

# **TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 28 June 2000  
*(Morning)*

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## TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2000, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) LD)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

### WITNESSES

Andy Baird (Transport and General Workers Union)  
Kevin Delaney (RAC Foundation)  
Dr Richard Dixon (Friends of the Earth Scotland)  
Neil Greig (Automobile Association)  
Colin Howden (TRANSform Scotland)  
Councillor Christine May (Fife Council)  
Rodney Mortimer (Glasgow City Council)  
David Spaven (TRANSform Scotland)  
Bill Taylor (Fife Council)  
Councillor Alistair Watson (Glasgow City Council)  
Tracey White (Scottish Trades Union Congress)  
Alastair Young (Glasgow City Council)

### CLERK TEAM LEADER

Shelagh McKinlay

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



# Scottish Parliament

## Transport and the Environment Committee

Wednesday 28 June 2000

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting in private at 09:06]

10:02

*Meeting continued in public.*

**The Convener (Mr Andy Kerr):** Welcome to the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting this year of the Transport and the Environment Committee. I have received apologies from Linda Fabiani and Tavish Scott, who are attending a meeting of the Holyrood progress group, and from Des McNulty, who is attending a meeting of the Standards Committee.

### Transport (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Convener:** At today's meeting we will take further evidence on the Transport (Scotland) Bill, for which we are designated lead committee at stage 1. This is our second week of taking evidence. Today we will hear from the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Transport and General Workers Union, Glasgow City Council, Fife Council, the Automobile Association, the RAC Foundation, Friends of the Earth and TRANSform Scotland.

With us at the table are Andy Baird from the Transport and General Workers Union and Tracey White from the STUC. I welcome you warmly to the meeting. As has been indicated, you will have the opportunity to make a short opening statement. Thank you very much for the list of bullet points that you provided.

**Andy Baird (Transport and General Workers Union):** I am also chair of the economic committee of the STUC, so I have a joint role.

The STUC and its affiliated trade unions represent transport users and workers throughout the transport sector. Our interest in transport policy and in the Transport (Scotland) Bill arises from the recognition that all sectors throughout Scotland rely on efficient and sustainable movement of people and goods. We represent not only the people who provide passenger transport, bus services and road haulage, but large numbers of people who are involved in the manufacture of goods on the construction side.

We welcome the positive features of the Transport (Scotland) Bill, particularly the proposals to promote the development of local transport strategies and regional plans and to improve the quality of bus services. However, we are less convinced that the case has been made for workplace parking levies and road user charges. We are pleased to have an opportunity to make a presentation today and we hope that we can make our views known constructively.

We support the principle of Scottish ministers having the power to instruct specified public bodies to prepare and submit joint transport strategies. We strongly support the proposal to enable local transport authorities to set up flexible ticketing systems and quality partnerships and quality contracts for bus services. We think that there is a clear argument for a universal concessionary travel scheme for rural and urban areas throughout Scotland.

We acknowledge the Executive's preference for a voluntary quality partnership approach, but a number of issues could be addressed by quality contracts. There is not much point in having two or three operators on a route if only one operates efficiently. Key issues are service frequency—at peak times and off-peak times—and the fares structure for long and short journeys. A large proportion of the people who make short journeys are women and the fares for such journeys are excessively high.

Drivers' hours are a health and safety issue. Although there are relevant regulations under road traffic legislation, a quality contract could include a reduction in the length of spread-over. That would have clear health and safety implications.

Disability access to vehicles is also an issue. Previously, there was an arrangement under which financial assistance was available for new-build vehicles. Further consideration could be given to that as a way of increasing the number of vehicles that have disability access.

Given the lack of alternative modes of transport, we remain concerned by the suggestion of penalties for car users. Before we go down that road, we need to have a clean and efficient transport system. We would always argue that the voluntary approach is best. Consultation is important, and there should be a forum through which all interested parties can become involved. It can be argued that three or four transport authorities in Scotland will be able to co-ordinate policy and ensure that there is a cohesive service throughout the country.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We will structure our questions to deal with issues as they arise in the bill. I ask Helen Eadie to open with a question on joint transport strategies.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** In the document that you submitted you set out your view on joint transport strategies. Should the bill contain a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce local transport strategies, as proposed in the Transport Bill for England and Wales?

**Tracey White (Scottish Trades Union Congress):** As Andy Baird said, we understand the Executive's interest in promoting such arrangements through partnership. However, we should ensure that there is a statutory underpinning to joint transport strategies, which would incentivise local authorities to play their role. Many different organisations have an interest in transport infrastructure and transport services. If we are to address some of the weaknesses in our transport system, it is important that those organisations should work together. They should want to do that because it makes sense, but it is important that there should be a statutory obligation to produce joint transport strategies, to deal with situations where joint working is difficult.

**The Convener:** As there are no more questions on transport strategies, we will move on to bus services.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** We all know about the problems that have been experienced since deregulation. Will the quality partnerships that are proposed in the bill be strong and binding enough to effect the changes that are required?

**Tracey White:** We want all those who have a shared interest to join together in partnerships. The fact that the Executive is prepared to create powers to legislate that that must happen is an important feature of the bill, which should bring benefits. People will be encouraged to go down the voluntary route because they will know that there is a statutory obligation on them to act appropriately.

**Janis Hughes:** Will it be easier for local authorities to take the option of quality contracts? The bill proposes that quality partnerships should be used initially, except when it can be demonstrated that that would be a problem, and that quality contracts should be considered only if quality partnerships fail.

**Andy Baird:** When the Scottish transport group comes into operation, the commissioners will award routes based on the public interest and each route will be restricted to one operator. Under the present framework, many operators may operate services on the same routes and service provision is reduced. There is a clear argument for saying to an operator, "Here is a route—this is what we expect you to provide." That approach could lead to lower fares because the operator will have more passengers on each

route. We do not pretend that it will be easy to initiate that approach, but it is worth exploring. In the public interest, we moved away from regulation—the benefits of going down the road that is suggested could be immense.

**Janis Hughes:** Do you think that quality partnerships should include reference to fares and the frequency of services?

**Andy Baird:** Off-peak services should be provided, including Sunday services, and the fares structure is important. A reasonable fare structure makes services accessible. We must take account not only of the cost of rural transport, but of the people who stay in the peripheral housing schemes, whose predominant form of transport is buses. Those services must be accessible.

A further problem has developed recently in that many operators are introducing varying wage structures. More women drivers are getting passenger carrying vehicle licences, but are earning less than people who were employed with companies before 1994. Drivers' hours constitute another problem. We can argue for the safety implications and say that people should not drive for more than eight hours, but that is not much good if they are booked off for only four hours in between such shifts.

**Janis Hughes:** Should there be scope within the terms of the quality partnerships to specify improvements to bus services for specific user groups, for example, improved access for disabled people?

**Tracey White:** I say strongly that that is the case. Providing safe and accessible public transport is the key matter in which the Executive and the various other agencies that have responsibilities for transport can start to make a difference to the way in which people go about their activities at a range of levels. Clearly, there are difficulties with accessibility that the quality partnership/quality contract approach would start to address.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I begin by declaring an interest in the matter as a member of the Transport and General Workers Union.

I want to follow up Andy Baird's point about safety for both the travelling public and drivers. Andy mentioned women drivers specifically. Should taking such problems into account be a bigger feature of awarding quality partnerships?

**Andy Baird:** If we can demonstrate to an operator in an area that revenue would be greater because passenger levels had increased despite lower fare scales, there will be greater opportunities in that area.

On equal pay, we always maintain that there is a rate for the job. People should not be penalised simply for coming into the industry. We must come up with a mechanism that will ensure that fairness applies. More women are taking up PCV licences—it is just and equitable to include that in quality partnerships. Such a mechanism need not be detrimental to the company that operates a service—we argue that it could be achieved through a balanced approach.

**Cathy Jamieson:** May I follow that up with a short supplementary question?

**The Convener:** Of course.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Drivers' working hours were also mentioned. Are you concerned about the patterns of working hours in relation to safety issues?

10:15

**Andy Baird:** That is an issue that is sometimes missed. We talk about drivers' safety and driving hours—the same regulations apply in the road haulage industry. Although drivers can be booked off during a working day, there are stresses and strains on them because of their responsibility and the size of the vehicles, whether the driver is involved in road haulage or carrying passengers. Road traffic legislation says that we should not operate to the maximum. We have an opportunity to ensure quality provision of a fast, efficient service through cities for passengers.

**The Convener:** There are no further questions on bus services.

You have given some views on road user charging and on the workplace parking levy. Robin Harper wishes to pursue those matters further with you.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I should declare an interest. I am a member of two STUC-affiliated unions—Equity and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

What further views would you like to express on the provisions for road user charging that are set out in the bill?

**Tracey White:** Our main point is that we recognise that enabling powers are proposed. Although the bill does not imply that those powers will be used universally throughout Scotland, it is important to establish them appropriately, which would take account of disparate needs and aspirations.

The legislation and the documents associated with it suggest a requirement on authorities to consult when they want to introduce charging schemes. We want those obligations to be more rigorous. Reference is made to consulting

business groups locally—we want to ensure that the Executive takes on board the need for that consultation to be as wide as possible. It must take into account the needs and aspirations of the local community and of those who work in the service. It is not immediately clear from the documentation that that will happen. In a sense, that relates back to the joint transport strategy, which we discussed earlier. We think that there is a need to establish joint transport strategies, but it is important that, when consultation takes place on such strategies, the responsible authorities do so in the widest and fullest way.

**Robin Harper:** Would you like the bill to be more specific in its description of the consultation process?

**Tracey White:** It would help if the bill indicated how the list of consultees would be constructed and how wide the consultation would go.

**Robin Harper:** Are you concerned that areas that will be subject to road charging—such as town centres—might lose out economically to areas that will not be subject to charging, such as out-of-town shopping centres? Do you have a view on the possibility of evening things out a little by introducing car parking charges in out-of-town retail centres?

**Tracey White:** I could bring into the discussion a whole series of issues in response to that question. One of the ways to influence travel behaviour is to introduce charges for the journeys that people choose to make. Another way to influence behaviour is to ensure that services and jobs are provided locally, where they are required. Although the bill does not address that approach, other activities that the Executive is pursuing do.

We have spent much time campaigning for more effective distribution of services and jobs. In a sense, the bill can do only certain things. It is important that local transport strategies, local economic development strategies and public service provision more generally are co-ordinated. One must consider how the introduction of a road charging scheme would impact on the economic, environmental and social inclusion priorities of an area. That is not necessarily easy to do, but it is important that the issue is viewed in the round, including the point that Robin Harper made about the difference between town centres and out-of-town shopping facilities.

**Robin Harper:** Do you have a view on the provision of workplace parking levies, as set out in the bill?

**Tracey White:** We are not convinced that a good case for workplace parking levies has been made. We recognise that the bill is enabling legislation and that authorities will not necessarily introduce the schemes that the legislation would

allow them to introduce. A range of issues arises in relation to consultation and consideration of the impact of charges on the local economy and on road users. We are concerned that workplace parking levies could be passed directly on to people working in an organisation. We are also concerned about the potential safety implications of workplace parking levies, particularly for those who work unsociable hours. If, for example, following the introduction of workplace parking levies, an organisation decided not to provide parking facilities, people would not be able to drive directly to work and would have to park further away. Several issues arise from that for those who work unsociable hours. Again, the issue is how consultation is conducted and linked to bus service provision. We must ensure that people can get to and from their work efficiently, safely and economically.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** You said that you are not convinced about the case for workplace parking levies. As you expanded your answer, it became clear that you are strongly against them for a variety of reasons. Do you think that there are any potential benefits from such levies?

**Tracey White:** Getting the provision of public transport right is much more important than introducing a penalty on people who might have no choice. That goes back to consultation and the questions whether people can choose to change their behaviour and whether schemes will penalise them financially, with knock-on effects.

**Mr Tosh:** In your answer to a previous question, you said that there was a risk that companies would pass on the costs to their employees. Is not the point that charges should fall on people to influence their behaviour? If one leaves the charges to be absorbed by the business, they become a business tax and a revenue-raising measure rather than a congestion management measure.

**Tracey White:** Presumably, the charges are also an incentive to businesses to do something to ensure that their employees can get to and from work.

**Andy Baird:** The frequency of services is important. We should not impose charges when there is no viable alternative. If a bus on a half-hour service does not show up, people might have to wait for an hour for the next one, but some services in operation have a five or 10-minute frequency.

The level of take-up increases because people travelling to work know that they will reach their destinations. On voluntary partnerships, not only must services be in place, but frequency is important to ensure that the cost is reasonable

and that people reach their destinations promptly. If those aspects exist, we can then go back and tidy up certain areas. It is not helpful to do that punitively in the first instance.

**Mr Tosh:** When the minister gave evidence last week, there was much talk about a carrot-and-stick approach, but your approach is all carrot. You are talking about providing the service positively, but do not sticks generate a flow of income that allows the carrots to be put in place? Somebody somewhere has to pay for the service; if not the person using the parking space, then the taxpayer or the person who pays the bus fare.

**Andy Baird:** If operators are encouraged to incorporate a high-frequency service in quality contracts, they will receive a reasonable return on their investment and people travelling to and from work will have a fast, frequent service. The question is: when do different measures come into play?

**Tracey White:** Unless I have read the record incorrectly—which is entirely possible—I have the strong impression that the minister pointed out that the issue is not the flow of revenue, but tackling congestion. However, our point is that there are different ways of tackling congestion. The question is how to balance carrots and sticks; an all-stick approach that does not allow people to make genuine choices about their travel behaviour will most likely impact seriously on those on the lowest incomes. That is an issue that we and others must consider.

**Mr Tosh:** Quite an impressive coalition of interests is building up against workplace parking levies. Last week, we touched on the question whether there ought to be any exemptions if we impose congestion charging and, perhaps, workplace levies. Should there be a nationally specified exemption scheme that might include emergency services, or should the authority that imposes the charges decide for itself?

**Andy Baird:** There should be a national provision for emergency vehicles. Vehicles such as buses, which are designed to reduce the use of cars, should not be penalised either. We need a balanced approach to exemptions; it would be hard to justify different schemes for different areas, and in some respects we should take a universal view.

**Mr Tosh:** We heard evidence from freight interests that delivery vehicles should be exempt from charges because they were in cities not through choice, but because they had to be there and no regime could, therefore, influence their behaviour or level of use. Do you agree?

**Andy Baird:** There could be a system that allowed for specified delivery times—



**Mr Tosh:** I was thinking more of measures such as allowing freight vehicles to use bus lanes and exempting freight vehicles from cordon charges that might be applied to other motorists.

**Andy Baird:** Allowing freight vehicles to use bus lanes at peak times would only snarl up the system. Delivery times can be restricted, but any charge on the road haulage industry will be passed on in some shape or form. Charges might be an inflationary measure in an industry that already faces severe problems with the levels of taxation on vehicles and fuel duty.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I want to follow up briefly a point that Murray Tosh raised. Last week, it was suggested that, as the bill is currently worded, levies might be applied to places where freight or haulage vehicles were parked overnight. Do you have concerns about that? Furthermore, should there be exemptions for a wider range of working vehicles than emergency vehicles?

**Andy Baird:** There are cost implications, in that additional charges applied to a group of specialised vehicles that provide a service will be passed on. What are we trying to achieve? There has to be a balanced approach. The road haulage industry has severe problems. We do not need to penalise people more if it can be avoided. We have to be constructive in how we approach different areas.

**Tracey White:** It is also worth mentioning the level of charges. We talked previously about carrots and sticks. If you introduced a new charging regime in which maximum charges were applied in the first instance, that could cause major disruption. With regard to passenger transport and freight transport, it is important that the principle is established—taking account of the carrot-and-stick approach—that charges are at their lowest where the alternatives are fewer. As the system improves over time it may be legitimate to increase charges, because people would genuinely have other options and could change their behaviour. I am not sure that the legislation as currently proposed takes account of the need to take a scaled approach to charges, in the sense that it would be more acceptable to have higher charges where genuine choice was available.

10:30

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** To follow on from Murray Tosh's question, do you accept that workplace charging as it currently stands has no carrot, and is simply a charge or tax? Would you take a different view if, for example, employers were able to offset any charge or tax by the provision of green transport plans, subsidised bus services, ridadcards or whatever? If that were preferable, would you see

any benefit in dealing with that through tax and national insurance schemes, as happens on the continent, as opposed to simply levying a charge through a local authority?

**Tracey White:** Employers should have some responsibility to introduce green commuter plans for their work force. To that extent, the proposal for workplace parking levies could be positive. The levies could provide an incentive to do something about how your work force gets to and from work. I am not sure whether that addresses your point.

**Mr MacAskill:** It does.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I have a couple of questions on concessionary travel. In your opening statement, you indicated support for a national concessionary travel scheme. Should the groups that are eligible for concessionary travel be extended? The bill proposes pensioners and people with disabilities. We have heard in evidence that that should be widened to include people on low incomes or young people. Do you have any views on that?

**Andy Baird:** It is beneficial to have a countrywide concessionary system that is seen to be fair to all. With cross-ticketing there are additional advantages for people in different income groups. Another area that should be considered is school journeys. Most people have gone past a primary school and seen a large number of vehicles outside. That is because of the restrictions on the provision of services by local authorities. There is a clear safety implication, as well as the issue of reducing unnecessary journeys. Taking a balanced view, if there is adequate provision, people will use it.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Could the scope of the scheme be extended beyond bus services to include other modes of transport?

**Andy Baird:** On integrated ticketing, the relationship that Strathclyde Passenger Transport has with bus, rail and sea with Caledonian MacBrayne, provides low-cost journeys. One could argue that a universal ticket would reduce emissions because the traffic flow is faster; for example, buses are not idling for long periods. There are clear advantages.

**Mr MacAskill:** Do you think that the Executive's role in the bill is hands-on enough?

**Tracey White:** It is important that the Executive establishes a framework for improving the transport infrastructure and services across the country. The STUC would support the role of local transport authorities and their implementation. The current balance is fairly appropriate.

**Mr MacAskill:** You mentioned four transport authorities. If we have Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive and a Highlands and Islands

transport authority, might there be a problem because the rest of Scotland would not be covered? Do you think that the four possible authorities should be statutory, or should there be different solutions in different parts of the country?

**Tracey White:** We do not have a view about where the boundaries should be drawn. However, we think that there should be a requirement for people to work in partnership across local authority boundaries. People do not just travel in the area in which they live. The appropriate authorities should work together on infrastructure and services in the area that they cover. I cannot tell you that the trade union movement thinks that there should be this, that and the next authority.

**Mr MacAskill:** No, but do you think that the authorities should be statutory or created in partnership? We seem to be approaching a position in which there will be two statutory areas and the rest will be dealt with through partnership. Is that a good idea, or should there be a level playing field?

**Tracey White:** There is an argument for some flexibility. I imagine that the legislation that we are discussing will not be the last word on transport and structure. That is not meant to be a glib answer. Our concerns are the outputs rather than the mechanism. If the flexible voluntary approach that is envisaged in the bill does not work, there would be a case to be made thereafter.

**Mr MacAskill:** Do you see any benefits in extending the fuel duty rebate scheme to community transport, school buses and emergency vehicles?

**Andy Baird:** There is a reasonable argument for that. Fuel costs are an inflationary item and that has an impact on the provision of low-cost transport. If the extension of the rebate increased the number of journeys made by bus, that would meet our aims.

**Mr MacAskill:** The road haulage industry is arguing for essential user rebate. Do you have a view on that?

**Andy Baird:** We support that view. It would have a clear social and economic impact.

**The Convener:** I thank Andy Baird and Tracey White for attending the committee. That was a very useful discussion.

I ask the Glasgow City Council delegation to join us: Rodney Mortimer, Alastair Young and Councillor Alistair Watson.

I should declare an interest at this point, having been employed by Glasgow City Council, and in particular land services, the department of which Alastair Young is now director.

Thank you for the written evidence that you have

submitted, which has been useful. Perhaps you would like to make an opening statement.

**Councillor Alistair Watson (Glasgow City Council):** First of all, I would like to say that this committee is ahead of the Local Government Committee as you have spelled my name right.

I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to set out Glasgow's views on the Transport (Scotland) Bill. That statement points out one of the anomalies in the west of Scotland. Glasgow contains 620,000 people but, as it sits at the centre of Scotland's only conurbation, its transport network has to serve three times that number of people. On a national scale, we host shopping, business, education, entertainment and health services that serve the whole of the west of Scotland. What we do in the city affects a large area and the council knows that it needs to work on transport issues in partnership with colleagues from outside the city. What we do in Glasgow has knock-on effects for the Scottish economy.

I cannot pass up the opportunity of asking the committee to regenerate the west of Scotland's economy—and, through that, Scotland's prosperity—by supporting the completion of the M74, which is crucial for job retention, obtaining new investment and creating access to brownfield sites throughout the region, particularly in regeneration areas.

The city council played a leading role in establishing the west of Scotland transport partnership, which brings together 12 councils and the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority to work on transport issues. It is important that the Executive also plays its role in the motorway and trunk road network. The new bill includes powers that require councils to draw up a regional transport strategy to deal with commuting to Glasgow. WESTRANS is already doing so and we see no need for the early use of the new powers. However, we need the support of the Scottish Executive in preparing the west of Scotland strategy, not only by becoming involved through its role as the operator of the motorway network, but by giving special funding support to Glasgow in recognition of the special position that Glasgow has in Scotland's transport network.

I will not dwell on the part of the bill that deals with the bus service, since the committee has already heard evidence from the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority, but I will say that I am disappointed about the long procedure that must take place before quality contracts can be put in place. While quality bus partnerships might be appropriate in some places, we should not have to wait until they have failed before establishing quality contracts in areas that need them.

Glasgow has made it clear that we do not support road charging in the city. Road user charging could not operate in a city that has a motorway. Our motorway is not tolled and carries one third of our traffic. However, we think that a workplace parking levy might have an effect on traffic in the city and we have already begun a study that. We must examine all the facts and figures before coming to a decision on workplace parking charges. The council is not committed to anything at present. A workplace parking levy would not affect shopping in the city centre. However, town and city centre shopping is under threat from out-of-town shopping centres with large, free car parks. Such car parks are unsustainable in environmental terms. The bill should have allowed authorities to put a charge on those car parks and use the proceeds to put in place new public transport services.

The new bill will go some way towards helping us solve our transport problems, but it could have gone further. We need to drive down unnecessary car use, but we cannot forget the fact that many shopping and business trips are made by car. One of Glasgow's great advantages is that it is easy to get to. We must retain that strength. Glasgow will flourish if we can provide a public transport system that people want to use for most trips, but we must ensure that is not impossible for people to use their car if they need to.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Many members of the committee share your view that progress needs to be made on the M74.

I ask Helen Eadie to open up the questions on joint transport strategies.

10:45

**Helen Eadie:** Good morning Alastair, Alistair and Rodney. You mentioned your views on several specific issues in your submission. Will you expand on why you believe that the minister should only use the power to direct authorities to prepare a joint transport strategy as a last resort?

**Alastair Young (Glasgow City Council):** This is partly from our experience of involvement in the WESTRANS organisation in which, certainly to date, all authorities are getting together and taking a realistic approach to the problems that the WESTRANS area has to deal with. There is no major conflict on the horizon. I am not saying it will not happen, but the partnership is currently working. Voluntary partnership is always better than something being forced on you.

**Helen Eadie:** You have mentioned the role of the Executive. Will you expand on that?

**Alastair Young:** The bill is disappointing in the sense that the Scottish Executive is sitting above

the local authorities. Within WESTRANS, we have the most used motorway in Scotland. Within a mile of Glasgow city centre, there are 23 on and off ramps. We cannot control traffic in Glasgow without the trunk road section being controlled. If the trunk road section is—as it currently is—with the Scottish Executive, it must be full partners in anything that we do. It should not sit on the sidelines; it must be fully involved with WESTRANS and Glasgow City Council. Any measure that we undertake in Glasgow city centre impinges on the motorway, so the Executive must be fully aware of what we are doing.

**Helen Eadie:** What are your concerns about the funding of the joint transport strategies?

**Alastair Young:** The obvious concern when funding is mentioned—that there is not enough of it. There is no funding for the secretariat. From the Glasgow perspective, it is normally expected that we would undertake the bulk of the work—the secretariat, research and so on. That is a concern because Glasgow, like any other authority, has limited resources. Nothing is in place to help fund major studies. There could be a conflict on section 94. Will funding come from the current transportation fund to WESTRANS? That could cause a conflict with individual authorities. There is no clear evidence that funding has been addressed.

**The Convener:** Have you been in correspondence with the Executive on involvement, for example, invited co-option?

**Alastair Young:** Someone from the Scottish Executive has been at a majority of WESTRANS meetings. The organisation is fully aware of our concerns. This goes beyond WESTRANS. It is about the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997. We must develop a close working relationship with the Scottish Executive.

I ask Rodney Mortimer, who is the officer chair of WESTRANS, to expand on that.

**Rodney Mortimer (Glasgow City Council):** As Alastair Young said, the Scottish Executive has sent an observer to most of our meetings. The Executive must become involved in more than observing. The motorway system takes a third of the traffic that goes through the inner city. I have had informal talks with the Executive and I hope that it will come on board in preparing the regional transport strategy that we have started to pull together.

**Janis Hughes:** You mentioned in your submission that we have already taken evidence from Strathclyde Passenger Transport. I will ask a couple of questions about points that you made in your written submission. You suggest that re-regulation of bus services is necessary, and we all appreciate that. However, you have concerns

about quality partnerships. Do you think there is a better system? Why do you think that quality partnerships are not the best option?

**Councillor Watson:** From the bus operators' point of view, and I do not speak for them, quality partnerships would be the lesser of two evils. We have a deregulated bus industry, but that is only one part of the public transport industry. Another part of the public transport industry—the rail industry—is heavily and quite rightly regulated, whereas the bus industry operates in a completely free market. I think that that is wrong.

The Executive has it in its power, through the Transport (Scotland) Bill, to institute some form of re-regulation. That could be done on the model that operates successfully in London, where a number of loss-making routes are cross-subsidised by London Transport from profit-making routes. The system is operated on a franchise system, and the commercial operators—who happen to be the same operators that we have north of the border—make a healthy profit. They also provide services on a large number of loss-making routes that would not otherwise be provided by commercial operators.

In Glasgow, we are in favour of some form of re-regulation. It is no secret that, when FirstGroup announced its overground system through the quality partnership, we welcomed that. However, we made it clear that that sort of service provision should not be at the expense of services elsewhere. Withdrawal of services has happened in areas of Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire. Decisions are being made on the basis of commercial return, and not on the basis of need.

**Janis Hughes:** You talked about contracts and the 21-month delay period, which has been a concern for a number of the groups from whom we have taken evidence. You said that going straight to contracts might be a better option. Is there a clear need to do that and, if so, how would you define it? What would be a more realistic time limit?

**Councillor Watson:** As soon as possible. The main problem lies with the nature of the deregulated industry. We are in a quality partnership with FirstGroup and the taxi owners association—and, ironically, with the Scottish Executive—in the promotion of the quality bus corridors in Glasgow. We are still consulting on that. However, if FirstGroup makes a commercial success of the bus corridors and gets a large return, what is to stop any other bus operator wanting a piece of the action? The legislation does not stop any operator—whether it is Joe Bloggs, Brian Souter, or whoever—having a piece of the action. In other words, there could be more bus wars. Whether that would happen remains to be

seen. However, the danger is that we may be providing the infrastructure that would allow that to happen. Some operators may decide to take a commercial risk and provide quality provision; other operators may just sit on their hands and wait until the provision is there before moving in.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Alistair, for that comprehensive statement of your position. We move on to a question about road user charging and workplace levies.

**Robin Harper:** In your written submission, you say that:

“The decision that road user charges will not be applied to motorways or trunk roads means that a cordon charging scheme is not a realistic option in the City due to the ease with which traffic could transfer from charged City roads to uncharged motorways.”

You go on to say that:

“The Transport Bill for England and Wales provides for trunk road and motorway charges where they need to be introduced to complement a local road charging scheme.”

Are you saying that you would consider local road user charging if you were also able to toll the motorways?

**Councillor Watson:** I am saying that we are achieving all the objectives that the Executive has set out by changes in the modal split. We have the largest commuting population in Scotland—and 65 per cent of our commuting population travel by public transport. In some of the measures that I have already mentioned, such as the quality bus corridor, we are achieving our objectives. Despite the difficulties that arise from having a trunk road network running through the middle of the city and large retail parks, such as Braehead, outside the city, at the moment Glasgow is not considering congestion charging, as we feel that we are already meeting the objectives set down by the Executive.

**Robin Harper:** Are you saying that the initiatives that you are currently pursuing are adequate to address the problems of congestion in Glasgow?

**Councillor Watson:** I am not saying that they are adequate. I would like the Scottish Executive to allow us to shift even more people from the car. However, we have to strike a balance and we must ensure that the city's economy does not suffer. We have recognised that, for the foreseeable future, the car will be a part, although not all, of our transport policy.

**Robin Harper:** My next question is one that I have put to all our witnesses. What is your view on the introduction of parking charges in retail parks?

**Councillor Watson:** I am for it—short and sweet.

**Mr Tosh:** I was interested in a number of the

points that you made in the summary that you prepared for us and would like to pursue them. You say:

"The Executive must pump prime transport improvements before any charging scheme is introduced."

What infrastructure would you like to be in place before charges are introduced? How do you see such improvements being funded?

**Alastair Young:** In Glasgow a good example of pump priming is the money that has been available through the transport fund. We have been very successful in bidding for resources from that fund. We have also been very successful in implementing bus corridors. We can point to examples of a minimum of 1 million more bus journeys per annum on a bus corridor. We are quite a long way down the road of trying to make the infrastructure and the transport that is provided on it more attractive.

That must continue, because in Glasgow we have dealt with only two out of 21 routes. We have a long way to go in the city centre, no matter what form of charging is considered. The workplace parking levy is one form of charging that is being considered in Glasgow. We must invest in partnerships with companies and encourage them to consider green travel plans. The council is considering special travel plans for its employees. All that requires funding, but at the moment the council does not have the funding available to achieve what it would like.

**Mr Tosh:** We appreciate that. Can you specify in quantitative terms the adequate level of transport infrastructure that you wish to see in place? Do you want all 21 routes to be up to scratch and the rail-carrying capacity to be increased before we countenance charges?

Could the Executive not say that you are asking an awful lot and that the amount that can be taken from the transport fund to pump-prime improvements from year to year is very limited? Could the Executive not suggest that money be taken from customers on the ground to do that? Is that not the Executive's argument, and is that not a more effective way of getting the end product that you want than saying that there should be no charging until improvements are in place?

**Alastair Young:** In an ideal world, we would say that there should be no charging until all the improvements are in place. Realistically, we need to strike a balance. Pump priming is necessary to allow us to make a start and to convert the travelling public. We have to try to bring about a change of mindset. In Glasgow there is already high public transport usage, so it is more difficult there than it is elsewhere to bring about a big percentage increase. We have the highest public transport usage in the UK, so we are dealing with

narrower margins.

**Mr Tosh:** Does that not put you in a prime position to impose charges, as you have more alternatives than anywhere else? Should you not be the test bed for every local authority, to see what charges work and how income can be generated to make even more improvements? There are another 19 routes that you want to bring up to standard, so there is plenty for you to do. Should not you go ahead with that?

**Councillor Watson:** No. As I said, we are the centre of a conurbation. We have competitors and large retail parks outside our city. The last thing that we want to do is to put the commercial viability of our city at risk, for the sake of some ideological ego trip.

We want to improve public transport and to enhance the quality partnerships, but we want more from the operators that provide the service. That includes the bus companies and the rail operators. There is capacity to be exploited and I am sure that, with sufficient political leverage, additional capacity can be provided.

**Mr Tosh:** You have said that you support workplace parking levies in principle, but we have received an awful lot of evidence from elsewhere that you are a minority interest in that respect—not too many of our other respondents are very keen on the scheme. Do you consider the workplace parking levy as a means of controlling car use and of influencing what happens on the streets, or do you consider it primarily as a means of raising revenue, albeit revenue to promote other improvements in public transport?

11:00

**Councillor Watson:** Most respondents would give evidence to say that doing nothing about the continual growth of the use of the car—which is 3 per cent per annum on Glasgow's streets—is not an option. We are carrying out a feasibility study with our partners in other local authorities to see how we could implement such levies.

Ironically, one of the organisations with which we are having discussions is the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. Initially, its opposition to the proposals was fairly forthright. However, it is willing to sit down and discuss how the money can be used. If evidence can be provided that the money would be used for the right reasons—to improve transport provision overall, possibly through ring-fencing—the audience might be more compliant than it is at present.

**Mr Tosh:** Are you considering funding the construction of the M74 extension from the charges?

**Councillor Watson:** We are examining all

options for the M74. As I said, that route is so important to the west of Scotland economy that we are prepared to consider any options in conjunction with additional financial support from the Scottish Executive.

**Mr Tosh:** I would probably agree with you about all that. There is a tension, however. In considering workplace parking levies to fund construction, you will have to be very careful not to kill your income stream. You therefore do not want to make much impact on car parking places.

**Councillor Watson:** In identifying a revenue stream, we would not want to harm that stream, but we must strike a careful balance between what can be provided for and the limited available space.

**Mr Tosh:** I want to pick up on an earlier point. You had the opportunity to state your support for charges for parking at out-of-town shopping centres. Presumably you do not want to do that on a city of Glasgow basis, because of the fear of pushing business outwith the city—you would want to do it on a WESTRANS basis, with some regional power.

**Councillor Watson:** Yes.

**Mr Tosh:** If the bill were to provide for it, would you consider a hierarchy of charges, with an attempt to put more charges at places such as the Braehead shopping and leisure centre or other developments that you consider particularly unsustainable in transport terms—or particularly lucrative in volume terms—while sparing those developments that are not such a magnetic pull on the region as a whole?

**Councillor Watson:** Anyone who has studied the history of Braehead knows that it should never have been given planning permission. In transport terms, it is an unsustainable shopping development. I represent a ward in Cardonald, situated by the edge of Braehead. The M8 motorway network is creaking at the seams due to the sheer volume of traffic that Braehead and similar developments are attracting.

No provision was made for other forms of transport at that development. Braehead is a commercial competitor not only of Glasgow city centre, but of Paisley, and that is severely damaging Paisley's economic viability. We would never consider doing anything in isolation, knowing that it would affect surrounding authorities, including Renfrewshire.

**The Convener:** If there are no other comments on that point, we will move on to the subject of concessionary travel.

**Cathy Jamieson:** In your submission, you indicate general support for a national minimum concessionary travel scheme. What is your view

on the possibility of extending the scope of such a scheme beyond pensioners and people with disabilities?

**Alastair Young:** Ideally, we would increase the number of people able to avail themselves of a concessionary travel scheme. Obviously, there is a financial penalty, which councils have to balance in their overall budgeting. I think that that should certainly be considered, but there are financial implications.

**Cathy Jamieson:** What are your concerns about the funding arrangements and the financial implications? What would be a way forward on that issue?

**Alastair Young:** I wish I knew the way forward.

**Councillor Watson:** After local government organisation in 1995-96, the concessionary fares scheme that was in operation in Strathclyde came under severe pressure, because it was being sourced by 12 different local authorities. Thankfully, we managed to maintain the scheme. On the idea of a national concessionary fares scheme in partnership with the transport operators, which are all recipients of fairly chunky subsidies from the taxpayer, we should seriously consider ways of making transport more accessible to groups of people who may be financially excluded, including unemployed people and people on low incomes.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Do you think that a national concessionary scheme should ideally extend to other services, such as rail and ferry services?

**Councillor Watson:** In the true spirit of integrated transport, yes.

**Mr MacAskill:** What is the possible financial impact on the council of the bill?

**Councillor Watson:** Could you expand on that question?

**Mr MacAskill:** What will the cost implications be of what you are being asked to do, given the level of funding with which you are being provided?

**Councillor Watson:** We are expected to make widespread provisions in the centre of a conurbation where there are 450,000 vehicle movements a day, a large proportion of which are on the trunk road network. I suppose that it is easy for a local authority such as Glasgow to strike a quality partnership deal, because there is a pot of gold in that for the transport operators. As a local authority, we are in the business of providing the infrastructure—for example, the bus information signalling system and the road network—and of maintaining the road network, which is subject to funding constraints. We are always examining ways of expanding our transport infrastructure. We also have the largest rail network outside London,

which is used extensively by a high volume of people. We develop a close relationship with the SPT and the rail operators, which we want to expand.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** You are clear that it is essential that the Scottish Executive should become involved in shaping Glasgow's transport strategy. How far does the bill go in requiring active involvement by the Executive?

**Alastair Young:** The bill does not go nearly far enough. The trunk road network goes through the heart of Glasgow. Over the past couple of years, I have talked to the Scottish Executive about the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 and asked the Executive what it will do about traffic reduction, as anything that happens on the motorway impinges on the city of Glasgow. However, no answers are being given and no measures are being taken on the trunk roads; that applies for any other traffic management measures that we undertake. I fully understand that the Executive is nervous that, if Glasgow removes a lot of traffic from the city centre, that traffic will go on to the motorway. That is a justifiable concern. We are in a catch-22 situation. We are being asked to introduce measures to reduce traffic, but where we are trying to put traffic is already at capacity and is outwith our control.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Do you have any practical suggestions that might help to cut the Gordian knot?

**Alastair Young:** Although it is fine to examine ways of reducing congestion in cities and towns, we have to look at the main motorway network as well, as that is where we have to start to reduce traffic.

**Mr Tosh:** I notice that, by the final bullet point in your submission, you highlight the fact that the bill allows higher tolls on the Forth road bridge, which you say is a national strategic road; you comment that that constitutes a new source of revenue for some authorities. You obviously want us to draw a conclusion from that. Will you spell out what that is?

**Councillor Watson:** A piece of the action.

**Mr Tosh:** I assumed that you wanted similar powers for the Kingston bridge.

**Councillor Watson:** We already have significant problems with the Kingston bridge. I am not suggesting for a minute that the Kingston bridge should be compared with the Forth road bridge. The Forth road bridge is a strategic road, which is important to the economy of the country. The Executive has to consider where the income that is generated by the large volume of cross-river traffic there is used—I do not want to put words into your mouth.

**Mr Tosh:** I thought that you would like the opportunity to put that point on the record.

**Mr MacAskill:** Do you have any views on extending fuel duty rebate to school buses, for example, or on the provision of rebated fuel for school buses and other services?

**Councillor Watson:** We are wholly supportive of such a policy for school buses. Yesterday, the road safety sub-committee in Glasgow discussed the fact that we are teetering on the brink of having the largest number of children in the western hemisphere who are conveyed to school by car. That is worrying. We would like to become involved in more dialogue with operators and the Scottish Executive about making adequate public transport provision for children going to school. I do not know whether we could copy the north American model of encouraging children to go to school by bus, which seems particularly successful. I think that what you suggest is a good idea.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Road pricing and workplace parking levies create a distortion or an incentive in the market. How successful has park and ride been in Glasgow and in the areas immediately around it in reducing congestion on the city's roads? Do you envisage park-and-ride provision as an obvious area of investment, if workplace parking levies are introduced?

**Councillor Watson:** The ability of park and ride to remove large volumes of unnecessary car use should not be underestimated. A car user who is encouraged to use park and ride will want some element of security. There is no point in building a car park next to a rail station that is unstaffed and has no security or lights. Secure car parks should be provided. I can name examples of such car parks by the bucket load: Johnstone, Bishopton, Airdrie and Croy all have secure car parks, which are bursting at the seams. People want to use them because they know that their cars will be secure there until they return. Park-and-ride schemes have been very successful. The SPT, the local authorities and the Scottish Executive have to realise that there is no point in providing a car park next to a station if people feel unsafe. The best example, which Des McNulty will know very well, is Bargeddie station on the outskirts of Glasgow. It is a custom-built station with a park-and-ride facility, but nobody uses it. Where park-and-ride schemes are successful, they have capacity problems. Johnstone station has about 400 spaces and there is no room left.

There are opportunities to develop park and ride in other areas. The SPT is opening a new station in Howwood in Renfrewshire and the local council has purchased some land next to the railway station, which it could open up for park and ride.

That would be an ideal location to attract commuters from Bridge of Weir, Kilmacolm and so on. Park and ride is very successful in attracting many car users on to the rail network.

**Des McNulty:** Do you feel that more emphasis should be put on constructing partnerships between city authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, and neighbouring authorities, to foster such provisions as park-and-ride schemes?

**Alastair Young:** We are doing that through WESTRANS. Glasgow has so little land available for park-and-ride schemes that we are discussing with local football teams whether we can use their car parks, which have a high capacity. We are also talking to neighbouring authorities about the problem. We recognise the benefit of park-and-ride schemes.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for your interesting, knowledgeable and forthright contribution to this morning's discussions. We very much appreciate it.

I now welcome Christine May and Bill Taylor from Fife Council. Good morning. We asked you along to discuss the proposed bridge joint board. I invite you to make a short opening statement, if you so wish.

11:15

**Councillor Christine May (Fife Council):** Thank you, convener. I do not intend to make a long statement. The bullet points with which the committee has been provided contain the essence of what we want to say. I shall emphasise one or two points.

The importance of the Forth bridge to the economic well-being of Fife cannot be overstated. We have a good track record of partnership working on transportation issues with previous Governments, with the Scottish Executive and with bus and rail operators. We have the best overall public transport scheme in Scotland and a strong concessionary fare scheme.

Our economy is in the process of regeneration. It is in a delicate state. We are just about getting over the hump and unemployment totals are at last beginning to come down by small amounts. However, there are still huge pockets of unemployment, which we need to deal with, and the impact of road charges and other transportation issues is extremely important in that respect. There has been a huge programme of investment in infrastructure and our major environment and development strategy is geared towards increasing employment to keep Fifers in Fife.

We welcome the bill and its provisions. We especially welcome the fact that the proposed new

bridge board will not have ownership of and responsibility for the Kincardine bridge, for which the Scottish Executive is responsible as the trunk roads authority. However, powers may change in the future, as for the Tay bridge. The statistical evidence shows that 43 per cent of toll payers on the Forth road bridge are resident in Fife and that only 20 per cent are from Edinburgh. Therefore, the make-up of the board, the use of revenues and the wider use to which any additional revenues might be put are all at issue. I heard the comments that were made by our colleagues from Glasgow; our answer is, "Not on your life." There is also a problem with time scales. The mechanics of setting up a new authority and getting all the anomalies ironed out mean that it will not be possible to implement any provisions in 2001. We need some interim arrangements.

My final point, which is not contained in the bullet points, concerns equity. Fife is faced with tolls on the Forth road bridge, the Tay bridge and, potentially, on the proposed new Kincardine crossing. Any increase in toll charges will disproportionately affect Fifers—as 43 per cent of toll payers come from Fife—and the Fife economy. Therefore, if there is any intention to use that additional income for purposes far removed from Fife, Fifers would have a justifiable right to complain on the ground of equity.

There are also issues of differential tolling and the size of tolls. The evidence from the Forth TRIP—the transport infrastructure partnership—shows that increasing the tolls significantly reduces the number of crossings over the bridge. It does not reduce the number of journeys into Edinburgh; traffic comes into the city from West Lothian and other areas. The impact that such toll increases are intended to have—and what their actual impact might be—needs to be considered carefully.

Those are the major issues of concern to Fife Council and the Fife economy. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much. You have clearly indicated the economic interests and the issues that relate to Fife and the bridge.

**Nora Radcliffe:** My first question was going to be how important you thought that the Forth road bridge link was to the economic well-being of Fife, but you have stated that unequivocally. To what extent are Edinburgh city congestion problems linked to congestion on the Forth bridge?

**Bill Taylor (Fife Council):** A high percentage of the travel between Fife and the centre of Edinburgh is already undertaken by public transport. Of the traffic on the roads that does not come from Edinburgh, Fife's share is perhaps a little less than 10 per cent. The shares of that



traffic from West Lothian, Midlothian and East Lothian are between 25 and 30 per cent, and the share from the Borders is about 6 per cent. The flow of traffic from Fife is not so substantial; a high public transport capture happens on most journeys as they approach the centre of Edinburgh.

Gyle is Edinburgh's Braehead, in a sense: it is a good commercial location, but whether it is the wisest location, in terms of generating traffic, is another issue. However, it draws custom out of Fife. Marks and Spencer keeps its Gyle store open on Sundays but shuts its Fife stores. That is not the best news for Edinburgh. Overall, however, Fife's share of traffic over the river is not as large as is popularly imagined.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Would you like the wider charging powers of the new board to enable greater funding for public transport? What form should that funding take?

**Councillor May:** Yes. Earlier, I referred to our concessionary travel scheme, its purpose and impact. Our concessionary scheme also includes rail journeys to Edinburgh, Glasgow and the major hospital sites outwith Fife. The Scottish Trades Union Congress talked about carrots and sticks. It is essential that there is, in the early stages, a significant element of carrot—although some stick—with a move towards the more punitive, stick elements in the later stages. It takes a lot to move people out of their cars and on to public transport—there is no point in denying that fact. We must ensure that those who can easily be persuaded are encouraged to make that move in the first instance—and that is a lot of carrot—before we use the stick on the hard core.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Would you like the wider charging powers of the new board to fund work on trunk roads? What form might that work take?

**Councillor May:** It is essential that some elements of the trunk road network are completed if the new powers, the new bridges and the whole of the integrated transport strategy are to work. I would not want the Scottish Executive to use the increased tolling capacity on the Forth bridge and other bridges as a substitute for its responsibilities in respect of the trunk road network. There are other roads for which local authorities also have responsibility, many of which are important to the more isolated communities. Some roads are essential—the A8000 and the Rosyth bypass come to mind—but their funding should not be considered a substitute for Scottish Executive funding of the trunk road network, or used as an abrogation of responsibility.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Can we have your views on the membership of the new board, especially in relation to local authority representation?

**Councillor May:** It is interesting that, at present,

the membership of the Forth bridge board reflects the original investment by the authorities. I would prefer the new board to represent users. Given the bridge's use—43 per cent Fife, 20 per cent Edinburgh and less than 3 per cent for some of the remainder—it could be argued that membership of the board should be confined to Edinburgh and Fife, although it is important that the Scottish Executive should be on board. Perth and Kinross and Stirling have made representations about the impact upstream of measures on the Forth, but it is essential for the economy and well-being of Fife that it has a significant presence on that board. My argument is that it should have majority representation.

**Helen Eadie:** You mentioned that the new board would not have ownership of and responsibility for the Kincardine bridge if the bill goes ahead as it stands. There is a Tay bridge board and a Forth bridge board. What is your view on whether the Kincardine bridge should have a bridge board? Will you expand on that view?

**Councillor May:** The Kincardine bridge is part of the trunk road network, which is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. To refer to my previous answer, that is a welcome indication that the Executive sees its responsibility for the trunk road network as separate from the bridge board. I note that the bill makes provision for responsibility for Kincardine. We wish to discuss with the Executive precisely how it envisages that that might work.

We have been asked for responses by the end of the month. There are references to a joint bridges board. The issue is what assumptions are being made about how that will work. Fife Council has said that, before any new bridge is built, trunk road issues to do with Kincardine must be addressed. It is essential that the bypass for Kincardine village is put in place first. I am pleased that the Scottish Executive is not absolving itself of its responsibility in that respect.

**Helen Eadie:** Do the provisions of the bill do enough to promote a clear, strategic approach to tackling the transport issues in the Forth estuary?

**Bill Taylor:** The bill goes some way towards that. We have pointed out in the evidence given to the committee that a complex set of circumstances applies to Fife. As an area, Fife faces three ways. By far the biggest and most important link is the southern one, but equally important is the link through Kincardine to central Scotland and Glasgow and travel north across the Tay bridge. I think that the famous phrase was "concentric circles"—you may know more about that than I do, Helen.

Under the bill, transport authorities remain as transport authorities; voluntary partnerships are

encouraged, as opposed to statutory boards; and there is provision for the Scottish Executive to identify an issue and require groupings of authorities and agencies to come together to address that issue within a specific time scale. In the instance of the Forth bridge, a proposed new board could have, effectively, some transportation functions and responsibilities in considering estuarial crossing and its funding. That is a fairly complex set of relationships. We need to get the bill right if those relationships are to come to bear on the situation.

In a wider sense, Fife Council and other authorities—certainly Glasgow—are concerned that quality partnerships are a fairly long-winded mechanism for bringing things together. We would have liked a simpler system. It is tempting to ask, if not for complete bus regulation, then for a stronger hand in regulation.

There is the issue of access to jobs and to training in Fife, an authority area that combines urban and rural. There are a large number of settlements. Access between one settlement and the centre is important, and the role of public transport is essential in that regard. Equally important is the role of voluntary and community transport, elements of which could be strengthened to provide a better basis for mobility than is provided for in the bill.

11:30

**Helen Eadie:** What are your views on the relative priority of the investment needs of the bridge versus investment in the transport infrastructure in the areas surrounding the bridge?

**Councillor May:** It is essential that the first call on revenue is for maintenance of the bridge; its integrity must be maintained. However, we cannot escape the fact that maintenance and upgrading of the roads immediately around the bridge is as important. I have mentioned the A8000, but there is also the Rosyth bypass.

If we are successful in attracting a roll-on-roll-off ferry—there seems to be increasing optimism that that will happen at Rosyth—that would be a major inward and outward link for goods as well as passengers, from not only the Fife area but the whole of Scotland and possibly parts of the north of England.

There are wider issues—that is why Fife Council said in response to the consultation document that it is prepared to consider a wider road network than the bridge—but the primary call has to be on maintaining the fabric of the bridge.

**Helen Eadie:** What is your view on the possible changes to the tolling levels on the bridge, after the establishment of the new bridge board?

**Councillor May:** It is significant that no powers to cap the upper levels have been included. I mentioned the differences between tolls to encourage and tolls to punish. Increasing the toll levels to a punitive degree would reduce the number of bridge crossings. It would not address congestion in Edinburgh, because it would not reduce trip numbers. It would disadvantage disproportionately the Fife economy and build huge resentment among the residents of Fife, who would feel that they were being used to pay for traffic congestion and road problems across the rest of the country. There is a balance to be struck.

**Robin Harper:** A couple of attempts have been made in the past to get a fast sea crossing from Kirkcaldy to Leith. Has that idea slipped off the agenda?

**Bill Taylor:** A study was commissioned by Forth TRIP, which involves the Scottish Executive, Fife Council, the City of Edinburgh Council, West Lothian Council and the bridge board, on cross-estuary travel by boat. It has not slipped off the agenda, and has yet to be formally considered by Forth TRIP in two meetings, one involving ministers and elected members and the other involving officials. A report that was made to officials indicated that a crossing would require something in the order of £1 million a year revenue support. There would probably be a requirement to support the capital costs of facilities and ships. That is not very different to what happens in other parts of the world. There are few cross-estuary ferries that do not receive some level of subsidy.

The subject is not off the agenda, although whether the time is right is another issue.

**Mr Tosh:** I heard what you said about wanting the Executive to live up to what you see as its responsibilities for completing the trunk road network for the Kincardine bridge. However, you will be aware that the budget for new trunk road construction is low by historical standards and there must be concern that the budget will never stretch to what is needed at Kincardine. What is your view about the possible establishment of a Kincardine bridge board that would have the ability to build the bridge, upgrade the roadworks and do all that is necessary in the area through tolling?

**Councillor May:** As a politician, I never say that something will never happen, because history usually proves one wrong. If there is a willingness to see something happen, a means can usually be found.

I recognise the constraints on the trunk road budget, and I recognise that it is unlikely that additional moneys will be available in the short to medium term. Our authority has said that it is

willing to consider funding methods that might encourage or enable such a project to go ahead sooner than might otherwise have been the case. However, the trunk road network is primarily the responsibility of the Scottish Executive, and I would not wish to see the Executive walking away from that responsibility—the people of Fife and Kincardine certainly would not want that. That would leave the people of Fife to pick up the bill for a solution that is not entirely down to Fife. The Kincardine bridge and its trunk road network are as important as the Forth bridge to the economy of Fife and Scotland.

**Bill Taylor:** The proposed solution for Kincardine is an upstream bridge and an improvement of the existing bridge. About 55 to 60 per cent of current traffic on the Kincardine bridge is between Clackmannan and Falkirk; the upstream bridge would look after that. The balance of the bridge traffic is between Fife and south of the river.

Christine May mentioned equity. If drivers are already to be charged on two bridges, and one hopes to use money from the existing bridges to add a third and move on to trunk roads, there must be an equity situation somewhere. We must not create a situation in which Fife suddenly becomes the most costly place in which to invest. That would run contrary to what the council is trying to do, working with partners to regenerate the Fife economy.

**Mr MacAskill:** Robin Harper mentioned ferries. One of the destinations suggested in the study is Granton. Are Forth TRIP and Fife Council making representations in view of the outstanding planning proposals to ensure that Granton harbour remains a viable prospect that is not blocked off?

On investment or expenditure from tolls on roads, are you aware from studying bridges south of the border whether bridges such as the Severn and the Humber are expected to fund connecting trunk roads from the toll income that they generate?

**Bill Taylor:** The study of cross-estuary travel by boat has not yet been formally considered by the minister or by elected members. Part of the study was funded by Forth Ports, which has indicated that it does not want to rule out the proposal. In terms of the level of support, Forth Ports has not found the study the best bit of reading that it has ever come across, but it is willing to work with the parties. We therefore hope that, whether it is Granton, Rosyth—which it also owns—or Kirkcaldy, Forth Ports would take an open attitude to such a prospect.

The Severn bridge is the most quoted example of a tolling operation that sought to build another bridge at the same location. That is not what is

currently being considered for the Forth estuary. A further Forth bridge is not, as the Executive and the minister have indicated, an immediate prospect or a proposal. In that sense, we are not comparing like with like. The Severn project was to build a safer bridge while the original one was improved. That is a somewhat different proposition from the issue of enhanced tolls on the Forth bridge.

**Mr MacAskill:** Are the Severn and Humber tolls used to pay for road access on the principal trunk roads?

**Bill Taylor:** No. It is not my understanding that the tolls from either bridge are used for another purpose in a different area.

**The Convener:** Are there any other questions? Christine May mentioned concessionary fares. We have asked most witnesses about the scope of the bill and proposals with regard to groups such as unemployed people or people with disabilities. Do you have any comments on the concessionary fare proposals in the bill?

**Councillor May:** We welcome the Executive's proposal for a concessionary fare scheme across Scotland. We are proud of the scheme in Fife and of the fact that we still maintain free travel for our pensioners and disabled people. Investment in community transport is significant for isolated areas, and our support for the commercial network is such that we have managed to maintain a high level of bus usage.

We would be concerned if the grant-aided expenditure were to be top-sliced to fund a national scheme that might be less than the one that is currently offered by Fife Council. We might be asked to find additional resources to maintain the current level of concessions, and we certainly do not want that.

There were some questions earlier about school transport. We are now the only authority that offers an additional mile above the statutory minimum to all school pupils in Fife. Our school bus usage is extremely high, and we would not want that to be jeopardised by top-slicing or other measures to establish a national scheme. It is a delicately balanced infrastructure and if one changes one aspect of it, there will be a knock-on effect on other parts of the scheme. Reducing concession availability would have a consequential effect on the network, as the witnesses from Glasgow pointed out when they talked about the commercial impact of bus corridors on other bits of the network.

On the quality partnerships, I would have wanted much stronger regulation of bus operators, to contain fares if nothing else. Reducing fares probably has the biggest effect on encouraging people to make that modal shift.

**Bill Taylor:** Christine May mentioned interlinkage, which is hugely important. Fife Council supports concessionary travel and school transport more than many other councils. However, we are one of the lowest authorities in terms of network support, because of the connection between the various elements. If there were a reduction in grant on concession to hit an average national scheme, Fife could suffer twice. We are starting from a low base in terms of the supported network, and we must get the chemistry right to ensure that the level of bus usage in Fife remains high. Fife is not the richest area in the country, but it has twice the average bus usage of the central belt, and the right chemistry has kept it high.

**The Convener:** There are no further questions for you. Thank you for your evidence, which has been helpful.

I invite representatives from the Automobile Association and the RAC Foundation to join us. We welcome Neil Greig and Kevin Delaney. As you know, we have asked most of our witnesses to make a few introductory comments.

**Neil Greig (Automobile Association):** I apologise for the late arrival of our written submission; I hope that you all managed to read it before the meeting.

I shall say a little about the background to the Transport (Scotland) Bill; it is important that that background is considered when the Scottish Executive and the committee are considering the bill. The Scottish Executive set the benchmark when it said that it wants a transport system to rival the best in Europe. We are top of the league in Europe for fuel prices and fuel tax, but bottom of the league in Europe for investment. That requires careful consideration.

The AA has close links with similar organisations across the world. It is very clear that road charging and tolling is acceptable only for large new projects that offer exceptional benefits. New tolls on old roads have never been popular anywhere in the world. In Austria and the Netherlands, active anti-Government campaigns have succeeded in reversing Government policies to introduce road user charging.

11:45

The problem is that motorists do not trust government to use new charges for transport because it has not done so in the past. In Singapore—which is perhaps not the most appropriate place to compare with Scotland—other motoring charges were lowered when a road charging scheme was introduced to reduce congestion in the city centre. In our view, it is important that the bill is seen as a congestion-

reducing measure, rather than as a means of raising new charges.

I am happy to take questions on the comments on the bill that are contained in our submission. We would like to work with the Executive to improve investment in transport infrastructure. We have put forward some ideas for reform of motoring taxation as a whole. I know that that is outwith the remit of the Scottish Parliament, but it is important that the Parliament supports us and is seen to be trying to change the unfair balance between tax and investment.

**Janis Hughes:** Your submission does not say anything about buses. Do you have a view on the respective merits of the proposals in the bill for quality partnerships and quality contracts for bus services?

**Neil Greig:** I did not think that buses fell within our area of speciality.

**Janis Hughes:** It would be interesting to know whether you have a general view.

**Neil Greig:** The image of the bus among road users is not good, and our surveys suggest that people would rather use trains than buses. I have concerns about the monopoly aspects of quality contracts. If the market is distorted by a road user charging scheme or workplace parking levies, so that buses have an unfair advantage and there is only one operator in an area, that operator could have a monopoly. We should recall that there is no longer any such thing as publicly owned public transport—it is all profit motivated. Provided that there are controls in the contracts to prevent monopolies, I have no preference for either quality partnerships or quality contracts.

**Kevin Delaney (RAC Foundation):** We do not disagree with the AA, but we take a slightly different approach. If you would like us to set out our stall, I would be happy to do that.

**The Convener:** Please do so. I thought that you were making a joint opening statement.

**Kevin Delaney:** Things move, but not to that extent.

Sue Nicholson, who has had most dealings with the Parliament on this matter, has asked me to apologise for her absence. She had a long-standing engagement and was not able to come.

I will take a moment to set out three overriding principles that I hope the committee will bear in mind when dealing with the bill and amendments. The first relates to what has already been said. Although those of us who are closely involved with transport issues recognise the potential of road pricing to reduce the number and frequency of car journeys and to generate a revenue stream to finance improvements in both roads and public

transport, the motoring public does not. Towards the end of last year, we carried out a survey, which indicated that just under a quarter of people supported road pricing, whereas just under three quarters opposed the idea. Opposition was higher among the elderly—those over 65—the young, by which I mean those under 25, and those on low incomes.

That is the gloomy news. However, our survey suggested to us that the public perception of road pricing is quite likely to be influenced by issues such as the inclusion in sections 40 to 44 and 51 to 56 of the bill of safeguards that are designed to ensure hypothecation, additionality, accountability and transparency both in the operation of the schemes and in the funds that they generate. Public perception is also likely to be influenced by the significant improvements in public transport that part 2 of the bill is designed to achieve and by improvements in the transport infrastructure that would benefit both cycling and walking. I realise that those do not appear in the bill, but I am sure that they have a place somewhere. Our survey found that if guarantees of such improvements were given, opposition to road pricing would fall and support would rise until they were about equal. Politically, that might not be wonderful, but it is a good deal better than the starting point. We also found that a large number of people would be prepared to consider using public and other modes of transport, provided that the improvements were already in place. They would want the improvements to be made up front. That links in with the point that Neil Greig made about trust.

Despite the clearly articulated desire, both in the Scottish Parliament and in the Westminster Government, to reduce social exclusion, we must all recognise that urban road pricing and the workplace parking levy would affect disproportionately those groups for whom a car may be essential but whose motoring is marginal. I am referring to the elderly, the young—who may be job seekers—and those on low incomes, many of whom work long and unsocial hours. For such people, public transport may not be available or may not be an appropriate option. I think that a previous witness referred to those who could be discouraged most easily; I am sure that the intention is not for road pricing to impact on the most vulnerable groups, but we must recognise that that could be an unintended consequence of such a policy.

On the question about buses, we have recommended that buses should receive an exemption within the national legislation, to reflect their importance within an integrated transport strategy.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that clarification.

Helen Eadie has a question on local transport strategies.

**Helen Eadie:** I notice from your submissions and from what you have said this morning that you favour voluntary partnerships. Would you like to comment on the fact that England and Wales are adopting statutory partnerships?

**Neil Greig:** In my view, Scotland's size makes it unnecessary for us to have that extra layer of bureaucracy. We have already heard from Glasgow City Council about the costs of setting up the secretariat of a voluntary group; if it were a statutory group, it would be even more costly.

Before the publication of the bill, the link between the local transport strategy document and the schemes that road user charging can be used to finance was not apparent. Many people thought that the document would be a stand-alone report and that projects on which the money that was generated by road user charging was to be spent would be reported on separately. It is now clear that if someone misses the opportunity to be consulted on the local transport strategy, they have missed the opportunity to comment on what the money from a tolling scheme can be used for. I would be keen to see stronger controls and more advice on consultation for the local transport strategy document. Perhaps that consultation should even be made statutory, but I am not convinced that there is a need to put the partnerships on a statutory basis.

**Kevin Delaney:** It is probably a good idea to enshrine local partnerships in statute, as an additional safeguard, but however statutory we make them, without good will they will not happen. De facto, they will emerge largely voluntarily, although it would be a mistake not to include them in the bill.

**The Convener:** We now move to road user charging and workplace parking levies.

**Robin Harper:** In your opening remarks, you indicated fairly clearly that you take a cautionary approach to road user charging. I invite you to comment in greater detail on the provisions in the bill—under what circumstances would you support the principle of trunk road or motorway charging in future?

**Neil Greig:** We might be willing to support trunk road charging if it were for a large, one-off proposal that brought significant benefits. I am happy that the Scottish Executive has decided not to impose new tolls on old roads, because that is the most unpopular aspect of the whole policy. People feel that they have paid for those roads already—they are paying for them every time that they top up their fuel tank. If there were a clear, exceptional benefit, there would be popular support, but as it stands at the moment, the idea

of tolling roads without a clear link to future benefits would not be at all popular.

**Robin Harper:** Do you believe that there is no urban area in Scotland that could currently justify the introduction of road user charging?

**Neil Greig:** City centre charging is a different matter. We are quite happy for there to be active management of sensitive areas, such as congested city centres; road user charging may have a role to play in that management. Glasgow and Edinburgh already have good modal splits and most of the people who travel into the city centres use public transport, but the difficulty will lie in catching those people who do not use public transport. If a level is set to catch those people who have chosen not to use an already fairly good public transport system, there is a risk of harming the local economy.

**Kevin Delaney:** I agree with Neil Greig. There is a distinction to be drawn between urban road pricing and inter-urban road pricing. People would probably be prepared to pay for inter-urban road pricing if they were getting a better service. Experience throughout the world indicates that where new roads and additional facilities are built, people are prepared to pay, but with one or two notable exceptions, people are not prepared to pay for existing roads.

**Robin Harper:** It would be a very clever Government that could introduce a new tax to universal approbation. Do you believe that the bill contains sufficient provisions to ensure that road user charges and workplace parking levies would be accountable and transparent, or do you think that those provisions should be improved?

**Neil Greig:** I differ from Kevin Delaney on this matter, especially in relation to additionality. The bill clearly promises hypothecation and transparency through annual reporting. I know that civil servants have said that it would be difficult to come up with a form of words that legally guaranteed additionality, but I would have liked the bill to be clearer on that point. In two or three years' time, it will be difficult to prove that the income has not been replaced somewhere down the line; we would have to consider the spending in the late 1990s and early 2000, the different forms of income and the variety of investment in transport, perhaps from Scottish Enterprise and so on, to reach a view on additionality. It comes down to the regulations, which have not yet been clearly spelled out. We would like the bill to include stronger promises on additionality.

**Robin Harper:** Do you have any specific recommendations?

**Neil Greig:** We would like an independent audit to be carried out, perhaps by a body such as Audit Scotland or the Scottish Parliament or one of its

committees, as a further guarantee to the promises that the Scottish Executive has made.

**Mr Tosh:** Your comments go to the heart of my concerns about the bill. Hypothecation is easier to demonstrate than additionality. Last week, we asked local authority representatives about ring fencing allocations for transport expenditure. The minister has made it clear that anything in the local transport strategy is eligible for funding, meaning that local authorities can use the money for basic maintenance and the upgrading of trunk roads. My concern about hypothecated transport expenditure as defined by the minister is the possibility of substitution, where local authorities use the charges to pay for basic maintenance, rather than using the roads budget. Would you support some kind of ring fencing, which would allow us to plot what each council had in capital and revenue resources for transport over several years? That would make any leakage obvious and would enable the transparent demonstration of truly additional spending.

**Neil Greig:** For many years, we have said that we believe that ring fencing and transparency are important. We have suggested the creation of a roads regulator—a specific body that could take the revenue from road user charging, together with current revenue, and dish it out again. There have been several suggestions along those lines. Until we have such clarity, it will be impossible to prove additionality. No matter what the Executive comes up with in the bill, unless there is one organisation that is vested with all the transport investment—possibly including local road maintenance—there will be a problem in defining additionality and substitution.

**Mr Tosh:** Are we not rather a small country to be inviting the bureaucracy that would be involved in the creation of a roads regulator?

12:00

**Neil Greig:** Scotland already has a traffic controller and there are moves towards trying to co-ordinate everything that is happening. Co-ordination and managing congestion are more important than raising revenue. At the end of the day, mechanisms could be put in place at the level of the Scottish Parliament.

**Kevin Delaney:** Neil Greig is clearly right. It is difficult to gauge additionality, but provided that there is transparency in the way that the schemes and funds are managed, at least there will be some degree of assurance that those funds are additional. As Neil said, the big problem with additionality is the sum to which we understand it to be additional. Are we talking about a sum that was spent on roads last year, or the average for the past five years? The key is transparency of

operation of both the schemes and the accounts. The relevant sections in the bill include provision for that. However, we would certainly need to examine the guidance or regulations that stem from those sections.

**Des McNulty:** What are your views on the role of local government in implementing the bill? Transport users from many different parts of Scotland use Glasgow as a city centre and workplace venue. Presumably, the local authority would impose any charging regime and gather in any revenue. How rational is that in the context of an overall strategy?

It may be that the most effective transport use changes, such as park-and-ride schemes, are not in the Glasgow local authority area. It might be that deferral schemes that reduce car use operate outwith the scope of the particular local authority that has the congestion problem. I am not sure whether I am explaining myself very clearly, but I am trying to add a different dimension to your point about additionality. The question is, additionality for whom?

**Neil Greig:** In Glasgow's case it is obvious that the local authority must look further afield to the journey-to-work and regional areas. The city council must work with the adjoining local authorities. We would be happy for money that was raised in one authority to be spent elsewhere if it was used to reduce overall levels of congestion.

We are more concerned about what the Scottish Executive is doing about congestion on the trunk road network; currently, it does not seem to be doing very much at all. Glasgow City Council might be doing its best to alleviate congestion in the city streets, yet every morning and evening there is a 12-mile queue either side of the Kingston bridge. It is important that the Scottish Executive works with WESTRANS, which must be able to disperse money to target congestion. For the council, the city centre will have the worst congestion, but the Scottish Executive must be involved to tackle the congestion problems on the M8. Park and ride and other initiatives undertaken by the local authorities could also solve those problems. The Scottish Executive must be involved in the partnership.

**Kevin Delaney:** There is a clear division between roads of national significance and roads of local significance—albeit local in the sense of Glasgow or Edinburgh. No one has ever suggested that, on its own, road pricing will solve the problems of pollution and congestion and no one should be lulled into believing that. Road pricing must be one option on a menu of measures. A combination of road pricing, improved public transport and better park and ride is important for local authorities that are trying to

improve conditions in their areas.

Roads that are of national strategic importance, such as the M8, are an entirely separate issue. While places such as Edinburgh, Glasgow and the areas through which the M8 passes will want to influence what goes on, it must be recognised that those roads are, I think, the responsibility of a national body, such as the Executive.

**Des McNulty:** I take your point about the link between trunk road and non-trunk road congestion.

I am anxious to pursue the point about whether the local authority is the best co-ordinating mechanism for examining the most appropriate anti-congestion measures, given that local authority boundaries are, in a sense, arbitrary, as those boundaries are not determined by transport requirements. How does one establish a rational anti-congestion strategy that benefits Glasgow, or the people who might travel to Glasgow, if one is going to put the local authority in prime position, given that the local authority will have a clear idea of what transport issues or roads it wants to spend money on?

**Neil Greig:** I hope that local authorities will work together in voluntary partnerships. One of the bill's omissions is the question of how to resolve disputes. Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire may be at loggerheads over what developments should take place or which specific improvements should be made. Good will exists already—local authorities have demonstrated that they are willing to work together in partnerships in Edinburgh, Fife and the area around Glasgow. Perhaps they have yet to receive any income or to reach the point where they are arguing about specific details, but, as I said, I hope that the good will is there; in any event, they must work together.

There is no doubt that there should be a focus on the regional journey to work, if you like. That is the only way in which congestion reduction will work. As Glasgow is so fond of telling us, and as has been shown recently in the letters page of *The Herald*, people who live outside and travel into Glasgow feel that they are unwanted—that they generate work and problems. Glasgow sees the congestion problem as the fault of people who come in from the commuter belt, people who work in Glasgow but who live elsewhere. That problem must be addressed at a regional level.

**Des McNulty:** That issue came up in the debate about whether Strathclyde Regional Council should have been abolished. It also came up in the debate about whether it makes sense to run transport, for example, on a regional basis. Of course, the answer is that it does make sense.

**The Convener:** We will leave that matter sitting, Des.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I want to focus on an issue that has yet to be touched on. I noticed that your submission concentrates on the financial costs, but I want to ask about safety issues. Do you think that the bill has gone far enough in relation to road safety? Would you be interested in local authorities having powers to improve the facilities for school crossings and home zones, by reducing speed limits and taking other measures? Is it suitable for some of the hypothecated finance to be put into those measures?

**Neil Greig:** We are supportive of continuing the strong downward trend in road accidents. We do not want to sound complacent, but road safety is good news in Scotland, as fewer and fewer people are being killed every year.

My only problem is that, when one starts to move further from the point of sale of road user charging and towards what the income is being spent on, one risks losing support. Taking the Forth road bridge or road user charging to get into a city centre as examples, if people can see what they are paying for and what they are getting back, one might find that their views are more favourable towards such schemes. On the other hand, if they see the money just disappearing into some pot and being spent all over the place with no real transparency and no real link back to their needs, one risks people finding that approach unacceptable. There is a political price to pay, if a scheme becomes unpopular.

I am quite happy that the Scottish Executive is putting money into safer routes to schools, as that has an overall, national benefit and is the best way to address that issue. I know that local authorities would like to have the money to spend as they like, rather than being dictated to from above, but I am quite happy that national objectives—it is clearly a national objective to reduce child pedestrian casualties—are being met by money that comes in from other grants.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I want to move on to the question of who might be exempted from road user charges and workplace parking levies. You mentioned buses earlier in that regard, but what vehicles do you think should receive national or local exemption from those charges if they are introduced?

**Kevin Delaney:** The route that has been taken of restricting national exemptions to the absolute minimum is right. The simple fact is that local authorities are best placed to decide what exemptions they may wish to incorporate in their areas, and they would not want to be saddled, for want of a better word, with regulation that comes from a national assembly. The only reason for our argument that buses should be exempted—I hasten to add that I mean buses running scheduled routes that have been authorised by

local authorities or local transport authorities—is to send a message about their importance.

The idea that national legislation should exempt emergency services, people with disabilities—subject to the committee grappling with exactly at what level that exemption should be set—and buses is about right. Thereafter, local authorities may want to include other categories. If taxis are important in a particular area, the local authority may wish to exempt licensed taxis. Other local authorities may not wish to exempt them in areas where taxis are of less importance. Keeping national exemptions at a minimum is good. It should be left to the good sense of local authorities, perhaps with guidance as to the areas that they may wish to consider.

**Neil Greig:** A case can be made for the exemption of vehicles that target congestion such as breakdown vehicles and traffic signal repair vehicles. If certain vehicles help to reduce congestion, they should not have to pay to go into a particular area.

Heavy goods vehicles were mentioned. A general exemption for HGVs would not be successful, as more targeted exemption is needed. Other steps can be taken, such as out-of-hours deliveries and differential charging during the night when you want deliveries to be made. I do not think that anyone would support the idea of an empty truck running down a free lane, in the same way as they would not support that idea for an empty or non-scheduled bus, as Kevin Delaney said. You will need to be a bit clever. Perhaps, at the end of the day, local authorities are best placed to decide the local detail of what happens in their city centre.

**Nora Radcliffe:** What are your views on the adequacy of the provision in the bill for consultation in advance of the introduction of these charges?

**Neil Greig:** If one had just picked up the bill, one would see that it says that local authorities “may consult”, which is not a very strong direction, although I gather that that is a nuance of the language of drafting.

As I am a member of the national transport forum for Scotland, I know that some work is being done on stage-by-stage guidance for consultation, which is a good idea. However, that idea should be more to the fore and it must be much clearer that those regulations are coming along and that there will be step-by-step guidance, on which the forum will try to consult as widely as possible. Road user groups should be consulted formally, as should business groups, to reach as many local users as possible. The fairest way forward is for consultation to follow a step-by-step process, with opportunities for appeals to independent



assessors.

**Kevin Delaney:** Following on from that, the RAC Foundation would have been happier to have seen the phrase “shall consult” in the bill rather than “may consult”. I am sure that we all trust local authorities, but “may” allows the option of not consulting, and “shall” does not.

**The Convener:** Point taken.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Obviously, you would like that provision to be tightened up.

What are your views on the effectiveness of workplace parking levies in reducing congestion and pollution?

**Neil Greig:** There is no research evidence from anywhere in the world that such measures work. Apart from Australia, nowhere else has implemented them, as far as we are aware. An AA member survey indicated that workplace parking charges are the least unpopular form of new tax, if the cost is absorbed by the employer.

**The Convener:** There is a surprise.

**Neil Greig:** The problem is that you might end up with an inconsistent situation—some employers would pass on the charge and some would not. A company’s policy on charging may become the new company car, in the sense that it would be used as an incentive to attract staff. Because of staff and skill shortages, there is competition for staff. It has to be made clear from the start what will happen with this charge. If there were a piecemeal approach, with some people being charged and some not, that would clearly be unfair.

12:15

**Kevin Delaney:** Our survey indicated about 50 per cent outright opposition to the workplace parking levy. There is a widespread belief—which is understandable given the way that the levy will operate—that it is just another form of local tax. Our consultation and research leads us to believe that, in the majority of cases, employers will merely pay it. Some will try to recover it from their workers, but even those who say that they will do so are realistic enough to believe that they will probably not succeed.

**Nora Radcliffe:** You seem to be saying that you do not think that the measure will be especially effective in reducing congestion and pollution, which is the stated aim of the policy.

**Neil Greig:** There is no evidence that it will.

**Kevin Delaney:** It may focus people’s minds on whether employees are sufficiently valuable to the company—and how valuable they are may be different from how essential they are. Are they

valuable enough to merit the company paying for their parking space?

A workplace parking levy may have a very small benefit in reducing congestion and pollution. However, once a certain number of parking places are paid for, there is a danger that the company will want to see the best value for that. You could—and I do not put it any more strongly than that—arrive at a situation where more vehicles will go on to the site, rather than fewer, because the company may try to get 16, or even 24, hours of usage of the spaces that they have paid for. Previously, they were happy with whatever usage there may have been.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Is it possible that employers will give more consideration to making green provision for their work force to get to work?

**Kevin Delaney:** Within the next two or three years, a number of factors, such as taxation, will force employers to consider greener provisions, certainly as regards their policy on company cars. Not all those factors will originate with the Government. A great many employees now realise that they are paying more in tax for their company car than is worth while. On its own, I do not think that a workplace parking levy will force employers to do as you suggest; but together with other factors, it may well do.

**Nora Radcliffe:** What will be the economic impact of workplace levies?

**Neil Greig:** If handled badly, they could have a negative economic impact. It is not possible to put a legal stricture on improving additionality, and the last promise that the Scottish Executive made was that public transport investment would be put in before other changes were made. That cannot be legislated for either. If the alternatives are not there, you risk having problems with the local economy. If people find it difficult to get into Glasgow or Edinburgh, and they do not find the alternatives attractive, they may go elsewhere. If you want to get people out of their cars, the alternatives have to be put in place in advance, before motorists are hit with the sticks.

**Kevin Delaney:** In the short term, the economic impact will be in the generation of significant sums of money for the local authorities. In the longer term, the impact may be adverse. Companies that are thinking of moving into an area with workplace parking levies may—and, again, I put it no more strongly than that—change their plans and move to another area if they perceive that employee parking, or company parking, is essential to the work that they do. It may be a sufficiently important economic factor to cause them to move to a different area entirely. There will be short-term gains, but the long term is less certain.

**Helen Eadie:** What are your views on the

relative priorities of, on the one hand, investment for the Forth road bridge, and, on the other hand, investment in the transport infrastructure of the area surrounding the bridge?

**Neil Greig:** I believe strongly that the first call on any toll income should be for the maintenance of the bridge. The bridge is a good example of what can be done when there is a dedicated income that is not cut every year and does not have to be dissipated elsewhere. The bridge has been maintained to a very high standard, and that must continue.

After that, our priority would be to improve the roads that are immediately to either side of the bridge. The further you go away from the bridge, the more the link is lost between the people who pay the toll and the people who get the benefit. We should also consider viable and attractive public transport options, to try to reduce the overall traffic on the bridge.

**Helen Eadie:** Is there a case for the toll income from the bridge to be spent only on maintaining the bridge?

**Neil Greig:** The answer to that obviously depends on what the toll level goes up to. If it remains at its present level, yes, the maintenance should have the first call on the income. If it were to go higher in future, there could be surpluses. At the moment, surpluses are not huge, but it has been possible to put small amounts of money into small improvements at either end of the bridge that have benefited the users of the bridge.

**The Convener:** I would like to ask about the environmental issues that surround motoring. We have heard the views of your organisations on measures that the Executive should take. But what measures will your organisations take to reduce emissions? What research have you done? What do your members feel?

**Kevin Delaney:** This view may not go down too well in a legislative assembly, but the greatest impact on emissions will not come as a result of regulation, but as a result of agreement between government and vehicle manufacturers. That will lead the manufacturers—indeed, it has already done so—to reduce dramatically the emissions from their vehicles. The difficulty, of course, is that although the vehicles may be cleaner, there may also be more of them. However, to reduce emissions per vehicle, the greatest impact will come from the work of the manufacturers. That work may be done to meet legislative standards, but it is unlikely to be affected by tolls and so on.

**Neil Greig:** I agree with that. A recent report by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency said that air quality had improved, although specific local areas have problems. That is often in city centres where the majority of the vehicles are

buses and older diesel vehicles. European arrangements on air quality are driving down substantially the emissions from cars. Cars are getting cleaner.

My organisation encourages green approaches to the ways in which fleets are bought, run and operated. We encourage our members to drive less. However, we cannot really do that unless alternatives are in place. In the bigger picture, there has to be both encouragement and alternatives. Drivers who have a one-off bad experience with an alternative may simply go back to their cars. We want to avoid that.

**The Convener:** I would like to thank Neil Greig and Kevin Delaney for coming along. It has been most useful.

We will now hear from Dr Richard Dixon from Friends of the Earth Scotland, and David Spaven and Colin Howden from TRANSform Scotland.

**David Spaven (TRANSform Scotland):** I am sorry that committee members have not received notes from TRANSform Scotland before. We had very short notice of the meeting. Would it be helpful if we handed them round now?

**The Convener:** Yes, thank you. I invite the witnesses to give the committee their overall views of the bill.

**Dr Richard Dixon (Friends of the Earth Scotland):** We will make some short introductory remarks. I will be using the overhead projector.

**The Convener:** I remind you to speak as closely to the microphone as possible to ensure proper sound quality.

**Dr Dixon:** In this introduction, I aim to remind you of things that you already know, including the importance of this bill and the things that I think you should do with it. I will focus on two problems and say why I think the set of measures that make up the Transport (Scotland) Bill are useful, but do not go quite far enough, and why I think this committee should become very enthusiastic about the bill.

The first problem is climate change. Members can see a graph showing the reduction in emissions that will supposedly result from the UK's programme on climate change. It shows the sector that the emissions will come from. The UK Government has set up a programme to reduce emissions over the decade to 2010, and 40 per cent of the reductions will come from the transport sector. About half that will supposedly come from voluntary agreements, as has been mentioned by other witnesses, which will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from cars, but I remind you that those agreements are voluntary. The other half of that 40 per cent will come, according to the UK Government, from measures in the UK Transport Bill.

We do not have a separate target for Scotland, but a commitment to make an equitable contribution to the UK's reduction in emissions. We have not been doing very well in Scotland. In the five years from 1990 to 1995, UK emissions fell by about 10 per cent, whereas they rose by nearly 1 per cent. We are some way behind in our contribution. Transport in Scotland should be making a big contribution to the reductions if we are to do our bit in the coming decade. The 40 per cent of all the reduction in emissions is actually a 17 per cent reduction in the emissions from the transport sector. Today, we are discussing the tools that local authorities and the Executive will need to use in the Transport (Scotland) Bill to bring about a significant reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The other major problem is one of air quality. Neil Greig told you that the SEPA air quality report said that things are getting better. My reading of the report is different. I have quoted it in my bullet points—it said:

"motor traffic emissions are now posing the principal threat to air quality in urban areas . . . traffic pollution problems are worsening."

I now show a map of the city of Glasgow from the SEPA report. Overlaid on the map are contours of air pollution levels. The first shows pollution from nitrogen dioxide, 75 per cent of which in an urban area comes from motor traffic. The level of 21 parts per billion of NO<sub>2</sub> in the city centre is the standard that we are supposed to meet by 2005. Everywhere inside the box that I am indicating, which includes almost everywhere in the city centre, west almost as far as the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, north as far as Springburn and a fair bit to the east of the city, has a problem.

In Edinburgh, the first report under the air quality strategy suggests the designation of air quality management areas. Those are proposed for North Bridge, West Maitland Street and Roseburn Terrace. If we consider the traffic coming through those areas, where it is going and why it is there, it is a significant problem, which we have to tackle.

The key thing is that technology is already taken into account. Those areas have been declared air quality management areas because they will still fail, even though the vehicles passing through will each have lower emissions in the future—in 2005. We have either to get some significant change in technology or have fewer vehicles there. Glasgow city centre will have similar problems as those streets in Edinburgh: large areas will need to be designated and some action will have to be taken. The Transport (Scotland) Bill gives us the tools to tackle the problem.

I will now indicate some of the culprits and address some of the issues raised earlier. The

next graph shows daily commuter traffic into Edinburgh in 1995, between 8 am and 9 am. In that period, the City of Edinburgh Council counted nearly 18,000 vehicles, with about 53,000 people going to work. Members can see that the vast majority of the vehicles—93 per cent—are cars. Just over 40 per cent of people arriving at work had come in a car. The cars, the majority of which had just one person in them, are holding up the other people who take the bus or cycle.

The graph clearly brings it home that, if people are charged to come into the city by car or to park their car at work, some of them will transfer to other modes. Alternatively, they might move into the city or get a job in Fife, where they live. They might work one day a week at home. It is intuitively obvious that, if there is even a small charge—if they know that the cost will go up—that will make people start to think, "What can I do about this?"

I will stop there.

12:30

**David Spaven:** Good morning, everyone. Thanks very much for giving us the opportunity to speak this morning. I am not sure if I should thank you for the opportunity to be grilled by you, but we are here.

TRANSform Scotland is the campaign for sustainable transport. We represent about 66 member organisations, including environmental campaigns, local transport groups, local authorities, road and rail operators and chambers of commerce. We are a broad church, but we are all interested in the concept of sustainable transport.

We broadly welcome the proposals contained in the Transport (Scotland) Bill, in particular those for road user charging. We do not think that they go far enough, however, and we think that some of the benefits of road user charging have been rather understated in the bill as introduced.

The urgency of the situation has also been understated. Transport is in a mess. Everyone in this room would probably agree with that for a variety of reasons—there are economic, social and environmental impacts. We have become over-dependent on the car and the lorry, and we are not making enough use of the sustainable modes of transport, which include bus and rail for passenger use, walking and cycling, and rail for freight transportation.

Why are we in this mess? We think that motoring is too cheap. If we read the tabloids, and some of the broadsheets, we could be forgiven for thinking that the motorist has been ripped off for many years. In fact, the real costs of motoring

have remained flat for the last 25 years. In contrast, the cost of moving by bus or train has risen by between 60 per cent and 80 per cent in real terms. In those circumstances, it is of little surprise that people tend to flock to the car.

There is, in two respects, a distorted market place for transport. First, the motorist is not confronted at the point of use with all the costs of motoring, in contrast to travelling by rail. In paying for their ticket, a rail passenger pays not just for the cost of providing the service, but for that of the infrastructure and the return on capital for the many firms involved. In contrast, motorists generally perceive the cost to be only the marginal cost, that of fuel. The wrong signals are therefore being sent out on cost.

There is more to it than that. The second point is that motorists do not pay for the external costs of transport. I am not an economist, not all of you are economists, but we understand the idea that the economic, social and environmental impacts of motoring are not just paid by people who drive, but are imposed on society at large. The costs include loss of life resulting from road crashes, a loss of valuable working time because of congestion, the impact of pollution on the national health service and on the environment and, ultimately, climate change, which Richard Dixon has been discussing.

In a recent report, it was calculated that, across Europe, the external costs of transport—the whole package of impact—amounted to about €700 billion a year, which represents about 10 per cent of gross domestic product in the European Union. Studies carried out in the UK a few years ago suggested that the total cost of transport in the UK was £50 billion, which is about twice the revenue that is raised from motorists in taxation. We do not know the situation in Scotland, but it is probably about time that we did.

Essentially, we support road user charging because of that distorted marketplace. Such charging seems to bring together the two key elements of a progressive transport policy—stick and carrot. All the evidence suggests that stick on its own or carrot on its own will not work; we need the two together. We should use stick and carrot together to secure a reduction in road traffic. Let us not forget that there are two road traffic reduction acts on the statute book at Westminster, and we should be moving towards implementation. That is somewhat glossed over in the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

Reducing traffic will not reduce people's access. If we improve land use planning and the provision for getting about by bus, train, foot and bike, and transport more freight by rail, we will improve accessibility. As Friends of the Earth has said, we need to have targets to move towards on traffic

reduction as well as on climate change. This bill is notably lacking in targets.

Too often, the bill seems to be concerned with presenting an image to the motor lobby, rather than with protecting the interests of all transport users. We could do with a little less talk of a contract with the motorist. We want to see a contract with the citizen.

**Mr Tosh:** Both witnesses have highlighted how serious they consider the problems of pollution and congestion to be. I want to tackle the general question of how good the bill is. Richard Dixon said that it was a useful bill that provided tools with which to work, but David Spaven was a little more critical. However, from the point of view of our witnesses, the bill is pretty useless because it contains only enabling powers. The evidence suggests that, at most, only a couple of councils are prepared to use those powers. We have been given a broad hint this morning that Glasgow will pitch parking levies at a level that will not damage vehicle movement, so that it can protect its income in order to build a motorway that both of our present witnesses think would be an abomination.

Only Edinburgh will use the powers. Even if they work in Edinburgh, which remains to be seen—I hear stories that Edinburgh might opt for a city-centre cordon rather than a broader cordon—the bill simply does not tackle the problems of congestion, pollution and emission, because the Executive has chosen not to have a strategy. It is putting all its obligations and potential unpopularity on to local authorities. Do you agree?

**Dr Dixon:** It is correct to say that this is, in the main, an enabling bill. However, what it enables are steps forward. I have problems with how difficult it might be to implement some of the proposals. The process that must be gone through in relation to quality contracts is difficult. Many hoops must be jumped through and it must be proved that nothing else will work before it is possible to put in place a quality contract, even if it is obvious from day one that that is the way to go. The process for charges is also complex. The set of hoops includes a final approval by ministers, an appeal and a possible inquiry process. The measures should be streamlined to ensure that they are more attractive. The fact that a council that wants to implement the measures and sell the idea to the public has to jump through five hoops in order to convince the Executive, acts as a significant disincentive.

I said in my paper that without a central transport strategy—one that sends out a strong message about transport and that is linked to planning, climate change, the environment and the economy—there is a danger that the bill will be passed with all its lovely measures, yet will end up on the shelf, with only the City of Edinburgh

Council implementing any of its proposals. Having said that and although the urgency of the situation is such that we should be trying to get everyone to implement the measures, it would be okay if only Edinburgh did. In five years' time, other local authorities would look at the amount of money that Edinburgh had made from the measures and what it had been able to build and so on and they would decide that the measures were good ideas after all.

A key job for the committee is to try to make the measures more attractive to local authorities and to promote the bill. The Executive has done that to some extent, but I want the committee to send the bill on with an endorsement that will emphasise that the measures are important. The committee must tell local authorities that they are expected to consider the measures seriously and we must let them know that the committee will help any local authority that is interested in implementing the measures.

**David Spaven:** I endorse what Dr Dixon said. We are all aware that there has been a trend for shuffling responsibilities on to local authorities that might not have the resources to implement what is being asked for. That is critical.

An important point was raised about local authority boundaries being too restrictive to allow a broader perspective to be taken. The bill requires local authorities to come together and I hope that that will be used strategically to deal with the fact that some local authorities cover a small geographic area that does not represent a proper travel-to-work area. In many ways, it might—in terms of planning transport and land use—make sense to use the structure plan areas.

In England, local transport plans are a statutory requirement. That is not the case in Scotland and we have yet to receive an adequate explanation for that. Local authorities should be required to produce a local transport strategy that would deliver key elements that would deal with the fundamental issues.

There is a reference in the bill to the idea of green travel plans being a voluntary initiative for larger public and private organisations. That would enable them to get their house in order in terms of the impact of their activities on transport and land use planning. Why not make it a statutory requirement for organisations above a certain size to produce a green transport plan? If the public and private sectors work together, we have more chance of achieving results on the ground. We want results—not an airy-fairy approach.

**Mr Tosh:** There is a problem. We heard this morning that Glasgow City Council could not act on city entry charging because a motorway runs through the city. Have not the guts of the strategy

that you want to be adopted been ripped out by the decision not to allow charging on trunk roads and motorways, which is not the situation in England and Wales? Has not that lamed Aberdeen and Glasgow councils? Are not councils looking at each other competitively and worrying that if charges are imposed in one area, business will go to another? Is not the whole strategy hare-brained because—given the imperatives under which local authorities work—the measures cannot be implemented by local authorities?

**Colin Howden (TRANSform Scotland):** We accept that. We have criticised the Executive for dropping the proposals for trunk road charging from the bill. We have also criticised the Executive's failure to allow local authorities to bring trunk roads that run through urban areas into an urban road user charging scheme.

Mr Tosh is being a wee bit harsh on the bill. There are some good provisions in the bill, such as the provisions for bus regulation.

**Mr Tosh:** I am not arguing any point of view; I am encouraging you to express yours.

**Colin Howden:** It is important to remember that there are helpful elements in the bill.

**Dr Dixon:** I will defend local authorities and say that there are many decisions about transport that are most appropriately made at local level. I agree that it is unfortunate that tolling on existing motorways and trunk roads has been ruled out. However, the bill could be of some use in such obvious situations as that of the M8—a lot of local traffic uses the M8 as a way of getting around Glasgow. It is clearly not sensible for that traffic to be excluded from charging. We could have tolls on each of the 23 ramps that go to and from the M8, but that would be the least desirable solution and I would hope to come up with something a bit more elegant.

The other objection from Glasgow City Council was that it would be difficult for Glasgow's economy to have a charging scheme that did not take into account out-of-town retail centres and business developments. The committee could take up that suggestion and make sure that powers are put in place in relation to that. That would be fairly non-threatening because the level of the charge would not be prescribed. The charge would be small and set at a level that would achieve the ends for which councils are aiming.

**David Spaven:** It is unfortunate that inter-urban road user charging has not been provided for. In the strategic roads review, the Minister for Transport and the Environment required multi-modal appraisals of a number of road corridors. We have argued for years that the transport needs of a given corridor should be assessed with a view to finding the best mix of transport options.

It seems most unfortunate that the provision for road user charging will not be available when the multi-modal analysis is done of the M8 corridor. One needs only to think of some of the things for which moneys raised by an M8 toll might be used. As many members will be aware, the train between Edinburgh and Glasgow, our two key cities, is still slower than it was 25 years ago—the only rail route in Scotland that is.

We could, using inter-urban tolls, consider electrification of the gap—of about 25 miles—in the rail network between Glasgow Central and Edinburgh, through Shotts. That would enable a very fast service of between 30 and 35 minutes from city centre to city centre. We need to be able to demonstrate to the citizens of Scotland that they will get benefits in return for charging. People will not accept the concept of vague improvements in public transport—they want to know that something will affect their lives day in and day out. We have been critical of the Scottish Executive for failing to sell some of the potential benefits. That is an important omission from the bill.

12:45

**The Convener:** You have covered joint transport strategies.

**Helen Eadie:** David Spaven has covered the key points that I wanted to ask about, but questions arise from this morning's debate. We have heard from Bill Taylor and Glasgow City Council about the overlapping circles of partnerships. If one is a member of a partnership, one's transport requirements do not only ever flow south or west or north, but flow in a variety of circles—Bill Taylor used the words concentric circles, I think. Perhaps you could comment on that, as well as on the equity of congestion charging.

This morning we heard about the proposals in the bill for Fife and Edinburgh councils to introduce congestion charging for the Forth bridge. Can you comment on whether that is equitable, in the light of Murray Tosh's question about road user charging being equitable across the whole of Scotland?

**Dr Dixon:** We heard about the moral imperative of some of the benefits of charging going to Fife, whose citizens, in the main, pay the cost. That seems fairly sensible. However, in the longer term we want to discourage people from living a long way from where they work and commuting every day. People who live in southern Fife and work in Edinburgh or Glasgow are living an unsustainable life, which—as a society—we should want to change. MSPs who represent Fife are, of course, exempt, but the issue needs to be addressed.

**Helen Eadie:** Some people might agree with

you.

**Dr Dixon:** Putting the money that was raised on the Forth bridge into new roads in Fife would encourage more people to live in Fife and work in Edinburgh—the reverse of the result that we want. To spend the money on creating jobs in Fife so that the people who live there can work there instead of in Edinburgh is, however, extremely desirable.

**David Spaven:** I take the point about equity, which underpins the whole transport debate. Sometimes the issue is geographical equity, but often it is social, economic or environmental equity. Underlying that is the fact that we have had 25, 30 or more years of policies that have, in effect, been geared towards people who have cars. Let us not forget that 38 per cent of households in Scotland do not have a car. We have a Government that supports social inclusion, so we need to keep firmly in mind the fact that we want to spread benefits as widely as possible and give people opportunities that they might not have at the moment. Most poorer people do not have cars; they depend on public transport—which is of variable quality—or walking. That is the reality and we should not forget it.

**Janis Hughes:** I have a quick question on bus services. You mentioned quality contracts. Your overarching concerns include the reduction of emissions and encouragement of people to consider alternative forms of transport, such as public transport. Buses are one of the most obvious alternatives. Do you have any views on how the proposals on quality partnerships and quality contracts in the bill could be enhanced to encourage people to utilise bus services?

**Dr Dixon:** In a sense, the bill examines matters too much from the perspective of the industry—the desire for a competitive market and for companies to thrive—rather than that of the bus user or the environment. From the environmental perspective, it makes no sense to have a bus war with lots of empty buses arriving at a stop a minute apart. From the city bus user's perspective, it is not sensible to have three different bus companies with different timetables—some of them displayed at bus stops, some not—operating different concessionary schemes and season tickets. It is much easier for the bus user—at least on a given route, if not in the whole urban area—if one company runs a high-quality route at a reasonable price with a timetable that can be understood. Our view is that quality contracts are much more attractive from a bus user's perspective, because a route—or a set of routes—would be given to a company and it would have to run a service at an agreed level of quality. Competition would still exist because the tendering process would still be competitive.

There might be issues about small companies being able to compete and enter the market, but they are minor in comparison with the big issue of providing good quality services and not having lots of buses with empty seats driving around polluting our towns and cities.

**David Spaven:** Sometimes transport decision makers lose sight of the fact that the bus is a fundamental mode of public transport. I suspect that that is because many decision makers do not travel by bus. The bus is crucial for many people.

We support the idea of quality partnerships and quality contracts, but outputs are important. We believe that a key output should be reduction of car traffic. If all that the contracts lead to is more people travelling by bus or making more journeys by bus, or people ceasing use of local rail services that are supported by local taxpayers, we are not convinced that contracts are a good idea. Output is the most important thing, which goes back to some of the fundamental issues that Richard Dixon talked about—reducing road and car traffic and ensuring that we make our contribution to climate change targets.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We come to the subjects of road user charging and workplace parking levies.

**Robin Harper:** I declare an interest: I am a member of Friends of the Earth and, by association, of TRANSform Scotland. I will try to wrap my questions up in one catch-all question. Could improvements be made to the proposals for road user charging? Is there a way to encourage greater take-up of road user charging throughout Scotland? Are there areas where charging will be an absolute necessity, because there is no credible alternative?

**Dr Dixon:** The proposals in the bill are reasonably sensible. David Spaven has already mentioned the contract with the motorist. That approach comes from the wrong perspective. In paying charges, motorists are paying for the burden that they put on the rest of us. In many ways, therefore, the non-motorists should get the benefits. There is a problem with how the idea is being sold. I agree with David about the problems of selling the positive side, which is the fact that there will be cash that is guaranteed to be spent locally on transport. The proposals could be streamlined to make them a little more attractive, but they are essentially fairly sensible. The key thing is to encourage take-up.

Edinburgh has correctly identified itself as an area where charging must happen, because of the mounting pressure from increasing car traffic.

If Glasgow City Council could sort out the issues of out-of-town charging and the use of the trunk road by non-trunk traffic in the city, and if it could

work together with its neighbouring authorities, it would begin to view road user charging positively and would take it up. We know that the authorities in Aberdeen and Perth are interested and Stirling Council would probably be interested as well. The essential areas in which to promote road user charging are the two big cities and Aberdeen. As I said, the Executive is undertaking some of that work, but perhaps it needs to be a bit braver and to show more leadership. I hope that the committee will send out the positive message that the measures are important and useful and that Parliament should promote them enthusiastically.

Take-up will depend on cash. If the committee recommended some kind of fund that would help local authorities to move in that direction—such as research money or seedcorn money—that would make the idea of road user charging more attractive to local authorities in the early days. They will all take it seriously when the first scheme is up and running and in 10 years' time every authority will be considering such schemes. However, we want that in two years' time.

**Colin Howden:** I support pretty much everything that Richard Dixon says. I have two specific comments on road user charging. The RAC talked previously about hypothecation of revenues and transparency. We agree that there needs to be a clearer expression of the additionality of the funds that come back in. If that additionality is not clear, there will be more unease about whether road user charging is acceptable.

There is also some concern about the insistence on public transport services being in place before road user charging is implemented. We need more clarification about what is meant by public transport improvements. Are we talking about one or two more greenways being introduced in Edinburgh, or are we talking about a massive light rail network being installed?

**Robin Harper:** Do you agree that we risk getting trapped in a chicken-and-egg situation?

**Colin Howden:** Yes.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I want to address workplace parking levies. What are your views on those, as they are set out in the bill? Are you aware of any evidence that shows that levies have the potential to reduce congestion? You might also comment on whether more should be done to encourage a greater take-up of such measures by local authorities.

**David Spaven:** We support the concept of workplace parking levies. The matter of the economic impact of such a scheme was raised. Obviously levies will raise money, but they could also potentially help to reduce the negative economic impact of road congestion. The idea is not always considered from that point of view.

The bill often puts such measures in the context of what local businesses will say about them. They will obviously have something to say about the measures, but we must bear everyone's perspective in mind. Levies might help to make alternative forms of transport more attractive and reduce unnecessary journeys. For example, several parts of the business district of Glasgow act as a car dump for eight hours a day. A significant minority of people could use alternative forms of transport, but they need a little prompting—through the use of levies—to do so. We should bear in mind not only the perspective of the business community, but the benefits to others of workplace parking levies.

We have heard a lot about how much the measures in the bill will cost the motorist, but there will be benefits—otherwise we would not be introducing those measures. Those benefits need to be spelt out both at strategic and local level as something that people can relate to in their everyday lives. That is essential, and I hope that the committee can have a role—as Richard Dixon said—in encouraging local authorities to spell out the benefits of such measures.

**Des McNulty:** Do you have any thoughts on incentive regimes for measures that might be funded from workplace parking or road congestion bills? I have in mind such things as the provision of secure bike shelters in or adjacent to workplaces. There might also be low-cost, subsidised local bus services in city centres, similar to those that are provided by ScotRail to get people from Queen Street station to Central station. Do you think that such positive alternatives are worth thinking about, alongside the charging regime?

13:00

**Colin Howden:** There is a good example in Edinburgh of that idea at work. The City of Edinburgh Council has done a good job with its consultation during the past year. It has spelt out what could be done across the city, not only through large infrastructure improvements—new rail services and roads—but through improving the cycle network, providing a walking network and creating home zones and safe routes to school. That is what could be done with the revenues raised from workplace levies, which is primarily an environmental and social measure.

**Dr Dixon:** I agree that all those schemes are good ideas. We should try to encourage firms to do something different, which would avoid some of the costs that will be involved. I agree with TRANSform Scotland's suggestion that any company that has a certain number of employees should be obliged to produce a green transport plan. That would force companies to think about

the issues and to consider how best to invest whatever money was available to them, whether in car parking spaces and charges, or in bike loans and public transport season tickets.

In general, the bare proposals in the bill are fine, apart from the number of hoops that people will have to go through. However, one of the suggestions in the consultation paper was that local businesses should be asked their views and that the scheme should proceed only if the majority of those businesses were in favour of it. If someone asked me whether I wanted to pay VAT, I would probably say no. It seems crazy to ask businesses whether they want to be taxed—they will not say yes. They should be consulted and their views should be taken on board, but if the approval of the majority of businesses were to be a requirement, no schemes would go ahead. That would be foolish.

**Robin Harper:** Would you include universities, colleges, schools, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive at Victoria Quay and St Andrew's House in that consultation?

**Dr Dixon:** Yes. There are cases for exemptions and reductions, but in general, any business or institution that has a large impact on traffic levels and movement of people in a city should be consulted and involved in any scheme. Some institutions have done much already, and some have done very little. Such a scheme would certainly focus their minds.

**David Spaven:** There is an important potential link between workplace parking levies and green transport plans. We are a little behind England in consideration of green transport plans and what they can do in the health sector by involving, for example, blue-chip companies such as Boots in Nottingham. Not only can there be environmental benefits for communities, but the companies' attention will be focused on the cost of maintaining parking spaces. Businesses can end up saving money by addressing such issues, but they need a bit of prompting from the public sector to think about the issues in a more focused way.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Colin Howden said something about the principle of additionality and the way in which it would be demonstrated. Would the other witnesses like to add anything to that? Another issue is the degree to which the provisions in the bill differentiate between town centres and out-of-town locations.

**Colin Howden:** I do not have a great deal to add about additionality. The national transport forum's sub-group on road user charging suggested a way in which to calculate additionality using a moving average over three or five years. We do not have a specific proposal for the way in which additionality could be calculated, but we



would like one to be introduced.

**The Convener:** Do you have any comments on the out-of-town issue?

**Colin Howden:** To reinforce what Richard Dixon said, there is no level playing field in terms of retail and leisure facilities. Many parking spaces for such sites are charged for in town, but outside town there is free parking at stores such as Ikea. There is a financial incentive to drive to the free parking space on the outside of town, rather than travel by a more sustainable mode of transport to a site in an urban area, which it is easier to provide transport to. We criticised the Executive—and the UK Government in 1998—for dropping from legislation the proposal for retail and leisure parking charges.

**Robin Harper:** For the record, my question was more to do with green transport plans than workplace charging.

Glasgow councillors took the opportunity, when they sat in the seats that you are in, to put the case for the M74. Would you like to comment on that?

**David Spaven:** I would be happy to. This is 2000, not 1960. Examination of the experience of great cities of the world such as Boston and San Francisco and other progressive cities, such as Portland in Oregon—which are in the home of the car—shows that they are dismantling urban motorways and replacing them with high-quality tram, light rail and bus priority schemes. There are also very progressive land use and transportation planning policies, which are giving neighbourhoods back to people.

The idea that in 2000 we should be contemplating spending £170 million on an eight-lane motorway on stilts running through the south-east Glasgow conurbation is not compatible with the Government's objectives for road traffic reduction, climate change and local environmental quality. Such a road could not be built for six or seven years and, as members know, there is a problem with congestion on the M8 through the centre of Glasgow that has to be addressed. At the moment it is a free for all.

There are opportunities to consider high-occupancy lanes, priority for buses and perhaps priority for heavy goods vehicles that head from the west of Glasgow with exports to the rest of Britain and European markets. The Minister for Transport and the Environment asked Glasgow City Council and South Lanarkshire Council to produce a multi-modal appraisal. They were asked, for example, to analyse the options for a Glasgow cross-rail service, improvement of rail-freight links across Glasgow and better traffic management on Kingston bridge to give priority to the most important vehicles. A range of things

must be done. At the end of the day, it is nonsense to think about spending that amount of money to build a road that will generate more traffic, when we have not examined the alternatives.

**The Convener:** There are no other questions, so I thank Colin Howden, Richard Dixon and David Spaven for coming along. That concludes our evidence-taking session today—it was useful once again.

We have much evidence to digest. We are meeting again next week to take further evidence on the bill. Do members agree to meet privately before the next evidence session begins to discuss lines of questioning?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We hope also to consider the content of our report at that meeting. Is it agreed that that consideration should take place in private?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We plan to consider our next steps for the water inquiry at the next meeting. Do members agree that we should take that item in private?

*Members indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

**The Convener:** We move now to agenda item 4, which is subordinate legislation. We have two negative Scottish statutory instruments to deal with. The first is the Sulphur Content of Liquid Fuels (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/169), which is accompanied by a briefing paper, the Executive cover note and the regulatory and environmental impact assessment. In addition, European Council directive 1999/32/EC has been circulated with the papers.

The regulation comes into force on 30 June, with a time limit for parliamentary action on it of 11 September. The Transport and the Environment Committee is required to report on the instrument by 4 September. Should annulment be required under rule 10(4), the Transport and the Environment Committee will have to debate the matter and report on its decision to Parliament. The Subordinate Legislation Committee considered the instrument on 13 June and determined that the attention of the Parliament need not be drawn to the instrument. Are there any comments?

**Members** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Convener:** There is none, so we have nothing to report on the instrument.

The second negative Scottish statutory instrument is the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/170), which was circulated with the usual papers. The regulation comes into force on 1 July. The limit for parliamentary action is 10 September. The Transport and the Environment Committee is required to report on the instrument by 4 September. The Subordinate Legislation Committee considered the instrument on 13 June and agreed to raise points with the Executive. However, the committee's points did not relate to the amendment regulations, but related to the principal regulations. The Executive's response to the Subordinate Legislation Committee is reprinted as an annexe to the covering note to the instrument, which members have received. Are there any comments?

**Members** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Convener:** There is none, so the committee has nothing to report.

We move now into private session, as agreed by the committee.

13:10

*Meeting continued in private until 13:12.*

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