

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 13 June 2000
(*Afternoon*)

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2000.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 13 June 2000

Col.

TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1	1015
LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE.....	1034

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

20th Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Trish Godman (West Renfrew shire) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

*Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

*Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

WITNESSES

Bob Christie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Iain Gabriel (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Trond Haugen (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Councillor Walter MacLellan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Councillor Alison Magee (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Keith Rimmer (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Councillor John Scott (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Irene Fleming

ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Local Government Committee

Tuesday 13 June 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:04*]

The Convener (Trish Godman): Comrades, it is now just after 2 o'clock and I would like to start the meeting.

Transport (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener: Attending today's meeting are Councillor Alison Magee, Councillor John Scott, Councillor Walter MacLellan, Bob Christie, Trond Haugen, Iain Gabriel and Keith Rimmer. They will give us a presentation on the part of the Transport (Scotland) Bill that we are considering, before taking questions. I appreciate that our witnesses have not had much time to prepare; I say that because it gives us an excuse in case we ask some rather dumb questions. I am sure that we will tease things out in the question-and-answer session.

Councillor Alison Magee (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): As you said correctly, convener, we have had little time to consider the bill—we did not see it until the end of last week. My opening remarks will, therefore, be brief. We will do our best to answer questions, which will probably be the most important part of today's meeting.

I would like to make three initial points. First, we hope that there will be sufficient time in the bill's passage to go through the bill in detail and for COSLA to make detailed representations on behalf of local government. It is a complex and important matter. We have plenty of views on the bill, but we might not go into all of them today. I would hate to feel that this and a possible meeting next week were the only two opportunities that we had to make representations.

Secondly—and this might colour all the answers that we give to the committee—we are unanimous in feeling that it is of prime importance that the Executive should be a partner. Whether we consider trunk roads, buses or something else, the Executive must be on board. It is important that the Executive does not merely stand back and that we do not get the feeling that the Executive is imposing solutions. Rather, it must be seen as a partner that is working to develop joint strategies with local government, other public bodies and

other interested parties during the passage of the bill and into the future. The Executive has responsibility for many transport modes, such as trunk roads, ferries and airports. We will not end up with integrated transport strategies if the Executive is not a partner in development.

I doubt that my third point will come as a surprise to the committee, because it relates to resources and the bill has resource implications. There is a growing feeling in local government that our roads infrastructure is crumbling and that the welcome investment that is being made in rural and urban public transport must be matched by investment in infrastructure. Some of our councils and COSLA have started to examine the economic and social impact on communities of weight restrictions, temporary road closures and so on. If the bill is to succeed, we must examine carefully where resources are being directed. We recognise that education and social work are the Executive's priorities, but there is a strong case to be made for saying that our local roads infrastructure is the life-blood of many communities.

The Convener: Thank you. Does any member have a question?

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I have quite a few, but I will restrict myself to a couple to start with. As I understand it, both the Opposition parties tabled amendments to a similar bill at Westminster that sought to extend the powers of local government to bus fares and service frequencies, but the Government resisted that. However, such powers are critical. If local government will not be able to influence bus fares and service frequencies, much of the bill is a waste of time. What is your view on whether the bill should include such powers?

Councillor Magee: We agree that it should. Our original response to the consultation document included that suggestion. We would support a maximum fare ceiling and a minimum service frequency. That would give bus companies some flexibility, but would also recognise the investment that local authorities must make in quality partnerships. There is a rail regulator—it might be appropriate to have an equivalent for the bus industry.

Councillor Walter MacLellan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Mr Gorrie has asked an important question. There are many issues surrounding accessibility to transport and the bill refers to concessionary fares and so on. However, one of the key issues is affordability. By and large, those who do not have cars find it difficult to afford bus fares. High bus fares cause severe difficulty in both rural and urban areas; at the moment, many fares are well beyond the reach of many people.

In the bill, the relationship between transport authorities and the bus industry is inadequate to the achievement of a properly co-ordinated and integrated public transport service. We are concerned by the expectation that a partnership with bus operators would achieve the aims of the Executive, which are supported by the local authorities. To be frank, the behaviour of the bus industry does not give us confidence in the idea that partnership with it would deliver services, except in the most profitable corridors.

Councillor John Scott (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Quality partnerships have already been introduced in some areas of Scotland and in some areas they have broken down for commercial reasons. One of the biggest drawbacks in rural communities—and in the city of Edinburgh—is the possibility that bus wars will develop over which the quality partnerships will have no control. Quality contracts should have priority, rather than quality partnerships.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I know that North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council have discussions about common transport issues. Having visited Clackmannanshire Council, I know that many of the transport decisions that that council makes are based on the situation in Stirling. Do you have concrete evidence of such cross-authority working? Does that extend to cross-agency working on common transport policies in particular areas?

Councillor Magee: I can answer that in relation to my part of the world, which is the Highlands and Islands. There is a Highlands and Islands integrated transport forum. We also have a fruitful voluntary working party involving all the rail companies—ScotRail, Railtrack and so on—which has delivered station reopenings, a commuter train, transfer of freight from road to rail and various other things. Cross-agency working does work in the Highlands and Islands.

14:15

To go back to one of the points I made in my introductory remarks, it is one thing for local authorities to work together, but we need the Scottish Executive as a partner as well. If we are to be transport authorities rather than roads authorities, we need to start developing strategies. We cannot, however, do that in isolation, because other bodies have responsibilities. A lot of fruitful work is going on between local authorities, but if they are to develop strategies, they must do that in partnership with everyone who has an interest.

Mr McMahon: Do you think that the Scottish Executive must become actively involved, or does it merely have to give the powers to local

authorities?

Councillor Magee: It must become actively involved. We would not like the Scottish Executive to impose solutions—we want a partnership approach. Our colleagues feel strongly that trunk roads should not exist in a separate little world; they are very much intertwined with local authority roads. Moves might be afoot to deal with the matter, but in the Highlands and Islands the Scottish Executive has responsibility for ferries and airports. Those are lifeline services for the people who live there. None of those modes should be in separate compartments. If we are considering transport strategies, different modes should be interlocked and should work together. We should not see the Scottish Executive as a separate body, which is trying either to impose solutions or to stand back from them. We want the Executive to be involved.

Councillor Scott: I am chairman of south-east Scotland transport partnership, which takes in Clackmannanshire and Stirling. We are only two years old, but one of the great benefits that we have found is that, although working together has taken time, the partnership has come together gradually and we are working constructively to ensure that cross-boundary flow of transport works. Sarah Boyack is very supportive. A new ticketing scheme has been highly publicised. SESTRANS is not a statutory body, but people will stay in it if they feel that it is working well and that there will be some gain at the end of it.

One thing that SESTRANS is considering is the possibility of tapping into congestion charging from the main magnet in our area, which is Edinburgh. The Dunfermline to Stirling rail line via Alloa and Clackmannan is—at the moment—for freight only, but I hope that it will be used for passengers. That line and the Borders rail line—which it would be remiss of me not to mention—could both be assisted in the long term by public transport cash and also by congestion charging. That would work provided that the partnership stayed together and Edinburgh was seen as the key area.

Councillor Magee: I have a quick example. We welcome much of the bill and I do not want the committee not to take that on board. There is talk of joint ticketing on buses—surely there is a case for multi-modal joint ticketing, especially in rural areas. We want such detail to be developed in the bill. We want all those who have responsibility for providing public transport to provide an integrated service.

Iain Gabriel (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Since local authority reorganisation, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council have worked closely through a joint committee on transport and planning. We have developed the bones of a transport strategy through the north-

east Scotland economic development partnership, which was set up to examine economic development throughout the two council areas. That partnership involves the chamber of commerce, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and the two relevant councils. Differing partnerships will evolve in different areas. In relation to partnership with the Scottish Executive, a strategy will not work in Aberdeen unless the trunk roads are included as part of the overall package. That probably applies everywhere.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): I wanted to ask about road user charging and workplace parking levies. Councils hold different views, but does COSLA have a position on that section of the bill? Has COSLA carried out any research into the revenue that could be generated from such schemes?

Councillor Magee: We are at an early stage on the matter. Some councils have done research on the viability of charging and I will leave that to my colleagues to answer.

I do not think that any council has yet made a commitment to such charges. Councils are examining the possible effects of measures such as workplace parking levies. They are asking whether the introduction of such measures in a town would lead to a flight of business from that town.

The policy document that accompanies the bill says that local authorities will benefit from the revenue from such measures and that they will be able to use it to provide investment in transport infrastructure. However, for large numbers of local authorities—especially rural authorities—workplace parking charging and congestion charging are non-starters. Not all local authorities will benefit and the question of funding will remain.

Councillor MacLellan: Glasgow City Council is considering workplace parking charges and has decided that congestion charging is not practical because the city's boundaries are tightly drawn. The city has a population of 1.5 million and has a municipal population of 600,000. The M8—which runs through the city—is a trunk road that would, under the proposals, be exempt from a charging scheme. Glasgow City Council is setting up a study and appointing consultants to consider whether workplace parking charges would work if shopping parking charges were not included and whether developments such as the Braehead shopping complex would affect the scheme.

The intention of the study is to decide whether workplace parking charging would work as a transport policy and generate enough income to support both the scheme and the public transport improvements that would be necessary to make the policy acceptable. I suspect that, if a policy

that included workplace parking charges were not a goer in Glasgow, it would not be a goer anywhere else in Scotland.

Glasgow City Council is working on the study with local authorities around Glasgow and the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority in a voluntary partnership called WESTRANS.

Bob Christie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Bristow Muldoon asked whether COSLA had commissioned any research into the merits or demerits of road user charging and the revenue streams that might arise from that. Such charging is not a tool that will be available to all local authorities: it will probably be applicable in only a limited number of urban areas. We have therefore left it to local authorities to consider what might work locally. However, if we cannot take trunk roads into account, that is a real disincentive to road user charging and that applies to all the major urban centres in Scotland.

We are concerned that the Executive is promoting road user charging in the context of a contract with motorists. Representatives of local government would say that some thought should be given to a contract with the community. We have made the point before: the contract should be made with all those who have mobility and access needs in an area—not only motorists.

One reason we have not done much collective thinking on charging is that the elements of the bill—which does not cover the full range of transport issues—are indivisible. As Walter MacLellan pointed out this morning, it is not a transport bill, but a roads and buses bill. A key element of road user charging is that it must be both preceded and followed up by visible public transport improvements in the local area. Because of our reservations on the efficacy of quality partnerships, we are not convinced that we could make a visible change that would impress local people enough to command the political support that we would need to introduce a congestion charging scheme. If the quality partnership could be proved to have failed, which would be a long and cumbersome process, it might take several years to introduce a quality contract. Although we would like to work with the Executive on joint solutions, we are not quite certain how we could do so on road charging.

Keith Rimmer (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Edinburgh—perhaps uniquely in Scotland—has done a lot of preliminary work on road user charging. My council is satisfied that a workable scheme could be introduced in Edinburgh, using road user charging to produce an investment stream. That investment would be not only for Edinburgh transport, but for a package of measures in the wider Edinburgh travel-to-work area, which would involve the SESTRANS

partnership that Councillor Scott spoke about.

Mr Muldoon asked about possible revenue streams. I emphasise that the figures are somewhat tentative but, in Edinburgh, we have so far established that revenue of between £35 million and £50 million per year is possible, depending on the cordon arrangements that are introduced. Those figures are based on an assumption that there would be a cordon around the city centre, with a nominal charge of £1 to cross the cordon in each direction. On that basis, a sizable investment package could be introduced.

The Convener: Some local authorities have suggested that we should follow the Westminster bill and introduce charging on some trunk roads. What Walter MacLellan said suggests that he might like that for Glasgow. Are you saying that charging on trunk roads is not a bad idea, that we should go for broke and try to introduce it on all trunk roads or that we should not introduce it at all?

Councillor Magee: COSLA's policy is certainly not to charge on all trunk roads. We obviously recognise the strategic inter-regional and inter-urban nature of trunk roads but, as Walter MacLellan said, in specific instances where trunk roads could be included in a congestion charging scheme, it would not seem logical to exclude them. If we did, all the traffic might then hurtle towards that trunk road and cause the congestion that we were trying to reduce. We could support trunk road tolling, but only in very limited circumstances.

The Convener: So would you agree with the Westminster position?

Councillor Magee: We would certainly like it to be considered.

Councillor MacLellan: The wording that has been used in the Westminster bill is quite helpful; it talks in terms of the preparation of a strategy at local level, which may include trunk roads. It is aimed at the urban situation, rather than the inter-urban situation. At many points in the trunk roads system in the central belt there is far more local traffic than inter-urban traffic. We need to leave it much more open. At the moment, charging tolls on trunk roads seems to have been eliminated, which means that west central Scotland cannot consider that as realistic option.

14:30

Councillor Scott: We need to take the people with us. If we talk about road tolling, it tends to put people off. We have been emphasising congestion charging—ridding cities of their problems with fuel emissions and the like. Edinburgh succeeded in persuading traders and the surrounding local

authorities to support congestion charging by pointing out that we would get something back from it. To do that, it is important to stress hypothecation of resources. People need to see the money being spent to benefit their area, the park-and-rides that it funds and a change in transport modes before they will say that it is a good idea that they will continue to support.

The Convener: It must be additional money, rather than money the council already has.

I will now take a question from Kenny Gibson, who will not want to do anything that is done at Westminster.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): Possibly. I intended to ask a question on the issue that Bristow Muldoon raised, but I want first to comment on the point that you have just made. My concern is that if the Edinburgh scheme is implemented, people from outlying areas will have to pay to go into Edinburgh, but the money will accrue to City of Edinburgh Council, which will use it to improve Edinburgh's transport network. If money is hypothecated, how will it be dispersed to rural and outlying areas?

Keith Rimmer: I mentioned that an essential part of the strategy for investment that we are pursuing is to deal with the whole Edinburgh travel-to-work area. That extends as far as Clackmannan and Stirling in the west and the Borders in the south, and covers all the authorities in between, as well as Fife. That is a big geographical area that includes a large number of potential schemes that benefit not only the individual areas concerned, but Edinburgh. They offer people in the wider travel-to-work hinterland better and more effective public transport choices when making journeys into Edinburgh. Under the arrangement that is proposed, we can disburse a very effective transport investment package in a logical way throughout a large geographical travel-to-work area.

Mr Gibson: What about areas further afield, such as the Highlands? How will they benefit from this scheme? People from the Highlands who make occasional visits to Edinburgh or Glasgow to shop at Christmas time would have to pay to enter those cities. How will their transport networks be improved? How will they get additional resources through this scheme, if at all?

Councillor Magee: In my general comments I stressed that there were large areas of Scotland for which this kind of scheme would not be practicable and asked how they would be able to fund infrastructure improvements. The question Mr Gibson asks about people from the Highlands travelling to Edinburgh is difficult to answer. Perhaps we should suggest that people shop in the Highlands.

Mr Gibson: Perhaps they should, but there is not quite the range of shopping facilities there as there is in the major conurbations.

Councillor Magee: I am not so sure about that.

Mr Gibson: Having been on holiday in the Highlands for the past four years, I can tell you that transport is one of the reasons that I will not over the next four years be holidaying in that part of the United Kingdom.

I refer you to the research paper on the Transport (Scotland) Bill that we received. There is a paragraph on page 19 that says:

"The Executive has concluded that in certain circumstances it would be appropriate to expect motorists to pay for road use, reflecting the fact that road space is a scarce resource, and to confront road users with the wider costs of their actions."

Does COSLA agree with that?

Bob Christie: I am the only person who has a copy of the paper that Kenny Gibson is referring to. I do not know quite how it came into my hands, as it is a parliamentary paper. What was the page reference?

Mr Gibson: Page 19. It is the third line of the fourth paragraph.

Bob Christie: It is precisely that spirit that COSLA supports. We want to work with the Executive on that. If we are talking about confronting road users with the cost of their actions, we must underpin that with a national awareness campaign about why we need the Transport (Scotland) Bill, why we need partnerships to come together and why we cannot carry on as we are. We understand that there will be a Scottish travel awareness campaign, but we have not had much information about what it will consist of.

Councillor Magee: Mr Gibson mentioned confronting motorists, but we would like to address the wider community. Cyclists, people who use public transport and pedestrians are also road users. They are omitted from the bill, which is only about motoring. There are many road users. We must address the wider communities that use our roads.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I want to shift the questioning on to capital funding. "Guidance on provisional Local Transport Plans—advice by the Commission for Integrated Transport" states:

"Finally, we are deeply concerned about the potential effects of the single capital pot for central Government capital support for local authorities. In Scotland where this policy has already been implemented there has been a 41 per cent decline in local authority capital expenditure on transport over the period 1995/6 -1997/8."

What is COSLA's view on that? We are talking

about ring-fencing. You know only too well, Mrs Magee, as I do, what happened to the Highland Council's capital budget.

Councillor Magee: Capital allocations to local authorities have reduced. The Executive has priorities in education and social work, which most local authorities are following, and that leads to a further reduction. I am well aware that local authorities tend to build up their transport capital piecemeal, through challenge funding and a variety of other funding mechanisms.

Through COSLA, we have been considering an important angle on transport funding in the Highlands and Islands—the social and economic impact of crumbling roads infrastructure and what can happen to a rural community if weight restrictions are imposed.

I can give two concrete examples of what I mean. They are both from the Highlands, but I am sure that they are replicated elsewhere. In Caithness, a weight restriction has been imposed on a road that leads to an oil fabrication yard, which is the largest employer in Caithness and provides 200 jobs. Unless that road can be reconstructed, those jobs and all that investment are at risk.

In Fort William, there is a short stretch of single-track road on which a weight restriction has been imposed. The problem with many rural roads, particularly in the north, is that they are built on peat and were not constructed with the kind of loads that they now have to carry in mind. That road provides access to the reservoir for the British Alcan smelter, so another 200 jobs are at risk if it collapses.

We cannot look at roads separately from the communities they serve and the economic and social benefits that those communities get from having a decent road infrastructure. Once the research is done, COSLA will be making the case—certainly in the Highlands and Islands—that roads do not exist divorced from the well-being of the communities they serve.

Large-scale investment is identified as necessary for other infrastructure. For example, sums of hundreds of millions of pounds are being considered for schools. Nor can I pass up this opportunity to mention the water authorities; in the North of Scotland Water Authority area, a 43 per cent increase is deemed necessary to upgrade infrastructure this year alone. It is all infrastructure. It is the absolute life-blood of the communities we live in. Roads are no different.

Councillor MacLellan: It would be easy for COSLA to provide committee members with more detail from across Scotland of the backlog in infrastructure maintenance that has resulted from the capital programmes being tightened. The

committee would find it horrendous reading. I know we have when we have received such reports.

The Convener: If you indicate to me, I will write down who wishes to speak.

Councillor Scott: To continue what Walter MacLellan said, we do not have statistics for the whole of Scotland, but £60 million is required in Dumfries and Galloway to bring the local network up to an acceptable condition and £17 million is required in Glasgow. In the Borders, bridges are crumbling, which is affecting communities around them similarly to a school closure. In the Borders, £7 million is required right now to make roads safe. That is one of the most important aspects. Safety is crucial. Sarah Boyack announced that she has upped the cash for trunk roads from £80 million to £169 million, but local authorities are struggling with the wider roads network to keep things as they are at the moment. Things need to change and they need to change quickly.

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I will return to a point that Councillor Magee made about rural roads being in difficulty and the economic impact of roads. Between Howwood and Lochwinnoch, which is where I live, there is a single-lane road over a weak bridge. I know of a farmer whose life is interrupted because of that. People are in conflict over who should pay for it.

There has been mention of the Edinburgh travel-to-work area, the Highlands and Islands and, by definition, the Glasgow travel-to-work area. Does COSLA have a view on the number of transport authorities that we might end up with in Scotland to make a strategically and locally efficient transport system?

Councillor Magee: It comes down to whatever meets the need. We are not in favour of statutory partnerships; we would like to see voluntary partnerships. There may be a statutory partnership in the Highlands and Islands. That will bring funding and other implications with it. We would not like in the Highlands and Islands some kind of glorified joint board that could simply requisition money from its partners; there must be a more inclusive and positive approach.

It is for colleagues from the south to say what they think, but we are not in favour of having partnerships imposed on us and plans being drawn up by the Scottish Executive. It goes back to what I said in my opening remarks: this should be a much more inclusive process.

Councillor Scott: I raised with Calum Macdonald how to fit in certain authorities. I am thinking in particular about Dumfries and Galloway, which does not have a major link with a city, but which would probably have to tie in with Strathclyde in some way. You must remember that

partnerships also have to link with neighbours, and that some of those neighbours are not in Scotland—Belfast, for example. A city is a crucial element in tying together successful partnerships and there are some areas of Scotland where that will be difficult.

Mr Stone: I have a quick supplementary. From my own experience, I understand what you say about boards requisitioning money. Do you have any thoughts on what the funding mechanism might be for such a partnership, which could be applied to other parts of Scotland?

Councillor Magee: That is one of the main problems that have made people in the Highlands and Islands rather cautious. They broadly welcome the opportunity to have a greater say in, and greater co-ordination of, strategy but as with all these things there is the need for the funding to go with it. There is no doubt that talk of strategies and integrated transport has raised public expectations of better quality services across the board, but that comes at a cost.

The other problem is what I call lumpy expenditure, which the Scottish Executive may have had problems with. When we consider a new ferry, a causeway between islands and so on, we are talking about enormous expenditure. One of the problems with strategies is that we have to find a way to deal with that lumpy expenditure. If it seems that we are not giving the fullest answers, I ask you to take on board that we received the bill only at the end of last week.

14:45

Councillor MacLellan: Two things are needed: first, it is necessary to examine how the organisation of the partnerships is to be funded; and secondly, there is the issue of the methods by which the partnerships will be able to front load projects. Almost all transport projects, even when they are private partnerships, need public sector front loading to get them off the ground. Those are two issues that have to be addressed by the Scottish Executive.

The other issue that the Scottish Executive must address is the need for it to be a member of each transport partnership. It is, after all, the trunk roads authority. Outwith the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority area, it has powers to specify rail services. It has a key role in ferry services. It would be thoroughly unacceptable for local authorities to be made to form partnerships. We would prefer to be able to work out the partnerships ourselves.

If the Scottish Executive was not involved, it might veto the partnerships if it did not like them. That would be unacceptable. Local authorities are enthusiastic to implement the general principles of

the Scottish Executive's statements on transport policy. We have to work in partnership.

In Strathclyde, we have the advantage of an established passenger transport authority. That authority works with the local unitary roads authorities, which have formed the WESTRANS partnership. The local roads authority has agreed that the passenger transport authority would act as the administrative agency for the voluntary partnership. Local authorities can get their act together in their local areas, but the Scottish Executive has to come on board and it has to consider the funding implications.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I sympathise with the short time you have had to consider this—I received it only on Saturday.

Does COSLA wish to highlight any omissions from the bill?

Councillor Magee: We have touched on them in our general comments. The bill contains a great deal of detail about buses and motorists. Is a UK rail bill not going through at the moment? It is a rather selective bill. We would like it to be broadened out to cover all transport users and for a more integrated approach to be taken.

Mr Harding: Would you include walking and cycling?

Councillor Magee: Absolutely. There is the safety argument.

Councillor Scott: I was going to mention that. There seems to be something lacking—some members of COSLA have approached us on this—on road safety. There was an opportunity, perhaps, to include making footway parking illegal and for more initiatives on walking and cycling, such as making the construction of cycleways and the like more easy to implement.

One of my pet projects is the power for police and others to implement regulations in relation to orange badges. The COSLA road safety task group is working on 20 mph zone powers and on powers for traffic wardens to impose fines on speeders, or at least to identify them. Road safety does not seem to be included in this bill, although it is a key element in congestion charging and road use in cities and it touches the public the most.

Mr McMahon: The danger in this question is that I will upset my colleagues from Glasgow. It is about the current structures of transport authorities. I will again use local knowledge and discuss the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority as it affects my area in Lanarkshire. There is a perception—I do not know whether it is true—that the SPTA is too Glasgow-centric. Does COSLA have a view on that? Does a problem

genuinely exist or is it just a perception? Would a Lanarkshire passenger transport organisation be more beneficial than the regional one that we have at the moment?

Councillor Magee: I will pass you straight to my colleague from Glasgow.

Councillor MacLellan: I should declare an interest. As vice-chair of Strathclyde Passenger Transport and the chair of the services committee that deals with subsidised bus services among everything else, I can assure Mr McMahon that 90 per cent of my time is taken up with service provision outwith the city of Glasgow.

In a conurbation such as the one in west central Scotland, the area is interdependent in transportation terms. For example, about 60 per cent of the supported services in the North Lanarkshire Council area start or finish outwith that council's area. They either start or finish in other council areas in Strathclyde or in the Falkirk or West Lothian Council areas. The railway network in west central Scotland is centred on the city of Glasgow.

The interdependence in the conurbation is such that it is difficult to see that the transport needs and social and economic needs that flow from transport could be met without an organisation akin to the SPTA. With its relationship with WESTRANS, which is the voluntary partnership of roads authorities, developing strongly, I think that the SPTA offers the most sensible way forward for the conurbation. It is certainly not a Glasgow-centric body. Some of the transport problems in Glasgow are easier to deal with because of the concentration of problems in Glasgow.

A lot of the SPTA's deliberations relate to connecting up the areas that are well beyond the boundaries of the city of Glasgow. The representation on all of its committees is on the basis of one from each authority, regardless of size. It has a wide representative body.

The frustration and difficulties that the Lanarkshire authorities have expressed—and I am well aware of them—relate to the fact that the way in which the major bus companies in that area have been responding recently has reduced their bus services from a network to a patchwork. Instead of one company running a network of services, a dozen different companies are running different services that do not connect with one another. If someone needs to change from one bus to another, they must pay two fares. The passenger transport authority and the current regulatory framework are able only to put wee bits of sticking plaster here and there to prevent the most dire consequences of this withdrawal of the major bus operators from routes other than the main corridors.

There is a huge problem in Lanarkshire, which the passenger transport authority is trying to address. We hope that the new bill will give us the sort of teeth that will enable the local partnerships or statutory bodies, as in Strathclyde, to meet people's needs.

Councillor Magee: I return briefly to the previous question about omissions from the bill. We feel that a national transport context is missing in which the bill could be set. We have dwelt on the importance of trunk roads as part of that, which are not included in the bill. Anyone who travels on an integrated basis would also need to use rail and ferries. That should be considered.

We have talked about confronting the motorist. The Executive needs to conduct a hearts-and-minds campaign—like the anti-smoking campaign—to win the public over. There is talk of a contract with the motorist, but if we are to reduce congestion and pollution, there should be a public campaign to make people aware of the potential benefits. It should not be seen in a negative, bash-the-motorists light.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): You talk about the national context. I wonder whether the Executive acknowledges the different transport issues that exist throughout Scotland. In my constituency, the big problem is the M77. No matter how efficient and effective a main corridor such as that is for people who are travelling, the people who live next to it face consequences for their health.

Kenny Gibson made a point about people being deterred from going to the Highlands on holiday. Even in urban areas such as my constituency, people can feel abandoned by the bus service, especially if they live in an outlying area of a city. Do you have any comments on that?

You talked about being more broadly concerned with all transport users. To what extent does the bill succeed in addressing disabled people's travel needs, women's safety issues and the needs of elderly people? Walter MacLellan said that cost can inhibit public transport use. Those groups are disproportionately represented among the poor. Have you carried out any work to improve quality of access to public transport and to promote sensitivity to the needs of a much broader group of transport users than road users?

Councillor Magee: We have concerns about the fare concessions in the bill. Trond Haugen may want to say something about them. Concerns are also being expressed by various councils—this enlarges on what Walter MacLellan said about there being a patchwork rather than a network—that there are situations in which access to buses is not desirable. We are not convinced that quality partnerships are going to redress that. I shall allow

my colleagues to address those concerns, as they are better informed on the matter.

Trond Haugen (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): We are concerned that, although quality contracts could help to improve the network and could address the issues of fares and frequencies, they represent an awfully cumbersome procedure. It will take 21 months for the measures to be implemented, and all the options must be assessed. Essentially, we have to prove an awful lot before we are allowed to move on to quality contracts.

Efficient measures dealing with fares and frequencies are lacking from the bill. When it comes to disadvantaged people, the concessionary provisions do not go far enough in terms of the groups of population that can be included, because they extend only to pensioners and disabled people, as in the current circumstances. Many people have a low income and perhaps should be included as well.

There is also the question of the extremely elderly who are more dependent on community transport schemes because they have difficulty using public transport. Community transport schemes have not been taken on board in the bill. They have not been given the fuel duty rebate that operators get. One could also argue that sections 19 and 22 of the Transport Act 1985 ought to be changed to provide more favourable conditions for community transport operators. Much has changed in the fifteen years since the last transport bill was passed.

15:00

Johann Lamont: Is it COSLA's position that we should move straight to contracts, avoiding quality partnerships altogether?

Trond Haugen: We are pleased that we will not have to go through quality partnerships as was originally envisaged. However, to get to quality contracts, we must prove why policies cannot be implemented in any other way. It is such a long time scale; after 21 months the circumstances might have changed, so the initial aim might no longer be appropriate.

Councillor MacLellan: I have one simple point to add: the bus companies that serve the Pollok constituency have signed up to quality partnerships.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that Johann Lamont will be delighted by that point.

Donald Gorrie: The Scottish Executive and the Westminster Government often set out targets, either in bills or statements. They say that child poverty or hospital waiting times will be reduced by X amount in Y years. Do you think that

including such targets in the bill would be helpful? One could envisage targets to reverse the decline in bus passenger miles, to reduce the amount of urban air pollution or to decrease the number of accidents. Does COSLA have a view on whether setting targets is helpful or is the rhubarb of public affairs?

Councillor Magee: We have some reservations about targets. Transport strategies already have aims and targets and there are strategies for monitoring air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. If targets were to be introduced, we would expect them to apply across the range of transport and not just to those aspects for which local authorities have responsibility.

I am always slightly concerned when I consider recycling targets, which are continually set, not met and quietly put to one side. That is not to say that we should not have definite ends in view, but that properly drawn up strategies should already include such aims.

Councillor MacLellan: The Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 imposes targets for traffic reduction on local authorities. However, trunk roads are exempted. If the bill took that approach to target setting, realistically, local authorities could not be expected to live up to it. Local authorities could reasonably be asked to set targets for their local transport strategy and for regional transport strategies, but I think that that could be done only if the Executive came in as a partner and set comparable targets for its part of the network.

Donald Gorrie: You certainly have this line about partnership with the Executive very clear. You have been well briefed and are much more together than some of our lot sometimes are.

Councillor Magee: We have also tried to achieve geographical inclusion, Mr Gorrie.

The Convener: With regard to the question of the formula for hypothecation and additionality, some local authorities want to ensure that their transport spending is not reduced. In England, the money has been ring-fenced for 10 years, but that does not appear to have happened with this bill. Are you happy with that?

Councillor Magee: I think that we are, yes. We would like hypothecation to be guaranteed and the money to be additional. However, I return to my point that there are local authorities that will not benefit from that. A way needs to be found to get investment into their areas. Transport is becoming an important issue across the whole country. It is moving up the agenda.

Councillor Scott: I will enlighten Kenny Gibson on the problems that he had with congestion charging. Trondheim has gone ahead with the

scheme and it is working fairly well there, I believe. Bristol, Rome, Genoa and Copenhagen are all on board as well. That shows that we would not be out on a limb if we introduced the scheme in Edinburgh.

On hypothecation, it is vital that any cash that can be gained from congestion charging or other means of charging the public is not taken away from the lump sum that we will get. The Executive tells us that the local councils get the money and can decide how to spend it. Often, however, transport is the cinderella sector of local government, although it is important and affects everybody. It is time that Cinderella got to the ball and, if you can give us some cash, you will provide the carriage.

Iain Gabriel: We must consider the upfront costs. While we may get a revenue stream at some point down the line, it will cost money to get things moving. Money needs to be fed in, presumably from the Executive, to pump-prime projects and get some public transport alternatives in place in advance. That is quite a challenge. Local government will not be able to do anything with the proposals unless there is upfront funding.

Councillor Scott: It is vital that the Executive encourage the private sector to assist at the start to enable us to get things such as park-and-ride schemes in place before we try to do anything about getting money from the public.

Mr Gibson: Park-and-ride schemes need land. I do not know whether land is available in some areas in Glasgow. I recognise what you say about Trondheim, but what Councillor MacLellan said earlier is true: if Glasgow had congestion charging, people would go to the Olympia centre in East Kilbride as well as Braehead and other surrounding areas.

The bill talks about putting fresh emphasis on the reallocation of road space to give priority to buses. I am sure that many people would agree with that. What can be done to ensure that the impact of bus lanes on businesses is minimised? There have been many complaints in Glasgow—as I am sure there have been in Edinburgh—that when bus lanes are implemented, local businesses are adversely affected. Business people tend to throw proverbial stones at councillors and at other people. Such issues have come as far as the Parliament.

Keith Rimmer: A lot can be done for small businesses as part of such bus priority measures. I can give the example of initiatives that are beginning to be implemented in Edinburgh. The greenways scheme has been at the forefront of much criticism from small businesses.

The issue is the availability of short-stay parking. There is a lot that can be done to provide short-

stay parking. Part of greenways was to provide short-stay parking in side streets. It is fair to say that many small businesses did not think that adequate, and it is natural for small businesses to prefer parking outside their premises. More recently, we have worked on schemes that can be introduced to allow a measure of off-peak, short-stay parking in the traditional shopping areas, the only restriction being that it should not greatly impede the flow of public transport.

There is obviously a conflict between any parking and the flow of public transport on a main urban road. Things can be arranged, however, so that a limited amount of off-peak parking can be provided without a great deal of interference with public transport provision. At the peak times, when the road capacity is really needed, all the short-stay parking can be removed. Such initiatives can go a long way towards meeting the criticisms of small business.

The Convener: Thank you very much. You have given us lots of information over the past hour or so. This is stage 1 of the bill, and one of the reasons we and you got the bill very late is that the Transport and the Environment Committee has to report before the recess, which starts at the beginning of July.

When we return from recess, that committee will move into stage 2, when you can submit your amendments. You cannot lodge them yourselves, as a group or personally, but you can ask any MSP to do so on your behalf. You can perhaps give some more information to MSPs in this committee or to your own pet MSP, if you have one, about some of the things that we discussed today for the purpose of having amendments lodged.

You have given us a lot of information to think about. It is always the same with bills—there is always a lot more to consider than first meets the eye. It is good to have people in who know what they are talking about and who can help us out. For example, I have been aware for some time of the difference between bus partnerships and bus contracts. My personal feeling is towards contracts, as I represent an area with a large rural population, and I would rather that there was a contract than a partnership that keeps collapsing.

I will say to you what I say to other witnesses: if you need to be called back, we will ask you to come back. In the meantime, I thank you very much for coming along today.

Councillor Magee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you, convener.

Local Government Finance

The Convener: We now move to the second item on our agenda, the briefing paper into the terms of reference and specification for an adviser in the local government finance inquiry. Are members happy to proceed with the paper as it is?

Mr Gibson: Yes.

Donald Gorrie: It includes systems for local taxation, which covers the point that I made previously, so I am happy with it.

The Convener: Does anybody have any problems with it? If not, that is it.

Next week, we will hear more evidence on the bill from Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council. I thank members for their attendance today.

Meeting closed at 15:14.

Members who would like a printed copy of the Official Report to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

Members who would like a copy of the bound volume should also give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the bound volume should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Parliamentary Headquarters, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Monday 26 June 2000

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £500

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies: £70

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75

Special issue price: £5

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriol Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF1 2BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,
their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers