

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 January 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 January 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): To lead our time for reflection this afternoon, I welcome Mr Chris Docherty, who is the convener of the Action of Churches Together in Scotland youth forum in Glasgow.

Mr Chris Docherty (Convener of Action of Churches Together in Scotland Youth Forum): Good afternoon. In my day-to-day job, I work for the Catholic archdiocese of Glasgow as its youth development officer. On Sunday, we celebrated the feast-day of St Kentigern—Mungo to his friends—who is the patron saint of that city and of the archdiocese of Glasgow. The feast tells me something about where I come from and about the story of my faith community.

Next week, the world celebrates a week of prayer for Christian unity, when we recall that our unity as children of God is our primary identity and a gift of the Holy Spirit that we must try to rediscover. The week is a celebration that speaks to me about where I am being called to go and about how I am constantly renewed and transformed according to the mysterious purpose of God.

So today, halfway between those two dates, I am poised between a sense of where I have come from and of where I could be going. The work that we do with young people under the auspices of Action of Churches Together in Scotland and the work that members do as MSPs also involves journeys out of places of familiarity towards new places of discovery, risk, dialogue and hope. What are we taking with us from our past? What do we need to leave behind?

In August 2000, a joint pilgrimage of young Scots Catholics and Protestants went to the world youth day in Rome. Over 2 million young people attended that huge celebration of faith and life. As can be imagined, many strange encounters took place. One young Presbyterian described with some delight how he had been asked in Rome—I cannot quote directly—about what it was like to be a young Presbyterian. He said, “I had to find another way to explain who I was, because the usual words made no sense.” I was keen to find out whether that breakthrough dialogue had

occurred in the Vatican, or in another basilica, or during an intercontinental group that had been facilitated by our project team. Members will understand my horror when he blithely explained that it all happened over a burger under some golden arches.

Let us similarly try to discover new ways of talking to one another and of listening to one another, so that we strengthen the bonds of solidarity and unity amongst all our people.

Let us pray, using some of the words from the first Scottish ecumenical assembly, which was held in this city in September 2001:

“Loving Father,
Awaken among us the dreams and hopes
Of patriarchs and prophets, martyrs and saints,
The known and the unknown people
Who have loved you and each other.
Keep us true to your Word,
Responsive to the Holy Spirit
And ready to serve you in our neighbour.”

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Points of Order

14:35

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is the point of order of which I gave you prior notice.

Yesterday, the Executive held a press conference to announce the delay in the implementation of free personal care for the elderly. In the chamber, we have had four ministerial statements on matters related to free personal care, because it is such an important issue to the people of Scotland. It is one of the most controversial of issues and has been subject to the democratic will of the Parliament. However, although the SNP offered time during this debate for a statement, a statement was not forthcoming.

Is it correct that the Executive should be allowed to hold press conferences without coming to the chamber or to the Health and Community Care Committee to make a statement? I draw your attention to page 10 of today's business bulletin. Is it appropriate for a planted question from Angus MacKay to have been published only today? Members will note the interesting triangle beside the question number. I am not sure if that is a symbol for former ministers who are hoping to ingratiate themselves with the Executive. Is such a question not inappropriate? When there are important announcements on this important policy, is not it more appropriate that—as has happened previously—the Executive should come either to the chamber or to the Health and Community Care Committee? That did not happen, because a press conference was held yesterday.

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Mr Johnstone has a point of order on the same point. I point out to members that the next debate is heavily oversubscribed, so let us keep this as short as we can.

Alex Johnstone: There is concern in my party that it appears that the Department for Work and Pensions had, as early as October of last year, made it clear to the Minister for Health and Community Care that there was no further scope for negotiation in the transfer of £23 million of resources to the Scottish Executive. However, the point has been made repeatedly—in this chamber and elsewhere—that negotiations were on-going. Would it be in order to suggest that the minister has perhaps misled Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: That second point is not a point of order for me.

I will deal with the point of substance—and I am grateful to the member for giving me notice,

allowing me time to consider it.

I have previously acknowledged that it is for the Executive to judge which policy announcements are of sufficient significance to be made in the Parliament. It strikes me that it is at least arguable that the announcement made yesterday by the Minister for Health and Community Care was of sufficient significance.

I note that there was a written question, the answer to which appeared on the website yesterday afternoon, but not in advance of the press conference. I note too that Hugh Henry, the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, explained the Executive's position to the Health and Community Care Committee at its meeting this morning. However, neither of those responses is the same as an announcement to the Parliament. I therefore invite the Executive to reflect further on what happened.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This point of order is on a different subject and I gave the Presiding Officer prior notice of it. I feel that it is a matter of major parliamentary importance. If what I am about to describe had happened at Westminster, it would certainly have been regarded as a breach of parliamentary privilege.

I draw the Presiding Officer's attention to a report in last Sunday's *Sunday Herald*, which indicated that the Scottish executive of the Labour party is requiring a pledge from all Labour candidates for the next elections that they will never vote against a Labour nominee for any post in Parliament. The article says that that has happened against the background of the recent vote for the post of Deputy Presiding Officer, when Mr Murray Tosh was elected. I suggest to the chamber and to the Presiding Officer that this seems to be a quite outrageous attempt to fetter the discretion of MSPs. I seek the Presiding Officer's guidance as to whether such an undertaking, if given by MSPs or potential MSPs, would be in breach of the Parliament's code of conduct. I am thinking in particular of the key principles in section 2 of the code.

I also seek guidance as to whether the Parliament has any sanction against any outside political organisation that seeks to bind members in such a way.

The Presiding Officer: I am again grateful to the member for having given me notice of a point of order, giving me time to consider it.

I do not think that it is correct to say that the Scottish executive of the Labour party is requiring such a pledge. What the *Sunday Herald* reported was a request from an internal party committee convener for it to do so. As such, it is an internal Labour party matter and not one for me.

However, I will say this: all Parliaments jealously guard their right freely to choose those who are to preside over them. In this Parliament, that is clearly marked by the fact that elections for Presiding Officers are the only occasions on which we have a secret ballot. Accordingly, if any member is approached by anybody asking how they voted, they should politely but firmly refuse to answer.

Railways

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now turn to this afternoon's Scottish National Party debate on motion S1M-2606, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on Scotland's railways, and two amendments to that motion. I call on Kenny MacAskill to speak to and move the motion, and I invite the opening speakers to reflect on the fact that the debate is heavily oversubscribed.

14:40

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Well, well. Monday saw a fanfare for the Executive and Strategic Rail Authority announcements, pledges and promises. What is the substance behind the spin? The minister for enterprise, rehash and spin—who in her previous portfolio had convictions for recycling the same Government money with multiple announcements of the same proposal—is at it again. She is a serial political offender.

Where are we at the moment? It took the Minister of State for Europe to indicate that our railways were the worst in Europe—probably because the UK Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was sitting on a beach sunning himself. "Crisis? What crisis?" brought down Jim Callaghan, and a similar ignorance and insensitivity will do likewise for new Labour.

We have seen a 25 per cent cut in ScotRail services—services that were already drawing increasingly frequent complaints from disgruntled commuters—leaving an economy stagnating and travellers marooned. The situation is epitomised by the service from our third city to our fifth and newest city, where a 90mph train travelling 108 miles takes two and a quarter hours to arrive. So much for an intercity service in the 21st century.

The spin must be substantiated. How much is the Executive spending? When is it spending it? When will we see the construction and improvement? Passengers do not want platitudes; they want firm commitments about what is being spent and when they will see the dividend. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

We are on our third First Minister and our second transport minister, but what has changed? Let us consider the evidence. Let me quote, and let the Scottish traveller listen and weep:

"A Scottish parliament and executive with substantially wider powers and democratic authority than the Scottish Office ... will be better placed than ever before in developing and implementing Scottish solutions to Scottish problems."

I quite agree. A new dawn for Scotland and rail. What a pity that the Minister for Enterprise,

Transport and Lifelong Learning and her colleagues have failed so lamentably. Given the unique circumstances, the minister has abdicated responsibility and wasted a golden opportunity.

What else was said?

"The prevarication that characterised our predecessors' approach to transport is at an end; this Government intends to deliver, I can assure you of that."

Those are fine words, worthy even of the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, even though they were not hers. The tragedy is that the prevarication continues, and the delivery is non-existent. And yet there is more:

"We have promised a balanced package of measures to deliver a sustainable effective transport system appropriate to the needs of Scotland's people, environment and economy."

Who made those pledges? It was the late Donald Dewar, addressing the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority on 4 December 1998. More than three years on, and into not just a new century but a new millennium, the situation is simply this: things are worse now than they were then.

Last week, our third First Minister, not our first First Minister, was rightly criticised by the leader of the Opposition for failing to act in the current ScotRail dispute. It was pointed out that he had powers to give direction and guidance to the SRA, but that he had chosen not to do so. Moreover, it was pointed out that this is not a run-of-the-mill labour dispute between management and unions. Not only is the service vital to our society and economy, but ScotRail is a private monopoly run by public subsidy. There is no alternative train for the commuter and it is our taxes that are paying the franchise holder. What response of gravitas and depth was given by the third First Minister? He flippantly chastised my colleague John Swinney for suggesting that he could get trains to run when there were no drivers. There was much hilarity on the Lib-Lab back benches, but no solution for those waiting on the station platform.

What was pledged by the first First Minister? He extolled an

"eight point action plan including the recruitment of 800 extra train drivers",

but where are those drivers? What trains are they driving? If the first First Minister thought it important to extol the virtues of recruitment, why does the third First Minister deny responsibility for the absence of those drivers? Does the civil service in the First Minister's office rely on civil servants working in the evenings or at weekends? Does the office rely on rest-day working? If the First Minister does not operate in that way, how does he expect our railways to run in that way? He or his transport minister either knew or ought to

have known. Either they are culpable or they are negligent. Either way, they have failed. Crown prince? Court jester more like.

I should add that the first First Minister went on:

"I am satisfied that ScotRail has less to worry about than the other train operating companies—but we will ensure that they are kept on their toes."

On their toes? Most people think that the Executive is falling flat on its face.

"Who is responsible for all this?" ask a disgruntled public. That is a perfectly legitimate question and one that the first First Minister appeared prepared to acknowledge and accept responsibility for, but that has not happened. The public ask who is responsible. "Not I," says the First Minister. "Nor I," says the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. "Nothing to do with me, gov," says the Scottish Executive. That is the sort of behaviour that drives passengers to distraction and a rail operating company into disrepute.

What about some of the Executive's announcements? On Monday, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning promised us the Milngavie to Larkhall line within four years. However, three years ago, the first First Minister indicated that the Larkhall project was high on his list of priorities and that he hoped that an announcement would soon be made.

The minister indicated that we would have the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line by 2005. That was notwithstanding the fact that the project was first mooted in 1991 and that the previous Minister for Transport had a photocall on the track in November 2000 to give a visual image of the impending opening of the line.

The announcements are not about a new beginning. They are a regurgitation of existing commitments that have yet to be honoured—could kail het up.

What do we need? We need responsibility, accountability and vision. I shall deal with each of those concepts in turn.

On responsibility, the Executive needs to get a grip and end the excuses and abrogation of responsibility. The Executive is elected to lead, not to hide. It must cease denying responsibility and being fearful of entering into dialogue, never mind giving direction. If the Executive will not confront the combined forces of ScotRail, the RMT—the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—and ASLEF, which is the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, who will?

The Executive funds ScotRail and the RMT funds some Labour members. On either or both of those grounds, the Executive not only can, but

must intervene.

The issue is about taking charge of our rail network. The minister cannot expect plaudits for going cap in hand to London and returning with a commitment that it might be possible for a rail link to the airport to be built by 2005. That is notwithstanding the fact that the document that the minister is supporting and extolling in her amendment makes no commitment to build that link by 2005, only to build it within 10 years. The minister is pleading for crumbs from the UK cake for the Scottish rail network. As long as the minister denies responsibility, Scotland will remain on a railway siding and go nowhere.

On accountability, we must be in charge of our rail network. The current system is not delivering. Why can the minister be responsible for highways, but not railways? That is neither logical nor beneficial. The SRA is a UK body and it will look after UK interests. It is self-evident that, with 70 per cent of UK rail journeys starting or ending in London, the expenditure will be focused on London.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): We are over eight and a half minutes into the speech and we have not heard one comment about what the SNP would do with our railways. Would Mr MacAskill tell the chamber? He has just implied that he does not believe that any investment in services on the east coast or west coast main lines will bring any benefit to Scottish passengers. We in the Labour party do not agree with him.

Mr MacAskill: I found that rather a convoluted question.

The purpose of this debate is to focus on—and to give the chamber the first opportunity to debate—the SRA announcement and the Executive press release. I will come on to what we will do, but this is the first democratic airing of what the Executive put in the press. That contrasts with its inability to give—despite being offered the opportunity—a democratic airing to health care for the elderly, for which it has decided to abrogate responsibility.

Why can the minister be responsible for highways, but not for railways? The SRA is a UK body; its announcement confirms that fact. The SNP is clear that the minister and the Parliament must be responsible and accountable for rail. The SNP believes that a separate Scottish public trust for Railtrack is the best way forward. That would allow us to spend our money on our priorities and direct our funds to where they are first required.

What is the argument against that proposal? People say, "Trains don't stop at the border." Blow me—that is a hard one. Do not trains pass from the Netherlands to Germany, or from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland, or from Portugal to

Spain? Does the minister suggest that those independent nations have somehow missed a trick and that the rail services that they have and aspire to would be better served by re-entering or entering the British empire—on rail or otherwise? The minister should not be absurd. The SNP's suggestion is not narrow-minded nationalism; it is plain common sense.

Do not the M74 and the A1 cross the border? Do we require to change our tyres at a border interchange? That would be ridiculous. Even if the minister, with her limited aspirations, thinks the suggestion is a step too far, surely the current circumstances are unacceptable. The SRA is based in London and has a representative for Scotland who is located not at Victoria Quay, but at Victoria station. At the minimum, we require a dedicated Scottish director of the SRA in an autonomous Scottish department, as 96 per cent of rail journeys in Scotland start and finish here.

We can work together on an inter-island basis on cross-border matters, but internal Scottish services must be decided on here. If we can build our own Parliament building, we can build our own rail network. If we can decide on the furniture and fabric of that building, we can be responsible for the signalling and stations on our railways.

Although we call for the rails to be publicly owned, we accept that the train operators will remain in the private sector. That brings us to the ScotRail franchise. We cannot continue to limp along until 2004. There must be some light at the end of the dark tunnel. ScotRail claims that it is haemorrhaging money. If the present situation continues, it will haemorrhage rail users.

We must seek to have ScotRail deliver to the terms of the franchise, but we must also acknowledge the extent of the difficulties that it faces. A carrot must accompany the stick. If, like other franchise holders, ScotRail is making a loss, we could say, "Tough. You got it wrong, you pay the price." ScotRail might pay a price, but so would we all. For those reasons, there must be discussion and review.

The status quo is unacceptable. Moreover, the minister must urgently set in place the time scales and conditions for franchise renewal. Like the travelling public, we do not care whether ScotRail, Stagecoach or SNCF runs the network. We care that the company delivers a working network that is safe and reliable, enhanced and expanded, and based on a clear strategy that focuses on passengers and service.

Where is the vision? A rail link to an airport sometime in the next decade, or if we are lucky, by 2005 is suggested—and the minister was quoted as saying that it might happen by 2005. Having failed to impress the morning papers, she tried to

think of something new for evening television. The Railtrack network management statement that was issued in 1998 talked about a rail link to Glasgow airport within 10 years. Why the slippage? When will that be constructed? Who will pay for it?

No mention has been made of electrification and the sparks effect. We have had tea and sympathy for those in the Borders. We need to take responsibility, enforce accountability, develop a strategy and deliver a vision.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): How much would the SNP invest in railways in Scotland?

Mr MacAskill: We argue for European levels of investment. That has been proposed at a UK level by the British Government and by David Begg, who used to sit with members of the Labour party. We must recognise the need for investment. We must decide how much is available to spend and what rail network we can obtain for that. At present, we have neither timetables nor vision.

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment.

Plenty must be done, not only to improve the service, but to enhance and expand it. The service to which we should aspire is not a utopian vision, but the service that is taken for granted in other small European nations, such as Sweden.

At the outset of the debate, I gave details of the travel time between Inverness and Aberdeen. I repeat that it takes two and a half hours in a 90mph train to travel 108 miles. Comparable journeys in Sweden are completed in half the time and at half the cost. We need to get control of our share of the rail money and spend it on our vision and projects.

There has been much criticism in the industry that the rail network is being run by accountants and financiers. I can only echo those comments. It is the same here. I recently met a senior person in the rail sector who indicated that, at best, only three lines could make a profit. What an absurd premise. What road makes a profit? When I get in my car for a road journey, it costs me money. When the minister gets in her limo, it costs us all money. Apart from those plying for hire or carrying for trade, no road journey makes a profit. We build roads, we care for them and we patrol them. Do we talk about social highways? No. That is because a proper road network brings social and economic benefits.

When there are environmental as well as social and economic arguments for rail, why do we predicate our position on the false premise of profit? That was the logic of Thatcherism. Margaret Thatcher was a woman who prided

herself on never travelling by train and who, when she was Prime Minister, revelled in rubbishing British Rail. Let us never forget that it was the Tories who created the mess.

We must end the concept of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. A modern 21st century Scotland needs a vibrant, expanding network. It needs such a network not just socially and economically, but environmentally.

Let us dwell on the Executive amendment—although not long will be required.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Before moving to his summation, would my friend like to comment on the status of the Executive's transport policy? We know already that the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning is utterly isolated—no other member of the Cabinet is in the chamber to support her, although she has plenty of friends on the back benches. Does the member agree that, because the transport portfolio is a serious portfolio, the First Minister needs to take serious account of factional fighting?

Mr MacAskill: I am happy to agree with those sentiments. The minister will have an opportunity shortly to answer for herself.

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I am concerned that we are about to reach the last few moments of Mr MacAskill's speech and that we do not have a clear idea of his vision for Scotland's railways. He has told us nothing of what the SNP's priorities are. What are its investment priorities and how much will it invest? Will the member please tell us that before his speech ends?

Mr MacAskill: We are not the Executive. We are not the Strategic Rail Authority. On Monday, the SRA, the authority to which Labour has abrogated responsibility, made its position clear. That position is that it will govern rail in the whole of the UK for the next 15 years. The minister went cap in hand to see Byers because she did not like the fact that the SRA specified rail networks for 10 years or more. Last night on television, and today in the papers, a promise for 2005 was aired.

Labour has said that the SRA document will dictate railways. We say that that must be addressed. We say that there is a different way to run our railways. We say that the minister must take responsibility. We do not want a minister who scuttles down to London cap in hand, who does not accept responsibility for the immediate crisis, who does not seek accountability for herself and the Scottish Parliament and who does not create a strategy for delivering a future vision.

Labour has been in office in Scotland for five years. We have had one election, three First Ministers and two transport ministers. In the UK,

we have had one Prime Minister, two elections and three transport ministers. What has Labour been doing? I have heard about finding one's feet, but that is the gestation period of a political elephant, conceived in the 20th century and inadequate for the 21st.

The structure is absent. The Executive has neither accepted responsibility nor created accountability. It has neither vision nor strategy. The Executive does not even require a Jo Moore to bury press releases. That is because the industry, press and public view the Executive as stillborn.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Executive's neglect and lamentable lack of vision and strategy for Scotland's railways has contributed to a deterioration of rail services in Scotland to the point at which they have become amongst the worst in Europe; further notes that the Strategic Rail Authority's new strategic plan offers nothing new for Scotland; believes that Scottish railways must be fully controlled by, and accountable to, the Scottish Parliament, and therefore calls upon the Executive to take responsibility for delivering a strategy for the running and operation of Scotland's rail network.

14:59

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): I welcome today's debate, not least because transport is at the top of the political agenda at the moment. I shall make some serious points, because a number of people in Scotland are watching the debate and asking, "What are the Scottish Executive and the Westminster Government doing about transport?" As members of all parties in the chamber know, I am a politician who likes to tell it like it is. Let us try to do that today.

As Kenny MacAskill said, we are elected to lead, so let me make things clear. Do we need to improve transport in Scotland? Yes. Do we need more, better and faster trains and new lines? Yes. On coming to office—I am speaking in the context of the UK Government—we faced a choice. We could either undo the entire system that we had inherited or try to make it work. We took a gamble to try to make it work. Post-Hatfield, we concluded that the failed privatised system could not be made to work—it simply was not up to the job. Although, politically, it would have been easier to struggle on with the status quo, we took a difficult decision for the right reasons. Of course, there was political flak—we have heard some of it today.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The minister says that the Government struggled with difficult decisions but realised, post-Hatfield, that it was wrong all along and should have taken the rail network back into public ownership. Why was that

decision delayed until only a couple of months ago?

Ms Alexander: We inherited a privatised rail industry and decided that we would try to make that system work. However, post-Hatfield and the failures in safety, we decided that we had to make for change.

Another criticism is that the railways need more investment. I do not doubt that that is the case. Our railways have had decades of underinvestment. We are paying the price for the lack of investment in infrastructure in the 1970s and 1980s. However, we make no apology for the tough decisions that we took, which mean that Britain is better placed than any other member of the G10 to face the current economic difficulties. Scottish rail passengers want to hear me say that although our first priorities were to invest in education then health, we have now accepted that transport has to be a priority. It is important for Government to recognise when we need a new structure and new investment. I am not complacent and I do not want anyone to suggest that the Government is complacent.

However, let us turn to what we should do now. We did not hear it from Kenny MacAskill, but what the SNP wanted me to do yesterday when I went to London can be seen in the motion, which

"calls upon the Executive to take responsibility for delivering a strategy for the running and operation of Scotland's rail network."

According to the SNP, when I went to see John Armitt, the new leader of Railtrack, I should not have talked to him about how quickly we are going to get Railtrack out of administration and what we are going to do about the four lines that are held up because we do not have signalling resources. According to the SNP, I should have been asking, "Please can we have our own Railtrack? Please can we have something called SPRINT?" According to the SNP, instead of talking to Richard Bowker at the SRA about how we get Waverley station moving and what we want in the refranchise contract in Scotland, I should have said, "We want to cut ourselves off further."

I should then have gone to Stephen Byers and said, "You know how you are in a fight with shareholders about compensation at the moment? Could I ask you whether, instead of integrating the railways further in Scotland, we could break Railtrack up so that every operator in Scotland—Virgin, Great North Eastern Railway, ScotRail and the freight companies—has to negotiate not only with Railtrack, but with Scotland Railtrack plc?"

What our railways need is a common agenda, a common plan and common investment. The lesson of failed privatisation is—

Andrew Wilson: Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: I would like to finish this point. The lesson of failed privatisation is that too much fragmentation is bad for our railways, yet that is what the SNP wanted us to ask for yesterday. The point about fragmentation is not simply a debating point. If we had a different regime north of the border, which is apparently what I should have been bickering about yesterday, what would be done about safety? Are we to have different signalling systems north and south of Carlisle on the west coast main line or are we perhaps—

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: Let me make it very real. Today, we announced—*[Interruption.]* Members may not like it, but they should listen to the point that I am making. Today, we announced the extension on a Great Britain basis of the GNER franchise for the east coast main line. If I had spent yesterday arguing for two Railtracks, we would not have been able to see the sort of plans for the east coast franchise that will at least make a start on some of the improvements that are needed on the east coast main line in Scotland. Let me say that—

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way?

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: If the minister does not want to give way, members must sit down.

Ms Alexander: I am happy to take an intervention from Mr MacAskill.

Mr MacAskill: Does the minister agree that the basis of yesterday's GNER announcement was that the expansion of the service would be brought about by making the three Eurostar trains that it was promised would go from Edinburgh and Glasgow to London and Europe go instead from London to Leeds? Where is the benefit to Scotland from a GNER announcement that sees an improved service to Leeds but absolutely nothing better for us north of the border? Were not the Eurostar trains that have been allocated to the London to Leeds service originally promised to Scotland? Are they or are they not our trains?

Ms Alexander: Let me correct Mr MacAskill. It is simply not true to say that what was announced does not bring improvements to Scotland. There will be refurbishment of all carriages, not just the carriages that come to Berwick. The expansion will also include the lengthening of all high-speed trains to address overcrowding and a commitment that, when the east coast main line is upgraded, that will be done on a GB basis.

I would like to move on, as I have already made the point—

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: No. Let me continue.

We live on one island. The case for a GB network—for safety, for growth and for unity of purpose—is right. It is also right that we in Scotland should be part of making decisions about the future of the railways in Scotland. We already do so.

Andrew Wilson: Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: Yes.

Andrew Wilson: I am grateful to the minister for giving way and I note that she now has support on the front bench. Does she recognise that, although we are on one island, we have separate investment in the roads system, because devolution recognises a Scottish solution to Scottish problems? Why is that good enough for roads but not for rail?

Ms Alexander: I hope that I have dealt with the case for dealing with the GB network on an overall basis. I have made points about safety, about the west coast main line, which is a single rail line, and about the east coast main line. I would like to go on to talk about what I think makes a difference to the railways in Scotland. What passengers want is more reliable trains, trains that run on time, more frequent trains and less overcrowding. [MEMBERS: "When?"] Let me repeat that. Passengers want more reliable trains that run on time, that run more frequently and that are less overcrowded. [MEMBERS: "When?"] I am about to tell members when. The single most important factor in delivering that is the franchise. Later this year, the Scottish Executive will begin reletting the ScotRail franchise, which expires in March 2004.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way on that point?

Ms Alexander: What I want, and what we should have been discussing in London yesterday, is a long-term franchise that will bring more, better and faster trains in Scotland. We do not need two Railtracks, two fights with the shareholders and two different safety systems.

Mr Monteith: I thank the minister for eventually taking a Tory intervention.

The minister constantly talks about failed privatisation, but she also says that she is willing to enter into agreements with GNER and consider further agreements with ScotRail, which are privatised companies. To what extent have those companies failed? If they have failed, will they be put into administration without compensation? Will they be nationalised? Will the minister explain what she means by failure?

Ms Alexander: I always expect Brian Monteith to defend the privatisation of Railtrack, which was

probably the most controversial and misguided aspect of rail privatisation.

I want to look forward. The talks have not been universally successful. There is a problem in having far too many talks and there have not been suitable performance regimes. One way in which the east coast main line has been improved is through placing on the train operating companies obligations that did not exist before.

What do we need to do in Scotland? New lines are one issue. Kenny MacAskill rightly asked why the Stirling to Alloa line, for example, is taking longer to be moved forward than we had hoped. The reason is that, post-Hatfield, Railtrack decided that the signalling resource had to be concentrated on safety considerations and that, temporarily, throughout the country, projects that did not concern safety would be put on hold. Who could have anticipated the Hatfield crisis?

In London yesterday, I spent some time trying to work out with Railtrack how to move signalling resource that is not required for safety considerations on to the west coast main line. We want to move on and build the lines that have been delayed.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): The minister is aware that Scotland represents more than 30 per cent of the British landmass. What extra investment will be spent in Britain in the next 10 years and what percentage of that will be spent in Scotland?

Ms Alexander: The total amount of money that was mentioned yesterday—the sum has increased since the transport plan 10 years ago—was £33 billion. Scotland will have a fair share. Much of that expenditure will not be made on a geographically disaggregated basis, because safety and signalling, for example, are UK-wide commitments that need to be delivered on a UK-wide basis.

I want to talk about what we will do.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: I want to move on—I think that I have taken five or six interventions.

One good feature of the SRA plan is the commitment to upgrade Waverley station—not because that is a criticism of the station. Unless we create much more capacity at Waverley station, the opportunity to open up Fife, move people between Glasgow and Edinburgh faster and get down into the Borders will not be available.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Ms Alexander: No. I have taken many interventions.

There will be improvements to the Edinburgh to Glasgow corridor and links to Scotland's airports.

It would be inappropriate not to mention the dispute. The demoralisation caused by the failure of privatisation, the lining of too many people's pockets and contractors fixing in their own interests have hit the morale of many staff. Probably no member does not know someone whom they would describe as a railwayman—they were usually men—who wanted the best for the old railway and felt that the old railway had disappeared over recent years in the system that we inherited from the Tories. Those are some sources of the dispute.

The current dispute is making headlines. We regret the inconvenience to passengers and the disruption.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is in her final minute.

Ms Alexander: The Prime Minister has said that we want people to consider arbitration. The dispute is between employers and employees and should not be turned into a public sector or national dispute. We hope that representatives on all sides get round the table.

I was asked what the concrete promises are to Scottish passengers. Let me make them clear. The position is that there will be three new lines. For half a century after the Beeching report, the railways have been cut back; for the first time in half a century, we are planning for expansion.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): It is not half a century; the Beeching report was in 1962.

Ms Alexander: It is 40 years then, but there were cuts before Beeching. The point is that the service has been contracting for 50 years. We are planning for three new lines and six new stations, and 140 stations are to be done up. There will be improved flexibility for trains at Dumfries and Dunblane; platforms for longer trains at East Kilbride, Ayr, Bathgate and on the Fife circle line; additional capacity for the Kilmarnock and Paisley to Glasgow lines; provision for Sunday services to Shotts, Cumbernauld and East Kilbride; and a new train crew depot at Dumfries. There will be new washing plants, trains will be refurbished and 200 new coaches are to be ordered. New electric trains are also coming into service. All that will happen in the next three years.

I have restricted the list of what Scottish passengers can expect the Executive to do in the next three years. We are planning for expansion. We recognise that the key failure has been fragmentation. The Opposition proposes more fragmentation; we propose delivery for Scottish

passengers.

I move amendment S1M-2606.2, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the publication of the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan and the vision it contains as a first, significant step towards a bigger, better and safer railway for Scotland."

The Presiding Officer: I warn members that the debate is heavily oversubscribed, so the Presiding Officers will adhere strictly to the time limits.

15:16

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Today offers a welcome opportunity to debate the state of Scotland's railways and their future. Alas, the SNP motion and Mr MacAskill's contribution were simply a rehash of what we have heard before. At least the minister surprised us. Last week, Jack McConnell told us that his Government would do less, but better, but Miss Alexander tells us that her aspiration is to be bigger and better.

I am genuinely disappointed that the minister lodged an amendment that is based on platitudes and that has little to say about how she intends to deliver. At least the publication of the strategic plan by the SRA on Monday and the subsequent debate have forced the minister to break her 50-day purdah on transport issues and speak out. Alas, Monday's pronouncements were the usual attempts at spin over substance and had to be followed up yesterday with shuttle diplomacy to London to try to add credibility to what had been announced.

No one doubts the importance to Scotland of the Edinburgh and Glasgow airport rail links or the other items on the wish list with which the minister concluded her speech and which she and the SRA drew up. Where are the detailed plans? In the words of Jerry Maguire, it is time for her to show us the money. The hole in the finances for the SRA's package of measures is big and getting bigger. Until she tells us how she will get the private sector funding that is necessary for long-term investment, the public will not believe that there will be any improvements in services.

Ms Alexander: Would Mr Mundell like to comment on the fact that, by the end of this spending period, the transport budget in Scotland will be almost double what it was under the Conservative Government?

David Mundell: We have identified the need for future spending; the question is where the minister and the UK Government will get the money. The minister and the Labour party should take account of the polls at the weekend and must learn that the public do not believe that everything can be blamed on the Conservatives. Labour has been in power at Westminster for five years—the buck

stops with the Labour Government.

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I will come to Mr Smith shortly. I hope that he will echo the robust stance that has been taken by Mr Don Foster at Westminster in criticising the UK Labour Government and its transport plans. I expect nothing less from him.

When the minister met Mr Byers yesterday, she might have asked him why, since he pulled the plug on Railtrack and put the company into administration, the number of train delays have increased by 45 per cent UK-wide and by more than 70 per cent on some lines. Strikes and working to rule have crippled ScotRail and, as other members will no doubt point out, every day brings more news of commuters' misery.

The UK Government and the Scottish Executive have again tried to raise expectations that the SRA plan will be the answer to passengers' needs. However, from what we have heard today, passengers will be sadly disappointed. The SRA has set out three milestones that must be reached in order to achieve the aims of the strategic plan. First, the Railtrack administration must be resolved. Has the minister any idea what will happen to Railtrack? Did she ask Mr Byers for the date on which the company will come out of administration? It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the UK Government has no plans in relation to that issue. Indeed, Westminster Labour has a great deal in common with the SNP: it is all talk, with no clue about what should be done about the situation.

Andrew Wilson *rose—*

David Mundell: Perhaps Mr Wilson will clarify things for us.

Andrew Wilson: Perfect timing. I am grateful to the member for giving way. Given Mr Mundell's amendment, which interestingly talks about "regret" at the "acquiescence" to Westminster on this issue, will he clarify the Conservative position? Does the Conservative party agree with the Labour party that we should wait until London sorts the matter out and then implement the measures that it draws up, or does Mr Mundell agree with Brian Monteith and Murdo Fraser, who are sitting behind him, that railway finances should be controlled in Scotland?

David Mundell: Until the UK Government sorts out the railways, Mr Wilson can talk as much pie in the sky as he wants. Indeed, I am sure that we will hear more of the same later. Restoring confidence in the UK Government's ability to bring private finance into the network is the key to improving the network. Nothing that we say in this Parliament will change that.

The second milestone in achieving the SRA's plan is addressing the instability and lack of confidence, which is a point that I will return to. The third milestone mentioned by the SRA is dealing with skill shortages. Although we have heard much about the national rail academy in the press spin, passengers' misery is already being increased by the cancellation of trains because of union disputes. It is about time that the minister delivered a much clearer message to her union friends that there is no place for a return to the 1970s in work relations in the rail industry.

In addition to the three milestones that the SRA highlighted, there is another milestone—capacity. We have heard a little about the Waverley project, but, without increased capacity, the promised improvements will not be delivered. The plan holds out little hope that increased capacity can be achieved in the UK, and certainly not in Scotland. The minister must grasp the difficulties of dealing with the pinchpoints in the network and of identifying the key paths and best utilisation of resources. Sadly, despite its good intentions, the SRA plan for Scotland offers no money, no new schemes and little hope for passengers in the immediate future.

Bruce Crawford: In that case, does the member agree that there is a dire need in Scotland for a 10-year investment plan in the railways to be introduced as soon as possible? Such a plan exists south of the border, and the English cities and big regions are bidding for the money. Scotland is missing out in that respect.

David Mundell: We need to know where the money will come from, and neither the SNP nor the Scottish Executive has been able to resolve that issue.

The philosopher George Santayana famously wrote:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Members: Wool!

David Mundell: Yes, he did. The Conservatives have recognised that truth and others would do well to heed such wise words.

Tony Blair and now Ms Alexander might wish to air-brush the reality of British Rail from history, but, for several decades before 1994, Britain suffered from an inefficient, unresponsive and unreliable railway network. Britain's nationalised rail industry was never a success, and we should not pretend otherwise.

Iain Smith: I have two quick questions. First, does the member accept that part of the problem before 1994 was the complete lack of investment by the UK Government in the railway network, starting with Beeching and particularly during the

Thatcher era? Secondly, Mr Mundell talks about history. Does the Conservative party think that, in retrospect, its privatisation of Britain's railways was a success?

David Mundell: I wish that Iain Smith had listened to what I said. I acknowledged the lack of investment over many years. Indeed, the Conservatives at Westminster have recognised the fact that privatisation has caused problems, that there have been many complications and that mistakes have been made. Decades of nationalisation resulted in chronic underinvestment and mismanagement.

Despite the problems, the evidence clearly shows that the British rail industry was moving in the right direction until Labour came to power in 1997 and started meddling. The service had improved and more people were using the railways. That was achieved without any deterioration in the safety of the service. In the seven years after privatisation, there were fewer accidental deaths than in the seven years before privatisation. Even Mr John Prescott—who seems to be air-brushed out of everything these days—recognised that fact. He said, and not about the Deputy Presiding Officer:

"I have heard a lot of tosh about the public and private sectors. Do hon. Members feel less safe when they get on board a private-sector aeroplane than they did when British Airways was a public company? ... We have been told to remember Paddington, but I remember King's Cross and Clapham—public sector disasters. Safety was not better under the public sector in that industry ... I have never accepted 'public good, private bad'".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 May 2000; Vol 368, c 714-15.]

Unfortunately, despite some promising beginnings, the Labour Government ignored the successes of privatisation and is now trying to bring forward its own agenda. I do not accept the minister's line, which was being spun out of No 10 over the weekend, that the Government inherited the system and tried to make it work. That is simply not true. The UK rail industry needed a Government that could provide a positive and stable framework that would allow it to deliver the sort of service that the travelling public are entitled to expect.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

David Mundell: I thank Ms Boyack for giving me notice of the intervention last night.

Sarah Boyack: Will David Mundell not accept the fact that the key problem at Hatfield was the lack of effective maintenance by the privatised railway network and that that is what brought the system to a crashing and shuddering halt?

David Mundell: No, I do not accept that that happened because the network had been

privatised. No evidence has been produced to substantiate that claim.

The Labour party has—as Ms Boyack has just done—carped about and criticised the privatised system for nearly five years. It has blamed everyone for the mess but itself. I do not believe that any management, in the public or private sector, could function effectively under such a sustained political onslaught. Now, Labour must start to answer the questions, and the prime question concerns where the money is going to come from. Simon Haslam, a City financier, said:

“There is no doubt that the risk premium for dealing with the UK Government has increased. If private sector lenders need just half of one per cent extra to cover the increased risk of government intervention at some future date, this will be £1.5 billion over 10 years. In my view, lenders will actually look for a far higher risk premium than that.”

That issue will have to be addressed and the money will have to be found.

The SNP motion is simply a sideshow—unfortunately, not a very good one. The Executive’s amendment consists of platitudes that do nothing for the travelling public and do not set out how anything is to be achieved. Alas, business users and the travelling public seem to have a long, slow and faltering journey ahead of them before there will be any improvements in our railways, under either the Labour UK Government or the Scottish Executive.

I move amendment S1M-2606.1, to leave out from “that the Executive’s” to end and insert:

“with regret the acquiescence of the Scottish Executive in Her Majesty’s Government’s woeful handling of our railways which has led to the uncertainty and chaos that now exists throughout the UK rail industry and, in particular, the undermining of the confidence that is needed to secure the necessary private investment in our railways in order to meet the needs of the travelling public and business users, and calls upon the Executive to set out its strategic objectives for the rail network and services in Scotland, how and when these are to be achieved and how they will be funded.”

15:29

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): It could be said that our railways are a shambles. The number of trains that were cancelled rose by 45 per cent between 2000 and 2001; the number of delays on Britain’s trains rose by nearly 70 per cent over the same period; and—one of those quirky statistics that researchers delight in—rail delays in the first nine months of 2001 amounted to the equivalent of 3,400 years of passengers’ lives.

A Government-commissioned report that was published in November confirms that Britain has the most congested roads, the longest commuting times and some of the highest bus and rail fares in Europe. That shows the effects of half a century of

underinvestment. At least it has now been recognised that the situation has to be turned around, but there is no quick fix. Even if unlimited finance miraculously became available today, the skilled people we would need to engineer track, design and build rolling stock, operate signals and drive trains would not be available. That is why I was especially pleased to see recognition in the Strategic Rail Authority plan of the crucial importance of training.

The Conservatives made a mess of rail privatisation and Labour has delayed tackling that, but there is no point in wasting time arguing who is to blame for what. What is important is that we start from where we are and start moving things—including trains—on.

In February last year, the Liberal Democrats at Westminster produced a detailed new rail policy for the UK. There is no advantage in not considering the rail network as a whole, across the UK, and as part of the continental network to which it is now physically joined via the channel tunnel.

Mr MacAskill: What is the Liberal Democrats’ position on the SRA’s policies in relation to the Orton loop and the improvement of the Aberdeen to Inverness line? Does not Nora Radcliffe believe that, from a Scottish perspective, those are of fundamental importance? If we leave matters with the SRA and the current Scottish Executive, when will people in Nora Radcliffe’s constituency see an improvement in the Aberdeen to Inverness line?

Nora Radcliffe: It will not surprise Kenny MacAskill to hear that I will deal with that later.

Liberal Democrats think that there is merit in simplifying the regulatory system for public transport by establishing a sustainable transport authority that would, among other things, take over and combine the functions of the SRA and the rail regulator. The new body would take the lead in using public investment to secure partnerships with the private sector to deliver growth and quality. We would charge the new body with changing the culture from the current bureaucratic and penalty-driven system towards a simpler, incentive-driven one. At the moment, for example, there is almost a perverse incentive not to develop services—if Railtrack allows more trains to run over a length of track, it gains little extra income from access charges relative to the greater risk it runs of being penalised.

We believe that Railtrack should be restructured so that the railway infrastructure, track, signalling and power supplies are run as a not-for-profit public-interest company.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am interested to hear Nora Radcliffe talk about the Liberal Democrats’ UK strategy for rail. How

much does that strategy suggest should be invested in rail in Scotland?

Nora Radcliffe: I do not have the figures to hand, but I can get them for Tricia Marwick.

The focus of Railtrack should be sharply on efficient engineering and safety management. The property side of the current set-up could be left in the private sector.

We also propose bringing together timetabling and signal operation as an integrated task. That could be within the remit of the not-for-profit company. The focus must be on passenger requirements, as the fact that the train is on time is not much comfort to someone if there is no connection.

The railway system should be simplified by reducing the number of franchises. As part of the renegotiated franchises, the scope of fares regulation could be widened and train operating companies could be given some responsibility for infrastructure renewal and repair.

There should be an independent railway safety body and a separate accident investigation body modelled on the air accident investigation branch of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

There are two key issues in relation to rail freight: the quality of service, given that rail freight is competing with an efficient road transport industry; and the cost of access to the rail network for freight carriers. To achieve a shift of freight to rail, there must be incentives for Railtrack to operate more efficiently. Research that was done prior to the Hatfield disaster suggested that there was capacity to decrease costs by 11 per cent a year and improve reliability by dealing with broken rails. That would enable access charges to be much lower.

The sustainable transport authority that the Liberal Democrats suggest would also make specific payments for network enhancements to accommodate increased rail freight. We would also continue the SRA track access grants to support traffic flows that cannot pay the full price but which offer significant environmental advantages compared with movement by road.

That is what we would like to do. I now turn my attention to what the SRA proposes. As I mentioned, I was pleased to see recognition of the importance of providing training opportunities to create the skilled work force that is necessary to operate a first-class railway system.

I welcome the station improvements, not only the improvements for average passengers, but—much more—the improvements in accessibility that will be achieved. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was an excellent piece of legislation, but

the proof of it was in the implementation, which has been desperately slow. It is disgraceful, in the 21st century, that a body such as the independent travel project that was set up last year, and which is based at Inverurie station in my constituency, should be needed to help disabled people suss out which parts of the public transport network are available to them.

The fact that Waverley station is operating at capacity has been demonstrated to me in the past two weeks. Since the Glasgow to Edinburgh service was reduced to a half-hourly service, my train from Aberdeen has been able to dock—or whatever the train equivalent is—at a platform on time, instead of arriving in Edinburgh on time and hovering at the foot of the Castle rock until a platform becomes available. The major upgrade at Waverley station is essential to allow service delivery and development.

I would be more enthusiastic about references to the high priority that is being given to the east coast main line if long-overdue recognition was given to the fact that the east coast does not disappear at Edinburgh; it continues to Aberdeen and beyond, although the railway no longer does. I am well aware that electrification of the line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen would not necessarily deliver improvements in the speed of the journey, but it is important for passengers to be able to travel from London to Aberdeen without interruption.

Ken Sutherland of the Railway Development Society (Scotland) described as “hugely disappointing” the fact that there is no reference in the SRA’s strategic plan to electrification of the lines between Edinburgh and Aberdeen and between Glasgow and Edinburgh. I quote from material that he sent me today. It says that the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh line will never achieve its full potential and that

“services on the main line and other local lines will always be subject to ‘touch and go’ punctuality/reliability until the present inadequate ... diesel trains are replaced with high-performance electric trains - as was recommended by the 1993 Local Authorities/ScotRail Study. ... Modern electric trains on the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh ‘flagship line’ could also reduce the ... journey time”

from 48 minutes to 30 minutes

“ – something which ScotRail management had ‘looked forward to’ back in the mid-1980s!”

The RDS suggests:

“the Scottish Executive should insist on a commitment to the Glasgow – Falkirk – Edinburgh, and Edinburgh – Dundee – Aberdeen electrification as an integral part of the new ScotRail franchise”.

Mr Sutherland described the references in the strategic plan to the rail links to Edinburgh and Glasgow airports as “weak and evasive”. If Wendy Alexander has managed to move the rail link to

Edinburgh airport up the agenda, I welcome that.

The RDS lists six of what it considers to be

"ESSENTIAL ADDITIONS FOR A MORE COMPETITIVE MORE RELEVANT SCOTRAIL NETWORK".

They are: the Glasgow crossrail; the rail links to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen airports; main line electrification of the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh-Dundee-Aberdeen triangle; the introduction of 14 new commuter lines in Scotland's congested towns and cities, which involves the

"re-opening/restoration of previously 'axed' lines, or short new construction";

the restoration of the Borders regional line; and implementation of ScotRail's intended Dornoch link. The RDS notes:

"The majority of the above projects have already been advanced by British Rail/ScotRail or Local Authorities as essential for the more attractive and comprehensive rail network now required in a modern Scottish transport system."

I will not elaborate on those points, as a great many members want to speak in the debate and will probably pick up on them. The large number of members who want to speak indicates the importance of the railway network for the economy, the environment, quality of life, access to services and recreation. We had a great railway once; we can have one again, but only if we put thought, effort and resources into it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We move to the open part of the debate, which is substantially oversubscribed. Even if speeches are kept to four minutes, it is most unlikely that all members will be called.

15:40

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): We have heard the self-congratulatory remarks and rhetoric from the Labour party, just as we have heard the latest batch of endlessly—and I mean endlessly—recycled reannouncements that we constantly get. Make no mistake about where the blame for the current predicament and the current state of the railways lies—with the parties opposite. I do not just mean Labour, but the Tories as well.

Under the Tories, investment declined, but new Labour has spent even less than them, believe it or not. This year, only £1.5 billion will be invested, compared with £3.3 billion in 1994-95. The Tories and new Labour are equally guilty of causing the crisis in our railways. Perhaps Keith Raffan would like to ask Nora Radcliffe—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must not solicit answers.

Ms White: This is part of my speech, Presiding Officer. Perhaps Keith Raffan would like to ask

Nora Radcliffe how much the Lib Dems are prepared to invest in the railways. That was an aside.

The SRA plan that was announced this week offered some improvements, but a bold vision, radical ideas and the promise of the massive investment required to bring a rail system into the 21st century are lacking. Where are the plans for the major projects that have been mentioned, such as the electrification of the Glasgow to Edinburgh line, the reopening of the Borders line, the Glasgow crossrail scheme and the Glasgow and Edinburgh air links? There is no commitment to commence work on those projects before—or after—2010.

Like many others, I have been campaigning strenuously for many years for the implementation of the Glasgow crossrail scheme and the Glasgow airport link. Believe it or not, plans for the crossrail scheme have been on the board since 1960.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): Perhaps Ms White can tell us what Kenny MacAskill was unable to: what level of investment would her party promise?

Ms White: I talked about recycled rhetoric. Recycling rhetoric is all that Labour seems to do. Let us have an independent Scotland, where we can invest properly in our railways.

The crossrail scheme has been identified as vital to enhance the accessibility of the rail network, not just in Glasgow but throughout Scotland. Improvement of the rail infrastructure would also provide a massive boost to the regeneration of certain areas of Glasgow that are run-down or derelict. The crossrail scheme would bring in the Glasgow airport link and would improve access to the airport from the north and west and even to Stirling, Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

The Glasgow airport link has been on the cards since the early 1990s. I came across a website that tells us about a proposed new Doncaster/Finningley airport. An old air hangar there is now being remodelled to accommodate a rail link. Guess what the website says—that there will be

"a new rail link, new railway station".

The best part is that the airport does not even have any passengers yet—yet it is still getting a new rail link.

Glasgow airport has 9 million passengers, but it has no rail link, and there is no rail link for Edinburgh airport either. The Government should be ashamed that the proposed airport at Finningley, which is not even off the ground yet, can have a planned rail link, whereas Glasgow airport cannot.

Ms Alexander: I do not know whether the member had the opportunity to read the press this morning. As I made clear in my speech, we are planning for airport links. Should local authorities give permission for them, the proposals will go ahead from 2005. The reason for specifying 2005 is that, at the moment—

Ms White: I heard you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Ms Alexander: It is because, at the moment—

Ms White: I am quite happy with the minister's reply.

Ms Alexander: May I just clarify this?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let the minister finish, Ms White.

Ms Alexander: The consultants are considering the various possible routes. I would be interested if the SNP could clarify its favoured routes for both lines, and do so now.

Ms White: I thank the minister for that statement, but she forgot to say:

"subject to suitable resource being available".

I quote the minister in today's newspaper. That seems always to be her war cry. It was also in her press release.

I wish to move on to the Strategic Rail Authority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your four minutes are up. Will you begin to wind up, please?

Ms White: Begin to wind up? Okay.

I have spoken about Scotland needing vision; I also mentioned Scotland taking control of its railways. Let me illustrate that: of the 17 major projects announced by Stephen Byers in the rail plan, 15 are located south of the border and 11 are in London and the south-east of England. What do we say to that? We say that, again, Scotland is losing out and the bulk of investment is going south.

15:45

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Today's debate, initiated by the nationalists, demonstrates again that the SNP has nothing positive to offer the people of Scotland. Since our last debate on the rail industry, which took place six weeks ago, the SNP has not proposed a single new idea for developing Scotland's railways for the 21st century, except to say that we must wait until there is independence, when nirvana for every public service will be achieved. All that the SNP does is apply its obsession with independence and divorce to every public service.

Bizarrely, the SNP chooses to claim that the

Scottish Executive shows a lack of vision in the very week that probably the most ambitious and progressive strategic plan for the railways in 50 years was launched.

Andrew Wilson: The member is having a laugh.

Bristow Muldoon: I am not having a laugh.

The plan that the SRA unveiled this week, which was developed following consultation with the Scottish Executive, will provide extra capacity in Scotland's railways—for passengers and freight—and will lead to a reduction in overcrowding in the existing network. Investment will also be made to correct the skills shortage in the industry.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Would the member care to explain what extra capacity the plan will provide north of Dundee? What will it do for rail services between Edinburgh and Aberdeen and Aberdeen and Inverness?

Bristow Muldoon: Extra capacity is planned for services between Glasgow Queen Street and Dundee, between Aberdeen and Inverness and between Perth and Inverness. Those proposals are spelled out clearly in the plan—if Brian Adam has not read it, that is not my fault.

Apart from providing for extra capacity and investment in our railways, the plan outlines a major initiative to address key skill shortages in the industry. The proposed national rail academy will help to address some of the shortages that are currently causing problems, in particular for ScotRail.

After 20 years of underinvestment and a deeply flawed privatisation of the rail industry, a period of silence would be most welcome from the Tories, unless they can bring themselves to apologise for the damage that they have done to the industry. If they are not prepared to remain silent, they should at least say how many of the cuts that they outlined at the time of the general election would come out of proposed rail expenditure.

David Mundell *rose*—

Bristow Muldoon: David Mundell is going to tell us.

David Mundell: Does Mr Muldoon know what the outcome of the UK general election was? The Tories do, and we understand what that means. It is for Labour to answer the questions that are being asked about the rail industry, as it is running the UK.

Bristow Muldoon: Long may we continue to do so.

In my remaining minute, I want to outline some of the major advantages that will accrue to Scotland through the plan. We will achieve major strategic projects, such as the redevelopment of

Edinburgh Waverley, which will affect much of the surrounding track infrastructure. There will be major investment in the safety infrastructure of Britain's railways and, as the minister outlined, plans will be developed to build links between Edinburgh and Glasgow and their respective airports. Three new lines will be introduced. Contrary to what the SNP believes, the investment in the west coast and east coast main lines will be a major boon to Scotland. There will also be expanded capacity on a number of lines apart from those that I mentioned in my earlier response to Mr Adam. Those include the Glasgow to Ayr line and, if I may get in a parochial plug, the Edinburgh to Bathgate line, on which capacity is set to be expanded by 2002-03.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Bristow Muldoon: I am concluding.

The SRA's proposals represent the most ambitious plan for the development of the rail industry for about 50 years. Contrary to the nationalists' assertions, Scotland will benefit substantially from the plan, which the Scottish Executive played a major role in developing. We should reject the carping, negative motion lodged by Mr MacAskill and embrace the approach that the minister outlined, which will bring lasting benefits to our rail industry in the United Kingdom.

15:49

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to begin by being very positive about two aspects of the document issued by the SRA this week. A stated intention for the first time in 50 years to develop a strategic plan to expand the railway network must be seen as highly laudable. The Executive's commitment to honour the pledges that were previously given to communities such as Larkhall and those on the Alloa to Stirling route is laudable. Such a response is decent, given the fact that those pledges appeared to be jeopardised by Railtrack's decisions late last year.

We should be fair and praise what is in the document. However, the document has more strength as a mission statement than as a detailed implementation strategy. As the document lacks an awful lot of substance, the Executive must move quickly to clarify its thinking on some areas and to tell us where its thinking is going over the next few years.

Most analyses that have considered what went wrong with Railtrack and how the crisis came about have concluded that one factor was at least significant. That is the fact that, after privatisation, the train operating companies' success in generating additional passengers and services was not matched—perhaps could not be

matched—by Railtrack's maintenance even of the existing infrastructure, much less by its ability to provide additional capacity for what was an unexpected upturn in business.

That raises a degree of doubt in my mind about the essential thrust of the SRA's strategy, which is to increase passenger kilometres by 50 per cent. That figure is contained in the Scottish section as well as in the UK section of the document. Although that is a laudable principle, we must ask ourselves what that means in practice and whether it is achievable. The Executive must move quickly to clarify where that growth in Scotland will take place, whether it considers that the capacity is available and what investment will be needed to provide the capacity to achieve that objective.

If the Executive does not do that, we shall have great difficulties determining our priorities. We would all agree that upgrading Waverley and increasing the number of through routes must be major priorities, but the document says nothing about the need for additional rail capacity east of Waverley, on which the aspirations of Midlothian and the Borders depend. Little is said about what is planned for either the east coast or west coast main lines, other than that the expensive programme that was previously planned for the west coast main line is liable to be scaled down a little.

Other than its laudable reference to the Airdrie to Bathgate line, the document says nothing about the whole question of central Scotland, which is where our worst congestion is and where most of the pinchpoints are. The central Scotland corridor study, which the Scottish Executive initiated a couple of years ago when Sarah Boyack was Minister for Transport, will identify its conclusions on capacity in the near future. Has the SRA's list of objectives pre-empted the findings of that study? What happens if it concludes that the most important priority is to do something about the central corridor routes, for example electrifying routes across Lanarkshire and connecting marginalised communities? What happens if the decision is that combating congestion, stimulating the economy and improving our railway network through such schemes are more important than the valuable airport links? We in this chamber are guilty of talking up every project we can identify before we have addressed the issues of spatial or regional fairness that members from the north-east rightly raise.

We need to focus much more on what we need to do and on what we can do. We then need to focus on how the special purpose vehicles that will be charged with implementing the public-private projects will be made to work. When we know all of that, we might be able to talk sensibly about the way forward. We are very much in the early

stages. Before we know where we can spend the money, which can be done only once we know where it is coming from, the Executive must do much more work to engage us in meaningful debate about the way forward.

15:54

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Let me begin with a supportive comment for the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. I bow to few in my understanding of the minister's capabilities and energies, but I do not think that she is well served or helped by the First Minister's decision to burden her with the key Cabinet post of transport, which should be a distinct Cabinet position. I mean no disrespect to Lewis Macdonald, but the fact that transport has been relegated to a deputy minister shows that the First Minister is willing to play factional internal Labour party politics with the future of Scotland's transport system and of our economy. It is unfair on Wendy Alexander and on people who need the transport system that the First Minister has done that. The fact that Wendy has to rely on Andy Kerr for a best friend in the Cabinet speaks volumes about the parlous situation that lies before her in the Labour party.

During the debate so far, Labour members have continuously called on us to produce our own proposals. In fact, we have brought more to the debate by way of reasoned, considered and researched arguments than anyone else in the chamber. If Labour members could, for once in their lives, bring themselves to be reasonable and constructive during a debate with the SNP, they would acknowledge that a six-page policy document on the railways is more than they ever brought to the debate when they were in Opposition. I recall John Prescott calling for the renationalisation of the railways at a Labour conference not too long ago—but let us not look to the Labour party for consistency in transport policy.

I think that we all agree—and Mr Tosh's comments were prescient—on what we want for the railways. We all want investment and we all want the status of the railways to be boosted—Sarah Boyack, the former minister, was key in promoting that agenda. However, we disagree on the means by which that boost in status will be achieved.

Members can stand with us and say that the whole principle of devolution was supposed to be that Scotland would take control of its own affairs—albeit on a limited basis with which we, of course, disagree. Scotland took control of its own affairs in certain areas of policy, and transport was one of them. The current imbalance in transport powers is absurd—we have fully devolved

financial and policy control over the roads, but lack similar control over the railways.

The result, which has been criticised by Professor David Begg and others, is an unsymmetrical—if that is a word that I can perhaps make up for the sake of grammatical accuracy—

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Asymmetrical.

Andrew Wilson: Asymmetrical! I thank the former English teacher for telling me that. The asymmetrical approach to transport policy has led to today's situation. Everyone and his granny, and the dogs in the street, know that Scotland's railways are inadequate.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Mr Wilson tell us his policy on the ownership of the infrastructure in Scotland? He has talked about his trust. Does he intend to take the infrastructure of the railway industry in Scotland into public ownership? That was not at all clear from his comments.

Andrew Wilson: I have e-mailed a copy of our policy paper to the deputy minister; if he checks his backlog, I am sure that he will find it. The policy is simple: as Railtrack comes out of administration in the rest of the UK, we should take the opportunity to set up a not-for-profit trust that would own the railway infrastructure in Scotland.

When the minister sums up, I will be interested to hear what we will do in Scotland if Stephen Byers decides to sell Railtrack as a going private concern to a foreign or indeed domestic bank or financial institution. Mr Macdonald has said that privatisation has failed. What if he does not deliver a not-for-profit, semi-public sector trust? What will Mr Macdonald do then? Where will his credibility lie?

We cannot wait for failed London ministers—and there is no more failed London minister at present than Stephen Byers—to come up with a solution; we can act on this issue now. If we show a bit of confidence in ourselves, and a bit of ambition for our country, we will acknowledge that the Parliament and the Executive are competent to administer a proper solution to Scotland's railway problems.

The current situation is mediocre and unacceptable. We cannot afford to wait for London to act because we cannot have any faith in the people in London who have already failed our railways. I say to the Executive: show confidence in yourselves and back Wendy Alexander by giving her the powers to deliver.

15:58

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister will not be surprised that, although I welcome the good things

that she has announced in the strategy, my views are tinged with disappointment about the absence of a direct commitment to the Borders railway link. However, that disappointment is tempered with a sense of realism.

I welcome Murray Tosh's contribution, asking for a mature debate. It would be good to have such a debate. In this chamber, it is not always obvious that we can do so.

I take heart from the terms of the Executive's amendment. It talks about a first step towards a bigger railway for the whole of Scotland. As members know, the Borders is the biggest area in western Europe without a rail link. If the strategy is to be for the whole of Scotland, it must include the Borders. On this side of the chamber, we are determined that the rail link should be delivered.

We greatly appreciate the £1.9 million given to the project by the Executive when Sarah Boyack was a minister. That has allowed progress to be made as well as the setting-up of the Waverley project partnership that was launched formally this week. Much work has been done and expectations are high. The Borders structure plan is heavily predicated on the coming of the railway and the economic opportunities that will arise from it. The new ways economic programme, which was endorsed by ministers, sets great store by the prospect of the Borders becoming a truly connected place.

I accept and welcome the expansion of Waverley station, which is a first step that will allow access to the centre of Edinburgh in a way that has not been possible. Before road pricing is introduced, I want park-and-ride places to exist. In addition, the work on Waverley has to take place before trains from the Borders can gain proper access. We must see progress on the Waverley project.

Since the formation of the Scottish Parliament we have campaigned for the Borders railway. We won the argument on the economics, on social inclusion, on sustainability and environmental issues and on relieving the pressures on Edinburgh. We won the argument to make this a flagship policy that signals a new approach to railways in Scotland.

Christine Grahame: I share Ian Jenkins's hopes for the Borders railway line, but I remember after the debate on the issue that he issued a press release calling on the Executive to invest in the Borders rail link. How is he getting on with the money side of it, given that he is part of the coalition?

Ian Jenkins: The Executive has given £1.9 million, which set the issue going. More will be coming in its own time.

We won the argument in all the parliamentary committees that considered the issue. We had unanimous support for the project when the Scottish Parliament debated the issue in May 2000. We have won all those battles, I say to the minister. I am delighted that Wendy Alexander and Lewis Macdonald last Thursday spoke positively about the project. Clearly, it is on the minister's mind and on her agenda. The Waverley link must remain firmly in our sights. Having won those battles, we have no intention of losing the war. We look forward to having the formidable talent and energy of the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning to help us win the war. Indeed, the picture of Wendy Alexander in battle fatigues is strangely attractive to me.

16:02

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I am happy to speak about the minister in complimentary terms, but perhaps not in quite the same terms that Ian Jenkins used.

I am pleased that we are having this debate today. It is important that we debate the future of Scotland's railways. It is all the more important that we address the debate seriously and that we address the substance of what needs to be done. Real issues and challenges face us, not only to make the trains run on time, important though that is, but to ensure that we have railways that are safe and reliable, trains that are comfortable and accessible and stations that are convenient, secure and truly fit for purpose. It is also important that passengers can get access to readily available information that is accurate and up to date. All those things matter.

More widely, we want to have a rail network that is part of a wider transport infrastructure that is fit for purpose for our nation today and in the future. We want integration in our transport system to move from being a concept to being a reality. That has happened in other countries, and it can be the case in this country. If we are going to deliver that, we have to approach the debate with vision, determination and honesty. Part of that honesty is recognising why we have such profound and deep-rooted problems today.

Our rail network suffers from years—even decades—of neglect and underinvestment. It must be repeated that it suffers badly from the dog's breakfast of the Tory privatisation of the 1990s. Even if one believed that it was right to privatise the rail network at that time—I certainly did not, and I still do not—the model that the Tories chose, against so much advice, patently was nonsense. Wendy Alexander described the system as fragmented. Frankly, that is a generous description. The job of work that needs to be done to put our rail network back together again is

monumental. We should be under no illusion about that.

To suggest that in the years in which Labour has been in power nothing has been done is complete nonsense. I will take a couple of minutes to focus on some of the things that already are being done, which are benefiting my constituents in Edinburgh East and Musselburgh and other people in Edinburgh and the Lothians: £8 million for new and better commuter trains to connect Fife and Edinburgh; £6 million for development work to provide trams in Edinburgh that connect to the rail network; and £1.8 million, as mentioned by Ian Jenkins, to do the vital preparatory work to provide the much-needed Borders rail link.

In Edinburgh the crucial crossrail development will provide a new station at Edinburgh park to benefit commuters in the west of Edinburgh. In my part of the city, the link will provide new stations at Newcraighall and Brunstane. Those are not empty pipe dreams. The stations are being built right now and will open in June this year, providing real benefit to the people of that area.

Kenny MacAskill said one thing that I agree with: passengers do not want platitudes, they want firm commitments. I have given examples not just of firm commitments given by Government north and south of the border, but of action and results that are being offered to passengers as a consequence of those commitments.

Of course, there is more to come. The major redevelopment of Waverley station will provide an opportunity for much-needed expansion of east coast main line services and vital local commuter services. I also welcome the Wendy Alexander's commitment to implementing the Edinburgh airport link. Much has been done, but it is not just a cliché to say that a great deal more needs to be done. Our railways are crucially important and we in this chamber today must send the clear message that we believe that.

The people who work on the railways in Scotland and the people who depend on those services deserve an awful lot more than the empty rhetoric and ranting that we heard from members on the SNP benches this afternoon. They also deserve an awful lot more and better than the collective denial and rewriting of history that we heard from the Tory front bench this afternoon.

I know that I can say in all sincerity and with complete conviction that Labour is unequivocally committed to investing in and developing our rail network. I know that we have backed that by tangible action and increased investment. I know that we will continue to do that because we believe in delivering real results and action for our people, not empty rhetoric.

16:07

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): I welcome the opportunity to debate the state of our railways. Privatisation has been an unmitigated disaster. Its resultant fragmentation had led to a deterioration in the service, even before the current industrial dispute. I appeal to ScotRail management to enter into meaningful negotiations with the trade unions to seek a fair solution to that dispute.

The dispute surely reinforces the case for national pay bargaining. We have a situation in which there is senseless competition among railway companies to attract drivers. In addition, something is far wrong when railway services are dependent on drivers and other employees working overtime and working on their rest days. I hope that ScotRail and the trade unions reach a fair agreement and that national pay bargaining soon becomes a reality.

Even before the dispute, much was wrong with our railway system, largely as a result of lack of investment. The SRA's plan contained welcome proposals for Scotland that included rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. Those links should have been implemented decades ago as part of an integrated transport system.

There are notable omissions from the SRA plan, such as the electrification of the line between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk High station. That should be Scotland's flagship line, linking Scotland's capital city to Scotland's biggest city. Electrification could cut that journey time to about half an hour. In 1993 a joint study by local authorities and ScotRail recommended electrification of the line, but here we are, nearly a decade later, and that plan has apparently fallen off the agenda.

A UK Government minister recently admitted that our railways are the worst in Europe. Scotland is near the bottom of the European league for the percentage of railway network that is electrified. The figure for Scotland is only 23 per cent, compared to 100 per cent for Luxembourg, 97 per cent for Switzerland, 77 per cent for Belgium and 75 per cent for Sweden. Only Greece and the Republic of Ireland are below us in the league table.

Electric trains are superior to diesel trains in terms of speed, acceleration, reliability, maintenance and length of vehicle life. Electric trains also provide huge environmental advantages, because they cause less noise than diesel trains and emit no filthy exhaust fumes. The electrification of the Edinburgh to Glasgow line via Falkirk High would have great benefits for employment and the economy in central Scotland, including the Falkirk area. Improved transport links would help to attract inward investment and help

commuters and other travellers.

The Falkirk area is expected to attract many visitors when the millennium canal link is completed later this year. The Falkirk wheel, which will link the canals, is a magnificent feat of 21st century engineering that will attract visitors from all over the world. Some of those visitors will travel by rail, so it would be appropriate for our railway system to be brought into the 21st century. Electrification would help to achieve that. I therefore urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that electrification of the Glasgow to Edinburgh line via Falkirk High is made a condition of the ScotRail franchise, which is due for renewal in 2004.

Scotland needs a state-of-the-art railway system and the Scottish Executive must do everything in its power to achieve that.

16:11

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I remind the minister that, on 1 June 2000, the Parliament unanimously supported the reinstatement of the Borders line from Edinburgh to Carlisle and urged the Scottish Executive to make representations to the Strategic Rail Authority. It was therefore disappointing not to hear the minister or the Strategic Rail Authority mention the Borders railway line on the radio. When the minister was pressed, she did refer to the line and she introduced a concept of which I had never heard before: a light rail link. I do not know where that came from.

No matter what Ian Jenkins says, no financial commitment has been made to that Borders railway line. Compared with the £450 million that can be spent on five miles' extension of a motorway, £1.9 million is small beer. At the same time, no one asks whether the motorway pays its way. Every time that the Borders railway line is mentioned, we talk about whether the fares that are collected will be sufficient. That is not the point of a Borders railway line. The point is to open the area to economic recovery.

In 1999, Lord Gus Macdonald said that the Borders railway line was crucial to the economic recovery of the Borders. We can continue to say that, but until money is put into the project or a commitment is given to put money into the project, we will have only tea and sympathy, which will be taken on a bus. At the moment, if that bus is on the A68, its passengers will have to sit in Dalkeith for 20 minutes, where they will have time to alight and get their scones.

Political words are useless if people do not see the Parliament delivering. The Borders needs that recovery. In the past five years, the area has lost 5,000 jobs. I can reel them off. Job losses have

occurred at Pringle of Scotland, Viasystems, Laidlaw & Fairgrieve Ltd, Ettrick & Yarrow Spinners Ltd and Lyle & Scot. We can name them all. They are not returning. The area needs investment. The economic investment that the Borders needs is a railway line.

The project itself would create 900 jobs. That does not include the knock-on effect from commercial interests that would move into the Borders from an overheated Scottish economy in the central belt. Edinburgh needs the Borders railway line.

I received an e-mail today from someone who had considered establishing a UK operation in the Scottish Borders. Tom Andrews from Australia went to the Borders and told me:

"Please keep campaigning for high quality infrastructure to serve the Borders – the rail link and improved roads will not only help business but will help boost tourism."

He will not come to the Borders with his business because it does not have that infrastructure now and needs that soon.

16:14

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): As a callow youth, I spent much time at school reading the travel writer Peter Fleming's works. He wrote about the trans-Siberian express from Moscow to Vladivostok and about journeys from Beijing to Ulan Bator and from Delhi to Madras. All those journeys seemed to be made with much less hassle, much less trouble and in much greater comfort than the journey from Glasgow to Edinburgh can be made now, many years later. Dennis Canavan was correct. That should be the flagship line, but I am afraid that the flag is flying at half-mast.

The last time that I kept track of my rail journeys, one train out of 12 arrived in time, and of those that did not, the delays were quite significant. The other day saw the farce of the Justice 2 Committee having to travel from Edinburgh to Inverness in a train without a loo. While it might be amusing to consider MSPs being put in such discomfort, a real issue is involved. The fact of the matter is that our train system in Scotland is a shambles. That fact impinges on many aspects of our lives. Stressed-out passengers, clogged-up roads and, possibly most important of all—as Christine Grahame rightly highlighted—a reduction in investment.

That said, I found Kenny MacAskill's contribution to be rather less sparkling than usual; indeed, I found it rather disappointing. It is true that he highlighted the questions, but he did not suggest answers. In many respects, he justified the view that Conservative members have of the SNP, which is that it is a party with a problem for every

solution. Kenny MacAskill was restrained when he came to his suggestions as to where the additional money might come from. He did not suggest what plans the SNP might have to improve Scotland's rail network, but he was correct to identify the problems.

Wendy Alexander was also suitably vague. To be frank, she parroted the spin that came out of London yesterday. She was also careful to avoid saying whether she flew or went by train to London. The fact is that she probably went by train.

As has been said already, the SRA plan is vague to the point of emptiness. Murray Tosh rightly said that the plan is a wish list, albeit a useful one that highlights the number of ways in which we wish to proceed. Many questions are unanswered. How does the plan resolve the uncertainty that has followed the Government's treatment of Railtrack, which was so badly handled that the knock-on effect on the confidence of Railtrack staff is tangible? Since the Railtrack fiasco, delays, disputes and a general lack of service have increased greatly. Against that background, how will the confidence be created to attract the £34 billion of private sector investment that is necessary if the plan is to go anywhere at all?

Much of the plan is superficial and cosmetic. The fact of the matter is that people do not want to hang around railway stations, no matter how exotic or comfortable. People want to arrive at the station shortly before the train is due to depart, catch a train that leaves on time and arrive at their destination at the determined time.

Susan Deacon dealt with the question of privatisation. She is perhaps correct to say that it was not handled as happily as it might have been. Nevertheless, passenger loads increased by 25 per cent.

Many questions remain to be addressed. The SRA plan does not address those questions and the SNP motion does not go terribly far in that direction.

16:18

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I detect a step change in the prioritisation that is being given to transport and, in particular, to rail. It is arguable that the Government could have anticipated public needs more quickly. However, the Government is now responding to a general mood in Britain, and in Scotland in particular, which is that we want to see more being spent on transport infrastructure. We recognise that transport is a major priority and agree the importance of improving our transport for economic, social and other reasons.

From a constituency point of view, I welcome the firm commitment made by Wendy Alexander to make the Milngavie to Larkhall project a priority. That line will improve services for my constituents and for those of my colleagues Brian Fitzpatrick, Patricia Ferguson, Tom McCabe and Karen Gillon. Although it may be surprising for a west coast member to say so, I give a warm welcome to the upgrading of Waverley station. Like Nora Radcliffe, I have become increasingly frustrated at being stuck between Haymarket and Waverley waiting for a platform to become available. Dennis Canavan made the correct point that the Edinburgh to Glasgow line should be a flagship. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that the journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow is no quicker than it was 20 years ago. We must pay some attention to that.

ScotRail could help if it could be induced to put an end to its present practice of collecting tickets on arrival at Waverley, which creates unnecessary delay for everybody and perhaps an adverse impression. The Edinburgh welcome could be warmer for those of us travelling here, although it could perhaps be checked whether passengers have a return ticket when they arrive.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): You'll have had your tea.

Des McNulty: As the member said, "You'll have had your tea."

As much as investment, we need to address the industrial relations and staff morale problems that privatisation cause. David Mundell made a valiant attempt to explain or justify the policies of the Conservative Government in the past, but there is no doubt that fragmentation of the railways has had profound negative effects, not least of which were the safety effects highlighted by the Cullen report.

Not only were resources sucked out of the industry, but we now have the daft spectacle of train-operating companies competing with each other for staff for whom they all seem to be reluctant to provide training. ScotRail drivers are paid about £12,000 less than some of their colleagues south of the border. It is no surprise that we have industrial relations problems in the rail industry. Investment is one issue, and we must get more investment into our rail infrastructure, but sorting out the organisational problems that have been created by privatisation should have equal importance.

In the west of Scotland, a lot was done in the 25 years to 1996 by Strathclyde Regional Council, and by its successor, the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority, to co-ordinate and bring together rail planning and to secure additional investment. That control, which brought together a

rail plan with other kinds of infrastructure investment plans, is something we could learn from. I would like that model to be applied throughout Scotland. Considering how we manage implementation is as important as talking about policy and the whole process of scrutiny. The SNP has not done that constructively.

16:23

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): A funny thing about the Scottish Parliament is that, while we can start off with a rather irrelevant motion, followed by a fairly unconstructive speech to start the debate and some partisan speeches along the way, a number of themes nevertheless begin to come through as the debate develops. This debate has been very much like that. One of the themes is that of investment in the railways in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

People who debate the railways or use them daily for travelling and commuting may forget how injured we are to the unsatisfactory railway system in this country and, as those of us who have experienced different railway systems throughout Europe are aware, how badly it compares with continental Europe. British railways are in a mess. There is no point in trying to gloss that over or give excuses for it. The reasons for it may not matter much, but it has a lot to do with lack of investment over a long period and the flawed strategy, not necessarily of privatisation itself but of the way in which privatisation was carried out by the Conservative Government.

My main point is that the strategic plan, welcome though it is, is ultimately completely inadequate and falls behind the aspiration of people in this country that the problem be dealt with. It is inadequate for dealing with the railways throughout the UK and it is inadequate for dealing with the scale of the need in Scotland, not least in our major conurbations and specifically in Glasgow.

Despite what Des McNulty said earlier, it is a bit of a paradox that Glasgow should have the only passenger transport executive in Scotland and one of the few in Britain, and should also be struck by an apparent paralysis of action on anything that would look like a way forward on key transport initiatives.

Since the Scottish Parliament was established, and since long before that, there has been an incestuous cycle of unending studies, reports and economic assessments of the Glasgow crossrail project to bridge the gap between the two systems. There has been a lack of action on the vital rail link to Glasgow airport, which compares very badly to the commitment shown by key players to the much more questionable M74

extension project. I listened with some interest to Wendy Alexander's comments about the drive that I hope she will be able to put into progressing that matter.

The opportunity offered by a lower-than-average car ownership rate in the greater Glasgow area has, in large measure, been squandered. However, as we have heard during the debate, despite the chaos after Hatfield, passenger journeys made by national rail were still up more than 2 per cent in the year to April 2001. There is no reason why passenger journeys should not grow at the rate of 50 per cent over the next 10 years, to say nothing of the freight potential. An important point that has not yet emerged in this debate is that the revenue stream is highly buoyant and is capable of sustaining substantial rail investment in future.

We must deal with questions of track capacity, station capacity and the ability of the country to have enough railway engineers to deal with those problems. Investment plans and plans to deal with those matters have not caught up with reality in this country. We must deal with those issues. There may be arguments about the euro. People in this country undoubtedly want European quality standards on our railways. The strategic plan is a start, but I am bound to say that it is a whimper rather than a roar.

16:26

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I travel by train to Edinburgh. That involves boarding a train at Johnstone, going to Glasgow Central station, walking across town to Glasgow Queen Street station and then taking the train on to Edinburgh. That illustrates the conspicuous lack of a crossrail, which denies the country a strategic link right through from Ayr to Edinburgh, and potentially from Ayr to Aberdeen. Such a link is vital, but it is missing from the Strategic Rail Authority's document.

Lateness has been referred to, as have trains lurking about outside Waverley and Glasgow Central stations. Those are, in my experience, pretty normal practices, which happen a lot because—as we know—there are not enough platforms for trains to come into. There is talk of improvement, but I would like to know the estimated time of completion for improvements to those stations.

On my return journey, the trip is usually characterised by very anxious passengers standing in Glasgow Central station staring at the departures board waiting for an intimation as to which platform their train will leave from. That intimation can come as close to the departure time as half a minute before it, which leads to an

undignified rush by passengers to get on the train. That does nothing whatever to induce people to travel by train, and would certainly discourage occasional rail travellers from ever bothering to do so again. I persist because I believe in rail transport and because the private car alternative will grind inexorably to a halt.

Reference has been made to the Glasgow airport rail link. What worries me about what the minister said is the dependence on the local authority on whether planning permission will be obtained. As somebody who inhabited the corridors of Renfrewshire Council for some time when that line was a matter of concern, I know that it was quite clear that there were disagreements—even within the Labour party—about which route the line into and out of Glasgow airport should take. I wonder to what extent light rail has ever been considered as a possibility there.

Gourock fell off Railtrack's plans just before Christmas, but it is now back on the plans. The current arrangements are dilapidated, disgusting and uninviting and they obstruct plans for the aesthetic and commercial improvement of the Gourock pier-head area. The new arrangement, which is welcome, will make a big difference to travellers' comfort as they shift from the Caledonian MacBrayne steamers to the trains. If improvements to the station are not matched by better frequency and punctuality of trains, they will merely be a local cosmetic and commercial improvement. They will be good for local people, travellers and tourists, but will be unlikely to get people out of their cars, which must be the main purpose of the exercise.

I want to say something about freight. English Welsh & Scottish Railway closed its operation to Mossend because SNCF reduced for security reasons the number of trains coming through the channel tunnel. I asked parliamentary questions before that happened and received four answers. I was told that freight is a reserved issue and that the Scottish Executive did not have the factual information that I sought. I was given the totally meaningless answer:

"The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the UK Government on a wide range of rail issues, including freight services."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 3 Jan 2002; p 513.]

Freight traffic has now resumed through the tunnel, but the defensive tone of the answers emphasises the need for Scotland to control and speak for its own transport system without going through the Westminster filter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to Maureen Macmillan and Brian Adam—both sat through the debate without being called.

We move now to winding-up speeches. Time limits must be observed—Iain Smith has five minutes.

16:31

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I will try to get through my contribution in five minutes.

The debate has been slightly disappointing, but Kenny MacAskill's opening contribution was extremely disappointing. We have waited for three years for an SNP strategy for our railways, but it has been delayed again. Perhaps that is because of signalling failures, but it is probably because of the wrong clichés on the line.

We should work together in the Parliament to get a better railway network for the whole of Scotland rather than continue to carry out unnecessary party political point-scoring exercises. We should have a proper debate about what the railway network in Scotland needs, rather than listen to what Kenny MacAskill said. Did he say where the SRA got things wrong? What should it do differently? Was there a list of SNP priorities for the rail network? Was there any indication of how much extra money the SNP would invest in the rail network? No: not a jot; not a penny; not a clue. When Kenny Macaskill was challenged, all that he could say was that the SNP is not the Executive or the SRA. We will get nothing from the SNP—it has no vision and no timetable.

Unfortunately, the SNP remains obsessed with the constitution. It consistently argues that the railways would be better if they were run from Scotland. However, the problem is not where the railways are managed from—it concerns how they are managed. We need to manage our railways better.

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Iain Smith: I am sorry, but I have only five minutes and I need all of those.

Kenny MacAskill is obsessed with the number of First Ministers that there have been. I remind him that the SNP has already had four transport spokespersons in the Parliament. Kenny MacAskill was a transport spokesperson until September 2000, Bruce Crawford was a transport spokesperson until June 2001 and Andrew Wilson was promoted by having transport added to his portfolio. In November, he was promoted again by having transport removed from his portfolio. Kenny MacAskill then took over that responsibility again.

It is important to remember that roads and rail are different in respect of investment—that is why we need a UK solution to the rail network. Anyone who travels down the M74 knows that there are

problems. After Gretna, the road suddenly becomes dual carriageway for a few miles because the English will not invest in the last bit of the network. As a result, on 2 January, there were eight-mile queues to get out of Scotland.

There could be investment in the railway network in Scotland that is not matched in England. The SRA has rightly drawn attention to the need to invest in improving our railways for freight so that more large containers can be taken off the roads. What would happen if the Scottish Parliament decided to invest that money in the rail network in Scotland, but that did not happen south of the border? Trains would come to a shuddering halt under the first bridge in Carlisle. It makes no sense not to invest in such services constructively throughout the UK.

In the chamber, we tend to forget about the importance of freight. We talk a lot about passengers—who are important—but it is vital that we remember freight if we are to change transport policy in this country. We should get more freight off our roads and onto the railways.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does Iain Smith also recognise the importance of sleeper services? I am particularly interested in the west Highland sleeper service. Without proper infrastructure and capacity south of the border, sleeper services will fade away and die.

Iain Smith: That is absolutely right. Sleeper services are important to the tourism industry in the west Highlands and other parts of Scotland and it is important that they are maintained.

The truth is that our railways—unlike many in Europe—have suffered from decades of underinvestment. That is often highlighted. Public investment in railways—not private investment—throughout the rest of Europe has been much greater, which has resulted in much more efficient, faster trains.

Underinvestment in the UK started with Beeching. It was a feature of the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s—particularly during the Thatcher years. There was a pre-privatisation blight. Investment in our railways came to a shuddering halt immediately before privatisation, because nobody was able to invest. That was very important.

The Labour Government in the UK has failed to get a grip of the problem and to sort out the difficulties that were caused by Tory privatisation. At the start of the debate, Wendy Alexander said that Labour had gambled that it could sort out the shambles of privatisation. That is not good enough. In 1997, Labour should not have gambled with the future of our railways—it should have got a grip and made the changes that were obviously

necessary at that time.

There has been progress. We have better trains, more stations and bigger stations, which are all to be welcomed. However, more needs to be done to improve reliability and capacity and to sort out the inadequacies within our system. As anyone who travels home on the 18:10 from Waverley to Fife every night will know, that service does not have sufficient capacity and is not reliable enough.

I welcome some proposals in the SRA's report—for example, improvements to Waverley station, the Forth bridge and especially those on the Edinburgh-Ladybank-Perth line. I am disappointed that there is a lack of support for, for example, improvements to the Tay bridge, the electrification of the east coast main line to Aberdeen and the development of more stations in Fife, such as at Newport, Wormit, St Andrews and Levenmouth.

It is high time that the Parliament got to grips with the problem to examine it properly. We need to work together to ensure that we can make decisions that will allow the necessary investment in our railways to take place. The ScotRail franchise must be sorted out and we must look at improved freight links and a bigger, better and more reliable rail service. Debates such as this will not help that process.

16:36

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I had better declare an interest. I am a regular rail user and I would like that to continue. Most members appreciate only too well what passengers are suffering at the moment. When it started, the debate was high on rhetoric, but there was little vision and little of substance. As Iain Smith said, there was little about freight. I was disappointed when I heard the contribution from the SNP transport spokesman.

The SNP initiated the debate; when a party does that, one assumes that it has a message to put across and that it wants to control the business of the debate. Nine minutes passed before I could write down a single word that was worth remembering. That does not do the SNP's cause any favours and it certainly does not help the people of Scotland to feel that we are getting to grips with a major problem.

Mr MacAskill turned on the minister and her responsibility with a watered-down version of the independence stuff that we usually get from the SNP. Even Andrew Wilson was almost consensual in being nice about things. Although I will not quote what he said last year about everybody abandoning their ideology and working together to improve transport in the UK, I welcome his comments. Unfortunately, the prime example of how to get things done that Mr MacAskill gave was

the new Scottish Parliament building. I found that quite amazing.

There was a bit of new policy—Mr MacAskill said that he does not care which company runs the service. He mentioned a number of companies. That represents movement from the SNP toward the realisation that there needs to be a mixture of public and private investment in transport in this country. He told us a lot about the Tory party and tried always to blame it, as is usually the case. What about the past five years?

That brings me to the minister. She is not present, although her deputy is. She talked about leadership, but I did not detect any in her speech. She talked about investment, but failed to realise that the handling of the Railtrack administration has frightened off investors. We share the agenda that she talked about—an integrated and co-ordinated transport system and all the things that go with it. Where possible, and certainly with rail, that should be done on a UK basis. The minister talked about too much fragmentation, but the UK Government will simply try to reconstitute Railtrack.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I am sure that David Davidson will agree that there was a singular lack of detail at the beginning of the debate—he commented on that. Does he also agree that it is a matter of singular regret that the minister reached the detail only in the last minute of her speech? She said that, of the seven new tracks in Scotland that are crying out for investment, the Executive would invest in only three. She then mentioned only one of them—the Larkhall project—and left us to speculate about the other two.

Mr Davidson: I thank Mr Harper for his intervention; I was just about to mention the litany of promises that the minister made. However, she did not say how much of the investment would have to come from private sector investment nor how much of it would be funded by the Scottish Executive or the UK Labour Government. All she said was that the investment would be subject to resources. In other words, that litany of promises is still only a wish list.

The new Conservative transport spokesman, David Mundell, was right to say that there are holes in the new SRA package. For example, it says nothing of real meaning about money or any new schemes. We have talked about the fact that Railtrack's going into administration really rocked the confidence of investors and the morale of staff and passengers.

In his speech, Murray Tosh was right to call the SRA document a mission statement; it is not a solution to any particular problem. He also made the most important point of the debate when he

said that choices should be made on the basis of best value to the economy.

As other members have cited examples, I will do the same. The north-east rail element of the integrated transport system in Aberdeen shows that we can have a rail link that does not just move goods, but helps people get to work. However, as Kenny MacAskill pointed out, goods cannot be moved to Inverness because of the single-track line that operates through much of Gordon.

Andrew Wilson: Will the member give way?

Mr Davidson: Am I allowed to take an intervention, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): No. You are in your last minute.

Mr Davidson: The SNP told us nothing about its plans, what they will cost, where investment will come from or where the issue sits in its list of priorities. For example, I presume that when SNP members talk about the electrification of the east coast line, they are quite happy to continue with the nuclear-powered generation of electricity. If so, that is another new policy that they are promoting.

Although I appreciate the position of the Liberal Democrats, they are not likely to be able to deliver nationally. What we have heard today is a lack of substance from the proposers of the debate and a decided lack of response from the ministerial team. I look forward to hearing whether Mr Macdonald can give us some idea of what the Executive will deliver in Scotland and of the Executive's input to the Government and the SRA document.

16:43

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): Members will recall that Kenny MacAskill's party previously chose to debate the subject of Scotland's railways last October. Of course, at that time, Mr MacAskill was not his party's transport spokesperson. I believe that he has held the position before and has recently been recycled. I welcome him back to his role. I also welcome the Tory party's latest manifestation of a front-bench transport spokesperson and look forward to the continuing debates around the issues and points that both members have raised today.

It is striking that the SNP previously raised the matter in the week when the previous round of public transport funding announcements were made, which formed the largest-ever single investment in transport in Scotland. For this debate, the SNP has chosen the week of the publication of the SRA's strategic plan. Again, I welcome the timing. That document sets out exactly the kind of vision and strategy that will be

required to develop our railway system over the next few years.

In contrast to the SNP's approach to the matter, the meetings that Wendy Alexander had this week with the UK Government and the chief executives of Railtrack and the SRA are evidence of our partnership approach to the GB rail network. By engaging with our partners in such a way, we can secure the outcomes that we desire regarding ownership and management of the whole rail network. That protect the interests of Scottish rail users.

Andrew Wilson: Will the minister clarify the Government's position on the question that was asked in the debate? How will the Scottish Executive react if the London Administration chooses to pass Railtrack on to another private concern?

Lewis Macdonald: As the Conservatives pointed out, the key question is what input we have. Unlike the SNP, we choose to have input. The discussions yesterday were designed to secure the outcomes that we require in the disposal of Railtrack when it comes out of administration.

Let us be clear: the strategic plan of the SRA reflects the rising priority that is being given to transport which, as Des McNulty said, is common to the UK Government and the Scottish Executive.

Mr Davidson: I asked what was the Executive's input to the development of the plan, not what it went to scrape out of the barrel yesterday, after the plan was published.

Lewis Macdonald: On behalf of Scottish rail users, we have been contributing to the development of the plan throughout its drafting. The plan is the first long-term plan for the expansion of the railway network in Scotland for more than 40 years. It makes clear the priority that is given by the SRA to major strategic projects—not just projects such as Waverley station and rail links to airports, important though those are, but other major strategic projects. Several members have highlighted the importance of rail in the central Scotland corridor between Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is important to acknowledge that the multimodal studies that we have commissioned, which will report later in the year, are also referred to and taken into account in the plan. Those studies will influence the decisions that remain to be made about the Glasgow to Edinburgh lines.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: I am conscious of the time and I want to respond to some other points that were made.

Several members, including Mr MacAskill, raised the question of the Aberdeen to Inverness main

line and the question of the passing loop on that line. That is also mentioned in the strategic plan as a project and its completion is expected in 2006-07. The upgrading of the Forth rail bridge has been mentioned, and diverting freight traffic by provision of the Alloa to Stirling line has benefits for rail travellers to Edinburgh from the north of Scotland. Today's GNER announcement also contains a commitment to multimillion pound investment in rolling stock and increased train length from Edinburgh to Inverness and Aberdeen.

Brian Adam: Does the member agree that ScotRail's policy of buying Turbostar diesels is the direct cause of Mr Aitken's discomfort on his way to Inverness and that it causes regular problems on the longer lines? Does he agree that that locomotive is wholly unsuitable for long-haul journeys in Scotland, although it is perhaps suitable for the central belt corridor?

Lewis Macdonald: I am conscious of the need to talk to the railway companies about the best and most appropriate locomotives to use on all the franchises for which we have responsibility. I do not agree with Mr Adam that Turbostar diesels do not work on the east coast and Inverness lines; they have been responsible for significant journey-time savings and offer the possibility of further such savings. Technology moves on and the requirements that we place on the companies must move with it.

Robin Harper asked a question about lines other than that from Larkhall to Milngavie. All the projects continue to be pursued by ministers. Three of them are referred to specifically in the Strategic Rail Authority's plan and the fourth is being developed with support from the public transport fund. The Borders rail link and the Waverley line have also been mentioned. Members who have an interest in that project will be aware that the ball is firmly in the court of the project managers who were appointed by the Scottish Borders Council on the basis of support from the Executive. Members will also be aware that our officials will meet those project managers later this month. We will address a series of further enhancements in the directions and guidance on the ScotRail franchise and on crossrail franchises as those are rolled out.

Mr Tosh: Will the minister clarify how the necessary enhancement of the railway track between Waverley and Portobello will be handled, given the fact that there are five further major rail enhancements competing for limited track capacity? Will that be imposed as a cost on a specific project, or will the Executive handle the matter strategically?

Lewis Macdonald: Mr Tosh will know that a series of projects is being developed which will feed into Waverley station and that the

announcement that we have made today, about Waverley is important. If Mr Tosh writes to me on that matter, I shall be happy to address it in detail.

We have a clear vision for Scotland's rail network as a safer, better and bigger railway. That will be achieved through our working in partnership with the Strategic Rail Authority and the other stakeholders. The strategic plan that was published on Monday charts a way forward in addressing decades of underinvestment in railways. It focuses on delivering sustained change over time by means of short-term, medium-term and long-term improvements. More locally, we will continue to work closely with ScotRail, Railtrack and the transport authorities to ensure the delivery of key projects that will bring benefits throughout Scotland.

When the Scottish Parliament last debated railways, in October, I said that we needed to give Scottish passengers the rail service that they deserve. With the SRA's new plan and our commitment to the delivery of it and local schemes, we are seeing the start of that process.

16:50

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Before I get into the burden of what I want to say, I want to comment on the speech that we have just heard from the Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning.

Lewis Macdonald's speech came from the school of politics that can be characterised by the announcement, "Good news, comrades, the butter ration has been cut." The speech contained no words about the reality of travelling by train, but was yet another series of announcements. The reality for the Scottish travelling public is clear. Today, as the minister was speaking, thousands of people were huddled on platforms waiting for trains that were not coming; thousands of other people were standing crushed on inadequate trains because there are not enough carriages; and there were thousands of people whose services had been cancelled because of an industrial dispute of which the Executive has washed its hands. Yet Lewis Macdonald, the man responsible for transport, said not a word about those things but, once again, made a series of announcements. It was woeful and pathetic.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Mr Russell give way?

Michael Russell: Absolutely not. I do not want to hear any more of that sort of thing.

On 18 June 1846, the Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed railway line—the first cross-border rail link—was opened. Two years later, the Royal Border bridge, designed by Stephenson, was opened at Berwick-upon-Tweed. The bridge

allowed people to travel by train from Edinburgh to London. The great industrial historian and social commentator, Samuel Smiles, as he watched a train taking people over that bridge on their way to the great exhibition in London, commented that railways provided the cementing of the union.

Fortunately, we are now seeing the unravelling of the union. One of the best reasons for sundering that union is the fact that neither a Westminster Government nor the Westminster-controlled parties can deliver effective and efficient public services. The union has failed Scotland and transport is as good a way as any in which to examine how that failure has taken place. The only future for Scotland is as an independent nation.

I was not surprised but saddened when Wendy Alexander asked what she should have done when she went to London. She should have stood up for Scotland rather than simply accepting what she was told.

The real job that must be done is to restore confidence in the public transport system. However, confidence in either of the parties that have run the railways for several generations cannot be restored. Rather interestingly, Susan Deacon—and Robert Brown, I think—said that there had been decades of underinvestment in the railway system. Susan Deacon said that as if it were just a natural occurrence—an act of God for which no one was responsible. The Labour party was responsible and the Conservative party was responsible. They are the parties that have been running this country. The decades of underinvestment are the political responsibility of either the Tories or Labour.

Susan Deacon: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I want to get through my speech.

The Tories took a system that was failing and turned it into a failed system. That was done for ideological reasons; actually, it was done to enrich their friends. Mr Mundell asked where the money is coming from, but the important question is, where did the money go? It went into the pockets of entrepreneurs, not into the railway system.

However, one must be fair to the Tories occasionally. They are no longer in power and have not been in power for five years. The Labour party has been in power. What did the Labour lot get wrong? Mr Sheridan referred to that. They had a policy that they inherited on 1 May 1997: they did nothing about it. As usual, they thought that they would get away with Tory policies. They would sign up as their chums the Tory chums who had made a profit from privatisation. The five years of doing nothing have been the problem.

Now that Labour has been found out and we know that it did nothing at all, what has its answer been? It has not been honesty. It has not been an explanation. It has not been an attempt to do something new. It has, incredibly, just been spin—spin, spin and more spin.

Let us take a couple of examples from the minister's speech. The Larkhall line was first promised in 1998 by Donald Dewar after a long period of debate. It was an electioneering announcement.

Ms Alexander: Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: Once I have finished my point, I will take the minister's intervention.

When the Larkhall line was re-announced in 1999 as part of the Hamilton by-election campaign, that line was just about to happen. Now it has been announced that the line will go ahead within five years. The reality is that Labour will produce the re-announcement when it thinks that it is in trouble, but it will not produce the goods.

Ms Alexander: As I made clear in my speech, the Larkhall line has not gone ahead because signalling resource is required for post-Hatfield safety considerations. Can I assume that Mike Russell believes that we should not concentrate on post-Hatfield safety considerations but pursue other projects that divert resource from safety instead? I ask him to clarify that.

Michael Russell: No. The reason that the line has not gone ahead is lack of political will.

Ms Alexander *rose*—

Michael Russell: No, I will not take another intervention.

The reason that the line has not gone ahead is that the Executive did not deliver it. That is the reality. That reality applies to many more things. Let us take the minister's announcement today, which is trumpeted in the *Evening News*: "AIRPORT RAILWAY IS GIVEN GREEN LIGHT". No it is not. Let us look at the words of the article. Stephen Byers says:

"potentially from 2005, we could begin to see some implementation of those projects."

Is that a green light? It is not. It is not even an amber light.

What does the minister say? This is the minister's binding commitment; this is what Susan Deacon called a firm commitment:

"This could make it possible to move to design and construction from 2005—subject to suitable resource being available at that time."

Those are not commitments. They are more spin; they are more promises. We are just not getting delivery.

I will make a commitment, which is a commitment that we have made often: we will build that line when we are in power. The minister finds that amusing. I think that the travelling public will find it less than amusing a minister and her deputy who have done nothing, delivered nothing and provided nothing but who sit in the chamber cackling. The travelling public do not trust a word that Wendy Alexander says, that Lewis Macdonald says, that Sarah Boyack said, or that Jack McConnell said. Nothing is provided, nothing at all. That is what is happening in Scotland today.

In Scotland, we need vision and the energy to put that vision into place. We do not need spin. We do not need deceit and incompetence. They were the hallmarks of the Tories and are the hallmarks of Labour.

Ms Alexander: Will Mike Russell give way?

Michael Russell: No. I am not giving way.

We need to say to the people of Scotland, "Here are the projects that we will deliver," then deliver them. Those projects were outlined by my friend Mr MacAskill.

Lewis Macdonald *rose*—

Michael Russell: I ask Mr Macdonald to sit down.

Iain Smith *rose*—

Michael Russell: No. I heard Mr Smith's speech and I do not want to hear any more.

The reality is that the Tories and Labour have failed to deliver services in Scotland over many generations.

Maureen Macmillan: Will Mike Russell give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not.

We must change the system in Scotland. The SNP is the only party that will do that.

The Presiding Officer: Order. There are far too many conversations going on. Members should concentrate on the business.

Cross-party Groups

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of motion S1M-2572, in the name of Mike Rumbles, on behalf of the Standards Committee, on rules on cross-party groups in the code of conduct. The motion will be moved without debate and voted on at decision time. I ask Tricia Marwick, the deputy convener, to move the motion on behalf of the committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament amends Rule 12 of Section 8.3 of the Code of Conduct of Members of the Scottish Parliament, as follows:

(a) leave out the first two bullet points and insert—

- MSPs, but not other members of Cross-Party Groups, may make reasonable use of the Parliament's telephone, fax, photocopying, IT facilities and Parliamentary stationery in pursuit of Cross-Party business or where expressly permitted by these rules e.g. use of the Cross-Party Group Bulletin. Groups may not otherwise use the Parliament's telephone, fax, photocopying, IT facilities and Parliamentary stationery other than where these are available for public use.
- Groups may not make use of free postage facilities provided by the Parliament.

(b) leave out the sixth bullet point.—[*Tricia Marwick.*]

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-2607, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau. The motion sets out a change in the business programme for tomorrow.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees as a revision to the Business Programme agreed on the 10 January 2002—

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after "Business Motion", delete

"followed by Adoption and Children Bill – UK Legislation".—[*Euan Robson.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-2606.2, in the name of Wendy Alexander, which seeks to amend motion S1M-2606, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: As amendment S1M-2606.2 is carried, amendment S1M-2606.1 falls.

The second question is, that motion S1M-2606, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, as amended, on Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan and the vision it contains as a first, significant step towards a bigger, better and safer railway for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S1M-2572, in the name of Mike Rumbles, on behalf of the Standards Committee,

on rules on cross-party groups in the code of conduct, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament amends Rule 12 of Section 8.3 of the Code of Conduct of Members of the Scottish Parliament, as follows:

(a) leave out the first two bullet points and insert—

- MSPs, but not other members of Cross-Party Groups, may make reasonable use of the Parliament's telephone, fax, photocopying, IT facilities and Parliamentary stationery in pursuit of Cross-Party business or where expressly permitted by these rules e.g. use of the Cross-Party Group Bulletin. Groups may not otherwise use the Parliament's telephone, fax, photocopying, IT facilities and Parliamentary stationery other than where these are available for public use.
- Groups may not make use of free postage facilities provided by the Parliament.

(b) leave out the sixth bullet point.

Renewable Energy (Western Isles)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I will pause for a moment to allow members to leave quietly. [*Interruption.*] Order. Would those who are not waiting for the members' business debate please clear the chamber now, so that we may start.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2588, in the name of Alasdair Morrison, on renewable energy in the Western Isles.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the development of the proposed renewable energy projects on the Isle of Lewis; recognises the substantial potential socio-economic and environmental benefits that they offer; congratulates the Stornoway Trust Estate for its professional handling of developments to date, and believes that ministers and officials of the Scottish Executive and Her Majesty's Government should continue their excellent partnership working with all relevant agencies.

17:05

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I am delighted that I have secured a debate on the subject of renewable energy, particularly in the context of my constituency of the Western Isles. The debate is an opportunity for me to highlight what has been done to date in the Western Isles. It is also another opportunity for the Scottish Executive to demonstrate its commitment to renewable energy.

We all know that the UK Government has intimated that it expects to create a £1 billion market for renewable energy by 2010. The main driver for that will be the renewables obligation, which will require electricity suppliers to source 10 per cent of their electricity from renewable sources. It is more than encouraging that a £260 million support programme has been provided over the next three years, of which £64 million will go towards wind energy. I am delighted that my constituency can be the source for the generation of many megawatts of electricity for many years.

The year 2001 ended on a high note for the Western Isles, when the chief executives of two blue-chip British companies, accompanied by the UK Minister of State for Industry, Energy and the Environment, Brian Wilson, travelled to Lewis to announce a £600 million wind farm development. The wind farm proposals outlined by AMEC and British Energy will transform the economic landscape of the Western Isles. They represent not only exciting proposals for the generation of electricity—there will be more than 200 windmills, generating some 600 megawatts of electricity—but

also the largest-ever single inward investment in the Western Isles.

Last week, Brian Wilson made another significant announcement in the House of Commons when he indicated that Scottish and Southern Energy, in conjunction with the company Wavegen, hopes to build and install shore-based wave machines in the Western Isles, again generating electricity. I pay tribute to all the companies that are involved in those wave and wind plans and to the Minister of State for Industry, Energy and the Environment for their commitment to renewables and to the Western Isles.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Does the member agree that the exciting developments in his constituency are an excellent example of how Scotland is using the oil and gas expertise in the north-east of Scotland to benefit the rest of the country, by diversifying from oil and gas into renewables? One of the companies that is involved in the developments in the Western Isles is based in Aberdeen.

Mr Morrison: The proposals demonstrate clearly what can be achieved by partnership working between colleagues in the Scottish Executive and the UK Government.

The developments that we are debating are equivalent in scale and significance to the building of the hydro dams that transformed the Highlands and Islands from the middle of the last century. Those dams were built and delivered by the Labour party visionary Tom Johnston. We can now use the technology of the 21st century to supply power to meet not only our needs, but those of the biggest energy market in Europe, the south-east of England. That will require the laying of a subsea cable that will run from the Hebrides down the western seaboard to the north of Wales. Our colleagues at Westminster are pursuing that project. The three ministers who are present for tonight's debate will also be involved in the project.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am absolutely delighted by the size and importance of this investment, from which not only the Western Isles will benefit. However, is the member satisfied that Scotland will derive direct financial benefit from the project?

Mr Morrison: This is a matter that affects the interests of my constituents. I can assure the member that at the end of last year it was stated in the Western Isles that the Stornoway Trust could accrue something in the region of £3 million in rent from the wind farm proposal.

One agency that I would like to single out for special tribute is the Stornoway Trust, which is landlord of Scotland's oldest democratically run estate. The trustees, who are elected by tenants,

have, along with their factor Iain MacIver and his staff, been exceptional in their dealings with Government, the Scottish Executive, private companies and the local public sector development agency. As I said to Dr Ewing a few moments ago, if—or rather, when—the proposals come to fruition, the Stornoway Trust can expect to receive an annual rent in the region of £3 million. That clearly demonstrates the direct link between community ownership and economic development, which is why the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is so crucial.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does Alasdair Morrison agree that this project shows that community-owned estates and companies are at the forefront of providing renewable energy generation? For example, the Assynt Crofters Trust, which has been vilified lately, is involved in creating a hydro dam.

Mr Morrison: I certainly agree with what Rhoda Grant said. The reform of land ownership in Scotland has been a Labour party aspiration since the days of Keir Hardie. Last week, the historic bill on land reform began its passage through the Parliament. Along with our partnership colleagues, we will ensure that the bill will not be derailed or diluted by forces that, for generations, have stifled development as they greedily pursued their narrow ends. As Rhoda Grant rightly pointed out, there was a despicable smear campaign against the crofters of Assynt by landowner representatives, whose vain attempts to discredit the crofters who run that estate thankfully came to naught.

The wind and wave farm proposals have great economic significance. The prospect of re-establishing a manufacturing base at the Arnish yard in Lewis has been pursued aggressively since the yard's closure over two years ago, which was the result of a global downturn in oil fabrication. Today, that yard has a bright future. AMEC, British Energy, Wavegen and Scottish and Southern Electricity have all said that they wish the wave turbines to be constructed in the yard. Knowing that public funding will be required to equip the site and prepare it for manufacturing, I ask Allan Wilson to give me an assurance that he will work closely with the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, who is seated to his right, to ensure that the refitting of the Arnish yard goes ahead.

I appreciate that the minister will not be able to respond to many of the planning and environmental matters tonight, but, on behalf of my constituents, I want to make a small point about the environment. We will not tolerate outside interference. We appreciate that everything must go through due planning process, but I remind the chamber that the Hebrides has a wonderful legacy in the shape of a pristine environment. It is worth

recalling that the real friends of the earth have been the generations of island crofters and island fishermen.

Will the minister further assure me that Scottish Executive ministers will deal efficiently and sympathetically with all matters within their locus that relate to the wind farm proposals? I confidently predict that Allan Wilson, Lewis Macdonald and Wendy Alexander will not countenance any unnecessary delay, but will they ensure that the message gets through about the scale and significance of the proposals? The need for prompt and proper responses from all concerned is a priority.

I know that Allan Wilson appreciates the scale of what I have outlined tonight. He is well aware of the role of the Stornoway Trust and he appreciates the need to prepare the Arnish yard for the manufacturing of wind and wave turbines. Will he give me an update on the situation regarding the redevelopment of the site? Another issue of great importance is that a Scottish Executive official has worked closely with the Arnish development group. Will the minister ensure that that successful liaison continues and that an official attends all future meetings?

Other issues that relate to the Crown Estate commissioners are being pursued by my colleague Calum MacDonald, the MP for the Western Isles, who has already contacted the Treasury to ensure that the community gets a direct share in industry profits.

Finally, I extend an invitation to any of the ministers who are present tonight—indeed, to all three of them—to visit the Western Isles as soon as they can, so that they can see for themselves at first hand what we have debated tonight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Eleven members have asked to speak. All can be included if speeches are kept to three minutes.

17:13

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome this debate and congratulate Alasdair Morrison on giving us the opportunity to discuss this subject. I wish that he had also invited me to visit the Western Isles.

The development in the Western Isles is hugely exciting. It brings with it the hope that Scotland will at last reap the benefits of our enormous renewable energy potential. Although it is true that many jobs will be created, equally significant is the fact, which Alasdair Morrison confirmed, that the project will have the capacity to produce 600 megawatts of clean green Scottish energy. That 600 megawatts, which represents about 10 per

cent of Scotland's energy needs, is equivalent to half the electricity production of Torness but will cost only a fraction of what it cost to build Torness. When one considers the downsides of nuclear energy and the need to dispose of nuclear waste, there is no question but that renewable energy by far outstrips nuclear energy in terms of value for money.

Compared with nuclear energy, the environmental case for renewables is overwhelming and needs no further explanation but, given the scale of the development, that is not to say that Lewis will not have any environmental difficulties. Alasdair Morrison was right to say that we should let the people there decide what they want to do.

The Isle of Lewis project is a huge opportunity for renewables in Scotland. However, we have seen false dawns before. Companies have invested and people have been ready to go, but it has turned out to be yet another damp squib. We cannot let that be true on this occasion. We must maximise employment opportunities to the benefit of the whole Scottish economy. It would be a sin if the turbines to be driven by the Western Isles wind were to come from somewhere such as Denmark.

Denmark has reaped the economic benefits from the 15,000 jobs in wind turbine manufacture that should have been ours. With 25 per cent of Europe's potential for renewables, Scotland should have had a natural market. We cannot lose out on the next generation of renewables. This evening, I would like to hear from the ministers what the Executive's strategy will be to ensure that turbines are developed and manufactured in Scotland for the benefit of Scotland.

It can be only a matter of time before we have the announcement of the biggest offshore wind farm in Scotland. The Executive must ensure that Scotland is seen as Europe's green powerhouse not only on the supply side but on the manufacturing side.

The decision to base this project in the Western Isles is very much linked to the development of the Celtic ring, as discussed by Alasdair Morrison. I hope that the Celtic ring will become a reality for the grid as soon as possible. I hope that, in three years' time, it will not be floating about in the ether, like a lost copy of the *West Highland Free Press*.

Investment is needed now so that we can reap the rewards later. Such projects can breathe new life into communities that have real sustainability problems. In particular, they can breathe new life into places such as Lewis.

I thank Alasdair Morrison for the debate, but the big question remains: can we secure Scotland's share of the wealth that will be created and the revenue streams that will come from renewables

facilities in future years? Or will the wealth of Scotland go straight back down to the UK Treasury in much the same way as oil wealth has done in the past? We cannot allow that to happen with Scotland's wind potential.

17:17

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on raising the issue of renewable energy, which is of immense importance, particularly to people who live on the island of Lewis. Alasdair is indeed a modern-day Don Quixote—instead of tilting at windmills, he is encouraging them, and that is great news.

The Scottish Conservative party welcomes the proposals for the construction on the island of Lewis of the world's largest wind farm. The Conservative shadow energy spokesperson at Westminster, Robert Key, recently said that environmentally friendly, sustainable energy is not the dream that it was 20 years ago but a reality that we have to encourage. That will involve hard decisions and hard choices. Sometimes local environment must take second place and suffer some discomfort if the means justify the end. In this case, the end is a cleaner global environment for all.

However, great care and common sense must be applied in the location of wind farms so that the visual and noise impact is kept to a minimum. I live in Argyll and overlook a wind farm in the distance near Taynuilt. I do not find it obtrusive. Some local residents lost their television signals, but the wind farm company installed Sky Television services for them.

The proposed Lewis wind farm will bring huge benefits, initially in employment—especially if the Arnish yard, which now lies dormant, could be reopened for the assembly of the wind turbines. Arnish has traditionally been a main employer for Stornoway and it is sadly missed.

I have been involved in a successful campaign to locate a wind turbine manufacturing company at Machrihanish in Kintyre. That will bring great local benefit. It will also bring valuable technology transfer to Scotland from the Danish company that is undoubtedly the world leader in the field.

The argument for wind farms in the Scottish hills is strengthened when one considers that so much land is under huge blocks of Sitka spruce trees, which lock up land only to make a loss. That form of timber loses £1 a tonne when marketed. It would surely be much better to manufacture wind farm turbines and earn money for local residents and at the same time reopen previously forested land for other uses.

The Government has hard choices to make. Renewable wind energy is not a cheap option. The renewables obligation tax is proving to be a hurdle to green electricity suppliers. Also, suppliers of renewable energy are still awaiting renewables obligation certificates, which were promised for last October but are now promised for April. Why are they six months late? If the UK is to meet its 10 per cent renewable energy target by 2010, it must spend now to renew the grid, which in Scotland is sadly inadequate.

Lastly, on the Barvas moor project, why not consider the east coast of Lewis and the Ness moor, which provide at least 100 square miles of barely visible sites for wind turbines and numerous inlets for possible wave energy. As a by-product, the much debated and often shelved plan to link Tolsta to Ness with nine miles of road might also become a triumphant reality. That truly would be progress—a windfall from a wind farm.

17:20

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): We face a straightforward choice in meeting our Kyoto commitments. We either commit fully to developing a renewable energy industry in Scotland, with all the widespread economic and environmental benefits that it will bring, or we allow ever-increasing pressure from the nuclear lobby to push the Executive into developing new nuclear power stations that are expensive to run and operate, and leave a fearsome legacy for generations to come.

The development of the wind farm on Lewis must be whole-heartedly welcomed, but the Executive must try harder and offer greater incentives or the Scottish industry will miss the boat or—worse still—end up being wholly foreign owned, like many of our salmon farms. Only last Friday, the Irish announced the world's largest offshore wind farm, which is to be built on a sandbank in the Irish sea. It will produce 10 per cent of Ireland's electricity needs and reduce by 13 million tonnes the amount of greenhouse gases emitted per annum. Nothing quite so advanced has been proposed in Scotland. Why not?

We are talking about large-scale renewable energy projects, but Scotland must not ignore what smaller scale renewable energy could contribute to meeting our Kyoto targets. The Scottish Executive should actively encourage smaller scale renewable energy production by making it easier and cheaper to access the national grid and easier to gain planning approval.

One serious problem that many new alternative energy projects have to overcome is the nimby attitude. It needs to be recognised that some sites

are not suitable for development, but in other areas objections are often raised on a personal level without bearing in mind the benefit to the community or country. The best way to overcome the initial resistance and gain support is to ensure that communities are involved with projects from the beginning and that they gain some benefit from their presence.

Another way to encourage new alternative energy projects is to examine the benefits of combining schemes with other infrastructure projects. In my constituency, there has been a proposal to combine bridging the Strome narrows at Stromeferry for both cars and rail with a tidal energy barrage. That would allow the building costs to be shared between the road, rail and energy companies, and provide an immediate revenue stream from the energy that is generated. Such projects must be considered and given a chance to succeed. The Executive must support such modest but potentially vital small projects, as they will all help to achieve our Kyoto targets. We must rise to the challenge and demonstrate that we have the potential to go beyond Kyoto and become the flagship renewable energy country of the 21st century.

17:24

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Although this is an end-of-day debate and the issue that has been raised is a local constituency issue, what we do in the Parliament about renewables will be one of our longest and most important legacies. It is something of which collectively we could be proud.

Members have made the point about the importance of developing clean energy sources. We have talked about waste issues. We do not have those with renewable energy. We do not get the problems that we have had from our legacy of nuclear waste and we do not get the problems that we have inherited with the waste from our coal-fired stations. Those problems can be tackled, but renewables offer us new technology for the long term that is environmentally friendly and genuinely green. When we develop renewable resources we are using the earth's capital, not squandering it. We will be able to use that technology again and again.

It is true to say that, historically, Denmark has cornered the market in onshore wind development, and has begun to corner the market in offshore wind development and wind turbines. The challenge for Scotland is to think about the future and to consider the new generating capacity that could come from wave power and offshore wave installations. There are already some pilot projects around Scotland.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: I would like to get further into my speech.

The significance of the debate is that we can focus on the new investment that is going to come through the development that is proposed for Lewis. That proposed development has the potential to lift up the perspective on investment in renewables in Scotland. It puts the issue right at the heart of our energy and electricity interests.

The work of the Scottish Executive and the UK Government that Alasdair Morrison identified is vital to develop fully Scotland's energy interests as part of the UK. That is why we need continued support from the Executive for new investment in capacity for transmission and distribution. Alasdair Morrison is also right to highlight the positive local impact on Lewis. We can see that being replicated across Scotland.

One of the things that people are worried about with regard to renewables and the development of wind farms is that they do not know what the experience will be like. I remember doing a television interview in the Borders. The interviewer asked, "Aren't people going to be worried about the noise?" We were standing underneath an operating wind turbine and could not hear any noise. We need more such developments to reassure people that they are an environmentally friendly form of electricity generation with a beneficial impact on local jobs.

The Lewis project is another significant step in raising the proportion of electricity generated by renewables. I ask the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development to consider the current target of 18 per cent. That is the right target for the next few years. We now need to be thinking about raising that target for the long term. I call on the minister to think about that as part of a radical expansion and to build on the success that has been highlighted by the proposed Lewis project.

I also call on the minister to think about the whole of Scotland and not to forget central Scotland. There are massive opportunities for the development of renewables and wind farms in the short term, with the longer-term prize of offshore development. I am not talking just about wind power; wave generation is the one area where Scotland could get ahead of the game in terms of manufacturing.

I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on securing the debate and I call on the Minister for Environment and Rural Development to take us forward.

17:27

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Morrison on bringing us this excellent debate. As he knows, I had the pleasure of visiting Stornoway last month. I spoke to people there and felt that there was broad support for the wind farm plan.

I note with interest that the first news of this story came from the unlikely source of *The Guardian* on 26 November 2001. I imagine that that did not cause unqualified and undiluted delight in the offices of the *Stornoway Gazette and West Coast Advertiser*. One name is in the frame for leaking the story, but modesty prevents me from mentioning his name here.

There are serious concerns about delay. Perhaps I could put into three words the name, which Alasdair Morrison did not mention, of the possible source of objection that might cause delay to the planning process: Scottish Natural Heritage. I was pleased to see that Kevin Dunion, who wears hats that include being a board member of SNH and a spokesman for Friends of the Earth Scotland, seems to welcome this type of development. However, he says that the preferred site for the wind farm is a Europe-protected peat bog, so there is dubiety that I trust Kevin Dunion will dispel at the earliest opportunity, because I agree thoroughly that the people in the Western Isles should decide on the plan without outside interference. That is essential.

I believe that the economic benefits will be the focus of much concern because all energy bonanzas—when we think of oil we think of Titusville, Pennsylvania, east Texas or Mukluk in Alaska—have been followed more often than not by neglect of the people who were living in the area before the energy source was discovered.

Wind does not come in barrels, but it is worth just as much. The £3 million rental is a commercial rental, so that is not a gimmick. The Government has no contribution to make there. The Government's contribution is an under-the-rocks system that will provide a supplement to energy from renewable sources. That is all well and good, but what about the revenue from the climate change levy and the fossil fuel levy that goes to the UK Exchequer?

We should have an early estimate of the billions that will be generated by the development, which is twice as large as any onshore wind farm development in the world. How much will Westminster get out of the Western Isles and how much will be given back? I agree with and endorse Calum MacDonald's judgment that the project will be the largest-ever single investment in the Western Isles. Will it be the largest-ever single investment for the people of the Western Isles?

17:30

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on lodging the motion. I observe that he sounded slightly prickly about what he termed interference from outside bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and Friends of the Earth.

Mr Morrison: If the member checks the *Official Report*, he will find that I did not criticise Scottish Natural Heritage. I am greatly encouraged by its mission statement, which says that one of its operating principles is to

"work in partnership, by co-operation, negotiation and consensus".

I am sure that that it will work in that way locally, and I hope that that consensual approach translates to its national offices.

Robin Harper: I stand corrected. However, I inform Alasdair Morrison that the depositions that I have received from the RSPB and Friends of the Earth do not show a knee-jerk reaction against the project—quite the opposite. They acknowledge the importance of renewable energy to the future of Scotland and the world. All they ask for is to be engaged in the planning process. That is perfectly reasonable.

Alasdair Morrison referred to Tom Johnston, whose original vision for the development of renewable energy—particularly hydro power in the north of Scotland—was that it should be community owned. Of course, that vision has been destroyed.

I ask the Executive to ensure that we are not so dazzled by big developments in renewable energy that we forget the small projects. John Farquhar Munro talked about the importance of recognising the enormous potential for developing renewables through community ownership and small projects. Individual farms can install hydro power and wind power for their own needs. Photovoltaics, solar power, combined heat and power and biomass all lend themselves perfectly to community development and ownership.

I remind the Executive that the local community has a majority shareholding in one of the largest wind farms in Europe, in Copenhagen bay. That is not proposed for Lewis, but would it not be wonderful if we adopted such a perception of the way in which renewables should develop? By doing that, we would involve communities in taking a positive attitude towards the development of renewables throughout Scotland. Surely that is earnestly to be desired.

17:33

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): On this issue, I share common cause with my island colleague,

Alasdair Morrison, who has raised an important matter. Many islands have the ability to develop and produce renewable power in great quantities. As Sarah Boyack rightly said, if the Governments here and in London are serious about the use of renewable power, we must be ambitious not only about the projects that Alasdair Morrison described but about the targets that Sarah Boyack mentioned. I am sure that ministers will reflect on those thoughts.

My constituency has built up wind power expertise through an initiative in areas such as Fair Isle and through a commercial company—Shetland Aerogenerators Ltd—that has a Scottish renewables obligation contract and supplies power. There is huge potential in the northern isles—in Orkney and Shetland—for such power. Wave power is simply stored wind power. I am sure that Alasdair Morrison knows that, in his constituency, hardly a day goes past without the waves of the Atlantic pounding the western coastlines.

I am pleased that a number of companies are looking at the potential of wave power in my constituency. One of them, Seapower Scotland, is looking at an SRO site. A series of enterprising local people are also looking at engineering prototypes for harnessing wave power.

Tidal power has enormous potential in Shetland, too. Unlike wind power, it is continuous. I welcome Brian Wilson's announcement in the House of Commons last week that the Stingray project, the world's first tidal stream energy device, will be based in Yell Sound this summer.

I would also like to mention the ability to export, which Alasdair Morrison rightly said is the key to delivering on Government targets. I welcome the UK Government's interconnector feasibility study for the Western Isles, but the cable should be extended to other areas such as the northern isles. No area should be ruled out. We could then look to build enough capacity into the system to meet the targets that we aspire to and need to develop. I hope that the minister will respond to that positive suggestion in his winding-up speech.

In a Westminster context, Alasdair Morrison mentioned the Crown Estate Commission. He is rightly leaving that issue to his colleague, Calum MacDonald. I, too, leave it to my Westminster colleague, Alistair Carmichael. No doubt if the minister wishes to take issue with the Crown Estate over what it will seek to charge in rental income for cables, he will do so more elegantly than me. I will be right behind him on that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Rhoda Grant, I advise members that I am not going to get everyone in by the usual fixed deadline of 17:50. With the minister's agreement, I

am prepared to extend to 6 pm, but not beyond that time. As the minister is indicating his agreement, I will entertain a motion without notice to that effect.

Motion moved,

That the debate be extended until 6 pm.—[Mrs Margaret Ewing.]

Motion agreed to.

17:37

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): It is with some envy that I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on securing the debate. It has taken him a few short weeks to secure a members' business debate, whereas I have been waiting considerably longer to secure my first members' business debate. Perhaps he can give me some tips. [Laughter.]

It is only right that the Western Isles should lead the way in renewable energy generation. As Alasdair Morrison said, the Highlands and Islands have a long history of using hydro power. As Tavish Scott mentioned, the northern isles are also very much involved. The marine energy testing centre on Orkney is a fine example of how rural island communities can take their place in renewable energy generation.

Huge environmental benefits are to be gained. Many people might ask why places such as the islands should look for environmental benefits, as they have clean air. People in many of our cities and towns aspire to having clean air. The debate shows that there is no division between town and country or between urban and rural areas on the issue. We all need to work together to provide benefits, which include jobs in rural areas and cleaner air in urban areas. Investing in renewable energy is not a waste of money. The energy is renewable—it goes on and on. The investment is well placed.

Many renewable energy sources can also be tourist attractions. That is a knock-on benefit that many people do not see or that they find strange. Other countries have gained increased tourist numbers by marketing the facilities and encouraging people to visit them. Infrastructure is also important. I am pleased that the Westminster Government is addressing that. There is no point in generating electricity if we cannot transport it to the areas that need it. We also need to invest in jobs. The Scottish Executive has shown that it is willing to do that by its investment in the Vesta Wind System plant at Machrihanish. We also need to look at scientific jobs and perhaps involve the university of the Highlands and Islands in the development of that area.

I would like to see a review of the national

planning policy guidelines. It is important that they are reviewed and updated to facilitate renewable energy generation. I do not want to reduce consultation with local communities, as that is important, but we need to find a way to facilitate consultation to ensure that all the people are involved. Renewable energy will benefit not only the people of the Western Isles; it will benefit the whole of Scotland.

17:40

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Morrison on securing the debate. I am sure that he will have enjoyed, as I did, the reversal of the usual situation when Sarah Boyack made the plaintive cry that we should not forget about the central belt. I have participated in many debates in which we have had to ask that the Highlands and Islands are not forgotten. How nice it is that the Scottish Parliament has reversed that dynamic so quickly.

Rhoda Grant made a plea for a members' business debate. Having the First Minister abolish one's job, with all that that means, is one hell of a price to pay for a half-hour members' business debate. However, if that option is open perhaps we can consider it.

I suggest that we give credit to Western Isles Council which, back in February 2001, created the energy innovation zone that Alasdair Morrison will know all about. That in turn created the environment for the developments on Lewis to come about. It is important that we recognise that that was a cross-party initiative that is now bearing fruit.

We have talked about the significant level of the investment. I would like to pick up on Rhoda Grant's point about the parallel with Vesta in Campbeltown and the dramatic impact that that is having on the optimism of people in the town and its long-term sustainability as a location for business. That model can be replicated in the Western Isles and beyond.

One not so rosy point that we need to dwell on is the development of wave power. Whereas with wind power, as Sarah Boyack said, Scotland has lost the initiative to its Scandinavian cousins, with wave power we have the opportunity to be a world leader. I salute Wavegen for what it is doing, but I ask members to remember that from 1987 to 1998 we witnessed an 81 per cent drop in the research and development moneys that were made available for wave power. Since 1997 there has been a 57 per cent drop in Government assistance. If we want wave power to become more significant, I suggest that we quickly reverse that trend and perhaps all Scotland can benefit.

Robin Harper: Does the member agree that the demolition of Stephen Salter's wave tank at Edinburgh University has scarcely helped in the furtherance of wave power research?

Mr Hamilton: I am happy to agree with the member that that may not have been the most progressive step. If the Executive and the UK Government took wave power seriously, there would still be an opportunity for Scotland to be a world leader.

There was a report before Christmas about the possibility of wave and wind power providing not 10 per cent but 75 per cent of total UK energy needs. A disproportionate amount of that could come from Scotland. It is also worth remembering that the Highlands and Islands, which are economically disadvantaged in just about every other respect, have a competitive advantage in renewable energy. The Highlands and Islands are uniquely well placed to benefit from the massive expansion in renewables.

Tavish Scott is right: we must have action on the interconnector cable and a better answer than we have had so far about when that report will be published. I asked that question this week and was told—and I quote—"shortly". Well, it needs to be very shortly so that we can get moving.

17:43

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I thank Alasdair Morrison for securing the debate. It gives us the opportunity to talk about renewable energy and, importantly, to welcome the good news that we are hearing not only about the developments in 2001 but those in 2002, including the one that Alasdair Morrison spoke about tonight. I look forward with interest, as I am sure Bruce Crawford does, to what might happen in future in Central Scotland.

I welcome the renewables resource study that Duncan Hamilton mentioned. It said that 75 per cent of existing generating capacity in the UK could be met by renewables in Scotland. That is very good news. If Kevin Dunion of Friends of the Earth Scotland says that that is fantastic news we must be doing something right.

Renewable energy has other good points: its ability to help us combat climate change is an obvious one. It can also help to reduce the use of non-renewable resources—oil, gas and coal. Generating renewable energy also helps rural areas by bringing jobs. I very much liked what Alasdair Morrison said about the rent that would go to rural areas from wind power farms run as community-owned trusts. I am sure that there is potential for that and I would welcome the minister's comments on it.

In the wider context, it is essential that we break into the turbine and associated technology market and do not leave it up to the Danes. I agree with what Robin Harper said about that and I wonder whether the minister will tell us how we are trying to get into that technology market. Again, Alasdair Morrison gave a useful example of what is happening in his area.

There are still issues, one of which was raised in an RSPB Scotland briefing. The RSPB was positive about what is happening, but said that the environmental impact assessment must be rigorous and that higher discussions with key bodies are important to ensure the smoothest possible planning process. Scottish Power has made a number of suggestions about how to prevent the cost to renewables developers of connection to the electricity transmission or distribution network limiting the development of renewables. There needs to be greater operational flexibility by generators. I would like the minister to comment on that.

The developments that have been discussed are very good news and I hope that they will continue.

17:46

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I shall make a brief speech, much of which will serve to reiterate what has already been said. One can wait hours for a bus and then three come at once; I am the third.

I very much welcome the investment in wind and wave energy projects in the Western Isles and in the tidal energy prototype in Shetland. The UK was at the forefront of development in the early days of wind technology, but we failed to capitalise on that. We have only to look at Denmark to see what a wasted opportunity that was. We are now in the vanguard of developing wave and tidal energy generation, but more money still goes into current and historical subsidies for nuclear power and fossil fuels than into supporting the development of renewable energy technology and the infrastructure needed to enable Scotland to capitalise on our unique assets for generating energy from renewable resources. Let us not blow it again.

17:47

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I join other members in congratulating Alasdair Morrison on securing this evening's debate. The attendance and the number of contributors show not only the depth of feeling that exists on the subject, but also a depth of knowledge among many members of the Parliament, and a commitment to ensuring that renewable energy is kept very much on the agenda of the Parliament. The debate is helpful in

contributing to that.

The Scottish National Party has long supported the use of renewable energies. Some of us were probably advocating the use of wind power, solar power and wave power, both offshore and onshore, before Alasdair Morrison was born. We have a long commitment to renewable energy and that continuing commitment was reinforced by our council earlier this year.

As other members have said, the developments in the Western Isles are important. Our rural communities often feel neglected and feel that they are not in the van of the modern technology and exciting developments that happen elsewhere. What is happening in the Western Isles is to be greatly welcomed.

In May last year, two similar proposals for wind farms were made in Moray, at Paul's hill and Cairn Uish. I had the pleasure of visiting those sites during the parliamentary recess last October. I will not tell members what that visit did for my complexion, my hairstyle or, on occasions, my dignity, but it was certainly interesting. The two sites combined have a potential capacity of 96 megawatts. That could supply the whole of the domestic energy requirement for the Moray Council area. It also represents 50 per cent of the Scottish Executive's target for renewable energies by 2010.

There has been some opposition to the projects—all of us experience opposition, for a variety of reasons, when proposals are mooted. However, following a series of public meetings and exhibitions, Natural Power's research shows that 85 per cent of Moravians are in favour of the projects, including me and the two other Ewings in the chamber.

One aspect of developments that has been touched on is job creation. There will be short-term employment opportunities in building wind farms. Like others, I emphasise the need for Scotland to develop its potential for building turbines. I am thinking of the skilled engineers from Ardersier, for example, who have not received employment.

The Executive should ensure that, when it considers applications, processes are speedy and that projects are not unnecessarily held up.

17:51

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Like many members, I am grateful to Alasdair Morrison for securing today's debate. I look forward to visiting his constituency again. I applaud his commitment to the Western Isles and to renewable energy. He has addressed those subjects passionately more than once.

I believe that we are beginning to understand the reality of climate change. We can no longer ignore the environmental costs of fuelling our 21st century lifestyle or take our energy for granted. Increasing the use of clean, sustainable energy is vital for the future—that is why renewable energy is about to move into the mainstream of the energy business. Therefore, a firm, long-term commitment to renewable energy is central to our Scottish climate change programme.

The Executive is rightly proud of our policies on renewables. We are committed to using Scotland's massive potential to raise our renewable energy production to new heights.

Bruce Crawford *rose—*

Mr McGrigor *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Which member would the minister like to have ask a question?

Allan Wilson: Bruce Crawford.

Bruce Crawford: I thank the minister. He says that he is proud of the Executive's commitment to renewable energy. How much money is in the Scottish Executive's budget to deal with renewable energy? Will he confirm that the sum is zero?

Allan Wilson: I cannot confirm or deny anything off the top of my head, but I will get the information to Bruce Crawford.

Mr McGrigor: I thank the minister for taking an intervention. I know people who have been struggling with applications for wind farms for seven to eight years. Will the Executive bring forward fast-track planning to prevent that? That is necessary to meet the targets by 2010.

Allan Wilson: As the member knows, we have recently renewed planning requirements for the development of renewables. It is important that those are bedded in and that we monitor how they proceed. I agree with the general principle that the member mentioned. We want to ensure that we get on with the job in hand as quickly as possible.

Alasdair Morrison is right to champion the potential for renewable development on Lewis and in the Western Isles. Our recent study on Scotland's renewable resource potential identified the massive scale of that resource in Scotland and the Western Isles.

I am delighted to acknowledge the local interest and the involvement of the Stornoway Trust on Lewis. The partnership approach that is backed by Alasdair Morrison is essential. I am not simply referring to partnership between Government departments, the renewables industry and enterprise networks, although that is critical. If we are to achieve our objectives, we and the industry need to engage fully with local communities and stakeholders. I give Alasdair Morrison the

assurance that he seeks in respect of the continued participation of Executive officials in the process.

Applications for consent to build large energy projects must be made to Scottish ministers for their approval. Members will understand that I cannot comment on the merits of specific developments, but we are well aware of the projects to which Alasdair Morrison and other members referred. There has been great interest in Wavegen's plans to install a cluster of shoreline wave energy devices in the Western Isles and in plans for several wind energy developments there.

The environmental benefits of renewable energy do not necessarily lessen the environmental impacts that they can have. Our positive position on renewables in support of our climate change policy is balanced against a national and international need to preserve important areas of conservation. Developments on Lewis and elsewhere must respect such areas' legal status. I am confident that the partnership approach, which the motion endorses, will ensure that the correct balance is struck between competing and often conflicting interests.

The proposals for Lewis are part of a pleasing trend in relation to the renewables obligation Scotland. Our objective of providing 18 per cent of our power from renewables by 2010 is challenging.

Mr Hamilton: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: I would rather continue, if the member does not mind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have just over four minutes.

Allan Wilson: Okay, I will take an intervention.

Mr Hamilton: My question is about making the dream of long-term sustainable energy a reality. Will the minister say when the study that the Department of Trade and Industry commissioned into the cost and feasibility of the interconnector cable will be published?

Allan Wilson: Shortly. The signs from Scotland's proactive energy industry suggest that we will be more than successful in meeting the target that I mentioned. As Sarah Boyack probably knows, a recent study confirmed that the renewables obligation (Scotland) ROS targets can be met without grid upgrades.

Some members, including Bruce Crawford, mentioned the important issue of the economic impact of the development of renewable energy. That development is good not only for our environment, but for our economy. Our largest companies are poised to invest more than £1 billion in renewable energy during the coming

decade. The world's leading manufacturer of wind turbines will soon open a new manufacturing plant in Kintyre. The demand that our policies are creating has attracted Vesta to provide more than 100 jobs in an area that is desperately in need of them.

Bruce Crawford asked whether turbines will be manufactured in Scotland. Considerable success has been achieved in attracting Vesta to Campbeltown and we are aware that other turbine manufacturers are interested in investing in Scotland. Scottish Enterprise is charged with developing that interest and turning it into something more positive.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: Will the minister take an intervention?

Allan Wilson: I cannot possibly answer every question on renewable energy that is flung at me.

I want to say something about Arnish to Alasdair Morrison, who asked if colleagues in the enterprise and lifelong learning department are involved in discussions. I can confirm that discussions were held only today. The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning has made it known that regeneration at Arnish is a high priority for the Executive, which remains active in the Arnish development group. In that context, I acknowledge again the sterling efforts to reopen Arnish by the Stornoway Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In pursuit of that goal, HIE stands ready to engage with any prospective developer on the Western Isles. The feasibility study is under way at a cost of £35,000, which has been provided by Western Isles Enterprise and the local authority, with the Stornoway Trust.

In conclusion, the exciting prospects for renewable energy are important for this country. I agree entirely with the sentiments that are expressed in Alasdair Morrison's motion. There are significant environmental and economic benefits to be gained from a renewables boom—not just in the Western Isles, but across Scotland.

Partnership is essential in everything that we do to move that objective forward. We will maintain the dialogue and the good relations that we have established with the industry and other Government colleagues. We will continue to urge the full and proper involvement of local interests and communities and to ensure that landscape and other environmental issues are not ignored in that push.

Climate change endangers us all. Renewable energy can and will help us to tackle the threat to our environment and our way of life. I believe that we all accept the truth of that and that the Executive's policy commands general and—in the main—constructive support. By working together, we can increase Scotland's prosperity, benefit its environment and safeguard its future.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

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