

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 13 January 2009

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2009, 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:

Mike Galloway (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland)
Bruce Kiloh (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport)
John Lauder (Sustrans)
Duncan MacIntyre (Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership)
Duncan McLaren (Scottish Environment LINK)
Alastair Short (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership)
Stewart Stevenson (Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change)
Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 13 January 2009

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon everybody and welcome to the second meeting in 2009 of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. I remind everybody that all mobile devices should be switched off—I will just check that mine is.

Agenda item 1 is a proposal to take in private item 3, which is our consideration of the evidence on national planning framework 2. Do we agree to take item 3 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

National Planning Framework

14:00

The Convener: Item 2 is continuation of our evidence taking on national planning framework 2. The framework was laid before Parliament on 12 December 2008, and Parliament has 60 days in which to consider it. As a secondary committee, we will report to the lead committee: the Local Government and Communities Committee.

We have three panels of witnesses today. We will hear first from a range of non-governmental organisations and then from regional transport partnerships and the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland. Finally, we will take evidence from the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change.

Without further ado, I will crack on and welcome panel 1: John Lauder, national director for Scotland of Sustrans; Paul Tetlaw, chair of Transform Scotland; and Duncan McLaren, of Scottish Environment LINK. We had also hoped to hear from the organisation Plane Speaking, but because of illness that is unfortunately not possible.

We start with some general questions. The new national planning framework states:

“A key challenge is to break the link between economic growth, increased traffic and increased emissions.”

Do the witnesses think that the policies and proposals in the NPF will achieve that goal?

Duncan McLaren (Scottish Environment LINK): I will take on that question by suggesting that the proposals in the proposed NPF and the strategic transport projects review are collectively far too much about business as usual. They predict and provide for traffic growth on an assumption that it is needed to deliver economic growth. Fundamentally, there is no assumption that we can grow the economy without increasing mobility, including vehicular mobility, around Scotland.

I am concerned, too, that the set of projects, particularly some of the national developments in the proposed NPF, will not contribute in any respect to sustainable economic growth. They are likely to redistribute economic activity from one place to another, which will not necessarily lead to any growth whatsoever. The proposed additional capacity across the Forth is an example of that.

The proposals could also lead to forms of growth that are unattractive and incompatible with the sort of growth that we want to see in the knowledge economy and in businesses that regard Scotland as an environmentally attractive place in which to do business. I highlight the Loch Ryan port

development in that respect because it is predicated on an increase in heavy goods vehicle traffic across central Scotland. That seems unlikely to generate significant additional economic activity but likely to undermine businesses that depend on a clean environment and do not want HGV traffic trundling past their doors.

John Lauder (Sustrans): I agree with everything that Duncan McLaren has said. In addition, the framework as it is currently ordered does not do anything to help Scotland be a healthier place in which to live, because it ignores attempts to encourage people to walk and cycle for the majority of trips, which are fairly short—up to 3 miles.

Sustrans and Transform Scotland recently published a report entitled “Towards a Healthier Economy”. Using the United Nations health economic assessment tool, the report showed that achieving a modal share for walking and cycling of 20 per cent of journeys over short distances could yield economic benefits of about £1 billion a year through reduced mortality. If we increased the modal share, savings would also increase. I argue that the framework will undermine economic growth if it simply encourages people to continue to pursue sedentary lifestyles, which the national health service will have to continue to fund by providing yet more treatment for the results of inactivity, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland): I will build on John Lauder’s comments. When considering the term “economic growth”, we must look at the wider economic impact of all transport activities; I will stick to transport, because that is what I am here to talk about. John Lauder is right to highlight the fact that the failure to concentrate on promoting active travel is a great disbenefit to the economy. A national strategy to promote walking and cycling networks is a good example of a project that ought to be included in the framework. Let us not kid ourselves—a modal share for cycling of 20 per cent has been achieved in northern European countries not through happenstance but by having a national strategic plan. Surely NPF 2, which aims to set a trend and pattern for planning in the long term, is the ideal place for such a strategy.

The convener asked whether the document will help to reduce emissions. Of the seven transport projects that are listed, only one is said to help to reduce emissions and none is said to help to tackle health issues. I find that both extremely disappointing and inappropriate in a long-term document that must be viewed alongside other Government strategies such as the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill that Parliament will consider this year. Surely the two should mirror

each other in their aspirations for emissions reductions; we do not see that in the framework document.

The Convener: The argument has been made by a range of sources—from the Government’s Council of Economic Advisers to the Sustainable Development Commission—that, although sustainable economic growth is not necessarily completely incompatible with the Government’s climate change commitments, the two have yet to be reconciled. Besides the specific projects of which you are critical—Paul Tetlaw mentioned some of those—what would you like to be included in the NPF to demonstrate that that potential contradiction has been resolved? What measures are missing from the framework?

Duncan McLaren: There are things missing, but the priority is to remove the projects that are wrong. That is more important than thinking about those that are not there because, if we are locked into high emissions as a result of the unabated use of coal, increased road transport capacity and increased use of airports, we will be more likely to fail to meet climate targets—especially that of getting emissions on to a sharp downward trajectory, as climate science requires.

Scottish Environment LINK argues that a national priority of active transport should be included in the planning policy framework. We also suggest that a national priority of managing carbon sinks throughout Scotland—our forests, peatlands and soils—should be embedded in the framework. It would also not be beyond the stretch of our imagination to suggest that, although the individual developments may rarely require planning permission, a national programme of upgrading our housing stock to reduce the emissions that are related to heating our homes—which is perhaps the most urgent of my suggestions—should be referenced in the national planning framework, if only to ensure integration between new housing development and the programme for upgrading existing stock to cut emissions.

John Lauder: Two specific projects could be weaved in. One would involve following the Danish example and declaring that there will be a safe route to every school in Scotland from the neighbouring communities. That has been the policy in Denmark for a number of years; it has been very successful and encouraged a huge growth in active transport of young people to and from school.

The second project, which is of particular concern to Sustrans, is the completion of the national cycle network. In the first version of NPF 2—the discussion draft—in January 2008, paragraph 218 stated that Sustrans and the Government would work to complete the national cycle network. In the latest version—the proposed

framework—that reference has been removed and the document states that the Government will work with partners to complete the national cycle network. As the lead body on the national cycle network, we are a little concerned that we are no longer mentioned in the framework. I would like the reference to Sustrans to be put back in.

Paul Tetlaw: I would like to add to that before we go further, as I went straight to answering questions without making an initial statement. We welcome many aspects of the document, such as the commentary, the context that is laid out and the fact that it emphasises the need to reduce climate change emissions and dependency on fossil fuels, and acknowledges the need for a shift from car-based travel to walking, cycling and public transport. That, which is in the introductory part of the document, is all welcome.

We take issue with some of the document's conclusions and how they sit with that set of aspirations. With regard to what is missing, we are concerned about the high emphasis on the expansion of facilities at a number of airports, which we can only conclude will lead to the expansion of air travel. Good reference is made in the commentary—and I believe that the committee heard about this from witnesses last week—on the need to improve rail links to the south and, in particular, to cities in the north of England and London in order to make rail travel competitive with air travel. Although that is acknowledged in the commentary, there is no commitment to it while there is a commitment to airport expansion. We think that the document has arrived at the wrong priority.

The other area on which the document is very clear—and which is a critical economic aspect—is the need to move away from reliance on fossil fuels, and oil in particular, for transport. Our transport system is 98 per cent fuelled by oil. As we all know, oil is a finite resource and its price can fluctuate wildly, so it is a high-risk strategy for a country to continue with that reliance. It could be highly damaging economically, so we would like a strategy that takes us away from using oil as a fuel towards active travel—which we have talked about—the electrification of railways and other alternatives.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I would like clarification of a few points. Duncan McLaren mentioned the Loch Ryan project that is in NPF 2. Many of the road improvements are, as mentioned in the STPR, based on the need to reduce accidents, and there are a number of accident black spots in that area. Do you agree that it is a good idea to invest in roads if there are accident black spots? What are your views on the improvements to the rail network that are also included in the Loch Ryan project, which you did

not mention in your negative remarks about the project?

14:15

Duncan McLaren: I am happy to elaborate on the two issues that you raise. My concern about the project is based on whether it would contribute to sustainable economic growth. I do not think that such growth is sustainable.

It is reasonable to consider infrastructure improvement investment along with other ways of dealing with accident black spots. Speed limits—and speed limit enforcement—are often just as effective as infrastructure improvement is. We should target accident black spots, but we should not assume that doing so requires us to increase road capacity, which is what happens when we straighten or widen roads.

We welcome general improvements in the rail network. In particular, we welcome the positive aspirations to improve through services to the west of Scotland via Glasgow.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Lauder, you said that you are concerned that Sustrans is no longer mentioned in the draft national planning framework. We will probably discuss concerns about consultation. Perhaps the change reflects the Government's keenness to work with not just one but many organisations. Has there been cultural change in the Government that suggests that it is not willing to work with you and many other organisations?

John Lauder: No. There is no evidence of such change. We have a good relationship with the Government and work well with the sustainable transport team.

However, Sustrans was mentioned in the first draft, along with other partners, and I remain concerned that it is not mentioned in the current draft. We created the national cycle network and we are funded by the Government to develop and complete it, so we are anxious to ensure that we are mentioned, just as British Waterways Scotland is mentioned in relation to the canal network—the two situations are similar.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: However, the Government is working with you on the issue.

John Lauder: Yes. There is no question about that.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I represent some of the further-flung parts of the country and I sometimes have the impression that if the country were a nice round circle we could immediately sort out issues such as how we get children to walk to school. However, that is not the case, and some children have to travel long

distances. The Highlands and Islands transport partnership, which we will hear from later in the meeting, has said that making up for the current lack of infrastructure would involve considerable carbon output. How do we address such issues in the more far-flung areas?

John Lauder: Some of the trips that emit the most carbon are car journeys of between 10 and 25 miles, so it would be useful if people were encouraged to make trips to and from transport hubs, such as bus stops and railway stations, in an active mode.

Most schools serve their neighbouring community. It is possible to reduce car trips, especially in rural areas, if the infrastructure is good. Rural roads can be quiet, but they can also have many cars on them. Community links, such as the links that Sustrans is working with Highland Council to produce, can help to reduce the number of fairly short car journeys.

The majority of trips are very short and we need to continue to consider how we reduce their number. The potential carbon savings are high, because if we take traffic off the roads we reduce the maintenance burden. Minimal maintenance is needed for walking and cycling paths, whereas roads require much more maintenance.

Rob Gibson: It could take Highland Council 100 years to repair the roads that you are talking about. In the circumstances, do you agree with what Professor David Gray said at last week's meeting? He said that other countries have tended to invest more of their gross domestic product in transport projects than we have and that, to some extent, we are playing catch-up—pieces of infrastructure are missing and road repairs have to be carried out, and we have to do that work for wider purposes.

John Lauder: I argue that in encouraging people to make trips in an active mode we have not even started to play catch-up with the other countries that have been investing amounts that, although modest, are still much more than we have invested. Most other northern European countries have consistently been investing three times the amount that we have and, as I keep saying, they have consistently higher walking and cycling rates. That is the area of catch-up that I want to look at.

Rob Gibson: So the level of spending by those countries is consistently higher than we spend at the moment.

John Lauder: Yes. There is a consistently higher level of spending on active transport.

Rob Gibson: But what about on all transport?

John Lauder: I am focusing on active modes.

Rob Gibson: But you have to look at the issue in the round. I am asking whether there is consistently higher level of spending on all transport, including active transport.

John Lauder: I would want to be more specific than that.

Rob Gibson: Professor Gray quite clearly suggested that a higher percentage of GDP should be invested in transport in general and that, if there is more money, one can then decide on the priorities. At the same time, we are playing catch-up. Does anyone else wish to comment on that point?

Paul Tetlaw: I am happy to do so.

In a conversation that I had earlier, it emerged that the modal share of cycling in Morayshire is one of the highest—if not the highest—in Scotland. That shows that right across Scotland cycling and active travel are seen as very important for health and other benefits.

Compared with many other countries, we as a country—by which I mean the United Kingdom—have historically underinvested in all modes of transport. However, at what is a critical point in time, we are looking ahead. NPF 2 is a long-term strategy document for a world that is changing rapidly. We know that, as far as climate change is concerned, we have to reduce emissions by 80 per cent. Indeed, that target is set out in the Westminster legislation, and I will be amazed if the legislation that this Parliament passes does not require the same. On the strategic risk of oil depletion and our focus on oil as a fuel, it seems to me that the key drivers for the future mean that our investment in transport should be targeted at modes of transport across Scotland that will help most in weaning us off oil dependency and in reducing emissions.

Rob Gibson: Other questions need to be asked about this issue, but they will have to wait.

The Convener: Duncan McLaren has something to add.

Duncan McLaren: My experience of other northern European countries is that they show very clear leadership on the urban and peri-urban rail, tram and bus networks. I do not underplay the importance of transport links in our more remote communities, but such an approach recognises that the majority of people live in our urban areas, where the majority of journeys are undertaken, and that most of the reduction in emissions that can be achieved through modal shift will be achieved in those areas. In every area, we need to discriminate and be targeted in our investment to maximise the potential for both job creation and emissions reduction. Different investments in job

creation and emissions reduction will have very different characteristics.

The Convener: Before we move on, do you have any views on the Government's decision to base the proposals in NPF 2 on what is now being described as airport enhancement on the UK air transport white paper?

Duncan McLaren: Unfortunately, such thinking is now very outdated; indeed, I am really rather surprised that a Scottish Government is relying on it. I am concerned that the assumption underlying the focus in the discussion draft and in the current version of the NPF on airport enhancements, including surface access, lounges, hangars and so on, is passenger growth.

For the record, I understand that passenger numbers through Scotland's airports rose by 85 per cent in the decade from 1996 to 2006. That resulted in an increase of 131 per cent in Scotland's aviation emissions. One cannot increase passenger numbers, improve access to airports and enhance airport facilities without also increasing dangerous climate changing emissions. Given that those emissions happen at altitude, we need also to remember that the radiative forcing impact is magnified.

The Convener: Is it your view that embedded in what are now described as enhanced proposals is an assumption that there will be continued growth in passenger numbers?

Duncan McLaren: The only reading is that passenger numbers, if not capacity by way of runway expansion and so forth, will increase. That is the assumption.

Paul Tetlaw: I was rather surprised to find that the Scottish Government is following the UK model. Times are moving on quickly: the Conservative party south of the border is now taking a clear stance against airport expansion and the UK Government is reviewing rapidly its position on such expansion. For example, it is looking into the alternative of rail enhancement, including electrification.

The Convener: I turn to the consultation process, after which we will move on to consider the proposed national developments.

In the previous session, the Parliament debated changes to planning legislation that put the NPF on to a statutory footing. In large part, the ethos adopted by the Government was one of public engagement and participation early in the planning process, rather than one of challenges and appeals at the end. Was the process of developing NPF 2 in keeping with that spirit of early public engagement and participation? I am thinking of members of the public who are not part of existing engagement at the professional level and those

who may be affected directly by one or more of the proposed national developments.

Duncan McLaren: In its evidence, Friends of the Earth made reference to the process, as did Scottish Environment LINK, albeit to a lesser extent. We are aware of the work that Claire Symonds of Building Alternatives has done. The Government's aim of achieving a greater level of outreach and early engagement is welcome. However, I fear that, in the main, engagement on NPF 2 was with the professions and professional groups and not with the wider public or with people who will be affected.

As Claire Symonds made clear in her report, those who Building Alternatives surveyed indicated a level of dissatisfaction with the process. One gets the sense that the consultation was inadequate. From my previous role at Friends of the Earth, I can say that the responsible Government department responded positively when we urged it to mount an additional consultation event. That said, all the consultation events were held within regular working hours. The process did not achieve the ideal of reaching out to the ordinary working person.

From the evidence in front of us, it is clear that the Government's aspiration for good-quality participation, as set out in its participation statement, was not achieved in this case. I ask members not to take that as direct criticism of the team that was tasked with this work. I am sure that its members made good efforts in that regard. As I said, they put on an extra consultation event. However, the resources that were made available were inadequate for them to do the job.

The Convener: In order to participate in and engage with the planning process, people need to be aware of what is happening. I note your comments about the team that was involved. Do you agree that, following the consultation process, most members of the public are pretty unaware of the proposed new framework and how it might affect their local community?

14:30

Duncan McLaren: It has been our long-standing experience that, until there is a highly specific proposal on the ground in a vicinity, most of the public are unaware of it, regardless of whether they support it or oppose it. That is why Scottish Environment LINK still supports the position that the present Administration took when it was in opposition, when it favoured a third-party right of appeal in the planning system. Be that for the record, as it were.

We must recognise that, in the current circumstances, there is a need for much more active outreach and for better marketing of

documents such as the national planning framework, particularly if, as seems to be the case, the possibility of later engagement at public inquiries on fundamental issues such as whether a project is sustainable or whether there is a need for it is to be removed. I have some suggestions on how to improve outreach, which I could make if you would like me to.

The Convener: I do not want to reopen the debate on third-party appeal rights, but if we assume that the status quo remains, your argument is that low awareness of, and a low participation rate in, the development of NPF 2 will mean that individuals who want to engage with the planning process on national developments will be less able to do so than they would have been before the framework was put on a statutory basis.

Duncan McLaren: Not just individuals but, to be frank, most local authorities and councillors will probably realise that they have been consulted to only an extremely limited extent on what are major proposals. I know that you do not have powers to change anything in the framework, but I urge the committee in the strongest possible terms to recommend that it should still be possible for national developments to be subject to a full public inquiry, which could include an assessment of the need for a project.

John Lauder: I agree with Duncan McLaren. I believe that the health benefits of projects will be fed in as part of the Scottish transport appraisal guidance process, which is a welcome suggestion. One of the problems with documents such as the national planning framework is that they do not appear to be interesting to the vast majority of people, but when a major transport project comes along, it is of huge significance. As politicians, the challenge that you face is to engage with people so that they are aware of documents such as the one that we are discussing today.

Paul Tetlaw: It is extremely difficult for you as politicians to engage with the wider public because, to be frank, they are not interested in such matters until they come close to home and have a direct impact on them. When such consultations take place, organisations such as ours engage, comment and become involved in dialogue, but the position with regard to the wider public is difficult because the interest is not there.

The Convener: Rob Gibson has a quick supplementary, after which we will hear from Shirley-Anne Somerville.

Rob Gibson: I do not know whether you have read the *Official Report* of last week's meeting, at which Dr Docherty and Professor Gray answered questions on the subject of consultation. Dr Docherty said:

"The Government and the previous Executive have been asking the academic community in Scotland and further afield to come up with an answer to precisely that question"—

how to get through to people—

"for several years".—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 6 January 2009; c 1224.]

Duncan McLaren offered to suggest how we could do that, but that might be for another time.

Do you agree with Professor Gray that there are "doers" and "doubters" but that the "silent majority" are the disengaged? Those people are likely to continue to be disengaged while there remains a lack of any sort of decision making at the most local level. It is not a question of whether there are bodies such as yours that can represent the views of a particular area; it is a question of whether the ability exists for decisions to be made about projects at the most local level. The absence of such an ability is the reason why people are disengaged.

Duncan McLaren: There is a high level of disengagement. From the people with whom we have contact, that appears to be because they feel that they cannot make any change and that decisions will go a certain way regardless of what they might say. Our experience is that such disengagement should not be read as tacit support for the proposals that are on the table.

There is a real need to reach out actively. When that has happened, as with the Edinburgh congestion charging referendum—the result of which was negative from our perspective—a lot of people and organisations get engaged and express a view. I distance myself from Professor Gray's remarks. There are disengaged people but I do not believe that they will always stay that way. The "doers" and "doubters" categorisation does not reflect the reality. People who get engaged change their views quite frequently as a result of that engagement.

The worst thing that could result from the current process and a failure to engage early would be the risk of either side—although not necessarily organisations such as ours—making legal challenges to some of the proposals on the basis that the procedures that are set out for participation have not been followed. There could also be campaign activity on the ground. Either would lead to far greater delays than would be caused by having a full public inquiry subsequent to the publication of the planning framework.

John Lauder: Sustrans's experience of engaging with the local community when, for example, we construct a path, or begin to consider doing so, has been very positive. I cite the example of a project in Dumfries, which was

completed with a funding package. Before we began planning the project, we began to consult the local community and created a steering group of local people. I appreciate that it would be difficult to do that for a massive, nationwide building project, but the experience was positive. It gave us a lot of local support and buy-in for the challenges that faced the project once it was up and running. Having the public on board was very positive and meant that that transport project went ahead with a lot of support and co-operation. Such engagement is well worth the effort.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will ask about some of the national developments that are mentioned in the framework document. What is the panel's view on the use of the current Forth road bridge as a committed public transport corridor?

Paul Tetlaw: Interestingly, I was at a presentation about the so-called replacement crossing on Friday. I am surprised that that term is still being used because it is very clear now that it is going to be an additional crossing.

There are several interesting aspects to the question. I still do not believe that the case has been made that an additional crossing is required. Certainly, questions were asked at Friday's presentation about the economic case for an additional crossing in comparison with spending the money elsewhere in Scotland, and it was clear that such a comparison has not been made.

The case has not been made for an additional crossing and I am clear that the existing crossing can and will be repaired through the dehumidification process. If people choose to speak to the experts about that, that is the view that they will hear; I have taken the trouble to do that.

On your specific question about using the existing bridge for public transport only, which sounds like a nice idea, the percentage of public transport traffic over the bridge is very small. I am quite sure that if we go ahead and build an additional bridge and it becomes congested—which it might well do—people will look at the existing bridge, see how little traffic is on it and ask why we cannot have additional car traffic on it to relieve the burden on the new bridge.

It is said that the design of a new bridge would be such that it would not be subject to closure, as the existing bridge is. We therefore seem to be consigning public transport to the bridge that is going to be subject to closure, whereas cars and lorries will go to the secure bridge, which will not be subject to closure. That is another aspect that we find somewhat concerning.

There is also talk of trams perhaps going over the existing bridge. I am told that, in adverse weather, buses could be diverted to the new

bridge. Trams would be on a fixed track, so they would be stuck on the existing bridge.

Let us assume that I am completely wrong about our being able to repair and fix the existing bridge and that we need a new bridge, which becomes the only bridge. There would appear to be no access for walkers and cyclists across the new bridge, so there is a mismatch there. If what we are told is true—that there is a severe risk to the existing bridge—presumably a new bridge should be designed with walkers and cyclists in mind, too.

I am sorry to give you such a long response, but those were the areas that I wanted to cover.

John Lauder: Paul Tetlaw has covered a lot of what I might have said. If the existing bridge is to be used as a public transport corridor, what will be done to encourage greater use of public transport on that crossing? Is there any plan to develop a greater public transport corridor and put greater investment into smarter choices—choices that do not involve the many private motor vehicles that currently use the bridge?

Duncan McLaren: I do not have anything to add to what Paul Tetlaw said; he set out the position very well.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I have two questions. One is on the bridge and the other is on another transport project that is not covered in our question paper. Is that okay, convener?

The Convener: Okay. You can ask them both before we move on.

Des McNulty: The introduction to the NPF states:

"The Proposed Framework identifies a number of major transport, energy and environmental infrastructure projects which Ministers consider to be essential elements of the strategy for Scotland's long-term development".

One of those projects is the Forth crossing. I was not able to attend the briefing last week, and I do not have a hard-and-fast view about whether the proposal is the right one at this stage; my concern is that relatively little information is available. Last week, Iain Docherty said that there had been fairly extensive peer review, but I have not seen any of that information. Have the witnesses seen it? Given that the NPF is the mechanism for giving approval in principle to projects, do you think that we require an awful lot more detailed information—which I presume exists—to allow us to make a more informed judgment about the Forth crossing?

Paul Tetlaw: I would like to come back to you on that. I certainly learned a lot from the presentation that I attended last Friday; I heard things that I had not heard before. I think it is the case that most people have received their

information to date through the media, which is why most people—I readily acknowledge that they are reasonable, sane, sensible people—would come to the view that the bridge is falling down and that we absolutely need to replace it with another one. There has been an effective media campaign—or, rather, the media, being the media, have chosen to run with that story because it sounds like a good one.

Things were said to me somewhat in confidence, so I prefer not to say who said them. However, I took the trouble to speak to leading experts who understand the Forth road bridge and comparative bridges around the world to help me understand whether the bridge could be repaired and whether the dehumidification process would work. I had to go somewhat out of my way to find that information.

14:45

The other important thing that I learned is that the proposal, as it stands, is simply for an additional bridge. There are other worthy elements that are noted in the STPR, such as a cut-off rail line between Inverkeithing and Halbeath that would allow additional park-and-ride facilities to be built and would reduce journey times to the north, thereby encouraging more people to travel by train rather than by car. There are also proposals for additional park-and-ride sites. Those are all very worthy, but they are not part of the funding package for the bridge. We were told clearly, in the question-and-answer session, that the funding package for the bridge covers the bridge and connecting roads and does not include those other elements, which are the ones that we want to see to address the volume of traffic.

I learned about that issue, which is of concern to me, only last Friday. I suggest not only that those measures should be part of the package, if it goes ahead, but that they should be put in place now, before the bridge is built. There are issues about weight on the existing bridge and congestion, which mean that there is a need to reduce the volume of traffic that crosses the bridge. All those initiatives would address those issues, so why wait? Why are we not proceeding with them now? In fact, why did we not put them in place five years ago?

Duncan McLaren: I will elaborate a little on that. Des McNulty is right to highlight the fact that information has been poorly distributed and has generally not been adequate. That illustrates my more general point about the national developments and whether the need for them should be assumed after this examination by the Parliament. As in other cases, the emphasis is on a predict-and-provide model, which says that there will be increasing or at least stable demand for

cross-Forth movement and that we need to meet that demand. I am afraid that that is the antithesis of an approach that is rooted in sustainable development, which would first question whether the demand could be managed and reduced. That approach applies equally to road transport, aviation, energy use and waste management. In the case of waste management, it is legally accepted that there is a hierarchy, with waste reduction at the top. A similar hierarchy has been advocated for energy use and can be suggested for transport.

If a sustainable development approach is not taken in the national planning framework, instead of a predict-and-provide approach, the framework will not fulfil its statutory duty to contribute to sustainable development. That would be a serious shortcoming if it were the conclusion of this examination by the Parliament.

Des McNulty: My second question concerns the fact that, of all the projects in the STPR, only two are selected as being so significant that they merit inclusion in the national planning framework. The Forth crossing is one of those and the other is the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements, which are a project of similar magnitude to the Forth crossing. The paucity of information about the Forth crossing is one thing, but the paucity of information about the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements is considerably more acute. In principle, I am inclined to believe that that project is an important one for Scotland and that it should be considered an early priority, as is the Forth crossing, although the two should perhaps not proceed at the same time. What is your view on the importance of that project in the context of the national planning framework? What would it add?

Paul Tetlaw: My little commentary says that I welcome the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements—actually, the project is the only one of the seven transport projects that ticks the box for emissions reductions—but goes on to say that I wish I could have more detail about them. I have very little information on the project at the moment so, in the next week, I will make it my business to speak to key people who I hope will be able to tell me more about it.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We could argue and debate about the replacement crossing for some time. It will not surprise the witnesses to learn that I disagree that the economic case has not been made. Perhaps some of the organisations that are represented might be happy for the east coast of Scotland to experience economic stagnation while the current bridge is repaired for the nine years that are necessary, but I would not consider that to be helpful to our economy at this time.

Given the witnesses' concern about some of the local consultation, do they welcome the fact that

Transport Scotland is carrying out briefings in North Queensferry, South Queensferry and elsewhere over the next couple of months to involve local communities?

Duncan McLaren: Any additional consultation or participation is welcome. Our fear is that if, as seems likely, the national planning framework deems the replacement crossing to be of national importance, many people will feel that those events are not worth attending because the decision will already have been made. If you genuinely want to encourage community participation, people must believe that it is more than just their receiving information.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Does anyone else want to comment on that?

Paul Tetlaw: No, but I will place on record my exact comments on the Forth bridge. I am not at all suggesting that it is not an important piece of infrastructure or that it will need closure for repair. I am saying that the dehumidification that is being undertaken at the moment, which does not involve any closure at all, will work. Therefore, the bridge will be repaired and will not require closure. I accept that it is an important piece of infrastructure.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You suggested earlier that we should listen to the experts. Therefore, if the Forth Estuary Transport Authority suggests that it will need to close the bridge for between seven and nine years, I am happy to take that on board.

I fear that I have to move on, or I will get a look from the convener.

The Convener: I do not want to misrepresent the witness, but I have to say that you are talking about two different technologies: cable replacement and dehumidification.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Strategic airport enhancements are another controversial issue in the proposed framework. There have been different interpretations—shall we say—of what the phrase means, so I ask each of the panel members in turn to say what it means to them.

Duncan McLaren: I will try to repeat in summary what I said earlier. I understand the term to mean improvements in facilities such as surface access, terminal buildings, hangars and taxiways. My understanding is that it does not include additional runway capacity but that it is predicated on an increasing number of passengers, which I contend the evidence in front of us shows would lead to a greater than proportionate increase in damaging, climate-changing emissions from air travel.

John Lauder: That is the answer that I would have given.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I appreciate that.

Paul Tetlaw: I may as well say that cross-border rail enhancements are the important alternative that we should consider and to which we should give a higher priority. They receive some good commentary in the proposed framework, and I am confident that our comments helped to boost that, because there is more commentary on them in the proposed framework than there was in the discussion draft.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We covered some of my questions on airport enhancements in your earlier answers, so I will skip over some of them and summarise for the sake of time. The discussion draft identified the enhancement of Edinburgh and Glasgow airports as separate national developments, while the proposed framework—the final draft—has the changes to the four main airports as one national development. What are your views on that change?

Duncan McLaren: The change appears to me to be relatively cosmetic. Despite making many efforts on the morning of the release to talk to people in the press office team to find out exactly what that change meant, we were unable to get clear information. This is another case where Des McNulty's point holds, as the available information is limited. I certainly have concerns about the idea that, by definition, an airport is of national significance. However, I am more concerned about airports being used for domestic aviation within the United Kingdom than I am about international aviation and links to the islands, which are critical in the Scottish context.

John Lauder: Again, Duncan McLaren has said it all.

Paul Tetlaw: The only note that I might add is on the assumption that airport expansion provides a continued economic benefit. If we look at the economy in the round, we find that rather more money flies out of the country than flies into it. Unfortunately, many flights are used by our own people flying abroad to spend their money elsewhere rather than by people flying in to spend their money here. I do not have the figures to hand, but previous studies have shown that more money flies out of the country than flies in.

Duncan McLaren: I can put those figures on record. Department for Transport figures for 2000—my figures are a little old—show that tourism receipts from inbound passengers to Scotland were £0.5 billion. The comparative figure for outbound expenditure by Scots travelling abroad was £0.7 billion.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I will stay on the subject of money. Several transport-related national developments will require substantial

public investment. Should the Scottish Government make a formal financial commitment to those developments, given their inclusion in the NPF?

Duncan McLaren: I will comment briefly. The NPF has a renewal timeframe of five years and an ambition timeframe of more like 20 years, which goes beyond existing budget cycles. It would be hard for the Government to make such allocations in anything more than an indicative way but—as with any long-term investment, such as upgrading the housing stock—making commitments as far ahead as possible allows for business certainty.

John Lauder: I agree. It would be quite difficult to firm up plans so the allocations could not be anything more than indicative.

Paul Tetlaw: Any long-term financial commitment should be considered in the context of the other pieces of legislation that will come through the Parliament, such as the measures on emissions reductions. I hope that in future all parties—whoever is in power—will happily sign up to developments that contribute to that.

Cathy Peattie: I want to take that issue a bit further by asking about prioritisation of the proposals. The Scottish Government has chosen not to prioritise the projects in the list of national developments and not to attach any timescale for their implementation. What is the panel's view on that? Duncan McLaren has already flagged up the fact that some developments will take a considerable amount of time. How do we ensure that the NPF is not just a wish list?

Duncan McLaren: Friends of the Earth and, I believe, Scottish Environment LINK would like to see prioritisation to the extent that we would like to see several projects removed from the list of national developments. Clearly, some of the other developments are important, but they all need to be done in a rigorous way that ensures that they are compliant with our climate change targets, biodiversity duties and sustainable development duties. My concern is that the procedural approach that has been used has not met those duties. It would probably be inappropriate to start suggesting a prioritisation now, but I would like to see those factors taken into account in producing a prioritisation or revision of the list. However, I suspect that I am being overambitious about what the Government might feel is appropriate.

15:00

John Lauder: The prioritisation process would be helped by reference to the United Nations HEAT analysis, which I mentioned earlier. That analysis examines the health impacts of major transport investment, consideration of which is currently missing. There is a proposal to include

such analysis in STAG appraisal, which would help to balance things and encourage greater debate about the prioritisation of major transport infrastructure projects. It would also help to engage the public.

Paul Tetlaw: I have nothing to add.

Cathy Peattie: Duncan McLaren suggested that the projects on the list should be prioritised and that he would remove some of them and reduce the list. Which ones would you drop and which are your priorities?

Duncan McLaren: I would definitely drop the airport enhancements, which would not be on a list of my national priorities. The Forth crossing would not be on my list until it was demonstrated that the existing bridge was not repairable, because it is an additional crossing. A replacement crossing would be on my list if we were sure that we needed one but, as Paul Tetlaw eloquently described, we are not sure about that.

I would also drop or rephrase what is called base-load power generation and the so-called clean coal plant at Hunterston. Neither of those projects would guarantee the operation of carbon capture and storage at the plants from day one, so they would either replace or increase emissions from the energy sector.

Paul Tetlaw: I mentioned earlier the commentary at the beginning of the document, which says that we need to reduce emissions, tackle climate change and reduce dependency on fossil fuels and that that means a shift from car-based travel to walking, cycling and public transport. That gives us a guide as to where our priorities should lie.

As I said earlier, many worthy proposals are being brought forward as part of bigger packages—for example, the additional Forth crossing—albeit without a full commitment to them. There are proposals for an additional rail link to the north to improve journey times, for additional park-and-ride sites, and for better management of the existing road infrastructure through intelligent transport systems that help the traffic to flow more freely. In the context of what I said about where our priorities should lie, those are all worthy things to be getting on with, not only because they will contribute to tackling the long-term challenges but because they will help us to manage the existing infrastructure much better than we do at present.

John Lauder: Through Cycling Scotland, the Government is taking forward a national cycling action plan, the aim of which is to increase levels of cycling. That plan, which is due to be published in March, is the type of thing that should be in the national planning framework if we are to have major transport interventions. Encouraging more

people to tackle short trips through a cycling action plan has been really successful on the continent and it is the kind of thing that should be in the national planning framework. The timing is right because the work is being done now, so there is no reason why it cannot be included in the NPF.

The Convener: Before we close, would you like to raise any other issues that we did not mention in our questions?

Duncan McLaren: If I may, I will say a little more about so-called clean coal, because that is as significant as the transport issues.

Setting aside the procedure for a moment, I think that the energy proposals in the national planning framework are broadly welcome because they address security and sustainability issues. However, constructing new or replacement coal-fired power stations at Cockenzie, Longannet and Hunterston would lead to very significant emissions and lock us into a high-carbon future. The national planning framework is the place where the Scottish Government should adopt measures to ensure that any future use of coal involves carbon capture and storage from the outset. We would recommend the use of an emissions performance standard, as supported by certain parties in Westminster, as used in California and now, interestingly, as endorsed by Denmark. It would be remiss of me not to emphasise the climate dangers and the broader biodiversity dangers that arise from the continued use of unabated coal power.

The Convener: We discussed the issue at our previous meeting. For the avoidance of doubt, do you agree that carbon capture technology is something that has potential and which the Scottish Government is right to explore, but that it should be a requirement for the construction of new coal capacity rather than an optional extra?

Duncan McLaren: That is exactly what I would suggest. Scotland can gain a lot from helping to develop carbon capture technology for use elsewhere in the world. Given our rich renewables resource, we probably do not need it, but if we are to help to develop it, we will need to equip our own plants with it. The idea of carbon capture readiness is rather meaningless; essentially, to put it at its simplest, it means just a facility having a car park that is large enough to allow the kit to be fitted at some later date.

The Convener: Do the witnesses have any final comments?

Paul Tetlaw: We have talked a lot about climate change and I know that, as the year goes on, the committee will consider the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill and that you might invite me back to speak about that, but I would like to leave you with a quote from Sir Nicholas Stern, the leading

economist who was asked to produce a report for the Government. A few months ago, he stated:

“Emissions are growing much faster than we’d thought, the absorptive capacity of the planet is less than we’d thought, the risks of greenhouse gases are potentially bigger ... and the speed of climate change seems to be faster ... People who said that I was scaremongering were profoundly wrong”.

That is a good context in which to look at all major projects.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses on the first panel for their evidence. I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow the changeover of witnesses.

15:07

Meeting suspended.

15:10

On resuming—

The Convener: We continue with agenda item 2, which is taking evidence on national planning framework 2. I welcome our second panel of witnesses: Bruce Kiloh, manager of policy and research at Strathclyde partnership for transport—I particularly thank him for stepping in at short notice; Alastair Short, strategy manager at the south east of Scotland transport partnership; Duncan MacIntyre, chair of Highlands and Islands transport partnership; and Mike Galloway, member of the executive committee of the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland. I thank you all for being with us to answer questions. I will hand over to Alison McInnes for the first question.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The transport section of the NPF opens by stating:

“A clear, long-term vision is vital”.

Do you think that the framework establishes a clear vision for the development of Scotland’s transport network? If not, how could that vision be improved?

Mike Galloway (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland): NPF 2 certainly identifies the right, key transportation issues that face Scotland. It has dealt with and embraced the range of strategic responses available to the transport sector, and identified an appropriate list of key national projects that is neither too long nor too short. My only criticism of the NPF 2 process concerns its synchronisation with the national transportation strategy and the strategic transport projects review. Although the documents for all those are clearly strongly linked, the sequencing of their publication was a little out of kilter. I would have preferred NPF 2 to come before the Parliament first, in order to identify the key

strategy for Scotland, and for the NTS and the STPR to have followed on behind. That is because I am a planner as well as a transportation professional. Planners like things in nice sequences.

Alastair Short (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership): In general, I welcome the framework. It recognises that sustainable transport is a key element in developing Scotland's economy, particularly in the east of Scotland, which is predicted to have the highest levels of economic and transport growth.

I welcome the recognition of key transport projects; it is helpful to identify those. However, projects in the SEStran area that we think are nationally important have not been identified or have been dismissed through the STPR process—we will obviously be concerned about matters in the SEStran area. In some cases, our concerns are about the timely implementation of certain projects. I will not go into depth on that just now, but an example is Grangemouth, which is identified in the planning framework as a key economic hub. However, the projects associated with that development will potentially not be addressed until 2017 onwards. Obviously, the concern is whether we or the area can wait that long for those key transport links to be implemented, and whether we should address some way of implementing them, so that we can more quickly put Scotland in a position to benefit economically.

15:15

Bruce Kiloh (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport): We very much welcome the national planning framework and the national developments that are included in it—particularly national schemes such as the Forth crossing, the Grangemouth freight hub and the metropolitan Glasgow strategic drainage scheme, which are vital for the continuing development of the west of Scotland.

As for transport developments, we very much welcome the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements, strategic airport enhancements, port developments at Loch Ryan and facilities for the 2014 Commonwealth games. We also welcome the links between the national planning framework and the strategic transport projects review, which have been mentioned.

The west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements are vital and interest SPT keenly. The renewal and protection of nationally important infrastructure, such as the on-going modernisation of the Glasgow subway, is a key factor. As for cross-Scotland rail travel, we have often said that the Glasgow crossrail project is the missing link in

Scotland's rail network. Those are two issues for us.

I think that the NPF provides a vision for transport in Scotland. We welcome it and SPT's involvement with Scottish Government colleagues in developing the NPF. We look forward to working in partnership with them and other agencies as we work towards delivery. One key aspect, to which others referred, is that the travelling public and others look to agencies such as us, the Government and Transport Scotland to get on with projects. Backing up the vision with delivery is a key aspect for all of us in the future.

Duncan MacIntyre (Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership): HITRANS welcomes the statutory basis of NPF 2 to develop, provide, identify and promote developments that are of national significance. However, we are considering the situation in our remoter communities, although we are centralising and giving importance to the likes of Inverness.

The NPF 2 proposals reflect the output from the recently announced STPR, which Transport Scotland undertook. I will bring you up to date on where HITRANS is. Last Friday, our board considered proposals in that weighty tome. The board strongly supports the proposed rail service improvements, to increase the connectivity of Inverness with Scotland's other cities, and the upgrading work on the A9 between Perth and Inverness and on the A96 between Inverness and Nairn.

However, HITRANS feels that, for Scotland to realise its full economic potential in the period to 2030—particularly in renewable energy, marine science, biomass, timber, tourism and whisky production—significant additional work is required on the A82, the A96 and the A9 between Inverness and the Pentland Firth. The Pentland Firth is important north of Inverness, where renewables are a big factor and are to be considered as something that will drive all the rural and island parts of Scotland.

The partnership will endeavour to discuss its concerns with the Government in the months ahead. We compliment those who managed NPF 2 on providing an opportunity for participation by and consultation of stakeholders before publication of the Government's final proposals. Our present concerns are a big reflection on what is in the STPR, on which there was little consultation.

Cathy Peattie: Several witnesses have talked about development of the hub in Grangemouth. Given that people in the Grangemouth area must put up with heavy haulage—with tankers and all the rest of it going through the centre of town—strong arguments have been made for developing

the hub and freight links in Grangemouth. Is the present situation acceptable? Does the fact that people will have to put up with the problem until 2017 run counter to the Government's ambitions for tackling climate change?

Alastair Short: It is not acceptable that residents of Grangemouth should have to put up with an increasing number of heavy goods vehicles trundling past their houses. The presence of the rail interchange hub has increased the number of heavy goods vehicles that come into Grangemouth to take advantage of the facilities there. It is ironic that, although long-distance road haulage has decreased because of the hub, it has led to an increase in local road haulage in urban areas such as Grangemouth. We are working on a European project on freight hubs called dryport, which is about moving interchange and intermodal facilities out of urban environments into areas where they can be accommodated and linkages can be made without going through urban areas. That is a long-term project, but Grangemouth is one of the main hubs in Scotland and we need to spend a lot more time figuring out how we can accommodate it more sustainably and to the least detriment of the local population.

Cathy Peattie: Do you agree that it would make a substantial difference if the freight facility were extended straight into the docks, instead of stopping outside them?

Alastair Short: The dryport project is about having intermodal hubs in those places, non-specifically, where interchange can be carried out most economically and sustainably, and, in Grangemouth's case, where there are direct linkages—mainly through rail connections—to Edinburgh and the rest of Scotland. We have a long way to go before that idea is developed fully; we are in the early stages of the project. A lot of thought is being given to how we can deal with freight on a more sustainable basis. However, Grangemouth is one of the main freight intermodal facilities in Scotland at the moment and will continue to be so for a while. We are looking at the potential for Rosyth to be developed as another container terminal; when doing so, we will try to avoid the development of a situation similar to that in Grangemouth.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): My question is directed at Mr Kiloh. You welcomed the strategic rail improvements in the west of Scotland that are set out in the framework and in the strategic transport projects review. Is the scheme that we used to call Glasgow crossrail dead? If so, did it leave any offspring? If so, can you describe the offspring to me?

Bruce Kiloh: That sounds like a family history question. SPT welcomes the STPR's announcement of strategic rail enhancements in

the west of Scotland, but we were surprised at some of its comments on cross-city tunnel connections between the north and south and the south and east of Glasgow. Last week, the chair and senior officers of SPT met the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change and representatives of Transport Scotland to seek clarification of the background to those comments and to ask how we can assist in taking the project forward. I gather that the meeting was positive and open-minded in tone and that the minister gave a commitment to ensuring that the proposals are examined in detail by SPT, working in partnership with Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council—which, like all our member councils, has an important role to play here.

I believe that you are aware of the history of the crossrail project.

Charlie Gordon: A wee bit.

Bruce Kiloh: We are looking at parts of that project being implemented, such as the city union line, and we are focused on what will happen in the future. The west of Scotland conurbation public transport study has been in development for the past two or three years—you could call it SPT's STPR, if you will forgive me for using too many acronyms. It is our thorough, STAG-based analysis of what public transport in the conurbation will need for the next 20 years and it will be our key reference document for inputting into the work on project 24, the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements.

As I said, we welcomed the STPR, and we have further welcomed the fact that the Scottish Government, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, and Transport Scotland appear to be extending an olive branch to organisations such as ours so that we can get the most meaningful results.

Projects such as crossrail have a long history, and this comes back to something I said earlier. There comes a time when a project has had to go through too many hoops. We want to draw a line under that now and get on with implementing projects such as the modernisation of the subway, which the STPR referred to as a possible metro light rail system—like fastlink—and bits of crossrail. We need to look at how to get the best value not only for people in the west of Scotland and Glasgow city, but throughout Scotland. Crossrail will do that; it will provide cross-Scotland transfer by connecting up cities across Scotland. That is the attitude that we will be taking into the discussions; we need to get something going on the ground that is of best value and achievable in the short to medium term.

So, in answer to your question, we welcome the STPR and we think that parts of the crossrail project could be implemented.

The Convener: Thank you. We are still with Alison McInnes.

Alison McInnes: Before I move on to my next question, I want to explore something that Duncan MacIntyre said. I detected a sense of disappointment that NPF 2 falls short of addressing the needs of all Scotland. You particularly mentioned the role of the Pentland Firth. Are there projects that ought to be in the framework because they are national developments?

Duncan MacIntyre: We welcome a lot of the projects, particularly the rail projects, which help sustainable development, the economy and our carbon footprint. However, there is no real substance to the list of forthcoming projects and no specifics.

We are concerned, because a lot of effort has gone into reports on the Dornoch Firth crossing and on looking at the Dounreay aspect of things. We are also looking at huge developments up in Orkney—the First Minister was there. There is, however, nothing on the list for the A9 beyond Inverness. That road is crucial for economic development, social inclusion and keeping the population in that part of Scotland.

There was a similar economic appraisal report on the A82 that identified a huge potential benefit to the west Highlands and Islands. We have a commitment from the previous Government for £16 million to do some work around Loch Lomond. We were looking for that funding to be carried forward, but there is no real evidence that that will be the case. We were also very disappointed about the Elgin bypass. There is a huge economic report that identifies it as the project to be implemented and it is not even included in the NPF.

We are talking about the country moving forward, getting the feelgood factor, and what to do during this difficult time. The people of Moray are saying, “This is a wish list that goes up to 2030 and the Elgin bypass is not on it. When will it be on the list?” The people cannot see why the bypass is not on the list and that has disheartened a whole county. It is bad enough to be on a wish list, but if your project is not on it, that is pretty sad.

Alison McInnes: I am not sure that anyone is particularly heartened, given that it is a wish list.

I will move on, convener. The witnesses will have heard us discussing consultation with the previous witnesses. What are your views on the level and type of consultation that the Government carried out with the regional transport partnerships

and the local authorities in developing the national planning framework?

15:30

Mike Galloway: The involvement of and consultation with local government and NGOs has been very good and the Government has, where appropriate, responded to comments that have been made. As mentioned earlier, the question is how we engage the public at such a highly strategic level. The issue is notoriously difficult; as the previous witnesses pointed out, the public do not tend to engage until something affects their front or back door. We have encountered the same difficulties at local planning level with structure plans—or strategic development plans, as they are now called. All I can say is that unless you are prepared to turn the planning system into some sort of reality television show it will be very difficult to engage the public at that level.

However, NPF 2 is very readable and concise; it has tried to avoid jargon and the public has had an opportunity to engage if they have so wished. That they have not is perhaps a sign that they in some way recognise that they have elected you to make these decisions for them. I am sure that, if they do not like your decision, they will let you know. In any case, the document by its very nature has to deal with a very high level of strategy and with issues lying at some distance in the future, and it is very difficult to get the public to engage with such abstract concepts. We simply have to accept that; we have to allow and encourage the public to participate, but we cannot force them to do so.

Bruce Kiloh: As I said, we were very pleased with the engagement that we had with our Scottish Government colleagues on the NPF. When we submitted our response, we offered to meet them to discuss any aspect of it. That meeting took place. We very much welcome the great opportunity that we have had to make input, and look forward to having that level of meaningful engagement with the Scottish Government in future.

Our response was based on the regional transport strategy and our member councils' local transport strategies. The huge consultation on SPT's regional transport strategy involved members of the public; for example, we went to shopping centres to discuss our high-level projects and ideas and held many different roadshows and workshops. I believe that in its approach to consultation on and engagement with regard to NPF 2 the Scottish Government relied on organisations such as ours to ensure that their submissions were firmly based on consultation. There has been a process in putting forward this information, and we were confident that our submission would have the backing of our

member councils and therefore of the general public. As I said, we ensured that our consultation on the RTS was the largest that had ever been undertaken on a transport strategy in the west of Scotland. That is as it should be, and it gave us confidence when we came to make our submission.

In summary, we would very much welcome having a similar level of engagement with the Scottish Government on the documents that it produces as we had on NPF 2.

Duncan MacIntyre: I agree. The consultation on our regional transport strategy took a similar approach and involved consideration of NPF 2. We hope that the framework's role will be extended to back all these projects and to give it some weight when we engage with Government.

Alastair Short: I agree with both my colleagues that the NPF 2 consultation process has been very good. We have certainly been able to buy into it quite easily. However, I am concerned about the links with the strategic transport projects review, the consultation process for which was not as comprehensive. Our partnership was involved only in the consultation on the processes for proceeding with the STPR. We were not consulted on the projects that the review considered; we had no input into that process at all. In fact, projects have come out of the review of which we have no knowledge and it is difficult for us to find out what they are. For example, we have no knowledge about the Inverkeithing to Halbeath rail proposal, which is in the SESTRAN area and is potentially important. I put in that caveat about consultation on the STPR.

I agree with everybody else that consultation is difficult, particularly consultation on strategies. I have consulted on strategies for many years and have found it difficult to get involvement. However, there was a considerable response to our regional transport strategy consultation. We spent a lot of time and effort on getting responses to it from the public and various bodies. The main difficulty is that, unless the strategy affects people personally—that is, there is a project outside their front door—they tend not to take much notice of it.

Further, there is to a great extent consultation fatigue. I get five or six consultation documents a week in my in-tray. When organisations get that amount, a fatigue element comes in and certain consultations are just disregarded. A consultation must therefore focus on the people whom it wants to respond and on the sort of response that it wants from its questions.

Alison McInnes: That is significant. It is concerning that the STPR process did not involve proper dialogue with the key organisations—the RTPs—particularly given that they recently

undertook an extensive consultation, as was pointed out. It would have been useful for the STPR to have had dialogue with the RTPs, because projects that appeared through their consultations and which were endorsed by their programmes did not appear in the STPR. Further, there are projects in the STPR that are not in the RTP programmes. That is worrying. You talked about consultation fatigue and said that we should better focus consultation. We should certainly ensure that the Government uses consultations that have already been carried out and that have some credibility. It is a real loss that that was not done. In light of that, do you think that the document sufficiently recognises the role of RTPs in delivering transport?

Duncan MacIntyre: Which document?

Alison McInnes: The NPF.

Duncan MacIntyre: As far as we are concerned, the NPF is a good document; the question mark is over the STPR.

Mike Galloway: I do not think that the NPF's role is necessarily to recognise the role of RTPs. As I said earlier, we would have expected the NPF to be produced first, then the NTS, then the STPR. The recognition of the role of RTPs would then spring from that.

I want to comment, too, on the views about involvement in consultation on the STPR. There were reference groups to help inform the preparation of the STPR—I was involved in one of them. However, we were under Chatham House rules, so we could not feed back to our RTPs or our local authorities the discussions that were under way. When the process reached the interesting stage, the reference groups were disbanded. That was not an example of best practice.

Alison McInnes: Yes.

I will move on. What impact will the transport policy section of the NPF have on the day-to-day work of regional transport partnerships and local authorities?

Bruce Kiloh: I will deal with your previous question as well as that question. I suppose the role of RTPs in the NPF must be considered in the context of the whole planning framework in Scotland. In that regard, the new strategic development planning authorities are key bodies. We have always tried to maintain a good relationship with what was the Glasgow and Clyde valley structure plan team and with the other structure plan teams in our area. We are working with them to ensure transport and planning integration in the future.

On how NPF 2 will affect the policy framework of the regional transport partnerships, as with the

STPR—putting aside concerns about consultation—we take the attitude that we are where we are and we need to move forward. The STPR is a fantastic reference document that provides guidance on how to take things forward, and we perceive NPF 2 as doing exactly the same thing. We will ensure that those are taken into account as we work towards—although it currently seems a long way off—the second round of regional transport strategies. NPF 2 will guide us in our development and will provide a basis for on-going discussion with the Government, Transport Scotland and strategic development planning authorities.

SPT and the other RTPs have a role in working with their strategic development planning authority partners to ensure that future work programmes are aligned. That is being done—for example, there are close links between SEStran and SESplan, which is the strategic development planning authority for Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. We will take the new framework on board and work towards it in the future. NPF 2 is an extremely valuable document that is great for context setting for regional transport partnerships.

Mike Galloway: It is important to emphasise that NPF 2 is not simply a list of 12 national projects. One of its key delivery mechanisms will be the extent to which it is used as a means of testing the appropriateness of the city region strategic development plans that are submitted to ministers. That is where some of the more fundamental questions will be dealt with, including how we get our city regions to be the drivers of our national economy, and the sustainability impacts of that. I hope that NPF 2 is used as a framework to test the acceptability of the city region plans when they come to ministers.

Alastair Short: As Bruce Kiloh said, we work closely with our development planning colleagues in SESplan—in fact, we share the same office building—with which we have a joint programme on developing transport planning and development planning. Both parties are also involved in economic planning for the east of Scotland. We are pulling together all the different elements of sustainable development and transport planning. NPF 2 is definitely a good basis for such future development.

Bruce Kiloh also mentioned that we are starting the process of reviewing our RTS. Obviously, the projects coming out of NPF 2 and the STPR will form a basis on which we will try to develop our future RTS policy document.

Duncan MacIntyre: I will answer the question on how local authorities and the regional bodies will be affected by the national framework. We all have strategies at local, regional and national levels. NPF 2 is the only thing that holds those

things together, because the strategies have elements that are unworkable under the current situation with the STPR. We have a situation in which regional partnerships work together as part of the local authority family. When projects appear out of the blue and others disappear—out of the red or, perhaps, into the red—we have a task to convince our local authority partners within the RTP to adopt a project in one authority area rather than in another. If that project is not part of a particular authority's own strategy, that will be difficult because—human nature being what it is—people do not want to let go of what is theirs and those whose projects are not promoted will ask why they were unsuccessful. Those are the sorts of issues on which we need to work with our local authority colleagues.

15:45

The Convener: I will allow a brief supplementary question from Des McNulty.

Des McNulty: I will challenge somewhat what the witnesses have said. When I read the STPR and asked myself how it fits with what I know of the regional transport strategies, I came to the verdict that there is no—or almost no—fit at all. I suspect that the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements came as a significant surprise to SPT. Bruce Kiloh said that there had been meetings to clarify matters, at which SPT talked about its projects and the Government talked about its projects. I am not sure that things have been meshed up quite as well as he suggests. There are some interesting arguments to be had about that. The Government seems to be arguing for large-scale strategic integration of rail travel in Glasgow, which would involve a link between Queen Street and Central stations, and SPT is talking about crossrail, which in a sense stands against such integration.

In Edinburgh, I can see no interface between the regional transport strategy and what has come out of the STPR. I am sure that colleagues in Aberdeen, who are interested in Aberdeen crossrail, would argue pretty much the same thing. Could the witnesses cut to the chase and let us know the reality of the situation? They are working away at regional transport proposals and the Scottish Government is working away at its STPR, but there seems to be no evidence that the two are meshing at the moment.

The Convener: I ask for just a couple of responses to that. So that we have sufficient time to question the minister later, I ask everybody to cut to the chase with questions as well as answers.

Bruce Kiloh: I thank Des McNulty for the question, because he has raised an important

point. I will be absolutely clear about our involvement in the strategic transport projects review: we always viewed the regional transport strategy that we originally submitted in March 2007—which was in line with the legislation—as our input to the STPR. After that, there was involvement in some matters, such as the transfer of projects between SPT and Transport Scotland. Although the perceived lack of consultation may be regrettable, we were absolutely sure that our RTS as submitted, which the minister subsequently approved, was our input to the STPR. It is for Transport Scotland and the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change to deal with the RTS, how the information was submitted and how it was assessed within the STPR. We have been assured that the review followed a true STAG process—again, that is a matter for Transport Scotland and the minister.

We were surprised at some of the projects that were included in the STPR—specifically, the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements. As I am sure most of the committee members are aware, we are keen to modernise the subway and are considering fastlink and other projects that, on the face of it, appear to have been excluded from the STPR. We view our meeting with the minister last week as being a positive step forward in seeking clarification. That is important for us.

We need to work with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government to work out exactly what is behind what they say on the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements in project 24 of the STPR, which states that connections are vital for Scotland's future. We would very much welcome any connection between the north and south of the city through a tunnel at a city centre station, but we must be realistic about that and think of what such a project would cost.

Our crossrail proposal, which we have submitted to Transport Scotland, is fully costed and achievable, so we are looking to take forward parts of the project in that context. It is best to accept that we are where we are. We do not want to rewrite history; we must move on and do what we can. Our main concern is to ensure that projects begin so that people in the west of Scotland and beyond see that things are happening on the ground. That will be the focus of our involvement with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government in the future.

The Convener: Do witnesses from other regions want to make brief additional points about the NPF? There are obvious connections with the STPR, but we are here to focus on the NPF, if possible.

Mike Galloway: I do not think we mentioned the importance of land use planning and its impact on the need for travel. It is important that the NPF

should differentiate—as I think it does—between unnecessary travel and travel that is necessary for economic purposes, particularly between our city regions, so that business journeys can happen in the most sustainable way.

The NPF should set out a framework whereby the planning system reduces the need for unnecessary travel. The focus should be not only on city regions but on sustainable communities, which are mentioned in the NPF. The expectation is that that thread will be picked up in strategic development plans and local plans throughout the country, so that the need for non-essential journeys is suppressed. It is important that the distinction between essential and non-essential journeys is made in the NPF and that it filters down through the various levels of planning throughout the country.

Rob Gibson: Elements of the development strategy are set out in NPF 2 in map 9. Are there transport projects that are not identified as national developments in the NPF but which would merit such designation? You might come up with a short or very long list—the shorter the better.

Alastair Short: As I said, we think that quite important projects did not appear in the STPR because they had been dismissed during the assessment process: I highlight, for example, rail access to the Rosyth dockyard. The port is identified in NPF 2 as a key area for development of container shipping facilities, so the dismissal of the rail access project through the STPR assessment process is not in line with the importance that Rosyth is accorded in NPF 2. The project should be reconsidered. I think it was dismissed partly because of the inclusion in the STPR of the Inverkeithing to Halbeath rail line project, which is supposed to cure all problems, although there is no indication of how that will happen. The lack of clarity about how Rosyth will be served by rail access is a key concern.

We are also trying to promote linkage with the new Alloa line in the context of the transfer of freight from Rosyth to the rest of Scotland. Such linkage is important and would provide a clear route for rail freight traffic to the rest of Scotland and potentially England without the need for freight to cross the Forth bridge and enter the Edinburgh area. That important issue was slightly sidestepped in the STPR, but it is important to consider it in the context of the NPF.

Mike Galloway: Any local authority, interest group or non-governmental organisation could give you a range of pet projects that it thinks should be included in the list. It is important to note that NPF 2 was not a bidding process, although that is what it became at the consultation stage, when everyone felt that their project would not happen unless it was named in NPF 2. I am glad

that the Government has not regarded the process as a bidding process and has kept the list very tight, to emphasise that it is not a case of listing only the projects that will happen. Many other important projects will happen across the country, despite their not being on the list. The list simply establishes that the need for particular developments need not be considered later on in the planning process. That is an important distinction. We should make it clear that there are important projects throughout Scotland that will happen in the medium or long term, despite their not being on the list.

Bruce Kiloh: I endorse what Mike Galloway said. It is important to retain perspective on what the NPF is. However, at the risk of going against what Mike said, I will briefly mention a couple of projects. As I said, the modernisation of the Glasgow subway is a key project for the west of Scotland. The subway is an important regional asset, which is at the heart of the city and the city region. However, modernisation will incur costs nationally, which we will have to consider in discussions around the STPR.

There is an important role for the NPF in protecting national transport infrastructure, such as Buchanan Street bus station, Queen Street station and Central station.

Facilities and infrastructure for the Commonwealth games, which are in the NPF, could include important legacy transport projects beyond those that were included in the candidate city file. Examples include Dalmarnock station, Clyde fastlink and strategic park and ride, which will be a key element in encouraging sustainable travel to the games.

Duncan MacIntyre: I agree with what has been said. We want to ensure sustainable rural economic growth. Over the next 30 years—or up to 2030—we will consider modern ways of making progress as a result of developments in marine science, for example in relation to the Pentland Firth project and wind power. There is also potential for tourism. Projects will be delivered far to the north of Inverness, which is our most northern city. We must consider Scotland's future and focus on how such projects can make a difference to the whole country.

We must open up areas such as Orkney, Caithness and the west coast to economic growth and prosperity so that communities there can survive. I emphasise that the A9 does not stop at Inverness.

Rob Gibson: Map 9—the strategy map—shows an international gateway at Scrabster and deep-water opportunities at Scapa Flow, in the Pentland Firth. The area is identified as requiring co-ordinated action—that is what the black dotted line

means. Inverness is also shown as requiring co-ordinated action, and the Cromarty Firth is also marked as an international gateway that has deep-water opportunities.

Duncan MacIntyre talked about the A9, but perhaps we should consider a multimodal approach. It is acknowledged that safety on the A9 is important and that we should encourage the carrying of goods on the railway as a means of co-ordinating action.

Duncan MacIntyre: The STPR is land based, so if we are considering what it will take to get connections to the far north we must explore such opportunities. Moray, which Rob Gibson knows reasonably well, is a huge producer of whisky and Moray Council is a small authority. An Elgin bypass would make a huge difference to Moray's economy.

I was delighted and encouraged to hear that the list of projects to be delivered by 2030 is not set in stone and that we will be able to add to it. However, the basis of our thinking is social and economic survival. Projects for which a good case has been made—backed up by reports from HITRANS and consultants—have not been included, although the approach in NPF 2 would appear to support them. However, as I said earlier, we are not seeing the swing to help that from the STPR.

16:00

The Convener: Thank you very much. Let us move on.

Des McNulty: We have asked which projects you would like to add. I will now ask you the reverse question. Do you think that any of the transport-related national developments fail to meet their designation? If so, can you explain why?

Mike Galloway: No.

Des McNulty: You think that they are all justified. Fine. Should there be a timetable?

Duncan MacIntyre: It is really the Forth road bridge on which you want an answer.

Des McNulty: No, no. I am just asking a question that has been written down by someone else.

Duncan MacIntyre: The Forth road bridge was debated earlier, and there is an issue over it. If it is required, it is required, so we must accept that. However, I do not think that the majority of people out there are convinced that it is essential or required at this point in time. If it will impact on all the other projects throughout the country, that is a huge consideration.

Mike Galloway: On the implementation timetable, it is not appropriate to include such detail in a strategy document. It should be contained within the delivery mechanisms. The delivery plans of the NTS, in particular, the STPR and the RTPs are more appropriate places in which to identify timescales, priorities, phasing and so on.

Des McNulty: Are the small number of projects that are included in both the STPR and the national planning framework probably the biggest priorities because they tick both boxes?

Mike Galloway: Yes, but not exclusively.

Bruce Kiloh: I think that they are the biggest priorities. I agree with Mike Galloway that the NPF is not the place to have a delivery plan—that is not what it is for. It sets a strategic framework for planning in Scotland for the long term, which is very much to be welcomed. The happy coincidence between projects in the STPR and in the NPF 2 is also to be welcomed, particularly with regard to the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancement. There is a great opportunity for partners in the west of Scotland to take that forward. That is very important.

On the question of withdrawing projects from the NPF, we welcome all the national developments in the NPF. I agree with Duncan MacIntyre about the need to set the context for the Forth bridge, which will be a huge national issue for Scottish transport over the next few years. We have always been firm supporters of the new Forth bridge on the basis that it will be a multimodal corridor and needs to be progressed as such. That must be considered in the context of the current economic climate, the environmental goals that the Government has set itself and the sustainable economic development of Scotland. It is important to remember that as we try to progress such projects.

Des McNulty: Let us stay on the subject of the Forth road bridge for a second. The risk is that it is the upas tree in whose shade no other transport project can grow. How should the Scottish Government deal with that situation? Displacement of funding will have an impact on other transport projects.

Bruce Kiloh: Absolutely. As you say, the Forth bridge could overshadow all other transport projects. It is up to all of us to work that out. There is a real danger of the Forth road bridge dominating transport spending for a generation if not for a couple of generations. From our side, the Forth road bridge is a national development—it is placed within the NPF. However, we do not anticipate the transport network in the west of Scotland being overshadowed as that project is taken forward. We will continue to make the case

for the developments to which we referred earlier. The balancing act, or the act of keeping all the plates spinning, is always difficult, but we must try to do it. The reality is that the need to replace the Forth road bridge will not go away, so we must deal with the matter in a balanced and reasoned manner.

Alastair Short: The Forth bridge is obviously a critical element of the infrastructure in the east of Scotland. If it had a reduced capacity or failed, the impact on the economy of the east of Scotland and how people function in that area would be catastrophic. It is a serious issue that must be addressed at national level.

The supposition that the measures that have been implemented to reduce the rate of decay of the cables will be a final solution is a bit false. At best, they might halt the decay, but they will probably just continue to reduce the rate of decay, with the result that the bridge will have an extended lifetime. If we continue on our present path, the heavy loads on the bridge—far in excess of its original capacity—will mean that the frequency of the continual repair cycle that is required to keep the bridge usable will increase, so there will be many months during which the bridge will not be usable. That needs to be addressed. The approach that has been taken so far has been quite measured: as members might gather from my submission, it is certainly very much in line with what we consider to be the way forward on the replacement bridge and the existing bridge.

The Convener: If you are right and the future of the existing bridge is as you expect, whereby months and months of closures will be required if its lifespan is to be extended through repair, what does that say about the strategy of putting trams, coaches and buses on the existing bridge and having them rely on it?

Alastair Short: As I have indicated, that strategy is in line with the aims that we set out in the regional transport strategy of not increasing capacity across the bridge for single occupancy vehicles, and of providing extra capacity for public transport usage, either by trams or bus rapid transit.

The fact that public transport will use the old bridge is a disadvantage because it is more vulnerable to needing repair and to windy weather. The new bridge will have wind protection, whereas the old bridge will still be subject to wind restrictions.

The Convener: As members have no final supplementaries, I invite the panel, in the final few minutes, to raise any issues on NPF 2 that have not come up in questioning.

Mike Galloway: We have dealt with transportation infrastructure, by and large, but Scotland's chief officers of transportation are normally responsible for other infrastructure matters, particularly drainage. We have a major input on issues such as water supply and electricity. In my comments, I have been supportive of NPF 2 from a transportation perspective, but SCOTS also supports the emphasis that the NPF places on other infrastructure developments and believes that they are appropriate.

Bruce Kiloh: I am more than happy to provide additional information to support any comments that I have made today or any of those in our submission. I would also be happy to provide the committee with additional information as projects progress. We look forward to continued engagement on that.

The Convener: That is appreciated. Thank you.

Alastair Short: I agree with Bruce Kiloh that we should work together with the Government and Transport Scotland to develop the NPF strategy and the projects that are identified in the strategic transport projects review.

Duncan MacIntyre: The STPR might benefit from the same indulgence that was granted to our work together on NPF 2, when matters were discussed publicly, rather than behind closed doors or under Chatham House rules. It would be better if everything were discussed up front, because we all have a role to play in the process. The issue is of such importance that it could even be debated in Parliament.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I thank the panel for giving of their time to answer our questions. I suspend the meeting for five minutes; we will resume at quarter past 4.

16:10

Meeting suspended.

16:16

On resuming—

The Convener: After asking members to be back on time, I am a minute late. I apologise.

We resume agenda item 2 and our evidence session on national planning framework 2. I welcome our third panel, which comprises the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, and Dr Graeme Purves, who is a Scottish Government assistant chief planner.

I will kick off with a question about consultation, on which a number of comments have been made

in committee and in written evidence. Minister, what is your response to the suggestion that the consultation process on NPF 2 has not met the Government's aims for high-quality consultation exercises? Has the process led to a high level of awareness of the document or of national developments among members of public who are likely to be most directly affected by them?

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The consultation process has been outstandingly successful. The largest proportion of written responses came from community councils and private individuals, and the number of pages in the participation statement listing the meetings and interactions that have taken place with a wide range of people shows the great efforts that have been made. We published 50,000 copies of an information leaflet, which went to councils and libraries throughout Scotland, and delivered more than 7,000 solicited e-mail copies of it. We had significant interaction on a subject—strategy for planning—about which there is not normally such enthusiasm. I am comfortable that we have not only met the requirements that we laid out for ourselves but, on many assessments, exceeded our expectations.

The Convener: I want to explore an example. Members have questions about aviation developments and the strategic airport enhancements project. I do not want to get into the rights and wrongs of that project, but what proactive efforts were made in the consultation to reach communities that experience noise and traffic impacts from airport operations and to explore with them the options for developing those airports and the impact on them of the final framework rather than the consultative draft, which was clearly different?

Stewart Stevenson: The national planning framework does not address airport expansion; it provides for additional surface transport to airports, which is different. The consultation that we have undertaken on surface transport in particular has been very effective.

The Convener: My question was: what efforts were made in relation to those proposals proactively to reach the communities who already live with the impact of aviation?

Stewart Stevenson: My point is that the national planning framework is not about aviation.

The Convener: So no effort was made proactively to reach the communities who live near airports.

Stewart Stevenson: That is correct. The aviation projects in the national planning framework are solely and exclusively to do with surface transport to airports.

The Convener: I have a question about the Government's position on the nature of the consultation that should accompany the NPF. When the legislation under which the NPF was made statutory was debated in the previous session of Parliament, the Scottish National Party voted in favour of a number of amendments—including some that were lodged by SNP members—to include a public examination, on the basis that the consultation process and the limited period of parliamentary scrutiny was insufficient.

On 14 June 2006, Bruce Crawford said:

"Yes, the bill provides for lots of scrutiny, comment and engagement during the consultation process, but there will be no consultation specifically on the final document before it comes to Parliament ... the bill as drafted will not allow local people, local authorities, national organisations and statutory consultees to object to the final national planning framework document or to be consulted on the final position."

Speaking to his amendment, he recommended to the Communities Committee that

"if we are to achieve public acceptance of national projects that because of their nature are bound to be controversial, we must do all that we can to ensure that individuals and organisations are provided with an open and robust process to participate in and engage with."—[*Official Report, Communities Committee*, 14 June 2006; c 3715-6.]

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change argues that there is no need proactively to reach out to local communities to engage with them, but I wonder whether that is consistent with the earlier statements on the need for an open participative process that allows communities to engage with the project. Most of the communities that are likely to be directly affected by national developments in the NPF are probably not aware of them—with the exception, perhaps, of the Forth bridge, which has had a very high profile.

Stewart Stevenson: I take a rather different view. Engagement was undertaken with precisely the people to whom Bruce Crawford referred. We attempted to reach the wider public by issuing a large number of copies of documents, and community councils were invited to participate in the consultation. The list of people who have been involved is substantial and wide ranging.

We are meeting in public today and, through the good offices of your committee and the other committees that are taking an interest in the national planning framework, we are inviting people throughout Scotland to take part in the current process. It is a very public process—as we speak, this meeting is being broadcast to Scotland and beyond. That ticks all the boxes that exercised my colleagues during the passage of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

The Convener: What is your response to Duncan McLaren's comments on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK in today's evidence-taking session? He said that, from examining the participation statement, it could be argued that good consultation standards have not been met; that there could be a legal challenge if the Government decided to pursue those developments without a public inquiry; and that any public inquiry should include the question of need. What is the Government's intention in relation to public inquiries to consider the projects that are included in the national planning framework as national developments?

Stewart Stevenson: The purpose of the national planning framework is to establish the principle that we have nationally designated those 12 interventions and we wish to proceed with them.

The Convener: Is the expectation that public inquiries will take place if those developments are brought forward?

Stewart Stevenson: Planning inquiries will be required if there are appropriate objections.

The Convener: Scottish Environment LINK commented that public inquiries should be allowed to examine the question of need in relation to those developments.

Stewart Stevenson: The purpose of the national planning framework is to establish in principle that the projects are required.

The Convener: Is it not possible that such a process could generate and stir up sufficient controversy to cause a more severe delay than would be caused by a public inquiry to examine the question of need? If the purpose is to crack on with developments that have been agreed as national priorities, a course of action that leads to further controversy and delay might be inadvisable.

Stewart Stevenson: There has been no evidence in the responses to the various stages of the wide-ranging public consultation, including this stage, that the projects are controversial. In any event, the purpose of the national planning framework in identifying the 12 interventions or projects is to deal with them openly and in public, engaging the elected representatives of Scotland—in previous stages of the consultation, we engaged community councils throughout Scotland.

The Convener: The NPF has a stated aim to further the Government's "central purpose" of "sustainable economic growth". How do the transport policies set out to achieve the aim of sustainable growth?

Stewart Stevenson: There are 12 interventions. The replacement Forth crossing has been discussed elsewhere and we will debate it later this week in the Parliament. Improved rail connectivity is a substantial intervention of the appropriate kind, and we have the projects on improving surface transport to airports, metropolitan drainage and the Commonwealth games. The other interventions are private sector schemes. At the committee's meeting last week, Iain Docherty expressed the view that the rail infrastructure investments in the national planning framework and the strategic transport projects review are the single most important intervention that we could make to address the issue.

The Convener: We heard in evidence this afternoon a concern that sustainable development was not a key guiding principle in the development of the transport projects that are listed as national developments or in the general approach to transport in the NPF. We heard that the majority of the transport projects will lead to increased emissions. Will you respond to that?

Stewart Stevenson: I am not clear how improved rail connectivity and surface transport—particularly by rail, but in other ways—will increase carbon impact. The transport projects in the NPF and the STPR will provide a significant benefit.

The Convener: Has a carbon assessment been carried out of the individual national developments?

Stewart Stevenson: We carried out a strategic environmental assessment of the projects and of the significant other candidates that were proposed for inclusion in the NPF. Those assessments included the issue that you raise. However, as we proceed with the detail of the projects—many of which are private sector, not Government projects—that will have to be assessed.

The Convener: Is the Government confident that there will be no basis for a legal challenge that is based on the sustainable development duty in relation to the NPF?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

Alison McInnes: How will the transport policies and developments that are set out in the NPF assist in meeting the national transport strategy's three key strategic outcomes?

Stewart Stevenson: The transport projects that are part of the NPF, which contains a substantial set of projects, are designed to improve sustainability, support connectivity and address transport issues throughout Scotland.

The NPF is a planning document; it is not a transport document. It is about spatial planning—creating the planning space within which the

transport projects can be progressed. Essentially, the transport projects are described not in the national planning framework, but in the strategic transport projects review. There will also be important interventions by regional transport partnerships and councils throughout Scotland.

16:30

Alison McInnes: We heard from representatives of regional transport partnerships earlier this afternoon. There is a sense of conflict between the policies—and I mean policies, not projects—of the NPF and those of regional transport partnerships. How should such conflicts be resolved?

Stewart Stevenson: I am not aware of any. If you would care to identify specific conflicts, I would be happy to respond.

Alison McInnes: Okay. I might correspond with you about that.

I will move on. We have heard concerns that, rather than focusing on the need to reduce travel and to increase energy efficiency, the NPF adopts a predict-and-provide approach to transport and energy developments. How do you respond to that?

Stewart Stevenson: My response is that it does not do that.

Alison McInnes: We have taken some significant evidence this afternoon, particularly in relation to the controversy around the new Forth crossing and your change in direction on the multimodal elements of that project. Could you discuss that a bit further?

Stewart Stevenson: The Forth crossing project is about replacing already existing capacity. We know that the state of the existing bridge, which supports substantially more weight and traffic than its design provided for, is deteriorating. The safety limit that is generally thought to be the one to which one should work is a factor of 2, and the safety margin for the bridge is currently sitting at around 2.2 to 2.1.

Although we know that the state of the bridge has deteriorated, it might be possible to arrest that deterioration. It is necessary to replace the provision that the existing bridge supplies, and it is on that basis that we are providing a replacement crossing. In so doing, we are taking the opportunity substantially to increase the public transport provision, and we have been advised that it will be possible to upgrade the existing crossing to provide light rail, a guided busway and so on.

Alison McInnes: Is it reasonable to say that all those improvements would be subject to the

weather and to the restrictions that exist on the current bridge?

Stewart Stevenson: You might want to look at the model of the Severn crossing, where there are two bridges. [*Interruption.*] One is contemporary with the Forth road bridge; the second was built to design standards covering weather protection. I might need to check that this is exactly so, but I believe that in the period since the new bridge across the Severn started operating, it has not been shut for weather reasons, whereas the old bridge has been shut 13 times. With a two-crossing strategy, traffic may take an alternative route to the bridge that is shut. That strategy works on the Severn, and it would be available on the Forth if and when necessary.

The Convener: I ask everyone to ensure that any mobile devices are switched off, as they interfere with the sound system.

Alison McInnes: The minister said that the alternative route would always be there. It would be a free-for-all, however, and there would be no prioritisation for public transport on the new bridge in such circumstances. Therefore, public transport would get caught up in any congestion.

Stewart Stevenson: I have two things to say about that. First, there are relatively few occasions when the existing bridge is shut. Secondly, we are considering hard-shoulder running among the interventions in the strategic transport projects review. One of the advantages of the new crossing is that it will have hard shoulders. The approach of using hard-shoulder running to provide additional capacity for public transport in certain circumstances can be used for the replacement crossing, which is replacing the capacity on the existing crossing that we will no longer be able to use.

It is perfectly correct to say that, when one of the bridges is not available for a few hours, capacity will be diminished. Nonetheless, one can develop and apply strategies that minimise the impact of that and which maintain the integrity and reliability of public transport options.

Des McNulty: I have two questions that are designed to get some precise information about costs. The projected cost of the crossing has been reduced from £4.3 billion to £2.3 billion. How much of that reduction stems from the redesign of the bridge to make it narrower and more streamlined, and how much derives from having less elaborate road works leading up to the bridge on either side of the crossing?

Stewart Stevenson: The subject is not addressed in the national planning framework in any way, shape or form. We considered a range of options—for the roads, the crossing, the budget and the way in which the bridge could be financed.

That process resulted in the price range for the bridge coming down to between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion or thereabouts. The purpose of the bridge is to replace existing capacity, so it is not unreasonable that the roads and the bridge should not diverge materially in capacity provision by having additional lanes. However, as I said in answer to a question from Mrs McInnes, we have provided for a hard shoulder, which will give us greater capability to sustain the operation of the bridge when there are breakdowns or accidents. We will have the option, if we choose to exercise it, of using the hard shoulder in some circumstances to support public transport operations.

Des McNulty: I asked how much of the cost reduction relates to the different design of the bridge, which is to be narrowed, and how much relates to changes to the road works.

Stewart Stevenson: Far and away the largest part of the cost reduction comes from the transfer of public transport provision to the existing crossing. We looked at a wide range of ways of connecting the bridge at both the north and the south end. For example, we concluded that the new bridge could best be joined to the M9 motorway by reusing and redesigning the existing junction with the A8000 and the M9 spur, which has now been connected to the existing bridge. That sort of redesign made a significant contribution to changes in the cost, because we reused more of the network than we initially thought would be possible. A range of contributions have come from a lot of innovative working by the project team. In reducing the cost of the crossing, we have also reduced its carbon footprint, which we were anxious to do.

Des McNulty: That is useful background information, but I would like you to quantify how much of the reduction comes from the various measures that you have described relating to the bridge and how much comes from the redesign of the road works that are associated with it. It may not be entirely fair to put that question to you here and now but, based on what you have said, an answer to it should be available. Is it possible for us to get that answer?

Stewart Stevenson: The change in cost is derived from a large range of changes that were made as we looked at the design and eliminated options. In our original pricing, we had to consider what options might be selected for the bridge and its supporting infrastructure. It is interesting that not only has the price come down but the range has also narrowed, which is equally significant. The reason for that is that as we eliminated a number of options for connection to the north and the south—from memory, there were four main options for connection to the south and a number

of sub-options—we closed down the range. Therefore, we are now considering a band of price options that are much more closely related to the project risk, whereas the figures that we first proposed were related to the wide range of options that were still under consideration at that stage.

Des McNulty: So some aspects are assignable to risk and some to technical changes. I presume that, under both those headings, you can separate out which are to do with the bridge and which are to do with the associated road works. That is the information I am looking for.

Stewart Stevenson: Convener, I suspect that the member is trying to ask me a different question about the design of the bridge, although I am not entirely sure what it is.

The Convener: There is obviously a high level of interest in the development. If members ask questions that will help to inform the debate on the Forth bridge that we will have in the chamber later in the week, I have no objection. However, today the committee is considering the NPF and the project's inclusion in that document. Does Des McNulty have a final question on that issue?

Des McNulty: My final question is actually to do with the Glasgow rail projects.

The Convener: In that case, I will ask one more supplementary question on the Forth bridge.

Minister, you argued earlier that the NPF establishes need. If the NPF is agreed to and the Government signs it off, the question of need will not come up again in the planning process for a national development. That being the case, we should surely expect the Government to provide more clarity about the existing bridge in order to establish the need for an additional bridge.

Over the past year and a half—over a longer period than that, in fact, but certainly during the current Administration—members have heard evidence both ways about the damage to the existing bridge and the dehumidification work. The assessment has been slightly more optimistic recently, but the Government still says that it may be the case that HGVs would not be able to use the existing bridge at some future date and that that demonstrates the need for an additional crossing. Surely it would be reasonable to wait for the result of the dehumidification work and to have some clarity on the bridge's condition before you argue that the need for an additional bridge should be settled once and for all.

Stewart Stevenson: The “may” relates to the date rather than anything else.

The Convener: That is arguable.

Stewart Stevenson: No, I am clear that it relates to the date. Bridges inevitably deteriorate throughout their life. That is why they and other similar structures have a design life; it is expected that the integrity of a structure will deteriorate over its life.

The Convener: The design life of the bridge that we are talking about is 120 years.

Stewart Stevenson: That is correct, but it makes my point that deterioration is a natural part of an engineering structure of that kind. In the case of the Forth road bridge, the deterioration has been substantially greater than was expected. Simultaneously—this is equally important—the quantity of traffic that the bridge carries has vastly exceeded its design limits and, since 1964, we have moved from having relatively light commercial vehicles to having 44-tonne vehicles. In addition, the damage that a vehicle causes, whether to a road or to a bridge, relates not only to its weight but to the cube of the axle weight. In comparison with a 22-tonne vehicle, the damage caused by a 44-tonne vehicle on a bridge is not doubled but increased by a much greater amount.

16:45

A range of changes are under way that draw closer to us the normal and natural expected lifespan of the existing crossing. That is without even starting to take into account the fact that there are wires in the spun cables that have already broken, degrading the ability of the bridge to deliver on its 120-year mission.

I said earlier that the safety factor was a ratio of 2. Given that I am not an engineer, I cannot fully explain that. I ask not to be unduly pressed on the subject, convener, although I can provide further information if required. There really is no doubt that the bridge cannot continue indefinitely without major intervention.

The Convener: My question was less about engineering and more about timing. Is it not reasonable for us to know the results of the dehumidification work that is under way before settling the matter once and for all and making legally unchallengeable the question of the need for an additional crossing?

Stewart Stevenson: I would dearly love to be able to wait for the answer in the knowledge that doing so would not compromise the economy of the whole of Scotland and, in particular, that of Fife and Edinburgh. However, that luxury is simply not available to me. We have a limited period during which to marshal resources and build the bridge. We do not have certainty that we will have certainty. Uncertainty may continue indefinitely; we do not know. Certainly, we would not be able to deliver the capacity over the Forth between Fife

and Edinburgh without a gap in provision. The economic impact of not having a reliable lower Forth crossing would be so substantial that it is beyond contemplation.

The Convener: Without wanting to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, I think your answer indicates that we remain in a period of uncertainty. Is that not the case in terms of the need for an additional crossing?

Stewart Stevenson: No. I disagree fundamentally. The need is certain precisely because of the uncertainty around the future capability of the bridge. We have a degree of certainty: we know that the bridge is approaching the margins of its ability to carry traffic safely; we know that there is deterioration in the carrying capacity of the cables on the bridge; and we know that, for the moment, that deterioration is continuing. We therefore know that we have to ensure the continuity of cross-Forth transport by replacing the capacity of the existing bridge.

The Convener: We could be here all day, but we will move on.

Alison McInnes: Last week, Dr Iain Docherty told the committee that the aviation policy in the national planning framework could be considered “yesterday’s policy”. What is your view on that statement?

Stewart Stevenson: That is not what Dr Docherty actually said. You will find that he said:

“the focus on aviation expansion is very much yesterday’s policy”,—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 6 January 2009; c 1229.]

which is quite different.

The national planning framework is about providing enhanced surface transport to our airports. Given the major role that they play in our economy and the number of people who are employed at them, it is entirely proper for us to make that provision in our national planning framework.

The Convener: We will explore aviation issues later in the meeting.

Charlie Gordon: I will stay with aviation, especially the links between central Scotland and London. Dr Docherty said:

“Assuming that we would not want to diminish the level of economic interaction between Scotland and London, the evidence is becoming ever stronger that high-speed rail is the only realistic way of reducing the carbon impact of that demand.”—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 6 January 2009; c 1249.]

Will you comment on that?

Stewart Stevenson: I agree.

Charlie Gordon: Good.

I have a more general question. The committee has heard concerns that there is often a disparity between the policies and proposals in plans such as the national planning framework, and eventual implementation. What are you doing to ensure that that does not happen to the new national planning framework?

Stewart Stevenson: As we took forward the strategic transport projects review and the national planning framework—both of which are in my portfolio—we sought to co-ordinate their activities. We will continue to co-ordinate their implementation through an action programme.

I come back to the significant point that of the 12 interventions, seven will be private sector. They are essentially planning issues, which, while they fit with and support Government policy, depend largely on the actions of others. However, we intend to ensure that there is significant oversight and that we are focused tightly on implementation and delivery. That is one of the lessons that we have learned from the previous national planning framework. I do not say that to criticise it; I merely note that it is always possible to learn from previous experience.

Charlie Gordon: I turn to one of the strategic interventions in the national planning framework: the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements. I asked a witness on the previous panel whether Glasgow crossrail was dead and, if so, whether it had any offspring. I asked him to describe the offspring to me. I received a long and complicated answer in which the minister’s name was mentioned. I concluded from that that Glasgow crossrail is not dead but continues to suffer badly from paralysis by analysis, and that it has a love child that faces an uncertain future. In the light of your recent meeting with SPT, which the witness mentioned, will you say a wee bit more about the issue than you did the previous time you were in front of the committee?

Stewart Stevenson: Mr Gordon is correct. I met SPT last week and, if I recall correctly, we are to have a full day’s session, with officials from SPT and the Scottish Government, to go through the technical issues. We have commissioned some independent work to inform that meeting.

The difference between SPT and us is not related to objectives. We both want Glasgow to be a place where interchanges are not compulsory and in which there are better-quality through-city connections. The issue is simply whether there is sufficient capacity at the termini. One change that will take place in the not-too-distant future, as we improve connections down to Ayr and other parts of the west of Scotland, is the introduction of trains of eight 23m carriages. The new trains will be

longer because the carriages will be longer and because there will be more carriages. Therefore, at certain of Glasgow Central's platforms there will be capacity for only a single train to sit, where at the moment there can be up to three trains. The differences of opinion have perhaps arisen because that issue has not been considered rigorously enough. I will not prejudge the outcome of the technical discussions.

There are also significant constraints in the rail network, such as bottlenecks at the approaches to stations, particularly Glasgow Central. Such constraints are difficult to address, which is why we have considered stepping up our ambition by examining the possibility of a new rail terminus in Glasgow. Of course, we need to work with Glasgow interests to establish the right location for any such terminus. The meeting that we are planning to have is focused on bottoming out the utilisation of existing capacity, because a lot of new train services are coming in with longer trains, which will fundamentally affect that capacity.

We would hesitate to give any particular label to the idea that we have in mind but, if I were to do so, I might call it crossrail plus.

Charlie Gordon: Or son of crossrail

Stewart Stevenson: Whichever.

The Convener: Des McNulty indicated earlier that he wanted to ask about west of Scotland issues.

Des McNulty: Some of the ideas that you are talking about are exciting, minister, and I would like crossrail plus to be taken forward. Is there a timescale for that?

This committee is engaged in considerable discussions around high-speed rail. If a high-speed connection were to come to Glasgow, the termini question would need to be thought through in that context; we could not bring that connection to Glasgow otherwise. Are the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements a prerequisite for a high-speed connection?

Stewart Stevenson: Mr McNulty makes a good point. At the current early stage of discussions around high-speed rail, no decision has been made about whether it would involve an enhancement of existing railways or an entirely new railway. I know that Network Rail's strong view is that it should be a new railway, and the experience of other countries that have introduced high-speed rail shows that success comes from having an entirely new railway with entirely new gradients and curves. That has significant advantages. In most other jurisdictions, the introduction of high-speed rail has, in a sense, been secondary to the primary objective of increasing capacity. However, when capacity is

increased through a new railway, it makes sense for that to be a high-speed railway—the French TGV line started off as a way of dealing with capacity issues. Although decisions have not been made at this stage in the deliberations, I expect that railways in Great Britain would follow a similar pattern.

I expect to have some discussions with Lord Adonis in the not-too-distant future. The early indications are that he and I—and, therefore, our Administrations—are of a similar mind in that regard. The points that have been made about the need to address the terminus issue are fundamental because it would be almost impossible to bring a new rail network into Queen Street station, and it would present considerable challenges to bring it into Central station. Of course, in saying that, I should point out that it has not been decided whether any high-speed rail connection would go to Edinburgh or Glasgow or both, as that is a matter for later on.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

You have given us a clear timescale for the Forth road bridge project, but there is no timescale for any other project in the national planning framework. Is it possible for you to give us an indication of what that timescale might be?

Stewart Stevenson: The timescale for the replacement Forth crossing stems from the strategic transport projects review rather than from the national planning framework, although there is a perfectly natural read-across. The action programme is about ways of taking forward projects in the STPR and the national planning framework.

We have said that the Forth crossing will dominate our road network expenditure. Of course, it is possible to continue railway projects largely in parallel with that project, because the financing of railways comes largely from other sources, including borrowing. Therefore, the action programme will determine the timetables. Equally, we need to be informed by knowledge of the long-term funding that will be available to the Government, which we see in three-year tranches. That is a significant part of determining what the timetable will look like, of course.

17:00

Alex Johnstone: If the timescales depend on funding, I am happy to move on to funding.

In evidence to the committee last week, Professor David Gray said that a massive increase in transport expenditure would be needed to implement the transport projects that are outlined in the national planning framework and the strategic transport projects review. How does the

Scottish Government intend to fund those projects and set the timescales?

Stewart Stevenson: Funding for projects will be decided on a project-by-project basis within the framework of considering what is prudent to borrow and spend from one's own resources. In general, uncertainties remain about the conversion to the international financial reporting standard from the existing financial reporting standard 17 and its predecessors. The new concept of contingent assets is introduced by international accounting standard 37, which is part of the international financial reporting standards. That relates to whether some things have to come on balance sheet. There are unanswered questions about that, and questions about IAS 31 concerning joint ventures. It seems that if the Government has any operational responsibility or input, that may have to come on balance sheet. Therefore, there is a range of questions, to which the answers are not yet available, that will determine over the long term exactly what the balance of the different funding options will be.

Alex Johnstone: I do not like to offer the minister an easy bowl—

Stewart Stevenson: Feel free to do so.

Alex Johnstone: My question may sound as if it is an easy bowl, but I will ask it and hope for a serious answer. What impact would the requirement to fund the replacement Forth crossing from the Scottish Government's annual capital budget have on other transport projects that are identified in the NPF and the STPR?

Stewart Stevenson: Clearly, there would be an impact. Our capital budget each year is around £3.2 billion to £3.5 billion, and the Forth crossing is a significant project, concentrated over a five-year period, which will inhibit our ability to do other projects. That is why we have explored several other options for mitigating its effects. Unlike the Northern Ireland Executive, we do not have any borrowing powers, so we cannot use borrowing to smooth the path. We have only the ability to work with colleagues in the Westminster Administration, who have borrowing powers that enable them to smooth the bringing forward of planned expenditure.

All the indications are that we will have worthwhile discussions with the Treasury on exactly how we can stage things and minimise the impact—not only because of the effects that there would be on building up our infrastructure and sustaining our economy, but to ensure that the work associated with the projects that we wish to undertake in parallel with the Forth road bridge can be done. Of course, that is one of the reasons why we are emphasising rail development, which will enable us to make significant transport

interventions, in parallel with replacing capacity across the lower Forth, as well as addressing a number of other agendas.

Alex Johnstone: I take it from that answer and a previous answer that it is safe to assume that talks are still going on. Is it equally safe to assume that opportunities still exist?

Stewart Stevenson: Of course. The letter that we received from the Treasury left a number of doors open for discussion, which was helpful. We shall see what comes from that. It would not be reasonable to anticipate the outcome, but all the indications are that there is a genuine desire to sit down and discuss the subject. There is a degree of good will on both sides. The Administrations might have different political views, but we have a shared view of the need to keep the economy moving forward, and we can work on that.

Rob Gibson: The requirement to fund the replacement Forth crossing could have an impact on many other projects. We do not know when some projects, such as the Scapa Flow container transfer facility, will be delivered. In map 9 in NPF 2, a black dotted line around the Pentland Firth indicates an area for co-ordinated action. Witnesses from the regional transport partnerships told us that they can consider only the road and rail elements of their remit. For national developments such as the Scapa Flow container transshipment facility, how can sea, road and rail elements be co-ordinated?

Stewart Stevenson: Scapa Flow is probably a private sector project rather than a Government project, although it is clear that there are implications for the Government in certain respects. You ask how we join the dots, so that the dotted line around the Pentland Firth means something sensible. Given the nature of projects in the area, there is no doubt that much material will be delivered by ship. Maritime transport is likely to be the most effective delivery mechanism.

We will need good communication links to the area. That means that we must ensure that places such as Wick airport are effectively supported in the plans of HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. It also means that we must continue to focus on improving train services north of Inverness and on making the safety and capacity interventions that are required on the A9. However, the area is a long way away. In relation to the project that you mention, the major transport interventions on which our action programme will focus are likely to be maritime.

Rob Gibson: I get a sense of what you are talking about. I was concerned that the regional transport partnership was bidding for road development that was about more than just safety—and, obliquely, for improvements to the

railway. In the area for co-ordinated action around the Pentland Firth, will support from the land for marine renewables developments be important? Road and rail elements could become more important as part of such co-ordinated action.

Stewart Stevenson: Your use of the word “could” is perfectly correct at this stage. It would be unwise to second-guess what will be required to support development. We are at the earliest stage of marine renewable energy development—I am talking about not wave power but tidal power, which is what the Pentland Firth project is about. The very first connection of some equipment to the grid has just been made. It has been suggested that, at the peak of this activity, there will have to be, I think, something of the order of an installation a week. We are talking about significant pieces of plant and it is probably unlikely that road or rail will be the best way of delivering these things.

However, at this stage, I really do not want to second-guess anything; the important point is that the interested parties, which must include the regional transport partnership HITRANS, Government officials and, of course, the private companies that will be involved in developing the work, get together. That is precisely what we are trying to do. We are seeking to ensure that not only our transport planning but our spatial planning, as set out in the national planning framework, are drawn together by a group of people who are seeking to co-ordinate all this activity.

Rob Gibson: With regard to Wick airport, which you mentioned a little earlier, it has been suggested that it be used for a pilot for global positioning landing systems such as those that are used in America, which are said to be a cheaper way of ensuring that planes can land in bad weather. Is that an area in which the co-ordinated action that I mentioned could be undertaken quite cheaply and quite early on?

Stewart Stevenson: Wick airport seems to have certain advantages for a United Kingdom pilot of a GPS-based rather than an instrument-based landing approach system. From memory, I believe that each year there are three dozen diversions from the airport, which is quite a substantial proportion of the flights, and precision approaches using modern GPS could avoid approximately half of them. Anything that provides more reliability will be of value to the local economy.

The advantages of Wick airport are that it is not so busy that such a pilot would have a substantial impact; there are not many hills in the vicinity; and it has a clearly established need. Of course, the licensing of such activity and the conducting of such experiments would come under the auspices of the Civil Aviation Authority, but I believe that

HAL is interested in encouraging the CAA in that respect. Given that the necessary equipment is already installed in almost all the aircraft that would benefit from such an approach, the marginal infrastructure costs will be very small indeed.

Cathy Peattie: You might well have answered this question, but I will ask it anyway. Do the strategic airport enhancements that are designated in the framework as a national development include the provision of new runways at Edinburgh and Glasgow airports?

Stewart Stevenson: No.

Cathy Peattie: I thought that you might say that.

Forth Ports has expressed concern about the designation of Grangemouth and Rosyth ports as national developments. What contacts have you or your officials had with the organisation to resolve those concerns?

Stewart Stevenson: My officials have met representatives of Forth Ports to discuss its concerns. We believe that we have addressed them, but we are happy to continue discussions as necessary.

We believe that there will be long-term growth in container traffic; containers will grow not only in size, but almost certainly in number. Of course, world trade will have to return to some of its previous levels, but there is not very much doubt that that will happen. Scotland needs to be well placed to support that, which is why the Scapa Flow development and developments in the Forth have been designated as national developments in the national planning framework.

17:15

Cathy Peattie: In that case, will the enhancement of freight transport encourage you to think again about the developments at Grangemouth and, in the long term, Rosyth?

Stewart Stevenson: Grangemouth and Rosyth both have advantages. They are relatively well connected to the road and rail networks and we plan to improve that. In essence, they are likely to be points of delivery or dispatch. Scapa Flow is more of an international hub where containers will interline between large long-haul vessels and smaller distributor vessels that will go throughout Europe. So there ain't a conflict at that level. We believe that having as much capacity as possible on the Forth will be of economic value and will not damage anyone's interests.

The Convener: I will briefly follow up on Cathy Peattie's question on the airport enhancements and then ask some general questions on climate change. You have made it clear that the airport enhancements do not include provision for new

runways. Can you be equally explicit that they do not include provision for increased capacity, for either passengers or flights?

Stewart Stevenson: We are seeking to support surface transport to the airports. It is not for us directly to answer that question. We will find out what happens, but we are seeing a downturn. Wherever high-speed rail has been implemented throughout Europe and beyond, it has supplanted competing flights—that is one of its advantages. I would expect exactly that pattern to be repeated if and when we deliver high-speed rail between the south of the UK and the central belt cities of Scotland.

The Convener: My question relates specifically to the national developments that are proposed under the NPF. Will the strategic airport enhancements national development lead to an increase in aviation's physical capacity for passengers and for flights in and out of airports? We have heard evidence from witnesses not just about transport access to the airports, but about access to hangars and issues such as taxiing.

Stewart Stevenson: The constraints on aviation at the airports will largely be to do with air-side infrastructure—in other words, the provision of extra runway capacity—on which the national planning framework does not touch. We are simply talking about ensuring that those who work in and use our airports have an easier journey to them. A substantial proportion of people who travel to Edinburgh airport do so by public transport, although they are still a minority. The proportion of people who go by public transport to Glasgow airport is much lower, although that will be improved by the Glasgow airport rail link, which will open no later than 2013. Aberdeen airport has a significant need for improved surface transport. A bus connection has recently been created between Dyce station and Aberdeen airport, which gives us the opportunity to find out the real demand for public transport interchanges. That is precisely the sort of intervention that will inform further surface transport interventions for the airport. By the same token, railway provision to Prestwick airport could be improved further. The national planning framework provides the opportunity to do all that for all those airports, which are important contributors to our economy.

The Convener: You gave a clear and explicit answer to the question whether there is any provision for new runways—you said no. Is there any provision to increase capacity to allow an increase in the number of flights going through those airports?

Stewart Stevenson: The only capacity for which we are providing in the national planning framework is improved surface transport.

The Convener: Does that mean to and from the airports, rather than within them?

Stewart Stevenson: Correct.

The Convener: The Sustainable Development Commission has described an inherent tension between the development and the climate change aims of the NPF. It has made the same comment about the Government's overall purpose of sustainable economic growth, as has the Government's Council of Economic Advisers. Some organisations, including the SDC, have argued that the national planning framework favours the development priority ahead of the climate change one. What is your response to that?

Stewart Stevenson: Development is a necessary part of ensuring that we address the climate change agenda. We must renew our infrastructure to make it more carbon efficient and to ensure that we have an economy that can afford to make the interventions that will reduce Scotland's carbon footprint. Far from being at odds with our environmental and sustainable growth credentials, the planning framework supports them.

The Convener: I move on to energy issues, especially the comments that have been made to us about coal-fired power stations. Earlier this afternoon, Duncan McLaren from Scottish Environment LINK described the term "carbon capture ready" as meaningless. Can the Government assure us that no additional fossil fuel capacity will come on line without a carbon capture facility being up and running?

Stewart Stevenson: The committee may be aware that we are consulting on precisely that subject, because we recognise its importance.

The Convener: What is the point of including coal-fired power stations in the national planning framework—which establishes statutory principles of need that are not legally challengeable—at this stage, before the consultation has been completed?

Stewart Stevenson: We must ensure that Scotland's energy needs are met, so it is proper for us both to provide for electricity grid replacements to support our renewable energy sources, especially the tidal energy in the north and the Pentland Firth that has been mentioned, and to establish spatial planning and locational principles that enable us to specify where generation can take place. As you know, the Government's policy is that there should be no nuclear generation. It is right that we should consult on non-renewable means of generation in relation to CO₂ emissions—we can move forward from there. Our long-term goal is to focus on renewable energy.

The Convener: It is suggested that coal may have a role to play until we can meet all our energy needs from renewable sources. Do you agree that a coal-fired power station that is carbon capture and storage ready has exactly the same emissions as one that is not?

Stewart Stevenson: It is generally held that substantial carbon sequestration—probably amounting to 90 per cent of emissions—is possible using current technology. One advantage that Scotland has over other jurisdictions is the presence of decommissioned oil fields. One sour gas field—I think it is the Miller field, but I may be wrong—is in the process of being decommissioned, and the pipelines to that field are able to take sequestered CO₂.

As many other countries will undoubtedly continue for some years to come to rely on coal and other non-renewable sources for their energy, it makes sense for us to maximise the opportunities for us to develop and take a lead on CCS technology, so that we are in a position to export that engineering skill and expertise to other countries. We are bidding for funding to develop the technology. The European Commission is on the case—the issue was part of discussions at the recent environment council—and is optimistic that the technology will be available and working within 10 to 15 years.

The Convener: I think that there is near universal support for enthusiastically considering the development of the technology and trying to make it work. In the meantime, I will ask the question again: does the Government accept that a coal-fired power station that is CCS ready has precisely the same emissions as one that is not?

Stewart Stevenson: Our objective is to apply the technology rather than simply develop it. We know what a significant part coal-fired and gas-fired power stations play in relation to our carbon output, which is why we have pursued carbon capture so vigorously for some time. We are now seeking to bid for funds to ensure that our power stations have the minimum possible impact, and much less than they currently have. We will have an opportunity when we replace our power stations, which is precisely the point on which we are consulting.

The Convener: I will ask one final time. I am not undermining the potential of the CCS technology in any way, but is it not correct that making a plant CCS ready before we have the technology will not reduce CO₂ emissions by one gram?

Stewart Stevenson: The important point is that we take every step to ensure that we meet our carbon obligations and conform to the cycle of future plans that we will be required to produce under the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which is

currently before Parliament. I hope that the provisions in the bill will gain widespread support.

The Convener: I can only wonder whether Jeremy Paxman would like a job as a committee convener. We will move on.

Rob Gibson: I hope that this is a wraparound question, as we have already heard about certain things in detail. The national planning framework states:

“A key challenge is to break the link between economic growth, increased traffic and increased emissions.”

How do you intend to achieve that?

Stewart Stevenson: The majority of the interventions in the national planning framework are related to improving the infrastructure in Scotland. If we do that, we will be able to generate more energy, in particular more renewable energy, which will make a significant difference.

The interventions to improve the rail network play to that agenda and, coupled with the strategic transport projects review—which, contrary to a number of people's expectations, has a positive impact on the CO₂ agenda—we are always seeking to improve our infrastructure and to examine the precise impact of significant projects. Economic activity is fundamental to our ability to fund projects that will benefit the environment, so we must continue to invest in projects and pursue strategies that will support economic growth while ensuring that those activities support our climate change agenda.

Rob Gibson: How will we relate the aims of the national planning framework to those of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill? One will be an act and the other—the NPF—is effectively a non-statutory element.

Stewart Stevenson: The national planning framework is about spatial planning rather than the delivery of the 12 projects, many of which—seven of them—are private sector projects in any event. As each of the projects goes through the planning process, we will seek to ensure that the carbon costs and benefits are assessed at the appropriate point in the decision-making process. The inclusion of those projects in the national planning framework does not by any means close the decision-making process in relation to carbon.

17:30

Des McNulty: I will build on Rob Gibson's question. If we simply focus on projects, we end up with a false perspective. The national planning framework should be about more than that. I will highlight three things that could be done to break the connection between economic growth, increased traffic and increased emissions.

First, people in the west of Scotland could be prevented from coming up to the levels of car ownership and usage that are prevalent in other parts of Scotland. There is a need to focus on public transport investment in the west of Scotland, to provide people there with a disincentive to behaving as people behave elsewhere.

Secondly, as planning minister as well as transport and infrastructure minister, you could re-examine councils' proposals for the location of new housing developments. For example, Stirling Council is proposing a significant amount of new housing in Drymen and Strathblane, which have no rail infrastructure, so people who move there will be pushed into car ownership. That is part of the problem. The distribution of houses in Fife, particularly for people who work in Edinburgh, leads to a load factor on infrastructure. Perhaps that is a planning permission issue as much as a transport management issue.

Thirdly, there is the issue of active travel as an alternative to all sorts of carbon-based travel. Do we not need to pay specific attention under the national planning framework to the promotion of active travel, not just for emissions-related reasons but for health reasons and all sorts of other reasons, as discussed by the first panel of witnesses?

Those three things might not be in the framework at present, but they are examples of what might be considered, instead of narrowly focusing on projects.

Stewart Stevenson: I do not disagree with the thrust of the three matters that Mr McNulty raised, albeit my opinion differs on whether they ought to be in the NPF. The issue of car ownership in the west of Scotland is fundamentally difficult. Glasgow, which has significant areas of economic and social deprivation, has—if I remember the figure correctly—a car ownership level of about 47 per 100 households, which is certainly one of the lowest in the UK. London has a significantly lower figure—in the 30s—but it has a very different transport infrastructure. There is a clear link between the provision of good transport and keeping car use—it is car use, not car ownership, that matters—down at appropriate levels.

One of the real difficulties is that, according to the psychology of people who are coming out of economic and social deprivation, a car is an aspirational acquisition—it is something that people want to have. People often see it—not always correctly—as essential to sustain employment. That gives weight to our interventions on rail connectivity in the west of Scotland in particular. It also highlights a need that lies well outside the national planning framework—to tackle the psychology of car ownership and to

get people to use public transport. That is why public transport needs to be of good quality. Once we get people to use it, there is a good chance that more of them will do so. I do not see that Mr McNulty and I greatly diverge on that.

There is an economic incentive for developers in particular to consider areas where the public transport is good, especially places that are near railways and railway stations. There is conflicting evidence, in that the least optimistic evidence suggests that a new house that is built within walking distance of a railway station commands a premium in the market of £2,000—although that figure might be slightly out of date now, because of what has happened recently. Other research suggests that the premium could be as much as a third. The truth will lie somewhere in the middle, but all the research says that there is a significant economic advantage for developers in building houses that are close to railway stations, and that, if those developers contribute to the building of railway stations, they get their money back quickly. It is up to councils and central Government to ensure that developers get involved in such projects.

Alison McInnes will be aware that Aberdeenshire Council has a pretty strong bias against allowing the development of new housing in the countryside. The key reason for that is to reduce the carbon impact and the costs of supporting people who do not necessarily pay the full costs of the dust cart that comes to collect their rubbish every fortnight. I believe that other local authorities take a similar approach.

On active travel, we have initiatives such as the sustainable towns initiative, but I reject the suggestion that active travel should be a planning issue under the national planning framework. It is certainly important that we get more people walking, cycling and using public transport, but that should be dealt with elsewhere.

The Convener: As we have no further questions, minister, I thank you for coming to talk to us today.

We shall now move into private session to discuss item 3.

17:37

Meeting continued in private until 17:54.

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