

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 June 2008

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

† 15th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

*David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con)

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

† 14th Meeting 2008, Session 3—held in private.

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 24 June 2008

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:00]

Rail Services Inquiry

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the 15th meeting this year of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee—the last meeting before the summer recess.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Wahey!

The Convener: Sounds of jubilation—marvellous. I am sorry that you have to put up with our company so much, Rob.

We have apologies from Shirley-Anne Somerville. Alasdair Allan is expected to attend as her substitute. I remind members and everybody present that mobile phones and devices of all sorts should be switched off.

We have three items on the agenda, the first of which is consideration of an approach paper on our proposed inquiry into rail services. Members are aware that at the end of May we agreed that our inquiry should focus on the development of intercity rail links between Scotland, the rest of the United Kingdom and Europe, and on the potential for high-speed rail links, and that we should investigate how the existing rail network in Scotland might connect to any improved links. Members will be aware of recent media reports of an exercise that Network Rail is to undertake, examining the feasibility of the construction of new high-speed lines. That is timely, and we will no doubt find out more about it as we engage with Network Rail during the inquiry.

I ask for members' views on the proposed inquiry remit, as set out in paper TIC/S3/08/15/1. We can then agree on a call for evidence and on issues relating to the programme for witnesses. My only comment on the proposed remit is that we should include the need to achieve modal shift away from aviation. If we are considering the climate change benefits of high-speed rail, it is important that we try to achieve a shift away from aviation, rather than simply meet, or even fuel, increased demand. That is my only point on the remit. Do members have any comments on the approach paper?

Rob Gibson: I agree that it would be nice to include that element, so that we are joined up in what we do. It is vital that the climate change elements are recognised in the remit.

I am concerned about the second and third objectives in the proposed remit, about considering intercity links and barriers to development. The word “inter-city” suggests routes such as Inverness to Aberdeen and Aberdeen to Edinburgh. Are we thinking about the Scottish network or just the intercity bits? Our consideration of the barriers to developing improved rail links might overlap with that and go further and wider.

The Convener: Do members want to flag up any other issues, after which we can consider how to reflect the comments?

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I am happy with the draft remit and I am happy to take on board your comments, convener, and Rob Gibson's. We should not die in a ditch over a word such as “inter-city”. We could say “interregional rail services”.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): It is absolutely essential that we consider a high-speed rail network, but we must ensure that we do not make our remote areas even more peripheral. It is vital that those two things are knitted together. We should not assume that we will work incrementally up from London: we should start in Scotland and consider how we can link better to the main cities and to mainland Europe. It is important that we have that focus.

The Convener: Perhaps those concerns can be addressed if we simply remove the word “inter-city”. The rest of the text probably reflects the wider issues about regional links as well as intercity links. With the caveats that we have just expressed, do members agree to the proposed remit?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Do members also agree to issue a call for written evidence?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The paper comments on potential witnesses. Do members have any comments on that?

Alison McInnes: It would be useful to hear from two additional groups. I am interested in taking evidence from Eurostar (UK) Ltd and perhaps SNCF. Also, the Institution of Civil Engineers in Scotland has done interesting work on high-speed rail links, so there might be benefit in interviewing representatives of it.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I am happy with most of the list, but we need to include trade

unions—I would be happy to hear from the Scottish Trades Union Congress. If we are hearing from organisations that represent passengers, it is important that we hear from other stakeholders.

The Convener: Given those comments, do members agree to the organisations that we have listed and to delegate to me the final decision on the witness programme for each evidence session?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: If members have specific comments as we move closer to the inquiry, please get in touch with me or the clerks.

That concludes agenda item 1. Item 2 is on our inquiry into ferry services, which we have agreed to take in private.

14:06

Meeting continued in private until 14:38.

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