TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 June 2009

Session 3

£5.00

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR Donnelley.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 23 June 2009

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
17th 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 ALSO ATTENDED:

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Mike Glover (Transport Scotland)
Frazer Henderson (Transport Scotland)
John Howison (Transport Scotland)
Kathryn McKee (The BIG Partnership)
Jill Mulholland (Scottish Government Transport Directorate)
Stewart Stevenson (Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 23 June 2009

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:01*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon. I welcome everyone to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's 17th meeting this year. I remind everybody present that all mobile devices should be switched off. We have received apologies from Rob Gibson, but there are no other apologies to record.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take item 5 in private. Item 5 is a discussion on the appointment of an adviser for the budget process. Are we agreed to take item 5 in private?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Road Safety Framework

14:02

The Convener: Item 2 is a discussion on the Scottish Government's road safety framework, for which we have been joined by the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson. He is accompanied by Jill Mulholland, who is the road safety team leader in the Scottish Government, and Ian Robertson, who is a policy officer in that team.

Does the minister want to make an opening statement?

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I am happy to go straight to questions. If at the end anything material appears not to have been covered, perhaps I can be permitted to wrap up the discussion then in exchange for saying nothing now.

The Convener: That is fine. Let me begin by asking for a general explanation of the role that the road safety expert panel has played in the development of the framework.

Stewart Stevenson: The expert panel was brought together to try to represent as many strands as possible of knowledge and opinion on road safety in Scotland. Basically, the panel's very open agenda was to try to push the boundaries of what might be achieved by creating a framework that will continue the progress whereby the number of deaths on our roads has dropped to one third of what it was 20 years ago. The panel's aim was to ensure that, as progress gets more difficult due to the ever smaller numbers, we keep up that momentum. Basically, we worked together and tried always to be open-minded and not to reject anything whatsoever at any early stage.

The Convener: Were any suggestions made by the panel that were not included in the final framework? Why were any suggestions rejected?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not think that any suggestions were rejected. I will outline the context in which I say that. We had several meetings at which presentations were made by people from Sweden, the United Kingdom Administration, the Driving Standards Agency and so on, during which we took part in quite free-flowing discussions that dealt with issues that were not presented or formulated as actual proposals. When proposals were brought forward, none of ours was rejected. One of the very good things about how everyone approached the process was that we were able to come to a unanimous view on everything that we discussed.

The Convener: Moving on to the consultation process, I gather that the consultation elicited only 94 responses, with just 20 coming from individuals. Given that there is an emphasis in the document on engaging with the public, that seems like a bit of a poor response rate.

Stewart Stevenson: It is not untypical of response rates in this area of policy, not just in Scotland but in the rest of the UK. In some ways, it illustrates the nature of the issue. People do not take a great deal of interest in road safety in any sort of detailed way. They take it for granted that, when they are driving in their cars, they are safe—they have a sense of invulnerability, particularly if they are inexperienced or young. The kind of response that we have had illustrates precisely why parts of the framework are about engaging people. As you have read the framework, you will be aware that we have made a proactive effort to reach younger and more inexperienced drivers in particular and to try to understand their behaviours. We did that because we recognised the particular challenges that exist around that group of drivers.

To summarise, engaging people in road safety is a significant challenge.

The Convener: I have to admit that the response rate for individuals is very low, particularly given that the issue directly affects many people in Scotland. Many people will have personal experience of a damaging or tragic incident on the roads and many other people—certainly, many people who speak to me—are concerned about traffic levels, dangers to the public, safe routes to school and so on. Given that you say that you went out proactively to engage people, 20 responses seems startling low.

Stewart Stevenson: The rate is not dissimilar to the response rate to consultations on other issues that are not, at the time, a matter of huge debate in the popular media. Certainly, one can expect direct engagement from people who have lost a loved one or a friend. However, thankfully, most people's direct exposure to tragedy on our roads is relatively limited. The challenge is to get to those people and ensure that they understand that they have a role to play in looking after their own safety, the safety of those with whom they are travelling, and the safety of other road users.

The Convener: You mentioned specific efforts to approach younger drivers. What proactive efforts were made to approach pedestrians?

Stewart Stevenson: We did not make pedestrians the subject of proactive engagement.

The Convener: Why not?

Stewart Stevenson: We identified that the key group in terms of contributions to road non-safety or lack of safety—I am just trying to think of the right word for that.

The Convener: Danger, I suppose.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you. We identified that the key group in terms of contributions to road danger was made up overwhelmingly of young and inexperienced drivers, which is why we made them a particular target.

Of course, you should be aware that on the panel were people who represent quite a wide range of road safety interests and are engaged with and very much aware of the needs of pedestrians and other groups.

The Convener: Clearly, someone's perception of danger, safety and behaviour that leads to danger will be different depending on whether they are inside or outside a vehicle. Would it not be reasonable to say that a fully rounded perception of the issues could be achieved only by getting both perspectives?

Stewart Stevenson: We have produced a framework that leads to a significant number of actions and engagements that will take place in the next 10 years. In developing those, we will be very much aware of the need to engage with pedestrians. In the framework, we have made a number of specific commitments in relation to pedestrians. For example, we are very much aware that there is a close correlation between pedestrian injuries and fatalities at weekends and the consumption of drink. That is not by any means the whole picture, of course, but that is an example of the sort of things of which we are already aware and with which we can engage.

We are also particularly aware of the issues to do with school students in the vicinity of school buses who are making the transition from being passengers to being pedestrians or vice versa. I have been particularly engaged in that issue, as has Alison McInnes.

There is a degree of engagement with regard to pedestrians in what we have already done. As we work up our programmes for the next 10 years, that will be sustained.

The Convener: You chose to use the mechanism of focus groups with 16 to 25-year-olds. Why did you decide to conduct focus groups only with that age group and not with others?

Stewart Stevenson: Because, as I said earlier, that is the group that we identified as being overwhelmingly at a substantially higher degree of risk than other groups. Understanding the motivations and actions of that particular group was especially important to our understanding of what the framework should look like.

The presence on the group of Professor Stephen Stradling, who is a professor of psychology, led us in that direction, to an extent. We understand that the challenge for road safety in the next 10 years concerns not so much building safer streets and improving the technology of cars, bicycles and so on but changing the risky behaviours of significant numbers of people who use our transport system.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Do you agree that many of the people who are at risk now, and will be at risk in the future, are children and young people? Children around the ages of 10 or 12 would seem to me to be an obvious target area, and we have an opportunity to engage with those young people through schools. Has any thought been given to consulting schools and young people who attend those schools?

Stewart Stevenson: There is already a significant amount of engagement with schools. For example, Road Safety Scotland's fridge magnet programme has been very successful and the kerbcraft programme has been used by various councils.

We have to be careful not to overlook the role of local authorities in this area of work because the skills that are required in rural areas will be different from the ones that are required in densely populated areas with heavy traffic. There must be a huge element of partnership working by road safety professionals, Government, local authorities and all those who have to take an interest. That will mean targeting different groups at different times in different places in different ways.

14:15

Cathy Peattie: I accept all that, and there are some very successful partnerships that work with children and young people. However, the positive step of asking children and young people what their views are about road safety and what they think might be done to keep them safe has not been taken?

Stewart Stevenson: One of the reasons for having Kathleen Marshall, the former Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland, on the panel was precisely to maintain that connection to her work with children. We distinctly valued that connection in coming to our conclusions. I expect that the new commissioner, Tam Baillie, in developing programmes for the future, will play a key part in influencing what we do from now. The existence of the children's commissioner and their connection to what we have been doing is a key aspect.

Cathy Peattie: Aside from revised targets, can you explain the key difference between the Scottish Government's framework and the UK-wide strategy that was published in 2000?

Stewart Stevenson: It is fair to say that 2000 was a reasonable time ago. I would prefer to focus on the fact that we and the UK Government are pretty much working in parallel. The UK Administration is consulting on a new road safety strategy for Great Britain, and a number of the powers that influence that are not ones that are at my hand; they lie with Paul Clark, the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport. Paul Clark wrote to me on 12 June after we provided him with a copy of our new road framework, and I am happy to give the committee a copy of his letter. He commented that our framework

"provides excellent, well-researched guidance for both practitioners and road users and sets out a clear pathway to achieving real progress in reducing road casualties in Scotland."

He went on to say how the Department for Transport has been part of the work that we have developed in producing our framework; by the same token, our officials contribute to the work that Paul Clark and his team at Westminster are doing.

In our different environments, where there will be nuances of different need, we are seeing each other's needs and proceeding to the extent that we can, and that is the important thing. We continue to have one or two areas where we take a different view, but that is a matter for healthy debate, and I am not going to make anything much of that.

Cathy Peattie: I very much agree with the suggestion in the framework that, as road users, we all have responsibility for road safety. How do you intend to help to meet that aspiration and encourage people to take that responsibility?

Stewart Stevenson: We will pursue a wide range of options over the coming years. We should inculcate into drivers—from the outset of their driving career, at whatever age they become a driver—the idea that passing their test is not the completion of the process of acquiring, maintaining and sustaining skills. There are a number of ways in which people can add to their skills and verify that they are still up to the required standards. There will be opportunities in years to come to assess what retraining might be appropriate for drivers under certain circumstances, and we will continue to discuss that.

Drivers are one category of road user to consider. There is a framework within which people can operate as drivers. People need a licence; they have to demonstrate, at one point in time, that they have the skills to drive safely on our roads. Other road users can use the roads without

that gateway: cyclists, pedestrians, youngsters and old people whose mobility is restricted are not people whom we will ever test to use our roads. In addition, disabled people, and especially blind people, have specific needs. Those people need interventions that are specific to them. An intervention for drivers will not necessarily help a blind pedestrian with a guide dog, for example, although I presume that there would be a mutual advantage in that they will both be able to use the road network more effectively and respect each other needs. However, there will be different interventions.

Cathy Peattie: I welcome the fact that you included in your answer the very people whom I wanted to talk about. One of my concerns is that vans and cars are parked on pavements, which means that people with disabilities have to go on to the road to get past. I have seen toddlers having to do the same thing—okay, mum should be holding their hand, but that is neither here nor there. Children on their way home from school have to go on to the road or even into the middle of the road to get past a van. Again, that is very much to do with people's awareness of road safety.

You said that we perhaps need to consider the driving test, but is there anything that we can do under the framework to make walking safer for pedestrians—particularly children, young people, disabled people including those in wheelchairs, and people with buggies—given that it can be dangerous and that people have no other option?

Stewart Stevenson: There are standards—I am now wearing one of my other hats, as opposed to my transport hat—for the planning of road layouts and, in particular, pedestrian ways. I cannot quite remember the required width. From memory, I think that it is 2m, but I will not be held to that. However, we must recognise that much of the infrastructure that we have does not meet modern standards and needs to be managed in a particular way.

In a sense, that brings us back to the need for effective partnership working, because some of the questions that you are asking me relate to enforcement. In other words, the answer is not to create a new legislative framework that says that people cannot do certain things. Many of the behaviours that you describe are already not permitted or are illegal. A degree of enforcement is required.

Equally, I come back to the point that the biggest contribution that can be made to improving road safety is to change the behaviours of the people who use the roads. The unthinking parker of a van on a pedestrian walkway, whose action leads to people having to expose themselves to danger, is clearly not performing at the standard that we require. We have many instances of unthinking behaviour. Jackie Baillie's Disabled Persons' Parking Places (Scotland) Bill was brought forward with all our support to address a particular problem. I am pretty sure that we heard in the debates on that bill that people who park in disabled parking spaces without due cause are four times as likely as the general population to already have a criminal conviction. In other words, there is a correlation between a person's preparedness to break the rules in one part of their life and a general preparedness to break the rules in many parts of their life.

It may be that targeting can be done.

Cathy Peattie: I do not know whether you are aware that there is a grey area. Some of the provisions on the matter are in UK legislation, but the police can act only if they see someone driving on to the pavement, so often they cannot deal with people who make a habit of parking on the pavement. How can we move forward and do the hearts and minds thing, or indeed make people take responsibility for their parking and realise the effect that it has on young people and others who have to walk on the road?

Stewart Stevenson: If I may say so, I am not going to give the explicit response that would make you happy, except to say that some good points are being made and we take note of them.

I make the general point that there are parts of our city streets—I can think of several examples—where parking is permitted on the pavement in marked parking spaces, but they are adjacent to pedestrian areas and the markings are far from clear and not understood. In certain towns and villages—and cities, for that matter—there is huge ambiguity around the subject. That is a matter for local action, primarily, rather than the minister walking every street in Scotland to work out where action is needed.

Cathy Peattie: Thank you. I do not expect you to do that; I expect your views to reflect the problems that people face.

How does the Scottish framework tie in with the UK framework that is being developed by the Department for Transport?

Stewart Stevenson: I mentioned Paul Clark's first letter to me, which was essentially the new minister saying, "Hello, I'm here and I'd like to help." The attitude that we are seeing is one of recognition that we face a shared issue and that we want to work together effectively.

By ensuring that our respective officials north and south of the border participate in each other's activities, we will benefit from each other's research and will, when it is appropriate, come up

with common views. There is plenty of scope for working together in a common purpose.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): You have stated that changes to road safety legislation by the UK Parliament

"would make a massive impact on reducing casualty rates even further".

What legislation are you referring to? What changes would you like to see?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not recollect using the word "massive", but there are certainly areas in which we think that a difference can be made. The most obvious area is drink-driving limits, which have been the subject of some debate. I think that Ireland, the UK and one other country, which I cannot bring to mind at the moment, are significantly adrift of the limit of 50mg of alcohol per something or other—per litre, it must be—that prevails across Europe. We think that it would be useful for that to be the limit. In this domain, I always note that the equivalent limit for flying is 20mg. If such a limit is good enough for flying, surely we can do a bit better on the roads. That is one area in which we would like to see change.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Can you give us an indication of the role and responsibilities that you envisage the proposed Scottish strategic group on road safety having?

Stewart Stevenson: As yet, we have not drawn up the group's terms of reference. I must ask to be reminded of something. [*Interruption.*]

Jill Mulholland (Scottish Government Transport Directorate): That board will be responsible for considering the causation factors for each child fatality.

Stewart Stevenson: That is right. Because children are of particular concern and because we have set the most challenging of targets in relation to children in our framework, a report on every accident in which a child has died will come to that board and will be analysed with a view to finding common elements so that we can learn lessons and ensure that they are disseminated and applied throughout the system.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Do we have a timescale within which that group will be up and running?

Stewart Stevenson: We will write its terms of reference later this year and will constitute it thereafter.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I have advocated the vision zero approach to road deaths for some time, and I am pleased that you, too, have embraced it. The main target in the framework is a 40 per cent reduction in road deaths between 2010 and 2020. The Swedish road safety strategy, which is where the vision zero approach comes from, aims to achieve a figure of zero road deaths by 2020. Can you state when you anticipate that we might adopt a target of zero road deaths?

Stewart Stevenson: The straight answer is no. We invited the Swedes to talk to us about what they are doing, some of which is quite interesting. Their approach is experiencing a bit of a stall at the moment. Even though they are ahead of us, we are catching up and making improvements more quickly than they are. Theirs is very much a centrally directed intervention. Much of their work has been on re-engineering roads, for example; much less of it has been about engaging local safety partnerships and local councils. However, Sweden has a very large number of councils, so practical issues may arise. I admire the Swedes and respect them for setting their 2020 target. However, when we consider the progress that they are making just now, we can see that the target is hugely ambitious.

It is right that we should say that zero is where we have to get to eventually, but the targets that we have set are recognised as being more challenging than the current UK targets—although I accept that the UK targets may be reconsidered. Our targets are challenging but should be achievable in the light of what we know. Zero deaths is the target that we have to get to, but I am not going to rise to the temptation of stating it as our target now.

14:30

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): For a long time, a test has been applied to any stretch of road in Scotland that is considered hazardous: the test is the number of serious incidents to have taken place. Only if that test is passed is it possible to get the council or the police to consider new road measures such as crossings or improved lighting. Is it a satisfactory arrangement that it takes three serious incidents to trigger a response?

Stewart Stevenson: I would not describe the situation in the way that you describe it. And, by the way, I do not think that the policy has changed from that of the previous Administration.

When three serious incidents have taken place, you are forced to look into it; but the absence of three serious incidents does not prevent you from looking into it. It is important to consider things from that perspective. For example, we are undertaking a study at Laurencekirk, where the test that Mr McNulty mentions has not been met at the main A90 junction. There are other junctions, and you could consider the aggregate over the stretch of road and get different figures. However,

although the test has not been met, we acknowledge the local concerns. Even though accidents are not happening, the junction is difficult. It is an example—although not the only one—of where we have put cameras at all the junctions to record traffic over an extended period to see how people behave. We want to record how many near misses there have been, because near misses do not make it into the statistics.

The test that Mr McNulty describes has been used for some time, and we continue to use it. It is the "You must intervene" test; it is not the "You must not intervene unless" test.

Des McNulty: My colleague Charlie Gordon will remember what happened at Peel Glen Road, which is in his constituency and adjacent to mine. A series of fatalities occurred, and it was not until after a number of such incidents that action was taken.

On the A82 in my constituency, between the Duntreath flyover and Drumry roundabout, three deaths have occurred within the past two years. It is only the fact of those incidents that has produced a response from the local authority.

We should not have to wait until such things happen for a response to be prompted. Could a more proactive stance be taken when it is clear that issues could be addressed in order to improve road safety?

Stewart Stevenson: One thing that we have done is to keep records of slight accidents, and we have secondary targets in relation to that. Any change in the number of slight accidents is an early indication that there are difficulties associated with either the local driver population or the engineering of the road. You are absolutely right that we have to be proactive.

I return to the fundamental point that the proportion of the accidents where people are killed or seriously injured that are down to road-user behaviour is rising. In other words, the engineering interventions have made a significant contribution over the past 20 years. In that time, we have gone from a figure of 900 or so people a year killed on our roads to less than 300 a year killed on our roads. However, the challenge for the next 10 or 20 years is to address the rising proportion of deaths that are caused by road-users' behaviour.

The A82 is probably the most dangerous trunk road in Scotland in terms of the number of people killed or seriously injured per kilometre—it depends how you look at it, but it is there or thereabouts. There are significant parts of the road where, if a driver of an adequate standard who is exercising respect for the road conditions, traffic conditions and time of day sees someone coming the other way who is going to cause an accident, there is no way that they can respond, because there is rock on one side and a loch on the other. On that road, and a number of other roads, there is a case for engineering interventions that create safe ways to avoid accidents for the drivers who are operating with appropriate skill.

We have not run out of engineering interventions by any means. That is why safety interventions are at the top of the hierarchy of interventions in the strategic transport projects review. The economic interventions are further down the hierarchy.

Des McNulty: The traffic light system that categorises road conditions and identifies the worst roads and the better ones has been useful. In analysing the risks associated with particular roads, or stretches of road, would it be possible to come up with a traffic light system that would guide the investment patterns of local authorities and central Government, so that, instead of our having a behavioural focus, investment would be driven by the risk of accidents, or the conditions that cause accidents?

Stewart Stevenson: I suspect that you are asking me two things. First, you are asking whether we can present the information that is held by the Government, councils and the police—who are the primary source—in order to better focus the engineering interventions. I would certainly respond to that positively. If you are suggesting that drivers would respond to the information if we put up a sign saying "dangerous road", experience suggests that that would be of relatively limited value, so we would probably not do it.

There are bits of road where accidents happen for a variety of reasons that are not wholly to do with the engineering. For example, there was a long history of significant accidents dispersed along the A77 that were related to the speeds at which drivers were driving. The speed enforcement camera system, which introduced average speed cameras, has made a relatively significant contribution to that. It is quite an expensive intervention, but it is still cheaper than killing people, by a long margin. It is the sort of thing that we would want to continue to use at the appropriate point, particularly when the next generation of such equipment becomes available.

Alison McInnes: You have set ambitious child casualty reduction targets for 2020, which is to be welcomed. Will you outline in a bit more detail how you aim to achieve those targets?

Stewart Stevenson: There are, of course, various kinds of child casualties. In-car child casualties have risen in the current year. However, the number of such casualties is quite small, and there will be variations when there are small numbers. As I said, the group that we will set up will analyse every single accident. We do not know

whether in-car casualties have resulted from children not being adequately secured in cars or from other passengers not being adequately secured and therefore impacting on secured children, which is equally a possibility. We need to address such issues.

There are young children who have been unsupervised in environments in which it was inappropriate for them to be unsupervised and have interacted with traffic in a way that has led to their being killed or seriously injured. There are also school student casualties and young driver casualties—drivers aged 17 remain children in legal terms. There is not a single intervention; rather, there will be different interventions for each group, and it is likely that they will also be geographically differentiated.

Alison McInnes: You touched on enforcing the wearing of seat belts. We must all be concerned when we walk up the high street and see unrestrained children in cars. It seems that it would be simple to run a campaign to raise awareness of that problem and enforce the wearing of seat belts rather more. Travelling in a car without properly restraining children is seriously negligent. We need to raise that issue up the agenda a little bit, and that can be done. Chapter 6.1 of the framework is entitled "Children and Young People". The commitments on page 36 are heavily weighted towards pedestrian interventions. I am, therefore, pleased that you have talked about in-car safety. That is reassuring.

Why do you need to commission more research to investigate the links between road safety and disadvantaged children? It is clear that there is already quite a body of evidence on that; the framework refers to it on page 31.

Stewart Stevenson: I have just been reminded—this is modestly helpful—that there will be a focus on seat belts next year, as the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland has designated 2010 as the year of the seat belt. We think that half of the deaths in cars are associated to some degree with the failure to wear seat belts, although it is not entirely clear that that is the case. Using equipment that is fitted in every car is a relatively simple intervention. When I travel by bus, I am almost invariably the only person wearing a seat belt. However, that is just me.

The Department for Transport's seat belt wearing rates for car occupants for August 2007 are on page 78 of the framework. Only 70 per cent of rear seat adults wore seat belts then. At a road safety conference that I attended—no names, no pack-drill—I asked how many of the 300 or so people in the audience had in the preceding six months travelled in a car in which one or more persons had not worn a seat belt. Half of the audience put up their hands. That was a road safety audience.

Wearing seat belts is one of the biggest issues. If we can address it, that will make a big difference. I take pleasure in a suggestion that I have made, which some have viewed as eccentric, about having fluorescent seat belts. Such seat belts would at least enable people outside cars to see more readily whether people inside them were wearing seat belts. Compliance would therefore be driven up and enforcement would be helped. We shall see whether that suggestion is taken up, as it is a matter for the UK Government rather than for us.

There was a review in 2000 of road accidents involving children living in disadvantaged areas. There has not been a review since then, and we need to understand what is happening because the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads has significantly reduced in that period. There was certainly evidence that disadvantage was one of a range of factors involved, and it was not an insignificant factor, but we need another review.

14:45

Alison McInnes: We share a concern about young drivers—particularly young drivers in rural areas. Your approach to the "drive for life" culture is interesting. I have previously raised the pass plus initiative with you. Have you considered developing that initiative and rolling it out across Scotland? Most young people learn to drive in towns and cities, so they do not understand how to handle a car on a rural road and they learn the hard way. That seems to be a matter on which we could make some headway. Did you consider the effect of the pass plus initiative?

Stewart Stevenson: As the member will know, there was a pass plus trial in Moray—

Alison McInnes: And in Aberdeenshire.

Stewart Stevenson: And in Aberdeenshire. It was generally positive, but we have to put it in the context that the people who went through the trial were self-selecting, so they came to the pass plus scheme with an interest in developing their skills. We must therefore be cautious about reading too much into it. Nonetheless, pass plus is one scheme. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents also has training schemes, as does the Institute of Advanced Motorists—for completeness, convener, I draw attention to my register of interests, which states that I am a member of that organisation. People can develop their skills in a number of ways—a number of driving schools also offer post-test training.

One issue is to direct people who are demonstrably failing to meet the required standards, particularly in the early years of their driving, to the remedial training that they clearly require. We will certainly consider the pass plus scheme as part of our broader intervention. The Driving Standards Agency is upgrading the pass plus scheme and is considering whether it may lead to a qualification. There is a broad understanding of the role of post-test training in improving the skills and behaviours of people on the roads.

Alison McInnes: You mentioned self-selection. An issue to reflect on is that we must learn how to incentivise such schemes so that they become an option that people want to take up.

I have a couple of other points. You referred to the role of infrastructure. The framework refers to two-plus-one-lane roads in more rural areas and states that you will continue to roll those out to provide overtaking opportunities. Will you consider the Scandinavian experience, which shows that you must have proper physical separation to reduce accidents on those stretches of road? A number of two-plus-one overtaking opportunities can cause the driver confusion, because there are changes in the direction of the overtaking lane.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, we will of course consider that. The figures for the two-plus-ones are somewhat ambiguous. For example, some of the safest sections of the A9 are not the dual carriageway bits, but the two-plus-ones. However, the figures are not sufficiently decisive to lead us one way or the other. We must also be careful about using only accidents as a measure. At junctions, the Swedes are currently replacing traffic lights with roundabouts. The number of accidents has risen dramatically, but the number of injuries has fallen dramatically, because the accidents are now low-speed accidents. However, we must qualify that by saying that it is early days and that, as drivers get used to the new road infrastructure, speeds will perhaps rise and the impact will rise. Subtle analysis of what goes on is required to provide some understanding of and engagement with the psychology of road users, so that we understand why they do things.

Infrastructure has a role and the Swedes can demonstrate that two-plus-one with a separation has some advantage. We will continue to look at the matter.

Alison McInnes: You refer specifically to improving the information that has to be captured for casualty analysis. I suggest that we could capture two other useful pieces of information. One is the reason for the journey and the other is the distance that had been travelled prior to the accident. I do not know how easy it would be to gather that information, but it would help to inform our decisions.

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes good points and we have noted them.

The Convener: I have a further question on the "Driving for life" section of the framework document. The Government states regularly that it has a commitment to sustainable and active travel, modal shift and public transport, so is not the assumption that is built into the description of children as pre-drivers unfortunate or unhelpful?

Stewart Stevenson: May I say, convener, you have used that phrase, but I never have.

The Convener: It is used in the framework.

Stewart Stevenson: I mean that, personally, I have never used the phrase.

The Convener: It is in your document.

Stewart Stevenson: If it has escaped into the wild via the document, we will perhaps lasso it and return it to the zoo.

The Convener: There is an entire section headed "Pre-Drivers".

Stewart Stevenson: I make the serious point that we must engage with people whom we reasonably expect to become drivers and ensure that, when they become drivers, they understand the nature of the transition to being a driver and that they have acquired a set of habits—I hope through the education system—that makes them much better drivers than they would be if we did not intervene.

The Convener: I hope that, when that language is being expunged next time round, the assumption might be the safer one that all young people will be road users, but that, certainly in parts of the country such as Glasgow, maybe only about half of them will be drivers. Perhaps that assumption should be reinforced next time round.

Stewart Stevenson: The convener makes a good point. London has the lowest proportion of cars per household, at something of the order of 37 per 100. The proportion in Glasgow is also low, with a figure that is below 50 per 100. However, when Alison McInnes and I return to Aberdeenshire, we are in territory where the figure is 102 or thereabouts. That reflects the different needs and opportunities to access public transport.

The Convener: I simply make the point that all of us are road users, whether or not we end up being drivers.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): The framework contains a commitment to promote the voluntary use of intelligent speed adaptation,

which in effect is technology to govern the speed at which a vehicle can travel along different sections of its route to tie in with speed limits. You are considering carrying out a pilot to test the effectiveness of such a system. Why would a voluntary scheme have the most benefit, given that, in all likelihood, it would not be embraced by the speed merchants and is more likely to be self-selecting, to use your phrase of a few minutes ago?

Stewart Stevenson: A voluntary scheme is a good place to start. The scheme is not about the technology intervening and putting on the brakes; it is about telling people that they are exceeding the speed limit.

Charlie Gordon: Sorry, minister, but the first one is an option.

Stewart Stevenson: It is an option, but our primary focus is on a system that tells people when they exceed the limit. Drivers who are caught speeding often say that they did not know that they were breaking the speed limit. For example, they were in a 30mph zone, but thought that they were in a 40mph zone, or they were in a 40mph zone, but thought that they were in a 50mph zone. Of course, we must take that with a pinch of salt. People in those circumstances will say such things, but the system that we are considering removes that excuse. We want to explore the role that it can play. About 15 years ago, I had a car in which I could press a button for three different speeds and it went "bong" if I exceeded the top speed. What happened was that, when it went "bong", I took my foot off the throttle and did not drive faster. Quite a lot of the time, speeding is inadvertent, but even if it is deliberate, it can perhaps be tackled through conditioning behaviour. We want to explore whether such a system can make a contribution, but it might not.

Des McNulty: Is the framework accompanied by an increase in the Scottish Government's road safety budget?

Stewart Stevenson: The framework is not a budgetary document. That matter will follow later.

Des McNulty: I will ask you about cycling. You have been under a wee bit of pressure recently from the cycling lobby about what it considers to be reductions in the budget for cycling. Pages 46 to 49 of the framework deal with cycling. The focus there is on improving behaviour through schools, for instance; there is nothing about separating cyclists from other road users or the kind of infrastructure development that the cycling lobby wants. How will the framework feed through to decisions on funding?

Stewart Stevenson: We have provided significant sums of money. Sustrans is getting a little more than £3.5 million for the national cycling network and school run projects in the current year; we are giving £2.5 million to trunk road cycling projects and more than £9 million to local authorities for cycling, walking and safer streets; and there is also £1.4 million for "Smarter Choices, Smarter Places" pilots, so quite a lot is going on. The way in which money to support cycling is delivered has changed, but I take issue with the suggestion that we are not making interventions that will make a real difference, because I believe that we are.

Des McNulty: The framework states that each road death costs £1.65 million. Therefore, the extrapolated cost of the 288 Scottish road deaths in 2007 would be £475 million. The road safety budget is £3 million and you just said that the cycling budget is about £9 million. Are those figures proportionate?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not want to get bogged down in numbers when we are trying to talk about principles and people's lives. The £1.65 million is not, of course, a cash cost. It concerns the loss of earning capacity of the person and the support that may have to be given to people who are left behind. It is the old apples and oranges argument: if we have six apples and four oranges, we have 10 pieces of fruit but describing it as 10 pieces of fruit does not tell us how many apples and oranges we have; they are different things.

We are trying to identify genuine benefits from changing the way in which we conduct public policy through creating the framework that we have just published and through the group that we will establish. If we can do that, it will guide and direct what we have to do to ensure that our roads are safer. There is an increasing need for road users—adult road users in particular—to exercise personal responsibility. Engagement in that is the fundamental measure that will change the numbers of people who are killed and seriously injured on our roads.

Des McNulty: I am examining the Government's panoply of policies from the highest level down to specific measures. Expenditure on walking and cycling ticks a number of boxes. Road safety appears to be a high priority in the strategic transport projects review that was published relatively recently and, according to the framework, £1.3 billion will be spent on major infrastructure projects and network management over the next three years. How much of that is going on safety or—I can never remember the exact phrase—ambulant and non-emissions producing forms of transport? Should we not focus proportionally more of that significant resource on those policy areas rather than on the big infrastructure, or should the big infrastructure projects more explicitly contain safety elements or

elements that promote walking or cycling than at present?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sure that you accept that we do not seek to build unsafe roads. Major projects to build new roads or make upgrades often involve embedded expenditure for cycling and walking that is not disconnected from the projects. For example, the provision of an underpass in the design of the Fochabers and Mosstodloch bypass has been slightly controversial, but it is an important part of creating the cycling infrastructure that will be associated with that road improvement and improving safety for cyclists and pedestrians. The question that you properly implicitly pose is whether we can do better in that regard. The answer will always be yes, because there will always be more to do, but it is a key part of planning our major transport projects and is not always fully reflected in the way that we count the money that we spend on walking or cycling.

15:00

Des McNulty: The category that I was struggling to find was active travel. Can we feature active travel more prominently in the framework and budgetary decisions? I think that you are saying "Yes, we can," but I hope that that will be taken up in the implementation of the framework and future budgets.

Stewart Stevenson: I am a fan of active travel myself and have so far done about 400 miles in ministerial journeys on foot. I will shortly journey to St Andrew's house and I will do that on foot as well. I will ensure that we certainly can.

The Convener: Perhaps "Yes, we can" will one day turn into "Yes, we are."

I thank the minister and his officials for attending the committee. We will suspend briefly before the next agenda item to allow for the changeover of witnesses.

15:01

Meeting suspended.

15:05

On resuming—

Forth Replacement Crossing

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is an evidence session on the Forth replacement crossing, which I still like to call the additional Forth road bridge. I welcome the panel of witnesses: John Howison, project director; Frazer Henderson, bill manager; and Mike Glover, commission project director—all from Transport Scotland—and Kathryn McKee, account director with the BIG Partnership. I also welcome Margaret Smith, who is attending for this agenda item.

I begin with a question about how the consultation process was developed; whether different approaches were considered; and which factors were used to determine decisions about consulting the public—using public exhibitions, for example—on a major project such as this.

John Howison (Transport Scotland): To answer that, I will need to say something about the general process with regard to how the project has been advanced. It is very much an iterative process: we do a certain amount of engineering work; come forward with proposals; consult on the proposals; review the consultation; revise the proposals; and examine the environmental consequences. The process began in 2007—leading up to the announcement in December—during which we examined various routes and types of crossing. During 2008, we considered the outcome—the plan for a cable-stayed bridge in South Queensferry—and undertook development work on it.

The consultation really began in 2007, with exhibitions that were visited by more than 4,000 people. We ran through 2008: refining our proposals, taking account of what was happening in the analysis of the Forth road bridge and undertaking some analysis with the Forth Estuary Transport Authority.

The proposals were announced in December 2008, and very soon after that, in January, the briefings were given. Public exhibitions were held, from which we got feedback. We have been undertaking various pieces of work, and we have come up with revisions to the proposals. We are now working out the environmental consequences of some of those revisions for incorporation in the environmental statement.

Throughout that process, community engagement took place through meetings with residents and community councils, the publication of newsletters and e-zines, and the maintenance of a website. There is a fairly complex process of public engagement throughout, which is structured

to fit in with the engineering and the environmental work.

The Convener: Were alternative or additional approaches considered or used, such as telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews or targeted mailshots in the areas that are likely to be affected?

John Howison: We need to recognise that we are talking about an engineered product, which needs to be developed in an engineering sense according to what is possible. I am not sure how feedback from focus groups would help in that respect. We have tried to present the engineering work to as wide an audience as possible, get feedback from those people and then consider what they have said in developing the project.

The Convener: The point that I am driving at, I suppose, is how wide an audience can be reached and whether some of those alternative methods might have reached a wider audience.

John Howison: Before I ask Kathryn McKee, who is an expert in this field, to say something, I should point out that the original consultation reached 4,500 people. More recently, the public information exhibition that we held in 12 locations over 12 days was visited by 2,200 people.

Kathryn McKee (The BIG Partnership): Perhaps I should give an overview of the ethos behind the consultation, which takes place on various levels. In engaging with the general public, we are, as John Howison explained, trying to reach as big an audience as is relevant for the project. In August 2007, for example, the exhibitions were very widespread and attracted 4,000 visitors from quite a wide area. However, as the project has developed, certain issues have taken on a more local significance, and we are adapting our techniques to ensure that, on the one hand, we get information to as many people as possible and that, on the other, we focus the consultation on the communities that might feel the impact of the project.

At the same time, other parallel strands of consultation are continuing to feed into the project's development. For example, we have a landowner liaison team, which is conducting one-to-one liaison with directly affected landowners; a very structured programme of environmental impact assessment consultation, which obviously requires a specific set of consultation techniques relating to environmental impacts; and a final strand that is very much focused on statutory consultees and bodies.

The Convener: One thing that impacts on all consultations across Government is the fact that, because of social exclusion, time pressures, family and work commitments, disabilities and a host of other issues, some people are harder to reach than others. What have you done to get over those barriers and reach harder-to-reach groups?

Kathryn McKee: We are very aware that people consume information in many different ways and have different access to different channels, so we have been careful not to conduct our consultation or disseminate information through a single means. For example, we use national and local mass media broadcasts for general announcements and with digital media such as websites and electronic newsletters, we reach a database of 3,000 people who have signed up at our events and briefings. We also have a mechanism for people who wish to write to us, a telephone inquiry line and so on.

Where we feel that we are not reaching a particular residents group or community—perhaps because they are not alert to the issues—we have conducted mail drops to provide those people with information and encourage them to engage with the process.

The Convener: Our information suggests that fewer than 10 per cent of the people who attended the exhibitions made any comment. Are you concerned about that level of engagement or response? Are you satisfied that it was clear to everyone that they could comment? Will you do anything to address that shortfall?

Kathryn McKee: The consultation on the exhibitions that took place in 2007 was a far wider exercise that, in its focus on corridor selection, choice of crossing and so on, had a broader scope and was of interest to a wider range of people.

Naturally, as the programme developed and the proposals became more defined, we expected that the second round of consultation would attract interest from a more local community, so I was not necessarily surprised by the level of turnout for the exhibitions. The advertising and awareness-raising communications gave the same prominence to the opportunity to attend the exhibitions as was given previously.

The mechanisms for providing feedback were not restrictive in any way and allowed people to use plenty of different channels. The issues that were raised were perhaps of a more local nature and more concerned with direct local impacts. That might explain why we received a smaller number of physical responses to the consultation. It is important to remember that the exhibitions attracted 2,000 people. The team who staffed the exhibitions also listened to all the comments, so we still got a feeling of what the feedback was regardless of whether a feedback form was submitted to articulate specific issues. We were able to consider all that feedback in the development of the project.

15:15

John Howison: At the exhibition, we ensured that everyone was given a handout that included a leaflet about the scheme and a feedback form. Therefore, no one who attended the exhibition would have thought, "How do I provide feedback?"

In practice, a response rate of around 10 per cent is very good for a transport project consultation of this type. I can think of many consultations in which the response rate has been much lower. My presumption is that those people who did not reply were generally satisfied with what they picked up at the exhibition and those who sent feedback forms wished either to reinforce that point or to raise an issue that they were not happy about.

The Convener: I am just a little concerned about language that suggests that the response rate is relatively good compared with that of other projects. Politicians, too, get a pretty poor response rate when the general public are asked to cast views on their performance, but none of us justifies the election turnout by saying that it is good compared with other elections. The consultation response rate is low: only one in 10 of the people who attended the exhibitions made a comment. You said that people made informal verbal comments, but we have no way of measuring those or of getting objective data on them. Is it not fair to say that?

Mike Glover (Transport Scotland): In structuring the exhibitions, we were absolutely scrupulous about which staff would attend them to ensure that the project representatives covered the whole range of the project. There was no question of individuals receiving comments that they could not deal with. We were careful to ensure that the representatives included an environmentalist, someone who deals with the main crossing and someone dealing with the connecting roads. That allowed for a dialogue with the public. By and large, people who came to the exhibition with a question went away understanding the answer to their question. That is one reason why the response rate, in your eyes, was perhaps lower. We had some active discussions at those meetings because of the level of attendance that we put into them.

Kathryn McKee: It is also important to bear in mind that the exhibitions were not the only route or channel for receiving feedback on the scheme. Since August 2007, we have had lots of other lower-level community events such as briefings and meetings with community councils. Although the exhibitions were obviously a large feature of the consultation programme, they were by no means the only way for people to provide us with feedback.

The Convener: A couple of other members want to ask about the same issue.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): As a preamble to my question, let me make the slight observation that what I have just heard does not square with what I hear on the doorsteps in my constituency from people who are directly affected by the project. You have explained the consultation process. It is fine to tick boxes in that way, but I would be happy to show the convener and committee members some of the many e-mails that I have received from my constituents about how the consultation was undertaken, with their feedback about the exhibitions, the public meetings and how letter drops were done or not done. I will not go into this in detail, but a briefing was held for elected representatives only weeks ago and some of us did not find out about it until after it had taken place—some MPs and MSPs were not even invited to it in the first place.

You can tick a box to say that that meeting happened, but the fact that no elected representatives from south of the river were there shows that another story is going on underneath. Many of my constituents tell me that they ask questions but do not get answers. They feel that Transport Scotland just gives them information at briefings or meetings, which does not feel like being part of a genuine consultation. How can you assure Parliament that your consultations are genuine, particularly when the vast majority of people in South Queensferry feel fatalistic about the situation now, because they were not listened to on the tunnel proposal or on many other matters? They do not feel that the consultation is genuine.

John Howison: I will explain the changes that we made because of the consultation, particularly with reference to South Queensferry. The easiest way to do that is to consider the information that we gave at the time of the exhibition and in the updating newsletter of April 2009. A number of factors came through from the exhibition. Much concern was expressed about the design of the road to the south of South Queensferry, and a number of points were made: the bus provisions were not good enough, the embankment to the south of South Queensferry was too high and the access to the new road was unsatisfactory.

It can be seen in the publications that we circulated that the project's layout has subsequently changed dramatically. We have introduced new, direct bus links from the A90 as it approaches Edinburgh so that eastbound services tie directly into the City of Edinburgh Council's bus priority measures. Westbound, a new link will join the A8000, with a bus priority junction going into the Echline roundabout. That was key to unlocking the position of the junction, which we have moved

further round so that it is more or less at the point where the new road will cross under the A904. In turn, that allowed us to reduce the amount of traffic on Builyeon Road, which was one of the areas of concern, and to lower the very high embankment that was to be north of Dundas home farm.

We therefore considered a number of, shall we say, apparently independent issues and the engineering behind them, and re-engineered the whole area to resolve those issues. The consultation was therefore real, because we listened carefully to people and made significant changes, which are evident in the information that we provided at the time of the exhibition and in that which we currently provide.

Margaret Smith: You referred to traffic reduction on Builyeon Road. I want to use that to illustrate something that often happens, which is that Transport Scotland makes an assertion, but local residents who ask for the evidence behind it and for up-to-date traffic figures—I have asked for them but have not received them yet—do not feel that there is hard evidence for what is proposed. They feel that information, but no hard evidence, is simply given out to people at local meetings and that there is no genuine dialogue. I can only represent what people say on the basis of having attended your consultation meetings. I acknowledge that many of the changes, some of which John Howison mentioned, are welcome—for example, the issues around the embankments and so on.

However, I think that we are about to be given an embargoed copy of a report that feeds back the results of the consultation and exhibitions that took place in January. Some changes to the roads proposals that were made and put on the website in April are the result of feedback from those exhibitions, but the report that led to those changes being made is not yet in the public domain, although it is nearly July. Many people have told me that they have had no feedback about their input into the process in January. Their input might have led to change—that is a generous interpretation of what you said—but they remain unaware of that.

John Howison: We need to consider the process: consultation; engineering; reconsultation; and then exposure to the public. Between January and April there was a period when we bunkered down to do the engineering work, to ascertain what could be done to manage the issues. We published a newsletter in April that gave an update.

Before we could get to that stage, we had engaged in further consultation with community councils and local authorities, to ensure that what we were doing met their requirements. We must remember that we were considering not only trunk roads, which are Transport Scotland's responsibility, but local roads, which are the responsibility of the City of Edinburgh Council and West Lothian Council, so the councils' buy-in was necessary.

We are talking about a fairly long process, during which it is a matter of evidence that there will be a time when there is no flow of information out to people who put proposals to us. I can only say that we have tried to bring the information forward as quickly as possible. Certain consultations must go on before others do, in particular consultation with community councils and local authorities. We must square things off long before we can talk to individual residents about matters.

Margaret Smith: You described the process as "consultation; engineering; reconsultation". I presume that the work of recent weeks has been to do with reconsultation on the changes that were made as a result of the consultation in January. People say that they are being told in meetings that the time for consultation on substantive matters such as roads has passed and that only matters such as mitigation and landscaping are open for consultation and change. I want to nail that down. Are you talking about genuine reconsultation, in which your minds are still open to the different approaches that I understand have been suggested, or are the road changes—pardon this pun—set in concrete?

John Howison: I should clarify what I meant. The process is as follows: consultation with the public at the exhibition; the engineering work; reconsultation with community councils and local authorities; publication of the results; putting out the information. As we go through each stage of the process, certain things become firmer.

For example, in December 2007 the decision was made that there would be a bridge at South Queensferry. In December 2008 the decision was as follows: there would be a bridge; it would be accompanied by certain roads; the scheme would be supported by intelligent transport system technology; the existing bridge would be used as a public transport corridor; and the new road would not provide a step change in capacity, although it should be slightly more efficient, so in future travel growth would have to come from public transport. Those things were set in stone in December.

We have looked at the junctions in very great detail and we have reconsulted with community councils, so those things are fairly set in stone and we are moving to a situation in which what we bring to the public will be issues such as landscaping. There has to be a process in which options are narrowed down to a final product.

15:30

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I want to support Margaret Smith on a number of points. In the past, there has been understandable confusion among elected members and people who live in the area about what decisions have and have not been made. When we express concerns about the matter, it seems to come down to terminology, language and misinterpretation. I suggest that that is not the fault of the elected members or the people who live in the area. Again, you are talking like engineers about an engineering project, but people and their daily lives are gravely affected. Can we learn for the future how to talk in an open and more understandable way, so that we can learn what is still open for debate and discussion and people can have a clear understanding of what decisions have been made?

John Howison: I ask Frazer Henderson to comment on the statutory processes that will follow, to place the discussion in the context of what will happen in the future. We have gone through various processes. You said that we have treated the project as an engineering exercise. There are engineering parameters that will define what is done at the end of the day, but we are mindful of the fact that the Forth replacement crossing, like all transport infrastructure, will impact on the people who use it and who live in its vicinity.

Frazer Henderson (Transport Scotland): Shirley-Anne Somerville asked what lessons have been learned. Lessons are learned from every activity that we take forward—that is a given. At the end of the process, we will learn lessons for the future from today's inquiry and from the feedback that is provided.

As members are aware, we intend to introduce a bill in November this year. Residents will have an opportunity to raise any objections or concerns that they have. A bill is a dry document, although it will be supported by other materials that, hopefully, will explain its provisions. For that reason, we intend to support the introduction of the bill by holding a number of public exhibitions, especially in North Queensferry, South Queensferry and Kirkliston, so that individuals whose interests are directly affected by the bill's provisions will have an opportunity to understand its contents fully and to reach an informed view about representations or objections that they wish to make after the bill has been introduced. The exhibitions are part and parcel of the consultation approach that we have attempted to take in pursuing the project. As Kathryn McKee mentioned, we speak to affected individuals and landowners on a day-to-day basis. Once the bill has been introduced, we will hold exhibitions to inform individuals further.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Again, there seems to be great concentration on public exhibitions. One reason that people may not give feedback is that they may have given up on getting a straight answer, rather than that they are happy with what is happening. Much of the feedback in the correspondence that I have received seems to suggest that. Will Transport Scotland attempt to re-engage with the people whom it has already lost along the way and who feel that there is no point in engaging with its public exhibitions?

Kathryn McKee: I will answer your question, but I want first to respond to your point about the need to make available information about the project, which is complex and large scale and relates to matters with which people do not deal on a day-to-day basis.

We recognise that we need to make information available to the public in an accessible and understandable way. For the first time on a transport project, Transport Scotland produced a document called "Engaging with Communities", which was made available in 2008, because we recognised that we needed to set out precisely how people could engage with us and influence the project, what the parameters were for that, and the different avenues through which they could reach us. In the past year, we have worked to fulfil the commitments in the document and we have undertaken the consultation that was outlined in it.

As Frazer Henderson mentioned, we are learning from the feedback that we picked up from residents and community councils about how they would like to engage with us and receive information. We are implementing that and changing the way in which we deal with them. We have successful relationships with a number of the communities, and particularly with the community councils in North and South Queensferry. We will strive to continue to do that as we close the informal consultation and move into the statutory process.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The telephone inquiry line has been mentioned as an example of good engagement. There is indeed such a phone line, but when people call, they do not feel that they are speaking to someone who will answer their query. I have also had comments about the sheer length of time that it takes to get an answer to correspondence, and then most people are not happy with the clarity of the decision. I am not suggesting that the people who are affected by the project will always be entirely happy with the answers that they get, but it would certainly be good if the letters and phone calls were such that they could understand the answers that they get and their implications.

I urge caution about using the telephone line as a great example of public engagement. The

feedback that I have been getting is that people are not impressed when they use it.

John Howison: We will take that on board and try to improve that side of things for the future.

Kathryn McKee: It is disappointing to hear that. That is not feedback that we have had before, but we will certainly take it on board.

On the turnaround time for correspondence, the team works to a deadline of providing responses within 20 working days wherever possible.

John Howison: It also depends on the question that we are asked. If the question is on engineering issues and we have done the engineering, we can answer it. If it is on environmental analysis, we are often not at the point of having the figures for that, because that depends on our finishing the engineering and considering the consequences. That is why a lot of the questions that interest people will not finally be answered until we publish the environmental statement later this year.

The Convener: Des McNulty has a supplementary question.

Des McNulty: I have two, convener. It is always difficult to summarise such documents, but I tend to look at the numbers and focus on the concerns that were highlighted most frequently. The four highest figures relate to concerns about the display of inaccurate images at exhibitions; concerns about lack of consultation with residents of Dundas home farm, which was raised 19 times; concerns about the effectiveness and validity of the consultation process and whether views will be considered and feedback provided; and requests for information about why the proposals changed from those that were consulted upon in August 2008 and why those who would be affected were not consulted.

The replies to those concerns are among the weakest responses that you came up with. Given that your own document shows that they are the main things that were thrown up, do you believe that your specific responses to those four points are adequate?

John Howison: Some of them relate to inadvertent errors that should not have happened. The one about the material that was on display refers to a photomontage that was shown at South Queensferry. By way of explanation, a newsletter that we published in December showed an arrangement at South Queensferry. By the time of the exhibition, we had changed the junction's design. I regret that we did not change the photomontage—we should have done that. To be frank, there is no excuse for that; the reason is simply inadvertency. We have learned from that.

As for the commentary aspect, our proposals did not meet everybody's wishes. Before August 2007, the project was to be heavily engineered and ran at a cost of £3.7 billion to £4.2 billion. It was well capable of increasing the amount of traffic to Edinburgh and other areas, but it failed to address some causes of the problems. The changes that were made after then resulted from the analysis of the existing bridge's capability that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth promised to undertake when he met the committee in January 2008 and from examination of the reason for queue development in Fife and South Queensferry. An engineering solution was produced to deliver an answer within the parameters that were set for the project, at a reasonable cost and with less impact on the environment.

That did not please the people who saw the project as an excuse to develop a higher-capacity road network in the area. Criticisms will be made, which it is right that we record and understand. We accept that we should welcome some criticisms, to the extent that the changes that we have made might not be in line with everybody's wishes but are right in the context of what has been Government transport policy for 13 or 14 years.

Des McNulty: The convener, Shirley-Anne Somerville, Margaret Smith and I attended a meeting in Queensferry that was attended predominantly by people from the Dundas home farm estate, who are concerned about the process that they have experienced and the project's impact on them. Their concerns have two strands. The first is that, as Mr Howison just said, the story kept changing and the impact that was presented in the first instance was not what was subsequently presented—it was perpetually modified. The second and more substantive point is that those people feel that the route choice and the road network fundamentally disadvantage them, and that less disadvantageous alternatives for them could have been considered. I simply ask whether, even at this late stage, an opportunity exists to fulfil their wish for the impact on them to be considered as part of a re-engineering or reorganisation of the access routes to the bridge.

15:45

John Howison: The impact that the project will have on those people is being reconsidered. Several subsequent meetings have been held with the residents and proposals have been made.

As for the road alignment, many route options were considered at the beginning of 2008. They were honed in the summer of 2008 to two options south of the river, which were examined and analysed. The route that we have proposed is the preferred option.

I will make an engineering observation. The original illustrative route that was proposed in 2007 connected the new crossing directly to the M9. Given traffic conditions in the west of Edinburgh, the reality is that the traffic going from the crossing to the north and centre of Edinburgh and much of the traffic going to the west of Edinburgh will use Queensferry Road. The illustrative route in 2007 did not capture the amount of traffic that would leak from that route on to the A904, if a junction with the A904 were provided to connect to south Queensferry. The proposal that we have brought forward is the engineering answer to the requirements for traffic dispersion from the southern landfall of the bridge. The previous examples would not have been practicable.

The full report analysing those matters is on the Transport Scotland website, and it is broken down into the work that was done prior to March 2008, the work that was done from March to August, and the work up to December 2008, when the managed crossing strategy was brought forward.

The Convener: We have got slightly ahead of ourselves with our questions. We move straight to Alison McInnes's questions.

Alison McInnes: A number of the points that I was going to raise have been picked up on already.

I have a final point about consultation. I note that 53 per cent of your respondents were from Edinburgh and 31 per cent were from Fife, but less than 1 per cent came from East Lothian or Midlothian, and only 6 per cent came from West Lothian. Are you going to do anything to improve engagement with residents in the areas concerned?

Kathryn McKee: The numbers and the feedback came from the exhibitions, which were almost equally well attended in the areas that you refer to and the other areas. There was the same level of awareness of the project as well as of the opportunity to attend the exhibitions. I cannot account for why some people felt that they did not need or wish to submit feedback on the back of that, but we certainly catered for the areas equally, if that is what you are alluding to.

Des McNulty: I wish to move on to budget issues. One or two of you might be able to relax; others can respond. The Scottish Government's current cost projections indicate that the new Forth crossing will cost between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion, which suggests an area of uncertainty of £600 million. That is clearly a high level of uncertainty. How is that uncertainty being managed down, given the stage that you are at in defining the cost of the bridge? What risks are being removed as part of that process of refining the cost?

John Howison: The answer must come in two parts, from me and Mike Glover. It is necessary to understand how the budget has been calculated in order to appreciate the range. We considered what we thought the bridge would cost at 2006 prices—that is, real prices that we have some sort of handle on. We went on to consider inflation up to present-day figures, then moved forward to actual outturn. We are talking about outturn figures—numbers of pound notes—for the whole project once it is completed. That is not the cost of constructing the bridge; the figures are for the whole project at outturn prices. The range comes from our consideration of two inflation rates—a high and a low rate. The uncertainty over inflation produces the wide range.

I invite Mike Glover to say something about risk and optimism bias.

Mike Glover: It is important to start with the basics of how we arrive at the cost of a project. First, we engineer it and then consider various ways of establishing the cost of the artefact. In that respect, we use a base cost—which in this case is at fourth-quarter 2006 prices—and work through the cost of labour, materials and so on to end up with what we call a spot cost. That figure—which, as I say, is the cost at 2006 prices—is not flexible.

We then carry out a risk analysis to find out what might influence the cost, for example the scarcity of materials or unforeseen ground conditions. Many of the issues might be environmental, but a great number of them relate simply to the logistics of building the works.

We also take a view on the level of information that we have been able to establish at that point of the project. You will appreciate that, at the outset of a project, our understanding of the issues that need to be dealt with is very different from the understanding that we have when we move towards tendering the works. The mechanism that we use to take account of that additional uncertainty is called optimism bias.

The Treasury lays down in the green book a set of what might be termed quite loose rules but which are certainly solid guidelines to establish the level of additional risk—or, if you like, super risk—that applies in a project. At the end of the process, we bring together the spot cost, the risk assessment that we have carried out and the optimism bias to reach a number. It is not a flexible number that floats, say, between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion; it is a number to which we apply a cash flow, which gives us the money that will be spent through the project's duration. In this case, the project will require five and a half years of construction, with two years of going through

statutory processes to secure the approvals to build it. That means that some of the money that we are talking about will be spent seven years hence, and the divergence between the £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion figures arises as a result of the different levels of inflation that we apply to the money throughout the whole period.

I feel that the elements that we can manage such as the spot price and the risk are very much under our control. However, the issues related to inflation are outside our control, and therefore we can only advise on what we expect the outturn to be. I am sorry if I have given you too much in one go, but that is the process that we go through.

Des McNulty: No, your explanation has been reasonably straightforward. However, would it not be more sensible to publish the risk-adjusted spot price that you are more certain of and allow us to examine the substance of those costs? After all, providing 2016 costs for the bridge simply introduces unnecessary uncertainty and, as far as I understand it, is not the practice that you follow in other projects. For example, the costs for the Aberdeen western peripheral route reflect the point at which they were identified instead of being projected ahead.

Mike Glover: I think that, as the project progresses through the approvals process, Parliament is entitled to know the number of pound notes that we believe it will cost at the end of the day.

Des McNulty: But according to your earlier explanation, you have a spot price that you can measure the risk on, known variables and so on. As a result, you have a number that you can be relatively definite about. However, with the 2016 costs that you have given us, there are areas about which you cannot be definite, which means that you are introducing unnecessary uncertainty. I am sorry, but I do not follow the logic of not giving us the price that you can quantify as close to certainty as is possible.

Mike Glover: The numbers are available; they are in the reports that we published. The summary that I have just taken you through is not something that has not been seen before—that is the process.

Des McNulty: So the numbers—

Mike Glover: Yes, the totals are there.

Des McNulty: Do you want to put them on the record? What is the actual cost, excluding inflationary assumptions for the future?

John Howison: I would rather give the information to the committee after the meeting than rely on my memory of four significant figures.

Des McNulty: Can you give the committee the actual costs as you have them, based on a more accurate measurement than that which produced the range of £1.7 billion to £2.3 billion?

John Howison: My recollection is that that information was tabulated, to show how we had worked out a figure from the base prices upwards. The information can be given.

Des McNulty: That would be useful. I will stipulate which bits of information we want—

John Howison: I am sorry to interrupt. If it would be helpful, I can tell you that we had an industry day in March, and we produced a publication, which is freely available from us, in which we said:

> "the approximate value of the design and construction of the project at today's prices is considered to be of the order of £1.1 billion."

That figure is in the public domain, but we can give you the precise figure.

Des McNulty: That would be useful. Can you give us a breakdown that includes the cost of the connected roads, the bridge construction costs, consultancy fees and so on? In the initial consultation, the figure that was given was about £3.7 billion. How on earth is it that you consulted on a bridge that in principle would cost £3.7 billion but you now think that the actual cost of the project, when you have sorted out the risk, will be £1.1 billion? That is not a minor adjustment, is it?

John Howison: No, it is not, and we should be fairly proud of what we have done. The original outturn cost range, when the project was investigated in 2007, was £3.7 billion to £4.2 billion. However, in January 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth gave the committee an undertaking that he would consider what use might be made of the existing bridge, given its improving prognosis. During 2008, we therefore considered how much of the functionality of the new crossing could be handled by the existing bridge. As a result, we have been able to cut down on the size of the bridge and the amount of road works. That is value engineering, which has led to real gains in price reduction.

The price range of £1.7 billion to £2.3 billion is the outturn cost range, which includes optimism bias, VAT and the cost of capital to Government. Therefore, the price includes a number of elements above and beyond the actual price that we would pay to a contractor to build the bridge. There is no inconsistency in that regard: there is a figure for the total cost to the public of delivering the project, and there is another figure for the cost that we would pay if we were able to get a price from a contractor today, in an inflation-free environment and without VAT—the spot price.

16:00

Des McNulty: You must accept that people will be concerned at a price that varies from £1.1 billion to between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion, and then to £3.7 billion. I accept that the £3.7 billion figure is for a different design of project, but the variation is still very wide. The poor member of the public is left saying, "We're always comparing apples with pears, even though we're talking about the same bridge." You never provide us with a basis on which to compare costs. When we consider how the Danes, the Koreans or others are bridging estuaries, they seem to be able to do it more cost-effectively than we can—based on your previous figures. However, you now seem to be saying that the real figure is £1.1 billion, which might bear more comparison with what the Danes and Koreans are doing.

John Howison: We are talking about two distinct mechanisms. The first, the move from £3.7 billion to £1.7 billion, is value engineering. You would expect us to go through that process to ensure that we secured best value for money. The second issue is the comparison between the overall project cost and the value of what we would expect a tender to come in at today, in an inflation-free and VAT-free environment, and without the ancillary costs. That is probably why we have concentrated on the overall project cost outturn: we want to provide the public with the number of pound notes that the project will cost at the end of the day.

The Convener: I am less clear now about whether we are talking about a specific price for this project than I was five or 10 minutes ago, before you started answering questions. You are still saying that the range is £1.7 billion to £2.3 billion, and you are also saying that you have a specific figure of £1.1 billion. What is the relationship between them? If I, Des McNulty or any other member of the committee starts lodging questions for ministers today, asking what the price of the new Forth road bridge will be, what figure will ministers give?

Mike Glover: It depends—

The Convener: The answer "I don't know" is legitimate.

Mike Glover: It depends on the question. John Howison has given a good explanation of the mechanics of the money. I mean, do you think that the pound note in your pocket has the same value as it had, say, seven years ago?

The Convener: It seems to me that the answer to the question, "How much is this bridge expected to cost?" is, "We don't know."

John Howison: If you asked ministers at the moment how much the project would cost, they would tell you that the outturn price of the project would be between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion.

Des McNulty: When I consider other capital projects—perhaps not of the same scale as this project, but of the nearest scale, if I can put it that way—I see that a different accounting methodology is employed when it comes to time scales, or time base, in order to calculate the cost. The cost projections for the M74 extension, for the Aberdeen western peripheral route, for Borders rail and other projects are not estimated on a cost base that is seven or eight years ahead of now. They are projected either on a current time base or, sometimes, on an historical time base. That gives an accurate basis for calculations, and, as I said earlier, means that we do not have to make heroic assumptions about future inflation.

With this project, it seems that a substantial element of the projected cost is based on inflation assumptions that may or may not turn out to be true. Surely a better way of understanding the cost of the bridge is likely to be based on knowledge that we have now about what the actual cost will be, based on matters about which we can be relatively certain. In the future, we might have to adjust the figure, perhaps if the assumptions turn out to be wrong or because of other circumstances, such as inflation. However, while the Scottish Government came up with 2016 prices for a range of projects—two bridges and a tunnel—the 2016 price for the current crossing has turned out to be way beyond what anyone now anticipates it will cost. You now tell us that the actual figure, based on current prices, for the bridge that you propose to build is roughly a quarter of that initial projected cost.

I am not an accountant, but I have sat on Finance Committees for long enough to know that that is a strange way of doing things and a strange way of explaining the matter to the general public. We need defined and clear information that is based on what we know. We can then make comparisons and judgments about what you are doing, and you will not be able to hide behind assumptions or financial projections over which you have little or no control.

John Howison: Our budgets are expressed in outturn prices and therefore our estimates must be expressed in outturn prices so that we can manage our projects within the money that Parliament makes available.

Des McNulty: Yes, but the baseline approach that you are adopting for the bridge project is different from the approach in other projects.

John Howison: My understanding is that the approach that is adopted for all projects is to estimate their outturn prices.

Des McNulty: If you look at the current cost projections for the Aberdeen western peripheral route or the M74 project, you will find that that is not the case. You might have to go away and consider the issue, but I have asked enough parliamentary questions about the way in which such projects are costed to know that the basis of the Forth bridge project is different. I cannot pursue the point further today, but it strikes me as strange that you have come up with such vastly different figures for the cost of a single bridge.

John Howison: I explained the two mechanisms that are behind that. One is value engineering, for which we make no apology and which has reduced the price substantially. The second is an expression of the components of the total price and the total price at outturn. Some of the money will be spent in 2016 and some will be spent in 2012, but it all has to be inflated forward to get the expected number of pound notes that will be required. We are describing components of the outturn price of £1.7 billion to £2.3 billion.

Des McNulty: One of the issues about the crossing is that the funding mechanism is not clear. I presume that the Government will have to come up with a proposition for how the project will be funded. The Government will have to say to the banks, the Westminster Government or other stakeholders, "This is what we want to do for this amount of money." Is the way in which you have set out the proposals the best way of establishing a funding mechanism and funding certainty for the people whom you seek to engage as partners?

John Howison: Actually, there is no lack of clarity about the funding. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change made it clear in his announcement on 10 December that the project will be funded with Government funds, as a design and build contract.

Des McNulty: Okay.

John Howison: That was the minister's statement at that time and it remains the minister's view.

The Convener: I suspect that we will continue to take up many of the issues that we have covered during the course of the project and in questions to ministers.

Charlie Gordon: I want to ask about the connecting road network for the proposed new crossing. Why will the new crossing be connected to the existing road network by dual carriageway rather than by motorway-standard roads?

John Howison: When we put forward the proposals in the bill, we will seek to extend the M90 from its present position to the northern bridgehead. The bridge itself will be motorway as far as the South Queensferry junction. The road from the Echline junction is already a motorway—the M9 spur. Our present proposal is for the section in between, at the south of South Queensferry, to be a special road rather than a motorway, largely because that road will have to take the traffic from the A90 from Edinburgh until it can leave the road at the South Queensferry junction. In effect, the road network for the bridge will be motorway standard all the way through, although in the interim the section south of South Queensferry will be designated as a special road rather than a motorway.

Charlie Gordon: So it will be as close to motorway standard as is possible but, because of the necessity of having a junction, it will not be categorised as motorway.

John Howison: That small section of it will not be categorised as motorway.

Charlie Gordon: Have you modelled the possible congestion impacts of that decision? If so, what were the results?

John Howison: That process is continuing. It is clear from the modelling that we have done why congestion occurs at the moment—it is not because the road is dual two lane instead of dual three lane but to do with the proliferation of junctions all the way from Halbeath right down through the scheme, and the interaction of traffic at those junctions. We intend to address that through the introduction of the intelligent transport system, which is a way of electronically controlling motorway traffic that is already used in Glasgow. We want to take it a stage further by making the speed limits, which are advisory in Glasgow, mandatory, as they are on the M25 and M42. We will also introduce the controls for metering in traffic from junctions that have been piloted on the Glasgow motorway network.

Charlie Gordon: Will you model your proposals?

John Howison: They are being modelled at the moment.

The Convener: I will allow Margaret Smith a brief supplementary on that.

Margaret Smith: What work have you done on the traffic levels on the connecting road network? When will that be made available to local residents and others?

I also want to pick up on what you said about the indicative road alignment that was in the original proposals, which would have taken traffic straight from the bridgehead out to the M9. Local residents and others based their interpretation of what would happen on those proposals, but I think that you said that further work was done and that that proposition was found not to be feasible. I am a little unclear about why something that it was

thought would be helpful to include in the original proposals for illustrative purposes was then judged not to be feasible. Quite a lot of the anger and concern in South Queensferry is about the changes in the roads. I am unclear why it is not feasible to take the road from the bridge away from the town straight to the M9. Was cost the only reason? You certainly said that it was an issue.

John Howison: I will deal with that last point first. I think that I mentioned that the problem with taking the traffic on to the M9 would be that, if it followed through into Edinburgh, it would use Newbridge roundabout, St John's Road and Corstorphine Road to do so. The reality is that Queensferry Road is by far the most effective artery into Edinburgh and the route of choice. If we sought to take people from the bridge on to the M9, there would be a substantial leakage of traffic on to the A904 through South Queensferry and back on to the A90 at Echline, the effect of which would be fairly undesirable.

Margaret Smith: Would it be possible for the committee to have the figures on which those observations, and the decisions to which they led, were based?

John Howison: The general analysis is already on the Transport Scotland website as one of the reports that we published to support the decisions that were taken in December.

16:15

The Convener: Is there an outstanding point from Margaret Smith's original question?

John Howison: There was a question about the traffic analysis that we have done.

Traffic has been analysed using two different methods. One involves the conventional transport model that was developed by Transport Scotland. It is a typical assignment multimodal model and it pushes traffic around the system—I see that you are smiling, convener. It has several disadvantages, in that it does not completely reflect congestion in the system, which means that it has the propensity to overassign traffic to various routes.

We are also analysing traffic using a Paramics model, which models the movements of individual vehicles through the network. That is the exercise that we are involved in at the moment.

Charlie Gordon: Can you comment on the current condition of the existing Forth road bridge and advise whether, in the long term, it will be able to cope with its proposed new role as a dedicated public transport corridor?

John Howison: FETA and its chief engineer would be the authority on that, but we work closely with them.

The problem with the existing bridge that captures most attention is the distress in the suspension cables, which have already lost about 10 per cent of their strength. The aim is to stabilise that deterioration through a dehumidification process. There are many other problems, however.

The committee will be aware that, because of the heavy goods traffic on the bridge, the resurfacing—which takes a whole summer to do—lasts only about eight years. That situation is likely to get worse. There are things called half-joints between the main joints on the bridge, where one beam rests on another, and they are suffering extreme distress as a result of heavy goods vehicles. The committee is probably aware that a contract was to have been issued for the renewal of the main joints, but FETA decided to suspend that when the construction of the new bridge and the timetable for that was confirmed. That work will be done later, which will result in a considerable saving.

There are operational disadvantages to the bridge as well. For example, it has no hard shoulder, so any traffic incident will cause a problem. For 30 to 40 days a year, it is closed to high-sided vehicles and, whenever a member of the public decides to climb up the cables—which I understand is quite easy to do because of the slope on the cables—the road is closed until the person is removed from the bridge.

The question is: with all of those disadvantages, how satisfactory will it be for public transport? We have considered that from two angles. One is the issue of the loading of the bridge and the other is the articulation of the bridge.

On loading, one must realise that the bridge uses about 85 per cent of its strength to keep itself up and about 15 per cent to cope with traffic loading. By removing general traffic from the bridge and using the bridge only for public transport, we will reduce the loading by such a degree that—if the cable stabilisation process is successful—we will be able to use the bridge for public transport without any further immediate concerns about the cables.

What I have just said concerns public transport in the form of buses, but we also considered whether the bridge might be capable of accommodating light rail transit in the form of trams. We conducted an analysis of the effects of stripping off part of the existing deck and replacing it with the equipment that would be required by trams, and we concluded that that would be acceptable as far as loading was concerned. The

majority of the options that we considered reduced the load. Further, because the number of trams on the bridge can be controlled, we can control the loading on the bridge more precisely than we can if heavy goods vehicles are using it.

We are satisfied that, subject to stabilisation of the suspension cables, the bridge should be capable of carrying the live load of public transport as well as the dead load of the equipment that would be required if trams were using the bridge.

We considered whether the articulation of the bridge—that is, the movement that is caused as a vehicle goes across the deck, under the towers and across to the other side—would be excessive for a tram, and we came to the conclusion that it would not be.

The work that we have done, as we have reported on our website, satisfies us that the bridge will be satisfactory for public transport. Should the stabilisation work on the suspension cables not be successful, we believe that the cables can be replaced without interruption to public transport, as those vehicles could be concentrated on one carriageway. However, that would require additional work, and we would consider it only if the dehumidification were unsuccessful.

Mike, would you like to add anything to that?

Mike Glover: No, that was word perfect. Great stuff.

Charlie Gordon: That was a comprehensive answer in relation to loading, but the other problem with the sole use of the bridge by public transport is the fact that 30 or 40 days a year can be lost due to wind conditions. Would that have an impact on public transport? It will be difficult to get people to leave their cars at home if their public conveyance might not be able to cross the Forth 30 or 40 days a year.

John Howison: I should have seen that question coming and answered it earlier.

You are right to highlight the problem. Because the existing bridge is a suspension bridge, although the wind shielding around the towers can be improved, no wind shielding can be provided over the bridge. That is why the new bridge is being provided with extra-wide hard shoulders. The idea is that, in periods when public transport is unable to use the existing bridge, there will be a priority route from the Ferry Toll bus station on to the hard shoulders of the new bridge and off again on the other side.

Charlie Gordon: You can see my next question coming, I am sure. Will there be a similar diversionary route for trams?

John Howison: The trams are not wind sensitive, and we cannot think of any circumstance in which the existing bridge would not be capable of taking trams. However, in the unforeseeable circumstance in which something happens that we do not know about at the moment, the hard shoulders of the new bridge would also be able to take the loading for trams.

Charlie Gordon: For completeness, can you say anything about the role of park-and-ride facilities in the public transport scenarios that we are talking about?

John Howison: Yes. The role of park-and-ride facilities is pivotal in catering for future travel demand. I have said that a new crossing will not provide a step change for general traffic and private cars; realistically, even if it did, that would not make a lot of difference because the road network of the bridge sits within a wider environment that is fairly congested—there is no more capacity for traffic coming into Edinburgh. That means that the solution for travel has to be the transfer of passengers on to rail—there are rail proposals in the strategic transport projects review—and on to buses, through the provision of park-and-ride facilities.

There is a fairly successful 1,000-car facility at Ferry Toll and, as part of the project, we will be improving its functionality. We have considered whether the redundant carriageway at South Queensferry, underneath the Echline junction, could be used for a park-and-ride facility for people from South Queensferry and people coming from West Lothian. We are satisfied that that is a possibility. It will not be included in the bill, but the south east of Scotland transport partnership is reviewing it further. Should that be of benefit when the new bridge opens in 2016, it could be developed relatively quickly.

The STPR also contains policies to improve strategic park and ride. In relation to that, we are considering sites at Halbeath and Rosyth in Fife. The STPR includes the policy of introducing an LRT scheme, which would initially be a guided busway from Rosyth to Edinburgh.

The transfer of private car users to public transport is essential and, if the convener will indulge me a bit longer, I will say something about that. The general assumption is, "Well, hang on a minute—the bridge is taking between 65,000 and 68,000 vehicles a day. What difference will a 1,000-vehicle park and ride make?" The bridge is not congested for most of the day, so we are not talking about park and ride replacing large volumes of traffic. However, park and ride must provide an alternative at the peak hours, when about 3,000 to 3,500 vehicles an hour go over the crossing in one direction. A park-and-ride facility with 1,000 car spaces that took 1,000 cars off the

road and replaced them with 20 buses would have a fundamental impact on that volume of traffic. For travel growth, we depend totally on the Government's modal shift policies being effective.

Charlie Gordon: Is it your understanding that the Scottish Government guarantees that the current Forth road bridge will not be reopened to general traffic following completion of the new Forth crossing, even if cross-Forth traffic congestion continues to increase?

John Howison: It is not my place to give a guarantee. All that I can say is that the Government's policy is that that should not happen—and I understand that that would also be Labour's policy if it were in power. The switch from private to public transport was kicked off by Dr Mawhinney in the Conservative party back in 1996, so I see no circumstances in which the existing bridge would be returned to use for general traffic.

The Convener: I will invite you to try to see such circumstances. The pressure of public opinion about the operation of cross-Forth travel has had a substantial effect in recent years, which has included the ditching of equipment—the smart-tolling system—that was paid for at public expense. Is it not just about possible that, come 2016 or whenever the additional bridge opens, the Government of the day might not be wholly convinced that trams are a good thing? I know that that is hard to believe, but that Government might decide that, instead of putting trams on the existing bridge, it would open the bridge not necessarily to heavy goods vehicles but to some private car use. Is that not possible? No guarantee can be given now that that will not happen.

John Howison: The consequence of what you describe would be that, instead of queueing in the area of the bridge, traffic would queue on the entrance to Edinburgh at Barnton. It would also queue as it tried to peel off the M9 at Newbridge. If that were sorted, it would then queue at Gogar roundabout and at Maybury roundabout. The effective treatment of traffic is not just about the estuarial crossing, the M90 and the M9 spur but about the whole network in the area, which is incapable of taking extra traffic at the moment.

The Convener: We will perhaps have to wait until 2016 before we know whether the pressure of public opinion has the same effect on bad transport decisions as it has had in the past.

16:30

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You have already answered some of my questions about the bill that will come before Parliament, but I am still interested in getting a detailed description of the timeline from here until the bill is passed, with particular reference to the strategic environmental assessment process, the tendering process, construction and so on. That might be a long answer and, through sheer pressure of time, we might miss some parts out, so will you commit to write to the committee with a detailed description of the timeline that we can analyse? If there are any issues about the timeline, we can get you all back in again to discuss it one more time.

John Howison: Yes, we can do that. However, I would not provide the answer, so it might not be so long. If you want a quick answer now, Frazer Henderson could perhaps help you.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We could get a quick answer now, but it would still be useful to get the timeline set out in writing, so that we have it all on the record.

Frazer Henderson: The intention is to introduce the bill in November. The passage of the bill is dependent on Parliament, but there is a reasonable expectation that we would at least get to stage 3 no later than February 2011. In the written response, I will set out the tendering process that will run at the same time that we are going through the bill process.

I think that on Thursday morning Parliament will be discussing the standing orders on hybrid bills, which set out the various stages for that.

Given the nature of the project, there is an onus on us and on the Parliament to ensure that individuals whose interests are likely to be affected are fully informed about how they can make representations on the bill, what the process is and so on. We will issue a series of information to that effect in early July—we are just waiting until the hybrid bill motion is passed in Parliament on Thursday.

In short, I will write to the committee about the timeline, and I would be delighted to answer any supplementary questions about the process. We will appear before a hybrid bill committee towards the end of the year and on many future occasions, and we would welcome the opportunity to see members of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee over the coming years.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am sure that you will.

Will the written response include information on the strategic environmental assessment, the code of conduct for construction, any consultation that is available and input that local residents can feed into the important document that you are working on over the summer?

Frazer Henderson: Yes. You have highlighted two documents that are key in supporting the bill process: the environmental assessment and the

code of construction practice. A third is the noise and vibration statement. We take all three extremely seriously, because they affect people's day-to-day lives. There will be a lot of scrutiny of those documents, so we have to engage with various parties to ensure that we seek their views. The code of construction practice in particular reflects some of the concerns and issues that local residents have. You can be assured that the documentation will be sound and complete. There will be aspects of it to which people will object or seek to make improvements, but that is part of the healthy debate that there should be about the bill as it proceeds.

The Convener: We have overrun slightly, but are there any final questions for the panel?

Margaret Smith: I just want to pick up on Shirley-Anne Somerville's question about the code of construction practice. It will probably not come as too much of a shock to the committee to hear that some of the issues that are giving great cause for concern at the moment are around the siting of construction compounds, particularly the suggestion that one could be put in the Echline field.

Mr Howison, it says in the paperwork that you have given me and others who have attended some meetings that your overarching aim is to construct the scheme with the least practicable impact on communities and the environment. Why do you think that siting a construction compound for six to seven years next to hundreds of houses will have the least practicable impact on communities and the environment? I accept that access to the sea is needed, but would not it be more sensible to site the compound on the other side of the road, where it would not be at the back of people's homes?

John Howison: The Echline field is part of the land that Transport Scotland already owns—it was purchased for a previous project. It is easy to accept that a site compound on the other side of the road could be made equally effective, but our problem is whether Parliament would be prepared to give us powers of compulsion to acquire land on the other side of the road when we already have available land in our ownership. One issue is whether the owner of that land would support us in changing the favoured location of the site. We are on the point of contacting the owner to seek his views on that. Those views will be fundamental to what happens.

Margaret Smith: I have a point of clarification. Obviously, whether you are given temporary compulsory purchase order powers to acquire any land that you do not own is up to Parliament, but I am simply picking up on what your document says. It does not say that your overarching aim in your construction approach is for the project to cost as little money as possible. If it did, your comment about ownership would have more foundation, but you actually say that you want to have the least impact on communities and the environment. I hope that Parliament shares that aim and that people will not simply say, "Well, let's use this particular site because we happen to have it in public ownership already."

John Howison: We are looking carefully at how we can lay out the site that is in our ownership to minimise the impact on houses. For example, we think that the industrial part of the compound will not be close to the houses; rather, there could be a visitor centre close to the houses that would be used for training purposes and for the numerous people who will want to see the bridge being constructed. We are already considering minimising impacts on the land that we have.

Another issue is whether it is practical to presume that other land will become available on a voluntary basis. If it did, we could probably move quite easily on that. The other issue is whether the Parliament would wish to give us powers to acquire land from a third party when we already own land that could be used for that purpose.

The Convener: Thank you very much for giving us your time to answer questions. I realise that we have taken a little longer than we expected, but your evidence is appreciated. I also thank you for the expression of enthusiasm for future meetings. I am certain that members share that enthusiasm.

Budget Process 2010-11

16:39

The Convener: The next item is consideration of a paper on the budget process for the draft budget for 2010-11. The paper asks us to consider what the primary focus of our scrutiny of the forthcoming budget should be. A number of options are included.

I will ask members for their comments, but my view is that it would be odd for us not to spend at least some time considering the carbon assessment project, given that the 2010-11 budget is the first in which any attempt will be made to apply the process, albeit only to specific portfolio areas in the first instance. We have had some opportunities to hear informally about progress, but the budget process will give us an opportunity formally to consider what the carbon assessment process looks like and to scrutinise it with ministers.

The second point that I highlight is that, in the past two years, we have repeatedly commented on active and sustainable travel and what has happened to those budget lines. It is probably important that we try to move that on a bit, rather than simply make the same comment for the third time in a row. We should push ministers for some progress on that.

Des McNulty: We cannot let two years pass without looking at the transport budget in some depth and detail. Since the previous budget, we have had the strategic transport projects review. The three transport issues that are identified in the paper—the funding of major capital projects, active travel, and concessionary fares—form a good package of things for us to consider. If we are to opt for a budget adviser, I suggest that we choose an adviser on transport to bring those three things together.

Having said that, convener, I am not deaf to your point about the carbon assessment process. I suggest that we have a couple of evidence-taking sessions on that. Rather than have an adviser on it, we should get two or three experts in to talk about it and then have the minister before us so that we interrogate him on how the process is operating. However, I suspect the point at which to come to a judgment on it might be the following year, once we have had a chance to see it from inception through to execution.

My preference is to focus our budget activity and advisory resource on the transport issues that are identified in the paper, and to schedule a couple of evidence-taking sessions on the carbon assessment process.

The Convener: If we can do the two things alongside each other, that would seem to be the answer. Are there any other comments?

Alison McInnes: I agree with the approach that Des McNulty suggested.

Cathy Peattie: So do I.

The Convener: Many thanks for that.

16:43

Meeting continued in private until 16:47.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Monday 6 July 2009

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00
Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh.

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by RR Donnelley