

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 28 March 2007

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 28 March 2007*

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

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good afternoon. The first item of business, as it is every Wednesday, is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Neil Gardner, minister of the Canongate kirk, Edinburgh.

**The Rev Neil Gardner (Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh):** I do not know about members, but I find myself increasingly irritated these days by some of the silly stickers that people fix to their car windows, invariably with some sort of light-hearted reference to their children inside: “Princess on board”, for instance, or “Messy person on board”. In the latter case, it is usually difficult to tell whether the declaration more accurately applies to the parents or the child, but in any case it is obviously just a fashionable joke. It all seems quite at odds with the serious intention behind the rather more frequently seen car sticker that says simply, “Baby on board”. Written in black letters and set in a yellow diamond, it was apparently originally intended—like similar labels on petrol tankers—to warn fire and rescue services what was inside in the event of a serious accident, and to advise them to search for a baby or child who might otherwise be overlooked in the wreckage. “Baby on board”—very sensible and very serious.

Part of the Apostles’ Creed moves us very quickly from the birth of Jesus as a baby to his suffering and crucifixion, and fits neatly with this point in the Christian year when, among other things, holy week and Easter are looming ever closer over the horizon and Christmas seems far behind.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried ...”

In the church, especially as Lent unfolds, we cannot help but focus on that suffering, but it is also important to remember—in conjunction—the birth: to keep the baby, as it were, on board and in the world, where the vulnerable Christ child can so easily be overlooked in the wreckage. How much better equipped we would be to endure the hazards and frustrations of our suffering world if we kept the baby on board.

The last verse of a favourite hymn sums it up perfectly:

“How shall we love you, holy, hidden being,  
If we love not the world which you have made?  
Oh, give us purer love, for better seeing  
Your Word made flesh and in a manger laid.”

“Baby on board”. It is not so silly after all, but very serious and very sensible.

## Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill: Final Stage

14:34

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is the final stage of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill.

In dealing with amendments, members should have the bill—that is, SP bill 64A—as amended at consideration stage, the marshalled list, which contains the amendments that have been selected for debate, and the grouping that I have agreed.

The division bell will sound and proceedings will be suspended for five minutes for the first division this afternoon. The period of voting for the first division will be 30 seconds. Thereafter, I will allow a voting period of one minute for the first division after a debate. All other divisions will be 30 seconds.

### Section 47—Interpretation

**The Presiding Officer:** Group 1 is on interpretation. Amendment 1, in the name of Phil Gallie, is grouped with amendment 2.

I call Mr Gallie. [*Applause.*]

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** I thank members very much indeed.

First, I congratulate Linda Fabiani, the convener of the European and External Affairs Committee, on her award from the Italian Government. [*Applause.*]

At consideration stage, the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee amended the bill to require mitigation commitment documents, including the landscape and habitats management plan and the environmental mitigation plan, to be signed off by the relevant bodies. Those bodies—the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and the local planning authorities—are known collectively as the mandatory consultees.

The mitigation commitment documents are important to construction of the authorised works because they set out the environmental standards and protections that the promoter and its contractors will meet in order to protect the environment and to minimise inconvenience to residents and others. The committee is keen to ensure that the process of finalising those documents is inclusive, robust and open, and that it makes best use of local knowledge and

expertise. In particular, we must ensure that the wishes of local experts in the fields—the environmental regulators—are fully complied with and are not overruled by the authorised undertaker, Network Rail, purely on the grounds of cost or convenience.

Since we amended the bill at consideration stage, Network Rail and the mandatory consultees have had exchanges with a view to achieving a more time-effective and cost-effective method of engagement. The mandatory consultees have agreed the new process, which is why amendment 1 has been lodged.

Under the new proposal, the mandatory consultees will be fully and properly engaged in and consulted on each document. All their requests and suggestions for changes will be incorporated, unless doing so is not reasonably practicable because, for example, of overwhelmingly strong grounds of cost or safety. Safety remains an overriding issue and we expect nothing in the process to impinge on the safe operation of the railway. Safety is governed by railway standards and subject to approval by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate.

Should Network Rail assert that a proposed change is not reasonably practicable, it must suggest an alternative approach or give reasons why the change cannot be made. Moreover, it must discuss its suggestions and difficulties with the consultee. If the parties cannot reach agreement on the proposed change, there is provision for escalation to an arbitration process which would, in broad terms, involve the disputes being referred up the management lines of each of the organisations concerned. If, having been considered at director level, the dispute still cannot be resolved, it can be referred to an arbiter for a decision, which would be binding. The revised code of construction practice now reflects that process.

The committee has modified the code of construction practice to specify that discussions will take place to reach agreement on timetables for production of the mitigation documents. The discussions will cover the timetable for consideration of alterations and alternative solutions, the method for consultation on each document, and how and when each document will be approved. That approach will ensure full consultation, engagement and consideration on suggestions for improving the documents; at the end of the day, that is what is important. We all want to be sure that there are high standards of environmental mitigation to reduce the impacts of the railway works both on the environment and on local communities.

The process that I have outlined is set out in an amended version of the code of construction

practice, dated 23 March. Under section 40C, the authorised undertaker will be required to use all reasonably practicable means to ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the code of construction practice. The same section also sets the standards in the code of construction practice as the minimum that must be met during construction.

Taken together, amendments 1 and 2 will leave intact the protections that the committee introduced at consideration stage while avoiding the possibility of the mandatory consultees incurring needless expense as a result of employing experts to advise them on matters that are not within their remits. Although the mandatory consultees will no longer have formally to approve the final documents, each and every comment and suggestion that they make will have to be incorporated. The only exception to that will be when it is not reasonably practicable to make a suggested change, in which case there will be full, open and inclusive consultation and discussion on alternative approaches, with provision made for resolution by arbitration if the parties cannot agree.

I move amendment 1.

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee on its thorough work. Many people who live adjacent to the proposed line have been concerned about the process, as is the case with any major rail or road construction exercise. The committee has done a good job under the able leadership of my colleague Phil Gallie, who has now completed 17 years as a member of Parliament and who, I believe, has ambitions to go to another place, as they say, although not the House of Lords. I wish him well in that. The committee's arguments were good. I am surprised that Phil Gallie has not yet mentioned the European convention on human rights but, no doubt, that will come in time. We support the amendments.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I simply want to confirm what I said last week about Phil Gallie. We support the amendments, for similar reasons to those that David Davidson outlined.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call the Minister for Transport.

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** I have nothing to say.

*Amendment 1 agreed to.*

*Amendment 2 moved—[Phil Gallie]—and agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the consideration of amendments.

## Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee (First Report 2007)

14:43

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-5759, in the name of Phil Gallie, on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee's first report of 2007, which is on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and European protected species.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament notes the 1st Report, 2007 (Session 2) of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, *Report on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and European Protected Species* (SP Paper 761), and agrees that the construction of the Airdrie-Bathgate railway project should not impact on the favourable conservation status of otters.—[Phil Gallie.]

## Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5760, in the name of Phil Gallie, that the Parliament agrees that the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill be passed.

14:44

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** How strange life can be: here we are debating legislation in a building that neither you, Presiding Officer, nor I wanted, in a Parliament that you fought for and I fought against, on what for each of us is the eve of retirement from half a century or more of full-time employment and 15 years of parliamentary activity. My mind goes back to a debate in the mid-1990s that was organised by the Hansard Society in your building of choice for the Parliament, the old Royal High school building, when we assessed the merits of a devolved Parliament. That debate is long since over and today, in the final hours of the second session of the devolved Scottish Parliament, we consider the final bill of the session, the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill, which will be the last private bill to be dealt with under the Parliament's private bill procedure for proposed public works.

It is perhaps not surprising, Presiding Officer, given your commitment to the cause that you hold dear, and given the respect that you have earned over the years, that you should be presiding over what can only be described as an historic event. Strange it is, however, that I should be moving a motion on, and advocating acceptance of, a bill that has the potential to receive the unanimous approval of this chamber. [*Laughter.*]

At this point, I will thank my fellow committee members, whose support, commitment and analytical minds, along with the huge contribution that was made by our indefatigable—although, given the effect of that word previously, perhaps I should say “tenacious”—clerk: Fergus Cochrane and his team have enabled submission of the bill to Parliament for approval. Although all concerned gave 100-plus per cent effort towards achieving that goal against a 10-month timescale that was necessitated by the late introduction of the bill and by Parliament's impending dissolution, I make particular reference to Janis Hughes, who will also leave Parliament, come dissolution. [*Applause.*]

I pay tribute to our assessor at consideration stage, Professor Hugh Begg, who considered in an open manner a mass of written and oral evidence from the large number of objectors and from the promoter. His work allowed timeous

publication of our consideration stage report last month. I contend that that collective effort has resulted in a better bill being presented to Parliament today than that which was first presented. The bill offers not only the considerable benefit to the wider community that the railway link will provide, but comfort for those who will be directly affected by disturbance as a consequence of construction and operation of the railway.

We were appreciative of Network Rail's commitment, after some cajoling, last Christmas to settle the minds of objectors who would lose their homes as a consequence of the rail link. The promoter did so by clarifying the valuation and purchase process. However, other concerns were not addressed so co-operatively. We and the assessor have made it clear—the promoter understands this—that all commitments by the promoter during committee meetings and assessment procedures are binding.

I want to talk now about engagement with the promoter—I go back to my time as a youthful engineer in a publicly owned utility. What a pain accountants, factors and other external bodies could be in preventing us from doing what we knew to be best for the plant and equipment under our care. At times I perhaps recognised the resentment of the promoter towards constraints that were being placed on it, but Network Rail has to realise that a project such as this one must be undertaken in a spirit of co-operation between the public and the promoter. It is in the public interest to commission and build the project to budget and by the set dates. That must be achieved within acceptable boundaries. That point has been addressed by some of the measures that I have yet to describe and which will be described by other committee members during today's debate.

Our previous reports were critical of Network Rail's initial response to a request for the provision of detail; the reports were also critical of elements of non-co-operation. I hope that Network Rail will have recognised its shortcomings in communication and liaison with external organisations and, most important, with local communities. I trust that Network Rail will take to heart the contents of those reports in any future plans and certainly in the implementation of this project.

The committee expressed disappointment at Transport Scotland's offhand approach to the promoter's level of engagement. It provided £340 million of public money to the project, so we thought that it should have displayed a greater interest, as our report suggested. We expect a future Minister for Transport to set monitoring criteria for project progression and implementation.



On engagement, the committee secured a base for local community forums at which matters of construction and timetabling, for example, can be discussed. Most important, Network Rail is obliged to enter into one-to-one discussion with every affected neighbour regarding the provision of planting, fencing and other protective measures.

A large number of objections were made against the bill. I pay tribute to the objectors, who were always constructive but genuine in pointing out difficulties that they considered they would face. Many changes were made to the project as a consequence of the objections. Our assessor identified site-specific requirements, all of which the committee agreed and adopted. For example, there will be a segregated bridge at a particular location to ease access for farm animals. The promoter will arrange for security reviews and meetings with local police for objectors who expressed strong concerns about increased risk of crime as a result of the railway or cycle track.

I recall the difficulties that the committee encountered when we faced objections from the local sailing club and fishing club. I believe that both clubs have attained reasonable settlements; indeed, with respect to the fishing club and its requirements for disabled people, I feel that a generous settlement was reached on its behalf.

A considerable number of objections related to the code of construction and to noise and vibration. Committee colleagues will refer to those matters in due course.

I feel obliged to say that all objections were treated in a way that ensured compliance with the European convention on human rights—justice and fairness were the committee's watchwords.

We believe that the project is sound. We accepted that improvements had to be delivered in areas such as local bus integration, new housing and improved pedestrian and cycle access into stations. Not all such aspects have been addressed yet—my committee colleagues will comment later on them. It is important to capture the railway's benefits from day 1, but it concerns us that aspects have not yet been addressed. However, given the conditions that have been laid down, I am sure that they will be addressed in the future.

There is a requirement for greater input and commitment from local councils and, in particular, from Strathclyde partnership for transport in delivering on the issues. Transport Scotland, too, must demonstrate that it has a cohesive strategy. Work must also be done in respect of housing—I believe that Jeremy Purvis will address that matter.

The major issue that we faced was provision of stations at Plains and Blackridge, so we welcomed

the Minister for Transport's commitment to take that issue forward. We hope that either he or his successor will do that and ensure that all aspects of the provision of those stations will be taken into account when the matter comes before the next session of the Scottish Parliament.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** I thank Mr Gallie for taking an intervention. Does he agree that, although the Airdrie to Bathgate link will vastly improve rail services across that part of the country, in particular for the people of Blackridge and Plains, who hope to get new stations in the future, the link would be greatly enhanced by the creation of Glasgow crossrail, which is the missing link in Scotland's rail network?

**Phil Gallie:** I could not agree more with Janis Hughes. It is a pity that she will not be here to fight for crossrail in the next session of Parliament. I hope that the members who will be here will put their backs into ensuring that a bill on crossrail is the first transport bill to be introduced in the next session. Janis Hughes has my total support on crossrail.

Much work remains to be done to develop the Airdrie to Bathgate rail project. At a cost of £340 million, the project must deliver on every front. The Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee fulfilled an important function and identified and secured enhancements to the scheme, but will cease to exist after the bill has been passed. It will therefore be for Transport Scotland to monitor with particular care how the promoter progresses the project. The needs of other people must be paramount. Transport Scotland must co-ordinate and deliver on a number of matters, such as bus services and housing, which will be part of an integrated scheme. I encourage the minister to reflect carefully on the tone of the clear messages in the committee's report.

I know that I have gone over time, but I want to thank every member of the Scottish Parliament for the friendship and support that I have received since Parliament's inception. I thank them for their good humour and the genuine debate that I have enjoyed as I have projected my sound, well-thought-out and practical Conservative principles and beliefs.

The Airdrie to Bathgate railway is a good project, which I am sure will bring about tangible improvements for the people who live and work in the central belt, especially in West Lothian and North Lanarkshire. *[Applause.]*

I am pleased to move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill be passed.

14:57

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):**

Such a young Parliament, so many historic events. I pay tribute to Phil Gallie's years of public service. I understand that he was with Cunninghame District Council for four years, during which time—my good friend and colleague Cathy Jamieson tells me—he was affectionately known as “the local Tory”. He spent five years at Westminster, where he lived through the Major years—I remember watching him on television during the debates on Maastricht. Of course, he has also spent eight years in the Scottish Parliament and has made some mention of Europe and the ECHR in every year. I suspect that Mr Gallie did not think that his career in the Scottish Parliament would end with a debate on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill, which is perhaps not the most exciting piece of legislation on which to end a career. However, I was encouraged to hear from Mr Davidson that Mr Gallie has aspirations to election to another place. He will not expect me to vote for him if he seeks election to the European Parliament but, by gosh, it will be fun watching him if he gets in. On behalf of everyone on the Executive benches, I pay tribute to Phil Gallie for his time in public life and I wish him all the best, whatever he chooses to do in the future. *[Applause.]*

The rest of my speech is somewhat dull, so I will get on with it. I thank Mr Gallie and his colleagues on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, including Janis Hughes. She and I served on a committee back in 1999—I forget which one, but it does not matter—which was great fun. I thank her for all her work as a parliamentarian. I thank the committee clerks, the promoter and advisers for their efforts.

The construction of the railway is a key commitment of our partnership agreement, so we fully support the motion to pass the bill. The railway will bring many benefits to Scotland: it will put in place a necessary public transport connection to the key economic centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh and, when it is operational, it will give people in North Lanarkshire a direct service to Edinburgh and people in West Lothian a direct service to Glasgow.

The railway will provide benefits to the economy of £716 million when we factor in the latest housing projections in West Lothian. It will encourage more investment: the promoter estimates that through opening up new opportunities for business up to 1,500 jobs will be created in the area that will be served by the railway. It will encourage a move away from cars by providing a fast and reliable service to city centres.

In its consideration stage report, the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee asked for clarification of a number of points. I will deal with those now.

I can assure Parliament, in response to a point that Mr Gallie made, that Transport Scotland is actively monitoring and assessing the performance of the promoter in all areas of the project. The issue of stakeholder engagement is part of the discussions at the regular meetings between Transport Scotland and the promoter, at which progress and performance are assessed. The promoter has recently developed a stakeholder engagement plan, to which it must adhere. That will be part of the gateway review process that we have discussed in Parliament on several occasions. The promoter must also engage with all interested parties in an open, constructive and proper manner. I assure Mr Gallie and his colleagues that if that were not the case, we would take action.

I also assure Mr Gallie and Parliament that the lack of clarity on housing issues in North Lanarkshire does not in any way affect the economic case for the railway. The bill was introduced on the basis of conservative estimates of housing, which used information that was provided directly by the council. As Parliament knows, the project has a very positive benefit to cost ratio. It will be good news for the project if, as is the case in West Lothian, more housing is planned than was originally assumed. That will reinforce the case for the railway. However, the fact is that the railway is needed now. I assure Parliament that Transport Scotland will ensure, through its regular meetings with North Lanarkshire Council and West Lothian Council, that the impact of new housing continues to be assessed.

As I discussed with the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee at one of its meetings, the railway will cost £299.7 million at 2006 prices. As I have said before, there is no new money for additional measures but, at the request of Transport Scotland, the promoter is currently undertaking the necessary detailed work to develop and design the specification for the proposed stations at Plains and Blackridge, which will give us the detailed assessment of the design, the environmental impact and the costs at both station sites. As Mr Gallie said, that report will be ready at the start of the new session of Parliament. Transport Scotland has started discussions with the councils on the stations and funding. Consultation of local community groups will be carried out in an open and transparent manner and all local interests will be involved. I know that that was an issue of concern to constituency members.

This Government has been getting on with the business of rail after years of neglect. More than £1 billion has been invested in the major projects—that is continuing and committed investment. The Larkhall to Milngavie line has already improved local access to employment and education. The latest figures show that 340,000 passenger journeys per year have happened because of that investment, which is an increase of 53 per cent in patronage against the projection.

The Waverley station infrastructure works will be completed by the end of 2007. That project will allow four more trains an hour into the station, which will bring clear economic benefits and ease congestion for rail users.

The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line will open and reconnect Alloa to the Scottish rail network. I know that the Presiding Officer has a close and long-standing interest in the project, which will help to ease road congestion and take freight trains off the Forth rail bridge.

The trams project here in our capital city will transform Edinburgh. We have this month approved the draft business case and awarded the moneys that will be necessary for vital utilities work.

Glasgow airport rail link and Edinburgh airport rail link have both concluded their Parliamentary processes. They will bring enormous benefits not only to those airports and cities but to Scotland as a whole, and the Borders railway will breathe new life into Midlothian and the Borders. It will improve access, open up employment and housing opportunities and increase potential economic development.

The Airdrie to Bathgate line will provide a reliable and sustainable public transport link to our major economic centres. It is an essential element of this Government's £3 billion capital investment programme in transport. I strongly urge Parliament to support the motion in Mr Gallie's name and to make a significant contribution to a positive vision for public transport in Scotland.

15:04

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I, too, wish Phil Gallie well for the future. His was a voice that was always heard in this Parliament—albeit sometimes from a sedentary position. We never had any difficulty in hearing Phil, but he has always been charitable and respectful to other members. While always putting across his points forcibly, he has been reasonable at the same time. We will miss him.

We will also miss Janis Hughes. It is always rash to assume what a lady is going to do, so I am not sure whether this will be her last contribution to

this session of Parliament. Irrespective of whether that is the case, I also wish Janis well for the future.

I believe that there will be an outbreak of consensus this afternoon in relation to the bill. That is not a frequent occurrence in this place. We should be pleased that, in our reconvened Scottish Parliament, we can unite behind a project that we all believe will bring considerable benefits to the people of Scotland, especially, of course, to the people who will be directly served by the Airdrie to Bathgate line. The line not only provides connections between those communities and Glasgow and Edinburgh, but connects to places such as Helensburgh. New stations will be provided, such as those at Caldercruix and Armadale, and other stations will be moved.

We certainly support the work in progress on the possible additional stations on the line, namely those at Plains and Blackridge. The Scottish National Party has been persuaded that there should be a station at Blackridge. We believe that that should be a commitment. It is, of course, always difficult to make such decisions. We wish to study carefully, and with a positive approach, the findings on the potential stations at both Blackridge and Plains, which, as I understand it from the minister, will be available to us early in the next session. We are persuaded that the case is particularly strong in respect of Blackridge.

I welcome the submissions that were made by my colleague Fiona Hyslop, who will speak about that possible additional station at more length. Efforts have been made by members of other parties, including Mary Mulligan and Karen Whitefield, who I expect also to participate in the debate. If I have not mentioned other members by name, I mean no offence.

There has been a strong voice calling for a new station at Blackridge. As the SNP transport spokesman, I have been persuaded that, in relation to the range of figures that we have been discussing—they are of course indicative, not exhaustive—a new station would be a valuable investment for the people of Blackridge. I think that the facts, as they emerge, make the case stronger than it has been before. Therefore, we will suggest that, if we are able to earn the trust of the people of Scotland at the elections, that project should be supported. I am pleased to make that clear now, as I did in the previous debate on the subject.

The Airdrie to Bathgate line will provide a much-needed economic boost to both areas. It will help to extend the travel-to-work zone, which will assist the economies in each area. People in Lanarkshire will find it much easier to travel to and work in Edinburgh, and people in the Bathgate area will find it much easier to travel to and work in Glasgow. In a real sense, that will bring together

the west and the east—something that has proved to be problematic from time to time in this country of ours, for reasons that I do not propose to go into.

The new rail link will provide a means of giving an economic boost to both areas. It will also improve the environment, increase the opportunities for people in Airdrie and Bathgate to obtain other jobs in our cities and give them other opportunities, and achieve faster journey times. All in all, it will increase people's ability to travel by rail rather than by road. That will relieve some of the congestion on the M8, which can be a serious problem from time to time.

For all those reasons, the SNP is happy to join other parties in supporting the bill. I noticed what the Minister for Transport said in the final remarks of his speech. I am not sure how long I have to cover this—do I have another five minutes, or 10 minutes, or one minute?

**The Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Fergus Ewing:** Thank you very much. I have no complaints about that whatsoever.

The minister trespassed somewhat more widely than the confines of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill. My party and I would like to see more rail links in Scotland. We take a different approach, in that we do not believe that the proposal to establish an Edinburgh airport rail link by means of a tunnel under the live runway and two rivers is sensible, because a surface option could be considered—on which we ask Network Rail to deliver a study—nor do we think that the Edinburgh trams scheme, at a cost of more than £700 million, represents value for money. We believe that the £1,300 million—and rising—could be better used for other purposes, not least to extend Waverley from 28 to 32 paths per hour and to invest substantially in the network throughout Scotland.

Inverness is the fastest-growing city in Scotland, but West Lothian is the fastest-growing county in Scotland. We wish the people of West Lothian and Lanarkshire well with this new line.

15:11

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** Consensus is breaking out. I begin with the retiring members who have spoken today. Phil Gallie has been a quiet, mild-mannered man all the way through his parliamentary life and has argued and won his case by subtle persuasion. On occasion, Opposition members have driven him to distraction, but I suppose that we are all human. I congratulate him on what he has done for this Parliament, as well as on the work that he did in

other places. I wish him every joy in his future life and hope that our friendship continues.

I enjoyed working with Janis Hughes on the Health Committee, of which she was the deputy convener. A good job was done there. However, I did not enjoy one job that I had to do at the beginning of the Parliament, when we had to negotiate the allowances scheme. Janis Hughes was sent along with someone else to negotiate, but could never give an answer or agreement. I am sure that we could have got the scheme settled much more easily if she had been given the full powers to deliver according to conscience.

The rail link is long overdue and is only one of the steps that we need to take to ensure that Scotland is joined up properly by rail. Some parts of Scotland, such as in the north-east, do not have rail, but the rail link is a welcome extension. The committee is to be congratulated on its thoroughness and on taking on board all the issues that affect the people who will be involved, for reasons of proximity. I congratulate Network Rail on its approach to compulsory purchase, which is a fine example of good practice that I would like to see applied to the Aberdeen western peripheral route, to name but one project, which I hope is coming along.

We believe that the project is good value for money with a good benefit cost ratio of 1.81, which is better than the figure for some of the projects that have been brought before the Parliament. More important, it is an ideal tool for regeneration. All too often, people talk about the central belt as simply Edinburgh and Glasgow, but there are many important communities in between. Sometimes, how we link such communities is a bit disjointed.

There is a good environmental case for the line, because it will lead to less congestion on the M8 and fewer parking difficulties in the cities, when people go to work.

The project will improve links to Edinburgh and Glasgow. A number of other issues were raised during consideration of the bill, such as noise levels during construction and the destruction of national cycle route 75, which I have heard protests about, although I am sure that it will be sorted out in due course.

The stations at Blackridge and Plains are important. Right from the beginning, we supported the case for them to be put in place. Even if that means two or three minutes on timetabling, it will be well worth it to ensure that more people are connected to the railway system. I am pleased that the minister is more or less promising to ensure that that work carries on. I look forward to hearing his final commitment on that.

We have always considered the bill to be important. It provides a part of the framework that we need in Scotland. It is regrettable that we have not had the Blackridge exercise. Time could have been saved if that had been done at the same time that the bill was considered. I look forward to the bill coming back, in whatever its final form, in the new parliamentary session. The most important things are to ensure that we get the timetabling sorted out—that includes Waverley station—and to look ahead to setting up a good rail link as part of a new crossing to Fife. We have to look at multimodal transport these days. Unlike the SNP, we favour Edinburgh's airport being linked to the railway system. We had a projection, which was disputed by the authorities, whose arguments we have now accepted.

We support the bill and congratulate the committee and those who served on it on the thorough job that has been done.

15:15

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I am delighted that the last speech that I will make in this Parliament prior to dissolution is on the Airdrie to Bathgate rail line. Mary Mulligan, Bristow Muldoon and I have been campaigning for the rail line since we became MSPs in 1999. Initially, many said that we were dreaming and that the line would never be reopened. I am glad that we chose not to listen to those voices of doubt and listened, instead, to the voices of the people in communities that we represent, such as Plains, Caldercruix and Airdrie, who all said that this was a goal that was worth aiming for. Indeed, although a station at Plains is not included in the bill, I am pleased that the Executive has made a commitment to deliver it during the construction of the line. That is an important commitment because, if we are going to spend £340 million, we should ensure that every community along the line has access to and benefits from the infrastructure. I believe that that is one of the many reasons why the people of Airdrie and Shotts will support the Labour Party in the forthcoming election.

We have been on a long and difficult journey and I would like to pay tribute to the work that has been done by West Lothian Council and North Lanarkshire Council to support the case for the reopening of the line. They have been supporters from the outset and provided convincing evidence to the committee of the benefits that the rail line would bring to their areas.

I thank and congratulate the members of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, who worked tirelessly to ensure that the project that we are about to embark on would not only provide good value for money for the taxpayer but would take

proper consideration of the individuals, organisations and communities that would be adversely affected by the line. In particular, it is appropriate that we mention Phil Gallie, who has ensured that a fair hearing has been given to everyone who has an interest in the reopening of the line. From the start, the convener understood the importance of ensuring that the proposal ensured access for all the communities along the line. I am grateful to him for his support of that idea and wish him well with whatever the future holds for him.

I thank Network Rail, which has worked hard to ensure that the bill has passed through the Parliament as smoothly as possible. For some people who have been involved, that passage has been a little difficult and challenging at times but, finally, we have reached resolutions on issues around the Monklands Sailing Club and the Airdrie and District Angling Club. That is to their credit. I hope that those organisations will benefit as a result of the agreements that have been reached. The co-operation of all parties has been vital in ensuring that the bill can be passed before the dissolution of Parliament, so that work can commence on the line as soon as possible.

The reopening of the railway line is historic. It is part of an investment in rail services, the like of which has not been seen in Scotland for more than a generation. It will open up a range of opportunities for my constituents. For the first time, students from my constituency who could never dream of studying in Edinburgh because no public transport links existed and they could not afford to rent accommodation in Edinburgh will be able to benefit from the higher education opportunities in Edinburgh and West Lothian. They will then be able to access employment opportunities in those areas, as well as social and recreational facilities.

The impact that the prospect of the rail line is having on the economy of Airdrie and the surrounding villages can already be seen. A number of housing developments have sprung up in the villages near the line and more are planned. Those developments are helping to bring money into the local economy and to ensure a sustainable future for the villages along the line.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I agree with much of what the member says, but does she agree that it reinforces the lunacy of closing the accident and emergency department at Monklands hospital?

**Karen Whitefield:** We are talking about a railway line today, and there will be more to discuss during the election campaign than accident and emergency services. However, my views on the matter are clear and members are aware of them, as are my constituents.

There is evidence that the prospect of the rail line is beginning to attract retailers back to Airdrie town centre. I welcome that. It is a positive thing, for which people in Airdrie have been crying out for many years. Indeed, when the line reopens, car parking will become a problem in Airdrie and a creative solution will be required. I know that North Lanarkshire Council is committed to finding such a solution.

I welcome the passing of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill. I look forward to the day when I can leave my car at home and take the train to work here in the Parliament. Of course, that assumes a fair wind in the coming elections. I commend the bill to the Parliament and hope that all members will support it.

15:21

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** Fergus Ewing and David Davidson began their speeches by talking about the consensus that has broken out in the chamber. When they are feeling so consensual, who would I be to break that consensus? I agree that the Airdrie to Bathgate rail line is vital. It will be not just a link between North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, but a vital link between North Lanarkshire and Edinburgh, between West Lothian and Glasgow, and even between Helensburgh and Edinburgh. It is welcome not just as a local rail improvement, but as a vital component of a national improvement in rail.

I was shocked to discover that there is no direct public transport link between Airdrie and Bathgate. The journey takes more than 40 minutes and requires passengers to change buses at least once. The new line will solve that local problem by providing local public transport as well as being part of a national scheme. It is very welcome.

The Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee did an excellent job and I join others in paying tribute to Phil Gallie and the other members of the committee. The committee's report mentions local communities' concerns that they were not fully involved in the consultation process. The committee did an excellent job in identifying those concerns and taking steps so that communities can feel that their concerns will be addressed in future. In particular, the development of local community forums is welcome, but they must be taken seriously by all sides. It is great to have such structures, but we need commitment to make them work.

The committee's report mentioned the commitments to improve walking and cycling access to the railway stations and the replacement of national cycle route 75, which runs along the old

Airdrie to Bathgate line. Again, the committee has done an excellent job in highlighting people's concern about that. As someone who has used the cycle route, I know that it is a wonderful resource for Scotland. It is a great route and a joy to cycle on. It is well used by cyclists and walkers, not just as a transport link but as a vital recreational facility.

I share the concern of cycling groups such as Sustrans that there is no impetus on the part of the developer quickly to secure land for an alternative cycle route. It is vital that the national cycle network does not lie broken for years and that we have the investment to ensure that we have a good cycle route for local people and as part of the link between Glasgow and Edinburgh, although it might not be quite as great as the existing cycle route. The concern is that the developer has not been ready enough to grasp the nettle of what putting in a high-quality cycle route will mean to fill the gap that the replacement of rail lines on the existing cycle route will leave.

I share the committee's concerns about access to railway stations. In West Lothian, 25 per cent of the population live within 1 mile of the new railway line. That presents a huge opportunity for that large part of the population to access the railway without having to go by car. However, they will not be able to do that unless the proper investment is made in walking, cycling and off-road routes to take people to the railway stations.

Having multimodal travel systems is great. When 25 per cent of West Lothian's population live within 1 mile of the line, why should the multimodal system mean taking the car to the station, when people could walk, cycle or take a bus? Proper integration of the bus network with the new scheme is needed.

The committee has drawn out all those points. We want the developer to exert effort to secure some of those facilities. When we travel through Croy on the existing Edinburgh to Glasgow line, we see a mass of parked cars, because people drive to Croy, drop off their cars and take the train into Glasgow. Those cars are in the car park and on waste ground and they jam up local residents' parking. That is not only a transport problem, but a problem for residents. We do not want the new stations on the Airdrie to Bathgate line to face similar problems because people who want to use the new stations and to take the train have no option but to drive to those stations. We need to ensure that effort is made to secure the alternative means of transport to those stations.

The project is great, but there is more to do. The committee has done a good job of highlighting some of the problems in the scheme's development. The project can go further. Janis Hughes was right to highlight the need for crossrail

to connect into the system, to allow further access to the east for people in the west, as part of a wider vision of the train system. That also means ensuring that the communities in Plains and Blackridge, which Karen Whitefield talked about, have access to the line's benefits. People should not just see eight trains an hour whizz through at the bottom of their garden; they should be able to access those trains and facilities.

The project is great. I congratulate the Scottish Executive on introducing it and on securing the £300 million of expenditure. However, more has still to be done if we want to secure the maximum benefit from the scheme.

15:28

**Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** Like many members, I am delighted to have reached the final stage of the legislative process and I look forward to the reopening of the Airdrie to Bathgate line. It has been a bumpy ride at times.

I thank the private bill committee members. Phil Gallie ably chaired the committee. I have listened to him for many years and I am sure that he will be pleased to know that he is still many miles from me politically. However, on this occasion, he has done my constituents a great service, for which I thank him. I wish him well in his retirement and future endeavours.

I am grateful to the other committee members who took on the bill. It came on top of their usual busy workload, but they listened attentively to all—particularly me and my constituents—who made presentations to them about Blackridge station. I thank Janis Hughes in particular and wish her all the best for the future. I have frequently had the pleasure of working with her on committees and I am sorry that that will not continue in the next session. I commend Network Rail for its work and look forward to working with it during the rebuilding process.

The idea of reopening the section of the line came after discussions between politicians and officials in West Lothian and North Lanarkshire. At first, even the Scottish Executive was a little reluctant to make a commitment to it. However, the Executive saw the success of the Edinburgh to Bathgate route, which my Labour colleagues on Lothian Regional Council bravely reopened, and the results of the central Scotland transport corridor study, and saw that there was a strong case for reopening the section. Therefore, it responded accordingly.

There was no long-running campaign with romantic attachments to a previous era; instead, a hard-headed business decision was taken. As many members have said, the line will allow people in West Lothian and North Lanarkshire to

access jobs and education in the east and the west. It will allow businesses to move out of the hotspots of Edinburgh and Glasgow and still attract workforces, and it will benefit people at stops in between.

There are many good things to be said about the reopening of the link, which I am sure we will hear. However, I want to mention a couple of outstanding niggles.

I was pleased that the Scottish Executive and Network Rail saw the sense of pushing on with the dual tracking of the Uphall to Bathgate section prior to the bill being passed. I am impatient to see that work finished when I pass workers just outside Uphall station, but I say to the minister that I am not nearly as impatient as my constituents, who are experiencing a dreadful service between Edinburgh and Bathgate. I have had numerous discussions with First ScotRail about the delays, and particularly about cancellations on the Bathgate part of the journey. I hope that the minister will use his influence to speak to First ScotRail and ensure that it keeps to the contract agreements that it has signed, which will allow people to get to work on time, fulfil family commitments and so on.

Members will not be surprised about my second niggle. We will not agree today to stations at Blackridge and Plains. I have referred to the beginnings of the project. I accept that the proposal was purely that there should be a line between Airdrie and Bathgate; stations in between were considered only after local intervention. However, given the housing growth in West Lothian and North Lanarkshire, it would have been a wasted opportunity not to propose additional stations.

I said that reopening the line was a hard-headed business decision. I contend that a station at Blackridge would tick all the appropriate boxes. There would be a good-sized catchment area; there are few other public transport options there, as the bus service is poor; and the community is growing. I have a gnawing suspicion that train people do not really like stations, as they stop trains running, that someone thought that it would be a good idea to offer us two of the four stations, and that we would settle for that and run away. They did not appreciate how strongly the communities of Blackridge, Greenrigg and Plains felt.

**Phil Gallie:** I understand the point that Mary Mulligan makes about train companies not liking trains stopping. They think that too many stops reduce the number of customers on lines because they increase the time that trains spend on routes. However, in light of what has been said about the Glasgow to Edinburgh link, is not there potential on the Airdrie to Bathgate line to miss out stops

occasionally to allow additional pick-ups at Blackridge and Plains?

**Mrs Mulligan:** Absolutely. I have always contended that, with a bit of imaginative thought, Network Rail could have planned a timetable that would have allowed that, particularly given that other stations on the line would have lower footfalls.

Despite the two niggles that I have mentioned, I strongly welcome the bill and recognise that Karen Whitefield and I will have the opportunity in the next session, given the new legislation, to see a speedier response to our desire for stations at Blackridge and Plains. The Parliament has done well in opening new rail lines. Railways are good for the economy, the environment and social inclusion, and the Airdrie to Bathgate rail link will deliver in all those areas. At something more than £300 million, it will be well worth the money. It will greatly benefit many of my constituents, including—I say to Mark Ballard—cyclists in my constituency, as there will be a track alongside it. I look forward to being on the first journey on the newly constructed Airdrie to Bathgate rail link.

15:35

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** On behalf of my constituents in the Lothians, I thank the committee for its diligence. It has served the people of West Lothian and Lanarkshire well in its deliberations. I also thank the clerks for their diligence. The parliamentary clerks are very dedicated to their work—none more so than those who serve private bill committees, as private bills are among the most difficult bills to steer through Parliament. I thank Fergus Cochrane, in particular, for his work on the bill.

When I was growing up in Ayr, George Younger was the local member of Parliament. Phil Gallie, his successor, had a hard act to follow. However, regardless of whether people voted for Phil, the people of Ayr always knew that they had an MP who fought for them. I thank Phil Gallie for taking on that role. It is interesting that, for somebody who opposed the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, he has been a vocal, diligent and effective member of the Parliament. He will be missed by members of all parties.

This is an important bill. In reminiscing about my childhood in Ayr, I reflect on the fact that, a few weeks ago, I attended an event for two West Lothian councillors—Jim Sibbald of Armadale and Audrey Gordon of Boghall in Bathgate—who will retire in a few weeks' time and who have served as councillors for 20 or 30 years. However, it was Councillor David Ramsey who was instrumental in getting the Bathgate to Edinburgh line opened and it was Robert Kerr, a West Lothian county

councillor in the 1960s, who was behind the petition to reopen it. In the 1980s, we managed to get the successful Bathgate to Edinburgh line opened; in the future, the Airdrie to Bathgate line, too, will be effective and will be well used.

It was extremely good that the committee made Network Rail, North Lanarkshire Council and West Lothian Council return to explain further points and pursue particular issues. I pay tribute to the people of West Lothian Council, who have worked hard to respond to some of the issues that the committee raised—especially the housing issue.

The benefit cost ratio of the line was originally estimated at 1.81. Network Rail has said that the station at Blackridge, which has been a point of contention, will reduce the benefit cost ratio to 1.71. It was interesting that, when the responses came back from the councils regarding what the future housing developments would be, the benefit cost ratio was revised. In Armadale, 2,000 houses are planned. In Blackridge, there are currently 750 houses and another 750 are planned. In Whitburn, on the Polkemmet site, which is very near the line, 2,000 houses are planned, although there will perhaps be another 1,000 and the developer is hopeful of building up to 5,000—that will be a major development in the area. The revised benefit cost ratio was 1.92, and that was without the Blackridge station. If the Blackridge station is included—and it is recognised that there may be some footfall issues—the benefit cost ratio, with the proposals for housing development, might be the same as it would have been for the original proposals without the Blackridge station. So, things can move on.

In that spirit, I want to look forward. Fergus Ewing gives his apologies for having to leave the chamber for a moment. He was characteristically modest in failing to mention that he visited Blackridge. He went to the old station house and saw where the lines would go. I am delighted that the SNP has made a public commitment to legislate for and fund the building of the Blackridge station. We look forward to seeing the Scottish transport appraisal guidance appraisal for the Plains station, to ensure that we have a proposal that fits both stations.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Did the shadow transport minister visit Plains as well?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am sorry. I did not quite catch what the member said. It is important that we recognise—

**Jeremy Purvis** *rose*—

**Fiona Hyslop:** Sorry. I will give way.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Did the shadow transport minister visit Plains as well?



**Fiona Hyslop:** I think that there is an outstanding invitation. I represent the Lothians. Not only did Fergus Ewing visit Blackridge, he visited the Avon gorge, which has one of the most difficult stretches of road—it has a 15 per cent gradient—and is a problematic area for the people of West Lothian. I look forward to Fergus Ewing as transport minister delivering on the Avon gorge road as well as the Blackridge station.

Interestingly, I looked at one of Mary Mulligan's 2003 election addresses, when she said that she looked forward to the Bathgate to Airdrie line being open by 2007. Perhaps that was a hope rather than an expectation. Under the current proposals, the line will be reopened in 2010, when it will make a constructive contribution to the local economy.

We have to look forward. The bill committee, the minister, the civil service and everyone who has been involved in the project so far are, in many ways, handing over a baton. The MSPs in the next session of Parliament will have to drive the project forward and ensure that Network Rail delivers on time, that Transport Scotland delivers on its recommendations and that the project is monitored effectively.

This is an important job for the Parliament. It is fitting that this bill should be one of the final bills that will be passed in this session. The objective now is to proceed with the job so that the line can reopen for the benefit of the people of West Lothian and Lanarkshire.

15:41

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** With regard to how strategic a view the Scottish National Party takes of this and other transport projects, the fact that the shadow transport minister visited only one place shows that the visit was more about politics than transport strategy.

As a member of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee and the Parliament, I take great pleasure in recommending the approval of the bill and the railway. In my first parliamentary speech, I raised the issue of the need for communities throughout Scotland to be connected by rail and to have proper integrated public transport links. That is particularly important for rural and urban deprived areas.

Inevitably, and unsurprisingly, my maiden speech focused on my own constituency. Other members have spoken with determination about how important the project is to their area. However, today we are at the final stage of a project for Scotland, for the people of West Lothian and North Lanarkshire, and, with its associated works, for the wider network. I am happy that my final speech of the parliamentary

session—although I hope to be returned—is also about rail projects.

In 1993, when I was a student, I was lucky enough to be in the House of Commons on the night of the vote on the Maastricht treaty. The House of Commons was divided and it was a late-night debate. Mr Gallie was directly involved in debates around that time, and he has consistently held his views over the years since then, which is to be admired. However, division was not needed and did not exist on the committee under his convenership. Even with his evident enjoyment in tackling the line of questioning about whether the bill is ECHR-compliant, he was consistent in his support of the project. I never determined whether he was glad or disappointed that the bill is ECHR-compliant. I wish those colleagues who are not returning to the Parliament well.

As other members have said, we owe a debt of gratitude to the committed, determined and persistent clerking staff. We would not be able to do the job for the communities that we represent without such dedication from the clerking staff, which all committee members have seen during the past few months.

With my interest in the Borders rail line, membership of the Edinburgh Tram (Line Two) Bill Committee and my membership of the bill committee for this important bill, I am proud to have played a very small part in facilitating a record level of investment in rail infrastructure in Scotland.

I see that my chief whip is sitting in front of me, so I stress that my relatively positive experience on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee should not in any way be construed as enthusiasm to be a member of another private bill committee if I am returned as a member in the next parliamentary session.

The Parliament has a duty to scrutinise thoroughly proposals for calls on the public purse—more than £300 million in this case—as well as major pieces of planning legislation. Within those areas, the committee was disappointed with some of the promoter's approach in presenting its evidence to us. Our preliminary report determined that the housing forecasts that were presented to us were incomplete. Given that that is such an important matter, and given the impact that new residents will have on the patronage forecasts that underpin the benefit cost ratio of the railway and the on-going subsidies that will be required if it is to provide a satisfactory service for those communities, we were disappointed. It was particularly disappointing because, in the preliminary stage debate, I highlighted the fact that the committee did not think that there was the necessary relationship between the local authorities and Transport Scotland or the required

clarity of information. We got the information that we needed only because of the persistent questioning of committee members.

On the positive side, the picture in West Lothian was somewhat more conclusive. The committee can draw much greater comfort from the work that has been done there. West Lothian Council officials should be commended for responding positively at preliminary stage to the committee's requests for more information. Much of the new housing that is planned in the western part of West Lothian, about which members have spoken, will benefit the scheme directly. The council gave evidence that there is a commitment to deliver more than 6,000 houses in the period to 2011, rising to more than 7,000 by 2015. The committee saw that as positive, but appreciated that it would place considerable burdens on the local infrastructure in the areas concerned.

The picture in North Lanarkshire was less clear. We leave the bill process without having a clear picture of the housing that is associated with the project, as the statutory local plan process is still in its early stages.

The committee was disappointed that it did not receive clarification on home loss payments. There is inconsistency between the process in Scotland and that south of the border. The Minister for Transport knows that I have an interest in how the matter affects the proposed rail line in my constituency. It is not acceptable for constituents not to have a clear response from the Executive on its intention for home loss payments. I hope that the Minister for Transport will have an opportunity to respond on that point today or, if not, that he will come back to the Parliament at the earliest opportunity with clarification of the position from the Minister for Communities.

Mary Mulligan was absolutely right to say that today we are making a hard-headed business decision, but it is more than that. The Executive is delivering record investment in the rail infrastructure, connecting all areas of Scotland. Communities in Midlothian and my constituency in the Borders, communities in Lanarkshire and West Lothian, and Scotland as a whole will benefit from that investment. That is why I have no hesitation in recommending today that the bill be passed.

15:47

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** I agree with many previous speakers, including Karen Whitefield and Mary Mulligan, that the project will bring economic, environmental, social and educational benefits to people throughout the M8 corridor. It will mean that my constituents in places such as Livingston and Broxburn will be able to travel to North Lanarkshire and, in particular, to

Glasgow to take up employment and educational opportunities. A significant proportion of the population of West Lothian—including me—hails originally from Glasgow, and many of us still have strong social and family links with the west of Scotland.

The project builds on the success of the existing Bathgate to Edinburgh rail line, which was reopened in the 1980s to boost a West Lothian economy that was suffering from mass unemployment. The reopening of the line played a significant role in the economic and population growth of towns such as Livingston, Broxburn and Bathgate, by making them attractive places to live for people who wanted to work in Edinburgh and by making West Lothian a more attractive place for employers to base themselves because of the improvement in transport links. The line made a significant difference to West Lothian in that regard.

Tribute should be paid to my late colleague Robin Cook, who played a major part in pushing for the project to be delivered. Those who pushed for the project could not have dreamed that it would be so successful. Its success has led to a doubling in the frequency of trains, from hourly to half hourly, and to a doubling in the capacity of those trains, from mainly three-coach trains to six-coach trains at peak times. The Executive has made those changes in the past few years.

The project that we are debating today will take forward West Lothian and North Lanarkshire in far more positive economic circumstances. Currently economic participation in West Lothian is higher, and unemployment is lower, than the Scottish, United Kingdom and European averages. However, we want to push down further the unemployment that still exists in pockets in West Lothian. In particular, we want to ensure that we get the highest levels of engagement in the economy by young people. The completion of the line to link the Airdrie to Glasgow and Bathgate to Edinburgh lines will allow us to build on that more favourable economic climate, help us to increase further employment opportunities and support the expected and planned continued population growth in West Lothian.

On benefits to existing commuters, as part of the project a number of enhancements will be made to the Bathgate to Edinburgh line, as Mary Mulligan mentioned. Twin-tracking will take place: work to clear the way has already started. There will be electrification and improved rolling stock. Trains will move to a 15-minute frequency, which will double the capacity of the line at peak times. I inform Mark Ballard that there will also be extra park-and-ride capacity, which is important. Although we want many people to access the lines by foot or cycle, it will remain the case that many

will make part of their journey by car and part of it by public transport. That has to be preferable to people taking their cars into our major cities Edinburgh and Glasgow. Park and ride is an important part of the environmental contribution of the project.

Rail passenger numbers have grown considerably in recent years. This project, along with a number of others that have been agreed to recently, will allow that public transport growth to continue in the decade ahead and will provide more opportunities for people to travel in and out of Glasgow and Edinburgh without taking their cars, thereby reducing congestion and the environmental consequences of the overuse of cars.

This new railway project will bring benefits to my constituents in Livingston and to many communities along the M8 corridor—in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and Edinburgh in particular, as well as in adjoining communities. The project will be good for the economy, will benefit the environment and will open up new social and educational opportunities. That one of the last decisions made in this parliamentary session will also be one of the best and most beneficial to my constituents and those of Karen Whitefield and Mary Mulligan is a good note on which to sign off. I am sure that the bill will be passed unanimously at decision time.

15:52

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** At the risk of repetition, I repeat what I said last week in the chamber: as a resident of Ayr, I vouch that Phil Gallie is the best member of Parliament that Ayr has ever had and, as Fiona Hyslop said, that is a great compliment, because Sir Thomas Moore and George Younger were very good constituency MPs before him. As a constituency member, Phil Gallie has been absolutely outstanding. I also pay tribute to Janis Hughes and wish her all the best in the future. Unlike Phil Gallie, she will not be retiring; she is going to pastures new. I am not tempted by this morning's poll to comment on those who might not be here involuntarily after 3 May, but we wish them well, too.

The committee's work and its report are an exemplar of the way in which a private bill committee should work. Not only did it produce excellent reports, listen carefully to witnesses and take into account fairly and objectively all the points that were made in evidence to it, it influenced heavily the behaviour of Network Rail in particular, about which I will say more in a minute or two. I do not hesitate to congratulate the committee on its excellent work on the bill.

As every speaker from every party has said, the project ticks all the right boxes. First, it ticks the economic box, because it will benefit the West Lothian and Lanarkshire economies, and by expanding the labour market throughout the west central belt it will benefit others outwith Lanarkshire and West Lothian. Secondly, it ticks the environmental box, because it will expand our railway network and, as Fergus Ewing mentioned, hopefully divert some traffic from our road network, and the M8 in particular. Thirdly, the project also ticks the social box. After all, surely it is socially beneficial to have a rail network that not only links Bathgate and Airdrie but strengthens links with Edinburgh, Glasgow and places as far afield as Helensburgh.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Does the member agree that the line will also very much benefit the people of Coatbridge?

**Alex Neil:** Of course I do. Indeed, that will be a very important consideration, particularly over the next five weeks. This project, which will involve public sector investment of about £300 million, is excellent and will provide real value for money.

That said, I have three points to make. First, as the committee has pointed out, we must monitor the long-term provision of local integrated bus services to maximise the project's economic and social potential. The Executive and local constituency and regional members will keep a close eye on progress in that respect.

Secondly, I hope that, during the bill's passage, the Parliament has learned a lesson about Network Rail. I have attended a number of meetings on the issue of Network Rail's treatment of constituents and organisations, such as the angling club that uses Hillend fishing lodge in Airdrie. I have to say that the senior management of Network Rail in Scotland have a lot to answer for. Their attitude to individuals and local organisations has been dictatorial, unreasonable, secretive and uncompromising, and their handling of the community with this project has been totally incompetent. Thanks to the committee, Network Rail has been forced against its wishes to come to a compromise or reach a deal on many issues, particularly with regard to the fishing lodge and the compulsory purchase of houses in Caldercruix. The minister needs to keep an eye on Network Rail's senior management, because if that is how they think people should be handled, they need a lesson in democracy, transparency and accountability.

My final point, which underlines a wise comment that Phil Gallie made in his speech, relates to Network Rail, Transport Scotland and the Executive. We will keep a close eye on proceedings to ensure that all the commitments that have been made are kept and implemented,

because only by doing so will we ensure that not only central Scotland but the whole country experiences the real, major benefits that the project can bring. In any case, that is exactly the sort of thing that this Parliament and an Executive should be doing.

15:58

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** I support this much-wanted bill, which provides for the reopening of the former Airdrie to Bathgate line by re-laying missing track between Bathgate and Drumgelloch. In practical terms, it means that when the new line is completed by the end of 2010—at least, that is the current estimate—trains will run from Helensburgh through Glasgow Queen Street to Edinburgh, calling at Airdrie and a relocated Bathgate station. In addition, the bill provides for the reopening of stations at Caldercruix and Armadale and the relocation of the existing station at Drumgelloch.

However, as a Central Scotland MSP, I am interested specifically in the project's positive economic benefits for people in Monklands, Coatbridge and, in particular, the constituency of Airdrie and Shotts. In that regard, I acknowledge the work and commitment of the constituency MSP Karen Whitefield in helping to make the bill a reality. That part of North Lanarkshire has poor transport connections with Edinburgh and suffers from a marked degree of social and economic neglect, which was exacerbated when the Boots factory—a major employer in Airdrie for more than 50 years—closed in February 2005 with the loss of more than 800 jobs. It is hoped that the provision of enhanced public transport opportunities to that area of North Lanarkshire and to those who do not have access to private cars will in turn boost the local economy in Airdrie and in the other towns that the railway will serve, resulting in job creation and population growth.

The bill has much to commend it, not least the contribution that it will make to reducing road congestion on the M8 by providing a public transport alternative to car travel. I welcome the decision to carry out appraisals of the proposals for stations at Blackridge and Plains, although it is regrettable that those stations are not included in the bill. Nonetheless, the bill is an excellent one to be the final bill to come before the Scottish Parliament in its second session. I pay tribute to everyone who has been involved in scrutinising it.

I wish Janis Hughes well for the future and make special mention of the committee convener, my colleague Phil Gallie, whose spontaneous constitutional contributions will be missed in the Parliament. I wonder whether the European Parliament realises what may be about to hit it.

16:01

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I congratulate the committee, which has clearly done a good job, and which, by studying the issues intensively, has done what committees are supposed to do. I congratulate the Executive—which I do not often do—and the Parliament on the positive attitude that we now have to rail infrastructure and improving rail services of all sorts. That contrasts with the situation in the mid-1980s. Various members have mentioned the opening of the passenger line between Edinburgh and Bathgate by Lothian Regional Council. Some of the people who were in favour of that have been mentioned. Obviously, some district councils and members of Parliament supported the proposal, but Lothian Regional Council drove the scheme. However, at that time, there was distinct scepticism about and hostility towards going for rail.

As a result of the curious way in which politics operates, no party on the council at the time had an overall majority. A proposal was produced for a road into Edinburgh, which was controversial, but, as part of the package, we achieved the reopening of the Edinburgh to Bathgate line for passengers, with a station at Livingston, the Livingston South station on the Shotts line and a station in Corstorphine, at South Gyle. The proposals were revolutionary because of the promotion of rail infrastructure, for which Lothian Regional Council deserves great credit. That is an example of the fact that, although in politics we have ever-changing coalitions, we do not need formal coalitions; we can have intelligent co-operation between parties. We could do a lot more of that in the Parliament.

We have come a long way and we now have a better attitude to rail. As members have said eloquently, the Airdrie to Bathgate line will be helpful. It is not simply about getting people from Airdrie into Edinburgh and people from Bathgate to Glasgow, although those features are important, especially for education and jobs. As members have said, developments in housing and job opportunities are taking place in North Lanarkshire and West Lothian. We can have better trade between the towns there. It is certainly a problem in central Scotland that, although the towns in the area between Edinburgh and Glasgow often have good transport links to Edinburgh or Glasgow, the links within the area are not good. We can build up a much better transport network in North Lanarkshire and West Lothian and so develop the prosperity of the towns there. The railway line will be useful.

I am not sure whether this will be my last effort at entertaining members. I am not into nostalgia, but I want to thank members. Everyone in the

Parliament is genuinely doing their best and they all make good contributions in different ways. I would especially like to congratulate those colleagues in all parties who argue the argument and who do not make up for the lack of an argument with political, party or personal abuse. I value people who argue in what I regard as a civilised manner.

The Parliament has a lot to congratulate itself on, as does the Executive. We have done quite a lot of good things but there is still a huge amount to be done. There is still a lot wrong with Scotland, with the Executive and with the Parliament. Members who have the good fortune to be elected in future will have plenty of good things to do. My commiserations to those who will be leaving involuntarily, and my congratulations to the colleagues already mentioned who are leaving voluntarily.

I hope to pursue the issues that excite me from outwith the Parliament, so I am not making a retiral speech. I will merely be wearing a different hat in future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** We come now to the winding-up speeches.

16:06

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** The Airdrie to Bathgate train line will link communities across Scotland and it will encourage more people to get out of their cars and on to the railways. It is a good-news story. Scotland has built more railway services than the rest of the United Kingdom, and we are committed to continuing to do so.

As Phil Gallie said, this is the last time that the Parliament will use the private bill mechanism for railways. Of course, that is welcome, but we in the bill committee have taken our job seriously to ensure not only that the bill was viable but that local people would be taken into consideration when construction was under way.

At the risk of sounding like an anorak, I want to talk about the code of construction practice. The code sets out how the promoter will minimise the disruption and the impact on local people. It is a robust document that can, and will, be further improved in the period up to the commencement of works. The latest COCP offers greater protection to local communities and an opportunity for engagement between them and the promoter. It includes more than 100 improvements identified by the committee since the first version was submitted. That version was far from perfect and far from fit for purpose. Many enhancements have been identified by councils, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

We have made some important changes to reduce construction impacts. Examples include a reduction in the construction hours of working. If the promoter wishes to work outwith those hours, the COCP provides a mechanism for that and for approval by local councils. The COCP now has statutory backing to ensure that the promoter complies fully with it. That is an important change, given the real concern among objectors about whether they could trust the promoter to deliver construction mitigation measures.

A planning monitoring officer has been appointed, funded by but independent of the promoter, to oversee compliance with environmental mitigation standards, including the code of construction practice. That officer will be able to halt construction works if standards are breached. That is a very important addition to the legislation. There was opposition to the creation of the post from the promoter, which wanted to deal with the issues in-house. However, such appointments are accepted practice in transport projects such as this. The appointment will ensure that the monitoring process is open, transparent and accountable.

There will also be improvements to the requirement on the promoter to liaise with and engage with bodies such as local councils, SEPA and SNH on the consideration of mitigation plans and mechanisms. There is a provision for equipment to monitor noise, vibration and dust at site-specific locations. Objectors were concerned about such impacts.

There will be one-to-one engagement and dialogue, between Network Rail and every person affected, on the provision of screening—such as planting—to lessen the visual impact of the railway. For every tree damaged or cut down because of the construction works, two will be planted to take its place.

We come now to even more anorak stuff. The noise and vibration policy sets out how the promoter will minimise disruption from noise and vibration during the operation of the railway. The NVP has statutory backing to give it teeth, and it will be enforced through the local planning authorities. Local people along the railway route can be assured that the promoter has no choice but to comply with the document. As I said, the first version that was submitted was far from satisfactory, but the latest version incorporates many of the improvements that were identified by the committee and the councils. The NVP now reflects more appropriate standards and expectations in the noise and vibration monitoring regime that it sets out.

I welcome the approach of designing out noise at source, rather than relying on the provision of physical barriers, which will be implemented

through measures such as track alignment, the use of rubber rail pads, the minimisation of track welding and joints, the use of ballast, the use of natural screening such as banking and an effective regime of train maintenance. The NVP provides a noise-monitoring regime for each of the first seven years. The bill committee hopes that those measures will give some comfort to local residents.

I thank all those who have worked to bring the bill this far: Network Rail, our assessor, the many people who gave evidence to us, our smashing clerking team and our excellent convener. I wish him well in his retirement and offer my best wishes for her future to my sister Janis Hughes. I have enjoyed my involvement in the consideration of an interesting bill. I like trains and think that railways are extremely important for our economy and our environment. We should be proud of the bill and I urge all members to support it.

16:11

**Mr Davidson:** The debate has been wide ranging and consensual and has covered all the relevant issues. The committee has done a wonderful job and the procedures that will be followed as a result of its work—the promoter's acceptance of which we hope will be backed up by the Executive—are a model of how we should deal with public consultation on projects that have a huge impact on people's lives.

The economic and social arguments for the railway have been well made. We must now apply the lessons that have been learned from consideration of the bill. I am not suggesting that we should retain the private bill procedure, but that we should adopt the model of practice that Cathy Peattie so eloquently outlined.

As Jeremy Purvis said, it is important that we review the compulsory purchase order provisions that apply in Scotland, which are way out of date. In England, such provisions are revised fairly regularly. There is a disparity in the value of the payments that are made. I want the minister to take on board Network Rail's good practice of purchasing properties that will suffer from proximity blight and to build it into a modernised compulsory purchase order scheme. That would benefit people who end up living on little traffic islands as a result of big road projects going past their houses, for example. *[Interruption.]* Mr Adam is quite unfair to suggest that I would benefit from such a measure, because my house is not affected in that way. Network Rail's good practice serves as an important lesson.

Many members have talked about how the railway will affect the residents of their constituencies. Collectively, through the facilitation

of the committee, the Parliament has done an excellent job. I congratulate all the committee's members, the clerks, the people who gave evidence and—for taking on board many of the issues that have been raised—Network Rail. I commend the way in which people have worked together. Although I am not a huge fan of coalition, people working together intelligently can make things happen, as Donald Gorrie rightly said. I hope that the bill will be passed unanimously at decision time.

16:13

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** It is right that tributes are being paid to those members who will leave the Parliament in the next few days. I would like to reminisce a little about Phil Gallie, who—it is my recollection—challenged for the leadership of the Parliament's Conservative group. We can speculate about how different things might have been if Phil Gallie had led the Tory group in either of the Parliament's first two sessions, but I understand that he is not really retiring and that he hopes to continue his political career elsewhere. He wants to get the full set—coouncil, Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament. He might be more successful in challenging for the leadership of the Conservative party's European group, wherever that happens to sit on the political spectrum. His strong views will undoubtedly contribute if he fulfils that particular ambition.

Members have used the debate, rightly, to address wider railway and transport issues. At risk of appearing to be Stewart Stevenson mark 2, I will say that my father was a railwayman and my family was temporarily broken up as a result of the Beeching cuts. During the first two sessions of the Scottish Parliament we have made sensible attempts to restore lines that should never have gone and to develop lines that we will need in future. If we are to bring about a shift in people's transport choices we must offer realistic alternatives, such as rail.

**Bristow Muldoon:** In the light of Mr Adam's commitment to railways, which I welcome, how can it make sense for the Scottish National Party to oppose the building of a railway line to an airport that serves 78 million people a year?

**Brian Adam:** I will talk later about the choices that people make.

The development of railways is important and the Airdrie to Bathgate line will make a significant contribution. Members eloquently put the case for the line and it is great that there is consensus in the Parliament on the bill.

I am not sure that many members will lament the fact that we are about to pass the final transport

bill to be considered under the private bill procedures. There is a great deal of detail in the bill, some of which was mentioned by members—Cathy Peattie talked about the anorak stuff. The matter is complex. We cannot just decide to restore or build a new railway. The process requires much detailed thought and, not least, engagement with the public. Concern has been expressed about how the public were engaged with in the initial stages of the Airdrie to Bathgate proposal. My colleague Mr Neil took a view on how public bodies pursued the project and spoke eloquently on the matter during the debate. However, the committee addressed many of the public's concerns.

The bill will bring opportunities for regeneration in West Lothian and North Lanarkshire. I hope that it will not just encourage people from those areas to travel to Glasgow or Edinburgh to work, but provide opportunities for them to work at home and for other people to move to the areas. I hope that West Lothian and North Lanarkshire will become more attractive to employers and that people will be able to work closer to home. However, the bill will improve connectivity and there is no doubt that it will make a significant difference to congestion on the M8 corridor.

Not every project will attract universal support. Many significant capital transport projects—£300 million is not an insignificant amount—are being considered, so we must make choices. The public will have their say on the choices that are set out in each political party's programme. Mr Muldoon was right to say that the SNP did not support the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link Bill. We support a link to Edinburgh airport but we do not think that the EARL project represents value for money. We can all argue our cases and we will hear the public's verdict on them very soon.

I believe that this project is worthy of support for a variety of reasons. It can perhaps be developed further by the introduction of new stations.

Other members mentioned crossrail. The mentions of crossrail assume that the reference is to Glasgow crossrail, but I am aware of two crossrail projects that are on the stocks—there may be others—as there is also one in Aberdeen. I welcome the fact that new stations can be opened. I certainly hope to see the Aberdeen crossrail project get off the ground. The options that are being considered by Network Rail for improvements to the railways will give us the chance further to develop our railway system, admittedly with significant capital costs across the board.

The choices available mean that not necessarily every project will be endorsed, but the Airdrie to Bathgate line is one that the SNP is delighted to endorse. We would also endorse having another close look at Plains and Blackridge stations.

16:21

**Tavish Scott:** Cathy Peattie made an excellent point about the 100 separate improvements to the code of construction practice that were identified by the committee on the basis of the evidence presented during the passage of the bill. That is what this place was recreated to do. The fact that so much work has been done by so many individuals, both in the committee and in the Parliament generally, is one of the important points that we must reflect on as we consider our procedures and look towards the new mechanism for handling capital transport projects in the future.

I welcome Karen Whitefield, Mary Mulligan and Bristow Muldoon's consistent and sustained arguments in favour of the measure that we are passing today. That has been important from a number of perspectives.

I will deal with a number of issues that have been raised. First, I say to Mary Mulligan that I am aware of the concerns that she expressed about the Edinburgh to Bathgate service. I will ensure that First ScotRail know of those concerns and, more to the point, act upon them. She also made a not unfair observation about train anoraks not liking stations. We have had similar debates in other places and no doubt will do so again in future. It is a fact that in dealing with the obvious desire to improve city-to-city connection times, we have to consider the number of stops that are on a particular line. The point that Mr Muldoon and others have made repeatedly in the chamber and in committee debates is that when there are four rail lines between Edinburgh and Glasgow we will be able to do much more about connecting the communities in between Glasgow and Edinburgh and about improving journey times, which I know is a cross-party wish.

I say to Mark Ballard that we will invest more in car parks and in better bus links, but I do not want a rail station to be only a rail station: I want them all to be—as far as we can achieve—proper transport interchanges, so that people can move between different modes of transport.

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** I think that everyone agrees that the bill is excellent, but the missing link that no one has mentioned is the 20 per cent of the population who will not be able to afford to use the facility. Will the minister look into free off-peak travel for pensioners and ensure that the facility can be fully used once it has been established?

**Tavish Scott:** We are certainly examining the affordability of our rail network generally. A fare review, which will inform ministerial decisions on the matter later in the year, is now under way. I take Mr Swinburne's point about many of the people whom he represents, although we all have

a general concern to make further progress on the issue.

I thank Donald Gorrie for his warm words. I see that, unfortunately, he has now left the chamber. Liberal Democrat ministers have not always enjoyed such support from Donald, but we certainly do today. Although it will be on the record rather than to him in person, I wish him a happy retirement and particularly give my best wishes to Astrid at this time. I have, as I am sure we all do, a number of constituents who write to me in exacting detail on many issues. Donald Gorrie may become such a constituent in the coming years.

Jeremy Purvis mentioned home loss payments. I say to him and to other members that I am very disappointed that we have not been able to come to final conclusions on that matter. As he and the committee know, the matter is under active consideration. The Deputy Minister for Communities wrote to the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee about that on 15 February. I earnestly hope that we will come to conclusions on the issue as quickly as we possibly can. I understand the points that members have raised on the subject.

Alex Neil—who is also not in the chamber at this point—and other members asked about integration with bus services. As Mr Gallie might have already pointed out, all parties gave firm commitments to take forward the necessary work no later than 18 months before the rail service is due to operate. It is important to emphasise that.

**Mark Ballard:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Tavish Scott:** May I finish these couple of points and then give way?

David Davidson raised timetabling issues. As the evidence to the committee has shown, the new direct service will take only 42 minutes to reach Glasgow from Bathgate. Currently, the journey takes one hour and 25 minutes on average. Colleagues have spoken about the sheer drive behind the project, and that is the sort of improvement that could be made to timetabling.

Mr Adam made an interesting wind-up speech on behalf of the Scottish National Party. He restated his party's opposition to connecting Edinburgh airport to our rail network. His is not a position that we support in any way whatsoever. The problem is that, one day, the SNP says that the saved money could pay for Waverley station—as Mr Ewing said today—but, another day, Mr Adam starts to talk about Aberdeen crossrail. We never quite know what the SNP's transport policy is. I am sure that Mr Morgan can wind up and help us with those points. I always enjoy transport debates, because we hear so many views from the SNP benches as to what it should spend

money on. As Mr Morgan will be winding up—and as Alex Neil mentioned this morning's opinion poll—I hope that he will deal firmly with such misplaced optimism.

The Airdrie to Bathgate line is an important project for Scotland, and I hope that the Parliament will support the bill this evening.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will now be winding up for the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, Mr Morgan.

16:26

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I never intended to do anything else, Presiding Officer—as you well know, I suspect.

I congratulate Phil Gallie, Janis Hughes, Donald Gorrie and others who, knowingly or unknowingly, have made speeches in this chamber for the last time. I do not think that it is an anticlimax to their careers to contribute on such a bill, because I do not think that there is any finer cause than restoring an old railway line. That having been said, the committee process that we had to go through to get here—a private works bill—is not sexy. It does not get the headlines—or very rarely, anyway. The process is long-drawn-out and there is little opportunity—none, in fact—for fine speeches.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Well—

**Alasdair Morgan:** Perhaps Mr Purvis wishes to say that he made many fine speeches. I must have exited from the committee at that stage.

Anyone who doubts what I have said need only look at the holyrood.tv website, where they might still be able to catch the webcast of our consideration of amendments at consideration stage. We were all provided with extensive speaking notes on the many complex amendments, almost as a legal requirement. The webcast of that meeting gives a real flavour of what it was like to serve on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee.

In their scrutiny of works bills, committees need to balance schemes' projected regional and—in this case—national social and economic benefits against the local economic impacts. I hope that we performed that task reasonably well. As members have mentioned, we recognised the real benefits that the railway could bring, through improved connectivity and accessibility, to the regional and national economy, particularly with respect to job creation in Edinburgh and Glasgow, new housing and access to educational and training opportunities. That is particularly important for communities that have been deprived of such access over many decades.



We have to balance those benefits against the physical impact the railway will have and its impact on individuals. We need to assess how any adverse impacts might be lessened. A small example of that, which I think has been mentioned, are the measures the promoter might provide to minimise the risks of vandalism and antisocial behaviour at the local sailing club. That does not rate highly in the national economic scheme of things, but it is very important to the sailing club. The committee managed to get the British Transport police to review security at the club's premises to recommend specific measures that might be put in place, such as fencing, tree planting and the installation of closed-circuit television. The promoter will have to provide whatever results from that investigation.

In striking a balance, we have secured important changes to the project that will reduce the constructional and operational impact and provide greater protection to individuals, particularly those who are close to or next to the railway. It is important to acknowledge that.

I am glad that there has been such unanimity about the principle of restoring the link. Some gentle electioneering went on, but nothing too heavy given that there was such consensus on the bill. Even though, as a nationalist, I baulk slightly at restoring a link that was once part of the North British Railway—I would have preferred it to be an ex-Caledonian line—I am still strongly in favour of the project.

Our debate is indicative of the way rail is beginning to regain its rightful place as the more frequent winner when transport choices are being made by individuals and Governments.

Members have clearly spelt out the benefits of increased connectivity between communities in the west that are to the east of Glasgow and communities in the east that are to the west of Edinburgh. It is clear that such connectivity cannot come from road transport.

Several members referred to the success of the reopened Edinburgh to Bathgate line, and various sets of politicians who participated in or contributed to it have been mentioned. Congratulations should also go to Chris Green, who was head of ScotRail at the time—I think that he is now with Virgin. He was an important driving force behind the reopening. I say that because although the committee was occasionally critical of Network Rail in its communications with it and in its reports, it was important to the project as a whole that we had an enthusiastic promoter who wanted to get the railway reinstated.

**Cathy Peattie:** Does Alasdair Morgan agree that Alex Neil was quite unfair in what he said about Network Rail? Our role as a committee was

to question the promoter and to make amendments in line with the requests of local authorities and others from whom we took evidence. I object to the way Alex Neil spoke about Network Rail.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I am sure that the member's remarks are on record. I have just referred to the consensus in the chamber. I am certainly not going to be drawn into criticising individual members at this stage in the debate.

I come to something that Phil Gallie was particularly interested in. There are two reports before members today, the smaller of which is about European protected species. We considered evidence from the promoter and various other statutory bodies on the effects that the works—the construction of the railway line rather than its operation—might have on protected species such as otters, bats and great crested newts. Members will be delighted to know—as, I am sure, are the newts—that with all the mitigation measures and enforcement, the favourable conservation status of otters will not be detrimentally affected in the long term. We have also found that no bat roosts have been identified and that there will be no impact on great crested newts. Nevertheless, we have made changes to the code of construction practice to provide appropriate controls to ensure that all is well. In case not every member has read the report, I can tell them that in the light of the amendments and other improvements made to the scheme, the construction of the railway will not affect the favourable conservation status of otters.

The integration of bus services with the railway is important. The committee is still unconvinced about the provision of local bus services, particularly about how they will integrate with the railway. We received evidence from the promoter, Strathclyde partnership for transport, councils—particularly North Lanarkshire Council—and Transport Scotland, but we felt that a lot of it lacked conviction and certainty. We got broad, sweeping statements, but we did not get real commitments of substance on precisely what will be done or what will be put in place.

West Lothian Council appeared to have made much more progress on the delivery of bus services than North Lanarkshire Council. Paragraph 367 of our report says:

“There is an impression of more confidence and commitment in the West Lothian area to ... capture the benefits of the railway from day one.”

We encourage SPT and North Lanarkshire Council to bring themselves up to that state.

A lot of work remains to be done by Transport Scotland and others to map out a clear and timed strategy for the delivery of the bus services. When and how will they apply for grant funding? When

should work begin on the integrated timetabling of bus and train services? How will the requirements of local communities be gauged and their views sought? If proper bus services are not in place on the day the railway opens, the agencies that I am talking about will have failed this project and the communities that are served by it.

The railway closed to through services in 1956 because it was not carrying enough passengers. I do not think that the same fate will befall the new railway, but the passenger traffic should not come just from those who live extremely close to the railway or can drive to it; it must come from the whole population of the railway corridor.

Mark Ballard referred to the cycle path and cycle access to stations. The committee had concerns at the preliminary stage about the promoter's commitment to a fully functional, integrated and connected cycle path and footpath, to address issues that were raised by the changes that had to be made to national cycle route 75. We were disappointed that, at first, the promoter did not feel obliged to provide a cycle path of a standard equivalent to the current route. There seemed to be a lack of dynamism in its dialogue with the various stakeholders. We have to stress the importance of cycle paths and footpaths for communities along the corridor. I am glad to note that, since the early stages, the promoter has given some positive responses to what we have been saying. At our request, it has established a forum with key stakeholders such as Sustrans that has identified and secured some route alignment improvements. We are glad to note that those improvements can be made without going above the project cost. We hope that that level of constructive engagement continues.

**Mark Ballard:** I welcome the work that the committee did to encourage the promoter to take into account the need to ensure that there is proper walking and cycling connectivity to stations and to renew NCR 75, but does the member share the concern that Sustrans has expressed about the slow rate of acquisition of land to replace NCR 75?

**Alasdair Morgan:** I was going to say that we got a slight impression that, to some extent, the promoter is going through the motions and that there is a lack of dynamism behind what it is saying. Because steam trains needed to run on tracks with light gradients, an old railway line will provide the best cycle route and a replacement route will not be as good, but we have to ensure that the replacement is as good as it can be.

Footpaths are also important because most passengers will access stations on foot. It is therefore important that the promoter takes on board the suggestions and ideas for further enhancement.

There was considerable discussion about flooding, but I do not want to go into that in too much detail. Some of the concerns were, perhaps, not as important as they might have been, but we are reliant on assumptions rather than hard evidence that, for example, culvert capacity will not have to be increased to avoid flooding. The promoter is responsible for undertaking whatever work is necessary to bring whatever flooding risk there will be down to the current level.

We were glad to note the minister's letter of 30 October, in which he acknowledged that there is a case for constructing stations at Blackridge and Plains. We welcome the Executive's commitment to consider that further in the next session of Parliament and, if necessary, to bring forward procedures under the Transport and Works (Scotland) Act 2007 and the normal planning process.

We note in our report that Transport Scotland was rather non-committal on how local community bodies will be involved in the consideration of the stations issue. We expect it to engage fully in gathering local people's views. I was glad to hear what the minister said about that in his opening speech. It is clear that there are difficult issues to be resolved. We need to strike the right balance between journey times—from end to end or between any two points—and the number of stations. I note that the motion for this evening's members' business debate proposes the reopening of various railway stations. The two are not incompatible, but within the constraints of the budget and infrastructure for any project, difficult choices will have to be made. Like the minister, however, I do not agree with Mary Mulligan's view that railway people do not like stations. If I interpret correctly the consensus that emerged during the debate, our view is that although none of us would insist that every train stops at every station, we need an imaginative solution so that each community gets the service that its population merits.

In considering its approach to scrutiny of the bill, the committee recognised the need to ensure that there was open participation. Everyone who was affected had the opportunity to appear before us or the assessor to explain how the railway or its construction would impact on their everyday lives. In its basic and most frightening form, the effect was that the person would lose their house.

The fact that we undertook our scrutiny in such a short time is due to the effective process that the Parliament has developed in the past few years to consider private bills, to the open way in which we tried to engage everyone who was affected, and to the expertise that we and the parliamentary staff gathered during the process. There is a lot to be learned from the process. I hope that, when the

next transport minister develops the Executive's new procedures for considering transport projects, they will recognise the good practice that the private bill committees have developed. It would be unfortunate if key aspects of our scrutiny process, such as those on engagement and the facilitation of discussions, were lost under the new procedure.

In passing, I point out that making the code of construction practice and the noise and vibration policy mandatory accompanying documents was a good thing. A lesson can be learned from that.

I thank the committee's clerking team, which was led by Fergus Cochrane, for the work that it put in. The volume of paper involved in a private bill is frightening. I suspect that if there is one way in which we can improve, it is to reduce the amount of paper that is used. A lot was done electronically, but still quite a few trees were involved in the process.

I support what Phil Gallie and nearly every other member has said: the Airdrie to Bathgate railway is a good project. It is recognised as a much-needed project that can bring important social and economic benefits along the corridor of the line and, due to improved connectivity, throughout Scotland. As we say in our report, the project could be better and we hope that work is taken forward in a positive vein to secure improvements.

I will finish with a quotation from the committee's report. The project can be

"a world class project that captures and maximises benefits to all sections of the community and not just the rail fraternity."

I support both motions in the name of Phil Gallie.

## Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5785, in the name of John Scott, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the reappointment of the Scottish public services ombudsman.

16:45

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** As a member of the SPCB reappointment panel, I speak to the motion in my name to invite members to agree to the nomination of Professor Alice Brown for appointment by Her Majesty the Queen for a second term as the Scottish public services ombudsman. To assist members' consideration of the motion, the SPCB has lodged a brief report that is available at the rear of the chamber.

The ombudsman was considered for reappointment by the SPCB sitting as a selection panel. The Presiding Officer was in the chair and an independent assessor was appointed to oversee the process. I am pleased to say that the assessor, Louise Rose, has provided a validation certificate to confirm that the process conformed to good practice and that the ombudsman is being nominated on merit. On the SPCB's behalf, I thank Louise Rose. She brought a wealth of appointment experience to the panel in ensuring that we complied with good practice and that the process was robust and fair.

On being appointed in 2002, the ombudsman had two competing priorities—dealing with continuing and new complaints and the difficult task of amalgamating the then three existing offices into a one-stop shop to give the public easier access to make complaints about maladministration or service failure in the public sector. It is to the credit of the ombudsman, her deputies and her staff that throughout the time of amalgamation, the office continued to be open for business to deal with complaints and inquiries from the public.

The number of complaints and investigations that the ombudsman undertakes has increased considerably since the one-stop shop was established. The ombudsman's remit was also extended following changes to the NHS complaints process and the inclusion of the further and higher education sectors. That has added to the number of complaints.

The ombudsman is uniquely placed to inform debate on issues that affect the public and those who deliver services, as she has a comprehensive overview of what is and is not working well in the

delivery of public services. As we know, the ombudsman communicates her findings through individual investigative reports and her annual report. I encourage committees to consider those reports as appropriate and possibly to invite the ombudsman to meet them to discuss emerging trends, so that we can consider a strategic approach to addressing issues.

The ombudsman lays reports of her investigations before Parliament and produces a helpful monthly commentary on the reports that are laid.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Is the member aware that one deficiency of the reports that are presented to the Parliament is the lack of clarity about the internal workings of the ombudsman's office, particularly the length of time the ombudsman can take to deal with cases? I wrote to the ombudsman about that and did not receive a substantive answer, which highlighted the fact that no internal record management processes were in place when the ombudsman's term started. Did the interview process clarify that?

**John Scott:** I thank Mr Purvis for his intervention. We have of course raised that with the ombudsman, who assured us that she is addressing those matters, particularly the length of time that is taken to publish reports. I will deal with that in a moment.

If members have seen any of the reports, they will be aware that the ombudsman has found in favour of many complainants and recommended action to improve public service delivery. Members will also be aware that the ombudsman's office follows up matters with organisations to ensure that they have implemented the agreed action.

However, as with any complaints system, not everyone will be satisfied with the outcome. Members are probably more aware than most of the problem, as we try to resolve constituency matters. I am aware that a number of people consider that they have issues with the handling of their complaints. I am sympathetic, but it is important to set the matter in context.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Mr Scott is aware that I have raised with him and the corporate body several concerns about the ombudsman's office's handling of complaints. I have expressed concerns about undue delays in the preparation of cases, to which Mr Purvis referred, and weaknesses in the quality of investigations and reports. What assurances have been sought from the ombudsman that procedures will be altered, on her reappointment, to ensure that such failings will be prevented in the future?

**John Scott:** We share Murdo Fraser's concerns. His point is similar to the point that Mr

Purvis made. We have raised the matters that he asks about with the ombudsman at interview and at other times. I think that he is referring to a two-year delay in one case, which was unacceptable. Professor Brown is also concerned about such matters and assured us at interview that she will address them. Murdo Fraser may be aware that we have significantly increased her budget—by around 20 per cent—which will allow her to employ more people to address delays.

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that the member has only one minute left.

**John Scott:** I am sorry.

The ombudsman has dealt with more than 14,000 complaints and inquiries since she took up office. We have received 20 complaints about the ombudsman, which have primarily been about the time it has taken to handle complaints and the quality of the complaint handling. We thought that it was appropriate to raise those issues with her at interview. In response, she assured us that there will be improvements.

On the length of time it has taken to deal with complaints, the SPCB has, as I said, agreed to a significant increase in funding for the ombudsman's office, which will allow an additional seven staff to be recruited. The ombudsman will also pilot revised procedures. A panel will initially assess all complaints that come into the office to establish whether they are valid, whether they fall within the ombudsman's jurisdiction and whether they should be investigated. We hope that that approach will help to speed up the process. The SPCB will also regularly monitor performance against agreed targets. I would be more than happy to lodge the resulting reports before the Parliament as we receive them.

We have determined that the ombudsman should be reappointed for four years, from 30 September 2007. I have no doubt at all that she is fully committed to providing a first-class service to the public and to ensuring that all public authorities learn from complaints. I am sure that members will want to wish Professor Brown every success in her second term in office.

I move,

That the Parliament nominates Professor Alice Brown to Her Majesty The Queen for reappointment as the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman from 30 September 2007 until 29 September 2011.

16:52

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I acknowledge the difficult task that the SPCB faces in undertaking such processes on behalf of

members of the Scottish Parliament. As a consequence, I have no intention of opposing the motion. In addition, I make it clear that what I will say is no personal reflection on Professor Alice Brown; rather, I want to comment on the operational processes of the Scottish public services ombudsman service that must engage everybody in the Parliament.

It is clear from what Mr Scott said and the interventions that were made on his speech that MSPs have fundamental issues with and concerns about the operation of the service. There are two particular issues, the first of which is the time it takes to handle cases. Certain cases have taken a significant amount of time to be processed and determined, which is unacceptable to people who are at the end of their tether.

The second and more significant issue is the ethos of the Scottish public services ombudsman's organisation. I would be much more comfortable with the work of the ombudsman's office if it focused on delivering a much more rigorous and robust critique of the operation of public services. People who have gone to MSPs or local authorities and still have outstanding issues are serious about their complaints. Some complaints should, of course, be rejected, but some need to be tested with much more robust effort and using much more robust processes in the Scottish public services ombudsman's office.

**Mark Ballard:** In that context, it is worth noting that the number of cases dealt with by the Scottish public services ombudsman has doubled between 2003 and the present day, whereas the funding has increased by only 20 per cent.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Quickly.

**Mark Ballard:** Does John Swinney share my concern that, in a demand-led institution, without the proper funding there will be delays in timetables?

**Mr Swinney:** That may be a reasonable point. I do not know whether Mr Ballard asked to speak in the debate, but he could have made that point in the debate.

MSPs must be absolutely confident that the Scottish public services ombudsman service will be robust with public organisations. I am very uneasy about the situation at present. I hear the reassurances John Scott gave us, and I look forward with enthusiasm to ensuring that the ombudsman addresses the issue in her second term of office. I have the feeling that she has not taken that approach in her first term of office. She must take a much more robust approach towards public organisations in order to guarantee that the public interest is fully and adequately served.

I reinforce the point that John Scott made about committees considering these issues. I think that committees should look at the ombudsman's reports carefully. By doing so, we will exert some pressure on the ombudsman to ensure that her reports are of an adequate standard, that the process has been robust and that the people whom we are sent here to serve can have confidence in the mechanisms that we have established to guarantee public scrutiny of important issues.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I will allow two brief speeches, from Alex Neil and from Fergus Ewing.

16:57

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I will keep my comments brief, to allow Fergus Ewing to speak.

I am happy to vote for the reappointment of Alice Brown as the ombudsman, but, like many other members, I have a number of concerns. One is that we do not have a more systematic way of ensuring that the ombudsman is held to account more regularly by the Parliament for her work. I hope that, in the new session of Parliament, both the Parliamentary Bureau and the corporate body will consider how we can improve that interface.

There are currently four problems with the ombudsman's office. First, to be fair, the resources required to do the job, to date, have not been made available to the ombudsman. We are going some way towards solving that problem, but I suspect that we need to go further. Secondly, the turnaround times for cases are far too long. It has taken more than a year for the ombudsman to decide whether to investigate a case that I am dealing with. Thirdly, the variability of the quality of the service is, frankly, not acceptable. It depends too much on which particular investigator handles the case, rather than on overall quality control in the office.

The fourth problem, which I hope that the Parliament in the new session will consider as well, is the ombudsman's remit and powers. We have given her too narrow a remit, compared with the remits of ombudsmen in other countries, and not enough powers to enforce her recommendations.

I hope that all those issues will be addressed after 3 May.

16:58

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I endorse the comments that have been made by my colleagues, John Swinney

and Alex Neil. In the short time that is available to me, I wish to make one further point.

Many cases—including one particular case that I dealt with for a constituent—are highly complex, and some of them are extremely serious. The case that I dealt with—I will obviously not name the constituent—involved a serious matter relating to possible medical negligence and severe deterioration in the health of the complainer's wife. It seems to me that the ombudswoman's office should have been willing to meet my constituent to ensure that the facts of the case were fully understood and correctly stated. A statement of the case was prepared, but my constituent and I believed that it contained errors and inaccuracies. No opportunity was afforded to my constituent to have a face-to-face meeting to discuss the highly complex and very tragic set of circumstances of the case. There was an abrupt and clear refusal to meet my constituent in his home in my constituency, which is a long distance from Edinburgh. He could not travel to Edinburgh because of his wife's ill-health. I wanted to put my point on the record, and I hope that it will be attended to in future.

17:00

**John Scott:** I thank members for their generally supportive stance in this debate. I note the concerns of Mr Swinney, Murdo Fraser, Jeremy Purvis, Alex Neil and Fergus Ewing.

I particularly note Mr Swinney's comments about the need for a more robust critique of public services, and I think that he answered his own question. There should be more parliamentary scrutiny of the ombudsman's reports, and I think he will agree with me when I say that I hope parliamentary committees in the next session of Parliament will subject the ombudsman's reports to much more robust criticism, with a view to proceeding with legislation following those reports. The worst thing that could happen in this Parliament would be if the ombudsman is still addressing the same complaints in 10 years' time; we must learn from the complaints that she is addressing now.

I thank members for their support.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S2M-5759, in the name of Phil Gallie, on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee's first report of 2007, on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and European protected species, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the 1st Report, 2007 (Session 2) of the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, *Report on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and European Protected Species* (SP Paper 761), and agrees that the construction of the Airdrie-Bathgate railway project should not impact on the favourable conservation status of otters.

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S2M-5760, in the name of Phil Gallie, that the Parliament agrees that the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill be passed, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill be passed.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third and final question is, that motion S2M-5785, in the name of John Scott, on a Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body motion on the reappointment of the Scottish public services ombudsman, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 113, Against 1, Abstentions 2.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament nominates Professor Alice Brown to Her Majesty The Queen for reappointment as the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman from 30 September 2007 until 29 September 2011.

## Railways

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5762, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on reconnecting communities by rail. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the work undertaken by communities across Scotland to enhance the rail network; recognises in particular the long-standing need to reopen railway stations at Blackford, Greenloaning, St Andrews and Levenmouth, and further recognises the role that community rail partnerships and businesses can play in developing new services and enhancing the quality and uptake of existing services.

17:05

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank those members who have stayed behind to engage in the debate and the many others who signed my motion.

This is the last members' business debate of the second session. We have just taken the positive step of passing the bill to reopen the Airdrie to Bathgate railway line, so this is a good time to look up and to look ahead to the further steps that are needed to bring about a renaissance of our railways in Scotland. It is clear that Scotland is ahead of England and Wales in restoring its railways and reconnecting the communities that were rubbed off the rail map by the Beeching cuts. However, we still lack the integrated transport that is enjoyed in many other European countries. The reopening of lines such as the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line has shown what is possible, but we must go ever further forward, building on that success and expanding the network so that it is fit for the needs of a low-carbon Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In my motion, I pay tribute to campaigns in my region of Mid Scotland and Fife to reopen stations and routes. I welcome to the gallery some of those who are working to make that progress a reality. In the west of the region, the campaign to reopen Blackford and Greenloaning rail stations has been spirited. It is rooted in the desire for a reconnection to the rail network not just of those two communities, but of the wider area of Strathallan and Strathearn. It is clear to the many people who commute from Perthshire to Edinburgh and Glasgow that reopening Blackford and Greenloaning stations is needed. Gleneagles station was built to serve a hotel, but it does not meet the needs of many current commuters in terms of convenience or safe access from the A9. As a result, many people drive to Dunblane station, which is turning into a giant, overcrowded

car park during the week. Reopening Blackford and Greenloaning stations would serve Perthshire better, taking pressure off Dunblane as the railhead and providing public transport connections for growing commuter communities. There is also synergy with the potential for rail-freight facilities at Highland Spring Limited in Blackford, which would cut down the number of lorries that use the A9.

The potential for freight and traffic reduction on the A9 is real, given the other proposals that are coming from business. Diageo wants to open a spur off the Stirling to Kincardine route to serve the vast spirit warehouses at Cambus. It also wants the Levenmouth rail route to be reopened, to allow rail freight to serve the Cameronbridge distillery. Such a facility would remove the company's impact and dependence on the Forth road bridge. Currently, 20 per cent of Scotland's wheat crop is driven in on the roads to Cameronbridge, so there is the potential in future to get the wheat, the bottles and the spirit moving on the rails once again. When that facility is in place, other companies such as Tullis Russell will have the option of using it.

Just as significant for the communities of Methil and Leven would be the option of a passenger service to connect them once again to the Fife circle, through the Levenmouth line. Those communities should never have been rubbed off the rail map in the first place. Given the communities' profile of low car ownership and low income, there can be no greater need, in social and economic terms alone, for the line to be reopened to both passenger and freight traffic.

That does not mean that St Andrews should be forgotten in transport planning in Fife, as it has so quietly been forgotten in the draft south-east Scotland transport partnership plan. The arguments for a new link between Leuchars and the town, as well as arguments for the reopening of the Levenmouth line, are strong, but for slightly different reasons. St Andrews is a big economic driver for Fife, through tourism and the university. It is also a world-class venue for golf tournaments, but it lacks the public transport infrastructure that would put it clearly above other venues' ability to deliver. When I talk to people in St Andrews about what for many is a daily commute to Dundee, the bridge tolls are an issue, but not the biggest issue. It is the lack of convenient rail transport to get people efficiently over the Tay that forces many people into cars. It is time to reinvigorate the community's bid to get back on to the rail map.

What is needed to help the communities that I have mentioned and other communities across Scotland to reconnect to the rail network? In my motion I highlight the strong and emerging role that community rail partnerships can play in



Scotland. We have seen how successful the Highland Rail Partnership and CRPs in England have been in building communities directly into the planning and promotion of new services, as well as developing the use of station facilities for commuter use and small business lets.

There is also a role for CRPs in tackling route crime, such as vandalism and antisocial behaviour, through community development. CRPs are well placed to work with Network Rail, linking into existing community projects, including youth projects and community arts. Ultimately, communities need to see rail stations as their own stations, as they would have done at the dawn of the railways. The partnerships are one excellent way of achieving that sense of ownership.

Regional transport partnerships that are busy submitting their final plans to ministers this week need to shift the focus away from increasing trunk road capacity towards asking ministers for increased spending on rail network improvements. For example, the SESTRAN plan highlights the Levenmouth link and potential links from Kincardine to Dunfermline, but it does not promote St Andrews, Wormit or even Newburgh as candidates for reopening.

Meanwhile, to the bewilderment of many communities, TACTRAN—the Tayside and central Scotland transport partnership—has pushed through bypasses for Dundee and Bridge of Allan and a Scone road bridge into its draft plan as short-term and high-priority transport measures, while Blackford and Greenloaning stations hardly warrant a mention. That is not good enough and, as I did last week, I call on ministers to view the regional plans critically, particularly where communities feel that the priority given to road building is running well ahead of debate on and amendments to structure plans.

We need a network that is fit to run more services serving local communities as well as improved intercity routes. Network Rail must adopt a can-do approach to bring the vision into reality. That means implementing the network utilisation strategy, planning for further growth and eliminating pinch points.

Finally, we need to make tough choices. If £3 billion is spent on a tunnel under the Forth and at least a further £500 million on dualling the A9, plus all the other road projects that I have mentioned, that will blow not only the transport budget but the aspirations of communities to get connected to the rail network. It is time to make those tough choices, build on our achievements so far and put our communities back on to the rail map, where they belong.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the debate; speeches will be three minutes.

17:12

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the debate. Given the bill that Parliament passed this afternoon, it is particularly appropriate that we continue to talk about the railways and the extent to which they are beginning to be seen by ordinary people as profoundly important in their transport options.

Presiding Officer, you will not be surprised to learn that I will concentrate on Perthshire, because it is a key central point of connection for much of Scotland's transport—not just railways but roads; everything tends to run through Perth. However, Perthshire's major connectivity does not seem to be acknowledged in its transport infrastructure. I know that the minister has commented on that in the past.

We in Perthshire are particularly concerned about the railway links. There is a bigger issue to do with railways—including the frequency and speed of trains—that is not really part of tonight's debate, although I am sure that we will come back to it another time. Blackford and Greenloaning are examples of places where we are failing to acknowledge the enormous demand that is being expressed by communities. There does not seem to be any response to that demand from the various authorities that are charged with dealing with it.

The main railway station in my constituency is Perth, which is massively important, and there is a station at Gleneagles, which Mark Ruskell mentioned. However, Dunblane station is also important to Perthshire. Many folk in my constituency travel to Dunblane to access trains that run at far greater frequency than do those from either Gleneagles or Perth. That is putting a massive pressure on Dunblane, which cannot cope with the demand, which would be infinitely alleviated if Blackford and Greenloaning were reopened and trains began further back up the line. That idea needs to be considered.

What concerns me about the TACTRAN document to which Mark Ruskell referred—and about which I could go into a great amount of detail—is that it does not link the undercapacity of the park-and-ride facility at Dunblane railway station with the fact that more frequent train services run from the town and that anyone who lives north of Dunblane is bound to want to travel there to access them. Moreover, it does not contain the kind of methodology that provides statistics that are useful enough to use in our arguments.

I am sorry that our speaking time is so brief. I will have to end now, but this debate will run and run. We will certainly return to it after 3 May.

17:15

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the debate. Of course, no group in the Parliament has a God-given right to give itself the “green” accolade—and I say that with due deference to the party that Mr Ruskell represents. I certainly pay tribute to David Cameron for putting green matters at the forefront of Conservative policy on both sides of the border. Of course, there will be more of that when our manifesto is published.

Effective and widely available public transport must be at the heart of any campaign to reduce carbon emissions. I speak from personal experience because, in my first two years in the Parliament, I regularly took the train from Leuchars junction into Edinburgh. However, I eventually became so frustrated by the delays and the cattle-market conditions on trains that, for the past two years, I have been making the journey by car. Although, thanks to delays in Edinburgh, I now sit in traffic jams rather than in immobile trains, I am at least sitting in relative comfort.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Mr Brocklebank:** I would rather not; I have only three minutes.

I realise that, as a single car occupier, I am doing little to cut emissions or, for that matter, to help the ozone layer. However, to that charge, I respond that I will do my bit when the Executive introduces efficient alternative means of public transport. To that extent, I agree with Mark Ruskell that major potential developments in Fife—I hope that members will forgive me for concentrating on that area—will bring certain advantages.

Mark Ruskell has already mentioned the proposal to reopen the Levenmouth line. Such a move will be important not only for Diageo's Cameronbridge distillery; if we are serious about developing Leven and Methil, we will have to consider a passenger link to Levenmouth. Having a regular stop at Markinch 6 miles away is simply not good enough.

There is also a very strong argument for restoring a rail link between Leuchars and St Andrews. That would benefit not only those who commute to Dundee; the fact is that despite being the oldest university town in Scotland and home to the only Scottish university in the United Kingdom's top 10, St Andrews is—as far as I am aware—the only university town in the UK without a direct rail link. I am not necessarily suggesting that we reinstall the twin track that was lifted as part of the Beeching cuts, but unmanned, single-track, electric monorails have been installed elsewhere in the world, including at airports, at a fraction of the price of traditional railway systems.

Might that not help to resolve the problem of how to cover the 3.5 miles between Leuchars junction and St Andrews? I believe that such a link would not only work wonders in cutting road traffic, but would hugely benefit the town's 7,000 students by getting them to Leuchars and then on to the national rail network.

The next Executive will require imagination and vision in formulating transport solutions, including those related to rail transport. To that extent, I am very happy to support Mark Ruskell's motion.

17:18

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I, too, congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the last members' business debate in this session of Parliament and endorse his remarks about freight on rail.

I want to draw the chamber's attention to the situation in my part of the world, the north Highlands. Mark Ruskell highlighted the work of the Highland Rail Partnership and I—and I am sure other Highland members—want to pay tribute to its very forward-looking approach. It marks an enormous change to the situation 10 or 20 years ago, when there was a question mark over the north Highland line's future. That question mark has been removed and the talk now is of building for the future on sure foundations.

It will come as no surprise to the minister that, in the very short time available, I want to highlight the state of some station buildings in the Highlands and Islands, particularly those in Brora, Tain and Invergordon. I should say at the outset that the situation is not all doom and gloom. For example, the minister has had constructive meetings with me and others about the station building at Tain.

Those station buildings are fine monuments to the spirit of endeavour that prevailed in the days when Highland Railway was out and about building such facilities. All the buildings are simply magnificent and are rightfully part of our heritage yet, despite the best intentions, they stand empty. Many of them are vandalised and are deteriorating quickly, despite the good intent and endeavours of ministers and others. The progress is mighty small and very slow. Brora station has been described to me by John McMorran, who will be known to members for the Highlands, as he is the chair of Brora community council, as the gateway to Brora. It is the first thing that people see when they get off the train, but they also see where the last fire was lit on the platform, which is not good at all.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Not by the member, I am sure.

**Mr Stone:** I hasten to assure Mr Fraser about that.

Mr McMorran's point was that we need somebody to own the building, in the sense of use and maintenance, as well as in the sense of ownership of property. Responsible ownership would lead to people keeping an eye on the building, which would keep the vandals at bay. To me, it does not matter whether the property is owned commercially in the private sector or by the community. There are many horses for courses.

In those stations and, I am sure, in many others the length and breadth of Scotland, we have an historic asset that was built through courage and faith in the future. It would be a tragedy if we let the stations deteriorate. The issue is not about selling them for big prices or making big rents. It would benefit Network Rail and the Scottish Executive to get the stations off the books and get them into community use. The buildings could do a huge amount for tourism. For a third time, I pay tribute to the Minister for Transport for coming to Tain—I thank him for that. However, we must push on. We know not which of us will be here in the next session of Parliament but, whatever happens, we must push on in tackling the issue, because our communities expect that.

17:21

**Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the last members' business debate of the session. I was pleased to sign his motion. My interest in rail goes back many years. I recall meetings some years ago with public transport operators at which I suggested tentatively that passenger services to Leven might be reinstated. At that, there would be many sharp intakes of breath and much sucking of teeth. The people in those gatherings, who were almost universally male—one of them was in the public gallery earlier, but he has now gone—would delve into their pockets, produce railway timetables and go into a huddle and mutter, before explaining to me carefully and clearly why it was impossible to get even another single carriage anywhere in Fife without inflicting catastrophic damage on the whole national rail network, from Cornwall to John O'Groats.

Then, they might well have been right but, in the eight years that have passed since then, there has been a sea change. We have had significant and sustained investment in public transport, particularly in rail, and, because of increasing fuel costs and environmental considerations, there has been a welcome resurgence of interest among manufacturing businesses in moving goods off road and on to rail. That has resulted in a climate in which teeth are no longer sucked and there is a willingness to talk about the expansion of rail services in Fife, both passenger and freight. I do not claim that reaching that stage has been

easy—it has been extraordinarily difficult and hurdles have had to be overcome. Discussions are still far too protracted with far too many people. When the property interests become involved, the discussions get extraordinarily difficult, which is an issue that the minister and his successor must get hold of if we are to speed up the process.

I will mention three projects that have led to my belief that, sooner rather than later, passenger services to Leven will finally be restored. The first is the improvements that are under way at Markinch after some delay. The second is the development at Earlseat which, although not directly on the line, will allow coal to be taken out and will get lorries off the roads. That was our first bleeding in dealing with the new Network Rail. The third project is Diageo's proposal to reopen the Thornton to Methil line, which will take us within a mile of our goal of passenger services to Leven. The project is in the draft structure plan. I certainly put the proposal in my submission to SESTRAN. The catchment population of 25,000 or more will, I hope, have access to about 60 stations, including the proposed new station at Edinburgh airport. When we build the multimodal crossing over the Forth, they will have trains that go over that as well.

I thank everybody who has supported us in the long campaign when it seemed as if the line would never happen. I thank the community with railway interests and everybody else. I look forward to being able to travel from here to Leven on the train, just as I travel from here to my home in Kirkcaldy. Once again, I thank Mark Ruskell.

17:25

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing this debate on reconnecting communities by rail. I hope that other MSPs will not mind a Glasgow MSP intruding on their territory. They will not be surprised to learn that I am going to mention the Glasgow crossrail link. I have mentioned it before and I make no apologies for that.

Crossrail, as a rail link and not a tunnel, has been mentioned by others. As a rail link, it is feasible, affordable and realistic. It has been studied for over 30 years and it has been costed. It would be a crossrail not just for Glasgow but for the whole of Scotland. It would give communities the opportunity to travel from the north and south of Glasgow to the north and south of Edinburgh and to Aberdeen. Some communities do not have public transport at all, so the link would be all encompassing. That is why I wanted to speak in this debate.

As I have said, crossrail is not just about Glasgow but about the whole of Scotland. If the

link went ahead, it would be the equivalent of a heart bypass for Scotland. I hope that people will accept that that comment is sincere. The link would benefit the whole of Scotland, just like the Glasgow airport rail link that the Parliament has recently passed. What would be the cost? It would be only up to £200 million. That is very good value. It would be cheap when compared with other rail links. I said up to £200 million, but it is actually £120 million to £200 million, so there is leeway.

There is cross-party support from politicians and there is support from Strathclyde partnership for transport and the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. The *Evening Times* is campaigning to ensure that crossrail becomes a reality. All that we really need is support from Transport Scotland—I have spoken to the minister about that—and from ministers. The draft endorsement will be with ministers in July and will go for finalisation in September with costings.

I will urge whoever is the transport minister in the next session of the Parliament to back the crossrail project. It is not the Glasgow crossrail but the Scotland crossrail, and we desperately need it in communities throughout Scotland.

17:27

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** I join other members in congratulating Mark Ruskell on securing the debate and on highlighting the desire of communities throughout Scotland to be reconnected to the rail network. Sandra White was right to say that it is not just rural Scottish communities that want to be reconnected to the rail network; in Glasgow, with the crossrail, and in Edinburgh, people want railway stations to be reopened.

When I came to Edinburgh 17 years ago, it struck me that the south of Edinburgh has a railway line that still has, in places such as Craiglockhart and Morningside, the platforms of the old south suburban line. Trains still travel on the line, but they are not passenger trains. Since 1962, when passenger trains were removed from the line, there has been a continuing campaign to have those stations reopened so that the south suburban line could give the people of Edinburgh the benefit of a suburban network similar to that of Glasgow or even London.

Christine May talked about her frustration that Levenmouth still does not have a rail connection, but trying to reopen the stations on the south suburban line has been even more frustrating. Sandra White talked about the cost of Glasgow crossrail being £200 million. The cost of reopening the south suburban line, because the line and the platforms are already there, is estimated at

between £15 million and £30 million. That is a trifling sum when compared with the £300 million that we have just agreed to spend on the Airdrie to Bathgate line, let alone when compared to the tunnel under the Forth that Mark Ruskell mentioned.

What gives me faith that we might see progress is the pioneering work that has been done by Professor George Hazel with his E-Rail Ltd proposal, which seeks to capture value from the uplift in land values that would come from restoring the south suburban line. We know that development of the Jubilee line in London led to an uplift of over £13 billion in land values. The development of the south suburban line would lead to a massive uplift in land values in Edinburgh, which is why developers have come forward, through the E-Rail proposal, to offer half the cost of restoring passenger trains to the south suburban line. In the terms of Mark Ruskell's motion, that shows that not only communities but businesses have a role in reconnecting communities to the national rail network.

Successive Executives and Scottish Office ministers have prevaricated on the issue. It is now time to reopen the south suburban line and to get trains running again through Cameron Toll. Such trains could connect to a tram scheme and Edinburgh's bus network, which would enable us to realise the vision of sustainable transport for Edinburgh.

**Stewart Stevenson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether I might take the liberty of moving a motion without notice that the debate be extended until five to six. You might wish to be aware, Presiding Officer, that I left an important event in my constituency so that I could come here today for my sole parliamentary speech on a matter that is of import to my constituents. If it is not possible to extend the debate, members present who may be denied the opportunity to speak should understand why that is happening.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is not possible for me to extend the debate—I am doing the best I can. If you had not stood up and taken so long, I could probably have got somebody else in. Iain Smith is to be followed by Rob Gibson.

17:31

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will try to be brief to help you get someone else into the debate.

I, too, congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the final members' business debate in the current parliamentary session. Ted Brocklebank secured one of the first members' business debates in this session—that debate also mentioned St Andrews, which is in my constituency. It is perhaps fitting

that we have references to St Andrews at both ends of the session of Parliament in members' business debates.

I am keen to see further expansion of our rail network, but it is important to bear it in mind that we already have significant visions for our rail network. This afternoon we passed the last in a series of private bills—the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill—to expand our rail network. The Borders rail link is progressing, as is the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line, and there are proposals to reopen the station at Laurencekirk. Those are all extremely important improvements.

I am particularly keen on the Edinburgh airport rail link being developed—Mark Ruskell's party does not support it—because it will connect communities. It will connect my constituents directly to Edinburgh airport, but it will also give them an opportunity to connect to other parts of the rail network at Edinburgh airport instead of having to go into Edinburgh, which adds considerable time to their journeys. It will also help them to connect to other parts of the transport network, such as trams and buses, at the transport hub at Edinburgh airport.

Other things that we are doing to connect our communities include, of course, investment in our existing stations, which is also important. Christine May mentioned the long-overdue redevelopment at Markinch, which will include proper disabled access. I thank to the minister for the announcement last week that Cupar station is in line to have its facilities improved so that disabled people can access both platforms, which is extremely important.

There are other stations in my constituency that I would like to be considered for reopening: Newburgh would be a very valuable station on the Perth to Ladybank line and it could be developed as a park-and-ride facility. It would also help to develop the community of Newburgh. Wormit has been mentioned as a possible station that could provide park-and-ride facilities for people wishing to cross the Tay.

I want to concentrate in the last few moments of my speech on an issue that is not to do with my constituency, but which would be of benefit to it—the Levenmouth proposal. It is important that we redevelop passenger services—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You should be finishing now, Mr Smith.

**Iain Smith:** I have had only two and a half minutes, but I will finish with a final comment.

The Levenmouth development is important because it would have significant regenerative benefits for that part of Fife, which needs it. It

would be a major economic boost to have a passenger rail network as well as freight services to Levenmouth, so I thoroughly support that proposal.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rob Gibson. If members stick to their times I will manage to get everyone in.

17:34

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I welcome the chance to speak in the debate and congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing it.

I am glad that there is such a positive attitude in Mid Scotland and Fife. Support from community organisations for railway development is important for people in the Highlands and Islands, too. Good work is done in the far north by the Caithness transport forum, Rail Futures Scotland, which works throughout the country, and the Dornoch rail link action group. We are ambitious for stations to be reopened at places such as Halkirk and Dornoch, which is the golfing capital of the north, but has no railway station.

Mark Ruskell mentioned the Highlands, but perhaps distance lends enchantment to the bodies that we deal with in the area. The Highland Rail Partnership, the voluntary Friends of the Far North Line, the Highlands and Islands strategic transport partnership and Highland Council, despite structure plan commitments, have all been negative about the development of the main railways north of Inverness. A large chunk of Scotland has been ignored. When I asked the minister last week about scrutiny of the HITRANS proposals, he replied:

"I do not believe for a minute that regional transport partnerships will disregard any views from elected parliamentarians in this place or from local people, constituent councils, community councils and other bodies."  
—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2007; c 33527.]

However, regional transport partnerships have ignored such views. I do not have time to go into detail, but post-Dounreay economic development, which hinges on rail development, is at stake. The potential Orkney container transshipment port would also benefit from rail-freight developments.

The enhancement of quality and uptake of existing services must be measured carefully. The industry-standard tables that are currently used do not work. People must be asked directly whether they want to use railways—freight users must be asked directly—and the Scottish transport appraisal guidance system must be changed to fit the needs of the climate change era. The European northern periphery roadex network is considering lifeline roads in fragile areas; we need a similar project for railways.

For the past 30 years, it has been possible to use European funding for development of railways, but little has been done with objective 1 money, transitional funds, European regional development funds or convergence funds. Today, my colleague Alyn Smith MEP received an answer from Commissioner Barrot, in which he was told that there is no money for any rail developments in the north of Scotland in the next tranche of time and we will have to rely on European Investment Bank loans schemes. That is a scandal for Scotland, which must be dealt with. The debate has allowed us only to touch on the edges of a problem that must be solved soon. Rail developments in the far north, in particular the Dornoch rail link, are wanted by many people. I hope that the minister will do something to help us along the way.

17:38

**Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green):** I will speak quickly in support of the motion in the name of my colleague Mark Ruskell. Communities throughout Scotland have campaigned hard to expand their local rail network. As Mark Ruskell said, if we are to improve rail travel for the vast majority of the travelling public, we need to focus on the smaller schemes for which communities are campaigning. The reconnection of communities by rail requires the reopening of stations, to maximise opportunities for rail travel and enable a much greater number of passengers to access the rail network.

I can evidence Mark Ruskell's arguments from my experience. A station at East Linton in East Lothian would cost just £2.9 million at 2004 prices. The community is campaigning for a station, through the excellent rail action group east of Scotland—RAGES—but where is the Executive? The Executive has got its priorities wrong. It is committed to spending at least £650 million, perhaps even £1 billion, on the Edinburgh airport rail link, but it rejects local campaigns such as that of the Clydesdale rail action group to reopen stations at Beattock, Symington and Carlisle, to provide a local service on the west coast main line. I would be delighted if the minister supported the reopening of those stations, which would provide a service that was described in the Atkins report as feasible and strongly integrated with local policy across a number of transport and economic development areas. The Atkins report found that the scheme would bring significant benefits and concluded that its wider economic benefits have large potential. The cost of the scheme would be just £12 million, with an annual operating subsidy of £2.3 million.

There has been a community campaign in the west of my region to reopen the station at Dunragit

and for a feasibility study into reopening the old military line from Stranraer to Cairnryan. If we do not do that, when Stena Line moves to Cairnryan the largest port in Scotland will have no rail access at all and the Glasgow to Belfast rail-sail option will have gone. The Executive is nowhere to be seen when it comes to supporting those campaigns.

We all welcome the fact that part of the historic Waverley line is to be reinstated, but it is not a Borders railway. I support the campaign for a Borders railway, which would allow Borderers to travel around the region. Such a railway would provide access to Borders general hospital, Scottish Borders Council, Melrose and Hawick. The current plan could increase the economic divide between Hawick and Galashiels and the central Borders.

The Executive plans to commit huge sums of public money to wasteful and pointless road projects such as the M74, the Aberdeen western peripheral route and an additional Forth road bridge. I call on the minister to listen to the local community campaigners, some of whom have joined us in the public gallery.

17:41

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the debate.

I will start with a declaration of interest: I believe in rail travel and I travel by rail every day. I think that it is the best way to travel but, unlike the Greens, I do not believe in rail travel to the exclusion of every other kind of travel. We need a further crossing of the Forth. That is as important as connecting our communities by rail—one should not be done instead of the other.

It is almost 10 years since I became involved in the campaign to restore the Thornton to Leven rail link. Levenmouth is the largest urban conurbation in Scotland that has no access to a rail link. To me, the case for reopening the line is as overwhelming now as it was 10 years ago. I believe that the whole corridor is intact and that compulsory purchase would not be needed.

I well remember the case that was considered by Fife Council—when Christine May was its leader, I think—which was a travesty. Despite the huge conurbation and despite the fact that the line could be connected to the Fife rail line, Fife Council found that the reopening of the Leven to Thornton rail line would be uneconomic so it refused to support it. I am glad that time has moved on and that there now seems to be a willingness to acknowledge the case for the reopening of the Thornton to Leven rail line. That is mostly to do with Diageo. I cannot say how welcome the company's intervention in the debate

is; its commitment to the reopening of the line for freight brings the tantalising possibility that we will also see the return of passenger travel.

The new station at Markinch is very welcome and there will be more car parking space. More car parking space has also been provided at Kirkcaldy. However, Roseanna Cunningham made the important point about ensuring that there is provision further back on the line. If people in Leven and Methil did not have to travel to Kirkcaldy and Markinch but instead had their own railway station, we would not always be looking to expand the car parks at those railway stations.

I understand that there is still a problem with the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail line, in respect of freight, with Transport Scotland and English Welsh & Scottish Railway Limited. I understand that Transport Scotland has not yet agreed to encourage EWS to come off the Forth rail bridge and use that line instead. Unless that problem can be solved, it will limit Diageo. I would love to hear the minister comment on that point, because I know that it has been a worry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Alex Fergusson, to be followed—very briefly—by Murdo Fraser.

17:44

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** I will be as brief as I possibly can be. I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the debate. I have every intention of being as parochial as Roseanna Cunningham was—and indeed some other members—not in relation to Perthshire, but in relation to my constituency of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale.

I will expand on a point that Chris Ballance rightly made about Stena Line moving from Stranraer up Loch Ryan to Cairnryan, as the minister is aware. That will leave a gap in the direct rail link, between Stranraer and Cairnryan. That might not seem like much of a gap—it is only 4 or 5 miles—but it is a big gap in terms of passenger comfort and convenience. People will have to get off the train or ferry and take a bus, which will be highly inconvenient. Talks have already taken place locally with bus companies about providing a service from Girvan down to Cairnryan. To me, that spells the possible end of a rail link south of Girvan. That would have bad consequences. My concern about what is known as the old military line from Stranraer to Cairnryan—the base still exists, so I do not think that it would be that huge a job—is not so much about what happens if we reopen it, but more about the possible consequences of not doing so.

There is also the possibility of moving freight from road to rail. On that point, I would be happy

to stop incurring the wrath of Green party members, which is invoked every time that I stand up to call for improvements to the A75. I unashamedly do so every time that I can, and I look forward to continuing to do so from May. I will happily stop incurring that wrath if and when a future Scottish Executive starts to examine the possibility of reopening a freight line from Cairnryan or Stranraer to Dumfries. That project would take all the pressure off the A75. The pressure on that road is enormous. The Scottish Executive's own figures will show the very high percentage of heavy goods vehicles using that road.

As other members have done, I emphasise the need to consider reopening stations such as Dunragit, which Chris Ballance mentioned, and Thornhill, which is on the existing Dumfries to Glasgow line. I believe that the travelling public are ready and willing to increase their use of rail transport. However, they rightly demand an infrastructure, and indeed a quality of service and convenience, that will allow and encourage them to do so.

17:47

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I will be succinct in my remarks, although I fear that, on this occasion, I might not be able to take any interventions. I commend Mark Ruskell for the motion and congratulate him on securing this, the final members' business debate of the session.

We in the Conservative party believe in giving members of the public the opportunity to travel by rail, and we are in favour of reconnecting communities by rail, for all the reasons that have been outlined in the debate. There is an important point to stress. We do not view this as an either/or issue. It is not about having rail instead of increased investment in roads. We believe that there should be both, and that they should be complementary.

Along with Mark Ruskell, and indeed Roseanna Cunningham, I have campaigned for the reopening of Blackford station. Members of COBRA—the campaign to open Blackford railway again—must be congratulated on their work to keep the issue on the political radar. I would like the new parliamentary session to be used to review train station viability on that line, as well as on the highland route across Perthshire and up to Inverness.

We have already heard reasons why Blackford station should be reopened. The same reasons apply to the halt at Greenloaning. Roseanna Cunningham and Mark Ruskell referred to the congestion that is caused at Dunblane by the pressure on the park-and-ride facility. Many of the

people who go to the Dunblane park and ride come from points north and west of there. If the facilities were available at Greenloaning or Blackford, that would provide a new opportunity for commuters to take their cars there, rather than clogging up the streets of Dunblane, as happens at the moment. Opening new halts in that part of the world would widen the market for those who wish to use rail, particularly those who commute to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

I would like to add another station to the list of those that could be reopened: that at Bridge of Earn. Bridge of Earn is a community with a growing population where a substantial number of new houses are planned. There would be clear environmental benefits in providing a new station at Bridge of Earn. It would enable those who live there to commute to work in Perth or Edinburgh and also, of course, allow locals and visitors to use the train for shopping and leisure activities.

Rail services have been high on my agenda for some years. We should be encouraging greater use of the train and reopening stations that have been closed. There are substantial environmental benefits to be gained in pursuing that agenda. I hope that we will see progress on that in the next session of Parliament.

17:50

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):**

Given that I have no stations in my constituency I, unlike others in this end-of-session debate, cannot be parochial about rail, which is probably just as well. I accept members' concerns and their desire to do more on rail and to see more improvements and a better rail network throughout the country. I do not always agree with Murdo Fraser, but I agree absolutely with him and others who argued in favour of rail being both complementary to other transport modes and a strong alternative to the car. Rail cannot always absolutely displace other forms of transport, but we have to find ways to provide it as a choice, so that we can address wider climate change issues—on which there is probably general cross-party agreement—at the same time as ensuring that we provide the systems for people to use the car, which is still a necessity in many parts of Scotland.

Alex Fergusson is right: for every member who raises a rail issue there is a member who argues the importance of certain road links in Scotland, as Mr Fergusson has done consistently in the two years in which I have been Minister for Transport. That will not stop—nor should it—as we develop our country's economy. I suspect that that is where some of us have a philosophical difference with our Green colleagues.

We all spent quite a lot of money this evening. I saw a few worried looks when Sandra White was holding forth on £200 million here and Mark Ballard mentioned another £15 million to £30 million there. To be fair, Roseanna Cunningham said that one station would cost only £1 million, but we all spent a bit of money.

There are choices to be made. I would love the transport budget to grow even more, but any Government has to make hard choices about rail versus other investments. With the greatest respect, Chris Ballance got the tone wrong. This Government has put 70 per cent of its transport budget into public transport. We have ensured that there has been a fundamental switch in expenditure in that regard. I would have thought that those of us who believe passionately in ensuring that public transport alternatives exist would support that, rather than denigrating it as Chris Ballance did, which was a great shame. I do not and will never agree with the Greens' heads-in-the-sand policy on EARL. The link to Edinburgh airport is one of the most important projects that we will take forward. Those of us on the Executive benches and, to be fair, the Conservatives, who supported the project in Parliament last week, were absolutely right and I hope that we get the project done. I feel strongly about it and I do not agree with either the SNP or the Greens about it.

Mark Ruskell made a good speech. I agreed with many of his arguments and he made powerful points. I believe that a renaissance in rail is happening. We are ensuring that the investment is there and will continue to do so.

As I said earlier in the debate on the Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill—Mark Ruskell also made this argument—stations must be transport interchanges where we can ensure that different modes of transport connect. I accept what Roseanna Cunningham said about circumstances where that is not happening. We do not have it right everywhere by any means. However, we will take forward the options in different localities in Scotland to the best of our ability.

I take the point that Rob Gibson and others made about regional transport strategies. I understand members' concerns. As we said at question time last week, when Mark Ruskell pursued the issue, there will be opportunities to ensure that the transport strategies reflect the needs of local people. However, hard choices will always have to be made about transport expenditure. For every occasion that Mr Gibson has raised the issue of rail in the north, Mr Ewing and others have raised the issue of investment in roads. They have every right to do that—I would never attack that—but that is what choices are



about and we will have to continue to take that approach in the coming years.

**Mr Ruskell:** The regional transport plans will be submitted to the minister this week. What is his view of transport plans that put forward projects that are not yet in structure plans? Is that unacceptable? Will changes to those plans be required at a local level before the minister—or whoever might follow him—can approve them?

**Tavish Scott:** It is important that there is consistency between documents. That is in the interests of regional transport partnerships and their constituent councils in respect of transport planning and all that goes with it. Many of the arguments that colleagues across the chamber have made in the past couple of years have been about ensuring that, in relation to health and education, the decisions that we make about the location of new schools or health facilities take into account the transport needs of people who have to use them. It is important that we address those points.

I say to Mark Ballard that I am aware of the E-Rail resource and am grateful for the information about it that he provided to my office earlier today. Earlier in the year, I took part in a cross-party discussion with the City of Edinburgh Council and I support its intention to refresh the business case for the project. However, I hope that Mr Ballard accepts the caveat that, no matter how small that project might appear to be, choices have to be made with regard to how we spend the money that we have available.

There is much to be done to make our railways truly world class, but the foundations have been laid by this Government. We are committed to the major projects and the minor enhancement schemes that many members are, rightly, passionate about. I hope that we can take the opportunity to achieve our aims at that local level and in relation to the larger projects that we are dealing with.

*Meeting closed at 17:56.*



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