all need to be careful. We all want to ask questions all the time, but we cannot. Douglas, do you want to ask any questions on that issue?

**Douglas Lumsden:** No, it has been asked already, convener.

**The Convener:** Michael, did you want to ask a question on hydrogen?

**Michael Matheson:** Not specifically on hydrogen. Parts of the network will be challenging to electrify, and would not make sense economically in terms of distance. There is also an issue in that it would probably create greater risk in relation to weather resilience on some of those routes. For example, if you electrify the line going up to Inverness, it is likely that adverse weather will impact overhead lines and so on, but I know that part of the plan is to electrify it.

I recognise that hydrogen technology is not there yet. At best, hydrogen might get deployed in a local commuter train capacity, but certainly not in intercity capacity, given the energy demands that there would be. Battery technology, again, will probably be used in the commuter space at best, rather than in the intercity space. I suspect that we will end up falling back on some sort of diesel hybrid. How can we deploy that technology in a way that helps to reduce its carbon output? I am conscious that renewable-type diesels could be deployed that might be a mechanism that would

allow you to use diesel while significantly reducing your carbon footprint. Has there been discussion about that in the industry? Could you see that developing in other parts of the industry outwith Scotland?

11:45

**Kevin Lindsay:** I am not an expert in those fields. What I can say is that ScotRail has looked at trying to run diesel trains with vegetable oil and is now running a trial on that. That might be an alternative way of looking at it. Again, I am not an expert on that.

I think that there will still be a place for some sort of diesel train, because of reliability issues. I can see the replacement HST being a diesel, because I cannot see any real alternative, but it will be cleaner and greener than the current HSTs. It will also be cheaper and more reliable. I can see a step forward; it might not be a full sprint to net zero, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Technology is developing constantly. If you look at all the technologies and investments around Europe and the wider world, you see that there is more investment going into different types of train. However, we have to take on board the environment that we live in. We have a Victorian railway, and all of it is on the coasts of our country. You are right that it is very scenic, but we get hammered by the weather. The wires on the electrics down the Ayrshire coast take a pounding, never mind trying to run the cables up to Inverness. However, who is to say that we cannot do something different and run the cables in a different way? Again, that is more for engineers than for me.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a question that follows on from that. We have just been talking about reliability in the network, particularly for trains, and we have talked about the loss of bus and train services. How do we get multimodal travel? There have been lots of representations to the committee about how to enable people to travel from where they are to where they want to go using different types of transport, whether that is walking and cycling or getting on a bus or train. We have heard a lot of stuff about reliability and real-time information and making sure that people know when to get off the bus or train at their stop. What more can we do to make it work for people? Do we need to join up our thinking? Should that be local, regional or national? What solutions do we need to be looking at?

**Gordon Martin:** The convener summed it up earlier when he said that he has been talking about this for the past 10 years.

You answered your own question: we need joined-up thinking. However, I do not know where

that will come from. Will it come from the Scottish Government down to the council level and through to companies?

I am currently dealing with ScotRail and CalMac Ferries. If you could get a ferry into Ardrossan, you could run a train right down there so that people could get off the train, straight on to the ferry and be over in Arran. There can be arrangements like that with buses, between ferry ports and train stations. However, as Jackson Cullinane said, there is nothing more frustrating than a bus driver leaving at 5 to 10 when he or she knows that the train is coming in at 10 o'clock. That is just madness.

We need wholesale public ownership for it to work. If you have private operators competing in that arena, it is not going to happen; they will look after their own vested interests as opposed to the interests of the community.

We need joined-up thinking. It will take political will. I do not know whether the political will is there; if it is not, we need to find it. We need political consensus. The trade unions will work with anybody in the transport industry who has a progressive agenda. We need to work together to achieve this. At the moment, in a lot of cases, what we are delivering collectively is not working for people, and we are letting the people of Scotland down badly.

**Sarah Boyack:** There are missed opportunities, are there not? There is lots of infrastructure, but we are not maximising its use. The rail freight industry lobbied us recently about that. You cannot get from ferries on to the mainland and straight on to rail infrastructure, which would take a lot of stuff off our roads. Do witnesses have any other thoughts on how we can integrate that and get planning? Frustratingly, I have been discussing this issue since 1999, not just in the past decade. What would be your top priorities to make it happen? Stephen Smellie, you stuck your hand up.

**Stephen Smellie:** I agree with what Gordon Martin said. We already have ScotRail, and most of the ferries and the subway in Glasgow are under public ownership. There are opportunities to properly integrate. More powers, or more investment, are needed for local transport planning.

I go back to the example of the bus leaving five minutes before the train comes in. As a public transport user, I have had to jump off the train and run as fast as I can to try to catch the bus before it heads up the road so that I do not have to walk for half an hour. All those things can be looked at, but only with public ownership and public planning. There is a stronger role for local democratic influence over these things.

At the moment, buses are run on the basis of competing in the market; that is the result of deregulation all those years ago. They compete on the roads. We should demonstrate, and clearly plan, what the market is, so that we know what we want providers to do and they can compete to serve the market, rather than saying that we want to run buses to make a profit and subsidising services in certain areas. That would allow us to cross-subsidise—for example, using profitable routes to subsidise rural routes. All that needs to be knitted together.

However, from a public sector union point of view, there are also other things that need to be done in order to get people to want to use public transport, and so that in some cases, as far as possible, people do not need to travel. We have people who work in the public sector who travel for miles every day when they could be working half a mile down the road—for example, people who work in schools. I am from South Lanarkshire—we have people who live in East Kilbride and travel to Hamilton to work in a school when they could easily be redeployed to a school in East Kilbride, and vice versa. We need to start thinking about how we encourage people to live closer to where they work, or work closer to where they live.

Those sorts of issues can be addressed—Unison is about to launch a report next week on greening social care, for example. We have social care workers driving around, sometimes in their own cars. The council sometimes provides cars, but in the private sector those workers tend to use their own cars.

We could develop a public transport system that would allow public sector workers to leave their cars at home when they deliver those services.

We need to look at that as a whole, not as different bits. That requires public ownership, public control and public planning, and integrated planning to meet the needs of communities, looking at people who are going to work and what employers need them to do, whether they are in the public sector or the private sector. A lot of planning needs to be done, and it needs to be democratically open to the influence of local people.

Again, I refer to Get Glasgow Moving, which is currently running a whole series of meetings across all of Strathclyde, talking to people about these issues, primarily around buses. The overwhelming view that seems to be coming out of those meetings is that people want to have access to, and to be able to use, public transport. If we could just plan it properly, they would be able to do so.

**Sarah Boyack:** Where would you start in terms of priority? Is it about the regional transport

partnerships working with community groups and local authorities and, on the islands, getting people to talk to CalMac—all those kinds of things?

**Stephen Smellie:** Yes. Regional planning is essential, and it needs to involve local people, local councils, grass-roots organisations, passengers and trade unions in planning on the basis of the actual needs in the community. It is like any other public service—what are the needs? We are talking here about a public service—it should not be a private profit-making service. It is a public service, and we need to consider what the public needs. I would start with that.

We need to start moving towards franchising models for buses. We need to start saying that the money that has leaked out of the system for both bus and rail services to provide profits should be recirculated back as investment into buses and rolling stock, and the types of bus shelters that we heard about earlier today. I empathise with everybody who talked about bus shelters—there is nothing worse than standing at a bus stop with no shelter in the pouring rain, no matter where you are in the country, whether it is a rural or an urban area. All those things need investment, and that requires money, which is currently leaking out into private profit.

I would start with the planning process and take that direction of travel.

**Sarah Boyack:** We would also need to look at practical things. You are at the bus stop, and hopefully you have a seat, but do you have real-time information? If you have sight loss, how do you find out that information?

Are there any other comments about how we actually join up the improvements so that people can use different types of public transport, and walk or cycle into the system?

Kevin, do you want to come in on that?

**Kevin Lindsay:** For me, the starting point is integrated ticketing. We had it for the dignitaries during the United Nations climate change conference of the parties, but it was not good enough for the people of Scotland, which baffled me. We have proved that we can do it. If we start with integrated ticketing and get the companies talking to each other, and used to dealing with each other, we can then start doing the stuff that Stephen Smellie and Gordon Martin mentioned earlier.

It is not difficult—it just takes the political will to do it, and that comes down to you people. It is not down to trade unions or the communities—it is down to our elected members to deliver a transport system that Scotland deserves and has been crying out for, whether it is since 1999 or 2016. That is what we require.

**Sarah Boyack:** I think that you will soon be able to use an integrated tram and bus ticket in the Lothians. That is coming soon, because they are prioritising it. Doing that and making it work right across the country is really important.

**The Convener:** I certainly heard about integrated ticketing in 2016. I think that Stewart Stevenson, who had been a transport minister, brought it up.

**Sue Webber:** I have a number of questions, if that is okay. First, I know that Jackson Cullinane spoke at length about the municipally owned Lothian Buses, but I remind everyone that it is, thankfully, not run by any politicians but by bus experts. The dividend does not always go back to local authorities; Lothian Buses decides the dividend. At the moment, a lot of the dividend is being used to finance the trams.

I want to ask about train passenger numbers, which is key to driving revenue, and I know that your views on profit are perhaps a bit different from mine. To increase passenger numbers, you probably need more stations. I notice that the number of stations that are managed in Scotland has been quite static. I wonder whether I can unashamedly make a pitch about building a nice new station in Winchburgh. How might that change passenger behaviour and drive people from cars on to trains?

**Kevin Lindsay:** I am smiling, because Winchburgh station should have been built years ago. The triangle should have been electrified, which would have taken away half the argument for not building it in the first place. Winchburgh is a growing town in West Lothian, and there seems to be no reason for the station not to be built.

Likewise, I want to see investment in the railway. The Edinburgh south suburban line and crossrail Glasgow, which are opportunities to build new stations within the central belt, could easily be looked at. At the same time, if we are going to build a station on the east coast, we should consider how many trains stop a day at the new one at Reston—is it called Reston?

**Sue Webber:** Yes, in the Borders. Not many do.

**Kevin Lindsay:** If we are going to build new stations, it is key that we serve them with trains. We would certainly welcome Winchburgh getting a station, because it is an anomaly that should have been picked up when the electrification of Glasgow and Edinburgh took place years ago.

**Sue Webber:** Do I have the opportunity to ask about bus priority measures, convener?

**The Convener:** You do, provided that it does not relate to a subject area that affects only your constituency.

**Sue Webber:** It does not. This morning, we heard about the reliability and punctuality of buses being a key issue when it comes to getting people to use them. The report on bus patronage trends notes that road works are among the most significant contributors to bus delays. Is there anything that we can do that might help to reduce the delays and lack of punctuality that is caused by road works across the various bus networks?

**Stephen Smellie:** Local government could certainly do with more funds in order to repair the roads more quickly and maintain them at a level so that we do not have to dig up so many, particularly towards the end of the financial year before the budget runs out. More funding would certainly help. We would welcome the investment in road infrastructure so that buses can be given priority lanes where it is practical. I am not an engineer, but I imagine that such lanes are probably not practical in every place.

To be parochial—as you were parochial—I am from Hamilton, where, after a campaign with the local community, we recently got the X1, the direct bus that goes from Hamilton on to the motorway, back. It was a bus that was run and then pulled, and we had to fight to get it back. It is early days yet, but the service seems to be quite popular. Such buses have to be properly subsidised.

We need to identify where the need is, so that people can commute to Glasgow from Hamilton and lots of other places. Getting buses and services that are designed for the needs of people is part of solving the problem as well. Local government would certainly welcome more investment in getting the roads maintained properly.

**The Convener:** There are no more questions, so I thank the panel. Kevin, I hope that you have not given away all the answers prior to this afternoon's press conference on your schemes. I just say with a smile that Dunbeath is one of the last stations where you actually wave to stop the train. There is a lot to do across all our railways.

Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given this morning. I move the committee into private session.

12:00

*Meeting continued in private until 12:45.*



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