

TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 30 June 1999
(Afternoon)

Meeting 1

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OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE:

*Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
*Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
*Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab)
*Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) LD
*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)
*Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con)

*attended

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Lynn Tullis

ASSISTANT CLERK:

David McGill

Scottish Parliament

Transport and the Environment Committee

Wednesday 30 June 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE *opened the meeting at 12:02*]

Robin Harper (Oldest Member of the Committee): I apologise for the late start. We were going to wait for Des McNulty, but he might be engaged on important business elsewhere.

First, I have to read the fire action notice. If members hear the fire alarm, they should make their way out of the building, following the green running person fire evacuation signs. In future, members should refer to copies of the notice, which will be displayed.

My name is Robin Harper and I am from the Scottish Green party. I am honoured and delighted to be the oldest member of the committee. It is only by virtue of my great age that I am sitting here to welcome the committee and its guests to the first meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

I have to ask members to ensure that they have their briefing packs. I shall preside over only two items of business before demitting office to Andy Kerr: the declaration of members' interests and the committee's choice of convener.

Interests

Robin Harper: If members have their declarations of interests ready, I propose to call their names as they appear on my list.

My declaration of interests is as follows: I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Equity, Friends of the Earth Scotland, the Soil Association, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Greenpeace, the Scottish Environmental Design Association, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Medical Campaign Against Torture, Reforesting Scotland, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Historic Scotland, the National Trust and the Episcopal Church. I am a fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. It appears on the official list of interests that I own a small flat, which I rent out.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): My only interest is that I am a sponsored member of the Co-operative party—the money went directly to

the constituency party.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union.

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I have no interests to declare of which I am aware.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I am also a sponsored candidate from the Co-operative party. Although no money was paid directly to me during the election campaign, a constituency plan agreement will be set up with my party in the Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency. In the same way I received some support from the Transport and General Workers Union, of which I am a member, at the election. I am a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Although I have no financial interest in it, my family has a small business in the motor trade; for the purposes of the committee, that should be noted.

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I am a member of Unison and have no other interests that are applicable to the committee.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I remain a partner in the law firm Erskine MacAskill and Company of 4 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh. The only matter of relevance to transport is that when I flew to Prague for Scotland v Czech Republic, I had to cancel my flight on the Monday, having organised tickets for 48, including myself. Czech Airlines kindly flew me out on the Wednesday and upgraded me to business class for no additional fee—I declare that perquisite for the public record.

Robin Harper: Thank you, Kenny. Unfortunately Des is not here yet.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I have no interests to declare.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I do not have as many subscriptions as Mr Harper, but part of my farm is a site of special scientific interest and a national nature reserve, and I have a management agreement with Scottish Natural Heritage. My interests are on the environmental rather than the transport front.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): As there is apparently great public interest in the holidays of the conveners and members of the Scottish Parliament, I am practising for mine by saying that I have nothing to declare.

Convener

Robin Harper: The next item on the agenda is the election of our convener. Subject to rule 12.1.2, the Parliament, on a motion of the bureau, has decided that only a member of the Labour

party is eligible to be convener. I invite Andy Kerr and anyone else who wishes to stand to identify themselves and confirm their candidature.

Mr Kerr: Thank you, Robin. I confirm my candidature for that position.

Robin Harper: As there are no other candidates, I invite the committee to confirm Andy as its convener by acclamation.

Mr Andy Kerr was elected convener by acclamation.

The Convener (Mr Andy Kerr): I get a swivel chair—now I know why Robin did not want to move.

First, I thank members for that vote of confidence in my becoming the convener of the committee. It is a vindication of the Scottish Parliament that someone as young as Robin can be the oldest member of a committee and that an MSP can come from the Green party. That says a lot about the Scottish Parliament—its make-up, usefulness and the diversity of political opinions that it represents.

In the Procedures Committee yesterday, we discussed best practice, which we would try to reproduce throughout the Parliament's committee structure. We agreed that committee staff should introduce themselves and that, instead of their whispering in the convener's ear, we should allow them to speak directly to the committee when appropriate. I believe that that is good practice.

I begin by introducing the staff. The clerks today are Lynn Tullis and David McGill. The official reporters are Claire Hall and Cameron Smith. Behind them are Alison Lang from the official report, Jenny Goldsmith from the committee support staff, and Graham Vidler, Stephen Curtis and Rebecca Badger from the Scottish Parliament information centre.

I have sat on the other side of the fence as an officer in a local council and believe that to ensure that everyone is involved is a good way to start. We shall be together for a long time in this committee and I am pleased to be a member of it, and even more pleased to be its convener. Some big issues lie ahead of us—we will be making decisions that we hope will improve transport and the environment for young families in particular. I look forward to working with the other members of the committee.

Remit

The Convener: We must now address the remit of the committee and topics for future briefing. I hope that members have read the relevant documents. For the benefit of members of the public, it is stated that our role is to consider and

report on matters relating to transport and the environment and any other matters that fall within the responsibility of the Minister for Transport and the Environment. That responsibility is understood to include transport—including the development of integrated transport policies for rural areas—the environment, natural heritage, sustainable development, strategic environmental assessments and the land use planning system. That gives an idea of the areas that the committee will cover.

I would like the committee to begin its work with its members having a basic understanding of the committee's role, remit and responsibilities, and of the aspects of transport and the environment that will impact upon it. I am minded to organise early briefings on the overall impact of the committee and the forces that will come into play in our work, so that we can all reach a broad understanding of our remit.

I ask committee members to describe the areas of interest on which they would like to be briefed and organisations that the committee might want to meet, which could give us a greater understanding of what we need to do in the committee.

Helen Eadie: I congratulate Mr Kerr on his election to the post of convener. I look forward to working with him and I am sure that everyone else around the table will work hard with him as well. Transport was my No 1 choice, so I am delighted to have secured a place on the committee.

As a matter of priority, I would like to be briefed on the subject of mobile phone masts. We have all read about that in the newspapers; I join the *Daily Record*, which carried a story on mobile phone masts last week, in saying that it is a subject that must be considered. There has been a Scottish Office consultation paper on the subject. At the moment, an operator can come along, and if the mast is less than 80 m high they can simply put it up anywhere. I want to make it clear that I am not against mobile phones—new technology is wonderful—but a balance must be struck between the public interest and erecting masts. I hope that we will adopt the Maastricht principle—the precautionary principle—on that.

The creation of a rail link to Edinburgh airport is dear to my heart and to the people of my constituency and areas north of the River Forth. For many years, countless MPs from across the northern part of Scotland—and even the central belt—have called for it, so perhaps we can have a briefing.

I have been associated in the past with the campaign for rail electrification from Aberdeen to Edinburgh. I would like a briefing paper showing the current situation and cost implications. May I

continue?

The Convener: You are stretching it, but you may continue.

12:15

Helen Eadie: I will have to choose between the other two issues on my list.

Community transport, particularly in rural areas, is important. We should consider what more can be done to help people in rural areas who are cut off from transport at, say, 6 o'clock at night, and have no hope of being able to socialise.

The last topic that I will raise is getting the balance right on land use planning and economic development. I think that Fife, where I come from, is second top of the league for unemployment and land use planning. There should be an inquiry into planning constraints across Scotland.

I will make do with that.

The Convener: That will be enough for our first few meetings—I say in jest.

Linda Fabiani: I will add to some of Helen's points. When we talk about rural transport, quite often the islands are left out. There should be a commitment to a route-by-route analysis of CalMac's ferries and their funding by the Scottish Office. It is important that the Transport and the Environment Committee knows what the funding is, how it is split up, and how CalMac intends to operate in future. Many communities depend solely on CalMac ferries.

I have the same concerns on planning as Helen has. I am glad that we are enabled to consider national planning procedures in general. Procedures should be streamlined, but first we must understand how they vary across the local authorities in Scotland. In considering planning, I want to include sustainable development.

Tavish Scott: As a councillor, I was on the transport committee in Shetland, and I spend rather a lot of time on a variety of means of transport, getting to the central belt. I endorse what Helen said about a rail link to Edinburgh airport as I have a vested interest in that.

We need to break down transport planning into rural, urban and strategic network aspects.

There is more to rural transport than sea transport. There is a need to consider the integration of sea and air transport, as air links are as much of a lifeline as any other type of transport, when, for example, one is trying to get to hospital, as hospitals in the islands do not have the range of medical services that are available on the mainland.

We cannot avoid assessing the effectiveness of

current measures that attempt to defray the high cost of petrol, such as those of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to encourage investment in rural petrol stations, and the rate rebate scheme.

On the environment, I want the committee to investigate the marine environment in particular, as we do not pay it enough attention. There was an incident in the Fair Isle channel this weekend, when a 78,000-tonne tanker lost power six and a half miles from the coastline of a vulnerable and fragile part of the world, which is a world-renowned bird sanctuary. The marine environment is worthy of considerable investigation. The advantage for the Fair Isle is that there are people there to argue for their community; that is not the case on St Kilda, which is an equally important area to investigate.

I want there to be investigation and assessment of those areas. I know that work has been done on designations. This committee will want to take a view on the numerous designations for many parts of our natural environment. I speak as one who has many.

Cathy Jamieson: I want to raise a number of points, but I will be as brief as possible.

A helpful list of organisations that we might want to consult and get briefings from is suggested in the briefing paper. I would like to add to that list, particularly transport unions—not just the Transport and General Workers Union, but the National Union of Rail, Transport and Maritime Workers, and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association. We should also have briefings from organisations such as Friends of the Earth, on general environmental and transport issues, and should not sideline those organisations into areas such as sustainable development. We should ensure that such briefings are part of the general working of the committee.

I suggest that we should form links to tackle the poverty agenda, with organisations such as the Poverty Alliance, Energy Action Scotland and various pensioners groups.

We should form links with transport users groups. I declared my membership of CND, which may well have an interest in the transportation of nuclear materials.

I am concerned about how the committee will deal with some of the issues that have been raised through motions and questions in the Parliament. I do not wish to give a long speech—I know that the convener would not allow me to do so—on roads in Ayrshire, but it will be useful for the committee to note that there is already cross-party agreement on the M77 and related issues, which need to be debated and put firmly on the agenda. I hope that we will be able to put those issues—and other areas in which there are particular interests—on

the agenda.

In preparing for the meeting, I was interested by the huge number of relevant issues that are covered by reserved powers. I should like an assurance that the committee will be able to form an opinion on those issues and to direct that opinion to the relevant people when the time comes.

The Convener: I can certainly confirm that point, as that is one of the roles of the committee.

Mr MacAskill: I echo what Cathy said. At the outset, we must get briefings and set down the remit of the committee. We are required to consider and scrutinise the Executive's legislative proposals. Issues have been raised and flagged up—in particular, road tolling. Further information about proposals on road tolling should be presented as soon as possible. We must clarify matters. There are two issues to consider: tolling of arterial highways and road pricing to address congestion. As a resident of the city and a member of the SNP, I oppose the former, but I am sympathetic to the latter in the right circumstances. The City of Edinburgh Council is seeking funding to consider the Oslo position. We should consider what is on offer.

We have to be visionary and participatory. That follows on from what Cathy has just said. We require clarification almost immediately—we obviously have to wait for what comes from Westminster—on whether the Scottish Parliament and this committee will be independently and separately represented on the strategic rail authority. If they are not, I believe that we will have been neutered and emasculated at the outset. It would be outrageous if we did not have direct input into the strategic rail authority. First and foremost, the committee must contact Westminster to ensure that the position is clarified.

We have to consider other measures in the legislative proposals, such as parking charges. We should perhaps investigate what can be offered as an inducement. For example, will tax breaks be on offer, so that an employer can provide ridacards, or reduced or subsidised public transport as part of employees' remuneration? What fiscal benefits will there be for an employer or an employee? We should look at what is done outwith Scotland and the United Kingdom; in France, for example, there are payroll taxes, and employers are financially encouraged to provide public transport benefits for members of staff. We have to consider the carrot as well as the stick.

On the environment, we know what is coming in terms of national parks and we will have to consider various matters that have been raised elsewhere. Tavish mentioned the marine environment. I know that the World Wide Fund for

Nature sees no reason why national parks should be restricted to land. Will we consider marine national parks? If so, we should take advice on what happens in Wales and elsewhere, so that we can preserve the natural environment and habitat in areas such as the Minch.

On participation and vision, will this committee be represented separately at the OSPAR commission meetings? Given the effect that OSPAR will have on the North sea environment, if we do not have direct and independent representation, how can we adequately represent the interests of Scotland and its environment? We want clarification on that.

I know that Stirling Council has raised the question of play zones. I have a young family and think that it is important that we reclaim streets in urban areas for people rather than simply for cars. Home zones, which have been put forward by various councils south of the border, offer the opportunity to progress matters here.

I am aware that waste recycling is costly. We are trying to catch up with limits and directives that have been set by the European Union, but we do not appear to be reaching them. However, we should consider the money that is obtained from Scotland in landfill tax. If money is to be hypothecated from parking charges, tolling charges or whatever, why should not the landfill tax, which provides substantial funds to the exchequer, be hypothecated to allow Scottish local authorities to recycle waste to the benefit of the community and the natural environment?

Nora Radcliffe: I think that voluntary organisations can bid for the revenue from landfill charges for environmental projects. That is a valuable asset in the overall environmental picture. It would be a shame if that were lost.

Mr Tosh: It is becoming difficult to think of fresh topics. The researchers behind me must be groaning under the weight that is piling on their backs, but I would like to mention some issues that have not been raised so far. Clearly, we will examine many controversial issues when we consider the legislative programme.

When the Executive's review of the A77 and M77 and other strategic roads is finished, this committee might have a role in investigating the link between road transport and economic development and how roads interlink with railheads and ports.

Taking up Helen's point about land use in relation to economic development, I suggest that commercial and residential builders are raising important questions about how we programme land supply. There may be a need to consider how that is done, how guidance is given to local authorities and how well local authorities deliver

land.

In the context of community transport, I can say that representations from pensioners groups on the variation across the country in concessionary travel schemes have been a feature in my mail. There may be scope for us to examine that and to find ways—whether through guidance or even, as has been suggested, legislation—in which to establish a national framework for concessionary travel.

I am also interested in environmental issues. A micro local issue is the impact on the community of the many old planning consents for quarrying that were given in the 1940s and 1950s, before the current planning framework was in place. In some areas, they are beginning to raise important environmental questions that we could investigate.

Another matter that arises from my Ayrshire background—it has been mentioned in the Parliament—relates to fifth and sixth freedoms for air freight. Those are primarily within the competence of the UK Parliament, but we may want to investigate them—I am reassured by what the convener said about this committee's interests in matters beyond our strict legislative remit.

Finally, I am interested in alternative energy strategies. As we exhaust our fossil fuels and become aware of the difficulties of traditional means of generating power, we will have to look to the future. I am sure that Mr Harper will have that in mind, too.

Janis Hughes: I echo Murray's view on pensioner concessions, which is a big issue. This committee should address as a priority the wide variation in concessions across the country.

I am also concerned about the regulation of buses. I come from an urban constituency. We have to remember that it is not just rural areas that have problems with buses stopping at six o'clock; it happens fairly often in urban areas, too. The whole issue of bus regulation would give us something to get our teeth into.

12:30

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I am delighted that—as we have always known—the Scottish Green party does not have a monopoly on environmental concern and knowledge. In fact, what has been said around the table addresses many of, if not all, the things that I would have brought up myself had I spoken first. I asked to speak towards the end so that I could make that sort of observation.

I strongly support the idea that this committee should look at our marine environment, which is seriously threatened. We should take views on the matter and see whether we can extend the powers

either of Scottish Natural Heritage or of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to include the seas around our coastline. The setting up of marine parks would be one way of providing the kind of protection that is required.

Pedestrianisation is also important. We are talking about transport, but I transport myself on my feet most of the time. There are many people who would probably cycle more if they had the chance, and transport decisions should be taken with such people in mind.

Scotland is way behind in the amount of material that we recycle and I hope that this committee will seek best advice on the matter.

The Scottish Green party takes the view that the environment is a poverty issue. There are no proposals to put landfill sites in Barnton or opencast mines in Morningside.

Inclusiveness is also important. When the committee is taking evidence, we must be careful about how inclusive we are. We must not think simply in terms of inviting Friends of the Earth, Scottish Natural Heritage and various other interest groups to speak to us; poverty action groups and other bodies should also be invited.

Best practice has been mentioned. There is an enormous amount of good practice on transport and the environment throughout Europe and we should consider that.

Murray Tosh mentioned renewables. Scotland could be leading the world in marine and wind energy and this committee must consider how we can encourage Scotland along that road.

Nora Radcliffe: The strength of this committee is that it is national; we can be powerful at a strategic level. In considering such things as roads, we should take a strategic look and see where the gaps are rather than zero in on individual problems. We must look at how things fit into the wider pattern.

I wonder whether we could have some information about how we can use geographical information systems technology to help us in our work. It is a very powerful tool, which is beginning to become relevant as places are mapped. If we are operating strategically, it may be useful to have that technology at our disposal.

In considering waste, I think that recycling is the last thing that we should look at. We should be looking at minimisation and reduction; we should treat the disease rather than the symptom.

The Convener: Thank you. There is a huge range of areas that we can discuss, with both macro and micro issues. Last night, for example, I was at a meeting of West Mains Community Council, where people were talking about

concessionary travel schemes for pensioners. There is a mixed bag of systems in operation, so it would be a good idea for us to look at that.

In terms of micro issues, dog litter is a huge problem for many people, particularly if they live near a park, as I am fortunate enough to do. Some people simply abuse that sort of physical environment.

Heading back up the ladder, so to speak, I have an interest in environmental systems. In my former employment, I began the process of implementing an environmental management system, ISO 9000. I would like us to undertake some research on the uptake of environmental management systems in the Scottish economy and Scottish business life and on how we can increase and improve the use of such systems.

Another important issue is how people can get involved in the planning process, which can be seen as somewhat distant and difficult to access, especially where the local authority or the advocate of an application has lawyers, QCs and professionals and the ordinary punters are trying to resolve an issue locally. I would like to see some examination of the planning process and how people can access it more effectively.

Those are a few issues, besides the ones that have already been raised, that I hope we can consider. We must discuss how to plan our work and how we can make best use of our time. The staff will endeavour to produce briefings on many of the areas that we have mentioned. I crave the committee's indulgence on a subject that I raised at the start of the meeting: are we prepared to spend a couple of days in establishing the bottom line in terms of our role, our impact and the areas that we can examine?

I have an interest in the environment; it was my first choice of subject matter. To put it bluntly, transport is not an area in which I expressed an interest. I am not saying that I am not interested in it, but I am not strong on it. I would like to hear more about the M77 and about strategic and planning issues to do with roads and transport.

I would like to begin the work of the committee by ensuring that everybody has a bottom-line understanding of the issues. We could then bring in as many of the subjects that members have raised as we can. That would be a good way in which to proceed. Are people comfortable with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: During the recess, we will get briefings and information from the parliamentary staff. I suggest that towards the end of the recess and the beginning of the new term—that sounds like we are going back to school; I should say

when the Parliament reconvenes—we should arrange a couple of full-day events at which we could cover a lot of ground. Are people happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The clerks assure me that they can arrange suitable dates with everybody. We are talking about the end of August or early September, so bear that in mind when you are making plans, particularly for slots on Mondays, Tuesdays or Fridays. We will contact all members individually and ensure that we choose dates that suit. We will also discuss a venue for those events.

Tavish Scott: I have a question on a point raised by Kenny MacAskill. Can you give the committee guidance on the timetabling of the bills that we will have to deal with? They will obviously have a major bearing on our work.

The Convener: I am unable to give you that guidance at the moment, but it will be given as soon as the information is available.

Cathy Jamieson: We must balance the logistics of this committee with the meetings of other committees. Each committee will have its own work load. I am on the European Committee, which has already identified a number of things that are likely to be discussed. The question of moving the location for committee meetings has been asked in every committee. Are there any proposals for this committee to go out and about?

The Convener: Yes, but we need to be sensitive about it. If we pay one organisation a visit or ask it to host a meeting, that may have an impact on how other organisations see us. We will be discussing that and recommending that the committee should move about as appropriate. Certainly, we should seek out venues that are appropriate to our requirements. It would be good to go to the organisations—I will not name any in case others are not named—that have an impact on the areas that we are discussing. That way we would be on the ground, so to speak.

Cathy Jamieson: That is reassuring. I was concerned that only the people who could afford to come here could make representations. I want to ensure that local communities throughout Scotland can be involved.

The Convener: The clerk has advised me of the cost implications of those activities, but Cathy's point is relevant and we must bear it in mind.

Mr MacAskill: I would appreciate some formal briefings. I have been having some individual and independent briefings, but anything that can be provided through a structured framework would be appreciated. The benefit of that would be that all members had the same knowledge.

I would like to flag up the structure of the committee. Perhaps there should be an informal structure. The briefing document mentions the possibility of establishing sub-committees. Before we kick off in earnest, we should consider whether we are one committee or whether we will have sub-committees and, if so, who will sit on which sub-committee.

Having chaired another committee yesterday, I appreciate the clerks' views on co-option. However, I would like this committee—and any sub-committee thereof—not simply to ask organisations, by citation or by invitation, to give evidence, but to sit with us as part of the committee and to have input even though they would have no voting rights. We should follow the recommendations and guidance of the consultative steering group by being inclusive. Following your advice, Mr Kerr, I do not want to name individual organisations for fear of excluding others, but we should try to have them on board rather than ask them simply to attend to give representation.

The Convener: You will see from the third item on the agenda that if we want to establish sub-committees we will have to discuss it with the Parliamentary Bureau. Once we have met and looked at our work load, we can look at the ideas, principles and membership of any sub-committees we deem necessary. We must also consider how we can run informal committee meetings in which people can participate. I am in favour of that.

Helen Eadie: Only last week, I had a meeting in Cowdenbeath in my constituency with Railtrack; I was fully briefed about the new railway line that is to be laid in my area. It will be a continuous line—in other words, it will not have all the usual joints. It was suggested that members of the committee might want to come to see the track being laid during the middle two weeks of July while the area is closed off. There has been massive consultation on the project with local groups and it might be worth visiting the site.

The Convener: Thank you. We shall bear that in mind.

Mr Tosh: We have been rattling through all these points and giving the research people a huge volume of work. We cannot possibly look at all these issues in the first few months of the committee's operation. When we get the minute of proceedings and see what work has been identified, we should agree—as part of our briefing session or at some other early opportunity—how we will prioritise our tasks. We must get them into manageable shape. If we want to tackle more work by devolving it to smaller groups, that might best inform our selection of sub-committees.

The Convener: I hope to agree a work plan that

will take cognisance of the legislative programme as well as the areas of interest that have been highlighted by members of the committee. That work plan will be discussed and agreed and then we will know where we are going in the near future.

To get through our programme of work, I shall be working with my team and delegating authority, and I will ensure that everybody is kept abreast of the situation. Is everybody comfortable with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Obviously, everybody knows how to get hold of MSPs and how to get hold of me. I will be happy to hear from anybody during the recess. Although it is unusual for staff to speak in committee meetings, the clerk will say something on this occasion.

Lynn Tullis (Committee Clerk): If, during the recess, members identify other issues on which they would like to be briefed, they should contact the clerking office and the issues will be incorporated into the briefing programme.

The Convener: Thank you, Lynn. Is there anything else?

12:45

Helen Eadie: It would be a major omission if we did not mention one further issue. We have talked about Scottish and Westminster legislation, but such things as trans-European rail networks and European legislation will also have an impact on the committee. We might want to consider how we can dovetail with the European Committee and possibly other committees.

The Convener: We are aware of the fact that we will impact on other committees, particularly on matters relating to Europe and, with the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, on matters such as poverty. There is no problem with that.

Linda Fabiani: Cathy spoke earlier about the committee going out to the people. Is there a general view that the committee should move, on a rolling basis, to different places all over Scotland, rather than just go out to meet different interest groups as the convener suggested? I am aware of the cost implications—I see a worried look from the clerk—but I think that we should consider that. We should go not just to the cities, but to the more remote areas of Scotland. The visits could also be combined with fact-finding missions.

The Convener: We will have to get Lynn to speak but, in the meantime, I will repeat what she has just told me. For specific issues, it may be appropriate to be in a specific part of the country.

That idea has been taken on board. The mood of the committee is that we want to get out as much as possible to meet real people.

Are there any late bids for other items?

Mr Tosh: Just a vote of thanks to the convener.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I have enjoyed this first meeting and I hope that we continue to work together constructively.

Meeting closed at 12:46.

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Wednesday 7 July 1999

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