Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

Transport Committee

Comataidh na Còmhdhail

Wednesday 16 September 2026

Session 7

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TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
5th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green)
Zen Ghani (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
*Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
*Graham Simpson (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
*Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Graeme Cook (Transport Scotland)
Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Joanne Maguire (ScotRail)
Hannah Ross (Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd)
Liam Sumpter (Network Rail Scotland)

LOCATION

The Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Transport Committee

Wednesday 16 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

The Convener (Willie Rennie): Good morning, and welcome to the fifth meeting of the Transport Committee in 2026. We have received apologies from Zen Ghani. I welcome Martyn Day, who is attending as Zen's substitute. As this is Martyn's first appearance at the Transport Committee, our first item of business is to invite him to declare any relevant interests.

Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP): I have no relevant interests to declare, but I will try to make my contributions as exciting as I can.

The Convener: Thank you, Martyn.

Scotland's Rail Services

09:30

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is an evidence session on Scotland's rail services. I welcome our guests this morning: Graeme Cook, director of rail delivery, Transport Scotland; Joanne Maguire, managing director, ScotRail; Hannah Ross, chief executive, Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd; and Liam Sumpter, managing director, Network Rail Scotland.

I ask members and witnesses to keep their questions and answers short and snappy. Of course, our witnesses will need time to answer the questions properly, but we will try to speed things along.

We will open with questions from Collette Stevenson.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I give a very warm welcome to our panel. I will touch on the issue of violence against women and girls. You will be aware that there have been several reports of assaults occurring on the Caledonian Sleeper. I completely understand that you cannot comment on matters that are sub judice, but can you give me more information on what the numbers are, the nature of the incidents that have been reported, how they were handled and whether any operational or safeguarding measures have been put in place as a result?

Joanne Maguire, do you want to come in first?

Joanne Maguire (ScotRail): I am happy to talk about safety across our railway, and Hannah Ross might want to talk about the Caledonian Sleeper in particular.

The safety of our passengers and staff is of paramount importance to us, and it will probably not surprise you to hear that the safety of women and girls is personally important to me. Since we came into public ownership, we have been backed by the Government to make a significant investment in personal safety across the railway. We have one of the largest closed-circuit television networks in the United Kingdom, which covers our stations, and we also have on-train CCTV.

On measures that are specific to ScotRail, we have trebled the number of body-worn cameras that we have, going from 300 to 1,000. Our commitment is that every front-line member of staff has a body-worn camera available to them. Reports show that those reduce the number of offences on the railway.

We also have an uninterrupted power supply to all of our help points, which we have on every platform. Those connect directly to one of our two

CCTV centres, which are in Paisley and Dunfermline, and enable people to talk to a human being 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if they feel that they are not safe on a platform and they want to connect with someone. Further, on our trains, we have a second member of staff—that is, we have the driver and a member of train crew—who people can talk to.

We have also expanded our travel safe team, and they now permanently cover the backshift. Initially, we had a team who booked on in Paisley, and we now also have a team who book on in Haymarket and cover the east of the country. Those teams work proactively with the British Transport Police, and we are very proud of that partnership. Liam Sumpter and I work closely with the BTP on a weekly basis, and our travel safe team works with it on a daily basis, focusing on known hotspots.

The final thing that I will say is that we also know that antisocial behaviour is linked to ticketless travel. Therefore, we have invested in our revenue protection team to ensure that we have more front-line staff who can make sure that our gate lines are closed and that we are checking tickets. In 2022, ticketless travel accounted for 8 per cent of journeys, and that figure is now just over 2 per cent. Under public ownership, we have driven down ticketless travel, which is also helping to combat antisocial behaviour.

I hand over to Hannah Ross to address the specific issues around the Caledonian Sleeper.

Hannah Ross (Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd): I acknowledge that this is a crucial issue and assure the committee that the board and executive team at Caledonian Sleeper take it incredibly seriously and are motivated to respond fully to it.

There have been a handful of issues with antisocial behaviour and violence against women and girls on the Caledonian Sleeper, some of which have been reported. In response to that, there has been a real look at the culture within the Caledonian Sleeper team, both on board and in the human resources team, which has included sexual harassment training, safeguarding training and policy development. There has been a real focus on escalation of grievances and on how we respond to those completely and fully. There has been a refresh of training on what counts as sexual harassment, to ensure that that is fully recognised, and on what counts as sexual assault. All incidents that are uncovered that have happened on train are now escalated to the Caledonian Sleeper board and safety, health and environment committee. It is a real area of focus and the executive team is highly motivated to respond to it.

With regard to Joanne Maguire's point about body-worn cameras, the team is also working with the union to expand the use of those on the sleeper.

Collette Stevenson: It is reassuring to know that.

CCTV is not preventative when an incident has already occurred, but what security arrangements are in place on the sleeper, particularly given that it runs overnight? I would also like to know whether alcohol is now allowed to be drunk on the trains again. If it is, have you seen an increase in incidents occurring because of that?

Hannah Ross: I will ask Jo Maguire to come in on the alcohol question. However, alcohol has been served on the sleeper for a number of years and we do not see that as a particular factor in our incidents. A couple of recent antisocial behaviour incidents have involved alcohol, but I do not think that that is a common theme.

We do have CCTV on the sleeper, but it is in the public areas and not the whole train.

Collette Stevenson: Are the times for buying alcohol on the sleeper the same as for buying alcohol in the shops?

Hannah Ross: I would need to double-check that. I do not think there is a cut-off for alcohol service on the sleeper, but I can double-check that to be sure and get back to the committee on it.

Collette Stevenson: Thanks very much—I appreciate that. I do not know whether anybody else wants to come in regarding alcohol.

Joanne Maguire: Speaking specifically of ScotRail services, we categorically have not seen an increase in antisocial behaviour since the alcohol ban was lifted. Alcohol can be consumed on ScotRail trains between 10:00 and 21:00. That is not exactly the same as alcohol licensing in retail premises, but it is not dissimilar, and we have not seen a spike in antisocial behaviour since we lifted the ban. We are not seeing a link between the consumption of alcohol on our trains and antisocial behaviour.

Collette Stevenson: Does anyone else want to come in?

Liam Sumpter (Network Rail Scotland): Good morning. I agree with the comments from my colleagues about how unacceptable this sort of behaviour is. It has no place in society and it absolutely has no place on our railway.

I want to focus on Glasgow Central station, because that is probably the location with the largest number of reports of these sorts of incidents. I will try to give the committee some confidence in how we are reacting to those. We are investing heavily in improving CCTV coverage at Glasgow Central, and we have a £3.7 million

programme to renew all the CCTV, which includes extending the coverage to places that have not previously been covered. We have a dedicated British Transport Police team at the station, and we have regular meetings with ScotRail and BTP to work to eliminate the scourge of such activity in the station. We are going through a process of training and retraining everybody who works at the station so that they can identify the signs when such activity might be starting to percolate and to intervene and de-escalate where possible. We see more of those issues in Glasgow Central, and we are responding to try to stamp them out.

Graeme Cook (Transport Scotland): I remind the committee that the Scottish Government, along with all the partners in the railway, set up a rail enforcement powers working group to address the rise in antisocial behaviour on the railway, which is part of a wider societal escalation of antisocial behaviour. That group reported in February this year and made 11 recommendations, all of which were endorsed and supported by the previous Cabinet Secretary for Transport. Officials are working with the railway to implement those 11 recommendations. In the interests of time, I will not go through all 11.

Collette Stevenson: Is the phone number that people can call widely advertised on trains, so that women and girls can see it at a glance? Should it be more readily advertised?

Joanne Maguire: We can always look at doing more. The number is advertised on our trains physically, and we include it in our on-train and station announcements, in which we remind people to contact BTP. Jointly with Network Rail, we launched a campaign with Crimestoppers that is specifically aimed at supporting those who experience VAWG.

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): I thank our witnesses for joining us. Hannah Ross noted that there have been a handful of issues on the Caledonian Sleeper. My question is for Hannah and for Joanne Maguire. Are we seeing a decrease or an increase in violence against women and girls on the Caledonian Sleeper and other trains? If there is an increase, how have you responded to that?

Hannah Ross: We have seen an increase in reports being made to us. I would not like to speculate on whether that is a genuine increase, or an increase in reporting and understanding.

Joanne Maguire: Across our network, we have seen an increase in reports of assaults. However, in some cases, that is proportionate to the numbers travelling. We encourage reporting, both from our staff—in fact, we have more reporting from staff than most other train operators have—and our customers. For example, we look closely at verbal and physical assaults, and we work with our trade unions on those. We have seen an increase. Unfortunately, as the committee will be aware, there is a societal challenge with antisocial behaviour, and the railway experiences that.

Iris Duane: Of course. As Hannah Ross said, there is potentially an increase in confidence in reporting, rather than in the number of incidents.

To jump off from something that Collette Stevenson said, are there any internal discussions about how to best cascade the information on how you support individuals? I know that you have information at stations, and I am impressed to hear that you have trebled the number of body-worn cameras and increased CCTV. However, when I speak to constituents, especially younger women, teenagers and mothers, I hear that there is a lot of fear about people being on trains or at stations late at night. There is potential for a campaign to ensure that people have confidence not only in where to report but that there is support in that area.

Joanne Maguire: I will mention one area that we are working on with and through our partners the British Transport Police and which is something that we are proud of at ScotRail. All our front-line staff come for at least one annual safety briefing. Around two years ago, we made a commitment that senior managers would attend that briefing so that we can take feedback directly from the front line on what is happening, because our staff know much better than my team and I do about what is happening day to day. A dedicated officer from the British Transport Police joined those briefings for a year, and we have restarted that this year.

09:45

We also have a dedicated member of the British Transport Police who works with our front-line teams to break down barriers and explain what happens when you send the BTP a text message. We have looked at what information is needed, and our staff know to give the carriage number, the service that they are on and the next station where they will stop, to provide the BTP with the best chance of being able to meet the train, perhaps a couple of stations along. We are working to educate our staff on the best ways to work with the British Transport Police, because they cannot be everywhere and on every train. We will also look at what we can do with the public, although, as I say, we make announcements about the BTP through our public information systems and we advertise it on trains, but we obviously need to do more.

Iris Duane: That is helpful. I have a final question on this topic. I have full confidence in the

intention to keep every station great, but we hear of problems with lighting at some stations that are serviced less. Is that considered, and do you know how quickly incidents such as that are responded to?

Joanne Maguire: We have lots of ways of checking that our stations, including our unstaffed stations, are operating properly. As I mentioned, we have help points, which are at unstaffed stations as well as staffed ones. We need to encourage more people to press the button on the help point if they feel unsafe, because they will be connected to a human. For example, they would be able to say to me, "We can see you—you've got a navy jacket on. Don't worry. Do you want to keep talking to us or do you want us to just keep an eye on you until the train arrives?".. They can do either.

Our managers check every station, including our unstaffed stations, cyclically at least every 30 days. In addition, Transport Scotland has an audit regime and goes around to check. It provides feedback directly to us, we review that feedback and our property services teams take action.

On further enhancing safety, we have around 70 senior managers in the business, and we carry out one safety audit per period, meaning that, every four weeks, everyone—including me—goes out and engages with the front line on safety. We record our actions, which are auditable, and they are followed up.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): I have a couple of quick questions on CCTV—the first is probably for Joanne Maguire to answer, and Liam Sumpter might be able to help with the second. Is the CCTV on ScotRail trains monitored live? Of course, ScotRail is not the only operator that has trains in Scotland. Certainly up until a few years ago, CrossCountry Trains did not have CCTV on all its trains. Has that been rectified? Do you know of any other operators that do not have it?

Joanne Maguire: I know that you have been to visit our CCTV centre in Paisley, Mr Simpson, so you have seen first hand the investment that we have made, with the backing of the Government. Our CCTV in stations is live, but, currently, it is not live on our trains, although we can access that footage. That is partly why we encourage staff to wear body-worn cameras; in addition, we get better footage from body-worn cameras, because they are in closer proximity to the action.

Liam Sumpter: On CCTV in stations, at both Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley, we have a control room with live CCTV in it, and we have somebody there watching the CCTV as part of their overall duties in the station at all times when it is open.

I cannot comment on which other operators have CCTV on every single service. That would be a question for those operators.

Graham Simpson: Does anyone know?

Graeme Cook: I do not know the answer, but all the cross-country operators other than that of the sleeper train are overseen by the United Kingdom Government's Department for Transport. It is a matter for the DFT to decide whether that is an appropriate policy to roll out, and I am afraid that I do not know if that is the case for all the operators.

The Convener: Thank you, all, for answering those questions. Those were substantial answers and we appreciate your time on that.

Let us turn to the app. It was reported that there were 3,000 complaints in the first 10 days of the roll-out. What is the number of complaints now?

Joanne Maguire: Thankfully, the number of complaints has not increased significantly since the 3,000 that were reported—

The Convener: Do you have a number?

Joanne Maguire: I do not have the exact number as of this morning, but we could certainly get back to you on that, convener.

The launch of the app has not been good enough. For that, I apologise to the committee and to all our passengers, whose confidence we have spent four years building up and for whom we invested in improving our services. We know that day 1 was not good enough—we had significant challenges with log-ons—and we had challenges on six other days. The service that we have provided has not been good enough. For the long term, the app is an investment that will make improvements for our passengers. Unfortunately, you have not seen those improvements yet because we are focused on stabilising the day-to-day delivery and operation of the app.

The Convener: Could I go back to the numbers, though?

Joanne Maguire: Yes.

The Convener: I had hoped that you would be on top of the trends in relation to what is happening and of exactly how many complaints you have received. I am a frequent user of your services and I see people having problems almost every day when I travel. I had a problem last week returning to Edinburgh from Glasgow Queen Street, when my return ticket did not show on the system. Your staff were very good and let me through, but other people have been encountering similar problems. I am disappointed that you do not have the numbers. Could anything in your papers tell us what they are?

Joanne Maguire: I do not have the exact number of complaints as of this morning. I can tell you that, this morning, a handful of customers came to us who could not access their flexipasses. As frustrating as that is for the customer experience, those issues were resolved by signing out of and back into the app.

On Monday morning, we had a challenge with payments, which lasted around half an hour, and we worked with customers to resolve 100 contacts on social media. Specific complaints will generally come into customer relations, and I do not want to mislead the committee, so I would rather give you an exact number, which we could get this morning and send to you later today.

The Convener: That is fine. The contract awards £83 million over nine years, but there was only one bidder. In hindsight, was that an error?

Joanne Maguire: There were several bidders but only one compliant bidder when we ran the tender exercise. We work within the frameworks of Scottish Government procurement, and SilverRail was the compliant bidder. Hindsight is a great thing, and we are carrying out a lessons-learned exercise to examine what could have been done better and what we should have done differently. We will share the results with our boards and with Transport Scotland.

The Convener: Should you have been able to predict that you would have only one compliant bidder because of how you shaped the contract?

Joanne Maguire: About five or six bidders tendered, but only one was compliant.

The Convener: Was that predictable?

Joanne Maguire: No, I do not believe that it was. We built a lot of requirements in because we want an app that will enable future developments and help us to deliver things such as multimodal ticketing, which is an ambition of the Government. A lot of requirements were built into the procurement spec; however, we did not foresee that we would have only one compliant bidder.

The Convener: Why? Surely, with the advisers that you have on site, you would have known who out there would be compliant. Did you not foresee the situation?

Joanne Maguire: In hindsight, we made the decision to go to the market because our contract with Trainline was coming to an end and that contract prohibited us from making further developments that we wanted to make. As I have said, hindsight is a great thing, and I am sure that some things could have been done differently. I did not see any reason for that to happen. I read our 494-page contract, in which nothing told me that we would not find another compliant bidder. Unfortunately, as many aspects of the railway are, our supply chain is quite constrained. The fact that we did not see that situation arising is as frustrating for us as it is for you.

The Convener: Are you not alarmed by that? Even with the myriad of people advising you, and with the support from Hannah Ross and her team and the experts in the system, you did not foresee that there was going to be only one compliant bidder.

Joanne Maguire: If I could go back in time—

The Convener: It is not about going back in time, though, is it? This is a publicly owned railway and we expect it to perform better. For one of the biggest contracts that we are going to award for the next few years, we got just one compliant bidder and we have this myriad of problems. Surely that was foreseeable.

Joanne Maguire: Up until the week before the launch, we were assured that everything was going to plan with regard to the launch of the app. However, we let our passengers down. It was notified to us at very short notice that SilverRail had made a change to the system. On the point about the one compliant bidder, that was not foreseen by us. I do not know whether Hannah Ross wants to comment.

Hannah Ross: I will just provide some assurance that Jo Maguire and her team have identified that one of the areas to be looked at as part of the lessons-learned review is the procurement process and the bid. I think that the market engagement and the understanding of the market's appetite for risk will come through when we undertake the lessons-learned review.

The Convener: SilverRail also had a problem when it rolled out apps for South Western Railway and Great Western Railway, so it has a track record of having problems in rolling out new systems. Did that come up in your risk register? Was it identified as a problem?

Joanne Maguire: We were assured that SilverRail had learned from that and that improvements had been made to its app. User testing had been ongoing since May, but, unfortunately, there was very late notification that changes had been made to the app. That has caused our customers significant frustration, which we are very sorry for, since the launch of the app.

The Convener: Does that not knock your confidence in SilverRail? How do you judge what it is going to do next? The problems are continuing and we are now six weeks on. Do you really have confidence that SilverRail will be able to deliver this nine-year contract?

Joanne Maguire: It is a nine-year contract. However, there are clauses in the contract whereby we could terminate—

The Convener: Are you thinking of a break?

Joanne Maguire: That is not the point that we are at just now.

The Convener: Okay.

Joanne Maguire: We are committed to making this right and we are working very hard with SilverRail. My team will continue meeting it multiple times a day until I have an assurance that the public can pick up the app without thinking about it and know that they can buy a ticket or search for a journey or that their ticket will be there. As soon as we have that stability, we will make that publicly known, and we will then work with SilverRail to make enhancements to the app and improvements to the customer journey. It is not good enough right now.

The Convener: You did internal testing, but there was no soft launch. Why was that?

Joanne Maguire: Part of our contract with the outgoing provider meant that there was no opportunity to do a soft launch because Trainline had exclusive rights to retail our tickets.

The Convener: Did Trainline insist that there had to be a hard change?

Joanne Maguire: I am informed that, contractually, we could not make the change on a phased basis. That will be picked up as part of the lessons-learned review.

The Convener: I find it remarkable that companies with the experience of Trainline and SilverRail could not reach an agreement between them to have a softer transition. Is it not well known that, across IT system roll-outs, there are teething problems and companies need a soft launch because they need to test the system publicly? You are saying that they could not reach an agreement.

Joanne Maguire: Trainline was the outgoing provider, so, to be fair to it, I would say that it was possibly less motivated to work with SilverRail. SilverRail tells us that it could not separate retailing and information to run a soft launch, but that will be forensically examined as part of the lessons-learned review.

The Convener: Why did you not call a halt at the point when you realised that there could not be a soft transition? It was a steep cliff that you were jumping off.

Joanne Maguire: Everything was going well up until less than 24 hours before the launch.

10:00

The Convener: Was there no opportunity to have a pre-download window? Was that not possible?

Joanne Maguire: There had been internal user testing. Unfortunately, we had not been able to user test it on our 250,000 passengers who choose to travel with us every day. We are thankful for their doing so and for their patience during this time.

As I say, through the lessons-learned process, we will forensically examine what happened and determine what could have been done differently. The information that I am sharing with the committee is the information that I have at this time.

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): Thank you for that. Reputationally, the incident does not do a lot for our publicly owned railway. Indeed, the First Minister has said that the launch of the app has damaged the reputation of ScotRail as an operator. What are your reflections on that, and how are you looking to build ScotRail's reputation back up?

Joanne Maguire: I will offer my reflections, and Hannah Ross might want to say a few words as the chair of our board.

As I mentioned when we talked about safety, we know that we have had significant investment from the Scottish Government since coming into public ownership, and we are really proud of a lot of the improvements that we have made since then. We have invested in our driver numbers, reduced the number of services that we are cancelling and driven up our revenue. Further, our passengers are currently benefiting from peak fares being gone for good, which was the result of a significant investment by the Government, and we are also currently investing in new fleet.

There was a lot that was going very well for us up until, unfortunately, we did not deliver a successful launch day, on 30 July. We are acutely aware of that, and we are acutely aware that it was not good enough. Although I do not want in any way to undermine the fact that it was not good enough, I would say that that same week was the busiest week that we have had since coming into public ownership and that, since 30 July, we have continued to exceed our revenue targets and we are continuing to deliver on journey growth, which we have done for the whole year.

We know that we need to rebuild our passengers' confidence, but we also need to rebuild our stakeholders' confidence. In addition to continuing the good work that we do, day in and day out, to improve our service reliability and to secure future improvements, we are absolutely

committed to putting the situation right and ensuring that the app delivers a stable service. We will publicly announce improvements to the app, but we will do that only when it is the right time to do so.

We are very fortunate that our passenger numbers and our revenue continue to be success stories, but we know that the app is not good enough and we are not complacent about it.

Lloyd Melville: Uncertainty about being able to use the app might cause some people to switch away from using the train if they are not sure they are going to be able to use that functionality. Is that something that you have modelled in?

Joanne Maguire: In the first couple of weeks, we saw a slight increase in people going back to buying from a booking office, from a ticket vending machine or, indeed, from our on-train staff. We are fortunate that we have staffed ticket offices and a second member of staff on every train. That small spike has started to decrease as people are going back to using our app. We have around 800,000 users of the app signed up.

Lloyd Melville: Hannah Ross, do you want to come in on the reputation aspect?

Hannah Ross: I absolutely associate myself with Jo Maguire's apology for the difficulties that people have faced in using the app since it was launched. From a board perspective, we see at first hand the very hard work that Jo and her team, and all the staff at ScotRail, put into maintaining the reputation of the organisation in terms of delivering a high-performing and safe service. It has been disappointing to see the service's reputation take a hit, but I agree with Jo that the focus now needs to be on stabilising the app and then growing the benefits of the app. Enabling the consumer to understand the benefits of its new functionality is absolutely key to getting their confidence back.

Graham Simpson: Joanne, you said that SilverRail made changes to the system 24 hours before launch. What were the changes?

Joanne Maguire: There were background changes to the operating system that we were not aware of until very shortly before the launch. Since the launch, there have been updates to the app to rectify the changes that were made.

Graham Simpson: I read that a response to a freedom of information request showed that ScotRail exchanged around 600 emails with SilverRail over a two-day period. That is a lot of emails. What was the tone of those emails?

Joanne Maguire: I was not copied in to most of those emails. I, myself, have been speaking to SilverRail's chief commercial officer, to ensure that I am kept up to date and to express my concern and dissatisfaction at the service that it has provided to us.

Although we have been keen to express that what it has done is not good enough, we have had to work with a lot of its front-line staff, to ensure that they remain motivated to fix things. That involved SilverRail being based in our offices, at our request, in order to be available to work with us in the early days as we rectify the challenges of the app.

Graham Simpson: Where is that—in Glasgow?

Joanne Maguire: Yes. We asked them to work with us in our offices in Glasgow.

Graham Simpson: Are they still there?

Joanne Maguire: Some of them are still in Glasgow. We have daily calls with them, starting at 7 am and repeatedly throughout the day, in order to have that assurance that the service is running steadily.

Graham Simpson: I am still not clear why you needed a new app. Maybe you have not explained it properly. For me, if there is a new app, it needs to do something different from the old app. The old app seemed to work—if you just wanted to buy tickets, that is what it did. This one does not even do that properly.

Joanne Maguire: That is a fair challenge. We came to the end of our contract with Trainline—it was a legacy contract that we inherited from the Abellio franchise—and we were due to retender. We are absolutely committed to getting to a stage at which you and all our customers have the confidence that, when you open the app in the morning, you will be able to search your journey or buy a ticket.

Trainline could not deliver the functionality in the longer term. I will give a couple of simple examples that will be transformative for some of our users. On our new app, you can book passenger assistance when you buy a ticket. Previously, you would have needed to go to a separate app or to make a phone call. Any of our passengers who require assistance will be able to assure themselves that they will have that at the point of buying a ticket. Also, we are about to enter storm season and we will need to be able to communicate with our customers more often. The new app will enable push notifications—like those that you get from the BBC or other providers—which will flash up on your screen if there is disruption to our services. Those are just a couple of examples; there is a lot of other functionality to the SilverRail app. When we have a dependable platform, day in and day out, we will start to launch that further functionality and you will see that it is an improvement versus the previous provider.

Graham Simpson: If I use Trainline—which I have occasionally done—I will get those notifications that tell me that a train has been delayed. Did your old app not do that?

Joanne Maguire: No, the previous app did not do that.

Graham Simpson: It did not do that, even though it was run by Trainline.

Joanne Maguire: It did not have push notifications.

Graham Simpson: You mentioned that, once the basics have been got right, you might want to add to the app, and it could be used for multimodal ticketing. Were you asked by the Government to build that in?

Joanne Maguire: My team is part of the national smart ticketing advisory board, which was set up by Transport Scotland.

Graham Simpson: That is a bit of a dirty word in this committee, I must say.

Joanne Maguire: As part of the procurement spec, we detailed the requirement for the app to be built in such a way that it could cope with multimodal ticketing. Obviously, it requires further development and, when the scheme is developed, it may require, for example, different bus operators. We would need to work with individuals. However, the capability is there.

The Convener: Are you saying that Trainline refused to make the changes to the app's functionality that it has made available on other parts of its system?

Joanne Maguire: Trainline was invited to bid against our spec—

The Convener: Under the previous contract, did it not make those improvements?

Joanne Maguire: The contract had been set up by Abellio, and we were not able to make changes within the constraints of the contract that we inherited.

The Convener: But it had not refused to do that in future. However, the way in which you constructed the contract to make it vertically integrated—in that you are changing the whole system rather than only the app—excluded Trainline, in effect, because it is not an expert on that. Is that right?

Joanne Maguire: The contract was not constructed to exclude anyone. We did it in that way to enable ScotRail to participate in the delivery of Government ambitions on multimodal ticketing, for example.

The Convener: Yes, but the way in which you constructed the contract—doing the whole system, including the ticket machines and the technology as well as the app—meant that Trainline, which is not an expert on all that, was not prepared to put together a joint venture on it. Did the way in which you constructed it exclude Trainline? I know that you did not design the process to purposefully exclude Trainline, but was that not the effect?

Joanne Maguire: Yes, you are absolutely correct. As you would expect, the contract was not just for the app but was for delivering our station retail systems and our on-train retail systems, and those are not Trainline's specialities, so it chose not to work along with someone else, which it would have been required to do.

The Convener: How long are the problems going to last?

Joanne Maguire: We are working each day to ensure that we reach a point of stability. I am absolutely committed to delivering as quickly as we possibly can.

The Convener: By Christmas?

Joanne Maguire: I give the committee my commitment that we are working day in, day out, and it will be as early as we can possible make it.

The Convener: So you are not confident that it will be by Christmas.

Joanne Maguire: We will do everything that we possibly can.

The Convener: Why did you not join in with the efforts of Great British railways to create a joint system? We would then have an integrated system between all the cross-border services and ScotRail. Why was it not deemed appropriate to join in with the larger UK-wide effort?

Joanne Maguire: We are very much kept up to date with the work that is going on in relation to that. In fact, I was at a briefing meeting with all the other train operating company managing directors last Thursday afternoon, where we were given an update on the development of retail and ticketing under GBR. Our contract with Trainline was due to expire this year, and we have a commitment to deliver multimodal ticketing, as an operator that is owned by the Scottish Government.

The Convener: Were you told by ministers you could not join with GBR?

Joanne Maguire: Absolutely not.

The Convener: You are absolutely confident that, if you had judged that it was appropriate to join with GBR's effort to meet your objectives, you would have been free to do that.

Joanne Maguire: That is not a conversation that we have had, and we would not rule out

working with GBR in various ways in the future. We certainly have not had any instruction on that.

The Convener: Just to recap, this has been utterly chaotic. I see people complaining to your staff every day. Your staff have been very good, as I said, but it is a repeated problem that is knocking people's confidence in the company significantly, and you will have to go some to recover its reputation. I hope that the app is worth it, because so far we have not seen that it is.

Anyway, thank you for answering the questions on that.

Lloyd Melville: I will talk about fares. The abolition of peak fares for good was a very welcome commitment and policy by the Government. Have you noticed a change in people's travel patterns since peak fares were abolished? Have people been moving from cars and buses on to the train since that happened?

Joanne Maguire: I will say a few words, and then Graeme Cook might want to say a few words on behalf of Transport Scotland.

Our customers were delighted with the news that peak fares were gone for good. In addition to making it cheaper to travel at certain times of the day, it has also simplified the fares offering. For example, we had evening peaks in some areas and not in the others. It is very reassuring to our customers that they can buy a ticket and travel at any time of day.

We only annualised the removal of peak fares this month. We also have the fares freeze, which, again, was a policy decision by the Government, and our customers are very happy with it.

On passenger numbers, we have seen about a 7 per cent year-on-year increase in journey numbers across our network in the year to date. My team is participating in multimodal modelling, led by Transport Scotland, to look at the impact on other aspects of public transport.

10:15

Graeme Cook: Work is under way to assess the impact of the removal of peak fares and of the fares freeze. We think that the statistical analysis will conclude in early 2027. That is our target, but it takes time to do meaningful, useful and statistically relevant analysis, not least because patronage is sensitive to a number of factors, including weather, for example. We need a large enough sample size to make the analysis meaningful, but we expect the analysis to be complete in early 2027.

Lloyd Melville: Joanne, you mentioned support from the Government, which has made a significant investment in scrapping peak fares. Has that paid for itself yet?

Joanne Maguire: We have only just annualised the change. In terms of the contribution to the Government's broader decarbonisation agenda, we are seeing an increase in the number of journeys and we will closely monitor our revenue figures now that they can be annualised as of this month.

Lloyd Melville: Are you saying that the scrapping of peak fares has not paid for itself yet?

Joanne Maguire: Because we had a fares freeze, our revenue growth is between 0.5 and 1 per cent despite the increase in passenger numbers. That has been affected by both the fares freeze and the removal of peak fares. The good-news story is that we are certainly seeing more passenger journeys, which contributes to decarbonisation.

Lloyd Melville: Do you think that the fares freeze and the scrapping of peak fares have given passengers value for money so far?

Joanne Maguire: We are four years into public ownership. Last year, a survey conducted jointly by us and by Network Rail told us that rail contributes £4.1 billion to the broader Scottish economy. I think that that goes some way towards answering the question about value for money.

Lloyd Melville: There has been some concern about the minimum fare, which I appreciate is largely for ticketless travel. The minimum fare is £10. Is that the figure that you wanted?

Joanne Maguire: We looked at various iterations of the minimum fare and took various proposals to our boards and to Transport Scotland. There was a three-month education period before we introduced the minimum fare on 1 July and that gave staff the opportunity to engage directly with customers, especially at gate lines or with those who buy their tickets on the train, to explain that they would pay the minimum fare in future. That is absolutely paying dividends for us, both in revenue generation and due to other consequences. As I said earlier, antisocial behaviour is often committed by those who choose to travel without a ticket.

Lloyd Melville: Who signed off on the final figure?

Joanne Maguire: I sent that figure to Scottish Rail Holdings, which sent it on to Transport Scotland for approval.

Lloyd Melville: Graeme, do you want to speak about who in Transport Scotland made that decision?

Graeme Cook: The decision is endorsed. The policy was supported, not least because of the impact on antisocial behaviour and also because of the revenue, because we do need to address the net cost of the railway. Jo Maguire mentioned the gross value added of more than £4 billion, which represents enormous value for the taxpayer, but that does not mean that we cannot address the level of subsidy, which is significant at £1.6 billion a year.

Lloyd Melville: I will press my point. We have got to a stage where the minimum fare is £10. Was a higher price considered?

Graeme Cook: That question would be better answered by Jo Maguire.

Joanne Maguire: There was a proposal to look at a higher figure. One part of the decision-making process involved an equality impact assessment and £10 was deemed to be an appropriate minimum fare to deter those people who were trying to claim for shorter journeys than the ones they had actually made and to deter those who try to travel without tickets.

Lloyd Melville: I will ask about the impacts of other public transport policy. You will be aware that the £2 bus fare cap is now fully operational across the west of Scotland and has been in the Highlands and Islands for some time. Have you made any assessment of the impact of that on passenger numbers on your services?

Joanne Maguire: We have been working closely with Scottish Rail Holdings and Transport Scotland since the manifesto commitment to roll out the £2 bus fare cap to the rest of Scotland was announced. We have been aware of the trial in the north of the country and have been modelling the impacts of that with Transport Scotland.

The £2 bus fare cap was rolled out broadly across the Strathclyde area just last week, so it is very early days when it comes to looking at its impact. We are very aware that we need to ensure that we are as competitive as we can be, and we are building customer confidence in choosing us, whether that be for a leisure journey or to get to work. We know that journey times in large parts of Strathclyde are much quicker with train than with the bus, and we know that the decision-making processes of commuters especially are led by journey time. We will be watching that area closely.

We are working with Scottish Rail Holdings and Transport Scotland to understand when the £2 bus fare cap will be rolled out to other parts of the country and how it will operate.

Lloyd Melville: I appreciate that it is still quite early days, but I would have thought that you would have received some initial data—for the Highlands, for instance—from your stations. Can you share anything with the committee on that?

Joanne Maguire: I am sure that some of the committee will be even more familiar with this than I am, but the trial in the Highlands happened at a time when there was a lot of tourist travel in that region. We saw about a 10 per cent extrapolation, as we would we call it—modal shift. In some parts of the Highlands, journeys can be quicker with bus than train because of the stopping patterns of our trains, but we are continuing to monitor that. We are also aware that 40 per cent of the population already qualify for free bus travel. We have always understood that we are in competition with bus.

Lloyd Melville: Given that there is such a big price disparity between the bus and the train, are you looking at other ticket price incentives? If your data were to tell you that there has been a big shift from the train to the bus because of the price, will you be looking at price incentives to try to get people back on to the railways?

Joanne Maguire: The short answer is that we are always looking at ways in which we can innovate. We know that there is a cost of living crisis. We know the challenges around child poverty in Scotland. We have had great backing from the Scottish Government in the form of peak fares being gone for good and the fares freeze. We are proud of the value for money that we already offer, for example with kids for a quid, which enables a fare-paying adult to take four children with them for £1 on a return journey anywhere in the network. We have previously promoted our great-value holiday passes for families, and we are promoting those for the upcoming October holidays. We are committed to looking at ways in which we can bake in better value for money.

In our budgeting rounds, and as part of the national smart ticketing advisory group and other groups that we are involved in across industry, we are always looking to develop our fares in terms of the value for money that they offer.

Lloyd Melville: Does anyone else want to come in on that point?

Hannah Ross: I echo Jo Maguire's comments.

Also, you mentioned trying to attract people away from buses. We try not to see ourselves as being in competition across public transport modes but rather as working together. Different people have different motivations for taking whatever mode of transport they choose. For some, journey time may be the most important thing, in which case we are likely to retain them as customers. If, to others, price is the most important thing and bus is the cheapest option, they will choose that option, and that is now available to them.

The Convener: Going from Glasgow to Inverness could potentially cost £2 on a bus, if there is a national scheme. What would you say to that, Joanne, if that were to come forward as a proposal?

Joanne Maguire: At present, we are working hard to replace our intercity trains. We will be replacing them with class 222 trains, which will be refitted and will have some maintenance improvement work done on them before you see the first of them in service in late 2027. We are absolutely committed to improving our customers' journey experience on intercity services, Glasgow to Inverness being one example of that.

Part of that business case was developed on the basis of the fares that we currently charge, so £2 on that corridor would be a concern to us. However, we will be committed to marketing our services as best we can to ensure that we retain customers, and we are always looking to build our customer base. Initiatives such as kids for a quid and our family passes, where we offer unlimited travel across Scotland for £50 during the holidays, are value for money, and we are always looking to improve value for money.

If the Government were to say that the £2 fare would apply across intercity routes, that would indeed be a concern to us.

The Convener: Have you heard that, Graeme? What are your thoughts about that? Are you hearing the concern from ScotRail about what happens if the scheme is rolled out nationally? What if there was a £2 fare versus the current fare from Glasgow to Inverness—is it £20 plus? What is your response to that?

Graeme Cook: We are committed to introducing the legislation for a nationwide £2 bus cap before the end of this parliamentary session. It is a priority for the Government to roll that out to the rest of Scotland. The analysis is ongoing. The data coming in from the Highland pilot and the data that is beginning to come in from the Strathclyde interim roll-out will inform exactly what the nationwide roll-out will look like. Information coming back from alternative modes will also form part of that analysis and picture.

The Convener: I do not want the process describing how you are going to reach a decision; what I would really like is a quality assessment of what Joanne Maguire has just said—that the proposal would be a direct threat to ScotRail's intercity services if people could get on the bus for that low fare. The quality of some buses is quite remarkable; they are very comfortable. That would have a dramatic impact on publicly owned ScotRail services. What are you advising ministers on that?

Graeme Cook: The analysis has not yet been done on those numbers and data.

The Convener: But we do not have an intercity service just now, so how can you make any assessment of that?

Graeme Cook: We do have an intercity service just now. It is run with the high-speed trains, which are being replaced by the class 222s.

The Convener: No—I am talking about an intercity bus at £2. We do not have that just now, so how can you make the assessment?

Graeme Cook: Not at £2—although, of course, 40 per cent of the population can travel for free on intercity buses right now.

As regards the analysis and the data being gathered to inform the advice to ministers, there is feedback from all the rail operators, not just ScotRail—I note that LNER goes right up to Aberdeen, so it runs an important intercity service within Scotland. The input, the data, the concerns and the opportunities being fed to us by all the rail operators and operators of other modes will absolutely form part of that analysis and, ultimately, part of the advice.

Lloyd Melville: If someone wants to get a bus from Glasgow Buchanan bus station to Uig pier, for instance, that would be £4: it is £2 capped within one region and then £2 capped in the other. The point is a very fair one, however. The price disparity is significant, and it would be a dereliction of duty if you did not model that. We look forward to seeing that data coming forward.

The Convener: We will move on now.

Graham Simpson: We will not quite move on, because I want to follow up on that last point. I will then ask about rolling stock, and then we will move on to freight, if the convener will allow that.

On the discussion that we have just had, I have to say that, at the current price point, I will always get the train from where I live in East Kilbride into Glasgow. It costs more than the bus, but you have to factor in the time that it takes, and the train is significantly quicker. Also, I like your trains, so I will continue to do that when I am going into Glasgow.

Graeme Cook, I think you said that the subsidy is £1.6 billion a year. Did I catch that figure correctly?

10:30

Graeme Cook: It is £1.6 billion for track and train for this financial year. That pays for infrastructure and the ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services.

Graham Simpson: That is a significant amount. Are we doing anything to reduce that figure?

Graeme Cook: Absolutely. With regard to track and train—which is the shorthand for the entire system—we are constantly vigilant in relation to managing costs and seeking opportunities for further revenue. There have always been savings targets across the railway and, of course, rail reform is an opportunity to integrate the railway and put it back together again after 30 years of track and train being separate. That will bring opportunities for further efficiency as well.

From the top to the bottom of the railway system—the rolling stock and the infrastructure—revenue and costs are carefully managed to ensure that the railway in Scotland continues to deliver significant value to the taxpayer.

Graham Simpson: Joanne Maguire, you were nodding at that point.

Joanne Maguire: Yes. Thank you for your comments.

We look at efficiency in two ways. One concerns what we can do to increase the revenue that we are bringing in. That involves passenger revenue as well as how we can best use our station estate through, for example, working with retailers to ensure that we are maximising the income that we have from our retail estate.

The other way concerns delivering efficiency measures. This year, we are delivering a £12 million efficiency programme. Last year, we delivered around £20 million of efficiencies. We are absolutely focused on delivering efficiencies into the system.

Graham Simpson: How are you tasked with doing that in order to reduce that subsidy?

Joanne Maguire: We are always tasked with looking at how we can deliver more efficiently, but we also look at working on our own initiative. Through what I do as a ScotRail executive and our work with Liam Sumpter and his colleagues in the alliance executive, we look at ways in which we can deliver more efficiently as a whole system.

Graham Simpson: Okay. I shall move on to the fleet, which has already been touched on. Joanne Maguire, you can correct me if I have got this wrong but, from my quick look at the information, I think that the ScotRail fleet is older than the average age of rolling stock across the UK, at around 25 years. That compares to a UK average of 17 years. It is, therefore, among the older fleets, although, if you are unlucky enough to travel by Chiltern Railways, you will find that its fleet is older. Of course, there are some much newer fleets: the Lumo fleet is 3.8 years old; Greater Anglia's fleet is 3.9 years old; and, indeed, the Caledonian Sleeper fleet is 6.2 years old. Can you explain in a bit of detail what you are doing to bring the figure for ScotRail's fleet down?

Joanne Maguire: ScotRail tops some UK charts, but this is not one that we want to top, although, unfortunately, we do.

Your figures are absolutely right, and two thirds of our fleet will reach the age at which it is no longer fit for continued operation within the next 15 years or so. Therefore, we are absolutely committed to a programme of replacement.

I touched on the replacement of our HSTs, which are largely an intercity fleet just now. We have acquired class 222 trains, which will be going through an overhaul in terms of maintenance, repainting and the internal passenger layout to improve family-friendly spaces, wheelchair spaces and the overall environment for our customers. You will see those trains start to enter service in late 2037.

You will see the suburban fleets around East Kilbride in the 2030s, which is when we are looking to introduce them, and you will also see them in areas such as Fife and the Borders, and on the Glasgow inner suburban routes, such as Glasgow to Motherwell, Larkhall, Lanark and so on. We are at the stage of inviting bidders to negotiate for our suburban fleet, and that process is ongoing.

I touched on East Kilbride because our suburban fleet is likely to be a mix of electric multiple units and battery electric multiple units—battery electric trains as well as electric trains. Everything that we do on fleet replacement we do closely and in partnership with Liam Sumpter's team, and there have been some great examples of joint working on planning for new fleets. The electrification of the East Kilbride line last year is a good example.

Ms Stevenson, I remember that you were at the opening of our new Hairmyers station. I mention that because electrification is about not just new fleets but the accessibility of the railway. We have been able to deliver two new stations, and we will be able to deliver lifts at stations where disabled passengers have not been able to travel between platforms.

There are lots of opportunities as a result of electrification, and it key to our fleet replacement, which is why work is ongoing in Fife and the Borders to electrify those parts of our network. We are progressing through our new fleet programme, and we are thankful to the Government for its backing. Hannah, do you want to say anything about the new fleets?

Hannah Ross: I will leave it there to keep things short.

Graeme Cook: I might have misheard Jo Maguire, but I think that she said that the class 222s will be introduced in late 2037. It is late 2027 when the first class 222s will come into service.

Graham Simpson: I heard her say 2027—I have that written down.

Graeme Cook: Oh, my apologies to everybody, then.

Graham Simpson: I was also at the opening of Hairmyers station. I startled one or two people by cycling there in my shorts—that was probably unnecessary. Anyway, I want to break this down and look at the class 222 trains. Are those going to be refurbs?

Joanne Maguire: They are having a maintenance overhaul and being refurbished before they enter service late next year.

Graham Simpson: Are they diesel trains?

Joanne Maguire: Yes, they are, although they emit less than our current HST fleet. The joint work that we have done across Scotland's railway, but principally between ScotRail and Network Rail, was on the timescales for the replacement of our current HSTs and the possibility of electrifying the route, which led us to conclude that there was a requirement for an interim diesel fleet.

Graham Simpson: Those are diesel trains because the routes are not electrified—is that right?

Joanne Maguire: They will not be electrified in time for the HST replacement timescales.

Graham Simpson: That is 2027.

Joanne Maguire: Yes, late next year.

Graham Simpson: When will the routes be electrified?

Liam Sumpter: We have a rolling programme of electrification, which I think you are familiar with. As Jo Maguire said, we successfully electrified the East Kilbride line on time and on budget last year, and we are currently on the ground electrifying the Fife and Borders lines as part of the next tranche of the rolling programme. That programme is really important, because it enables us to transfer the skills and project teams between projects so that we retain the capability but can also continue to deliver better, more efficient electrification, so we are reducing the cost, bit by bit.

The long-distance intercity stuff requires a funding commitment that will exist over multiple years, and we are not yet at the point where we have the funding commitment to enable us to commence the electrification work. There is a requirement to electrify or decarbonise the railway by 2045, and we anticipate that we will be in a position to electrify those lines by the end of the 2030s, in time for the introduction of the permanent replacement of the intercity trains.

Graham Simpson: Who do you need the commitment from? Is it the UK Government?

Liam Sumpter: No. All our enhancements are funded through the Scottish Government. We already have a commitment for Fife and the Borders, which is a £342 million programme that is ongoing. When we have made sufficient progress through that, we will turn our attention to planning for the intercity routes, which will come at a different cost. We will start to plan for that with the Scottish Government so that we can sequence it and continue the rolling programme.

Graham Simpson: Will you then replace the diesel trains with electric trains?

Liam Sumpter: I thought that Jo Maguire described it well. Electrification is not just something in and of itself; it is there to facilitate the introduction of more efficient and greener rolling stock. We will electrify so that we can introduce the new rolling stock, and that is done as part of a team across Scotland's railway.

Graeme Cook: The Scottish Government's ambition for electrification and decarbonisation of the railway is set out in the document "Rail Recharged: Scotland's Fleet Transition Strategy—Delivering a Modern Fleet for a Connected Scotland", which sets out the fleet transition and electrification plans. That includes the policy to electrify the intercity routes that have been touched on. The ambition is set out in that document, which I am happy to send to the committee.

Graham Simpson: That would be useful. Are the suburban trains brand new?

Joanne Maguire: They will be—yes.

Graham Simpson: Okay—that is a simple answer.

Convener, I do not know whether anyone else wants to come in on this issue before I move on.

The Convener: Before you ask about freight, I will bring in Martyn Day and then come back to you.

Martyn Day: It is freight that I want to ask about, and I suppose that my question is directed to Graeme Cook. What is being done to support modal shift from road to rail for freight?

Graeme Cook: In a Great Britain context, Scotland has shown genuine leadership on freight on the rails. Scotland was first to set a growth target for freight. Over the past decade, £40 million has been invested in rail freight-specific projects. In addition, more than £421 million has been

invested in wider projects that have freight benefits. That includes, for example, electrification. The freight facilities grant has been another significant intervention, and has helped West Fraser Europe Ltd and John G Russell transport group take millions of lorry miles off the system.

To illustrate what has been taken off with that support, in 2025-26, just over 10,000 commercial freight trains moved around 4 million tonnes of goods, saving around 58 million lorry miles in Scotland. That is a reduction of around 233,000 tonnes of carbon, compared to the equivalent road journeys by diesel heavy goods vehicle.

Martyn Day: That sounds impressive. How did we manage to do that with a freight facilities grant that sits at £1.3 million?

Graeme Cook: Freight railheads are already part of the system, so it is not just new facilities that are part of that intervention. Network Rail has specific targets, which are set by Scottish ministers, to drive freight, to work with logistics firms and to put more and more on to rail. It is about greater use of existing facilities as well as new facilities.

Martyn Day: You mentioned that we have made good progress. We are two years into the current control period, which is CP7. How well are we doing on meeting the target of an 8.7 per cent shift?

Graeme Cook: We have had significant dents and some big losses. The changes at Ineos have impacted on the number of tonnes on the rails. I look to Liam Sumpter to answer on the specifics of the targets.

10:45

Liam Sumpter: I am happy to come in on that. We are behind our freight growth target for the control period and—as you say, Mr Day—we are halfway through that period. The target for growth is 8.7 per cent across the control period, and we currently expect to outturn around 4 per cent growth, or perhaps a little bit higher. That is with the things that we believe that we can control. As Graeme Cook pointed out, there are things in the system that we cannot control. The loss of the Ineos traffic and the loss of Royal Mail, which has shifted its operations from rail to road, cost us around 6 per cent, so, in effect, our target became 14.7 per cent—that is the 8.7 per cent target growth plus the 6 per cent loss. I think that we will recover 10 per cent of that 14 per cent in the current control period.

It is not just about new facilities. As Graeme said, we work closely with the freight community to improve things such as train length and overall train performance. We currently have a really good record on train performance for freight. Cancellations for freight are below the 1.4 per cent target for each of the past three years, which is really strong considering some of the weather implications that have badly impacted freight traffic.

We are working closely with the freight community, and working increasingly closely with businesses that could choose freight in the future to try to make life easier for them and work out what it is that would attract them to come to rail and stay there. However, freight, even more so than passenger rail, is affected by exogenous factors outwith the direct control of the industry. Notwithstanding that, we will continue to work with Transport Scotland and the freight community to try to get closer to the growth target. I have given the number of roughly 4 per cent by the end of the control period because I am confident that we can get there. There are other elements of growth on which I have perhaps a more medium level of confidence that could get us closer to 8.7 per cent.

Martyn Day: That is all very interesting. I am thinking about what the easiest way would be to get more freight off roads and on to rail. In my area, we have the port of Grangemouth, which is Scotland's largest container port. There is currently no freight going in and out of Grangemouth on rail. The port itself has spent several million pounds upgrading its import facilities, so it is well capable in that respect. The difficulty seems to be finding operators that can fill trains in both directions. What can you do to assist with that? It would surely make the biggest dent in road-to-rail transfer if we could get stuff going to the ports by rail.

Liam Sumpter: You are quite right—Grangemouth is an opportunity for us. We have been talking to freight companies about how we can support them to provide a multidirectional approach.

The big growth opportunity for us is in the energy sector, looking at some of the project work that is going on across Scotland and how we can support that through rail. That is where we are having some of the conversations that I have talked about, looking to growth of 4 per cent or above. We are trying to remove barriers to entry into the industry, and we are increasing our capability in that space, but we can probably do a lot more to go directly to businesses to convince them, because there are fewer barriers to entry with road.

Martyn Day: How much have we spent in the past few financial years on modal shift revenue support?

Liam Sumpter: On revenue support to freight?

Martyn Day: Yes.

Liam Sumpter: Network Rail does not spend that directly.

Martyn Day: That question may be better directed to Graeme Cook.

Graeme Cook: I have a figure of £40 million over the past decade that is specific to rail freight, and I have some figures on some specific interventions, but I do not want to mislead the committee, so I will write to you with the exact figures, if that is okay, Mr Day.

Martyn Day: Thank you.

The Convener: We go back to Graham Simpson.

Graham Simpson: Well, Mr Day has done a sterling job; he has covered freight admirably. I have a slightly different question that is not on freight. This question may be for Mr Cook. Last week, we were keen to explore what happens when Transport Scotland is moved into the Government—

The Convener: We will come to that later, if that is okay.

Graham Simpson: Right. Well, I have no further questions at the moment.

The Convener: That is fine. We will go to Donald MacKinnon.

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I thank the panel. I will turn to rail in the Highlands.

First, I will briefly pick up on Graham Simpson's point about replacement of rolling stock. My understanding is that as the intercity rolling stock on the central belt routes that were discussed earlier is replaced, some of that rolling stock will be cascaded down to the Highland lines. At the moment, the trains servicing the west Highland line are as old as from 1987 to 1989. Those are already old trains that could be being replaced with stock that although not older is still hand-me-down trains from other parts of the network. Is that correct?

Joanne Maguire: With regard to the replacement of our trains, intercity is up first. Our HSTs are some of our oldest rolling stock. That will be followed by suburban, and then we will be looking at a replacement of some of our rural fleets. Donald MacKinnon is absolutely right that, in the intervening years, we will be looking to move our rolling stock around so that the age profile overall will decrease. It is a bit like having an interim intercity fleet—it will be on an interim basis while we are replacing intercity and as rolling stock is moved.

Donald MacKinnon: What does the timescale for moving beyond the interim period for the Highland lines look like?

Joanne Maguire: As it stands, our new suburban fleets will be introduced in the 2030s, so we are looking at after that.

Donald MacKinnon: That is quite a while.

Joanne Maguire: It is quite a while. For the new suburban fleets, it will take around five years from commencing a procurement exercise until we see trains in service. However, we are committed to looking at other improvements, and we have already delivered other improvements in the far north and the west Highland lines.

Donald MacKinnon: In the interests of time, I will move on from that point.

I was looking at reliability across the Highlands, and the far north line caught my eye. In 2025-2026, there were nearly 5 per cent cancellations on that route. In the past three years, that figure was more than 5 per cent, approaching 6 per cent in 2023-24. There are clearly some issues on that line, which push cancellations above the average.

I am also aware of commitments, or at least discussions, in the past, about improvements to the line in the far north, particularly in relation to looking at a loop in Muir of Ord, which would improve reliability, the service and journey times, which is another issue on that line in particular.

Could witnesses pick up on that point around cancellations on the far north line, as well as the wider point about improvements to rail infrastructure in the north and in the Highlands? In the interests of time, I will add the west Highland line to that question as well, as I am aware of some works taking place there.

Perhaps Joanne Maguire could start, and then we could pick up with Network Rail.

Joanne Maguire: Since coming into public ownership, we have been committed to improving performance across our network, and a significant amount of work has been done. The two biggest challenges for us on performance have been around the availability of our train crew—that is, our drivers and our on-train staff—and our ageing fleet, which the committee has touched on.

With regard to train crew, we have focused on delivering driver training. With the backing of the Scottish Government, we are currently delivering the biggest driver training programme in the UK. We are training 160 drivers per year and, through that, we are reducing cancellations. Overall across the network, we are sitting at 2 per cent cancellations. That is a figure that many operators—especially those with as challenging a geography as ours—would bite your hand off for.

Our fleet remains our biggest challenge. We have been addressing the driver challenge, and there are two ways in which we are addressing fleet. One is the fleet replacement programme. However, as you said, it will be years before some routes have new trains—they will have newer trains, but it will then be some years before they have new trains.

With the backing of the Government, we are investing in a capital improvement programme, and we are doing improvement works on our existing fleet to improve reliability, which will lead to reductions in cancellations. We are also providing capacity in the number of seats that we have committed to.

Across Scotland, 92 per cent of our customers tell us that they are satisfied. That is verified by Transport Focus, our watchdog—and, again, relative to other train operators, we have one of the highest percentages for a large operator. There is more to be done, but we have driven down cancellations while in public ownership, and we are committed to maintaining our commitment to driver and train crew training and to improving our fleets while we wait for our new fleets.

I am sure that Liam Sumpter will want to talk about infrastructure.

Liam Sumpter: Everything that Jo Maguire said is spot on when it comes to overall levels of reliability. We have very low levels of cancellation in Scotland compared with the rest of the network. We are really proud of that. We know that it is really important to our customers.

So far, during this control period, we have committed and started to spend roughly £40 million on renewing parts of the infrastructure on the far north line—which is a significant investment for that line. That is for renewing what is currently there. You mentioned a potential enhancement of a passing loop, and Graeme Cook might want to comment on that.

Graeme Cook: Liam has mentioned the enhancements so far. In phase 2 of enhancements to the far north line, Network Rail has worked on an outline design for the new passing loop that you mentioned. There is no funding for that this year, and any decision as to whether or not it is one of the next investments in the railway would be subject to affordability considerations and constraints. However, the work has been done to start to understand what it would take to build that additional loop.

Lots of significant investments have been made in the Highlands. I will not list them now, convener, given the time.

Donald MacKinnon: Thanks for that. I have one final question before we move on, which is about accessibility at stations. The picture across the Highlands is not great; actually, it could be better across the whole country. I understand that 26 per cent of stations in the Highlands are fully accessible. The picture across Scotland is 37 per cent, as far as I can make out. What steps are you taking to improve full accessibility at stations in the Highlands, as well as across Scotland and the wider network?

Graeme Cook: Accessibility on the railway is a reserved matter. That does not mean that the Scottish ministers or Transport Scotland are not interested. Funding comes from two sources and, ultimately, Network Rail and the GB side of the railway will decide which priorities come first. I will hand over to Liam Sumpter to talk further on that.

Liam Sumpter: As Graeme Cook said, access for all is a Department for Transport programme rather than one that is funded by Transport Scotland. In effect, it provides a pot of funding, which is distributed across Scotland, England and Wales, to improve accessibility at a variety of stations. We generally deliver those improvements, which usually include step-free access at stations.

At the moment, we are halfway through the five-year period known as control period 7. In control period 6, we delivered improvements at six stations to give step-free access. In the current control period, there will be less funding for that programme. At the moment, the only station that we have committed to that will get the full access-for-all treatment during this control period is Bellgrove station, although we have some funding to do a detailed design at Falkirk Grahamston as well.

We know that there is less funding for that programme during this control period, so in order to supplement it, we have developed a railway for everyone programme across Scotland's railway, which considers things that we could do in order to improve accessibility at our stations that are easier than the full access for all scheme. We look at all the stations across the entire network and the extent to which they are accessible from perspectives of getting to the station, moving around the station and getting on and getting off the train. We break that down to see which elements we can deliver in order to improve the overall quality of accessibility within existing funding arrangements in Scotland. That supplements the access for all programme.

11:00

There is a good example of that work at Dunbar. Recently, I was there with the cabinet secretary to look at a new footpath that has been put in place on one side of the station, which dramatically

improves the station's accessibility. That was supported through funding that came from the local council and other sources in order to improve the station's accessibility, outwith the generally more expensive arrangements of the access for all programme.

We did a lot of work in the previous control period. We are doing less work in this period because there is less funding. However, when we build new stations and do electrification projects, we also take the opportunity to improve accessibility, which I think that Jo Maguire also mentioned. When we did the East Kilbride project, we also improved accessibility and created step-free access at Hairmyres and the new East Kilbride station. We will do more of that when we are doing Fife and the Borders. We will also look to include more activity when we go beyond that, with the next stage of the rolling programme of electrification.

Donald MacKinnon: That is everything from me, convener.

The Convener: We are already out of time, but we have lots yet to cover. I hope that our witnesses will be able to stay a little bit longer.

Before we move on, there was a report in *The Times* in November of last year entitled "Old, cold and dirty West Highland Line is going off the rails". It described concerns from a lot of users about not just the age of the trains but the fact that they are cold and dirty. The first train in the morning, which I think goes from Glasgow, was called the "Polar Express". Will that change this year? Will those trains be better maintained, clean and warm? Do you think that that will happen, Joanne?

Joanne Maguire: I vividly remember reading the report at the time. We know that it is not good enough for customers. We have experienced heating issues with some of the fleets that serve that area. Our engineering team have been looking at new ways to ensure that we can provide a better passenger experience on those lines. We are making improvements for this winter for passengers on those lines.

Iris Duane: I will move on to the issue of climate change, which relates tangentially to what Graeme Cook said about electrification. We have seen a significant amount of heatwaves recently in England and, to an extent, Wales. Although we will wait for the investigation to conclude, heatwaves may have led to the buckling of some train lines and disruption on services. I understand that ScotRail has a climate action plan. Could you dive a little bit deeper into what preparations we are making in case that starts to happen up here? Are we concerned that there will be continued levels of disruption due to changing climate in Scotland?

Liam Sumpter: I am happy to answer that.

Everything that you said is absolutely spot on. We are of course very sad to hear of the derailments that took place in England during one of the most recent heatwaves. We also had our own heatwaves here. Although they were not as hot, they are still a relevant factor for us, as Scotland also gets warmer.

However, I think that we are ahead of the curve on climate change in Scotland compared to the rest of the network. We have started to see the impact of climate change on our railway for a longer period of time, most obviously, and most tragically, at Carmont in back in 2020.

We have started to invest heavily in preparing our network in anticipation of the impact that climate change will have on the railway. I have already mentioned on a couple of occasions that we are roughly halfway through control period 7, which is a five-year funding period. The total expenditure of operating, maintaining and renewing the railway throughout that period is roughly £4.2 billion. Half of that expenditure—about £2 billion—will be spent on renewing the network and replacing what is currently there. Of that £2 billion, around £400 million is dedicated to climate change resilience activity. There is a lot of investment going into stabilising our earthworks, improving drainage and improving the resilience of our structures. That investment is generally a result of—and in preparation for—inclement weather in Scotland, particularly high levels of precipitation and rainfall.

We are also investing £100 million—a significant increase on the previous funding period—in the removal of vegetation from the line side, because vegetation can have an impact during storms, for example by creating hazards for trains when trees come down. We are making good progress on all those activities.

We are also reducing the number of railway sites that are susceptible to flooding, and we are stabilising our embankments. If you travel about on trains, you will see some of the innovative things that we are doing, such as the little vertical poles that pop up along the line side, which are earthworks monitors that will tell our control centre whenever anything starts to shift, particularly during inclement weather.

Scotland is also the only part of Britain to have a dedicated weather operations delivery centre for the railway. There are meteorologists and weather and rail experts working together 24/7 to monitor in real time when weather patterns start to shift and to decide how we respond to that and what operational things we need to put in place to mitigate the impact.

Although a huge amount of work is already ongoing, climate change marches on very quickly, and we will face more challenges. We are now commencing discussions on the next funding period, which will, confusingly, be known as funding period 1 rather than control period 8—do not get me started on that. When we go into those discussions, we will make the case for continued, ongoing and greater investment in climate change resilience. We will need to reflect on the heat that was experienced this summer, particularly south of the border, and whether that will require us to invest more in managing heat, which is not something that we have traditionally needed to manage in the same way as do our colleagues south of the border.

Iris Duane: That is very helpful. You touched on something that I was going to pick up on, which is that climate change is anything but predictable, and we sometimes do not know exactly what will happen. Recent reports have indicated that we will now miss our targets for keeping the heat down. How far in the future do you look when you are trying to future proof the tech, and how adaptable will that work be? Things can change at the drop of a hat when new reports come out and we see the differing effects of climate change.

Liam Sumpter: That is a good question, and the answer is that we look a long way into the future. For example, with coastal erosion—which is a feature in parts of Scotland, particularly on the east coast, where the railway is close to the coast—we make projections across a 100-year timeframe. When we made our first projections on coastal erosion, we set a range of possible scenarios that started with not much erosion and went up to lots of erosion. It has been about eight years since we first did that analysis and we are now right at the upper end of that range; we see more erosion than we had even anticipated in the worst-case scenario. There has also been an increased amount of precipitation throughout the autumn and winter seasons, and we expect that to be the case more often. We need to adapt quickly to those things.

Therefore, we look far out across a long period of time when making our changing climate scenarios, and we try to plan accordingly. When we renew our earth structures, we plan to protect them for 30, 50 or 100 years into the future, rather than to just get through a few seasons.

At the same time, we have to look at the short term. I am sure that members will have read about the super El Niño phenomenon that is likely to hit us. That is all about temperatures in the Pacific ocean, which will probably have an impact on our climate and specifically on our railway sometime in the spring of 2027. We are looking at what that means and what extra we need to do to prepare for the short term as well as the long term.

It is a really dynamic environment. We have brilliant climate change experts in Network Rail who look at all the scenarios and what we can do to prepare the railway and help to prepare Scotland for that future. We work not only within rail. We learn from railways abroad that experience different types of weather, and we engage with other transport networks in Scotland, such as canals, and utilities such as water. We talk to all of them about the impact of climate change, because it does not affect only the railway.

Iris Duane: If you will indulge me, convener, I have one more supplementary.

You have anticipated my next question, Liam. In the short to medium term, for many people, climate change often feels tangential. In relation to things such as El Niño, do you expect significant disruptions to services? If so, are you considering communicating to consumers as to why that is happening or why we are unable to adapt?

Liam Sumpter: Obviously, these things are difficult to predict. We do not know the scale of the challenge that we will face next year. We model scenarios, and we sort of expect windier and wetter weather in the late winter and early spring, and hotter air temperatures in the summer, which can lead to hotter rail temperatures. The extent to which that will affect Scotland's railway is unknown at the moment, but we make our preparations in advance.

It is far too early to say that we anticipate disruption but, when we get closer to the timeframe, if we think that there will be severe storms or extreme heat that we cannot cope with, we will look to communicate that. We will work with ScotRail to communicate that and to plan accordingly as best as we can. We have a good way of working on such weather events. We have a strategic meeting to consider how we will face into some of the events. For example, we will determine the range of outcomes that could happen from a storm and what we would do with the service. If we lose lots of the network because trees are down or because of something else, we consider how to reopen it and prioritise. We work hand in glove with ScotRail on that.

Obviously, we communicate that to passengers as early as we can. Jo Maguire is always on my case during such events to say, "Let's tell passengers early," but I say, "We don't quite know how things are going to work out yet." We work together closely to try to model what the outcomes might be, to minimise service disruption and to give passengers as much confidence as possible about what is actually going to happen.

Iris Duane: That is helpful—thank you. It is a deeply impressive system.

The Convener: We witnessed your partnership working when we visited, so we recognise that. That includes the sticks by the side of the railway lines, as I call them, although they probably have a more sophisticated name than that.

We will try to pick up the speed a little, as we have a few subjects left.

Lloyd Melville: There has been an uptick in weekend rail travel as people are looking to get out and about for leisure purposes. Joanne, do you consider that weekend services are meeting that demand currently?

Joanne Maguire: We absolutely recognise that, in a post-pandemic world, leisure travel is more important to us than it ever has been. We have had some really busy weekends. Just this year, we had the combination of the Edinburgh festivals and the Commonwealth games in Glasgow, which made for a busy summer for us, with some of our busiest weeks—and some of our busiest Sundays—since entering public ownership.

We review our timetables twice a year, and we consult broadly on them across Scotland. I hold meetings in different parts of Scotland every six weeks or so. Two weeks ago, we were in Ayrshire and we offered to meet local MSPs, local councillors and other elected representatives. We consult broadly.

On building the timetable, we have ambition to do more at the weekends, and specifically on Sundays.

Lloyd Melville: You know what I am going to ask next, don't you?

Joanne Maguire: However, we know that we need a whole-system approach, so we cannot look just at the ScotRail timetable, whether it be for Sunday or any other day, in isolation. When we consider running more services, we need to consider the impact on engineering and improvement works, which might be carried out at the weekend or overnight. We have spoken about freight. If we have ambitions to do more, we need to consider the possible impact on freight paths. We also need to consider staffing from a ScotRail and a Network Rail perspective.

11:15

Members might be aware that, when ScotRail came into public ownership, we made a public commitment to bring Sunday into the working week. Like most train operators in the UK, we run services over seven days of the week but staff are contracted to work largely from Monday to Saturday—so, six days of the week. We have developed a proposal, which is going through the necessary approval process. We would need to negotiate with staff on their terms and conditions if we were to ask them to work contractually on a Sunday. We would also need to increase the number of train crew that we have, to be able to deliver our train services reliably, as we would be stretching our resources across a seven-day commitment rather than a six-day one.

We have an ambition to deliver that and are committed to doing so, because there is a revenue potential as well as the decarbonisation impact of getting more people on to the train and out of their cars on a Sunday.

Lloyd Melville: I appreciate that. At Monifieth on a Sunday, the trains run past and do not stop. Monifieth is a small but growing community that has seen a big uptick in passenger numbers since services have expanded across the other six days. That is welcome, but, on a Sunday, trains stop at Broughty Ferry, go past Monteith, stop at Carnoustie and then keep going. Why can they not stop at Monifieth?

Joanne Maguire: Stopping patterns are not dependent only on a train passing a station. There are many variables, including journey time and staff availability. We are certainly happy to take that issue offline. We have met Graham Simpson on more than one occasion to discuss that matter, and we are happy to meet you to look at the possibilities there. Unlocking Sunday and bringing it into the working week will be key to improving our Sunday timetable.

Lloyd Melville: That would be useful, because the issue is a long-standing one in the community. You and I have had discussions about it previously, too.

I will turn away from my constituency and towards late-night services, which are limited. I am aware that, when big events are on, ScotRail tries to run more services, which is much appreciated. However, people are looking for safe services so that, if they go out in Edinburgh on a Friday night, they can have a nice time and get back reliably. How are you considering building in later services as you evaluate the timetable?

Joanne Maguire: That is a good challenge, and it is one that we have heard before. Again, I refer to the need for a whole-system approach. As most members are probably aware, a lot of our maintenance is done overnight, whether that is cleaning trains—I have seen the very hard work that our train presentation staff do to clean trains overnight—or other maintenance. Liam Sumpter's teams also carry out work largely overnight, when the railway is not operating, and we should not forget that freight trains run through the night, as do services such as the Caledonian Sleeper.

As we continue to deliver the biggest driver training programme in the UK, with 160 drivers a year, and unlock Sundays and include them in the working week, we can look at other possibilities. As I said, it is about whole-system change and what we can operate and when. Obviously, new fleets will give us opportunities to do things differently.

Lloyd Melville: Convener, I do not know whether I have time to go on to performance.

The Convener: We still have a few other things to cover, so we will move on, if that is all right.

Lloyd Melville: I am happy to move on.

Collette Stevenson: I am delighted that East Kilbride's rail enhancement has been showcased very well today. You answered quite a few questions on the rolling stock and electric trains. We have also touched on the project value of those infrastructure programmes, such as accessible clean toilets and clean carriages. When Graham Simpson and I met Network Rail in East Kilbride, we discussed the social value and the community benefits. Eleven young people were taken on during that time, as part of the rail skills academy. I am curious to know how they got on with regard to their employment. In addition, do you keep a register of the community benefits that you provide? I put that question to Liam Sumpter.

Liam Sumpter: The rail skills academy to which you referred is one of the initiatives of which I am most proud within what we do in infrastructure. The East Kilbride project, much like the Levenmouth project, is delivered by a series of contractors—somewhere between six and eight of them, depending on the particular skills that we require. The rail skills academy enables us to bring on young people who perhaps would not otherwise have an opportunity to get into the industry and might not have much employment opportunity at all by giving them experience in one—or many—of those companies during the project. At the end of the project, or at a certain time during it, they are interviewed for permanent roles.

To use your example of East Kilbride, all 11 of those young people managed to get a permanent role in the industry. That is transformative for their life experience, and we should all be very proud of that. We hope to continue that model with future projects, because we see so much social value in it. It is a brilliant thing, and we keep a record of all the community value that we bring through those projects. Somebody in my communications team is responsible for that. We would be happy to share with the committee after the meeting more details of exactly what it involves.

Collette Stevenson: That would be helpful. Thank you.

I have a quick question on future projects, specifically the Clyde metro. It has appeared in many transport strategies since way back in 2009, but there is still nothing. As Graham Simpson and I have alluded, it is just a squiggle, really. Are you aware of, or can you comment on, when it is going to be completed? When will we know the details of it? I am thinking particularly of the public, because it has been mooted for quite a while. Who is ultimately responsible and accountable for it? Will East Kilbride feature in that project as well?

Graeme Cook: In November 2023, the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Zero and Just Transition endorsed the outcome of governance discussions around that project. At that time, it was decided that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, supported by Glasgow City Council, would be the primary partner to look at delivering the Clyde metro. Transport Scotland performs an assurance role in that, which is about ensuring that any business case that comes forward is in a form that could be supported by the Scottish ministers and the necessary checks and balances that come with significant investment. It is up to SPT and Glasgow City Council to come up with that case for investment, and it is currently anticipated that it will be complete in mid-2027.

Collette Stevenson: Thank you.

The Convener: We go back to Graham Simpson.

Graham Simpson: I am going to ask about Winchburgh, but, before I do, I will go back to the Sunday service. Is getting drivers on a Sunday roster dependent on hiring new drivers on new contracts?

Joanne Maguire: No, that is not part of our plan. Our plan is to work with the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, which is a trade union that represents drivers. As you would expect, we have had ongoing informal conversations with ASLEF about implementing Sunday in the working week, because a very public commitment to that was made through our 2022 pay deal. As I said, we would need additional drivers as well as additional train crew to run Sundays in the working week contractually, but that would involve negotiating a change to existing contracts.

Graham Simpson: Is ASLEF being co-operative, or is it resistant to the idea?

Joanne Maguire: We are very proud of the relationship that we have with all four of our recognised trade unions, which we have been able to work very hard on since coming into public ownership. We have very much been having conversations with ASLEF and meeting with it,

which we do regularly, to develop a proposal to include Sunday in the working week.

Graham Simpson: That did not quite answer the question. Is ASLEF opposed to the idea or not?

Joanne Maguire: ASLEF is absolutely not opposed to the idea. It will always be a negotiation—as it would be with any trade union. Through the pay deal, it has signed up—made a commitment—to including Sundays in the working week.

Graham Simpson: Good for ASLEF.

I do not know who wants to answer this next question—perhaps Graeme Cook. There is a long-standing proposal to build a new station at Winchburgh. We have the business case but we do not yet have the money. Nobody has agreed to pay for it. Mr Cook, who is going to stump up for the bill, and when will there be a new station?

Graeme Cook: As co-promoters of the new station, West Lothian Council and Winchburgh Developments Ltd retain the responsibility for its business case. The outline business case is broadly concluded, and the mitigations to address any risks within that will be covered by a final business case. Officials in Transport Scotland are investigating the financial options that are available for delivery, in advance of putting to the Scottish ministers an evaluation of those options.

Graham Simpson: What is the timescale for that?

Graeme Cook: The advice will be going imminently. It is not quite ready yet. I cannot put a specific timescale on it.

Graham Simpson: Is that advice to ministers?

Graeme Cook: Yes.

Graham Simpson: So, that will be given soon. If ministers say, "Go for it," when can we expect to see a new station?

Graeme Cook: I am afraid that I do not know how long it would take to run tenders, establish the supply chain and so on. Perhaps Liam Sumpter could give an idea.

Liam Sumpter: We would need to go through a detailed design phase, which would probably take about a year, before we would be able to enter into tenders and go to the delivery stage.

Graham Simpson: So, we first need the advice to ministers and then a decision from them before it goes out to tender. Somebody then needs to design it, which could take a year, and then we have to build it. All of that could take several years. Meanwhile, Winchburgh continues to grow and does not have a train service. That is not very good, is it?

Graeme Cook: Since 2020, we have funded the railway industry to construct 24 new stations across the Scottish network. It takes a long time to perform the right due diligence and to make and carry out the right designs. Each has to be safe and robust, and we need to be able to demonstrate to taxpayers that it was the right investment. Achieving that takes time, but we have a significant track record of delivering new stations in Scotland.

Graham Simpson: I am not doubting that you have delivered new stations, but that one is desperately needed. I will leave it there.

The Convener: We will excuse the pun of your "track record", and we will conclude with some quick questions from Iris Duane.

Iris Duane: I will be very brief, as I am aware of the time. Great British railways is a new and large factor in how we provide our railway service. Some of how that looks in Scotland will come down to political decisions at Westminster and here, at Holyrood. Very briefly, could whoever wants to take the question reflect on what would be the most effective way to integrate Great British railways with our existing services?

11:30

Joanne Maguire: In Scotland, we are proud that we have been trailblazers in how the railway works together. The convener mentioned that he had seen that in action when he visited our integrated control centre. The work that Liam Sumpter's team and I do, day-in and day-out, to deliver the best outcomes for passengers is seen as trailblazing in terms of our alliance work.

Liam Sumpter: I have worked in the industry for 23 years, and I am absolutely convinced that a more integrated railway is better. We make quicker and better decisions that are aligned if our incentives and reasons for doing business are exactly the same. It is not that those things are different at the moment, but the more clarity that there is on that, the better. I am interested in how we integrate.

Earlier, we had a conversation about night-time services. In a more integrated environment, there would be an opportunity to consider whether we could run later trains to service the night-time economy in Edinburgh, for example. We could also stop services a little earlier on different days of the week or at different times of the year in order to ensure that we can still carry out the necessary maintenance work. We could do those things now, but it is complicated because of the industry's arrangements. A more integrated railway should be able to make those kinds of decisions more dynamically and more easily. I am excited about what integration could mean for Scotland's

railway. We look forward to seeing how it plays out in Scotland.

Hannah Ross: Like Joanne Maguire and Liam Sumpter, I am excited by the prospect of further integration of the railway and what it will mean for how we work together for the benefit of passengers and the taxpayer. I appreciate that the political decisions that you have referred to are often about the structure that is chosen as the basis of the integration, but it is really important that we look at the cultural change, because the structure will be what it will be. Building on the existing alliance work of both Network Rail and ScotRail in order to bring forward the integration and the leadership that we demonstrate in order to make it real will be key.

Graeme Cook: We have heard from colleagues in Whitehall and from those at Westminster that rail reform has been inspired by the success of Scotland's railway alliance. We have heard that again and again from significant figures. I am confident that Scotland is already benefiting from a more integrated railway and that we will further benefit when changes are made to the underlying legislation, to enable additional choices to be made to better integrate the railway.

Iris Duane: It is nice to see that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet. In the interests of time, I am happy to leave it there.

The Convener: We will squeeze in one very last question.

Graham Simpson: I apologise for the late running of the train, but I am afraid that you will not be entitled to compensation. [*Laughter*.]

Going back to the question that I tried to ask earlier, I want to get a sense of how you think the new arrangements for Transport Scotland might work in practice when it is brought into the Government. We were exploring that last week, but I am not clear how it would work on the ground. Does any of you have thoughts on that?

Graeme Cook: Transport Scotland has played a pivotal role in transport in Scotland over the past almost 20 years, but policy shifts and the opportunities in public service reform, as well as the fiscal pressures, mean that it is time to look again, to see whether there are opportunities to do things differently.

Two of the stated aims of the public service reform programme are to be more efficient and productive and to be more preventative. It is inevitable that having multiple layers of accountability in a system brings complexity and a degree of duplication of reporting. Removing a layer of reporting would provide an opportunity to release staff so that they can focus more on preventative work. I would say that that means that they would be more efficient and deliver the stated benefits of public service reform.

Graham Simpson: Which reporting layer would be removed?

Graeme Cook: Transport Scotland reports to the Government. Our chief executive, Alison Irvine, is an accountable officer, which means that accounts have to be prepared and submitted to the core Government before being scrutinised by the core Government and considered by the director general. That layer of reporting would be removed by Transport Scotland moving into the core Government and the accounts becoming part of the wider accounts system. There would not be the same process of reporting on or scrutinising the accounts as there was before they were wrapped up into the Scottish Government's accounts. That would be the opportunity to have a more efficient system by removing a layer of reporting.

Graham Simpson: Would we not have an accountable officer?

Graeme Cook: The accountable officer would be the director general, and the permanent secretary would be the primary accountable officer. There would still be accountable officers and they would be accountable to the Parliament, but the change would reduce the number of reports and the layers of scrutiny. There is an opportunity to be more productive and more efficient.

Graham Simpson: I know that we will want to explore that further, but we do not have time now.

The Convener: Collette Stevenson, would you like to ask a short question?

Collette Stevenson: Graham Simpson is right that we need to look at it further. I take it that Transport Scotland is a registered charity.

Graeme Cook: Transport Scotland is a non-departmental Government body.

Collette Stevenson: Right. Okay. I take it that, when the transfer is made, staff will be subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations—TUPE.

Graeme Cook: Transport Scotland is an agency, so all its staff are already part of the civil service and there will be no change in their employment whatsoever. As an agency, Transport Scotland is the same legal entity as the Scottish Government, so there will not be a change of staff terms and TUPE or the Cabinet Office statement of practice—COSOP—will not be required.

The Convener: Thank you for your indulgence. We have stayed much longer than I promised at the start of the meeting, but you cannot trust politicians, so you should expect that. Thank you

for your evidence. There have been some challenging questions, but we appreciate the answers that you have provided.

That brings us to the end of our evidence session.

11:38

Meeting continued in private until 12:27.

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