TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 November 2008

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
21st 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)
*Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)
Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con)
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Garry Clark (Scottish Chambers of Commerce)
Ron Culley (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport)
Chris Day (City of Edinburgh Council)
Iain Duff (Scottish Council for Development and Industry)
Trond Haugen (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership)
Ron Hewitt (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce)
Anthony Hughes (Glasgow City Council)
Owen Kelly (Scottish Financial Enterprise)
James King (Passengers' View Scotland)
Robert Samson (Passenger Focus)
Stewart Stevenson (Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change)
Philip Wright (Scottish Government Climate Change and Water Industry Directorate)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 11 November 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 13:32*]

Climate Change Bill (Consultation)

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the 21st meeting in 2008 of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. We have received apologies from Shirley-Anne Somerville and Alison McInnes, and Alex Johnstone has notified us that he will be late for the meeting. I remind everybody present that all mobile devices should be switched off.

Agenda item 1 is an evidence session with the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change on the Scottish Government's response to the consultation on proposals for a Scottish climate change bill. We have a packed agenda and will be a little tight for time, so I ask members to keep their questions succinct and to the point. I am sure that you are all capable of that. Minister, I am sure that you will find that equally achievable for your answers, if you make the effort.

Without further ado, I welcome Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, and his colleagues Philip Wright, deputy director of climate change, Fiona Page, head of the Scottish climate change bill team, Andrew Henderson, policy officer for the Scottish climate change bill team, and Nuala Gormley, principal research officer. We will launch straight into questions.

There were more than 21,000 responses to the Government's consultation, which is a strong indication of public interest in the bill. However, the response document is less than eight pages long, which seems a little short compared with, for instance, the recent response to the committee on crofting, which ran to more than 20 pages. Is there a particular reason for the Government's short response to the consultation and the lack of detail in it?

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I welcome the substantial engagement with the consultation process. We ensured that we read and counted every single response. Many of the responses that would previously have been counted as campaign responses had significant contributions to make by way of additional material. In fact, 420 additional pieces of material were extracted from what might have been counted in other consultations as campaign responses.

We were pleased to find a substantial alignment in the consultation responses with the direction in which we seek to travel. We have sought in our response, on the back of the detailed report that we published on 20 August, to move rapidly to flesh out the areas in which we are responding positively to the issues that were raised by the 21,000 people concerned. I will not go through those with you because they are in our response, they are highlighted and they represent significant policy responses to the consultation. We could, of course, have provided you with more words, but that would not necessarily have meant more substance. It is important to focus on the areas in which we have responded and changed our policy position.

The Convener: It has been suggested that the Government could have taken the opportunity provided by its response to the consultation to outline the rationale for some of the actions that have been taken. For example, there is a very short paragraph on each additional bill topic, but there is little detail and little information about the rationale. Would it not have been worth while for the Government to set out in more detail its rationale for the measures that will be included in the bill?

Stewart Stevenson: The response is not the only word on the additional bill topics. In many cases, there will be additional consultations. For example, a consultation is open on the energy efficiency action plan, which is an additional topic; it will close on 28 November. A consultation is also open on muirburn. On 4 November, which is after we published the Government's response to this consultation, we launched a consultation on the support that the forest estate can provide to climate change objectives. There is also a consultation on the performance of non-domestic buildings. There is a range of consultations that augment the material that appears under the heading of additional bill topics and flesh out the issues at considerably greater length. It would be as well to say at this stage, if the convener will forgive me, that we hope that we are doing things in a way that will provide the committee with the opportunity, as it moves forward with its consideration of the bill after it is published, to examine what we are doing under each of those headings as well as the material on which we directly consulted and to which we are now responding.

The Convener: To pursue the point on the level of detail provided in the response, another

example is the call for annual targets. The response notes the level of support that the consultation generated for annual targets and states simply, "The Scottish Government agrees". I, too, agree with that and want to see strong annual targets, but would it not have been helpful to the Government and to others making that case if a more detailed rationale and justification had been given in response to the consultation?

Stewart Stevenson: We are doing the 21,000-plus respondents the courtesy of acknowledging that the arguments that they have deployed and which are fully described in the consultation analysis are the ones with which we agree. The necessity of adding further words to that is not an option to which we gave enormous thought.

We have added an interim target at the halfway point between 2010 and 2050. That is a substantial response to what is happening.

When the bill is published, a substantial policy memorandum to the bill will discuss in considerable detail the basis on which the various headings have been included in the bill.

The Convener: Again on targets, how has the Government ensured that, in developing the bill, it has taken account of scientific knowledge on climate change that has been updated since, for example, the 80 per cent target was fixed on? Before last year's election, a number of political parties talked about the 80 per cent target and the Scottish National Party referred to it in its manifesto. A number of voices in the scientific community are now calling for a more ambitious target than 80 per cent, even one that is based on parts per million rather than pure percentages.

Stewart Stevenson: We may be straying into what will be in the bill, but our approach is to have a bill that is able to adapt to changing science and circumstances. The one thing that all sides of any arguments that there may be on the subject acknowledge is that we do not understand everything today that we will understand in 2040. Therefore, the bill will not create artificial limits on what needs to be done. In any event, we will be driven by scientific advice. We take note of the interim advice from the United Kingdom committee on climate change—it is an interim body, not yet the full committee—which has reinforced our approach and target. Over time, the advice from our advisers, the UK committee on climate change and elsewhere may change. You can be sure that, if it does, the Government will take account of that, as I am sure any Government that was faced with solid, well-worked-out scientific advice would do.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): One of the most consistent pieces of scientific advice is that early action is needed to achieve any of the outcomes that are being set. The 2050 target will be meaningless unless we take the action that is required to slow the melting of the Greenland icecap, for example, so I am concerned by paragraph 16 of the Government's response to the consultation, which says that the annual targets to which the previous paragraph refers

"will be based on expert advice from the UK Committee on Climate Change and will be set more than 10 years in advance".

The logic of that appears to be that none of the targets that are set now will apply until 10 years' time, which is complete nonsense. Can you shed any light on that? Will we have meaningful annual targets for next year, the year after and the year after that? Such targets will be central to achieving the objectives of the exercise.

Stewart Stevenson: We will have targets from 2010.

Des McNulty: They will not be set 10 years in advance, in that case.

Stewart Stevenson: That is the one exception because, logically, it is not possible to set those targets in advance. However, we will set targets 10 years in advance for all the periods thereafter. I think that you said that it would be absurd to have no targets that applied before that, and I agree with you absolutely. The response does not flesh that out, but it is certainly our intention that there will be targets from 2010.

The Convener: We will ask further questions on annual targets later.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Has the development of the bill been influenced by the current economic and financial situation and the political debate about that?

Stewart Stevenson: Economic factors have always been one of the matters that must be considered in the bill.

Philip, who is the chair of the committee on climate change?

Philip Wright (Scottish Government Climate Change and Water Industry Directorate): Lord Adair Turner.

Stewart Stevenson: I beg your pardon—I beg his pardon, more to the point. Lord Adair Turner made this point neatly when he spoke to a Westminster committee—I may have said this to you, but it is worth repeating. The Stern report said that up to 20 per cent of our gross domestic product could be affected if we take no action and that it will cost us 1 to 2 per cent to take action. When pressed on that, Lord Adair Turner put it into perspective by saying that if—and the "if" is bigger now than it was when he said it—annual growth is 3 per cent, the growth that we would

expect to deliver in January 2050 will instead be delivered in July 2050. That provides some context and demonstrates that the economy is a consideration in relation to the UK Climate Change Bill, which will affect Scotland, and the proposed Scottish climate change bill. However, as Sir Nicholas Stern said, taking no action would be the economically irresponsible course; acting is the economically responsible course.

13:45

Charlie Gordon: Did the recent proposals to enhance the UK Climate Change Bill influence your thinking about the Scottish bill?

Stewart Stevenson: Scotland accounts for a seven hundredth of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, so it is self-evident that we cannot act alone. We are pleased that there will be a more ambitious figure in the UK bill. The Government was right to respond to the interim advice of the UK committee on climate change. This is not a competitive game; it is about opportunities and the contributions that countries and Administrations can make in different circumstances. The committee on climate change said that it is necessary and possible for the UK bill to have a more ambitious target. I welcome that and I congratulate the UK Administration on its positive response to the committee's advice.

Charlie Gordon: Is the Scottish Government already applying the spirit of the proposed Scottish climate change bill?

Stewart Stevenson: I think that it is doing so. With each passing month, year and decade, we will witness more action being taken by this Administration and Administrations around the world, as scientific knowledge increases and we learn how effective the steps that we take are. We will need to ascertain whether we are making the progress that we should be making, and we must be prepared to adapt and respond as we go forward, because we are not dealing with absolute certainty.

Charlie Gordon: Was the spirit of the proposed bill manifest in, for example, the decision on the Trump golf development? Will it be manifest in decisions about projects in the forthcoming strategic transport projects review and the national planning framework?

Stewart Stevenson: You are drawing me into matters that are slightly beyond the subject of the discussion. As we develop policy on a range of issues, we certainly consider the impact of policies. You will see the carbon effect of announcements that have been adumbrated when we come to make them.

The Convener: Will you clarify that point? You said that we will

"see the carbon effect of announcements"

when they are made. Do you mean that a carbon assessment will accompany the strategic transport projects review and the national planning framework?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

The Convener: Thank you.

Des McNulty: Will you carry out a carbon assessment of the removal of tolls from the Forth and Tay road bridges?

Stewart Stevenson: Such an assessment was part of the study that was published around the time when the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Bill was introduced—the estimate was in the range of 7,200 to 9,000 tonnes of CO_2.

The Convener: It might be worth comparing what you said today with what we heard when we took evidence on the budget. If ministers want to give a clear message, they need to tell us the same thing.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The UK climate impacts programme was due to publish a new assessment in late 2008, which would build on work that was done in 2002, but publication has been put off until spring 2009. Has the delay in the programme's project on UK 21st century climate change projections had an impact on the bill's development?

Stewart Stevenson: No. I am keeping my answers very short, as requested.

Rob Gibson: Indeed. Would it not have been helpful to have that assessment?

Stewart Stevenson: Our primary source of input at present is the UK committee on climate change, and we rely on the advice of that highly respected group of scientists. Under clause 36 of the UK bill, which is shortly to become an act, they are required to answer any questions that we put to them. That was embedded in the UK bill as part of our work with the UK Administration to ensure that its bill had the powers that were necessary for us. That is the way in which we will deal with matters of science.

Rob Gibson: However, I presume that the 21st century climate change projections include material about Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson: You must recall that one of the key reasons why the Administration in Scotland must work closely with the UK Administration is that we do not have powers over everything in Scotland that has an impact on the climate. Our actions must therefore complement and be consistent with the actions that are taken

under retained powers at Westminster. The work is a good example of Administrations of different political complexions sharing an objective and working together.

Rob Gibson: Talking of which, I presume that there are Governments of different political colours throughout the developed world. Have we been in contact, through your office, with Governments elsewhere in Europe and the world about the details of their climate change plans?

Stewart Stevenson: We have had a number of contacts. At official level, we have substantial and continuing contacts. My official Philip Wright was in Bali for the conference last year and he will be part of the UK Government's delegation to Poznań at the beginning of December. I attended a meeting in Brussels to meet other Administrations. There is a wide range of interactions of one sort or another because we must seek to establish where the best practice is. If we are not an example of best practice, we must find out where the best practice is and seek to learn the lessons and improve our game. I hope that everyone, all around the world, will take that position.

Rob Gibson: Do you have an example of how those meetings with other Governments have improved the UK Climate Change Bill?

Philip Wright: I was in Bali for the United Nations climate change conference but also for a parallel event that was run by the states and regions climate alliance, to which Scotland is a signatory. As I mentioned last week, that alliance gives us the opportunity to engage with other states and regions such as California, Quebec, Manitoba and the Australian states. It is early days, but we are engaging with such states and regions and they are examining what we are doing with the greenhouse gas inventory and our ability to disaggregate data from the member state or national level to sub-national level. That is useful.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Last week, I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth about Scotland's lack of participation on climate change in the world summit of regions, which is supported by the UN. I was disappointed to hear that the Scottish Government had not participated, given that a large number of regions and small countries did. Will the Scottish Government review its involvement in the world summit of regions and acknowledge the important work that Wales and other countries and regions are doing on climate change?

Philip Wright: My reply is similar to the one that I gave last week. We are keyed into what is happening. I mentioned the United Nations Development Programme last week, but that is only part of the process that is being run by other international fora. We are in close contact with our Welsh colleagues and we are also involved in the states and regions climate alliance, which is not dissimilar to the group that met at St Malo. The paperwork for the UNDP initiative is enormous. Absorbing that would take up a lot of our time, so we are sticking with our link to the states and regions, while keeping an eye on what is happening on the other side.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested in joint working. Wales has a fairly imaginative programme and it is clear that the Scottish Government wants to go further with legislation. Will there be a commitment to work alongside Wales and other areas in Europe?

Stewart Stevenson: We are happy to work with any other Administration in Europe and the world, preferably without having to make too many international air journeys. Wales has certain advantages in that respect.

Wales does not have our legislative competence, so it is in a somewhat different position. The Welsh also face some substantial challenges because of their industrial base, which will make things more difficult for them than they are for us. That brings me back to my point that each country must do what it can but we should not assume that every country can do the same.

Cathy Peattie: Why has the Scottish Government decided to cover the basket of six greenhouse gases rather than just carbon dioxide? How prepared is it for tackling the other gases?

Stewart Stevenson: That is an example of our responding positively to the consultation process. It was clear from the consultation process that the six greenhouse gases that are already internationally recognised should form part of our way forward and that our climate change bill should provide for the inclusion of any gases that we become aware of during the period up to 2050. That means that we are open to further extension if it is appropriate on the basis of scientific advice.

The scientific advice is clear that the impact of the gases can be substantial. There is a range of views on the impact of methane but, whatever view you take, the impact is many times that of CO_2. It is appropriate that we take account of those different gases. One argument that was put forward in response to the consultation was that, if we excluded from the targets some gases that are already known to have a greenhouse effect, there could be a displacement and distortion of activities to minimise CO_2 but increase an unmeasured greenhouse gas that is not covered by the target—methane is one example that several respondents mentioned. By including all the recognised greenhouse gases in the targets, we avoid that

distortion, which would make the numbers work but not affect climate change in the way that we are required to do.

Cathy Peattie: Given that legislation tends to change as it goes through the processes of the committees and the Parliament, are you minded to take on board evidence received by this or other committees about increasing the bill's scope to include other gases and climate change issues?

Stewart Stevenson: We will listen carefully to what the committee says. I would be slightly surprised if you came up with gases beyond those on the current list, and we would want clear scientific evidence of the impact of another gas if the committee proposed its inclusion.

In our response to the consultation, we pointed to a number of additional items on which we are still consulting. It would be expected that at least some of those items are likely to lead to amendments to the bill that the Government introduces. When the bill is published—as is the case with most bills—it is rather unlikely to be the final word. I want to engage constructively with everyone because the bill is bigger than a single political party or term of Parliament. It is for life.

Cathy Peattie: Absolutely—and the lives of my grandchildren.

The consultation on the bill expressed a preference for point targets rather than cumulative targets. Is that still the Government's thinking and, if so, what analysis has been carried out to reach that conclusion, and what was the outcome of the consultation in this regard?

14:00

Stewart Stevenson: If we have point targets that are sufficiently granular, in effect we lock ourselves into a cumulative target over the piece. That will be the effect of having those targets and of seeking to align those targets' timeframes with those of the UK Government—we do not have devolved powers over everything, so it is important that we align with the UK Government. Although we are going to go for point targets, the effect of that will be to lock the Administration into a cumulative target, even if that is not the language that we are currently using.

The Convener: On carbon targets, the consultation mentioned the concept of banking and borrowing from previous or upcoming carbon budgets, but the Scottish Government's response to the consultation makes no reference to that concept. Why not?

Stewart Stevenson: That is because we are not doing it.

The Convener: There will be no facility for banking or borrowing.

Stewart Stevenson: That is correct.

The Convener: A clear answer. My word.

Stewart Stevenson: I did just check with my officials.

The Convener: It is on the record now.

Is the Government developing any methodology that will account for emissions that are made overseas but which relate to goods or services that are consumed in Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: We have responded to the consultation by including international aviation and marine transport emissions. A move to a consumption-based measurement would have to happen all around the world or we would end up double counting certain emissions. Our approach has to be driven by evolving international standards. The bill will make reference to international standards and the need for us to accommodate, contribute to and respond to evolving international treaties and standards.

A consumption-based measurement might suit Scotland. Because we are a net exporter of electricity, the cost of producing the electricity would not be borne by our budget but by the budgets of the consumers of that electricity, who are south of the border. There are swings and roundabouts.

At the moment, our broad view is that to take a consumption-based approach instead of a production-based approach would not change the numbers much at the present time, although it might in the future.

The Convener: If the comparison were being made purely with our neighbours in western Europe, that might be the case. However, if a global comparison were made, I suspect that Scotland would turn out to be a fairly high-consumption country. In the longer term, intergovernmental negotiations might end up with a move towards a consumption-based model. Would the Scottish Government consider that to be feasible?

Stewart Stevenson: We intend that the legislation will be flexible enough to allow the Scottish Government to respond to international agreements that would result in the adoption of a consumption-based model.

The Convener: In February, you said to the committee:

"A strategic overview detailing how we might reach the 80 per cent target by 2050 will be issued before the bill is introduced. We will be able to give far more information then."—[*Official Report*, *Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 5 February 2008; c 427.]

Given that the bill is imminent, when will that overview be made available to the committee?

Stewart Stevenson: A report from AEA Technology will press that particular button and will be available before the bill is introduced. That is the first of a range of steps that we will take in that regard.

The Convener: The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth recently told the committee that the bill will now be introduced in early December. When—ahead of that time—can we expect to see the report? Can you give us a timescale and reassure us that we will have enough time to consider the contents of the report before we begin to consider the bill?

Stewart Stevenson: We expect the report shortly.

The Convener: That was another of those "Yes, Minister" answers.

Stewart Stevenson: I am not deliberately trying to be obtuse.

The Convener: You do not know when the report will be produced.

Stewart Stevenson: For a technical reason the exact day has not been confirmed. I know that it is within a few days of a particular date, which is quite soon.

The Convener: The proportion of our carbon emissions reductions that could be achieved through use of international credits was raised in the consultation, but I could not see a definitive answer in the response to the consultation. Has the Government considered that issue?

Stewart Stevenson: We are not currently specifying a proportion.

The Convener: Will the bill?

Stewart Stevenson: The bill will be published in early December.

The Convener: Has the Government considered sectoral emissions reduction targets? What analysis has been carried out to determine how useful sector-by-sector targets would be in achieving the overall Scottish target?

Stewart Stevenson: It is important that every sector contributes to the climate change agenda and to the reduction in CO_2 and other greenhouse gases. The current reporting has something like a plus or minus 6 per cent margin of error. When we disaggregate down to sectors, particularly some of the smaller sectors, the margins of error make it extremely difficult to understand what is happening. Rather than set sectoral targets, it is more important to ensure that we understand the effects of all the actions that have been taken in different sectors. Things will not be smooth in individual sectors and will depend on specific interventions. In many ways, sectoral emissions targets are economically inefficient because the various sectors will be able to make positive interventions at quite different points. To imagine that we can have sectoral plans that run in parallel does not accord with scientific advice.

The Convener: At the political level, is it more credible to say, "We can achieve the long-term, national target, so here's what we expect transport to do, here's what we expect buildings to do and here's what we expect electricity generation to do"? If we are going to say, "We can reach the 80 per cent target by 2050," do not we need to have an idea of how much can be achieved by each sector of the economy?

Stewart Stevenson: Clearly, as we develop the plan to achieve the 80 per cent target, we have to identify the steps that will make that contribution. In aggregate, they have to deliver on that aim. Our strategic overview will start to explore that.

The Convener: That will be soon.

Des McNulty: I appreciate the difficulties of a sector-by-sector approach when there is a large number of sectors, but most of the scientific evidence points to three areas in which significant changes must be achieved: electricity generation, energy efficiency in buildings, and transport. The last of those is within the minister's jurisdiction. The current rate of increase in transport-linked emissions is about 5 per cent. The most recent figures are, I think, for 2006. Before we can begin to make positive progress, we have to arrest the rate of increase in transport emissions. Within the timeframe of, let us say, between now and 2012, how could we turn back the current direction of increased emissions to the emissions levels of 2001-02? Are we looking too far into the future instead of implementing the practical steps that are needed to break the increase that is happening now and to get moving in the right direction?

Stewart Stevenson: At the risk of making a rod for my own back, I point out that I am responsible for building standards as well as for transport. The consultation that we are undertaking in that area shows our engagement in it. We now have some of the most ambitious programmes of investment in public transport for a considerable time and we will report on further proposals later this year. Since the Government came into office, we have seen consents for 1.5GW of renewable energy through 14 projects. That is against the backdrop that Scottish demand is about 6GW. Our potential for renewable energy is in the order of 60GW, so it is clear that we have a great deal to do. We will not deliver on carbon benefits in that area until we shut down the emitters: in other words, there will

be a period of investing in renewable energy, followed by a period of shutting down the emitters.

Des McNulty is correct that transport is a significant challenge. We saw a drop in private car usage and an increase in public transport patronage in the course of the year, which is a helpful indication that people are starting to engage. We will introduce plans to address that.

The Convener: How well developed is the methodology under the new legislation for accounting for emissions sources that are already covered by the European Union emissions trading scheme?

Stewart Stevenson: It is not our methodology—counting, recording and disaggregating into the nations of the UK are done elsewhere. We are content that that is so.

The Convener: The consultation response did not give me much more detail. Are you clear about how the emissions that are currently covered by the ETS will be accounted for under the Scottish target? Will they be accounted for under that target?

Stewart Stevenson: They are in. Philip Wright will expand on that.

The Convener: That would be helpful.

Philip Wright: This is a particularly complex issue that is challenging for all member states and for the EU as a whole. It is particularly challenging for the UK and Scotland because of the relationship between domestic emissions targets and the emissions trading scheme. The emissions that are covered by the traded sector will form part of the target, but when it comes to accounting for them, a particular approach will be taken because, in effect, those emissions are capped. We have the traded sector and the non-traded sector. We have careful arithmetic to do to capture and reflect the emissions trading regime that is imposed on us through the emissions trading directive. We are looking to ensure that the Scottish approach is in sync with that regime.

The Convener: Will some of the detail of those issues be covered in the strategic overview that is about to be published?

Stewart Stevenson: I referred to the AEA report, which is part of the development of the strategic overview and is the key first step. The strategic overview itself will come a bit later; it will come next year. The AEA report is the key—it is the first and most important step.

The Convener: I see. When was it decided that the strategic overview would not be available before the bill's introduction?

Stewart Stevenson: The AEA report is a strategic look at the subject. In the longer term, we are planning a bigger report that will be produced within the timescale of the bill and which will draw on other sources—it will draw together many of the consultations that are still to be completed. I had failed to take account of that in what I said previously. The important thing is the AEA report, which we will see shortly.

The Convener: You told us in February that the more substantive strategic overview would be available before the bill's introduction. That was an error—it will not be available before the bill's introduction. When will it be available?

14:15

Stewart Stevenson: We are looking for it to appear in early spring. We have referred to the AEA report in various ways internally, which is confusing, but that report is the key first step that will give you the information that will help you to understand the basis of our taking the bill forward.

The Convener: I do not want to take up too much time on the matter, as time is tight. Perhaps it would be helpful if you wrote to the committee to define clearly the remit and scope of those two separate pieces of work, and the timescales within which you expect to publish them.

Stewart Stevenson: I would be happy to do that.

Rob Gibson: On annual targets and the mid-point target, is there a scientific, as opposed to mathematical, basis for choosing a target of reducing emissions by 50 per cent by 2030?

Stewart Stevenson: We set ourselves a significant challenge by choosing the figure of 50 per cent for the mid-point. That figure is clearly on the relatively smooth curve to the 80 per cent reduction by 2050 target. We are mandated to provide a complete review of whether we have achieved that reduction by 2030 in order to show that we are on target to deliver on the 80 per cent reduction target by 2050. We have, of course, drawn on what the committee on climate change has said and on other scientific information. We chose the figure; it was not delivered to us by others.

Rob Gibson: Indeed. Would it be possible to amend the mid-point target upwards if the scientific advice showed that that was required?

Stewart Stevenson: It is not a limit—it could be amended upwards.

Rob Gibson: It is recognised that the mid-point target will require average annual emissions reductions of more than 3 per cent. That issue has been commonly debated. Could the committee see analysis on that before the bill is introduced?

Will the AEA report, for example, deal with that matter?

Stewart Stevenson: It should be remembered that we have sought to produce reporting periods that are aligned with United Kingdom reporting periods, and to provide 10-year notice of what requires to be done. Therefore, we will see the progress that we need to make within the context of the targets that we will set. In any event, it is clear that many changes in our carbon emissions will come in steps rather than in a smooth curve—for example, the shutting down of a significant coal-burning power station will make a huge change on the day it is shut down. However, we can provide a tactical note on the trajectory if the committee would find that helpful.

Rob Gibson: That would be helpful. It would be useful to have, before the bill comes to us, an analysis of what will happen so that we can interrogate the bill carefully.

Will the bill include a requirement for year-on-year emissions cuts of at least 3 per cent?

Stewart Stevenson: The bill will set budgets with annual components so that we will be able to see exactly what we will have to do and give maximum notice. It is not a matter of the Government doing things on its own; every person and all enterprises in the community have to be part of the process.

Rob Gibson: I have been leading up to an issue that I asked about earlier in the year. I asked the Government why it takes 20 months for Scottish greenhouse gas inventory emissions figures to become available. Has the Government done any work in the meantime to speed up that process? Are you able to collect data more quickly on gases other than CO_2 in that fashion?

Stewart Stevenson: We have done some work. However, it is a complex task and our data have to be disaggregated from the United Kingdom data, which entails further work. We want to get the figures as quickly as possible. If the data are received the best part of two years behind the actual event, then responses to an adverse situation will be two years late, so the response will not be as good as would have been looked for. That would be embedded in the system, so there is a key interest in shortening the time involved.

Obtaining data is complex: it is not just a question of sticking a probe up into the atmosphere and measuring CO_2. We have to consider the activities in our economy and estimate their effects. We are looking into ways of developing provisional views that will help us to get moving before the final definitive figures become available.

Rob Gibson: The committee has talked about various groups that collect information on climate change, and there is also the research infrastructure known as ICOS—the integrated carbon observation system. It is based in several European countries including Scotland, at the University of Edinburgh. How embedded is the Government's thinking when it calls on such groups? Do you use some kind of filter when accessing information from primary research bodies? It is taking you 20 months to get the data. Even though you mention obtaining provisional figures, the process must be speeded up enormously.

Philip Wright: The minister spoke earlier about respecting international protocols. We are keen to be able to demonstrate comparisons with other countries. It would be nice to go away and use the methods that various institutes have developed, but those methods would not necessarily accord with international practice. We are committed to using the UK greenhouse gas inventory, which accords with international practice. We want to disaggregate the data as far as is possible, bearing in mind that Scotland is not a contracting party. We always try to respect international protocols. Lots of other organisations have ideas on how to obtain better data more quickly, but the work that we do has to be placed in an international context.

Rob Gibson: ICOS is funded by the European Union, of which we are a part.

Philip Wright: Using ICOS's work would not be the same as respecting a UN protocol. However, ICOS can feed into the process.

The Convener: I have a quick supplementary question on the 20-month time lag. The Government is coming up for its 20-month anniversary, so it would be fair to say that any changes in emissions from now on will take place pretty much on your watch.

As soon as the Government was elected, we were told that a target of 3 per cent per year, as a rule of thumb, is an existing policy target. We were told that the legislation would take some time, but that the policy target was in place. Every time the committee has asked whether that is still the case, we have been told that it is. I ask again whether that is still the case. If you have set the policy target, you must be confident that it is achievable, so why not just legislate for it now?

Stewart Stevenson: When members see the bill, they will see exactly how we intend to deal with targets. I hope that what I have said makes it clear that we are setting ourselves ambitious and challenging targets. In particular, we are responding to the consultation by introducing an

interim target. I use that phrase because it is the phrase that we plan to use in the bill.

By aligning our reporting periods and our efforts with the timetables that the UK bill provides for, we will get a true picture—not just of what happens within the devolved competences of this Parliament, but of what happens within Scotland as a whole. That will be important.

The Convener: Does the 3 per cent per year target for Scotland as a whole remain a policy target?

Stewart Stevenson: If we are to arrive at 2050 with an 80 per cent reduction, we must deliver on a trajectory of that order.

The Convener: Okay. Will you confirm that the 2030 target is based on the same 1990 baseline?

Stewart Stevenson: The baselines are the same. For clarity, however, I should say that the baselines for some of the six additional gases—sulphur hexafluoride and so on—are slightly different. Owing to the inadequacy of the information on such fluorinated gases, the internationally recognised position is that the 1995 baseline is used.

The Convener: But the baseline across all those will be the same—

Stewart Stevenson: Yes. I simply wanted to ensure that I was not misleading the committee—

The Convener: Heaven forbid, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: We are in complex territory, as I am sure you are aware, convener.

The Convener: Indeed.

Cathy Peattie: On what scientific or political basis was the decision made to include international aviation and shipping in the targets?

Stewart Stevenson: First, the UK committee on climate change suggested that that should be done and, as we have said, we will seek scientific advice. I agree that there is a political element to the decision. That shows leadership: other Administrations recognise that government has to take account of those matters.

It is not as if the figures are unavailable: the work has been done that makes them known. If we also know that international aviation and shipping contribute to climate change, we should take account of them and include them in our targets. That is the basis on which we included them. We expect to continue our current work on disaggregating Scotland's international aviation and shipping emissions and we hope that the data on that will be published shortly.

Cathy Peattie: Obviously, I agree that international aviation and shipping are important to climate change, but I am confused by your response. How can the Scottish Government measure them? How robust are the figures on emissions that can be attributed to international aviation and shipping originating from Scotland? Also, is the Scottish Government confident that meaningful emissions cuts in the international aviation and shipping sectors are possible or is concern being expressed that cuts in other sectors will have to be made to allow those sectors to be included? How will all this be done? What are the implications for other sectors in Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: We will take advice on the methodology. A range of options are available to us.

I do not want to pre-empt the approach that may be taken—in fact, the suggestion that I am about to make is probably not the approach that will be taken. The addition of international aviation to the existing commitment on domestic aviation could simplify the way in which the effect of aviation is measured. It would mean that we would no longer have to consider whether fuel is being loaded into an aircraft for a domestic or an international journey. If international aviation is included, the fuel is simply being loaded into an aircraft for a journey that starts in Scotland—end of story.

That approach could turn out to be a technically simpler way to do things. Given that reporting is done at UK level as a memorandum item under United Nations conventions, the information is probably already known, in any case.

Cathy Peattie: I am not convinced. What about the implications for other sectors?

Stewart Stevenson: I think I am now being asked how to ensure that aviation makes its contribution to the climate change agenda.

Cathy Peattie: Absolutely.

14:30

Stewart Stevenson: The question is, of course, different to asking whether aviation should be included. Given the broad recognition that international aviation—all aviation—has a carbon impact, there is a sense that it should be inside the tent. Aviation is something that we have to deal with.

With our active support, the UK Government has ensured that aviation is included in the European Union emissions trading scheme, which is a start, but we have to work with the aviation industry to ensure that it makes its contribution. What can the aviation industry do? Turboprop planes, rather than jets, being used on short-haul routes more or less halves the amount of fuel that is burned per passenger, which provides a range of options. In addition, fuel is not burned if aircraft are towed out

to the take-off point on the runway instead of taxiing out, which is a significant aspect at some airports. A range of things can be done without creating huge differences. The aviation industry must also work on technologies that change the effects of aviation.

We also want to ensure that we get the necessary investment in, for example, high-speed railways so that many journeys that are currently undertaken by air can be done by other means. There must be a series of different developments to ensure that the aviation industry contributes to reducing greenhouse gases.

Cathy Peattie: You have addressed aviation, minister, but I also asked about shipping. Given Scotland's dependence on shipping for exporting and so on, how do you deal with emissions targets for shipping? I understand what you say about aviation, but I am less clear on shipping.

Stewart Stevenson: Shipping is probably a less understood and less developed area. Marine transport fuels are not yet as free from contaminants as other fuels are, so we will have to change that over time.

Aspects such as steaming speeds are significant. Broadly, if a ship's steaming speed is reduced by 1 knot, it can save 10 per cent on fuel. The consequent extra steaming time can often be recovered by improving the quality of the land-side infrastructure so that turnaround times are reduced. The total time can be maintained if the time for getting stuff on and off a ship is reduced when the steaming time is increased. The marine industry will have to consider such issues, while continuing to refine engines and hull designs. Frankly, it should also have better weather forecasting, so that ships do not sail into storms, which increases fuel consumption.

An official has just passed me a note that says the International Maritime Organization is considering how emissions can be reduced.

Broadly, even if we do not currently know how to deal with a particular sector or sub-sector, that should not prevent us including it in the targets, if we recognise that there is an emissions cost from the sector's operation. Arguably, it is important to include it in the targets to create more pressure and to ensure that we engage and deal with it and that others contribute. If a sector is left outside the targets, probably nothing much will happen.

Cathy Peattie: I agree with including the aviation and shipping sectors in the emissions targets, but I am still not convinced about how we can measure their emissions in Scotland and what we can do about them. Clearly, we will have to continue to monitor that.

The Convener: Des McNulty can ask a brief supplementary question.

Des McNulty: I go back to aviation and maritime transport emissions. I do not think that anybody would argue against including aviation and maritime transport emissions in the targets in order to reduce emissions. However, given the uncertainties that the minister has just listed and the problems with measurement and definition, my concern is about whether including aviation and maritime emissions would dilute other more clearly defined targets. Can you assure us that the inclusion of aviation and maritime transport emissions in the targets will not make it easier to go easy on other target areas because the aviation and maritime issues are not sufficiently defined? I am sorry to raise the question, but I hope that you understand the mathematics behind it.

Stewart Stevenson: I hope I do, because I suggest that the effect will be the exact opposite of what you describe. Any uncertainty will be dealt with by reporting on aviation and shipping. It is important that those areas are brought inside the tent, so that we can respond to that uncertainty by creating higher degrees of certainty. If we leave aviation and shipping outside, the uncertainty will continue for longer than it otherwise would. It is self-evident that the difficulty of achieving reductions in those areas—partly because we do not have the methodology to measure and understand them—increases pressure on other sectors. Equally, bringing aviation and international shipping inside the tent will create an environment in which pressure can be put on them to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

Des McNulty: I suppose my—

The Convener: We have to move on.

Charlie Gordon: The bill will require you and your successors to report progress on reducing emissions and adapting to climate change. Will such reporting be to bodies such as the UK committee on climate change, as well as to the Scottish Parliament? How will the reporting mechanism work?

Stewart Stevenson: You will see the exact data when the bill is introduced, but, in broad outline, ministers will be required to lay before Parliament a report containing a number of headings under which we will have to report. The report will enable the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and other committees of Parliament to test and engage with ministers. I reject utterly the suggestion that I will have successors.

Charlie Gordon: I dare say that you have one or two putative successors in this committee room.

The Convener: Before 2050, perhaps.

Charlie Gordon: Tomorrow is another day.

What sanctions will the bill include, should targets not be reached?

Stewart Stevenson: In the consultation process, various people suggested that if the Government does not deliver, it should fine itself, which is a rather strange approach. If progress is not being made, it is much more important that the Government shows that there is a remedy. The Government should be accountable to Parliament in the normal way and should demonstrate that the proposed remedy is effective and will deliver. At the end of the day, the parliamentary process of holding ministers to account is the only way in which we will make progress. In the nine or so years in which the Scottish Parliament has been around, every political party has been a minority, so there is never likely to be a lack of interrogation to hold ministers to account.

Charlie Gordon: From your answer, it seems that the remedies will be implicit, rather than explicit, in the bill.

Stewart Stevenson: If I gave the impression that implicit remedies would be an adequate defence for a minister before this or any other committee, I should correct it at once. Remedies must be absolutely explicit. I am certain that committees and Parliament as a whole will challenge ministers and explore issues with them to ensure that if remedies are implicit, rather than explicit, they are quickly made explicit.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): What work has the UK committee on climate change done to date on behalf of the Scottish Government?

Philip Wright: At the moment, we operate as part of the partnership that lies behind the UK Climate Change Bill, so we are engaged with the work of the UK committee on climate change. It is an independent committee, but we meet it to exchange information and to enable the committee to learn about the Scottish, Welsh and English situations. That engagement is under way. There is provision in the UK bill for the Scottish ministers to seek advice on the Scottish target directly from the committee. We can draw on that provision when enacting the Scottish climate change bill.

Stewart Stevenson: Clause 36 of the UK bill requires the committee on climate change directly to provide us with answers to any questions that we ask. A wee while ago, I met Lord Adair Turner, the chairman of the committee, which I found very useful. He is now moving on. As the minister, I will be party to the appointment of a new chair of the committee, as I was to the appointment of Lord Adair Turner.

Alex Johnstone: Given the position so far, is the Scottish Government confident that the committee on climate change will be able to respond suitably to particular Scottish circumstances and that requests will be dealt with as a priority when necessary?

Stewart Stevenson: The committee on climate change is required to respond to Scottish circumstances. If your question is whether it has the scientific knowledge and capability to do so, I have to say that we have no evidence to suggest otherwise at this stage. The committee is scientifically rather than politically driven, which has huge advantages, because it makes it difficult for any Administration—the UK Administration, ourselves or any of the other devolved Administrations—to reject its conclusions other than on clearly political grounds. We are comfortable with the nature of the committee.

We are not putting all our eggs in one basket, however. We expect to bring forward provision for a Scottish committee, but we are content, for the time being, to rely on the ability—which is entrenched in the UK legislation—of the UK committee to respond to our needs.

Alex Johnstone: Would it be fair to say that you have confidence in the UK committee on climate change?

Stewart Stevenson: As of today, yes.

Des McNulty: What duties does the Scottish Government envisage that it might be necessary to place on public sector bodies under the Scottish climate change bill, and what powers are likely to be contained in the bill to allow duties to be imposed?

Stewart Stevenson: The 32 local authorities have already signed up to a common declaration on climate change. We hope and believe that public bodies are already planning to and will respond to the climate change agenda. However, we expect to include in the bill a provision to enable the Government to take a stronger lead with public bodies to ensure that the appropriate contribution is made.

Des McNulty: Will that be in the form of encouragement rather than constraint?

Stewart Stevenson: Encouragement will always be the more effective option. We must all be in this together. It simply will not work if we are dragging a reluctant bride up the aisle to the climate change wedding. Persuasion is far preferable to coercion. Nevertheless, we will have the necessary powers to ensure that we meet Scotland's climate change targets. I hope that they are never used.

Des McNulty: Some bodies, such as Scottish Water, are required to take account of

sustainability. That was the kind of measure that I was thinking about.

Stewart Stevenson: Scottish Water is already considering siting renewable energy sources on many of its new plants. The new designs for waste water treatment plants and so on are already beginning to incorporate renewable energy technology. That serves two purposes. Scottish Water has one of the biggest energy bills of any enterprise in Scotland—we can all help by turning the tap off when we do not need to leave the water running. Scottish Water has a fundamental opportunity to do something about that, so there is an economic driver. Scottish Water is also aware of the fact that it is part of the natural environment in delivering a first-class product and that it must respond to the climate change agenda. The chairman and chief executive of Scottish Water have discussed that with me on several occasions, both formally and informally.

Des McNulty: Let us move on to energy efficiency. The Scottish Government proposes that the bill will include a requirement on the Scottish ministers to produce an energy efficiency action plan that will be regularly reported on, reviewed and updated. When will the first such plan be produced and what will the reporting mechanisms be?

14:45

Stewart Stevenson: Given that we are currently engaged in a consultation on the subject, it would be ill-mannered of me to anticipate the responses to that consultation and the analysis of them by setting too firmly in tablets of stone what will happen. Clearly, domestic and non-domestic buildings are a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and a major source of energy consumption in Scotland, so we need to make progress on energy efficiency, therefore we have included it in the bill. We are committed to ensuring that building standards are updated in that respect every year over the next few years in response to the Sullivan report. However, as perhaps only 1 per cent of our buildings will be replaced each year, we will also need to address issues with the existing stock. That is precisely the sort of thing that we expect the action plan to cover.

Des McNulty: Can we be given an approximate date or indication of when the first plan will be produced?

Stewart Stevenson: Not at this stage, Mr McNulty.

The Convener: I am afraid that we are pretty close to the end of the available time, as we must move on to the next evidence-taking session. We had hoped to ask a number of additional questions, including on the energy efficiency issues that Des McNulty asked about, waste reduction, recycling, muirburn, the energy performance of non-domestic buildings, renewable heat and the recent consultation on the Scottish forest estate. We will write to the minister to seek further detail on the questions that we had hoped to raise.

Before we close, let me just ask whether it is likely that any further additional topics will be included in the bill, either when it is introduced or during its scrutiny phase. Will new topics be introduced over and above those that I have just mentioned?

Stewart Stevenson: The bill as introduced should not have any surprises in that regard. Clearly, given that we will respond to some of the consultations during the bill's passage, the Government might propose some amendments at stage 2.

Officials have, I believe, offered the committee the opportunity of a briefing session—whether on the record or off the record is for the committee to decide—so I am anxious to make officials available to the committee to ensure that it can cover many issues that it might not otherwise be able to cover. We are happy, of course, to respond to the committee's questions. We want to have a high-level engagement with the committee so we will seek to make ourselves available in whatever form is appropriate or useful to the committee.

The Convener: That is appreciated.

Finally, at the risk of being given the final answer of merely "soon", can we be given further detail on Mr Swinney's comment last week that the bill will be introduced "in early December"? Is there a projected date?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

The Convener: What is it?

Stewart Stevenson: Ah, well, that is another question. "Soon" or "early December" is a good description of when the bill will be introduced.

The Convener: We look forward to that and to hearing more from the minister in writing. We will certainly take into consideration the offer of a briefing with officials. I thank the minister and his colleagues for their time.

I suspend the meeting for a few moments to allow the changeover of witnesses.

14:48

Meeting suspended.

14:51

On resuming—

High-speed Rail Services Inquiry

The Convener: Our second item of business is our inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services, on which we will hear from several panels.

I welcome the first panel, which comprises Garry Clark, who is the head of policy and public affairs at Scottish Chambers of Commerce; Owen Kelly, who is Scottish Financial Enterprise's chief executive; Ron Hewitt, who is Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce's chief executive; and Iain Duff, who is the Scottish Council for Development and Industry's chief economist and policy manager. Thank you for joining us. As I told the previous panel, we are packing a lot into today's meeting, so we will launch straight into questions. I hope that you will all have the opportunity to contribute on several issues that we raise.

What would be the major benefits for Scottish businesses of a high-speed rail network for the UK that linked Scotland with English conurbations, including London, and with Europe? Who would like to kick off?

Garry Clark (Scottish Chambers of Commerce): I will kick off. Such a network would have several benefits. Our members view an effective transport infrastructure in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom as an essential part of doing business. We certainly view high-speed rail as a key step forward for the future. The rail service network is operating at or near its capacity. Unless we do something to improve that capacity, we will end up with a railway system that was designed in the 19th century remaining the major form of public transport in the 21st century.

High-speed rail would be advantageous for business by reducing travel times and providing the ability to maintain productivity while travelling—it is far easier to do that when travelling by train than by air. High-speed rail would have knock-on benefits by taking some of the strain from domestic air services in the United Kingdom and allowing domestic air travel networks to focus more on areas that might not be touched directly by high-speed rail, such as Inverness and Aberdeen.

Developing existing rail capacity in the United Kingdom would have advantages. Capacity in the existing rail network could be opened up and freed to work alongside the high-speed rail network. A shift away from much of the existing domestic air travel between Glasgow or Edinburgh and south-east England would have considerable environmental benefits and would be a major contribution to tackling climate change in the years ahead.

Those are some of the benefits that we expect.

Owen Kelly (Scottish Financial Enterprise): I agree with everything that Garry Clark said. In addition, the symbolism of a high-speed rail network would be important for retaining Scotland's international competitiveness and ensuring that it is properly perceived as fully connected to the European single market and the great cities elsewhere in Europe. There is a real opportunity to send a powerful message about that.

We are well accustomed to large infrastructure projects in the UK taking an extremely long time and going through enormous amounts of analysis. A high-speed rail network would have all the hard-edged business benefits that Garry Clark described, but there is also a strong argument that it should be developed as a single imaginative leap rather than through a long, incremental process of analysis.

Ron Hewitt (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce): We represent 2,300 businesses across all sectors and consider the project to be a real opportunity. The committee has heard about the immense congestion that has a huge impact on our connectivity. Scotland is on the periphery of Europe, and it is important that we have access to the important European markets. In financial services—as I am sure Owen Kelly can tell the committee in detail—it is critical that there is a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between the two centres of Edinburgh and London. From a tourism point of view, our major markets in the south of England find it increasingly difficult to access Scotland as the networks become more congested. Coming by road is now almost impossible for many people because of the congestion.

High-speed rail services would provide a real opportunity to compress distance and contribute immensely to improved productivity. Those of us who have travelled back and forward by plane know that there is little opportunity to carry on with business when travelling that way, whereas going by train provides a great deal of opportunity to do so, because it provides almost uninterrupted time. High-speed rail services would therefore afford Scotland a real productivity opportunity as well as bring immense economic benefit.

Iain Duff (Scottish Council for Development and Industry): Even though we envisage that the network would come only to the central belt, there would also be benefits for other parts of Scotland. We would have to improve the other modes of transport, including the existing rail services, to connect to the high-speed network, but that in

itself would benefit the rest of Scotland in the ways that have been described. The network is therefore a project for the whole of Scotland. It would shorten the distance between us and our major competitors and other places that we want to get to. All the benefits have been covered.

The Convener: To a large extent, the case for high-speed rail is being framed in climate change terms—getting traffic out of the skies and on to the rails. However, if it is regarded as an alternative to aviation instead of an addition, is there really such a substantial business benefit?

Ron Hewitt: I do not consider high-speed rail services to be an alternative; I consider them to be an addition. However, they would bring enormous benefits in tackling climate change in a host of ways. They would provide an opportunity to travel from, say, Glasgow to Manchester by rail rather than by car. From a business point of view, there is a benefit from having that uninterrupted time.

We need choices. Unfortunately, we do not have many direct air routes to parts of the world where we want to do business. Many of my members do business all over the world, but they are required to fly through Heathrow. We must have both opportunities: aviation is necessary for long-haul journeys and appropriate connections to parts of the country, but the proposed high-speed rail network would increase the opportunities dramatically. Because the network would provide options, it would only increase economic benefit.

Iain Duff: The key is complementarity. I do not think that any of us sees it as an either/or situation. We want to increase the people of Scotland's choices when travelling around the country and further afield. Given the capacity constraints on various modes that have been mentioned, we want increased connectivity across all modes. We started by considering any extra capacity that a high-speed rail line would provide, rather than any trade-offs.

15:00

The Convener: So from the point of view of the panel, reducing aviation is not part of the picture.

Ron Hewitt: It is part of the picture. In our airports we have slots. For example, 58 per cent of all flights at Glasgow are to and from Heathrow. Those slots could easily be used for long haul, which is of increasing importance to Scottish business. Although it is not an either/or, aviation is critical.

The Convener: Does the panel envisage any financial costs or other negative impacts from the development of a new high-speed rail line?

Ron Hewitt: No. The project would create a huge number of jobs and new business opportunities. The WS Atkins report showed a 2:1 benefit from a £31 billion spend, which could be described as a bit of a no-brainer. Everyone else in Europe benefits from high-speed rail. I lived in France and saw the TGV's enormous contribution to not just social and cultural life but business. That is what we want, and we have been denied it up until now, particularly here in Scotland.

The Convener: Do any other panel members see any negative impacts or disbenefits from the development of a high-speed rail service?

Owen Kelly: Do you mean separately from the capital costs? Obviously, it would cost a considerable sum of money.

The Convener: I mean the cost to business, or any physical or economic impacts that might not be wholly positive.

Witnesses *indicated disagreement.*

The Convener: I am happy to accept no as an answer.

Rob Gibson: There is a letter in *The Herald* today from the chambers of commerce and others, supporting the third runway at Heathrow. It has been stated that the CO_2 produced between Heathrow and Brussels—to use a distance that is roughly the same as the distance between Scotland and London—is 160kg per passenger by air, compared with 18kg for a return journey by rail. What priority does the business sector place on a high-speed rail network? You said that it would be complementary. Does it have more priority than a third runway at Heathrow?

Garry Clark: Our priority is to have a strong and effective transport infrastructure in the UK that will help to drive our competitiveness internationally. We see high-speed rail and aviation playing a full part in that picture. Flights between Inverness and Heathrow have been cancelled, so we would want capacity at Heathrow to be expanded to benefit the north of Scotland. Inverness and Aberdeen are obvious examples of cities that will probably continue to have a significant need for air travel to London. Flights from there would utilise Heathrow, and there would be less reliance on the domestic air routes between Heathrow and Glasgow and Edinburgh in the central belt. We would look to the high-speed rail network to maintain connectivity with our existing transport infrastructure, whether that be rail or road.

Owen Kelly: I agree. Ron Hewitt's point is crucial. If the journey time between Edinburgh or Glasgow and London was sub-3 hours, you would be mad to fly—no one would do it. Aviation now involves extended journey times because of security and so on and it is hard to envisage those journey times diminishing any time soon. Sub-3 hours—as far below 3 hours as we can get—

would make it a straightforward choice for many people, and that would free up routes. I am one of the signatories to the letter in *The Herald*, and the point is this one about complementarity.

From a business point of view, we want to see as many transport options as possible. We do not necessarily want them to compete with each other for a particular route, but we want to ensure that there is as much coverage as possible, so that as much business as possible can be carried out.

Ron Hewitt: The importance of the runway at Heathrow is that it would enable a lot of visitors to arrive from destinations worldwide, many of whom, we hope, would be in transit to Scotland's tourism industry. We need all that complementarity.

Rob Gibson: There are many supplementary arguments about climate change. Is business changing its behaviour in relation to the amount of travel that is done and whether travel is absolutely necessary? It is difficult to get a straight answer from you. You say that yes, you want to have more options, with a high-speed railway too, but you still want to have as much of the infrastructure for air. In a climate change era, that is not possible. Are you changing your travel habits?

Owen Kelly: My straight answer to that is yes. However, that in itself will not make the scale of change that is required. Business will still be done and globalisation will still happen. For Scotland to compete internationally, we need to be sure that we can carry out business in that environment. You asked whether companies are changing their behaviour. The companies that I deal with certainly are, but I doubt whether that can ever be enough of a step change to counteract the more sizeable factor of globalisation.

Rob Gibson: Perhaps with banks becoming public sector bodies we might have more power over changing their functions.

There is an assumption that there will be high-speed rail between Glasgow and Edinburgh and London. It has been said that those of us who live outwith that area, in particular in the north, should look to aircraft to fulfil the function from Inverness. Do you agree that the question is not just about high-speed rail going beyond Manchester? It must go beyond Glasgow and Edinburgh, too.

Iain Duff: The various studies that are being carried out could sensibly consider whether there is a business case for that. You would have to consider the travel times and whether they would make enough of a difference to cause a shift. Everything that I have read suggests that the main route will be to the central belt. Regardless of whether the high-speed line goes further north, the existing rail and road infrastructure should allow people north of the central belt to link in with the route, so that they can get the benefits of it. It is important that the high-speed line shrinks distance, that we use it as a catalyst to improve intra-Scotland connectivity, too, and that we see what benefits there are. If analysis is done of the demand for the route to go further north and a business case is made for that, we would not be against it. It is just that the analysis that we have seen tends to show that the central belt is as far as the line could sensibly go.

Rob Gibson: Is that because—

The Convener: We will have to move on. I call Alex Johnstone.

Alex Johnstone: How do you envisage the structure of high-speed rail in Scotland? Will it prioritise the east coast or the west coast, or will both be prioritised in the long term?

Garry Clark: We would envisage high-speed rail initially linking up the key population centres and city regions in the United Kingdom. That would mean linking Glasgow with Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and London. The exact routing, planning considerations and so on are arguments for down the line, but we would want to link up those major cities as an initial spine through the UK.

Alex Johnstone: So you see it as a single high-speed line that links London to both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Ron Hewitt: Yes.

Garry Clark: Yes.

Owen Kelly: That would be our priority, for the obvious reason that London's financial services are of global importance.

Des McNulty: In France and other European countries, high-speed rail initially developed on single routes because of the economics. In France, the first route was Paris to Lyon and the system then developed around that. I presume that similar economics would apply in the UK. The choice is not really whether the line should run to Glasgow or Edinburgh; it is how the line should run from London to the midlands and the north of England. Given that the initial phase of any plan will focus on getting the crucial part of the line into London and its first destination, how should Scotland position itself?

Garry Clark: It is clear that the part of the line that goes into London will be the crucial part of the route, but it might also be the most difficult because of planning considerations and so on. It will be important to learn the lessons of the channel tunnel rail link. From a Scottish perspective, we have argued that a sensible approach would be to build the line like a bridge and start at both ends. The initial step north of the border would be to link Glasgow and Edinburgh

and the initial step south of the border would be to link London and Birmingham. The crucial spine of high-speed rail within the United Kingdom would then be developed.

Des McNulty: In economic terms, does that mean that there would be two projects? Would we have a Scotland-end project and a London-end project? How would that work in financial terms? What would be the respective responsibilities of the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government in that context?

Iain Duff: We state in our submission that, although the Scottish Government will fund the project, if it is to get the required equity, it must be regarded as a UK project. We might want to start building multiple sections rather than just starting in Scotland and London, because that would help to get the project built as quickly as possible. It would not be acceptable for Scotland just to wait until it arrives. We want Scotland to get the benefits as early as possible.

The Convener: I see heads nodding.

Ron Hewitt: On the connectivity between Glasgow and Edinburgh, a great deal of work has been done to encourage collaboration between the two cities. They are only a short distance apart, but the journey takes a ridiculously long time. The real way in which to connect them is to shrink the distance. That would give us a mega-region that could compete globally and attract real investment to Scotland. It is a vital part of the process.

Charlie Gordon: At present, we have three train links between Glasgow and Edinburgh, and when the line via Bathgate is reopened soon, we will have four. Your view is that we should build a fifth line for a high-speed rail link. Do you comprehend that even a very high-speed train would find it difficult to achieve a journey time to London of less than three hours if it called at both Glasgow and Edinburgh on the way?

Ron Hewitt: No. The work that was done on a maglev—magnetic levitation—system showed that the journey time between Glasgow and Edinburgh would shrink to 17 minutes and the total journey time to London would be two and a half hours. I am not suggesting that we must have a maglev system—the traditional TGV would do me perfectly well—but I do not think that the journey time would be more than about two and a half hours.

Charlie Gordon: That will bear further investigation, but I seriously hae ma doots that the train could call at Glasgow and Edinburgh and still get to London in less than three hours.

Moving on, the development of a UK high-speed rail network is likely to cost tens of billions of pounds. Would it, rather than alternative transport projects with similar benefits, be the best use of finite transport funding? In response to questions and in correspondence, some of you have mentioned a third runway at Heathrow. Where does a high-speed rail network sit among your transport priorities?

15:15

Ron Hewitt: First, such projects take some time to deliver, which is why the link is very much in the equation now. The truth is that none of the projects is mutually exclusive. If a project offers a 2:1 cost benefit ratio, it is a great investment anyway.

We must ensure that the infrastructure, which has been neglected for many years, particularly here in Scotland, is put in place so that we can compete internationally. Currently, we are being dramatically constrained by our transport infrastructure.

Owen Kelly: The high-speed rail network is a pretty high priority for us. You rightly make the point, "Are you not just asking for more and more?" In one sense, we are not asking for anything; we are offering a business view. However, if we are serious about competing internationally, the rail project is the kind of thing that we will have to do—one only has to look at the situation in many of our competitor locations to see what is required.

Charlie Gordon: I am looking for a hard-nosed business view. There are two alternatives: a third runway at Heathrow or a high-speed rail link between Scotland and London. The question is simple: which is the higher priority?

Ron Hewitt: Your reluctance to embrace the private finance initiative is significant. If we really embraced PFI, we could do all those projects.

Charlie Gordon: I will come on to how we fund the rail project shortly. I wanted to know what your priority is. I will move on, convener.

The Convener: You were about to get an answer.

Charlie Gordon: Was I indeed? I hope that it was going to be a straight one.

Owen Kelly: You always get a straight answer from the SFE. This cannot be seen as a matter of either/or. In respect of overall infrastructure investment across the UK, it is probably wrong to see those two transport projects as either/or options; we see them as being complementary.

Charlie Gordon: Perhaps politicians are more hard nosed than business people.

Do you have any views on how such a network might be financed? You are ahead of me, Mr Hewitt: what role should the private sector play in funding and development?

Ron Hewitt: It seems strange that we are sitting here with very few major projects on the go because we have decided not to use PFI. Many different types of public-private partnership project could be used and it is time that we got on with dealing with such major infrastructure projects, which can only be delivered by some form of PPP.

Charlie Gordon: Parliament will debate the Scottish Futures Trust later this week. Do any other witnesses have a view on the matter?

Garry Clark: We would expect investment in a project of this nature to be led by the public sector with a significant contribution from the private sector. Private sector funding has gone into projects around the country, such as the Glasgow airport rail link and the Heathrow express. There are potential opportunities for businesses.

We have been impressed by two things in the reports that we have read. First, the economic benefits of the rail project would be proportionally higher for Scotland than for the rest of the United Kingdom. The economic benefit to Scotland would be something like £7.3 billion, compared with about £60 billion in the United Kingdom. Secondly, there has been quite a bit of enthusiasm for the project from airports around the country. Last week, I spoke to Newcastle airport about the issue. It would be delighted for the high-speed rail line to have a stop at or near Newcastle airport. It is important to link in those vital parts of the UK's transport infrastructure. It is perhaps not unreasonable to think that we might be able to explore some funding options that include the private sector.

Charlie Gordon: Other than the cost, what other barriers to the development of a high-speed rail network exist?

Iain Duff: One of the first issues that we must tackle is planning. We must get engagement—we are trying to do that here and I think that people are doing the same in England—and ensure that the benefits for all communities, throughout the country, are properly explained. We want to get through the planning system as efficiently as possible, without upsetting too many people—if that is possible in this day and age. Planning is a big problem, especially in the conurbations.

Charlie Gordon: Can we get the project through the planning system faster than a third runway at Heathrow?

Ron Hewitt: The recent changes to planning law in Scotland give us some hope. I hope that the project would get the public's vote, because of the huge economic benefit that it would provide.

Iain Duff: There have been changes to the way in which major infrastructure projects are dealt with both here and in England. The project could be designated as a national project, if it secures the backing of the appropriate Parliaments. We have wanted to see that approach for some time. Once the project is included in the national planning framework and the equivalent structure in England, it can be fast tracked. The appropriate checks and balances should be in place, but the new arrangements should help projects such as this. If projects are delayed, the cost goes up.

The Convener: The project may get through Parliament faster than the third runway at Heathrow.

Rob Gibson: I return to the issue of funding. Do you agree that if the £2 billion that we have paid over the odds for many hospital and school projects had been available for public investment in transport, we could have started the project by now?

Ron Hewitt: It is for you to know whether that is the case—I do not. I am not sure which projects you are referring to.

Rob Gibson: I am talking about PFI projects.

Ron Hewitt: Many public buildings would not be in place if it were not for public-private partnerships. There may be some negatives, but there are a lot of positives.

Iain Duff: The issue is, what can Government afford within a sensible timescale, and which partners are appropriate if we are serious about delivering projects within that timescale? In times such as these, big infrastructure projects have a role to play in getting the economy on to the straight and narrow; the public sector should take the lead on such projects. Private sector and other partners will see the benefits that should come from them and will align themselves with Government's objectives. The national planning framework is about aligning objectives so that all of us get the benefits as quickly as possible.

Des McNulty: You seemed to suggest that the project's cost benefit ratio was better for Scotland than for the UK as a whole. Can you quantify the difference more clearly?

Charlie Gordon asked about the benefit of high-speed rail relative to the proposed third Heathrow runway. I will put the question in the context of Scottish transport projects. Scotland has a certain amount of money to spend on transport infrastructure. A number of projects, ranging from the Borders railway to the Aberdeen western peripheral route and a replacement for the Forth road bridge, are on the stocks. Where does the

group that you represent see the balance of advantage as lying, from a purely business point of view? On what do you base your position?

Garry Clark: Atkins's report on high-speed rail identified the economic benefits to Scotland as being in the region of £7.3 billion, against a total construction cost of about £31 billion and a total economic benefit of more than £60 billion. That is the answer to your question in money terms. The figure is made up of time saved, increased productivity and so on.

In terms of where the project stands among Scottish transport priorities, I am sorry if my answer seems similar to what some of my colleagues have said before. We view the key priority for transport infrastructure in Scotland as being to link our cities and city regions and the various economies throughout our country effectively. The key elements of that include the Forth bridge, the Aberdeen western peripheral route, the M74 completion project, the upgrading of the M8 from Baillieston to Newhouse, the A9 and the A96. They also include high-speed rail, which is very much part of the solution. That is where we want to go; how we get there is a matter for parliamentarians rather than businesspeople to decide.

Owen Kelly: I do not want to fall into the trap of sounding as though we want everything. The key issue for me is international competitiveness. You gave a list of different projects in Scotland. If your starting point is that by maintaining and enhancing our international competitiveness we can grow the economy and generate further revenues for Government and so on—if you buy into that vision and idea of economic growth—we would favour the high-speed rail link and the Forth bridge ahead of other projects.

Iain Duff: I have sat in front of many of these committees over the years and have heard similar questions from Des McNulty about our priorities for big transport projects. The answer is always that we want them all. In the STPR and the national planning framework there was no ranking for projects, but we would like to see something like that. Analysis can be done if projects are considered against economic, environmental and other, social objectives, so that we can try to give them a ranking, and the Scottish transport appraisal guidance is useful in that. There are ways of enabling everyone to have an input—as they had in, say, the STPR—to get a communal ranking, so that it is not just our opinion against others' opinion. That is the best approach, but it is difficult because we do not conduct the analysis on a day-to-day basis.

There are certainly lots of projects that we feel would impact well on our economic performance and the absence of which is holding us back. If the proper analysis is done, that could help everyone to know what the priorities are.

The Convener: We need to move on to other questions.

Cathy Peattie: What changes would need to be made to the current Scottish rail network to maximise the business benefits of any high-speed rail network?

Garry Clark: Iain Duff made the point that if we are considering a high-speed rail network that, at the Scottish end, links Edinburgh and Glasgow through the central belt, we need to ensure that the rest of Scotland can benefit from the increased capacity as quickly and easily as possible. That means establishing links to Inverness and Aberdeen, at the very least, and ensuring that the Scottish rail network is connected to the high-speed rail network, just as the high-speed rail network should be connected to our air and road infrastructure. In that context, we have also considered whether we should have some kind of linkage somewhere in the middle of Scotland, round about Stirling—

Cathy Peattie: Or Falkirk.

Garry Clark:—or Falkirk, to facilitate easy connection to Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee.

Ron Hewitt: In that regard, it is a pity that we lost the link between Edinburgh and the airport, which would have allowed us to complete the link to Aberdeen. There was a great misunderstanding over that. The project was really nothing to do with Edinburgh. The real benefit would have been enjoyed by people much further north than Edinburgh. It is a pity that the opportunity of that link was removed.

Owen Kelly: Ron Hewitt suggested that the high-speed route could run from Glasgow through to Edinburgh, which is still a possibility. Failing that, if one of those two great cities were to become the terminus, the Edinburgh to Glasgow link would become the number 1 priority for Scotland's rail infrastructure.

15:30

Iain Duff: I made the point about routes to the north, but the existing east coast and west coast main lines should not be neglected, because they connect to cities and would provide an alternative for people who did not want to use the high-speed line or could not use it for whatever reason. The lines should be on the agenda and should not be regarded as secondary to the high-speed line.

The Convener: You are suggesting that the high-speed line would be priced at a premium rate.

Iain Duff: It ought to be fairly affordable, but we would expect a price differential. However, it would

be interesting to see the pricing structure if the line is to compete with low-cost airlines.

Pricing aside, the east and west coast main lines will connect to places that the high-speed line would not connect. The high-speed line cannot stop everywhere, or the benefit would be lost.

Alex Johnstone: The witnesses have made it clear that they think that a high-speed rail link between London and Scotland would be valuable to the Scottish economy. I agree, but from the Government and politicians' perspective there is more to be gained than just the benefit to the economy. Two major benefits are the opportunity to increase modal shift, which you mentioned, and the significant environmental benefit of reducing air travel. You are considering the benefit to the economy overall, but do you accept that the need for a significant environmental impact will be a major part of the Government's decision making?

Iain Duff: The forthcoming Scottish climate change bill will contain significant and challenging targets, as the committee has heard. The modal shift that a high-speed line would encourage would help us to meet those challenges. I think that everyone is aware of the challenges that we face—business is certainly aware of them. Everyone must play a part in achieving climate change targets, by changing how they travel and do business. We need to encourage existing modes of transport to be more environmentally friendly, as well as provide more environmentally friendly alternatives. People will see environmental and economic benefits—the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In addition to the economic benefits, the environmental benefits are a fairly major plank of the argument for a high-speed line.

Ron Hewitt: Business takes environmental issues very seriously. We must be careful to avoid giving black balls to particular sectors. Aviation is mistreated in some respects, because an immense amount of technological development is going on, on route planning, engines and fuel. The intention of everyone who operates in the sector is to bring about dramatic improvement, for everyone's benefit. We must remember that businesspeople live in this environment too and want exactly the same things as everyone else wants.

Alex Johnstone: When the witnesses were asked straightforwardly to choose between a third runway at Heathrow airport and high-speed rail links to Scotland, most of you were careful not to suggest that one project was more important than the other. You said that you wanted good connectivity to be the transport priority. However, the environmental commitments that Governments north and south of the border are about to enter into are such that the issue is not so simple. It might come down to a choice between investing in high-speed rail to bring environmental benefits and going ahead with the third runway at Heathrow. Do you accept that Government's priorities are different from those of the business community and that Government might be thinking in terms of an either/or approach, even if you are not doing so?

Ron Hewitt: I hope that its thinking is not so obviously different, as I think that we share those priorities for both environmental and economic reasons.

Our take on the third runway at Heathrow is much more about international connections and the opportunity to encourage further investment. At the moment, many people in this room no doubt avoid Heathrow because the slightest bit of fog there slows everything down because there are so few runways—it is not that the planes cannot land. Amsterdam airport has three times the runway space, so businesspeople tend to avoid Heathrow and stop off and spend their money at Schiphol in Holland or at Frankfurt. Similar considerations arise for people who would otherwise divert their journey to Britain were it not for such problems. We must be careful that we do not turn off an enormous part of global business by making it so difficult to do business in Britain.

The Convener: It is a while since I have heard such optimistic projections for the development of new aircraft technology. Perhaps the business community will support an amendment to the climate change bill to outlaw the existing fleet over a set timescale. That might be helpful.

Charlie Gordon will move us on to the next question.

Charlie Gordon: We may have touched on this already, but the next question is on the possibility of early development of a Scottish leg of the high-speed rail network to link Glasgow and Edinburgh with the current east coast or west coast main lines. We have heard a number of views on that, but I take it from the answer that was given a few moments ago that people favour a brand-new high-speed rail line up the middle of the UK to Scotland's central belt. Are the existing east coast and west coast main lines incapable of adaptation to a high-speed line?

Garry Clark: We certainly believe that a new, dedicated line is the solution to high-speed rail in the UK. Such a line would have two benefits, in that it would not only create a dedicated high-speed line linking Scotland to the south-east of England and onwards to Europe but free up capacity on the existing east coast and west coast main lines to allow for increased commuter services and better connectivity between the stations on those lines. Depending on design, a

dedicated high-speed line could potentially act as a relief for those lines during engineering works. However, as has been pointed out, the line needs to be commenced both in Scotland and south of the border. That is absolutely what we are after. We see Scotland not as the end of the line for high-speed rail but as very much an integral part of a high-speed rail system within the United Kingdom.

Charlie Gordon: Do panel members have any views on whether the stations for any high-speed rail network should be located in city centres or on so-called parkway stations on city peripheries?

Garry Clark: We have certainly looked at the possibilities. Given the desire for multimodal connectivity, we would like to try to ensure that, in so far as possible, any high-speed rail network linked in with the United Kingdom's air transport network and road network.

Owen Kelly: If, as we discussed earlier, short-haul flights are to be replaced by high-speed ground transport—we have not touched on this yet, but we need not dwell on it too much—we will need to deal with the ancillary connections around London. If people are taking the train and then the plane, they will not want to travel to Kings Cross only to have to schlep out to Heathrow on the underground. There must be connections that make such transfers work if we are to realise the benefits.

Charlie Gordon: As I am sure the panel appreciates, those answers turn the traditional advantages of rail on their head. Most of our major rail termini are in city centres, but most of our airports are, by definition, out of town. Any facility that is located out of town tends to generate more car trips. Might there be potential downsides?

Owen Kelly: I was not suggesting that you should move away from the notion of city centre to city centre travel for any high-speed link. For the sort of businesses that I deal with, such connections are probably still a priority. However, I agree with the point that was made about how different modes of travel interconnect.

If something sizeable is built outside a city, of course there is a risk that that will attract car journeys. However, I have in mind the connection between Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris and the TGV network.

Charlie Gordon: Is there perhaps a slight tension between the views of Mr Clark and Mr Kelly? If the main rail termini are to remain in city centres, but we also want to call at airports, we will hardly have left the city centre and built up high speed before we have to stop at the local airport. That will make the sub-three-hour journey quite challenging.

Garry Clark: We will have to consider the siting of railway stations carefully. What was appropriate for the siting of main railway stations in the 19th century may or may not be appropriate in the 21st century.

Our objective is to ensure the fast and efficient movement of people throughout the United Kingdom. We could do that by having dedicated new stations that link directly with airports, by linking with existing infrastructure, or by constructing new infrastructure in city centres, but we would have to consider where the economic benefits would lie. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce are not tied hard and fast to any view on where any station should be sited. However, stations should connect with existing modes of transport, which means that they should connect with the airports and the road network.

Charlie Gordon: The answers seem to reflect different interests within the different business communities that are represented here.

The Convener: We will certainly have the opportunity to explore the issues with future witnesses.

Cathy Peattie: The Scottish and UK construction industries would benefit from the development and construction of a high-speed rail network. However, questions arise to do with expertise and manpower capacity to undertake such a development. If the capacity does not exist, what needs to be done to ensure that a workforce is available?

Ron Hewitt: We have some real skills here in Scotland. Unfortunately, they are not always used, and if we are not careful they could disappear. Many project management skills are required for a project such as the present tram works, and some pretty clever people are involved in that work and are building up their skills.

We have a proud heritage of engineering skills in Scotland, and many engineers could add great value to the high-speed link project and could lead in its development. Such a project would be just the thing to keep skills here in Scotland.

Cathy Peattie: But developers and major industries are already saying that skills in engineering and planning are in short supply. We might have really good plans, but we might not have the companies and the workforce to implement them. How can we deal with that problem, which we know exists right now?

Ron Hewitt: The answer, of course, is to have a booming economy in which we can afford to employ apprentices and not lay them off because construction has come to a standstill.

We have an opportunity to get back to the basics. If we want people to do jobs, we have to

ensure that they have the skills and the training. Fortunately, we have a network of universities and colleges that can provide the skills. The high-speed link will be a long-term project and it will be a long time in the planning. It should not be beyond us to put the two things—the project and the skills—together.

Iain Duff: That is a key point. We can go back to the national planning framework and consider some of the big projects that we want. In their submissions, all the witnesses have spoken about the crisis in skills, especially on the construction and engineering side. We require a good stream of big infrastructure projects to put certainty into the construction industry and give people who are choosing their career the certainty that a good career is here for them in Scotland.

We can attract people in, of course, but we want benefits in Scotland for the Scottish people. We need a good, smooth process, certainty in the construction and civil engineering industries, and certainty in decision making so that people will know about the sort of career that they will have in those industries. We have struggled with that. There are certainly problems that we need to deal with, even in delivering our existing plans. As Ron Hewitt said, it is a matter of getting the flow and process through so that we can come together and address the issue.

15:45

Des McNulty: Last week, we heard from the Water Industry Commission for Scotland and representatives of the water industry that the way in which that industry's processes have been organised, with expenditure of £400 million to £500 million each year over a four-year period and significant advance planning, has delivered major efficiencies in outcomes. I had heard that before. Should we be thinking about such an approach in the transport sector? Is there an equivalent approach? Rather than proceeding on a project-by-project basis and having long lead-in times, is there a better way of managing transport investment? Can we look at the pipeline of delivery in a different way, perhaps along the lines that delivery in the water industry has evolved?

Iain Duff: There would certainly be merit in such an approach. For our civil engineering sector members, there is lumpiness and uncertainty about whether projects will go ahead, how they will be delivered and timescales. I return to what I said earlier: there should be a good flow, certainty and a plan. The national planning framework should prioritise projects so that they are properly mapped out in a plan that everyone can buy into and which allows everybody to know, by and large, when and where projects will be delivered. The whole industry could then align itself with that plan to provide the required resources. We have suffered in Scotland and perhaps in the UK as a whole through proceeding on a project-by-project basis with no bigger strategy. However, I think that we are moving towards a bigger strategy, and there are STPR, national planning framework and infrastructure plan documents that can add to that.

Delivery in the water industry does not always match planning. That industry has a plan, but things come along that cause problems.

The various parts of the system need to come together much better. If they do, it will be much more productive and efficient.

Ron Hewitt: I am a non-executive director of Scottish Water Business Stream, so I have a little understanding of Scottish Water. Scottish Water's recent success is due to two things: the right people are now involved in the industry, and the right investment is being made in it.

Charlie Gordon: Such modesty.

The Convener: I have a final question for the members of the panel, although it is on a subject on which they may not have formed a view yet. If a political decision is made to back the development of a high-speed rail network, which body should be responsible for progressing that project? Should it be the Scottish and UK Governments, Network Rail or a body that is specifically set up for that purpose?

Owen Kelly: As you rightly predicted, we have not yet given much thought to that. However, if we could address the project as a transformational, visionary project, I think that the UK and Scottish Governments would have to progress it.

Ron Hewitt: I endorse that view.

Garry Clark: Absolutely.

Iain Duff: Government leadership is important.

The Convener: It is nice to end with clear answers.

I thank all of you for the time that you have given to answering our questions. You can follow the committee's progress as we hear evidence from other witnesses; we will publish a report in due course.

I suspend the meeting for a few minutes for a comfort break and to allow a change of witnesses.

15:49

Meeting suspended.

15:57

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome members back to hear our second panel of witnesses for our inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services. I welcome Anthony Hughes, who is Glasgow City Council's transport policy and planning manager; Chris Day, who is from the transport section of city development at the City of Edinburgh Council; Ron Culley, who is Strathclyde partnership for transport's chief executive; and Trond Haugen, who is a rail specialist at the south east of Scotland transport partnership.

I thank you all for joining us. You will know that we are packing a lot into today's meeting, so we will go straight into questions rather than hearing introductions. I hope that you will have the opportunity to respond to as many questions as possible.

I will open with a general question. What would be the benefits for Scotland of the development of a high-speed rail network for the UK or of a separate Glasgow to Edinburgh line, which some of the witnesses on the first panel mentioned? Who would like to kick off?

Ron Culley (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport): I suspect that the benefits have been well rehearsed; we were sitting in the public gallery and heard the earlier witnesses. The economic benefits would be substantial, as would be the environmental benefits.

SPT has debated four times high-speed ground transport between the east and the west as well as the north and the south. The partnership is concerned about proposals from the Conservative party's shadow secretary of state for transport to bring high-speed ground transport as far north as Leeds.

In a previous life, when I was Scottish Enterprise Glasgow's chief executive, I was well aware when chasing mobile inward investment that the main reason that people frequently gave for moving to a part of the British isles other than Scotland was poor transport. If we rebalanced the United Kingdom's economy by taking the white heat of the economy down in the south-east and not bringing it north to Scotland, but stopping at Leeds, I fear that Scotland's problems of peripherality would be exacerbated. We are concerned to ensure that the network is fully conjoined, as previous witnesses said.

Trond Haugen (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership): In the SEStran regional transport partnership strategy, we mention the importance of the city region. In order to strengthen the city region and derive maximum economic benefit, there must be exceptionally strong connectivity between Edinburgh and Glasgow and with external areas. In particular, we cannot continue to depend on air travel. High-speed rail transport is an important issue with regard to connections between Edinburgh and Glasgow and between those cities and the rest of the world.

16:00

Anthony Hughes (Glasgow City Council): As has already been said, we are, geographically, on the edge of Europe, and we do not want to make the problem of our peripherality any worse. Central Europe is connecting itself rapidly via a high-speed rail network, and I am sure that, if a high-speed network in Britain stops short of Scotland, we will miss out. That is a huge consideration.

We ought to remember what can happen with the price of oil. There has just been a hike in the oil price, which has since dropped again. We do not know what will happen in the future. If we are dependent on oil-powered, rather than electric, transport to get people and produce to and from Scotland, we could end up at a serious disadvantage. That is another economic reason to press for a high-speed rail link.

Chris Day (City of Edinburgh Council): I agree with what has been said. However, I add that the capacity of the existing lines between London and Scotland is gradually running out, regardless of the substantial work that has been done on the west coast main line, and it might run out entirely in 10 to 20 years. We must address that issue. One of the ways of overcoming the problem would be to provide high-speed rail to cater for the long-distance market.

As Tony Hughes said, high-speed networks are being developed across Europe, and there is a significant danger that Scotland will not be part of that, much to its disadvantage. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that places as far away as Morocco are contemplating high-speed rail. Given the proposed tunnel under the Strait of Gibraltar, one can envisage a scenario in which it would be possible to travel by high-speed train from London to Casablanca, but not from London to Scotland. That illustrates the issues about connectivity that we will have to face over the next 20 to 30 years.

The Convener: That project sounds like it might cost even more than the new Forth road bridge.

Alex Johnstone: Having said that a high-speed rail connection to Leeds could threaten the economy of central Scotland, might it be reasonable to progress that argument by suggesting that, if high-speed rail made it just across the border to Edinburgh and Glasgow, it could have a damaging effect on the rest of the

economy in Scotland, rather than the positive effect that was being claimed by the previous panel?

Ron Culley: It is fair to say that the engine-room of the Scottish economy is the Edinburgh-Glasgow conurbation; there is not much doubt about that. Anything that can be done to drive that would be of benefit. Right now, the absence of an agglomeration of the economies of Glasgow and Edinburgh is holding us back. If we could bring together the financial services sectors and other knowledge-based industries of those two cities, we would be able to punch above our weight in comparison with the larger conurbations on the European mainland. In an ideal world—I refer you to the evidence that you heard earlier—linkages between Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and so on would be preferable. However, that would involve a political decision down the line, because the cost would be not inconsiderable.

Anthony Hughes: If we do not get a line to Scotland, Aberdeen and Inverness will suffer in any case. In comparison with what would happen in that situation, they would benefit from high-speed rail coming as far as the central belt.

In my submission, I argue that there seems to be a case for a sort of central spine route, which might take the high-speed line as far as Stirling or Perth, which would be relatively easy. That would considerably shorten the journey times to points further north.

The Convener: Do panel members foresee any negative financial or other impacts on the public or private sectors from the development of a high-speed rail network?

Chris Day: We were clear in our submission that the economic benefits are well established, although they might require further work. In the previous parliamentary session, there was discussion of figures provided by WS Atkins that showed a £7.3 billion enhancement to productivity in Scotland and a total benefit of £62 billion across the UK as a whole. Those figures perhaps need fleshing out, but they are well established.

There is perhaps a bit more of a debate around the environmental benefits. However, I am clear that the carbon footprint of a passenger on a high-speed line is considerably lower, by a factor of about 10 or 15, than that of somebody who travels by air. We should not forget the considerable environmental impact of the construction process. However, if we take the view that I hinted at in my previous remarks that we will need to build additional railway lines anyway, we will incur that environmental cost. My personal view is that railway lines generally tend to integrate better with their environment than many other forms of transport do.

Rob Gibson: This issue has been partly touched on, but let us expand it a little further. What would be the required extent of any future UK high-speed rail network to maximise the benefits to Scotland? For example, would it be a single east coast or west coast line, would both be required, or is there another model? What cities would need to be served by such a network?

Trond Haugen: Ideally, the network would have both west and east lines. However, we must be realistic because the resource may not be available for that. From Scotland's point of view, the important aspect is that both Edinburgh and Glasgow are linked with London—that is key. The debate is then about what regional cities should be part of the network in order to benefit Scotland. That will require further discussion and studies. Certainly, the key criterion must be that both Edinburgh and Glasgow are linked to London. There has been talk of a three-hour journey time, which is generally regarded as the standard to aim for in order to make an impact on the airline industry and have more than 50 per cent of the market.

Ron Culley: SPT's view is that we must first determine what technology we are talking about. It has been argued that the use of maglev technology would permit far higher speeds and allow all the key cities to be connected by one route, instead of having an east or west line. Therefore, the preferred technology must first be established.

Rob Gibson: We will have to explore that further at another time. However, we must take into account environmental impacts. In that respect, what priority should be given to the development of a high-speed rail network relative to other necessary transport infrastructure? I think that there is a link.

Anthony Hughes: As far as Glasgow City Council is concerned, we would perhaps put two other projects slightly ahead of a high-speed rail network. The first is the crossrail link, which is a simple link-up of the current network and is our number one priority. Building the crossrail link will cost a lot less than building a new high-speed rail line. Secondly, as I hope members will know, we are keen on a sort of fast-link system or a type of pre-light rapid transit tram or tram/bus arrangement in Glasgow. Those are our local priorities.

After that, high-speed links to Edinburgh and south of the border are the priority. This will probably come up later in your questioning, but we take an overall environmental-climate change approach. We are trying to reduce the climate

change impacts of transport across the board, which is about reducing people's car use and use of flights—if they can be replaced, as domestic flights can be. High-speed rail scores very highly in that context and therefore has priority.

Trond Haugen: It is universally recognised that there has to be investment in the rail industry because we are running out of capacity locally in Scotland's central belt—in Glasgow and Edinburgh—and the same goes for the larger picture in relation to links between Scotland and England. We will shortly run out of capacity, so there must be investment. We need to add a wee bit extra to make the links high speed and thereby increase the benefit to a much greater extent.

Ron Culley: The trade-off that Theresa Villiers implies is the option of doing away with a third runway at Heathrow. If we can address inter-city travel by means other than air, we could use those slots for international travel rather than for local air connectedness within the United Kingdom. The savings that would be incurred as a consequence of not building a third runway would be considerable and could offset the cost of the high-speed rail technology.

Trond Haugen: I hasten to add that such slots could be used for flights to Aberdeen and Inverness because they also need better connectivity. If that cannot be delivered by high-speed rail because of their distance, they must be given better connectivity by air.

Rob Gibson: Okay. We have a fourth point of view from Chris Day.

Chris Day: I would be loth to get into an exact ranking, with priorities 1, 2, 3 and 4, but the importance of high-speed rail has shot up in the political, transport and academic worlds—I was going to say, "At a remarkable speed"—within the past couple of years, and it is certainly on the agenda now in a way that it was not previously.

A high-speed rail network would be a project of national importance, whereas, from the City of Edinburgh Council's point of view, there would be other projects of similar importance, but they would be local projects. It is important to progress projects on a national scale as well as local projects, within the constraints of available finance, obviously.

Rob Gibson: Given the constraints of time, I think that we had better move on.

The Convener: In that case, does the panel have any views on the potential location for high-speed rail stations? Should they be at the edges or in the centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh? You will be aware that that point was discussed in relation to the whole network by a previous panel of witnesses, but I am asking about Glasgow and Edinburgh specifically.

Ron Culley: Again, I suspect that the answer would depend on technology. SPT has commissioned three pieces of research that will report in January, unfortunately. I am not sure whether that will be sufficient time to pass the reports to the committee, but we will happily do so.

The research is being led by the University of Glasgow, the University of Southampton and the University of Plymouth and an organisation called Geoeconomics Limited. We are asking them to appraise demand for high-speed transport between Glasgow and Edinburgh, to consider the wider economic benefits that would accrue as a consequence of high-speed transport, and to look at terminals in Glasgow. We are looking at four possible destinations at the moment: above Queen Street station car park, above Buchanan Street bus station, at West Street subway station, and at Bridge Street.

I mentioned that the technology is important because it is difficult to conceive of how we would get high-speed ground transport into the inner core of Glasgow without significant use of tunnelling, if conventional rail were to be used. It is claimed that trains that use maglev technology are much more nimble: they can turn in tighter circles than high-speed rail and can climb gradients. That means that it is possible to have an elevated track that can follow roads and rails without lots of land purchases, which perhaps deals with some of the planning issues that earlier witnesses mentioned. If that is the case, it would be possible not only to bring a route into the inner core of Glasgow but to connect it with other modes of transport.

16:15

The Convener: I presume that the study into maglev that you mentioned is considering the technology's gargantuan energy consumption and how that would look from the perspective of the UK as a whole, rather than just how to get into Glasgow.

Ron Culley: It is considering that, but we must compare apples with apples. Maglev travels faster than high-speed rail services and, accordingly, uses greater amounts of electricity.

The Convener: It also has to lift the vehicle all the way along rather than just pushing it.

Ron Culley: Indeed.

Trond Haugen: SEStran stresses slightly more strongly the importance of the city centre as a trip destination on the outward journey and a trip origin on the return journey. We should try to avoid recreating the situation that we have with air travel, which is that passengers always have a fair

distance to go to the city centre. The priority must be to get to the city centre. That is not to say that we should not consider parkways where they are relevant, but the general rule is that we should try to access the city centre. That has been the case in Europe—I cannot think why it should not also be so in Scotland. To have high-speed links all the way into the cities creates more difficulties, but it is not necessary for the last few miles of track to be high speed, as long as the gauge is right to enable the train to access the city centre. That is the crucial part.

The Convener: I take it that there is general consensus among the witnesses on city-centre locations for the terminals.

Chris Day: We are certainly sold on that. The essential point is that we have had 20 or 30 years of planning in which it has been assumed that the way forward for development in urban areas is to build shopping centres, leisure centres and other developments out of town. We have now realised, and it is generally accepted, that we have neglected our city centres and that we need to enhance their role.

City centres also tend to be the places that are best connected to public transport. Terminating at Glasgow Central station and Edinburgh Waverley solves the problem of onward connections to the rest of Scotland because, with the Airdrie to Bathgate link, most stations in Scotland will be connected to one or the other. To build a parkway station would be to create the circumstances of 10 or 15 years in the future that we are now trying to remedy for airports. To me, the answer is to go where public transport is now, rather than build an out-of-town station and try to solve the problems that that would in turn create.

The Convener: We have received some evidence to suggest that development of a high-speed rail network would remove the supposed need for airport expansion. Comments have been made about capacity expansion at Heathrow, and Glasgow and Edinburgh airports also look to be included in the national planning framework for Scotland, as some people hope they will be. Do the witnesses have views on that, bearing in mind the comments that some of them have made on high-speed rail services being an alternative to aviation rather than an additional mode?

Ron Culley: If we had a blank piece of paper, it would be lovely to think that we could connect Glasgow and Edinburgh cities and airports so that they became one terminal rather than two. The conundrum is that we have the Glasgow airport rail link and must accept that we have to live with another intervention that is being planned and built between the centre of Glasgow and the airport, as we speak. The ideal connectivity is unlikely, given the public investment that has already taken place on GARL.

The Convener: What do you think about the additional runway at Heathrow and the capacity expansion at Glasgow and Edinburgh airports that some are calling for?

Anthony Hughes: I do not want to comment on Heathrow because I do not know to what extent that runway is necessary for international or domestic travel. For domestic travel, we are clear that rail—not air—is the way forward.

One slight issue has not yet come up. I do not have an answer to it, but it is worth mentioning. To some extent, the benefits of a link from city centre to city centre—which we are claiming for rail as opposed to air—disappear when people are going for onward flights because they have to get to another airport anyway. There may still be a requirement for onward travel connections to international flights from hub airports. What we really need to outlaw in some way or another—taxation may ultimately be necessary to address this—is the use of aircraft for flights just between UK town and city centres. That happens an awful lot at the moment.

The Convener: Would I be right in thinking that that would be more of an issue at the London end of a Scotland to London high-speed rail link than it would be in Glasgow or Edinburgh?

Anthony Hughes: That is the case. I am sure that second runways at Glasgow or Edinburgh could be put back if there was a high-speed rail link.

Trond Haugen: Also, the further from Heathrow you get, the less dependent you are on using Heathrow as an interchange. However, many of the proposals include a high-speed rail to link into Heathrow, which will also be a crucial issue in measuring whether there should be a third runway or a high-speed rail link. The high-speed rail link might be part of the solution for Heathrow itself.

The Convener: Does the panel have any views on other environmental benefits that might be achieved through a high-speed rail link? One example might be a modal shift not only from aviation but from road travel.

Anthony Hughes: I am certain that if we get a high-speed rail system there will be some transfer from car travel, but we also have terrific potential for freight transfer. Assuming that there is new construction and we are not just upgrading the existing line, there will be capacity on three lines between the north and the south. That will mean additional capacity for freight on the existing network, but we should also consider the possibility for the north of England and Scotland of using the high-speed route for freight.

I suspect that a brand new high-speed route will have more capacity than is needed purely for passenger traffic and, if the high-speed link is a new construction, the opportunity exists to build it to a gauge that can take big containers. It could also be built slightly larger to allow roll-on, roll-off lorry haulage. I understand from colleagues in the freight industry that that could be of benefit in getting goods from Scotland to the east coast ports as part of the system.

The Convener: The benefit would be in the physical capacity rather than the journey times.

Anthony Hughes: Yes, principally. Road freight operates using just-in-time delivery. If it operated without having to fit into slots at night between engineering works, the benefit that rail could have for freight is reliability: it runs to a timetable. At the moment, we rely on just-in-time delivery, and we all know that one lorry blowing over on the M6—which happens more often than one might think—closes a whole network and delays a load of goods traffic. That would be unlikely to happen if the freight went by rail, on whichever network.

Ron Culley: I suspect that there are two modal shifts in prospect. The first is from air to a high-speed rail link. I understand that 70 per cent of all journeys between London and Brussels are now made on high speed 1, rather than by air.

Secondly, I am sure that the numbers will, as we close in on decisions, be interrogated more substantially than they can be at this distance from a decision, but figures from UK Ultraspeed suggest that 40,000 cars per day will be removed from the M8 if there is a high-speed connection between Glasgow and Edinburgh. That is clearly something that we would applaud.

Trond Haugen: It should also be remembered that there would be capacity released on the existing network, which is where the transfer from car to local rail will be a crucial factor. That will be especially relevant to the southern part of the UK, but also to Edinburgh and Glasgow, if there are improved rail connections between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Chris Day: A lot depends on exactly how the network is configured. We often fall into the trap of thinking in terms of lines, which is not necessarily the same as thinking about the services that use those lines for part of, or all, their journeys. If we think of a high-speed network as also providing connectivity between Scotland and the large conurbations in the north of England, there is an argument that it would be of greater advantage to Scotland and northern England and that we should not worry too much about getting to and from London. If we do that we begin to see that the modal shift from car journeys would be much greater than for the London to Scotland connection, on the basis that a larger number of people drive from Manchester and Newcastle to Scotland than drive from London to Scotland. An appealing train service that provided such connectivity would hit the car-use modal share more, whereas a very long-distance service would have a greater impact on the air-travel modal share.

Charlie Gordon: Mr Culley said—perhaps in anticipation of this question—that he will make the results of the academic studies that have been commissioned available to the committee in January.

Ron Culley: Happily.

Charlie Gordon: What are your views on the possible early development of a Scottish leg, linking Edinburgh and Glasgow, of a UK high-speed rail network? How might that tie in with the current east or west coast main lines?

Trond Haugen: I am happy to elaborate on that. Regardless of whether the network comes up on the east or the west, we must ensure that both Glasgow and Edinburgh benefit. If it comes up on the east coast, there must be a continuation to Glasgow; if it comes up on the west coast, one leg must go to Glasgow and one leg must go to Edinburgh. We should try to utilise either of those options to improve the connectivity between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

I feel that the best option would be to consider the southern end of the central belt, which is less populated—in fact, it is hardly populated at all. We could utilise both the existing intercity lines down to Carstairs and build approximately 10 miles of new track to link them up. That would provide a potential high-speed link between Edinburgh and Glasgow that would serve a high-speed line coming up from England on either the west coast or the east coast. We should start thinking about that now so that we can get the planning right.

Ron Culley: There will be a significant opportunity if the Glasgow to Edinburgh leg is considered as an early leg—if not the first leg—of the network. If it were the first leg, there would be an advantage in the location being in the central belt, as we could start talking about the headquarters, signalling and other skills being located in Scotland rather than down in the south-east of England where, I repeat, the economy is currently imbalanced.

Anthony Hughes: I agree with Trond Haugen. I am considering the matter completely separately. The idea of the line coming up somewhere in the Carstairs or Motherwell area and branching from there has a lot going for it. To its advantage is that it would allow people to travel separately from both Glasgow and Edinburgh straight down to London and minimise travel time from either city. In such a

system, there could be four trains per hour, including one per hour direct from Edinburgh and one per hour direct from Glasgow that would not have to stop anywhere en route. That would be a super-fast service. What we have read suggests that the travel time would be two and a half hours, rather than three, which would make the service even more competitive with air travel.

As I hinted earlier, the other advantage of a high-speed rail network is that it could act as a collection point for trains north of the central belt. The line as far as Perth would be capable, without much upgrading, of accommodating trains running at fairly high speeds. They could certainly get as far as Stirling, although a new high-speed connection between Stirling and Motherwell or Carstairs might be needed. A system of that type would have the most potential to benefit Scotland as a whole. South of the central belt, we have come down firmly in favour of new construction, rather than upgrading the west coast or the east coast main line, because of the disruption that that would cause. We have all learned lessons from the work that has been done on the west coast main line.

16:30

Charlie Gordon: I want to press Ron Culley on the issue of a possible Edinburgh to Glasgow maglev line. Can you explain the thinking behind your apparent support for such a line, given the recent cancellation, because of cost inflation, of what was to have been Europe's first commercial maglev project, linking Munich to its airport?

Ron Culley: There is no question but that using maglev technology would be a bold step. I accept that there are arguments to be had about power consumption. However, there was a time when a man or a woman—a man, I suspect—stood on a beach in Panama, looked at the towering mountains in front of him and said, "Let's build a canal." Sometimes we must be bold about the technologies that we use. In my view, there is a compelling case for maglev; we should at least feel the weight of the case for it. That is the broad consensus of colleagues in SPT. When I attend conferences on these matters, I am concerned that there is conservatism in the rail industry—people understand steel on rail, which works well and has always been used. The United Kingdom in general, and Scotland in particular, should explore the case for maglev. Scotland could have the eyes of the world on it for its brashness in making use of that new technology.

Chris Day: I will liven up the panel by disagreeing. We are significantly sceptical about the claims that have been made for maglev. I will not bore the committee by going over the 11 points that we make in our paper, which are based on research by two respected academics working on the railway industry, called Roger Kemp and Roderick Smith. They raised a number of issues, especially in relation to proposals for maglev.

At the end of the day, you must decide whether you want to be bold—as Ron Culley suggests—and run the risk of everything going pear shaped. It is not possible to build part of a system using maglev—once that commitment is made, there is no going back. Mr Gordon mentioned the Munich scenario. Perhaps the most high-profile system that is running at the moment is the Chinese maglev. The Chinese definition of high-speed rail is slightly different from ours, but over the next few years China plans to build 12,000km of high-speed line. It plans to build 160km of maglev line—just an extension of what is already in place. Members may want to draw some conclusions from that.

The Convener: Do other members of the panel have views on the issue?

Trond Haugen: SEStran's strategy states that maglev should be considered. It is being considered as part of the Greengauge 21 study, but I would not like to comment beyond that.

Cathy Peattie: How should the development of a high-speed rail network be financed? Should local authorities or regional transport partnerships have a funding role?

Ron Culley: We would love to be able to finance it. A recent article by Theresa Villiers suggested that it would cost £20 billion to build a high-speed rail line between London and Leeds. The presumption is that it would cost £30 billion to build a line between London and Scotland. Those figures are borne out by the work of UK Ultraspeed, which has, I understand, made a submission to the committee. They are substantial amounts of money and I, like earlier witnesses, suspect that such plans would be difficult to afford without private sector investment. The figures only relate to the basic London-Glasgow-Edinburgh line; any notion of going beyond that to the north of Scotland would involve another substantial sum.

Trond Haugen: It is important that local authorities are involved. SPT, SEStran and the City of Edinburgh Council are all contributing to the Greengauge 21 study, but that is perhaps the limit in terms of studies—it is a national strategy, and serious national money will be needed. I also want to emphasise that the existing franchise on the east coast is not receiving any subsidies, and is paying £1.4 billion to the Treasury over the extent of the franchise. That leaves only 20 per cent of the travel market between Edinburgh and London going by rail. With high-speed rail, there might be potential for serious private money to come in.

Cathy Peattie: Mr Culley spoke about the billions of pounds that the project would cost. Do you think that represents best use of transport money, or would you have another use for that money?

Ron Culley: Frankly, interconnectivity between London, Glasgow and Edinburgh is paramount. When one adds to that the environmental benefits that would accrue as a consequence in terms of reducing air miles, there is a compelling case. I view it as a very important priority for the UK and Scottish Governments.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested to know whether other panel members share that view.

Anthony Hughes: Yes.

Trond Haugen: Yes.

Chris Day: As I said earlier, we have to face the fact that the west coast and the east coast main lines—at least at their southern ends, as well as at points further north—will both run out of capacity in the foreseeable future. We then face the problem of how to address that. Do we carry on doing what has been done on the west coast main line and try to upgrade an existing railway? That can be done in certain specific locations on a small scale, but if we are talking about significant lengths of railway, the message is clear: we have to build new railway.

Ron Culley: Although the studies that we cited earlier will not be available until January, a verbal account of their progress so far suggests that in conventional terms, the capacity between Glasgow and Edinburgh will suffice until 2022. After that, the probability is that we will be considering a high-speed solution to address the needs of the conurbation.

Alex Johnstone: What changes would need to be made to the existing public transport services to maximise the benefits of any high-speed rail network? Who should be responsible for taking forward such changes?

Ron Culley: I confess that I am embarrassed when I go abroad and see the connectivity in the city centres of mainland Europe. I am confounded when I face huge underground caverns that link all sorts of modes of transport while here in Scotland, we do not appear to have the enthusiasm or resources to bring about that kind of connectivity within our city hubs.

All today's panellists have mentioned that there should be a city centre location for the terminals. That will work only if we invest in other modes of transport to ensure that there is interconnectivity between them when the great day arrives.

Trond Haugen: That extends to interconnectivity in the rail networks. The network in Scotland is not electrified—to get connectivity, we need more electric railways in Scotland.

Alex Johnstone: I think that this will be my final question for this panel, unless something else crops up. Who should be responsible for progressing high-speed rail networks? Should it be the Scottish and UK Governments, Network Rail or a body that is created for that specific purpose?

Ron Culley: The answers to the question about technology lead me to suggest that it should be Government or a specialist body. If maglev technology were to be considered, for example, we would not ask Network Rail to take on the work, because its expertise tends to be on the other side of the equation.

Chris Day: We would probably adopt the model that was used for the channel tunnel rail link, which is the most directly comparable project, although I am a bit hazy on the details. I think the project was initially regarded as a private sector exercise, but it quickly became clear that that was not viable, so in essence there was heavy leadership from the UK Government while project delivery remained clearly in the private sector. I think that the infrastructure has been taken over by Network Rail. The model already exists—perhaps we could regard the channel tunnel rail link as a pilot project.

Trond Haugen: An important point is that although Network Rail would not instigate the project—Government would do that—it oversees the existing network, and the likely scenario is that there would be building phases, which would link into the existing network. Whether or not Network Rail took the lead, it would need to be heavily involved in order to ensure that we end up with a fully co-ordinated network and not a fragmented network in which different parts are overseen by different parties.

The Convener: Committee members have no further questions, so I thank the witnesses for taking the time to come and answer our questions. As I said to the previous panel, you will be able to follow our evidence sessions online and we will report in the new year.

16:42

Meeting suspended.

16:45

On resuming—

The Convener: We will proceed with the third and final panel—the third all-male panel on railways today. What is it with the railways? I do not know.

Cathy Peattie: Women travel on them; men plan them.

The Convener: I welcome James King, who is Passengers' View Scotland's convener, and Robert Samson, who is Passenger Focus's passenger link manager. As I said to previous panels, you will know that we are packing rather a lot into today's meeting, so we will proceed straight to questions, if that is okay.

I asked the two previous panels what they considered the benefits of the development of a high-speed rail network to be. In the main, the witnesses talked about connectivity, competitiveness and business interests. Have your organisations researched passengers' views on possible benefits of a high-speed rail network in the UK?

James King (Passengers' View Scotland): You will have noticed that our two bodies have collaborated to quite a degree in trying to provide a useful response. We will try to add elements that have not been covered in other evidence sessions.

The first point to add is the focus on the demand for rail travel, which has risen by about 45 per cent since 1997. The research shows that passengers are piling on to the railway for a variety of reasons. The existing routes are operating at or close to their capacity, so new lines and high-speed lines seem to be the way forward. However, Passengers' View Scotland has been unable to do specific research on high-speed lines.

Robert Samson (Passenger Focus): We have not researched new high-speed lines, but passengers have told us that the faster journey times that such lines would deliver would be a benefit. High-speed rail could add substantial capacity—capacity constraints are coming on the west coast and east coast main lines. It could also contribute to modal shift, as high speed 1 shows.

James King: PVS has examined the Cushman & Wakefield research on European cities, which has been updated since we sent in our submission. That research is conducted among 500 very large European businesses on their attitudes to investment in different locations around Europe. More than half the sample classed four factors as essential to deciding where to relocate. The first was the availability of qualified staff; the second was easy access to markets, customers and clients; the third was the quality of telecommunications; and the fourth was transport links with other cities and internationally. Ease of access was the second factor and transport links were the fourth. The report makes it clear that those four factors are the fundamental factors that businesses take into account when seeking to relocate.

We have heard a lot today about the attractiveness of city regions in Europe and Great Britain. In the ranking of cities in Cushman & Wakefield's 2008 study, which I am happy to leave with the committee, Manchester has risen four places from its ranking of 2007, which could be partly the result of better rail links, whereas Glasgow's ranking has diminished by one, despite—or perhaps because of—the west coast main line upgrade. In view of Ron Culley's comments, I mention that Leeds has risen by two places, to sit just under Glasgow. There is quite a lot of mobility in the attractiveness of locations in Europe.

A lot of stress has been laid on bringing in new investment but, from work that my company has done elsewhere for Scottish Enterprise and for other bodies in Scotland, I can say that the committee should not forget the importance of retaining businesses that have already invested in Scotland. Businesses—big companies, in particular—constantly consider other city regions to locate in, for a variety of reasons. It is clear that the era of big investments in Scotland is over. We want to attract small nuclei from which bigger businesses can grow. The two aspects of attracting new investment and retaining existing investment are another factor that makes high-speed rail important.

The Convener: What is your perception of passengers' opinions on the importance of improved journey times in comparison to other factors such as price, comfort, reliability, wi-fi availability or whatever else makes people choose a rail journey over other modes?

Robert Samson: We carried out research in Scotland on that issue last year—I will leave a copy of the research document with the committee. Journey-time reduction was about 12th on the list, below factors such as value for money, frequency of service, punctuality and reliability. However, some people have taken the research out of context and used it as an argument against high-speed rail. To put it in context, the survey asked people who were travelling between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Shotts what improvements they would like, and high-speed rail is unfortunately not on the agenda there. Improved frequency was at the top of the list for those passengers, who would like their hourly service to move to a 30-minute frequency. If we ask people on a poorly performing route, such as the one between Lanark and Glasgow, on which there is a high rate of cancellations, punctuality and reliability are top of the passenger list. It is apples for apples. We are asking Scottish passengers—95 per cent of the journeys are internal—what they want to see, and journey-time reductions do not come up.

With regard to modal shift, existing passengers use the rail service because the journey times are acceptable to them just now. For each 1 per cent reduction in journey time, there will be a modal shift of 0.9 per cent. We are talking to existing passengers, who are by and large content with journey times.

The Convener: That factor will be pretty common to many of the issues that you examine when you survey existing passengers. Has there been any attempt to canvass specifically the opinion of passengers on the east and west coast main lines that run from Glasgow and Edinburgh?

Robert Samson: We do that with our national passenger survey, a copy of which I can leave with the committee. The main concern that comes up in that survey is about value for money and the price of tickets—the cheapest walk-on fare is more than £100. There are concerns about punctuality and reliability. That survey, like the other research, questions existing passengers. We would need to carry out new research on what would attract air passengers or people travelling on the M6 to move out of planes and cars and on to rail.

James King: If the committee wishes, PVS could pick that up in partnership with Passenger Focus. We could conduct specific research if you ask us to do so. We have a call on the Scottish Government's research budget, and it might be worth doing something in that line.

To add to my colleague's comments, there might be no research into the benefits of high-speed rail, but it is clear that a greater number of people now use National Express East Coast and Virgin Trains between Scotland and London—the figures from both operators show that demand is increasing. On the east coast line in particular, the operator is able to sustain extremely high return fares—£350—for first-class business travel, and that accommodation is quite full on the busy trains. It is clear that there is a demand.

Another element that came out of the national passenger survey is that passengers want sufficient trains at times when they want to travel. With the extension of the working day, which is starting earlier and finishing later, one of the advantages that high-speed rail can perhaps offer over air—and which we have not heard about so far today—is a longer-running day. High-speed trains are not subject to the same noise restrictions as aircraft, and they do not have the same noise footprint. It might benefit Scots to have a very early journey start, so that they could be in London for half past eight rather than 10 o'clock as is currently the case, and leave London a little later than is possible now.

The Convener: I appreciate your offer of specific research—we will perhaps pursue that with you in writing.

Cathy Peattie: From a passenger perspective, what would be the required extent of any future UK high-speed rail network in order to maximise the benefits to Scotland? Would it involve, for example, a single east or west coast line, or another model?

James King: As we have heard from earlier speakers, case studies and evidence from elsewhere show that what makes high-speed rail work is joining up city regions. We have heard a lot of discussion on the relative merits of city-centre and parkway stations. The stations have to be located where the demand is. Businesses are by and large located around city centres, so it seems to make sense for trains to run from city centre to city centre. Of course, the costs of running in and out of city centres could be extremely prohibitive because of the built infrastructure. That would have to be looked into.

Cathy Peattie: What priority should be given to the development of a high-speed rail network, as opposed to the development of any other necessary transport infrastructure?

James King: To answer that question, it might be better to look at it another way. The existing rail network needs continual investment to keep it fit for purpose. It would be bad for rail use in general if money were taken away from the existing network to be put into high-speed rail. If the network were starved of funds, the attractiveness and connectivity of rail would decline and many environmental benefits would be lost. In our view, the money put into high-speed rail would have to be additional money. The returns from that might come back sooner than people might expect, because of the economic factors that other speakers have mentioned, such as an input of private sector money.

Cathy Peattie: People who live between Glasgow and Edinburgh—in Falkirk, for instance—are concerned that a new high-speed service between Edinburgh and Glasgow would lead to the loss of the Falkirk service. Do passengers in other areas have similar concerns?

Robert Samson: There are similar concerns over the west coast main line upgrade. For instance, passengers at Motherwell and Lockerbie will have a reduced service. Currently, seven Virgin services a day stop at Motherwell, but the figure will reduce to two come December. That is happening at the same time as Strathclyde partnership for transport has a business case to invest in Motherwell station; I think that there is a £20 million plan to redevelop the station, including the provision of more car parking. However, what

will be the point of that if trains are just hurtling through the station?

A balance has to be struck. We want reduced journey times between London and Glasgow, but we also want connectivity so that intermediate locations get a good service, too. The balance might not be perfect just now.

Cathy Peattie: And passengers might suffer.

Robert Samson: Yes. Passengers might suffer at those intermediate locations.

James King: But if high-speed intercity trains were taken off existing routes, leaving more capacity for suburban or semi-fast services, the Lockerbies of this world could come out of it a lot better.

Cathy Peattie: I was thinking of the Falkirks of this world—

James King: And the Falkirks.

Cathy Peattie:—and of the economic development in the area.

James King: Indeed. Falkirk, like the whole of central Scotland, feeds both Edinburgh and Glasgow. If a high-speed line connected through or from Edinburgh and Glasgow, there could be more capacity on other lines. Journeys would not be being made into the city centre to go out to an airport to go down south.

Robert Samson: People talk about faster journeys between Edinburgh and Glasgow, and about city regions, but it is worth remembering that 50 per cent of the journeys between Edinburgh and Glasgow are from intermediate stations. We have to remember the intermediate passengers who are not making end-to-end journeys. In the great debate about reduced journey times, passengers using intermediate stations can be forgotten.

The Convener: We have heard arguments that the development of a high-speed rail network, taking in Scotland, would remove the need for airport expansion, or at least further undermine the case for it. We have heard some discussion of the proposed third runway at Heathrow and, as the national planning framework is introduced, we will hear more on the question of the airports at Glasgow and Edinburgh. Do you have views on those issues?

James King: Many submissions to the committee have talked about the strength of the Scotland to London air market. Evidence from the experience in France and elsewhere suggests that the market would be reduced by the impact of high-speed rail, thus freeing up slots. In addition, more journeys from Scotland to Paris or Brussels might be taken by rail.

The issue will have to be studied in more detail, but it seems that a transfer of traffic on to high-speed rail would free up a significant number of slots at Scottish airports and, therefore, at Heathrow and other London airports. That might weaken the case for a third runway.

The Convener: So it seems premature for the UK Government to make a decision on aviation expansion while the possibility of high-speed rail is still being considered.

17:00

James King: PVS would concord with that statement.

The Convener: Are there any other views on whether or how the development of high-speed rail could achieve environmental benefits? You have mentioned noise, which most of us recognise as an environmental issue that affects many people's lives profoundly. Are there other environmental benefits, such as other forms of modal shift, perhaps from road travel, or a reduction in local air pollution?

James King: Air pollution would be reduced. High-speed rail would also introduce significant safety gains compared with road travel. I do not have the figures with me, but trains are significantly safer than any form of road travel, so there would be a benefit in that way.

Rob Gibson: I know that you have contacts with international counterparts, but have you had any contacts on the involvement of passengers in the development of high-speed rail in other countries? What have we learned from those contacts?

James King: At this stage, I am afraid, PVS has not had any contact with international counterparts, although we are trying to source information on the experience in other parts of Europe. One must only consider the expansion of high-speed rail in Spain and France to see how high the demand for it is. The demand is not just for the expansion of routes but for the development of trains on those routes. A new generation of TGVs is coming in—I think that the new trains are called AGVs—that is more environmentally friendly and offers several other benefits. That points to increased demand.

Rob Gibson: If you had access to the pot of Government research funding, as you suggested you might, would that be a good area for you to extend into to carry out comparative studies?

James King: It would be sensible for us to extend into that, perhaps in conjunction with colleagues at Passenger Focus, which has a European contractor working for it, who may have studied that.

Robert Samson: The work that we are doing at present is to compare the fare structures and strategies in Europe with those in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain. We have not considered the benefits of high-speed lines in Europe.

Rob Gibson: Can you tell us anything about that?

Robert Samson: We can share the report with you. As with the report that I mentioned previously, that one is due in January or February. However, to give a verbal update, Europe seems to be better than Great Britain as far as passengers are concerned.

Charlie Gordon: Now there is a surprise.

Rob Gibson: So it is attractive to travel by train in Europe because prices are competitive.

Robert Samson: Yes.

James King: The Department for Transport has gone public on the fact that it is seeking to increase the price of rail tickets above inflation from two years ago until 2014, as a means of changing the balance of funding between taxpayers and fare payers from 75:25 to 50:50. As the DFT lets the franchises, in effect it controls the fares policy on regulated tickets. That is one reason why fares are going up. Another is simply that, with demand outstripping supply, operators can afford to charge what they like for the unregulated tickets.

Rob Gibson: We will have to feed in those issues.

How best can the views of rail users and potential users be fed into the development of a UK high-speed rail network?

James King: There are two ways. One is by using best practice from abroad. We can learn lessons from abroad and from the Channel tunnel rail link. The second is that consumers, when asked for their views, need to have a series of options put in front of them to allow them to form views. Carefully constructed research on options would be the best approach.

Robert Samson: We can consider the existing research, from our national passenger survey of National Express and Virgin Trains passengers on the east and west coast main lines. That shows what passengers think of existing services and what their priorities are for the future.

Rob Gibson: How should we tap into that from the reports that you will leave for us or which are about to be delivered?

Robert Samson: They are about to be delivered. We can provide the information in a way that would be beneficial for the committee's work. We are prepared to work with the committee in that regard.

Rob Gibson: We will have to explore that in more detail later.

The Convener: We can do that through the clerks.

Charlie Gordon: Mr King has substantially anticipated the questions that I will ask, but Mr Samson might want to add something briefly. First, would a high-speed link be the best use of limited transport funds? Is there something more important that we should spend billions of pounds on? Secondly, I want to ask about the issue of city-centre versus parkway stations—although I am pretty clear about the answer to that.

Robert Samson: Our work with passengers tells us that passengers want money to be spent on the local lines that they use day in, day out. They might use a high-speed line once in a while, to go on a trip to London or on holiday, but what would spending billions of pounds on such a line mean for people who use local lines to commute to Glasgow and Edinburgh every day? What would it mean for journey-time improvements in the far north or on the Highland main line? Those are the concerns of the passengers whom we represent, and the high-speed line does not come into the equation. Would the local lines and trains that people use be starved of investment as a consequence of investment in a high-speed line?

On out-of-town parkways, a selling point for the existing operators on the east and west coast main lines is that the lines run from city centre to city centre and compete on that basis, so it seems logical that a high-speed line would achieve more modal shift if it ran from city centre to city centre. That seems to be the sensible option, although I acknowledge that there are planning constraints.

Cathy Peattie: What changes would need to be made to the Scottish rail network to maximise the benefits to passengers of a high-speed line?

Robert Samson: Benefits would be possible if a high-speed line were built using conventional methods. Connectivity would be needed, so that trains could continue from Edinburgh to Aberdeen and Inverness, albeit at a reduced speed, to make overall journey times from Aberdeen and Inverness to London faster. Connectivity and integration have been mentioned. We need warm, enclosed, staffed stations with good lighting. For many a day, people have been talking about the 24-hour, seven-days-a-week railway, which would have earlier starts and later finishes. All those issues must be taken into consideration.

The new high-speed line would have to be affordable for passengers. We suspect that it would be a premium railway, which would be

dearer than the classic lines, but what would be the price differential? Would the price exclude many passengers and make the railway inaccessible to large sections of the population?

Cathy Peattie: That would keep people in their cars.

Robert Samson: Yes. That is an environmental concern.

James King: An important aspect has not been touched on. We need to be clear about where high-speed trains can get to. I say "trains" rather than "line" deliberately, because the high-speed line will have a beginning, a middle and an end—although it might be extended later. Let us say that the end of the line is Edinburgh/Glasgow. We said in our submission that if the line is built in stages from north to south or south to north it would be helpful if the trains that ran on it could connect on to the existing network, to afford connections between the high-speed line and the conventional-speed parts of the network.

That has implications for the gauge of the trains—not the distance between the wheels but the envelope within which the trains run. If the trains are to run on conventional track they must fit into the dimensions of the Victorian heritage with which we have been left. It might be easier to run trains into Edinburgh/Glasgow than it would be to run them further north, where tracks have much tighter radii in terms of curves and there are all sorts of other tight structures around tracks. For passengers who come from the north—or Falkirk or anywhere else in that category—we would want there to be good feeder services to meet the first and last trains of the day.

As one of the people who spoke earlier said, it would be useful to have electrification, as that would allow the domestic services to feed in more quickly and would perhaps be more environmentally friendly. Those are the fundamental points.

On the gauge issue, the European TGVs and the Eurostar trains are coming to the end of their lives. The French ones will be replaced soon, and the British Eurostar trains will be replaced in 10 years' time. The British Eurostar trains are cleared to run to Edinburgh and Glasgow on the conventional tracks, and the French ones may well be—we would have to check. That means that there could be a situation in which, when the first section of high-speed line is built in the south, those trains could be bought second-hand and used—perhaps after refurbishment—to run on the conventional lines up to Edinburgh and Glasgow. That would deliver some of the benefits at a better price than might otherwise be obtainable.

The Convener: That is a useful suggestion.

Mr Samson, you talked about maximising benefits. Would it be fair to say that many of the issues that you are raising concern things that we ought to be doing anyway, regardless of whether we have high-speed rail, in order to maximise passenger benefits from the existing rail network and to encourage people to use it?

Robert Samson: Yes. Much of our work involves examining the existing rail network and determining what trains and services passengers use and what services they want in the future. We are working on that with Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail.

Alex Johnstone: Other witnesses this afternoon have told us that the right way to begin this process would be to go ahead with an early development of a Scottish high-speed rail link between Edinburgh and Glasgow. What do you think about that proposal?

James King: That is an interesting question. I have not seen any evidence to suggest that passengers are dissatisfied with the journey times between Edinburgh and Glasgow to the extent that would warrant a maglev or a high-speed TGV.

The high-speed trains are best suited to going longer distances, from conurbation to conurbation. It is therefore difficult to see how anything that is a quantum leap beyond some of the planned enhancements to the Edinburgh to Glasgow route would be cost effective, as a first step.

Another aspect that has not been touched on today is that, given the scale of the investment that would be involved, the Government or whoever invested in the proposal would want to see some returns at a pretty early stage. However, it is hard to imagine that there would be sufficient returns from a high-speed link between Edinburgh and Glasgow to pay for the infrastructure. I cannot see, therefore, that high-speed rail of the TGV or maglev type would work if it only went between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Robert Samson: The greatest concern for passengers who travel on the Glasgow to Edinburgh via Falkirk route is car parking. If you ask people on trains whether they want faster journey times, they will tell you that they would rather have a bigger car park at the station. Passengers are concerned about that kind of bread-and-butter issue.

The Convener: I know; with me, it is getting a seat.

I thank our witnesses for giving evidence and for their patience. We will report on our inquiry in the new year, and I think that we might pursue one or two issues in writing, specifically those around further research.

Meeting closed at 17:14.

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