

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 10 December 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 10 December 2008

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. As always, the first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Iain Gordon, from the Bethany Christian Trust.

Iain Gordon (Chief Executive, Bethany Christian Trust): Good afternoon. Christmas is coming, as you may have noticed. There are adverts for cut-price but still expensive Christmas gifts, music is playing in the shops, people are selling Christmas trees and children are rehearsing nativity plays.

For those of us working with homeless and vulnerable people, the nativity story in Luke's gospel is particularly significant. Christ, the light of the world, came to earth not as a king but as a vulnerable person, a baby, as part of a poor family on the margins of the community in Bethlehem. In homelessness terms, he was denied mainstream accommodation and was destined to spend the first of his nights sleeping rough, were it not for the charitable act of an innkeeper who provided shelter, or temporary accommodation, in his stable.

At the very beginning of his life, Christ was poor and vulnerable and marginalised, but he went on to spend all his life and ministry working with and transforming the lives of poor and vulnerable and marginalised people across society. That is why those of us who are Christians in Scotland today, who are charged with living out the teaching and example of Christ, also seek to serve the poor and the vulnerable and the marginalised in our society.

Later in the Bible, James in his letter to the Hebrews calls on us to be like Christ. He says:

"Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

That is why we in Bethany, along with more than 100 churches, offer, among other things, winter shelter to rough sleepers in Edinburgh, Inverness and Aberdeen. We treat them as we would hope to be treated if we were in their situation.

This Christmas, as in the first Christmas, there are those who find themselves vulnerable, outside

the system and with nowhere to spend the night. As we remember the story of a baby born poor and vulnerable and marginalised in Israel 2,000 years ago, I pray that we think of those who find themselves similarly poor and vulnerable and marginalised in Scotland today, that we truly offer our love to those who are suffering and mistreated, and that we show our Scots hospitality to strangers. Who knows? We too may entertain angels in Scotland this Christmas.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (Elections)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-2987, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's first report in 2008, "Elections to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body".

I call Gil Paterson to speak to and move the motion. Mr Paterson, you have three minutes.

14:03

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): At the beginning of the debate, I want to put on the public record my thanks to the former members of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. As members will know, the membership of the current committee is almost brand new, so most of the work on the report was carried out before we took up our places.

Another important point to mention is that, because we are all new members, our clerking team has had quite an onerous task. When the Parliament and its committees sit for the first time, everybody comes in at the same speed, but we are in a different situation. Almost all of us are new, which has meant that we have had an awful lot of assistance from our clerking team. We are all very pleased with that, as they have done a good job. I am particularly pleased, as they have helped me a lot. I wanted to say that in the first instance.

I am pleased to open the debate in my capacity as convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I should point out that the two reports that we will consider this afternoon were concluded before I became convener. Former members of the committee might wish to pick up on any points that I do not cover.

The committee's first report in 2008 recommends one simple rule change on elections to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, which will extend the period for elections to that body from 10 sitting days after a general election to 20 sitting days after a general election. Rule 3.7.1 of standing orders currently provides that elections of members to the SPCB should be held no later than 10 sitting days after a general election, while the Scotland Act 1998 allows 28 days for the Parliament to nominate a First Minister.

In 2003 and 2007, those timescales proved problematic. As the formation of a Government took longer than 10 sitting days, the SPCB election could have preceded the selection of the

First Minister, which could have caused parties difficulties in establishing their ministerial and shadow ministerial teams. To avoid that situation, the office of the clerk was closed on days that should have been sitting days, which meant that questions and motions could not be lodged. The committee's recommended rule change will mean that such a situation should not arise following future general elections.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 1st Report, 2008 (Session 3), *Elections to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body* (SP Paper 47), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 11 December 2008.

14:07

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): With regard to the committee's report on the period of time for elections to the SPCB, the committee is agreed on a commonsense and pragmatic recommendation that has attracted general support. A period of 20 sitting days after a general election will allow for more flexibility, which the Parliament might require after future general elections. Most of us would agree that the neatest arrangement would be for the selection of a First Minister to precede elections to the SPCB, as the selection of a First Minister has a ripple-down effect on the selection of ministerial and shadow ministerial teams and on parties' choice of representatives for the SPCB. I trust that all members of the Parliament will concur with the committee's proposal, which is essentially a tidying-up exercise.

Before I sit down, I record my thanks to the committee's clerking team for its assistance in preparing the two reports.

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Audit Committee (Title and Remit)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): We move on to a debate on motion S3M-2988, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on its eighth report in 2008, "Audit Committee—Title and Remit".

I invite Gil Paterson to speak to and move the motion. This time, you have up to six minutes, Mr Paterson.

14:08

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I doubt that I will take six minutes, but let us see how we go.

The committee's eighth report in 2008 sets out our recommended rule changes on the title and remit of the Audit Committee. Again, I was not a member of the committee when the report was completed, but I am happy to open the debate.

The request for the proposed changes was made by Hugh Henry, the convener of the Audit Committee, who felt that the current title and remit of that committee do not reflect accurately its role and function. In considering the Audit Committee's proposal, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee took evidence from Hugh Henry, the clerk to the Audit Committee and Robert Black, the Auditor General for Scotland. The proposed changes were endorsed by the Conveners Group and the Parliamentary Bureau.

The first change that we recommend, which was suggested by the Audit Committee, is that the title of the Audit Committee be changed to the public audit committee, to make it clearer that the function of the Audit Committee is not internal audit but the scrutiny of Scottish Government departments and public bodies.

The second change that we recommend is a change to the Audit Committee's remit. At present, as set out in the standing orders, the committee's remit is limited to considering documents that are laid before the Parliament or, in the case of the Auditor General for Scotland, reports made to the Parliament. When the Audit Committee considers documents that are not accounts or reports from the Auditor General, those documents must concern financial control, accounting and auditing in relation to public expenditure. However, the Audit Committee felt that its current remit does not fully reflect the range and depth of its work. For example, primary legislation is not formally laid before the Parliament, yet the Audit Committee was designated as the lead committee for the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill.

The Audit Committee is regularly consulted by the Auditor General for Scotland on documents that are produced by Audit Scotland but which are not laid before or made to the Parliament, such as documents on the adoption of the international financial reporting standards and Audit Scotland's forward work programme.

We are aware that the Audit Committee does not scrutinise expenditure by individual local authorities. The audit of local authority expenditure is the responsibility of the Accounts Commission. The changes that we recommend today will not affect that position.

We therefore propose to amend rule 6.7.1(c) of the standing orders to enable the Audit Committee not only to consider documents that are laid before the Parliament—as now—but to consider documents that are referred to the committee by the Parliamentary Bureau or the Auditor General for Scotland. Any such documents must still concern financial control, accounting and auditing in relation to public expenditure. We believe that the proposed change to its remit meets the Audit Committee's concerns without creating any increase in overlap with the work of other committees.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 8th Report, 2008 (Session 3), *Audit Committee - Title and Remit* (SP Paper 151), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 11 December 2008.

14:12

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This important report reflects some serious discussion in the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. As the committee's convener Gil Paterson said, nearly all the members of the committee who discussed the issue have now moved on—apart from me. I now regard myself as a veteran of the SPPA Committee, at least in this session.

The rule under consideration is rule 6.7.1, which says:

"The remit of the Audit Committee is to consider and report on—

- (a) any accounts laid before the Parliament;
- (b) any report laid before or made to the Parliament by the Auditor General for Scotland; and
- (c) any other document laid before the Parliament concerning financial control, accounting and auditing in relation to public expenditure."

Under that rule, the Audit Committee's remit is to consider and report on laid accounts, reports and other documents. However, that was considered

too restrictive by the committee, as a laid document is tightly defined, and the committee's remit could be interpreted as excluding some of the things that it has already considered. The SPPA Committee took the view that the situation should be remedied and that any amendment to the remit of the Audit Committee should not change the nature of the work undertaken but should merely reflect existing and past practices. The convener of the Audit Committee, Hugh Henry, helpfully assured the SPPA Committee that that was indeed his committee's intention in bringing the matter forward.

Initial draft changes to the rule suggested that the Audit Committee would have been able to consider

"any other document referred to it by the Auditor General for Scotland".

However, it was thought that that would allow an external party unusually direct access to a parliamentary committee. It was also thought that the rules had to ensure that the Audit Committee remained focused on the impartial audit of public expenditure, rather than on wider policy issues, which—rightly—are for other committees. The SPPA Committee therefore decided that that suggested change was a step too far. It decided to recommend restricting the ability of the Auditor General to put other documents before the Audit Committee, allowing him to put before the committee only documents relating to financial control, accounting and auditing of public expenditure.

The changes will help the new public audit committee—to give the committee the new title that it will have if the motion is agreed to—to do its work better. I am pleased by its convener's assurances in relation to keeping to the spirit of the changes. I urge members to support the motion.

14:16

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I echo a point made by Gil Paterson: there is no intention behind the proposal to stray into issues of local government finance. We understand clearly that those issues are a separate interest.

As Dave Thompson suggested, it is right that we should clarify the parts of the Auditor General's work that the Audit Committee can consider. I can understand the worry that, if we simply gave the Auditor General carte blanche to put issues before the committee, some issues extraneous to his current work and our current work could end up being considered. It was right to make it clear that any documents put before the committee should have an accounting or financial basis. It was also

right to reflect the nature of the work that the committee has been doing.

The suggested change is supported by all parties and all members of the Audit Committee. If we are constrained by a rule that says that a document or a report has to be laid before Parliament, we are constrained by a tight and specific definition, as Dave Thompson suggested. It is in the wider interests of the Parliament and the public that the committee be allowed to consider the financial and accounting issues that the Auditor General considers significant.

There is no intention to stray into the remit or work of other committees. People would be right to be worried if the Audit Committee wanted to become an all-encompassing committee that could delve into policy matters on justice, health or education, because that would be inappropriate.

When we think about how things might look in the future, we often refer to how things looked in the past, but there is no point in examining the past if we do not learn lessons from mistakes. However, when we are in danger of considering policy development issues, we should refer those issues to other committees.

The proposed change has the unanimous support of all committee members and all parties. The proposal better reflects the work of the committee, and the change in nomenclature will be easier for the wider public to understand, because it will take us away from the notion that we are simply an internal audit committee of the Scottish Parliament, when internal audit is not part of our remit.

I have no hesitation in recommending the proposed change to Parliament.

14:19

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): When I spoke in a previous Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee debate, I was wrongly accused of having let myself be "got at". I trust that I will not have to endure such an attack today.

I am pleased to speak in this short debate about changes to the title and remit of the Audit Committee. I believe that the proposed changes are positive and that the clarity that they will create will be welcomed both by members of the public and by those who are involved in the vital audit process throughout public spending in Scotland.

The changes were recommended by the session 2 Audit Committee in its legacy paper, in which members understandably expressed concern about the perceived function of the Audit Committee being one only of internal parliamentary audit. I am pleased that the

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee was able to act on the previous Audit Committee's suggestion and that it found consensus among those who gave evidence.

Changing both the title of the Audit Committee, so that it will become the public audit committee, and its remit will ensure that members of the public are left in no doubt that the committee has a locus in wider audit issues relating to public spending within the devolved remit of the Parliament. I agree with the Auditor General for Scotland that the public will understand the title—the public audit committee—and I commend to my fellow members the changes to both the title and the remit, which will mean that the committee will be able to consider reports that are referred to it by the bureau or the Auditor General. The changes will be good for the public audit committee, good for the committee system and good for the reputation of the Parliament as a whole.

14:21

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Along with my colleague Gil Paterson, the convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I thank the clerks to the committee, who have given me so much support as the new deputy convener. Indeed, I thank all members of the committee. It is important that our thanks are a matter of public record.

Like most of my colleagues on the committee, I joined the committee after the inquiry into the proposed changes to the Audit Committee's title and remit was concluded. I thank all those who took part in the inquiry and gave evidence. I am happy to close the debate on behalf of the committee and to cover some of the salient points.

The committee was satisfied with the arguments that were put forward by the convener of the Audit Committee and the Auditor General for the proposed changes to the title and remit of the committee. We have heard from Jamie McGrigor and Hugh Henry what those were.

Furthermore, the proposed rule changes have been endorsed by the Conveners Group and the Parliamentary Bureau. Also, the recommended changes will not affect the role of the Accounts Commission in its scrutiny of local authority expenditure.

The mechanisms of referral by the bureau regarding, for example, the consideration of legislation and by the Auditor General regarding, for example, his forward work programme will allow the Audit Committee to consider and scrutinise relevant areas of public expenditure.

I am happy to close the debate on behalf of the committee and hope that the recommended changes will receive the chamber's support at decision time.

The Presiding Officer: Indeed, decisions on both motions will be taken at decision time.

Strategic Transport Projects Review

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): We come slightly earlier than expected to the next item of business, which is a statement by Stewart Stevenson on the strategic transport projects review. The statement will be followed by a subject debate on the matter, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during the 25-minute statement.

14:23

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I am pleased to announce today the conclusions of the strategic transport projects review, which sets out the future investment programme for transport in Scotland over the next 20 years—the most structured and ambitious Scottish transport plan ever published.

I bring this nationwide programme to Parliament at a time when we are seeing turbulence affecting major economies and global markets. Scotland is not immune to that. The Government's central purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth is well articulated in "The Government Economic Strategy" and we are absolutely clear about the importance of infrastructure in delivering that growth.

I am, nonetheless, clear that vision and ambition are not enough. It is good government to construct a clear and sustainable pathway to the future, it is good government to make that journey as smooth as possible, and it is good government to ensure that we take everyone with us. That is what we are doing through sound and efficient governance and a prudent approach to investment of finite resources to ensure that we get the optimum return for every pound that is invested.

This Government continues to invest in transport, with announcements just last week of additional capital spending in the current year to deliver projects including the A96 Fochabers bypass and key interventions on the A9, including improvements at Moy, Carrbridge and Bankfoot. Further funding will be brought forward in 2009-10 to ensure that those projects are carried through. However, as John Swinney made clear, there will be a corresponding reduction in the budget for 2010-11. Our current capital plans support record levels of investment in our railways, which includes work on the delivery of the Borders railway and the Glasgow airport rail link. The plans that I will set out today clearly identify where we as a Government see the priorities for investment against the background of increasing pressure on our budget.

Our continuing investment in major transport projects is helping our hard-pressed construction industry now by creating hundreds of much-needed construction jobs. After decades of waiting and years of uncertainty, it is this Administration that is delivering completion of the M74. After generations of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative government in Scotland, the difference is clear: they talked, we are delivering. *[Applause.]*

The Government already has an ambitious programme of transport projects, including the Airdrie to Bathgate rail improvements, the recently opened Clackmannanshire bridge, M74 completion, the Glasgow airport rail link and our continuing support for the Borders railway. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Some members were clearly not present when I said that there should be no interruptions during the minister's statement. That includes applause and sedentary interventions.

Stewart Stevenson: We are also making progress on other projects, including the Aberdeen western peripheral route, and we will shortly announce the second national planning framework, which will set out the national schemes that will contribute to our purpose.

Transport Scotland's current investment programme is delivering more than 40 major projects to enhance and improve the national strategic road network serving our cities, communities and centres of economic activity throughout Scotland. In addition to those that I have already set out, the programme includes projects such as Pulpit Rock on the A82, the Raith interchange on the M74 and dualling of the A90 from Balmedie to Tipperty.

The strategic transport projects review is the first nationwide multimodal evidence-based appraisal of Scotland's transport system as it stands and as it is forecast to develop over the next 20 years. It is at the leading edge of transport planning at national level and undertakes an orderly assessment of the strategic transport corridors that cover Scotland. It considers predicted changes in areas such as land-use, population, economic performance and emissions in order to address our objectives of improving journey times and journey reliability and quality, and of reducing carbon emissions in line with our climate change objectives. The challenge that faces Scotland's strategic transport networks over the coming years is to adapt to those competing pressures within a finite budget, while improving the levels of service that we expect of a dynamic and modern country that is focused on growth.

The STPR has considered many options to address those nationally significant issues, including many projects that are promoted by stakeholders across Scotland. On proposals that will contribute to our objectives at regional or local level, the STPR has identified those that should be owned and promoted by the Government, and has made it clear where other delivery partners such as local authorities and regional transport partnerships are best placed to lead. In some cases, we will work with local partners to deliver the schemes.

The programme complements the Scottish Government's current and continuing investment in maintaining the trunk road network and in ensuring that train services are further developed by means of the high-level output specification.

The package of schemes that are recommended by the STPR covers all Scotland, from improvements on the A75 and A77 to the Loch Ryan ports, via railway enhancements across the network and safety improvements in the north of Scotland. The schemes include significant projects such as the Forth replacement crossing and railway improvements between Edinburgh and Glasgow, on the Highland main line and for Aberdeen and Inverness.

In total, 29 schemes are recommended within a hierarchy of, first, maintaining and safely operating our transport network; secondly, optimising the use of those networks; and, finally, where there are identified gaps, considering targeted infrastructure improvements. The hierarchy emerges from the national transport strategy that was put in place by our predecessors in 2006.

Our high-level modelling suggests that, taken together, the overall package of schemes could—compared with business as usual—cut between 100,000 and 150,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year, which would help us to meet our climate change commitments. By focusing on the hierarchy for delivery, and with the emphasis on public transport, we are leading the way in making sustainable transport more attractive.

The financial climate in which we are working has materially changed. External factors that are outwith the Government's control will have an impact on how and when we can deliver on the infrastructure investment that the country needs. There is continuing uncertainty in the financial markets, and the cost of borrowing and the availability of funds are fluctuating daily.

We now have to deal with the practical implications for budgeting of changes in United Kingdom Government accounting practices, which will have a significant impact on the capital cover that is available for our major transport investments. Our investments will all be

undertaken in an environment in which the Government accounts will conform to the international financial reporting standards. That will mean that almost all infrastructure projects—including private finance initiative and public-private partnership schemes—will come on balance sheet.

Following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pre-budget report on 24 November, there are projected cuts in future budgets—approximately £1 billion of cuts to Scotland's budget in 2010-11 and 2011-12. For the sake of the people and public services of Scotland, all members in the chamber should unite in resisting those Westminster cuts.

Given the urgency of timing and its central importance to the economic wellbeing of the whole nation, the Forth replacement crossing will, until it is open in 2016, dominate our investment programme. We have approached the Treasury about mechanisms to secure budgetary cover for the unique investment of the Forth replacement crossing by reprofiling our capital budget over the next 20 years. Such cover would not mean that the Treasury would pay for the new crossing, but that there would be an increased capital budget during the years in which we will be paying for the crossing so that other important investments can proceed at the same time. Capital budgets in later years would be correspondingly reduced.

In circumstances in which capital investment is at a premium, it becomes even more important that we secure maximum value for the public purse from the resources that are available. That underlines the importance of the Scottish Futures Trust as a centre of expertise and project collaboration in helping the Government to maximise the value and effectiveness of our infrastructure spending by releasing every year up to £150 million of extra investment in the fabric of Scotland's public services.

The STPR is about providing a robust framework of schemes, the delivery of which will be prioritised in each spending review. I will, of course, keep Parliament updated on progress. Members might wish to reflect on how much more satisfactory it would be if this Parliament had full financial and borrowing powers so that we could make these decisions for ourselves, in the best interests of Scotland.

Improving rail connections between Edinburgh and Glasgow will provide more and faster services that will run more frequently and will have increased capacity. By 2016, services will have increased from five or six per hour to 13 per hour. In addition, a new suite of services will be defined by significantly quicker journey times between Edinburgh and Glasgow; the journey time between the two cities will be reduced by about 30 per cent

to around 35 minutes. Transport Scotland is progressing the programme through working with Network Rail and First ScotRail. Feasibility studies are complete and contracts to take the project through to design development are on schedule to be in place by the end of this month.

In addition to service improvements, the project will involve the construction of a new railway station that will be designed to integrate with the Edinburgh tram network, which will provide onward connection for passengers who use Edinburgh airport. That facility will provide a much-needed improvement in public transport access to the airport and the surrounding areas. The station will be situated on the Fife railway line to the north of the A8 Gyle roundabout. Outline design is under way, and it is planned that the station will be completed in time for the opening of the Edinburgh tram network in 2011. Transport Scotland is working closely with the tram project team to produce the best possible link for passengers between the railway and the tram network, which will provide an easy and effective interchange for passengers.

However, our investment in rail is not limited to the central belt—we are committed to improving connections across Scotland for business, commuters and leisure travellers alike. Feasibility work for the Highland main line is under way, with the aim of providing a faster and more frequent service between Inverness and Glasgow and Edinburgh, via Perth, by reducing existing journey times by up to 30 minutes.

Transport Scotland continues to invest in our rail network through the high-level output specification. Work is already under way to develop the HLOS for the next period—2014 to 2019—and the STPR's recommendations will play an important role in that.

When there is investment in rail projects, not only are we moving on our climate change commitments, but the use of the regulated asset base allows us to keep that investment within the overall scope of our payment to Network Rail and off the Government's balance sheet.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth announced last year our plans for securing the future of cross-Forth travel and undertook to set out during 2008 how we would promote and fund the new crossing. The condition of the existing bridge continues to deteriorate. Inspections continue on the cables and although the existing bridge, which opened in 1964, may be deteriorating less rapidly than was previously thought, it is clearly not certain that it will provide a reliable and resilient crossing for the current weight of traffic. Safeguarding that vital connection in Scotland's transport network remains absolutely essential to the nation's economy, so providing

alternatives to car use for travellers across the Forth has been central to our strategy for the replacement crossing.

Updated findings from the Forth Estuary Transport Authority have allowed us to consider the future of the existing bridge. We have concluded that it can be retained, alongside the new bridge, as a dedicated public-transport crossing as part of a managed crossing strategy. Sustainable public transport will be given priority on a dedicated public transport corridor across the existing bridge, with the option in the future to convert the existing bridge for light rapid transit, trams or guided buses. The existing bridge will continue to provide access for pedestrians and cyclists.

A narrower design for the replacement crossing is therefore possible, which will help to reduce the carbon footprint of its construction. Implementation of that strategy will provide an immediate boost to public transport infrastructure, but with less environmental impact and at significantly less cost. It will protect and enhance the economies of Fife, Edinburgh and the east coast of Scotland as it will create new opportunities for sustainable economic growth.

The Government set the project team a challenging and demanding target of designing a scheme that will provide value for money, realise savings wherever possible and make the most efficient use of existing resources. The strategy that I have set out today delivers against each of those elements. I am delighted to announce a saving of around £1.7 billion in the project cost estimate, which is now between £1.72 billion and £2.34 billion. Of course, included in that cost is £100 million to £200 million that will be handed over to the UK Exchequer as VAT.

Work throughout 2008 to assess possible financial and procurement routes to deliver this huge project has been thorough and comprehensive, and has been set against the reality of the new international financial reporting standards, which bring infrastructure contracts on balance sheet. Officials have worked with experienced advisers on contract strategies, and that work has pointed us to the best form of contract for the project. To explore the opportunity for off-balance-sheet treatment, we have examined contract strategies ranging from conventional design and build contracts, through non-profit-distributing design, build, finance and operate concessions, to innovative long-term leasing options. As a consequence of that work and that reality, the Forth replacement crossing will be publicly funded and will be procured through a conventional design and build contract. That will deliver best value for money and the certainty of delivering the replacement crossing by 2016.

The Forth replacement crossing will be promoted through a parliamentary bill that will be introduced to Parliament late next year. I can also announce to Parliament that, under an SNP Government, the new Forth bridge will be toll-free.

I understand the keen interest in the design of the replacement crossing, and my officials continue to work closely with Architecture and Design Scotland to develop a bridge that will not only improve operational flexibility and provide greater reliability for all, but will enhance what is an iconic vista. Continuing our commitment to engage with local communities, we have arranged a full programme of supporting public information exhibitions for the new year.

The project is of a scale that is unprecedented in recent times in Scotland and will form a massive part of our infrastructure programme. Our strategy, which is economically sound and provides value for money, meets every requirement and maximises use of our existing assets. We remain on target both to achieve the 2016 opening date that we are committed to, and to deliver the substantial cost savings that I have reported today.

I have set out our immediate priorities for transport, which balance investment between road and rail. The whole of Scotland will benefit from nationwide packages that will enhance the road and rail networks for all travellers and users. Schemes include reconfiguration of our national rail timetable and measures to improve the attractiveness of public transport by, for example, introducing a strategy of park-and-choose sites serving the following: Aberdeen at Dyce and Charleston; Dundee; Edinburgh at Pitreavie and Halbeath; and Glasgow at Bargeddie, Fullarton and Bannockburn.

We have made clear our belief that providing quality public transport alternatives to the private car encourages responsible modal choice. To further that aim, we will bring forward schemes to build on the Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvements, including detailed signalling changes to manage the network better and changes to junctions in order to improve capacity. Rail services between Edinburgh and West Calder, Newcraighall, Dunbar, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy will be improved, the Haymarket interchange will be upgraded, and a national integrated ticketing scheme will be introduced to support services.

In the west of Scotland, there will be a step change in strategic rail enhancements not only to meet predicted future demand and capacity constraints within Glasgow, but to increase public transport access to areas of economic activity and key public services such as the new Southern general hospital. Those enhancements, which

include the possible development of a metro or light rapid transit network across Glasgow, will also allow improved rail connections with Ayrshire and Inverclyde through additional platform capacity in Glasgow and additional parking at stations including Ayr, Prestwick, Troon, Glengarnock and Kilwinning. Links to the Loch Ryan ports will continue to attract investment along the A75 and the A77 and, for key freight routes across Scotland, there will be specific measures on the west coast main line to lengthen passing loops, improve the loading gauge and increase freight terminal capacity.

In the central belt, the continued growth and success of the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee will be supported by intelligent transport systems on the M8, the M90, the A720 and the motorway approaches to Glasgow, and by active traffic management to manage pressures on the links between these cities. Improved access to the port of Grangemouth will include the upgrade of the A801 between the M9 and M8.

Allied to all that is the ability to make significant economic progress by reducing journey times between all of our cities. Although for Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness, work towards that aim will be led by investment in the rail network, it will be complemented by road safety improvements in targeted locations.

Moreover, after years of talk and no action under previous Administrations, and for the first time in any Scottish transport strategy, we have included in the STPR our intention to improve the A9 to dual-carriageway standard between Perth and Inverness. Improvements to the A96 will include upgrading the road to dual carriageway between the A9 and Nairn, with a new connection between the A9 and the A96 to provide relief for the Raigmore interchange. Other improvements to the A96 will include a long-overdue new Inveramsay bridge.

Promotion of solidarity and cohesion—key roles within our economic strategy—will be delivered by route improvements and safety measures, where required, across the west and north of the country on strategic routes including the A82, A835, A9, A90, A96 and A830. Targeted road congestion-relief measures will also be introduced, including upgrading the A77 to dual carriageway around Ayr, introducing bypasses at communities such as Dalry and Nairn, and junction improvements at key points such as Sheriffhall. Together, those schemes will make a major contribution to the principle of providing

“sustainable, integrated and cost effective public transport alternatives to the private car, connecting people, places and work, across Scotland”.

Since coming to power last year, we have applied the greatest possible impetus to

progressing the Forth replacement crossing. Even with that effort, building on planning that commenced in 2005, construction will start only in 2011, which illustrates the time that is needed to deliver major transport projects from inception to construction.

The STPR has been developed in close consultation between officials, recognising the key links between transport, planning and climate change. That has ensured that a common strategic agenda has been found across the national planning framework and the STPR, and that the recommendations that have been made are mindful of our commitment to reducing emissions. I anticipate that, after consideration by Parliament, the national planning framework will be approved by the Scottish ministers and published in spring 2009. To ensure effective delivery, the STPR and NPF teams will take forward an action programme with key delivery bodies in the new year.

We are keenly aware of the challenge that is posed by climate change and of the need to reduce emissions from Scotland. Our ambition to play a leading role internationally is reflected in our Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to Parliament last week. The bill represents the most ambitious climate change legislation anywhere in the world. The targets that it sets will drive new thinking, new solutions and new technologies, and will put Scotland at the forefront of international action to move the world along the path to a sustainable low-carbon economy.

The imperative of reducing emissions has featured large in the consideration that has been given to the options for crossing the Forth, and to the package of interventions that have arisen from the STPR. The carbon emissions that will be associated with the construction of the Forth crossing are now significantly less than those for the earlier option.

In the case of the STPR, the majority of the interventions involve improvements to the public transport infrastructure, thereby facilitating the shift from car-based travel to bus and rail. Although those outcomes are welcome—with the potential to reduce emissions by more than 100,000 tonnes—we acknowledge that much more needs to be done. In particular, we shall continue to give early priority to interventions that improve safety.

We are on track with the delivery of the Forth replacement crossing and, in addition to the investment that we are making in transport in the current programme, the STPR provides the robust evidence base to plan for the future of Scotland.

In the current financial climate, we, as a Government that is committed to delivering for the

people of Scotland, must ensure that our approach is ambitious, yet accountable and achievable. As we deliver this ambitious programme, we will take the right decisions for the future of all Scotland.

Strategic Transport Projects Review

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): As agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau, we now move straight to the debate on the strategic transport projects review.

I call Des McNulty, who will be followed by Alex Johnstone. Mr McNulty, you have nine minutes.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Mr McNulty did not come into the chamber until the seventh minute of the minister's statement.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order for me, Mr Neil.

Alex Neil: It is inappropriate—

The Presiding Officer: Please take your seat, Mr Neil.

Mr McNulty you have nine minutes.

14:49

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I thank the minister for making a copy of the summary report available in advance of the debate, and I apologise to the Parliament for not being present at the start of the minister's speech.

The summary is relatively brief, but the substantive report is 3,500 pages long. All that I can promise is that we will examine carefully the 29 projects and, in particular, the list of projects that are recommended as targeted infrastructure improvements. When we have done that, we will take a view on what is proposed.

I will make general comments. The review document does not say whether projects are listed in order of priority, but the lack of timescales, the lack of inclusion of the total cost, which is between £12 billion and £20 billion at 2008 prices, and the vagueness of many of the project specifications suggest a wish list rather than a programme that the Government expects to deliver. The programme name checks as many communities as possible but, on delivery, it will satisfy few of them.

It would have been far better for the Government to make clear what it can do with the cash that is likely to be available, when it will act and how projects will be funded. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change announced that the replacement Forth bridge will be procured through a conventional design and build contract, so at least he has given us that information. I understand that Mr Swinney intends to brief journalists about the funding arrangements for the new bridge at 3.30, when I hope he will admit the

failure of the Scottish Futures Trust and consign it to the dustbin, where it belongs. I also hope that any information that he shares with journalists will be shared with the Parliament this afternoon.

Let us be clear: the new Forth crossing was the acid test for the SFT. The SFT's failure, which Mr Swinney admits by not using it for the Forth bridge, will impose a huge burden on the capital budget while the project is being paid for. In that context, the review document is a cruel con. It will raise hopes that projects will be delivered, whereas the pecking order of projects in the minister's list and the resources that will be available once the Forth crossing has been accounted for mean that most of the projects are fantasies, so far away are they.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The member talked about burdens on the capital budget. Will he join us in lobbying Westminster to relieve us of the £1 billion burden that it recently imposed on us?

Des McNulty: I am interested in whether Mr Stevenson had a dialogue with the Westminster Government before making his statement today, as much of it is predicated on money from Westminster. *[Interruption.]* Would the minister like to comment?

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Des McNulty: Previous assessments of the need for a new Forth crossing rested on engineering assessments of the impact that the volume of traffic and the loads carried by heavy goods vehicles are having on the existing bridge's fabric. A sleeker additional crossing—which is a strange choice of words—is now proposed, which I presume will become a replacement when the existing bridge reaches the end of its useful life. The early indications from the drying-out or dehumidification process are promising, but the risk is that the replacement crossing that Mr Stevenson announced today will not be future proof.

The business case that the minister presents must be adapted to take account of changed circumstances and a different pattern of risk. It is inevitable that two bridges will be more expensive to maintain than one. The minister said that the projected cost of the proposed new bridge could be reduced to between £1.7 billion and £2.3 billion. I hope that those estimates and the specification are more robust than previous costings, which were a long way out of line with benchmarks for similar projects elsewhere. Before giving the green light to expenditure on the project, Parliament will have to be convinced that the specification meets requirements and that the costs will be vigorously managed.

The three-tier approach in the review document is supposed to demonstrate sustainability, but it simply adds confusion. Instead of setting out criteria for decisions on whether to include projects and showing timescales and costings, the minister has provided ballpark figures that underline the vagueness of some of the commitments.

The Government is paying lip service to its strategic priorities, to its policies on greenhouse gas emissions, as set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, and to the complementary objectives in the national transport strategy. We know that only a percentage of these projects will be built, and the reality is that the Government is giving a higher priority to road projects than it is to public transport projects. It is not right that it should do that.

In looking at Scotland's transport needs, no objective person would come up with a non-prioritised list, as the Government has done. Scotland deserves to know what the Scottish Government proposes to do and what, in practical terms, it can deliver.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): The people of Scotland would like to know at what level tolls on the new Forth road bridge should be set.

Des McNulty: Mr FitzPatrick misses the point. The reality is that decisions on the new bridge will be made by this Government, which is in power until 2011, and the contracts will be agreed and set in place by that point. This Government will have to come up with the funding arrangements. We will look carefully at its proposals.

We will also look carefully at the Government's proposals for elsewhere in Scotland. It has given us a long list of things that it might do and put costings against that long list, but it has not said what it will do about Glasgow crossrail, the A9 or the A96, and when. If one goes through the list of projects, one finds no dates and no accurate prioritisation.

Given the Government's approach to funding the Forth road crossing, it will have a radically diminishing resource to achieve anything else. Looking over a five or six-year period, one sees that it is placing all its eggs in one basket. There are severe limitations on what the Government will be able to achieve.

It is all very well for the Government to promise people in various parts of Scotland a bypass here or dualling there but not if it does not make it clear where the resources will come from to deliver those and its other plans, including significant improvements to rail services. What financial arrangements has the Government put in place to give substance to the promises that it has made?

Even if a project in a member's constituency is on the list—even high on the list—there is no guarantee that it will be taken forward. For those projects that come below the line—and some of the projects in west central Scotland appear to come well below the line—the prospect of delivery recedes ever further into the distance.

There is an economic logic to taking forward public transport initiatives and identifying key projects that need to be taken forward, such as high-speed rail projects, including electrification and a reduction in the Edinburgh to Glasgow journey time. Other projects that would deliver practical benefits, such as Aberdeen crossrail, do not even appear in the review. Elements are missing from the review that should have been included and the Government has no practical intention of delivering some of the elements that have been included.

The review is a con. That is what it will turn out to be.

14:58

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I also thank him for changing the attitude of Government to one that prioritises transport spending across the board.

More than 10 years ago, under a Conservative Government, Conservatives freely made a commitment to develop the transport network in Scotland. Of course, at that time, road transport was our highest priority. Since then, we have seen not only a change in Government but changes in attitudes to transport spending, including to the nature of the spend that is required. Conservatives now freely acknowledge that rail is an appropriate target for investment.

As we look at the detail of the statement and the supporting documents, the first issue for us to address is the Forth road bridge. For a long time, the Conservative group in the Scottish Parliament has believed that a new—replacement—Forth crossing is the single biggest transport priority in Scotland, and last year we were pleased to be able to assist the new Government in moving the project forward as a priority. However, although we agreed with the principles behind the decisions that were made, we were always concerned about the price that was attached to the project. We welcome the fact that today the minister has presented a proposal that is streamlined, both physically and financially, and which will deliver an affordable project that can put in place within an appropriate timescale a bridge to support the economy of Scotland.

It is interesting that, after talking about the costings for the bridge, the minister mentioned the

Scottish Futures Trust. I point out that the trust will play no part in funding the bridge. Although the minister may not have made the same choice as I would have made, I welcome the fact that a novel funding method is not being used for this fundamental, very expensive and important project. I take the opportunity to commit any future Conservative Government to ensuring that there will be no tolls on the new Forth crossing.

The fact that the costs of the bridge have been streamlined and brought under a reasonable degree of control indicates that something else is afoot. We need to bring forward capital projects over time and accept that efficiency and value for money will be key elements of how we deliver them. Changes to the economy of the country—which the minister mentioned—mean that it may be possible for us to drive a harder bargain in future. I seek a commitment from the minister to achieve similar efficiency savings in a range of projects that he may be costing.

The minister mentioned the development of rail transport. I welcome commitments to electrification, passing loops and timetable changes. I also welcome the changes that he proposes to the Aberdeen to Inverness route—he was so enthusiastic about those that they appeared in his statement twice.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): So far, the member has spent his whole speech giving fulsome praise to the SNP Administration for all that it is doing. Does he extend that fulsome praise to the killing off of the Aberdeen crossrail scheme, which the minister failed to mention as a project for the next 12 years?

Alex Johnstone: No, I do not.

I welcome the proposals for improvement to the Edinburgh to Glasgow rail line.

The economic importance to Scotland of road development cannot be denied. Although proposals to develop the A9 and A96 are welcome, they are in stark contrast to many of the smaller but locally essential developments that the minister failed to mention and on which we have still to see substantial detail. People will seek information on developments such as the A90/A937 junction at Laurencekirk and the Haudagain roundabout in Aberdeen. I hope that the absence of information on those from the statement does not mean that they will not be delivered.

The minister closed by saying at some length that he wishes to see carbon efficiency. I am disappointed that he did not take the opportunity to comment on the talks that I know he has had with Theresa Villiers, the UK shadow transport spokesman, on the possibility of developing high-

speed rail, which needs to come in within the timescale to which the statement relates.

Previous Governments have promised the earth on transport and done little. This Government must deliver. Today's statement falls short of what Parliament expected. It falls short of delivering a true list of priorities and true budgets and, above all, it fails to deliver an adequate timescale. There is much in the statement that delivers true progress, but there is not enough. I want a further statement at some time in the future that will deliver on priorities, the allocation of resources and, above all, progress.

15:04

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank the minister for his statement, although it has turned out to be disappointing, given that the announcement was expected in September.

I had hoped for clarity and for a coherent, costed and timed transport investment programme. I had hoped that we would be presented with a portfolio of projects and a clear timeline for their implementation, leading to improved journey times and connections, reduced carbon emissions and improvements in quality, accessibility and affordability—a programme that was built on the foundations of the national transport strategy that the previous Administration developed.

I had hoped for real details about the protection and enhancement of key trade routes, with the development of public transport routes to encourage modal shift. I wanted better connections to and from all our main towns and cities, especially Aberdeen and Inverness, which have particular transport needs, to service our indigenous industries such as timber, whisky, food, fish processing and oil-related businesses. Everyone in Scotland should have access to high-quality public transport options. Businesses that are located further from their markets should be helped to keep their transport costs down. Many places in Scotland have been given a name check this afternoon, but detailed analysis will be needed to ascertain whether anyone is actually getting very much from the deal.

Since the Scottish National Party took power in 2007, there has been so much disappointment at the Government's unwillingness to commit to certain projects, despite the party having supported them previously. The SNP has shown a remarkable reluctance to discuss such projects, hiding behind the review process for 18 months now. The STPR process has been clouded in baffling secrecy and equivocation, and the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has persistently refused to give even an indication of what Transport Scotland and the Government

have been considering under the review. As with the ScotRail franchise, there has been a lack of consultation and discussion. Instead of the knowledge and expertise of local councils, regional transport partnerships, transport operators and, indeed, users being used to assess projects, everyone has been kept at arm's length.

Today, after much anticipation, we got to unwrap the festive offering. Unfortunately, the Christmas present that we have all been eyeing with excitement for months turns out not to be the shiny new train set and construction kit that we were hoping for—it is only a box of fudge. No amount of ribbons and bows can hide the fact that what is hiding under the wrapping is another strategy, not an investment plan. It is a corridor-based approach that will be further worked up, costed and argued over, and communities do not know anything more today than they did yesterday. It is heavy on assertions and aspirations but light on detail and timescales.

Alex Salmond and his flock spent the 2007 election campaign promising all things to all people, adamantly insisting that their party alone would be the worthy sentinels of Scotland's transport infrastructure, who would waste not a single second in cutting the first sod for projects ranging from the new Forth crossing to the Inverness bypass; from a bullet train to the dualling of the A9. SNP ministers have since come out with a series of lukewarm and sometimes dismissive statements about some of our important transport projects. They have been poor custodians of the projects that are already in progress. I have watched in dismay as projects such as the Aberdeen crossrail have been reduced to nothing more than a few timetable improvements.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alison McInnes: No.

According to the strategy, the Dundee northern relief road will be either a new northern peripheral bypass or an upgrade to the existing junctions. We know nothing further than we knew before.

The Government appears to have knocked a massive £1 billion off the price of the new Forth crossing—and wants to be patted on the back for that—but the SNP inflated the price in the first place. In June 2007, Transport Scotland estimated the cost at £1.5 billion. By January 2008, it had risen to between £3.5 billion and £4.2 billion—a massive increase.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison McInnes: I do not have much time.

What possible confidence can we have that the Government is up to the task of delivering that vital transport link? Even with the £1 billion discount, it could still be the most expensive bridge ever built. The second Severn crossing cost £550 million at 2016 prices. The Severn bridge is twice the length of the Forth bridge, with six lanes, and it was built under public-private partnership.

Disappointingly, we know now that the Government is willing to invest £2.34 billion in a new Forth crossing that provides no multimodal options. Is a bridge that is to serve us until the end of the century to have no public transport priority? The existing crossing will need extensive and on-going maintenance—as the minister himself acknowledged today, the old bridge continues to deteriorate. Therefore, public transport has been downgraded to a second-rate solution; yet, the same Government trumpets its commitment to meeting climate change targets. In one breath the SNP urges us to unite against the United Kingdom Government; in the next breath it says that it is relying on a UK Treasury solution to meet our infrastructure needs. The bridge will come to us courtesy of UK plc.

The previous Administration was committed to effective transport infrastructure and put record levels of investment into the development of modern transport links. In Government, the Liberal Democrats shifted the balance of spending on transport, reversing the 70 per cent-30 per cent split between roads and public transport. We set the pace, but the SNP dropped the baton when it took over and is now completely out of the race. We were clear about our priorities; the SNP promised everything to everyone. The SNP overpromised in opposition but it still has not learned the lesson. The party's unwillingness to prioritise means that it continues to mislead everyone by suggesting that we can have it all. Meanwhile, the continuing delay will cost us dearly.

15:10

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I welcome today's announcements and look forward to progress being made on the delivery of major strategic transport infrastructure projects throughout Scotland and in particular in Aberdeen and the north-east.

The plan to deliver electrification of Scotland's railways is bold and overdue. I remember when colleagues from the north-east who represent other parties supported such plans and I am disappointed that those members have not acknowledged the direction of travel. I am sure that at some point they will congratulate the minister at least on that outcome of the review.

I welcome specific measures for the north and north-east, including the package of improvements for sections of the A90 between Aberdeen and communities in the north-east and the proposed improvements to sections of the A96 north of Aberdeen. I have been driving the A96 all my adult life and the hold-up at the Inveramsay bridge has been a running sore for many years. Today the minister announced that the issue will be addressed. I am delighted to welcome that project, which will enhance the quality of life in and economy of the north-east.

We will also have faster trains and improved services between Aberdeen and Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and Aberdeen and Inverness as a consequence of the strategic transport projects review. Line speed improvements, additional loops, upgraded signalling along entire lengths of track and more powerful rolling stock will also be introduced as part of the package, and similar improvements could be made to rail services between Aberdeen and Inverness.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am a regular traveller on the A96 and a resident of Inverness, so I welcome the announcement on improvements to the A96, but what happened to the First Minister's commitment to dual the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness, which was in his election campaign literature for the Gordon constituency?

Brian Adam: Considerable progress will be made on that, particularly between Aberdeen and Nairn, where work will be completed. There will also be a new loop between the A96 and the A9 at Inverness, which I am sure the member will welcome.

In addition to the significant focus on rail improvements in the Aberdeen area and to the north, west and south, I think that we will hear about other significant details. For the benefit of Mr Rumbles, in particular, will the minister spell out the differences between his plans for improving rail services around Aberdeen and the Aberdeen crossrail proposals?

Stewart Stevenson: I—

Mike Rumbles: This is absolutely bizarre.

Stewart Stevenson: Presiding Officer, the member asked me a question and it would be helpful if I indicated that new stations will of course be considered. We have dramatically increased cross-Aberdeen rail services—we did not wait for the strategic transport infrastructure projects review to do that.

Brian Adam: Will there be an opportunity to discuss the plans and their delivery with the north east of Scotland transport partnership?

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take a real intervention?

Brian Adam: I will be delighted to take an intervention from Mr Rumbles, provided that it is short and to the point—although it is unlikely to be so.

Mike Rumbles: Does the member agree that the minister has killed off the Aberdeen crossrail project? He has not even done so quietly. There is no mention of the project in plans for the next 14 years. The prospect of a service between Stonehaven and Inverurie with a 15-minute frequency has gone.

Brian Adam: That is an absurd characterisation of the proposals. There are significant rail enhancements.

Mike Rumbles: Oh, come on.

Brian Adam: The fact that Mr Rumbles wants to adhere to the words “Aberdeen crossrail” does not change the fact that there will be big improvements in rail services to both the north and west and the south of the city.

Mike Rumbles: It's my English now, is it?

Brian Adam: Presiding Officer, I ask for your protection from Mr Rumbles, who wishes to make a sedentary speech.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Adam: I think that I have taken enough interventions on that point. I would like to develop my speech.

As has been said, the proposals are for 2012 to 2020, and projects to which the Scottish Government has already made commitments, such as the Aberdeen western peripheral route, will continue to proceed. Perhaps when he sums up, the minister will confirm that the associated work required at the Haudagain roundabout in Aberdeen, to which he has already given a commitment, will also proceed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): You have one minute, Mr Adam.

Brian Adam: At what stage are the minister's considerations of the various options, and will he advise us how and when the work will be delivered?

Those of us who were up early enough this morning may have heard Des McNulty on the radio. He may have managed to apologise for being late to today's debate, but he did not apologise for being ill prepared. During his performance on “Good Morning Scotland”, he was given eight opportunities—that is one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight opportunities—to reject

tolls on the Forth road crossing on behalf of the Labour Party, but he failed to do so. The public in Scotland will want to know not how much time and effort Labour spends in knocking the proposals but when it will provide us with an alternative.

Des McNulty: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Adam: I do not think that I will be given the opportunity.

I am delighted that the package has been brought before us. It is unfortunate that it comes against the background of real cuts of £1 billion from the Labour Party, which will significantly affect capital programmes, and suggested cuts of a similar order from our colleagues in the Liberal Democrats, for which they have not spelled out—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is enough, Mr Adam.

15:17

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

Given the length of the strategic transport projects review and the fact that we have just heard the minister's statement summarising its most salient points, I will confine myself to some general observations, with a particular focus on one specific transport project proposal.

Work on the review started in summer 2006. It claims to be nothing less than a blueprint for a national transport strategy that will meet our country's needs. Such a vision, if it is to have any hope of success, must contain a series of interrelated capital projects that complement one another and deliver on the three strategic outcomes that are identified in the national transport strategy. Only if the fine detail of the STPR announced by the minister today meets the objectives on improving journey times, tackling climate change, and the quality, accessibility and affordability of transport can it be judged to be logically coherent, fair and beneficial to communities throughout Scotland.

Understandably, there will be a great deal of public and media interest in big-ticket issues, such as the new Forth crossing and its suitability, cost and method of funding. I will leave that to other members who want to touch on those issues. Unsurprisingly, I will focus on a rail project that has enjoyed widespread cross-party support and undoubtedly meets the three strategic outcomes described in the national transport strategy: Glasgow crossrail.

In April, I secured a members' business debate on crossrail, which is the missing link between

Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street stations. It is more than an inconvenient 15-minute walk for passengers; it is a decisive division in Scotland's rail network. It is an avoidable gap that could be bridged by the proposed Glasgow crossrail project. Crossrail would link the routes that run to and from the stations, providing a new line across the Clyde.

The minister will be aware that a report detailing the crossrail appraisal and economic case was published earlier this year, and it predicted that the implementation of the project would add £1.06 billion to the Scottish economy over the next 60 years. Additionally, 4 million passengers were predicted to use new stations at West Street, Gorbals and Glasgow cross if crossrail becomes a reality. The report also indicated that more than 3 million passengers would use the Glasgow cross station at High Street, which would make Glasgow cross a potential hub of the interchange.

That research provides proof positive—substantial, compelling evidence—of crossrail's economic development benefits, environmental benefits, benefits to business including construction businesses, and connectivity benefits. The project would be nationally important, because not only would it have an impact on Glasgow and west central Scotland, it would link up Ayrshire, through Glasgow and west central Scotland, with the east.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Bill Butler: I am afraid that I do not have time. Another benefit, of which the minister's intervention has reminded me, is that the scheme is deliverable by the time of the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games.

Finally, the capital cost of linking Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street stations would be relatively insignificant, given the benefits that would accrue. That must be a grave and serious consideration. As the minister said in his statement, we need

"the optimum return for every pound that is invested."

I could not agree more. Imagine my surprise, then, when I could find no specific reference to Glasgow crossrail in his statement.

I also scanned the Transport Scotland summary document in the short time that was available to me, but I found no mention of Glasgow crossrail. In project 24—entitled "West of Scotland strategic rail enhancements"—I discovered a reference to what I take is a description of a hugely expensive and impractical scheme, which was discounted long ago, for linking the two Glasgow stations. I would be grateful if, in summing up the debate, the minister confirmed that my understanding of that is correct. Many members, including me, believe that

Strathclyde partnership for transport is still willing to work with the Government to deliver cross-city rail travel in Glasgow, but not through the impossibly expensive scheme that is placed at number 24 in the strategic transport projects review.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Bill Butler: People in Glasgow want a cost-effective crossrail scheme to be in place before the Commonwealth games. Any governing party that ignores the overwhelming case for Glasgow crossrail will pay a heavy electoral price. In my view, project 24 as described kicks the many benefits of SPT's cost-effective plan into the long grass. We need a real discussion to agree a way to use a tiny fraction of the £3 billion costs that are ascribed to project 24—a project that is a pipe dream—so that we can together construct the cost-effective, realistic and deliverable Glasgow crossrail that I described earlier.

To avoid the SNP Government being tagged with the label that it does not care about Glasgow—which I am sure the minister wants to avoid at all costs—I hope that, at tonight's meeting of the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail, he will begin to engage in a productive discussion with members of SPT and members of all parties—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must stop now, I am afraid.

15:23

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): If we are candid, those of us not involved in drawing up the strategic transport projects review—our first sight of the review has been over the past few hours—must agree that it would be unrealistic to form a balanced view on whether the review provides the best set of priorities. It is sensible to reserve judgment until the full details of the plans emerge.

Let me focus first on the Forth bridge. It is obvious that any Government of whatever colour that failed on the new Forth crossing would be severely politically damaged and would do significant damage to Scotland's economy, so it is essential that the new Forth crossing is completed as soon as possible, notwithstanding the perhaps more positive prognosis for the existing bridge.

I will not be churlish. The saving—or reduction in cost—that we have been told about today ought to be welcomed. The cynical might suggest that the original cost was inflated, which is a perfectly legitimate position to adopt. Given previous experience of transport projects, members might well have reason to be cynical: the Stirling-Alloa-

Kincardine railway doubled in cost, the Borders railway seems to be trebling in cost and the cost of the Airdrie to Bathgate line has increased fourfold. Transport projects have a history of significant cost overruns.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am among those members who are cynical about inflated estimates, but does the member accept that questions must be asked about where some of the savings have come from and what impact that will have on remaining projects, such as the building of approach roads, which will affect towns such as Queensferry?

Derek Brownlee: Absolutely. The issue of the savings resulting from a change in specification is fundamental and must be examined.

I want to discuss the decision to use conventional funding to construct the new bridge. The obvious alternative would have been some variant of private finance. I have no particular problem with the Government going down the public procurement route, but we know that there are problems with existing public design-and-build contracts, and the Government needs to take that into account in the contract. For example, we need to know whether there will be a cap on construction costs. It is essential that there is a limit to the risks that the taxpayer will bear when it comes to the cost of constructing the bridge, but equally, if we cap the cost, we need to know about the robustness of the contractor that is chosen to deliver the contract. We must be provided with a significant level of detail on the underwriting of costs, to ensure that the taxpayer is protected.

I make no sweeping generalisations about the public sector being unable to deliver projects on time and on budget, but safeguards must be put in place to ensure that the new Forth crossing is delivered on time and on budget. We must be aware of the penalties that will apply to any company that is involved in the construction process if the bridge is delivered late or over budget.

I have no particular problem with the decision not to use the Scottish Futures Trust to construct the bridge; frankly, what matters is that the bridge is built as soon as possible and at the least possible cost to the taxpayer, while preserving the key attributes that we have requested.

The minister's statement raised other issues. One of the fundamental problems with transport policy is the difference in the relevant timelines. The timeline for the strategic transport projects review is different from the timeline for comprehensive spending reviews, which in turn is different from the lifetime of Governments, so we need some form of consensus among parties about what projects are prioritised and when they

will be delivered. We cannot expect complete consensus, but it would be appalling if, for example, the new Forth crossing were to be started and a new Government were to stop it. That is an extreme scenario, which is unlikely to arise, but on other projects different parties might take different approaches. We must be cognisant of the fact that the Government might change during the project.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I agree. It is not only the Scottish Government that might change. Given that the Scottish Government is, in effect, seeking to borrow from the Treasury to fund the project, it is dependent on UK Governments and their future plans for the devolved budget.

Derek Brownlee: Absolutely. We can only hope that there is a change of Government at Westminster soon.

There is also uncertainty about the level of resources, which raises a question for all of us about how to pursue a range of options. The Government must have in its mind a projection for how much it intends to spend on transport over the next 10 years, given what it expects to receive. It will not necessarily have the fine details, but it must have a central assumption. If we are to be able to make political choices, we must know what the highest and lowest assumptions are, and we need to know what the projects numbered 30 and beyond—which are not dealt with in the projects review document—would be.

I will give an example of why that is important. The second phase of project 16, which is the A9 upgrade, is costed at between £1.5 billion and £3 billion. If the Government budgeted for the higher estimate but brought the project in at the lower cost, the £1.5 billion could fund 13 of the 29 projects that are mentioned in the summary document, including the upgrade of the A96 between Nairn and Inverness, rail system enhancements, measures to improve the A82, and park-and-ride initiatives. The achievement of the lower costs for the A9 project could affect 13 different projects. That is just one example; there will be a whole load of others.

As we move forward, we must be clear about how Governments prioritise not just how much money is allocated to transport, but where it is allocated. Today's statement might be a start, but it is certainly not the end of the road.

15:30

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): These are excellent proposals for road and rail transport improvements throughout Scotland, but we should recognise that the project hierarchy emerged from our predecessors and that, because

of the length of time that it takes to deliver projects, continuity is the responsibility of the whole Parliament.

Into the bargain, two issues have been added. First, according to the chambers of commerce, almost 70 per cent of businesses said that lack of quality transport infrastructure was inhibiting inward investment in Scotland. That should be considered carefully. However, the imperative to address climate change also concerns us. The need to reduce our carbon footprint is a major aspect that must go along with the strategic transport projects review. I was delighted that the minister talked about the reduction of 100,000 to 150,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent against business as usual.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: Not at the moment. I am about to develop my point.

In transport, there are two potential methods of reducing emissions. One is to use cars and lorries that have the capacity to do 70 to 100 miles to the gallon instead of the average 35. Building safer roads is not the only means of tackling climate change. We could insist that within five years, the British Government should not allow cars and lorries to be sold that cannot do more than 70 miles to the gallon. That would help us enormously.

The second method of reducing emissions lies in the development of rail. In that context, the infrastructure for inward investment and future major developments throughout Scotland come into sharp focus. My constituency office is in Wick, and I understand the difficulties of doing it all in 12 years, 20 years or whatever. We have inherited a situation in which nothing will have happened north of Stirling until this set of plans is in place. As the chambers of commerce have pointed out, the Highland main line has been dilapidated for a long while. I am delighted about the proposed improvements to loops and double-track sections, line gauge enhancement, new and improved signalling and more powerful traction through the investment of between £50 million and £100 million in phase 1, £100 million to £250 million in phase 2, and £50 million to £100 million in phase 3.

If Scotland is to be a modern country, the journey time for passengers who wish to go from the northern capital of Scotland—Inverness—to Edinburgh must be reduced by 35 minutes between Inverness and Perth and also reduced south of Perth. In the high-speed rail debate, it was recognised that there should be the potential for high-speed rail to go from London to not only Glasgow and Edinburgh but the centre of

Scotland, up towards Perth. If we started the high-speed rail link from both ends—from Scotland and from London—we could start seriously to improve travel times to the central belt, thereby reducing times to the far north. I hope that that will come into the plans in due course.

I have to mention important developments around Inverness. On the railways, Dalcross station has potential. Indeed, the SNP Government is ensuring that an hourly service to Inverness will be possible for the first time. That is an excellent result to go along with improvements to the Highland main line.

I hope that what I have to say about roads is equally helpful. We recognise the massive size of the job that has to be undertaken. We cannot shirk the fact that parts of the A9 require safety work. The developments around Perth and on other sections of the A9 are therefore welcome. However, work on the section between Kingussie and Aviemore is essential, because there are many accidents in that area. I very much welcome what the strategy says about that.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

At a recent safety briefing, it was suggested to us that it is better to arrive five minutes late in this life than 20 years early in the next. Road safety is an important aspect of the developments, and it also fits in with the climate change agenda.

The minister's statement went into detail on electrifying the network by the 2030 target, but we will have to consider the routes. I hope that the minister will consider the far north railway line: some preparatory work could be done to ensure that more people can use the line. An appalling lack of investment has reduced signalling capacity, increased the journey time to more than four hours and reduced the number of people using the line. It is desperately important that, in the great process of developing rail in Scotland, we consider the whole network, not just the network as far north as Inverness.

15:36

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As others have said, it is impossible to analyse documentation totalling more than 3,000 pages and then speak on it just a few minutes after the minister has spoken. What I am about to say will, I am sure, be added to in due course, once we have had time to analyse the documentation thoroughly. However, what is already clear—other members have made this point—is that the summary documents contain very little by way of precise timescales, which gives rise to uncertainty on a

whole range of projects. There are also few indications of the relative priorities of projects, as Des McNulty said. It is obvious that many pre-election promises have now been shoved eight, 10 or even more years into the future.

The only thing that is guaranteed is a huge amount of SNP spin about today's announcement. As we speak, John Swinney is no doubt briefing the press thoroughly and putting the best possible gloss on the announcement. As Alison McInnes said, every community in Scotland gets a name check in the documentation, but I urge those communities to check what is under their name. They may be disappointed by the difference between what was once promised and what is now being offered. Today's announcement is as much a fairytale as it is a transport plan. Tomorrow, next week, the week after and in the months to come, I am sure that we will see the reality.

SNP spinning about transport is not a new phenomenon. We have witnessed it for many years—I am sad to say that the principal culprit left the chamber a short time ago. Before the election, we were asked to suspend belief in the laws of financial gravity: everything was not only possible but possible right now, for example the dualling of the whole of the A96 and the dualling of the A9 from Perth to Inverness. Stewart Stevenson went further and talked about dualling the whole of the A9. Perhaps he did not realise that it runs up to Thurso.

The impression was given that those projects would happen immediately the SNP came into office. However, what have we got? Eighteen months later, not a single centimetre of dual carriageway has been put in place on either road, not one design for a single centimetre of dual carriageway on those roads has even been approved, and no environmental assessments or statutory procedures have been completed to build a single centimetre of dual carriageway. Not so much as 10 miles of land has been purchased on which to build the dual carriageways that were promised, no contract specifications or tender documents have been drawn up for new dual carriageways, and no diggers are on site anywhere along the length of the roads.

Only last week, John Swinney announced that two sections of the A9 were to be upgraded—the minister may have referred to them again today—at Moy and Carrbridge, which are within my constituency. Was it the dual carriageway that we were promised before the election? No. What was it? It was the overtaking lanes that the SNP condemned and decried before the election. That is what we are offered. And today, what is being announced on the A9 and the A96? More of those overtaking lanes that the SNP condemned. From

Blair Atholl to Inverness in phase 1, there will be not dual carriageway but more overtaking lanes. Are we to suspend our belief in reality here as well?

Jamie McGrigor *rose*—

Peter Peacock: I will not give way, if Jamie McGrigor does not mind. I want to develop the argument.

Are we really to believe that in phase 1 we will build three-lane roads between Blair Atholl and Inverness, and that in phase 2 we will rip it all up and start to develop dual carriageways? I say to people who are following today's proceedings and listening to what is being said, "Watch what the SNP does. Don't listen to what it says." The SNP said that it would dual the A9, but its first action is to produce the overtaking lanes that it previously condemned.

Looking forward, can we hope for better? How much dual carriageway will be completed by the end of next year? None. How much by the end of the following year? None. What about the end of the year following that? None. Indeed, what about the duration of the next Government, the Government after that and the Government after that? If we are lucky, less than 20 per cent of the A9 and the A96 that we were promised would be upgraded will be upgraded.

The Conservative finance spokesman pointed out that there is a £1.5 billion difference between the estimated costs of upgrading the A9, which is a remarkable figure. Why is that? Is the lower estimate not for the dual carriageway but for the continuation of the three-lane road?

What about the A82? We have seen a superb campaign from the people of the west Highlands about the dangers of the A82. That road desperately needs to be upgraded. The campaign pointed out that more than 130 miles of that road do not meet the basic design standard of a 7.3m road width. Today, we are offered a welcome development of the section between Corran and Fort William, which it appears from the documentation will be widened, but what about the other 100-odd miles of that road? When will it be upgraded and to what standard? From the documentation, it looks as though it will be years before we see any significant improvement. That is to say nothing of the A95, the Kessock bridge roundabout or many other routes that I could mention.

I will finish on the issue of the Inverness trunk link route. The road is of great and growing strategic importance to the Highlands and Islands. I note the commitment to develop the east junction between the A96 and the A9, which I welcome, but it falls far short of the ambitions of the people of Inverness and the wider Highlands. It is significant

that today's announcement does not change the fact that the A82 runs through Inverness, which is the problem. The Government must adopt the new trunk link route as a strategic trunk road and relieve the old road. Today's announcement is designed specifically to exclude that, and people should not miss that fact.

15:42

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I will concentrate my remarks on two projects in my constituency that received no mention at all in today's statement—a grade-separated junction on the A90 at Laurencekirk and the Aberdeen crossrail project. The omission of those two projects will be a matter of huge regret to my constituents.

The need for a full grade-separated junction on the A90 at Laurencekirk is not new. Local campaigner Jill Campbell has collected an 8,000-strong petition and first addressed the Public Petitions Committee on the matter back in 2004, when she said:

"The petition began in anger and confusion—anger at yet another life lost, and confusion as to why nothing had been done to make the junction safer. In the past five years, there have been five fatalities, 29 reportable accidents and 16 reported injuries. The reality for us is that five people have died and two unborn babies have also been lost. There have been countless collisions and near misses. People have been shocked and injured, families devastated and a community has been affected by yet more tragedy."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 10 November 2004; c 1173.]

Around the same time, Jill Campbell and I met the then Minister for Transport, Nicol Stephen. Within weeks of that meeting taking place, temporary—I stress the point that they were only temporary—safety measures were put in place in the form of a 50mph speed limit and speed cameras. Those measures have been a success in that, since their installation, there have fortunately been no further driver fatalities either entering or leaving Laurencekirk via the A90. However, my constituents who use the junction tell me that near misses are a regular occurrence and that there have still been an alarming number of accidents.

The minister wrote to me earlier this year, claiming that, since the introduction of the safety measures, there have been only two slight injury accidents at the junction of the A90 with the A937 at Laurencekirk.

Stewart Stevenson: Correct.

Mike Rumbles: However, that statistic disguises the fact that people in Laurencekirk use three junctions to access the A90.

Stewart Stevenson: Correct.

Mike Rumbles: Just listen, please, minister.

The minister's figures relate to only one of those junctions. Figures that Jill Campbell secured under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 reveal that, taking into account the three A90 junctions, there have been a total of 21 casualties—

Stewart Stevenson: Correct.

Mike Rumbles: Oh please, minister, just listen.

Those casualties have occurred as a result of collisions at the junctions since the safety measures were put in place. Six of the injuries were classified as serious. It is clear, therefore, that even with the supposedly temporary safety measures in place, the stretch of road is very dangerous. There is no question but that we need a full grade-separated junction for Laurencekirk.

The minister will no doubt try to defend the omission of any mention of Laurencekirk by saying that his review says that "Specific plans will ensure" that the A90 will be

"safe and suitably maintained ... and may ... include realigning sections of road"

and improvements to junctions. However, in a parliamentary answer, Stewart Stevenson said:

"The Strategic Transport Projects Review ... could consider the possibility of a grade separated junction at Laurencekirk."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 11 June 2007; S3W-324.]

Furthermore, in a letter to me last month, the First Minister said:

"the safety record of the A90 including the junctions on the Laurencekirk by-pass, is being considered in the context of the Review."

However, there is no mention at all of the need for a grade-separated junction at Laurencekirk in the minister's report, although it includes specific commitments to building grade-separated junctions on the A9 at the Keir, Broxden and Inveralmond roundabouts in the SNP-held constituencies of Perth and Stirling—so much for the assurances of Stewart Stevenson and Alex Salmond, and so much for their impartiality on road safety.

Stewart Stevenson's failure to include specific plans for a grade-separated junction for Laurencekirk in this review, along with his repeated refusal even to meet Jill Campbell and other campaigners from Laurencekirk, is a real kick in the teeth for my constituents. Even at this late stage, can the minister reassure my constituents by agreeing with me that a grade-separated junction is needed at Laurencekirk and by saying that he will allocate the funds that are necessary to build it? I am not holding my breath.

The omission of any reference to the Aberdeen crossrail project in the statement will also have implications for my constituents and for many other communities in the north-east. There can be little doubt that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has now killed crossrail. The alarm bells started ringing back in June, when the chair of Nestrans, the minister's party colleague Councillor Kevin Stewart, wrote to the minister to say that, at a meeting between Nestrans officers and Transport Scotland officials last year,

"The distinct impression had been given that at officer level this scheme was dead and only political pressure could change that."

It is clear from the statement today, as well as from the minister's record of 18 months of doing absolutely nothing to promote crossrail, that the necessary political pressure will not be forthcoming from this minister or the SNP Government. That is to the minister's eternal discredit. I note that the minister is laughing.

The Stonehaven to Inverurie crossrail scheme—involving a 15-minute service—was, along with the Aberdeen western peripheral route, an integral part of the modern transport strategy for the north-east. The minister's decision to kill crossrail—strangling it quietly in the hope that nobody would notice—will unquestionably leave a huge legacy of transport difficulties for everyone in the north-east.

15:48

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I congratulate John Swinney and Stewart Stevenson on the statement on the STPR.

Years of neglect and underinvestment by the previous Administration and successive United Kingdom Governments have left Scotland with a transport infrastructure that the Scottish Chambers of Commerce describes as dilapidated. Listening to Mr Rumbles, other Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party members who have spoken today, I am tempted to ask them why, if they think that all the schemes that they have mentioned should be in the Government's STPR, their parties did not deliver them in the eight years during which they were in government.

It will surprise nobody to learn that I will concentrate my remarks on the new Forth bridge. In December last year, the Government confirmed its intention to build a multimodal, cable-stayed bridge. Members are aware of the reasons why it is needed. The cables on the existing bridge are decaying, and heavy goods vehicle restrictions might need to be imposed, although it does not look as though the bridge will have to be closed completely.

Today, the Government has announced that the project will be publicly funded. In other words, there will be no private finance initiative funding and there will be no tolls.

Jeremy Purvis: We heard from the minister that an approach has been made to the Treasury for borrowing to pay for the capital costs. Is the member aware—because the Parliament is not—whether it is certain that that process will be approved by the Treasury? All that we know is that an approach has been made.

Tricia Marwick: The minister will probably address that matter in summing up. The project will be publicly funded—it will certainly not involve PFI and it will not be funded by tolls.

I welcome the sensible steps that have been taken to reduce the cost by £1.7 billion, but the new bridge will still cost up to £2.3 billion and it is vital that the Government realises the best value for that money. Does the minister intend to make representations to the Treasury to ask for any VAT that this Government pays on infrastructure projects to be returned to it to allow us to do more? The prospects for using the present bridge for public transport are welcome.

I listened to Des McNulty on the radio this morning: it almost sent me back to sleep, but I got myself out of that. He was not happy with the funding or with the two-bridge strategy. He suggested that the bridge could have been built using PFI, which brings the Skye bridge to mind, and he would not rule out the Labour Party imposing tolls to pay for it—where has Des McNulty been?

Des McNulty: I said on the radio this morning that Labour did not favour the Skye bridge approach. I also want to make it clear that the Labour Party has no plans to introduce tolls on the existing bridge or on the new bridge. The bridge will be signed for under the current Government, which will make the plans and set the funding mechanism in place. I hope that it will be completed under a different Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is long enough, Mr McNulty.

Tricia Marwick: I will quote what Mr McNulty said this morning on the radio when the question was put to him. The interviewer said:

“To be clear, to keep your options open, you would keep the option of returning the tolls, then”

to which Des McNulty replied:

“No, what I said is we would do is look at all—all possible options.”

The possible options include tolls. Some of us remember that it was a Labour Government that imposed the tolls in 1964, and it was the Labour-

Liberal Executive that refused to remove the tolls between 1999 and 2007.

I will turn to the Leven to Thornton rail link, which the south east of Scotland transport partnership will approve for consideration tomorrow. I am well aware that that project is too late for the current STPR, and that it is a regional and not a national priority, but I would welcome an assurance from the minister that he will meet with SEStran to consider how the link can be taken forward—I know that he is aware of how vital it is for the Levenmouth area.

The Forth bridge is the most exciting and important infrastructure programme for generations. It is vital for the economy of Fife and the whole of the east coast of Scotland. The whingeing from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties is remarkable if one considers that when they were in Government they refused point blank to commit to building a new Forth crossing. The STPR is a well-thought-out review from a Government that is intent on delivering for all people in Scotland.

15:53

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): A journalist suggested yesterday that MSPs would need to take a speed-reading course to grasp in a matter of minutes the sense of the documentation—which runs to over 3,000 pages—on which today’s ministerial announcement on the strategic transport projects review is based. It so happens that some years ago I took a speed-reading course, which enabled me to read Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” in 20 minutes—it is about Russia.

Most of us, however, are referring in today’s debate not to the 3,000-page tome, but to the summary—or idiot’s guide—that runs, I estimate, to a modest 27 pages, although the minister’s attention to detail did not run to having the pages numbered.

In some of my previous capacities, I have been responsible—like the minister—for implementing transport programmes worth hundreds of millions of pounds. The norm in the transport industry is to have a five-year programme of funding and implementation, with a few reserve projects that may be advanced into the programme in the event of other projects slipping.

Such a programme is made up of individual projects, with a start date given for each over the five years. The proponents of particular projects need to take an intelligent interest in seeing that their favoured schemes are in a committed, funded programme, which gives an actual start date, or that they are at least on the reserve list.

Does today's ministerial announcement on the STPR constitute a programme? Let us take a closer look. Is it made up of projects? No, they are called 29 major "packages of work", which is a very flexible phrase. Does that matter, provided that individual projects have precise sums of money and precise start dates shown against them? Let us look again. The cost of project 1, the strategic road safety plan, is given as between £10 million and £50 million and the timescale is over 10 years. There is not a lot of precision on that project.

The cost of project 8, which is "park and ride/park-&-choose", is between £50 million and £100 million and the timescale is not shown. Project 16, the A9 upgrade between Dunblane and Inverness, received a lot of applause when the minister mentioned it. The cost of phase 1 is between £500 million and £1 billion and the cost of phase 2 is between £1.5 billion and £3 billion. Phases usually mean that there is a long timescale, but no timescale is shown.

I invite members to play hunt the commitment. Is their favoured project committed to or merely mentioned? The minister said that this is a 20-year plan, but that is an oxymoron. If a favoured scheme is on a five-year funded list, that is a programme. In the real world of transport, a 10-or-20-year horizon for a given scheme is a mere gleam in the eye.

Like most members, I have scanned the document looking for particular schemes. For example, I looked for a six-figure sum—the sort of small sum that a transport minister ought to be able to find down the back of a couch—for a study of high-speed rail links from Scotland to London, but I looked in vain. There was no sign of 20:20 vision in the 20-year plan.

Project 11, improving links to the Loch Ryan ports—Stranraer and Cairnryan—caught my eye. The cost is—here we go again—between £10 million and £50 million and no timescale is given. I have no particular quarrel with the scheme—it is about the upgrading of the A75 Euro route from Stranraer to Dumfries, which is a sub-standard piece of infrastructure. However, it shows no appreciation of the fact that Stranraer is served by a Cinderella rail service, which, in the context of Glasgow crossrail, could be linked to Prestwick airport; to Troon, with its links to Ireland; to Glasgow airport; and, for example, east and north to the enhanced port of Grangemouth for freight and to the international passenger ferry port at Rosyth.

The announcement falls well short of doing what it says on the tin. It is not a programme; it is a wish list. Those so-called "packages of work" are slices of salami. The approach is not strategic; it is pork

barrel. It is an idiot's guide, but the Scots people are not idiots and they will not be fooled by it.

15:59

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Des McNulty was the first member to mention the 3,000-plus pages of documentation that back up the document. A few moments after that, he seemed to run out of things to say. It occurred to me that I should ask that his committee papers be given to him only an hour before the meetings. That might solve a wee problem or two for me.

Seriously, though, to produce more or less out of the blue an immense document that must be carried around in two large boxes, with no consultation or open and transparent process, must be a questionable action. However, it is not the first time that we have seen the Government do that on major transport decisions, and we will debate another such decision in the chamber tomorrow morning.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I will do so only once, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: It may be helpful to say that there has been a continuous and long-standing engagement with the regional transport partnerships on the issue, which is reflected in the document that has been produced.

Patrick Harvie: I certainly think that what is reflected in the document is the extent to which sustainable transport organisations have not been part of the process.

I want to consider the document in the context of the national transport strategy because it is a strategic document—it claims to be—and we should consider its strategic objectives. On the objective of affordable and high-quality public transport, I suspect that bus users or users of First ScotRail services, which we will debate in the chamber tomorrow morning, will know all about the price rises that they have seen and will question whether any approach is achieving high-quality and affordable public transport.

Let us look at the climate change objective in the strategy. The minister was happy to talk about a reduction in CO₂ emissions of 100,000 to 150,000 tonnes—I think that Rob Gibson echoed that figure—but I call that poor. The document claims that that represents a 1 per cent reduction in emissions from the transport sector. In fact, we are not talking about a 1 per cent reduction in emissions from the transport sector overall, because the 1 per cent relates only to the projects in the document. It ignores the fact that, for example, the M74 extension alone implies an additional 450,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per

year, which wildly overshadows the projects in the document.

Having a serious programme to boost active travel such as walking and cycling would be one of the best ways of helping to reduce the carbon emissions from transport. Why is there no sense in the document that that is a strategic objective that we are willing to spend big money on? Transport policy has long had an unstated objective that is not strategic, but psychological. I do not level this charge purely at the current Government, because it existed in the previous Scottish Government and exists in the UK Government. The objective is not about climate change, connectivity or the economy, but about vanity. Ministers of any political party love the idea that they can stand there cutting the ribbon, wearing their hard hat and smiling for their photograph, thinking, "This is what I built! Look what I did! Aren't I a big strong minister?" That objective has marred transport policy for far too long.

Let us look at one example of that objective. We can all see in our mind's eye Mr Salmond in his hard hat opening the new Forth crossing, but where has the multimodal element of that crossing gone? What about the contradictions in what the Government says about the existing bridge? It now seems to accept implicitly that the existing bridge can be repaired and will last, and that it is even strong enough for us to run trams over it. Well, if it is a robust, repairable bridge, why on earth do we need a new one, if not to increase road capacity, which runs entirely contrary to the climate change objectives?

There are contradictions, too, between paragraphs 30 and 31 in the minister's statement. Paragraph 30 says that

"the existing bridge ... can be retained as a dedicated public transport crossing".

However, paragraph 31 states:

"Sustainable public transport will be given priority in a dedicated public transport corridor".

Well, which is it? Will public transport be given priority in a corridor or will it have exclusive use of the bridge?

Brian Adam *rose*—

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: No. I indicated earlier to the minister that I would take only one intervention from him. He will be able to respond to me in his closing speech.

I want to move on and talk about Glasgow in my closing remarks. Like other Glasgow members, I am dismayed to see no reference to the Glasgow crossrail proposal in the summary document. However, I managed to find a relevant extract from

the 3,000 pages before I got to my feet to speak. Annex 3 to Appendix E of "Strategic Transport Projects Review Report 3: Generation, Sifting and Appraisal of Interventions" states:

"Construction of Glasgow Crossrail ... Rationale for Not Recommending ... On balance, as a 'stand alone' intervention, Glasgow Crossrail performs reasonably well",

and goes on to state that there are

"better opportunities to enhance connectivity"

from other projects being suggested. The summary document states:

"Significant works could include developing a Metro/Light Rapid Transit ... and/or a new city centre station",

but the minister mentioned those as mere possibilities. Why should Glasgow be satisfied with a reference to mere possibilities? Glasgow has a very good crossrail scheme gathering dust on a shelf, waiting for approval. It also has disused tunnels that are being maintained in safe order and which could be used for extending the subway, for light rail or for safe and convenient walking and cycling routes.

Those are my reflections on the possibilities, but whatever my reflections, the Government should know what it is going to do; it should be able to come here and explain what solutions Glasgow will have, rather than merely floating the possibilities.

Presiding Officer, I know that you do not always approve of background chatter, but earlier, while the minister was on his feet, Mr Brownlee was heard to remark to me that the review was clearly not an attempt to get the Greens on board. I am forced to agree with Mr Brownlee on that point.

16:06

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome today's debate, just as I welcome the minister's statement.

The Central Scotland region, which I represent, is one of the most densely populated in Scotland and its residents depend on an efficient and effective public transport system. The first members' business debate that I managed to secure was on the subject of the vastly important rail improvements that the Government has planned across Central Scotland and ways to encourage greater use of rail travel through effective ticket pricing. I therefore welcome the part of the minister's statement on smarter ticketing.

Years of underinvestment have left not just Central Scotland, but the country with an inadequate transport system—I hope that we all agree about that. In the current economic climate, an efficient, up-to-date transport system to move

people and goods around is vital in order to ensure sustained economic development in Scotland. We cannot afford to have our national transport infrastructure sidelined as it has been in the past. That history of neglect is why the Government is, rightly, addressing the issue of transport infrastructure directly with a degree of diligence that was previously lacking.

The strategic transport projects review outlines a number of key developments that will benefit people not only in the region that I represent but across the country as a whole. As I have said before in the chamber, I warmly welcome the Government's policy of electrifying the main rail route between Glasgow and Edinburgh, which will increase the number of services from five or six services to 13 services each and every hour. That will transform the region even more than the introduction of the quarter-hourly service did several years ago.

Jeremy Purvis: I am struck by what the member said about proper diligence. Has he seen the costs note in the summary document that the minister published? The costs are not projected at point of completion; they are only for broadly similar projects and they are not inflation proofed. The summary document states:

"The costs quoted here are offered as an indicative guide only."

That is one hell of a diligence, is it not?

Jamie Hepburn: The point that I was making was about ambition for our country. The review sets out clearly a level of ambition for infrastructure that has been sadly lacking for so long.

As I was about to say, users of the Glasgow to Edinburgh service, particularly Central Scotland's commuters, will benefit from a timely and reliable service as a result of those improvements. Improved services in terms of journey time, reliability and perhaps even frequency at Croy, Falkirk High and Polmont stations in the region that I represent, will be welcomed. So, too, will the potential for direct services from Edinburgh Park, given that many people across the central belt now work within the vicinity of that station. Many of my constituents travel to Glasgow and Edinburgh for purposes of work and recreation, so improvements to the rail services between the two cities are to their benefit.

Of great importance is the fact that the move will create more economic opportunities for the place of my birth: Glasgow. So, too, will the other improvements that are planned for the city. Patrick Harvie and others seemed to be dismayed about some of the improvements that are being outlined for Glasgow; I think that they represent the

greatest potential investment in the city's transport infrastructure in my lifetime.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to the member for giving way. I would be even more grateful if he could tell me precisely what those improvements are. They are mentioned as mere possibilities.

Jamie Hepburn: I am about to discuss that, so that intervention was timely. I particularly welcome the suggested construction of a new city centre station for Glasgow, as outlined in the review. That would link rail networks to the south and the east and to the north and south of the city, alongside the proposals to increase capacity and reduce journey times between the city, Inverclyde and Ayrshire. For too long, the lack of capacity at Central and Queen Street stations has held back our rail network, not just in Glasgow, but throughout the country.

Bill Butler: Will the member give way on that point?

Jamie Hepburn: No—I am afraid not.

The demolition of former main line stations in Glasgow under the so-called Beeching axe has been shown to be short sighted. The proposal can put that right.

I also welcome the potential development of a metro or light rapid transit system across Glasgow, as that would improve transport within the city.

The people of Central Scotland will welcome other aspects of the minister's statement and of the review, such as the introduction of rail access to Grangemouth port and the freight hub, which involves electrification of the railway between Coatbridge and Grangemouth, track modifications to improve access from the west and the east and an increased loading gauge to allow trains to carry larger containers. Such projects help to serve existing and developing industrial and distribution facilities locally. Above all, they help to get freight off the road and on to trains, which I am sure we all support.

The proposal to electrify the whole rail network is welcome and is exciting for our country. It confirms the position that the Government previously set out, which means that my constituents who use the Queen Street to Cumbernauld line will be able to rely on improved services in the future. Allied to the improvements to the Glasgow to Edinburgh main line and the Airdrie to Bathgate line, that is good news for Central Scotland.

I am sure that members agree that we cannot allow Scotland to be left behind developments in transport infrastructure in the United Kingdom and in the rest of Europe. The proposed projects will ensure that our transport system is modern, quick and efficient and is ready and able to deal with the

maximum economic activity and with moving people and goods around the country.

The benefits of the proposals in the review are not solely economic; they extend to the environment, too. The proposals actively encourage modal shift. Park-and-ride facilities are proposed. The minister used the term “park and choose”; I am not sure why we have changed the terminology, but I am sure that he will explain that. Improvements to rail infrastructure are also proposed. Such improvements will lead to improved environmental performance and we would be wrong to discount them lightly.

In some ways, I wish that the Scottish Government could go further. Members around the chamber have described projects that they want to be implemented and which were not in the statement. Of course, they must tell us how those projects could be achieved; often, our hands are tied by the frustrations and limitations of the Scotland Act 1998.

I am being told to conclude. I welcome the review and I look forward to hearing what the minister says at the end of the debate.

16:12

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I declare an interest. I am a Portonian—someone who has lived all their life in Grangemouth—so it is unsurprising that I will start with the issues in Grangemouth and the local campaigns there. In my constituency, it is widely understood that the distance that freight travels by road needs to be reduced and that more freight needs to be transported by sea and by rail. That makes sense for all sorts of reasons—social, economic and environmental. A few differences of emphasis might exist, but almost everybody agrees with the core argument.

Likewise, consensus is at the heart of how we achieve that. We need to make it easier to transfer freight from one mode to another, so Grangemouth has an intermodal hub, where road, rail and shipping meet. The national planning framework recognises that. The Grangemouth freight hub is one of the nine national developments that are listed in NPF 2. So far, so good.

The people of Grangemouth understand why taking traffic away from other people's roads is a good idea, but they see problems as their roads become busier. Falkirk Council welcomes the jobs and the boost to the local economy, but it is concerned that local infrastructure could be overwhelmed. Businesses large and small—not least local hauliers—welcome the development of a freight hub, but they are afraid of bottlenecks that will undermine development.

Local government, businesses and the community are all worried about the deterioration of the environment in Grangemouth and surrounding areas. We know that the freight hub will benefit the economy and the environment of Scotland as a whole, but we want to ensure that it provides benefits across the board.

Last year, following an approach by Grangemouth community council, I helped to set up the Grangemouth transport forum, which encompasses all those I have mentioned thus far, and many others including Forth Ports, freight transport companies and hauliers, trade unions, the police, Ineos, SEStran and Scottish Enterprise. The forum has discussed the issues; we have worked together to present them to Parliament, the Government and transport agencies. I thank everyone who became involved for working together on the basis of common ground and beliefs.

We believe that a solution can be found that will maximise the potential for the growth of Grangemouth as a freight hub without asking local people and the environment to pay the price of improving the economy and business environment in Scotland. The solution involves making infrastructure changes including to Grangemouth, the M9 and the Avon gorge crossing on the A801. Of course, such a solution will require national funding. We need to recognise that there should be no half measures and no quick fixes.

Given that the Grangemouth hub lies at the heart of the sustainable development of freight transport in Scotland, any solution must not affect that sustainability. Many people in Grangemouth will be interested in and appreciate the importance of the documents that the Government has released this afternoon. I look forward to future discussions that the minister will have with my constituents. As other members have said, we cannot debate the documents in full this afternoon. I look forward to putting them to good use as Christmas bedtime reading. I hope that members enjoy the Christmas recess.

Thus far, I have spoken from the perspective of my constituency, which dovetails with the perspective of the best interests of Scotland as a whole. As a member of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, I will consider the Government's projects and judge them on whether they are good for Scotland, communities, the economy and—more important—the environment. I will ask whether we are focusing on big projects to the detriment of issues such as improvements in public transport and the provision of safe and convenient routes for cyclists and pedestrians.

Much as we cannot afford to rush things through without thorough consideration, we cannot afford

to delay much-needed improvements without good cause. At the same time that we are considering the nitty-gritty of Scottish transport appraisal guidance and planning objectives, criteria and policy directives, we must maintain a wider perspective. In addition to asking whether a solution is the best for the next decade, we must ask where that solution will lead, whether it is truly sustainable in a low-carbon economy and how we can tell that for sure when we are still guessing what that means.

In this afternoon's debate, we can only scratch the surface. However, when we get the detail, we can look more fully at the risks and potential. Over the coming months, there will be lots of digging to be done and discussion to be had. I look forward to that. I hope that people in my community and constituency, and the whole of Scotland, will benefit and that we can move this forward.

16:18

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): It will come as no surprise that I will focus my remarks on the Forth crossing. As other members have said, there is a lot of detail behind the statement. No doubt, the minister will be delighted to know that I will come back to him on that.

I welcome the clarity that we now have on the existing bridge, the condition of which has given rise to great concern in the local area. Obviously, the Forth road bridge is an iconic structure. It is incumbent on the Government, in going forward, to ensure that the new crossing does not overshadow the existing two bridges. The condition of the existing bridge remains an issue, as does the question of how it should be maintained. I assume that the minister will give us answers to those questions.

Over the past year, I have sought clarity a number of times on the funding mechanism for the project. Today, we have been told that an approach has been made to the Treasury. However, uncertainty remains given that we have not been told whether the approach was successful and what response—positive or otherwise—it received. Clearly, given the importance of the project to Scotland, we can only hope that a positive response was forthcoming. We can hope, but we do not know.

We know that the bridge will not be built under the Scottish Futures Trust. The biggest bypass in the review is the bypass around the Scottish Futures Trust.

We have a number of questions on the original costings. I was one of the people who suggested a tunnel as an alternative to another bridge. Transport Scotland was very robust in what it told the people of Queensferry about the costings and

details of the project, so it is a bit concerning to find out that £1.7 billion can be shaved off because we now have an economic crisis on our hands. I want to know where that £1.7 billion has gone and what specification reductions we will have to deal with. One is the lack of a multimodal element on the new crossing. I am sure that the minister shares my concerns about the issue—I have no reason to doubt that, as I received personal assurances from him that he was keen on the multimodal aspect of the project. What proportion of the saving will come from scrapping plans for road approaches that would have taken traffic from over the bridges away from Queensferry?

The minister said that the existing bridge will carry public transport, but there are contradictions in that suggestion. The update document that we have received today promises us that the existing bridge has potential for a

"light Rapid Transit system such as a tram",

but a few years ago the Government's consultants, Arup, said that it was not feasible to run a tram on the bridge. The short version of the review document states that the potential LRT

"could include provision of a bus-based rapid transit service",

with a price tag of £10 million to £50 million. Unfortunately, that has all the hallmarks of a guided busway, rather than a tram system. Is that the best that we can do to come up with transport solutions around the Forth for the next century, not just the next 10 years?

We are told that junctions and the route are still indicative at this stage. The minister knows that my constituents have real concerns about the impacts of the project on the Queensferry area; those concerns remain after his announcement. I trust that engagement over the coming months will be genuine and that the minister will ensure that the details and costs that Transport Scotland presents to my constituents and members of the Parliament will stand up to proper scrutiny and be more robust than those that were given previously.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I remind members that they should listen, rather than carry on conversations, when other members are speaking.

16:22

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): I thank the minister for allowing me an early viewing of his statement and of the reports that we have debated today.

In today's debate, the Government has claimed that it delivers rather than talks, but the minister's delivery of the strategic transport projects review is

all talk. Parliament has been given no clarity on how the Government will finance and deliver anything like the 29 projects in the review. An increased capital budget to help to pay for a new Forth crossing does not mean that the project is being funded by the UK Government—it means that once again the Scottish Government does not have a clue about how the financial black holes in key infrastructure improvements will be filled. When will the minister be honest with the Parliament and confirm that the Government's Scottish Futures Trust is a dead duck? The strategic transport projects review is little more than a Government wish list. Will the Government clarify what projects will be prioritised, when those projects will be delivered and, crucially, how they will be funded?

The Government seems to have dumped the multimodal bridge option. A longer connection at the south side of a new bridge will lead to higher emissions from vehicular traffic. Like Jeremy Purvis, I am greatly concerned by the fact that, according to a note on page 7 of the strategic transport projects review document, the wildly varying costs that appear in the document are quoted in 2008 prices and exclude VAT, at whatever rate is imposed by the Exchequer. Will the minister confirm that that is bound to mean that all the costings that are given in the document are a gross underestimation of the real costs of the projects to the Scottish taxpayer?

I was quite taken by some of the points that Des McNulty made. Like me, he said that the Government has produced a wish list, rather than a mechanism for delivery, that the Scottish Futures Trust is a dead duck and that the Government should admit failure. I agree with Mr McNulty that not using the trust to fund the Forth crossing is an admission of defeat.

Alex Johnstone—who seems no longer to be in the chamber—gave us a somewhat nauseating nod to all the points that the Government made. On the Forth bridges, he agreed with and supported the principles, but he was concerned about the costs. The new crossing is now an affordable and streamlined project, he said. He said that there would be no Tory tolls. That would be good and proper if ever the Tories got back into government to put that pledge in place, but that is extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future.

My colleague Alison McInnes made a very good speech. Among her key points was the fact that the Government's statement is disappointing and long overdue, with no timetable, nothing about affordability and no details of work on key trade routes—no real help to Scotland. Many people feel disappointment with the Government's review. There has been no consultation with some key stakeholders. I think that Alison McInnes

described that disappointment as being like getting only a box of fudge for Christmas; I could not agree more. The review is heavy on assertions but light on detail. When it came to the north of Scotland, Alison McInnes was dismayed by the lack of progress on an Aberdeen crossrail project. I know that many members representing the Aberdeen area are keen to progress that project.

As for the Forth crossing, Mrs McInnes pointed out that the costs were inflated in the first place. That gives no confidence that the Government is up to the task. Thank goodness the Government did not go for the much more expensive option of a tunnel. Mrs McInnes made it fundamentally clear that, once again, the Government has failed to deliver. Will the minister clarify whether the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was aware of, or indeed involved in, the review? Who else has he failed to consult in producing the review?

Brian Adam made some—possibly—helpful comments. He said that there would be further significant benefits. I ask Mr Adam, and the minister, where and when? Whether it is from the SNP back benches or from the minister, there has been no clarification.

Bill Butler's speech touched heavily—and quite reasonably—on Glasgow crossrail. He said that it fulfils three key strategies of the STPR. He spoke about the real division in the existing rail network, not just the inconvenience of a 15-minute walk in Glasgow. I have taken that walk sometimes, and I agree that it is not the most convenient way to get across Glasgow. If crossrail was in place, it would bring economic, environmental and business benefits to Glasgow. I can only agree with Mr Butler on those points.

I return to the Tories. Derek Brownlee said that he had had only a

"few hours ... to form a balanced view ... It is sensible to reserve judgment".

Alex Johnstone was clear: he welcomed the review. There seems to be some contradiction in the Tory ranks on some of the key points. The timelines certainly require some clarity on the priorities of the Government—and of future Governments—on continual commitment to and funding of the projects.

The quote of the day came from Peter Peacock. As he said, everywhere has been name checked—but will they get the cheques under their names? That is a key and important point. There is no certainty about the detail of any of the projects, whether it is the Forth crossing or the various other projects in constituencies throughout Scotland.

Peter Peacock also mentioned the A9. He said that there will, in fact, be more overtaking lanes, not the full dual carriageway that the SNP had promised. Only actions will do, and the SNP will deliver only 29 per cent of what was promised. The proposals do not meet design standards for 7.3m-wide carriageways. When Peter Peacock was discussing those points, I noticed that there was no denial from the minister. I will wait and see whether he gives us a denial when he winds up.

My colleague Mike Rumbles made a passionate speech, which covered a grade-separated junction project on the A9 and Aberdeen crossrail. Those key points were omitted by the Government from the review that was launched today. The member also expressed real anger on behalf of people in his constituency, where there have been five fatalities in recent years at Laurencekirk. That is of great concern not just to us, but to the families concerned. The stretch of road concerned is very dangerous, and I hope that the minister can give some assurances about improvements in that regard when he sums up, both for Mr Rumbles and for the families.

Mr Rumbles said that the minister has now killed off the crossrail system in Aberdeen.

Stewart Stevenson: No.

Jim Tolson: The minister says no, but let us hear the details, which we have been extremely short of today. There have been 18 months of inaction from the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change and his Government. Perhaps today is the day for him to stand up and give us some real feedback.

16:29

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I will focus squarely on the economic importance of our transport infrastructure in Scotland. The Scottish Conservatives focused heavily on the matter in our two most recent manifestos, in which we called for increased investment in our transport infrastructure, whether that was the Forth crossing, the A9, the A96 or high-speed rail links between Edinburgh and Glasgow and Scotland and London.

It is worth reflecting on statistics that were published recently by the British Chambers of Commerce, to which I think that Rob Gibson was referring when he said that 70 per cent of businesses in Scotland had said that the current transport infrastructure limits inward investment. Rob Gibson did not give two other statistics that the chambers published: 43 per cent of companies said that their ability to expand their business is limited and 70 per cent claimed that the transport network is not meeting their needs. Therefore, the review is timely. We need more detail, as

members of all parties have quite fairly said, but it is important that we learn lessons and make progress as quickly as possible.

If we take a broad-brush perspective on the announcements, the main issue is priorities. Before the debate, I heard someone say that the projects are numbered but not ordered, which is an important point. We need quickly to get a handle on how the Government intends to prioritise the 29 projects. As the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change said,

“vision and ambition are not enough”,

so it is important that we get information on priorities sooner rather than later. The previous Administration was criticised—some people would say fairly; others might disagree—for saying that everything was a priority. The consequence of such an approach is that nothing becomes a priority and there is gridlock, which means that progress is not made on transport projects. Choices—positive and negative—have to be made.

When Audit Scotland was preparing its report, “Review of major capital projects in Scotland: How government works”, it considered 43 infrastructure projects during a five-year period and concluded that only two fifths of projects were on budget and only a third were on time. The minister will need to tell us the order of priority of the 29 projects and give us the approximate timetable for them. I emphasise the word “approximate”, because we are not holding the minister to a precise week or month. However, it is important to get a rough idea of what year we are talking about, because a project that starts in 2012 might be quite different for a community from a project that will last until 2022 and span two and a half parliamentary sessions. The approximate timetable for projects is important.

The approximate cost of projects is also important, as members of various parties said. Approximate costs for each of the 29 projects are given in the review, but the fair criticism was made—I think by Jeremy Purvis—that they are indicative costs. If we are talking about a single project, the difference between £100 million and £250 million is big and the difference between £1.5 billion and £3 billion is enormous, as Derek Brownlee pointed out. When we add up the costs of all 29 projects, the difference between the higher and lower estimates is astronomical. We need far better projected costs than figures that are simply based on the costs of similar projects. I hope that such work is forthcoming sooner rather than later.

There has been much talk about the Forth bridge, which affects the whole of Scotland and

the Lothians and Fife in particular. Like my colleague Derek Brownlee, I welcome the reduced projected cost range of between £1.72 billion and £2.34 billion. Whether or not previous costs were inflated, as has been alleged, their reduction is a bonus. However, we must carefully consider how the money has been saved. Are the reduced estimates purely to do with the narrower design, or are the specifications weaker? Margaret Smith asked a fair question about that and it is important that we have detail on the matter as soon as possible.

Alex Johnstone's point is valid: if the answer is positive and if the savings have come from sterling and impressive work by the project team to cut costs significantly, the same principles ought to be applied to the other 28 projects. If we can get similar results by investing far less money, we need to examine that seriously. Are the savings simply on paper, or will they be real?

Of the other points that were made in the debate, I will pick out the comments by the minister and others on the Edinburgh airport train station. That station relies entirely on there being an Edinburgh tram system, so I hope that we will hear far less criticism from SNP members about the trams project. Without the trams, they do not have an Edinburgh airport train station.

As my colleague Derek Brownlee said, we will reserve full judgment until we have a chance to review the plans properly. At least five documents that are outlined in the headline document need to be considered.

There needs to be, if not full consensus, at least a degree of consensus about transport projects. Business and communities as a whole hate nothing more than the stop-start mentality that we have sometimes seen with transport and infrastructure projects. There needs to be a degree of consensus, because the lifetime of many projects will outlast the lifetime of a Government or a session of Parliament.

16:36

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the minister for an early sight of his statement. Looking ahead to this debate last week, I commented to a colleague that the review would be rather large. They replied that they hoped that we would see it well ahead of the statement because, otherwise, the debate would not be very good. Fortunately, that has not been the case—we did not get the report in time, but the debate has been good. It has given members an opportunity to raise issues and concerns from their constituencies and to feed into the process. As we move forward, the process will be important for the Parliament.

However, we must make the important point about advance sight of documents. For announcements of such significance, it is beneficial for members, the Government, the consultation process and the Parliament as a whole for members to have sight of the documents in advance. Several members have pointed out that a longer time to digest the documents would have been beneficial and might have led to a more meaningful debate. Having said that, I believe that the debate has been of high quality. I have certainly enjoyed it.

Let me make some initial comments about the minister's statement. He spoke a lot about employment and jobs—an issue that is close to everyone's heart in the current economic climate—and the Forth road crossing, which I will speak more about later. He referred to the employment opportunities from projects that are on track just now and might happen in the future, although he showed more front than South Queensferry in taking the credit for projects that he knows were planned and started under the previous Executive, such as the Clackmannanshire bridge.

Both the minister and I know that employment is a big issue for the future, so will he give some clarification about the reductions in cost of the new Forth crossing? There was a report in July that the Scottish Government and its consultants were considering offshoring some of the work. It would be done in China and then barged to North Queensferry for final construction. I was concerned by that, so will the minister clarify the position when summing up today? In recent times, we saw a huge First ScotRail contract for new rolling stock that could have gone to the Bombardier factory in the midlands going to Siemens factories in Poland and Germany. We are talking about not just Scottish but British jobs.

My colleague Des McNulty raised a number of legitimate concerns about the lack of detail in the Government's plans. That has been echoed in several speeches, including Gavin Brown's eloquent contribution. The Government also said little about timescales, which are vague enough for us to be concerned, so I ask the Government for more clarity. My colleague Bill Butler highlighted exactly what happens when expectations are raised and not met. With the lack of clarity in the document, that is an acute possibility for a range of the projects that have been mentioned today.

I was interested to hear Alex Johnstone's comments—I agree with him on this point—on the need for the strategic transport projects review as a whole to be subject to further parliamentary scrutiny. Obviously, individual projects will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny by members, but the proposals as a whole should be looked at in

more detail in the current and future parliamentary sessions. As members have said, that would be beneficial. I was also pleased to hear Mr Johnstone commit any future Conservative Government not to introduce tolls on the new Forth crossing. I share his view on tolls, but I do not share his optimism for his party's chances in this Parliament.

Brian Adam and Tricia Marwick made a point about comments that were allegedly made by Des McNulty on the radio this morning. Let us be very clear—let us nail this once and for all—so that we can forget about this from here on in. As Des McNulty made clear this morning, there will be no tolls from a future Labour Government on the existing crossing or the new Forth crossing.

Given reports that we have heard recently, I want to know what the SNP's views are on shadow tolling. The business community and others have expressed concern that shadow tolling would add significantly to the costs on the country's taxpayers for the new crossing. I hope that the minister can provide clarity on whether shadow tolling has been fully ruled out.

Derek Brownlee made excellent points about the cost and financing of the new Forth crossing. Undoubtedly, as I have mentioned, we need to protect the taxpayer.

Margaret Smith, understandably, commented on why the Scottish Futures Trust does not appear to be a suitable method of funding the new crossing, despite John Swinney talking up its credentials on "Newsnight Scotland" as recently as May. It is interesting to hear that the SFT's potential as a funding option for the new Forth crossing seems to have been shifted to one side, with the Government now looking to a traditional funding method from the Treasury. That raises an important issue, on which we need some clarity. What dialogue has the Scottish Government had with the Treasury on that issue? What dialogue has it had with the Treasury on the other projects, which could be equally important as time progresses?

I agree with Jim Tolson's comments on what Mike Rumbles said. Mike Rumbles raised an example of the real issues that face us as MSPs on a daily basis. Any MSP who lives in a constituency that has a dangerous road that causes deaths and accidents needs to ensure that the voices of his constituents and communities are heard in the Parliament. Undoubtedly, although he was unable to force the issue today, I am sure that his constituents will be safe in the knowledge that, as long as Mike Rumbles represents them in the Parliament, he will pursue the issue vigorously.

I want to talk about the new Forth crossing, which is an issue in which I have taken a great

interest over several years. I have lived in the area for a long time, so the issue is of great personal interest to me. I have supported the construction of the new crossing and I have campaigned for that to be multimodal. The campaign had the support of all the major business organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry, and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. However, we must also remember that the current bridge is only 40 years old. That is why I was pleased that, when the announcement was made earlier this year, the Government suggested that it was prepared to think differently about the new crossing.

I recognise that the existing Forth crossing is coming into play. Those who have heard a cable ping on the existing bridge will know that that is a disconcerting sound. Given that we will not know what will happen to the existing bridge until 2011, there is an assumption that the bridge will be able to continue carrying public transport beyond 2011. The expected date on which the existing bridge might be completely closed to HGVs appears to have shifted somewhat, so the current dates might no longer be relevant. I seek clarification from the minister on that. The Government seems to have moved away from the prospect of having a new future-proofed bridge, which would have a middle lane and would accommodate LRT and, possibly, a guided bus. I think that the minister talked about having a slimmer bridge, so we seem to have moved away from that prospect.

We are relying on the existing bridge, even though we are completely unclear about whether it will be fit for purpose in the future because we have not yet had the technical reports. We must be cautious about moving forward on that basis until the full technical reports have been provided.

The fact that the report that we are considering is lacking in detail has created frustration. Given the number of projects that it contains, it might produce plenty of local headlines, but it will result in little in the way of concrete Government action. I assure the minister that that will be the focus of the Labour Party over the coming months and years. The projects that the report identifies are relevant to communities across Scotland, and we will ensure that they are prioritised and advanced in a way that makes a difference to the people of Scotland. We will also ensure that the detail delivers for the people of Scotland, because the devil is always in the detail. As parliamentarians, we have a role to play in ensuring that many of the projects that are identified in the report become a reality.

16:46

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The debate has been illuminating. Unsurprisingly,

members have focused on local interests. I congratulate Patrick Harvie on being the only member who spoke in the debate who was able to quote from some, at least, of the 3,800 pages of documentation. Good for Patrick.

I will try, in the time available, to pick up as many of the points that members made as I can. Des McNulty asked whether the existing bridge will take the public transport loading. The answer is yes. As we take private cars and HGVs off the existing bridge, we will reduce the loading on it quite significantly. The deterioration of the existing bridge is driven largely by the weight that it carries. In addition, the flow of bus traffic across the bridge is relatively predictable, so the public transport loading on it at any particular time is relatively predictable. That does not eliminate every uncertainty, but the fact that the bridge will not deteriorate as quickly as was previously thought, together with the fact that there will be a change in the quantity and character of the transport that can go on the bridge, means that we have every prospect of having a very real asset for the creation of probably the single most important public transport intervention that we could create.

We are not talking just about the separation of public transport. The two bridges will have different approach and leaving roads, so the benefits could be substantial. This is an example of extremely imaginative thinking by the project team, on which we should congratulate it.

Jeremy Purvis: I am sure that the minister will come on to the financing of the Forth replacement crossing, but he said in his statement that the Scottish Government had approached the Treasury on mechanisms to secure budgetary cover. Has the Treasury provided the necessary consent? Has the Scottish Government secured agreement for the project to be funded through such mechanisms?

Stewart Stevenson: We will fund the construction of the bridge with public money from our budget—that is clear. It would clearly be of benefit if we could draw forward some of the funding from future years, as that would enable an acceleration of projects across Scotland. That is entirely consistent with what the UK Government is seeking to do. We wish to help the UK Government to bring forward projects—in giving it a way of helping us, we can help it. That is a proper way to proceed, and we will move forward on that basis.

Alex Johnstone talked about a streamlined bridge—as the slimmer of the year in the Scottish Parliament, he is an expert on slimming. The new bridge, with a more restricted design, is not only cheaper but narrower and it still has a lane beside the main lanes that can be used in future for trams, a guided busway or dedicated buses

without guiding. However, the transport operation provided on the existing bridge is substantially in excess of what we would have provided in the dedicated lane.

John Park: I recognise that there will be an increase in lanes when the second crossing is built, but can the minister clarify that capacity has been removed from the proposed new crossing?

Stewart Stevenson: The member is correct, but that is more than overtaken by the utilisation of capacity of the existing bridge. In aggregate, the available capacity for public transport has risen dramatically, and the reliability that the public transport option can offer is dramatically better. We should congratulate those in the project team who came up with the intervention.

Alex Johnstone also mentioned high-speed rail. I have talked to Lord Adonis, the new Minister of State for Transport in the Westminster Government, and I expect to meet him in January to talk about high-speed rail, among other things. As he asked me about the matter, I encouraged him to contact the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, which is undertaking an inquiry into the benefits of high-speed rail services, and I assure members that he is watching that committee's work with interest.

I also met the Opposition transport spokesperson at Westminster, Theresa Villiers, to discuss high-speed rail, albeit that, as yet, the Tories seem to see only as far as Leeds. Perhaps her discussion with me has enhanced her view of what we should do.

Brian Adam made a point about the Haudagain roundabout in Aberdeen. That project is not in the STPR, but not because it is not being done. I remind members that I made a commitment that, before we passed to Aberdeen responsibility for that part of what is at present the A90, an appropriate intervention would be made there. Of course, it has to be made in the context of the form that emerges for the Aberdeen western peripheral route after the public inquiry and in the context of what the Haudagain roundabout will be used for.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister explain in more detail what that means? Is there a commitment for the Scottish Government to invest funding in upgrading the Haudagain? If so, is it part of the STPR programme or not?

Stewart Stevenson: As I said, it is not part of that programme, but I adhere to my previous commitment on it. Today, we are discussing strategic transport projects. The Haudagain is an example of a local project. Projects that will proceed over the years are not confined to what is strategic for the whole of Scotland. The nature of the local intervention at the Haudagain will be

informed by whether there is a third crossing of the river, which people in Aberdeen continue to pursue. The form of the intervention is yet to be determined, but the commitment that I made previously stands.

Bill Butler was well informed, as ever, on the Glasgow crossrail project. By coincidence, I will meet the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail tonight—that is convenient. The thing that we have to focus on in Glasgow is the lack of capacity at Queen Street upper station and Central station. That is why we need to focus on the provision of new rail station capacity using the existing tunnels, which Mr Butler mentioned, and the existing infrastructure. I spoke to SPT briefly before I came down to the chamber and there was real enthusiasm for engaging on the matter. We will work closely with the people at SPT.

Aberdeen crossrail was mentioned as well. We are making early progress on dramatically increasing provision from three peak morning train services from Inverurie to Aberdeen to a raft of services that go all the way to the south. We are starting to deliver on that, and we will continue to opportunistically enhance the services. We will also, in early course, consider whether we can proceed with a station at Kintore, in a rapidly developing part of the north-east.

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have time, minister, if you want to take an intervention.

Stewart Stevenson: Unfortunately, I have run out of time if I am to cover points that have been raised. I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention.

Peter Peacock talked about timescales and priorities. Today's announcement informs a series of future comprehensive spending review periods. If members can tell me how much money will be available to the Scottish Government in—for the sake of argument—2014 to 2017, or 2017 to 2020, I will of course be able to give them some of the certainty that they are asking for.

As usual, Charlie Gordon's comments were well informed. However, unusually, he got something absolutely wrong. If he looks at the left-hand side of the page of the document, and turns it through 90°, he will find that the pages are numbered rather than unnumbered. Unusual for Charlie. Must do better.

In relation to paragraph 31 of my statement, Patrick Harvie asked whether the existing bridge would be dedicated to public transport. I am happy to confirm that—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Far too many conversations are going on in the chamber.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

If I did not make it clear in the wording of paragraph 31, I now make it absolutely clear that the existing bridge will be dedicated to public transport.

Jamie Hepburn asked why we were supporting park-and-choose initiatives. Park-and-ride initiatives were started by the previous Administration, and have been supported and continued by this Administration. Building on the success of those initiatives, we now look to have more modes and more variety in the ways in which people can change modes. Park and choose is probably the thing for the future.

I think that Cathy Peattie said that she was a Portonian.

Cathy Peattie *indicated agreement.*

Stewart Stevenson: Cathy Peattie is nodding, so it must be correct; the word was new to me and many of us. I thought that her tone was constructive and helpful. She focused on issues for her constituents, and on the opportunities in Grangemouth for supporting the economy of Scotland. It is important that we are at last bridging the gap at the Avon gorge between the M9 and the M8.

Margaret Smith talked reasonably about the costs of the existing bridge. The cost of maintaining the existing bridge is relatively modest, and we have published information on that already.

On the issue of roads leading away from Queensferry, we heard conflicting messages from members about a lack of consultation. However, the whole point is that we want to engage meaningfully with the people of Queensferry.

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Stewart Stevenson: I really do not have any time at all now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have time to take the intervention if you wish.

Stewart Stevenson: Okay, but if you do not mind, Presiding Officer, I have another four pages of notes on points that members have raised.

Mike Rumbles: I—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is for the minister to decide. He is not taking the intervention, Mr Rumbles.

Stewart Stevenson: Jim Tolson asked who else had been involved in work on the STPR. I am happy to confirm that COSLA has been involved since Easter this year. We have also engaged directly with the regional transport partnerships.

Gavin Brown talked about the economic importance of transport. Few of us would disagree with that importance. Transport has to be transport for a purpose; it is not an end in itself. The costs that are given in the document that we have distributed are range costs. The actual costs are known only when one manages to buy a project.

Gavin Brown said that we were relying on the trams. Yes, we are. If nothing else, we want to get value for the £500 million that you guys and gals asked us to spend, so we are going to get value for that £500 million. My difficulty is not with trams as such but with the fact that the excellent number 22 bus route is simply being replicated by the trams. I use the number 22 all the time and I know how effective it is. Trams are absolutely a good idea, but maybe not in that case. However, that is history, and we are now moving forward.

John Park, as ever, made a useful contribution. However, on procurement issues, we have to use the *Official Journal of the European Union* and accept bids on an unbiased basis.

There will be no tolls. John Park asked me about shadow tolling. There is some shadow tolling in Scotland, on the M74, but that is not our responsibility. We will not be doing it.

I thank members for their time. This has been an informative debate and I look forward to progressing with this bold and challenging programme, which is hugely important for everyone in Scotland.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3077, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 17 December 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Finance Committee Debate: Budget Process 2009-10

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 December 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Drink Driving

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time Finance and Sustainable Growth

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Organ Donation Taskforce

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 January 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 January 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time

Europe, External Affairs and the
Environment;
Education and Lifelong Learning

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-3071, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee be designated as the lead committee, and that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee be designated as secondary committee, in consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motions S3M-3070 and S3M-3072, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) and the Charity Test (Specified Bodies) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2008 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Fundable Bodies (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on those motions will also be put at decision time.

Before we come to decision time, I am sure that the chamber will wish to welcome the Speaker, or President, of the Assembly of Macedonia and the Macedonian ambassador to the United Kingdom, who have joined us in the Presiding Officer's gallery. [*Applause.*]

Decision Time

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Fundable Bodies (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): We now come to decision time. There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-2987, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on elections to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 1st Report, 2008 (Session 3), *Elections to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body* (SP Paper 47), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 11 December 2008.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2988, in the name of Gil Paterson, also on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on the Audit Committee's title and remit, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 8th Report, 2008 (Session 3), *Audit Committee - Title and Remit* (SP Paper 151), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 11 December 2008.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3071, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee be designated as the lead committee, and that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee be designated as secondary committee, in consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3070, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) and the Charity Test (Specified Bodies) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2008 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3072, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-2630, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 10 December 2008 will be the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the General Assembly of the United Nations; believes that the UDHR is one of the outstanding statements of the dignity, integrity and rights belonging to every human being, and further believes that the principles of the UDHR should continue to serve as inspiration for the future development of Scotland.

17:04

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I thank those colleagues who signed my motion to enable the debate to take place. I put on record my particular thanks to Michael McMahon, who readily agreed to give up this spot, which had been allocated for Labour Party members' business, to enable the debate to take place tonight. I am especially grateful because that has allowed the debate to be held on the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adding to the pertinence or purpose of tonight's exchanges. I am also grateful to colleagues who have stayed behind to participate in the debate. I look forward to hearing what everyone has to say.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The anniversary is being marked in different ways by various organisations. I was delighted to receive today, among the growing number of Christmas cards that I am getting, a birthday card for the declaration from the Equality and Human Rights Commission—I remind the commission that that does not mean that it should not send me a Christmas card as well.

I also welcome the booklet "My Rights Passport", which is published by Amnesty International and which underlines its commitment to educating people about the declaration. I should declare that I am a member of Amnesty International and that my wife works for the organisation.

I also note that the Scottish Human Rights Commission has published the declaration in Scots Gaelic. The cover of the document is illustrated with 30 concentric circles of light, which symbolise the 30 articles of the declaration.

Clearly, a lot of work is going on to acknowledge the anniversary.

The declaration, which is often called the world's best-kept secret, was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. It is easy to see how the world leaders of the time, emerging from the years of horror and terror that the second world war represented, felt that was important to create a document that would set out the basic rights with which we should all be endowed due to the simple fact that we are human beings.

The principal mover behind the declaration was the person who was chosen to head up the UN Commission on Human Rights, which drafted it: Eleanor Roosevelt, to whom I shall return later.

I was privileged to be able to attend, along with our Presiding Officer and other colleagues, the launch event for the Scottish Commission for Human Rights earlier this year. At that event, Mary Robinson, the former Irish President and former UN human rights commissioner, was able to inform us that the declaration has been translated into more languages than any text other than the Bible.

I was delighted to learn that today, Amnesty International was able to present to the First Minister a translation of the declaration in the Scots language. Added to the Gaelic translation, that is a welcome demonstration of Scotland's commitment to human rights, and I hope that it is not long before the Scots translation is listed among all the other language versions on the UDHR website.

However, the fact that the declaration is one of the most translated documents in the world does not make it one of the most widely read, and it is certainly not one of the most implemented. That is why, even though it is in its 60th year, the declaration remains important to us today.

The significance of civil liberties and broader concepts of human rights is all too often maligned and downplayed, but I can think of little that is more important to the human experience than the rights and freedoms that we all too often take for granted. We should not take them for granted, for many of them were hard fought for and hard won by our forebears many years ago.

It is true that ideas of human rights and civil liberties are misunderstood by many. All too often, people seem to imagine that those rights exist only to protect the worst among us. Although it is true that they are indeed designed to protect such individuals, we should recognise that those rights are universal and apply to us all—that is why we call them human rights. However, all too often, the human aspect is forgotten as we read stories in the popular tabloid press about the application of

rights. That is why the declaration of human rights is as important today as it was 60 years ago.

There exists a long global tradition of the declaration of rights. The American declaration of independence set out that

“all men are created equal”;

the French revolutionary Assembly set forth fundamental rights, not only for France’s citizens but for “all men without exception”; and our own declaration of Arbroath helped to build the idea that sovereignty is invested in the entire people of a nation, and not in one individual alone.

The declaration of human rights draws on that fine tradition, but, in a sense, is of even greater importance than any of those documents, for it sets out rights for us all on a universal basis. Its universality—the fact that it is for everyone on the planet—makes it unique and capable of superseding those other documents.

Article 1 of the declaration reads:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Those are fine words, but they are more than that; they represent a fundamental right that everyone here and across the world is endowed with. However, I am afraid that, in many ways, they represent ideals much more than reality.

We are all aware of human rights abuses around the world. None of us can fail to be aware of the detention without trial that Guantánamo bay has come to represent. We all know about China’s continued suppression of Tibetan national identity. We know about the sweat shops of the far east, where many children are forced to work to the exclusion of their education. We know about the appalling situations in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and across much of the world.

The declaration stands against those abuses. We can bemoan the fact that they happen, or we can work—using the declaration as the basis of that work—to end those abuses. It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

I turn to the part of my motion that states that the Parliament

“believes that the principles of the UDHR should continue to serve as inspiration for the future development of Scotland.”

Members might have heard me in the chamber, on occasion, state my belief that Scotland’s future is best served by independence. I am proud that at my party’s most recent annual conference, we were able to pass a resolution that stated that the declaration should serve as the inspiration for any founding declaration, bill of rights or constitution

adopted by an independent Scotland. Whatever our beliefs about the future constitutional direction of travel for our country, we should always emphasise the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I close by quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, whose words demonstrate why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is important. She was once heard to say:

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

I could not have put it better myself.

17:11

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate to mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which for the first time set out universal human rights for all people in an individual context.

The anniversary is being celebrated by United Nations organisations around the world, which are informing and reminding us of the achievements of the declaration, and of the issues and campaigns that bring people together in a common cause. The theme of the United Nations campaign is dignity and justice for us all. Amnesty International, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and others are hosting a number of events to mark this significant anniversary. Oxfam has discussed climate change and human rights, Help the Aged has considered the rights of older people and the Scottish Trades Union Congress is campaigning for improvements in workers’ rights.

Positive action can be achieved, and progress is being made. The 60th anniversary is an occasion for all of us to recommit to the declaration’s vision. The European convention on human rights was legislated for in the United Kingdom Human Rights Act 1998, which resulted in the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission and our own Scottish Commission for Human Rights. I look forward to further important work by those commissions.

Signing up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an important step, but it must be backed up by action. Human rights sit behind everything that the Scottish Parliament does—all legislation has to be human-rights compliant. Human rights are particularly relevant for the Equal Opportunities Committee, whether we are considering legislation such as the Sexual

Offences (Scotland) Bill or the Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Bill, taking evidence on the sexualisation of goods for children, or considering inquiries on unpaid carers' rights or women offenders.

I welcome the strenuous campaigning by Amnesty International supporters and others, which has led to the UK Government signing the European convention against trafficking. That convention demands that trafficked people be provided with support and protection rather than hounded as illegal immigrants. That also requires action from the Scottish Government—in particular in providing specialist support, emergency medical care, legal advice and safe housing to victims of trafficking; in training officials to identify and help victims; in agreeing not to prosecute victims of trafficking for offences relating to documentation and working illegally; and in extending the reflection period that is allowed to victims of trafficking from one to three months. I look forward to hearing details of such action from the Government, and I call on the Westminster Government to ratify the convention without delay.

I conclude by quoting the 2008 anniversary publication on the declaration, which states:

"It is our duty to ensure that these rights are a living reality—that they are known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. It is often those who most need their human rights protected, who also need to be informed that the Declaration exists—and that it exists for them."

17:14

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate exactly 60 years, as he said, since the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the declaration on 10 December 1948. It was an historic occasion and one of which we should all be proud. As Jamie Hepburn said, it was born out of the horrors of war.

My comments will perhaps be a wee bit controversial, but we must all ask ourselves whether we and other nations have upheld the democratic rights that are outlined in the declaration. I think that, sadly, we have not.

The preamble to the declaration states that recognition of the

"inherent dignity",

equality and rights

"of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

Those are fantastic sentiments, which we should all strive to live up to, but we know of many cases of inequality not only in Scotland but throughout the world.

Let us look at some of the articles. Article 14 states:

"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

That was written 60 years ago, but it is still relevant today—perhaps it is more relevant than ever. However, as I said, do we really uphold those sentiments? We may accept people who are fleeing persecution, but it is certainly not an enjoyable experience for them. We do not allow them to work or to contribute to society and we hound them continuously, which leads to dawn raids, imprisonment in Dungavel and deportation. Those are not examples of respect for the dignity and rights of human beings.

Article 13(1) states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state."

and article 13(2) states that

"Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

In referring to those articles, I draw members' attention to the creation of the state of Israel which, by coincidence, is also 60 years old today. I will point out some of its actions that are against articles 13(1) and 13(2). In the west bank in Palestine, Palestinians do not have freedom of movement or the right to residence. Instead, they are confined to certain areas and must go through checkpoints that are manned by Israeli soldiers. They sometimes wait for hours at a checkpoint just to visit their families. That is directly against article 13(1). Parliament must highlight those issues as best we can, as this debate will do.

As I said, Article 13(2) states that

"Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

People who live in Gaza, within the country of Palestine, are not allowed to leave their country. If they manage by good fortune to leave their country, they are not allowed back in, which is directly against the declaration. The Scottish Parliament has a duty not only to Scotland but to the world and to all human beings to ensure that we highlight that infringement of people's basic human rights.

17:18

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Because I have been known to criticise the somewhat eccentric application of some aspects of European human rights legislation, it may seem surprising that I am speaking in the debate. However, I am reminded of the words of Churchill when he was asked what he thought about democracy. He replied that it seemed a terrible way to govern any country until

one considered the alternative. A society in which human rights do not operate is not the sort of society in which any of us in Parliament would wish to live.

Some progress has been made since the lofty but sincere declaration was made 60 years ago. Progress has been considerable in this country, but the tragedy is that in many other parts of the world the declaration has not worked at all. For example, how many people in Darfur or the Democratic Republic of Congo have heard of the declaration, never mind been able to enjoy the rights that it encompasses? That is the real tragedy. In the years ahead, we must all strive to ensure that the declaration is enacted more widely than it is now.

We are not without our own little foibles in that respect. Jamie Hepburn rightly raised the question of detention without trial in Guantánamo bay. However, I remind him that when the matter of detention without trial came before this Parliament, his party voted—albeit before he was here—to extend the 110-day rule to 140 days, which I think was inappropriate. There is a presumption of innocence here, so the period that a person should spend in custody awaiting trial should be minimal. I also point out that the actions of this Parliament have resulted in legislation dealing with the question of trial in absence. Do we want to send out a message that says that although we are in favour of human rights, people can be tried when they are not in court? That would be somewhat dangerous.

Having made those points, I have to say that we are, indeed, fortunate that the society in which we live enables its citizens to enjoy human rights of a type that cannot be enjoyed by citizens of many other countries around the world. That is why—although I recognise the very real tragedies and victims of the asylum system, to which Sandra White referred—I think that how we operate the asylum system is, on the whole, fair. Again, members will have heard me criticise the way in which the asylum policy has been implemented by the Westminster Government, which has sadly not been able to separate in the public consciousness those who are in desperate need of asylum and succour and who face real physical risks in their country of origin, from those who are simply economic migrants. I will not criticise anyone for coming here in an attempt to better themselves, but such people are not asylum seekers in the true sense of the words. The real tragedy has been that the Government's failure in asylum policy has not been fair to a number of people because of the way in which asylum was allowed to escalate.

60 years on, there are real hopes that people are becoming much more humane as time passes. That can surely be only a good thing and it can

surely only continue to be supported by the declaration that was made 60 years ago today.

17:22

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing this timely debate. 60 years on, the declaration is better observed in its breaking than in its keeping in too many parts of the world. Other members referred to Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other locations. However, I make no apology for using the debate to highlight an all-too-often ignored scenario that has slipped off the media agenda. I am talking about Gaza.

I want, through this debate, to encourage all human rights organisations to focus their attentions on raising the profile of the situation of the people of Gaza. I went there recently with Sandra White and Pauline McNeill and we saw for ourselves the extent to which the human rights of the people of Gaza are being abused. In Gaza, 46 per cent of the children suffer from anaemia and large numbers of people cannot leave the area, which is contrary to the convention articles to which Sandra White referred. That is surely a clear breach of the international declaration.

Although the lofty words and high ideals of the declaration give us a benchmark, we must put pressure on all our Governments in relation to application of the declaration. We should do so not only in relation to their own legislation and behaviour, but in relation to the behaviour of other countries over which they have influence. By our silence, we are complicit in what is happening.

Just this morning, a spokesman for the Westminster Government indicated that it might revisit the UK Human Rights Act 1998, which was described by the spokesperson as being perceived as a "criminals' charter". We must ensure that we continuously underline the fact that human rights are for every single person. They are not just for the people society feels have been wronged, but for us all. With that, we have a responsibility to ensure that every country that ratified the treaty 60 years ago upholds its commitment to ensuring that its fellow countries do as much as they can to ensure that the human rights of the most marginalised people in the world are protected.

17:25

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing this debate on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

If we were to wander out into the street and ask people about human rights, they would talk about other countries—they would talk about countries

where they know there is torture, about Guantánamo bay and about asylum seekers. Perhaps some of them would know about the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma. I do not think that they would think of this country in the first instance in relation to a lack of human rights, but there are abuses of human rights that I believe this Parliament has the power to change and I will talk about a couple of them before I talk about international violations of human rights.

Article 25 of the declaration states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for ... health and well-being"

and that we should be given help if we are out of work, ill, elderly, disabled, widowed or cannot earn a living. Those fine sentiments would raise a hollow laugh among some of our military veterans. I have a young constituent who was severely wounded in Iraq who had to wait nine months for a wheelchair. When he was finally given one, it was in such poor condition that it did not fit his needs. He had, to put it bluntly, served his country with distinction and bravery but been denied his human rights as a disabled veteran on his return home. The same can be said for those who return and are in need of social housing or community employment. I believe that this Parliament and the Scottish Government have an important role to play in these matters and in relation to their commitment to human rights.

Article 27 of the declaration states:

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community".

Tell that to someone who is housebound because of the lack of appropriate wheelchair provision. Forty per cent of the wheelchairs in this country are not fit for purpose. That is not good enough.

Article 5 states:

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

As Marlyn Glen said, what about the women and children who are trafficked into this country? What are we doing to stop that sickening abuse? Some inroads have been made in the attempt to stem the flow of women and children who are being trafficked, but, again, not enough is being done. I hope that the new criminal justice and licensing bill will attack with vigour the horrendous crime of trafficking.

The rights passport that Amnesty International sent us states that we have a duty to stand up not only for our own rights but for the rights of others. What can we do to eradicate the grinding poverty, ill health and lack of education that blights the lives of the citizens of Zimbabwe today? How can we show our solidarity with them? What can we do? I believe that Mugabe should be deposed and stand

trial at The Hague. We have no influence over these matters in this place, but we should stand four square with our colleagues at Westminster to make demands on the UN and on other African countries.

In December 1955, in Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, which resulted in the Supreme Court of the United States decision that Alabama laws requiring segregated seats on buses were unconstitutional. As Rosa Parks said, she sat down so that others could stand up. Jamie Hepburn has already quoted Eleanor Roosevelt. I will do so, too. She said:

"Where ... do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home ... the neighbourhood ... the school or college ... the factory, farm or office".

Rosa Parks is an excellent example of how true that is.

Although I readily acknowledge that we cannot ignore the gross violation of the human rights of hundreds of millions of people who are living in the developing world, we in this devolved Parliament have a duty to protect the human rights of our fellow citizens, whether they are unable to work, victims of trafficking or armed forces veterans. We should remain vigilant and hold the Government to account.

17:29

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I join my colleagues in congratulating Jamie Hepburn on securing this important debate. We all know a lot about the sad affront to human rights all over the world, but tonight I would like to draw to members' attention the thin veneer of civilisation that pertains in this country in relation to how our human rights are slowly being eroded.

Several members have mentioned articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I will consider how two or three pertain to what is happening in the United Kingdom today.

Article 3 says:

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

That sounds all right, does it not—but does our role in the global arms trade contribute to everyone's right to life?

Article 5 says:

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

We have heard about trafficked women. We have looked with some smugness at Guantánamo bay, but what about our role in rendition flights via Prestwick for people who are being tortured in

other countries? Not much has been done about that.

Article 9 says:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

My wife, who is a medical doctor, visited her daughter in New York, where she is an attorney. That should have been a fairly middle-class experience, but my wife was suddenly taken to a detention room, where her passport was taken from her and she was separated from her luggage. She was detained for some time, along with a crowd of other people who were being questioned in a rather hostile manner about their criminal records and so on. She regained her freedom after an hour, without any explanation for being kept in that way. That gave her the feeling of what it would be like to be put in prison on detention without charge—people have wanted to detain some suspects for up to 42 days—and of the experience of child migrants and asylum seekers who have been locked up in detention camps. It was a shock to a middle-class person to realise what it is like when everything that we take for granted is suddenly taken away in a frightening manner.

Article 11 says:

"Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence."

Despite that, the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 restricts the ability to present a defence to some alleged crimes if a person has been charged—whether or not they were found guilty—with a similar offence in the past. Is that in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Article 12 says:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy".

More and more DNA samples are being collected and stored for future use. I am glad that the European Court of Human Rights recently ruled against that, but it has happened. Closed-circuit television surveillance can also sometimes be misused.

Article 19 says:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression".

What about the anti-terrorism legislation that was used to get rid of an elderly heckler at a Labour Party conference, who was not allowed back in? What about the recent raid on the offices of a member of the Westminster Parliament under such legislation?

Article 20 says:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association."

What about the break-up of demonstrations outside the Houses of Parliament in London?

We have much to account for in our own country.

17:33

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I join other members in congratulating Jamie Hepburn on obtaining the debate and introducing it with a good speech. As he said, it is important to remember the context in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was made in December 1948. It was made in the aftermath of world war and of horrendous abuse, torture and murder of individuals, families, communities and racial groups—not just of Jews, but of Slavs, Gypsies, homosexuals, people with disablements and those with mental illnesses. The declaration followed huge displacement of populations throughout Europe and beyond and the rape and murder that occurred in the wake of some armies. It was coincident with the rule of Stalinism in the east, with the gulag and with the descent of the iron curtain, in Churchill's famous phrase,

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic",

while an increasingly apartheid Government ruled in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the assertions of the universal declaration sound modern and relevant to today's concerns here and abroad. It refers to equality before the law and no arbitrary interference with privacy, which Ian McKee and others mentioned. When the Government holds and loses vital personal information left, right and centre, when DNA samples are collected—Ian McKee touched on that—and when even a senior member of the Opposition can have his rooms in the House of Commons searched and be held for nine hours, we do not have anything to be particularly proud of.

Other members have touched on

"the right to seek and enjoy ... asylum"

and yet we hear so many desperate stories from people who are left unable to work and living in a sort of legal limbo land between their arrival in this country and the determination of their case. Marlyn Glen talked eloquently about the victims of trafficking.

Everyone also has

"the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family".

Things tended to be written from that perspective in those days. We need only contrast that with report after report on child poverty and vastly varying life spans and health inequalities.

The declaration also says that

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”,

but that remains an aspiration, albeit one that we are seeking to obtain through the curriculum review in the Scottish education system.

As article 30 says, powerfully:

“Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.”

The world has seen many changes since 1948: the apartheid regime has gone and countries of eastern Europe have—to a greater or lesser degree—joined the comity of nations where the rule of law is upheld, but appalling Governments in many parts of the world remain to be inspired by the principles of the declaration.

As several members have rightly said, here in Scotland the need is for us not to take for granted our human rights and civil liberties. Hugh O'Donnell and others mentioned moves on various pretexts to modify the Human Rights Act 1998 and the commitment to the European convention on human rights, and attempts to say that human rights are conditional. I hope that the Scottish Parliament will resist such moves. Indeed, we have seen it do so in the furore over proposals to join commissioners together. I hope that members recall why the Parliament established the Scottish Commission for Human Rights, the bill for which I took through the Parliament in the previous session. We should remember why we set up such institutions and why they are important.

Let the chamber say clearly tonight that human rights are unconditional, universal and expressive of our highest aspirations for the present and future. As many members have said, human rights challenge all aspects of our national life and politics.

It might not be a bad idea to cause, as the universal declaration requires, the text of the declaration

“to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded ... in schools and other educational institutions”.

We should know about the declaration, as should our young people and citizens more generally. We should bring forth the declaration into the activities of our politics and daily lives. There could be a worse new year resolution than that.

17:37

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I will touch on three separate areas. Before I do so, I thank and praise Michael McMahon for his great public spirit. I also thank Jamie Hepburn for bringing the debate to the chamber. I apologise to him and to you, Presiding Officer, for having to cut short my presence in the chamber owing to a prior engagement. I will make my comments brief.

The 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is something to celebrate. The declaration has made a difference, but it has not yet reached into all the places that Governments worldwide protect, in the main on the false premise of public interest or safety.

One of the most glaring examples of somewhere with a complete lack of human rights is the despicable Guantánamo Bay, an example that is compounded by multi-Government duplicity in co-operating to render people to and from that place. Of course, there are also the horrors of torture for those who find themselves in that unjust place.

People around the world have campaigned vocally for the closure of Guantánamo bay and for the individuals who are held there illegally to be transferred into the US justice system where they can be given a proper pre-trial evaluation, without threat. A considerable amount of that campaigning has taken place in the USA, even at high political level.

Having had to be taken to the European Court of Human Rights on the issue of building and retaining a DNA database that includes samples taken from innocent people, the UK has nothing to crow about. I am pleased that last week 17 judges ruled unanimously that the UK Government broke human rights law in retaining those samples.

Lastly, human rights are being breached in Scotland day in, day out by the well-financed and organised gangs that are involved in the slave trade and trafficking women and children into the sex trade.

I am pleased and honoured to speak in this debate, but I am ashamed that society requires such laws to establish fundamental human rights in the first place. I declare—as I hope other members will—a commitment to join others in continuing to campaign for worldwide enforcement of the declaration.

17:40

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I join other members in congratulating Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate. I am pleased that the Parliament is marking the important occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in response to the experience of the second world war, especially the horrors of Nazism. It was appropriate for Robert Brown to remind us of that point. As a Liberal Democrat, he pointed out in a typically balanced way that Stalin was equally guilty—perhaps at the other end of the spectrum, or as one of two heads on the same coin. The secretary-general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has described the declaration as the first global statement of what we now take for granted—the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings. Jamie Hepburn was right to emphasise that point.

Human rights are not just for other people in other countries. As many members have said this evening, in a wide-ranging debate, they are also for us in Scotland. The values of the declaration are at the heart of what the Parliament and the Government are about. For example, article 4 prohibits slavery and servitude. Members will recall the debate on human trafficking that took place in Parliament in March this year. In that debate, to which Marlyn Glen referred, I was pleased to set out what we in Scotland are doing to stamp out that vile trade. During last month's debate on children's rights, we made clear our intention to use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to deliver improved outcomes for all children in Scotland. In my portfolio area, I am reminded that between 40,000 and 60,000 children in Scotland live with one parent who has a serious drug misuse problem and that 65,000 children have at least one parent with a serious alcohol problem. Recent events have shown just how seriously we must all continue to take issues relating to the rights of those sad and vulnerable children.

In last month's debate, members spoke passionately on the rights of children, and today I have been encouraged to hear many members speak with equal passion on a variety of topics related to the rights of every human being. As Jamie Hepburn said, human rights are universal. The Government has taken a firm stand in defence of human rights on a wide range of issues. We have spoken out against the UK Government's proposals on identity cards and 42-day detention without trial. We have strongly condemned dawn raids on failed asylum seekers and the holding of children in Dungavel, and have made clear our opposition to rendition flights. I pay tribute to Trish Godman for her eloquent advocacy of the rights of veterans. In my constituency, I have encountered similar difficulties, with constituents not even getting a wheelchair. The member is right to highlight that issue today. I know that she is aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing views it with the utmost gravity.

Rightly, many members have taken the opportunity to set out their views on the situation in other parts of the world, not least Israel, Zimbabwe and Gaza. They are quite right to do so and to use the platform that today's debate provides to raise their concerns. I do not have time or the portfolio responsibility to address all the issues that they raised, but it is entirely appropriate for members this evening to express concerns on international issues, on which the Parliament has a voice.

We should also recognise the need for a proper balance between rights and responsibilities, to which some members alluded, including Hugh O'Donnell and Bill Aitken. For example, there is understandable public concern about substantial amounts of public money being used to pay compensation to convicted criminals. The rights of others, such as the victims of crime, prison officers and other staff who work in our prisons, should also be respected. We need to find ways to address such issues if we are to maintain public support for the human rights agenda, which can be tarnished by episodes such as the ones that Bill Aitken was right to highlight.

I should not and will not let this occasion pass without mentioning the new Scottish Commission for Human Rights. The SCHR has as its chair an internationally respected expert in human rights, Professor Alan Miller, and we look forward to working closely with the commission.

When I was listening to various members' speeches, I was reminded of the huge contribution that authors have made to strengthening human rights and ensuring that they are not breached. They include Solzhenitsyn, with his "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"; Kafka, with "The Trial"; Orwell, with "Animal Farm"; and Camus, with "The Outsider". Those formed the staple diet of my adolescence—and I am sure that those authors' works will be long remembered after this speech is long forgotten.

I conclude with the observation that struck me as I listened to the speeches from Robert Brown and Ian McKee, who mentioned the time when a member of his family suddenly found herself in a nightmarish situation. The reflection is a prosaic one, and certainly not an original one. It is this: human rights are not only important when they are under threat; it is when they are under threat that we begin to appreciate just how important they are.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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