

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 22 April 2009

Session 3

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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS

Office of the First Minister

FIRST MINISTER—Right hon Alex Salmond MSP

MINISTER FOR CULTURE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE CONSTITUTION—Michael Russell MSP

MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS—Bruce Crawford MSP

Health and Wellbeing

DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER AND CABINET SECRETARY—Nicola Sturgeon MSP

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SPORT—Shona Robison MSP

MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES—Alex Neil MSP

Finance and Sustainable Growth

CABINET SECRETARY—John Swinney MSP

MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE, ENERGY AND TOURISM—Jim Mather MSP

MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE—Stewart Stevenson MSP

Education and Lifelong Learning

CABINET SECRETARY—Fiona Hyslop MSP

MINISTER FOR SCHOOLS AND SKILLS—Keith Brown MSP

MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY YEARS—Adam Ingram MSP

Justice

CABINET SECRETARY—Kenny MacAskill MSP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY—Fergus Ewing MSP

Rural Affairs and the Environment

CABINET SECRETARY—Richard Lochhead MSP

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT—Roseanna Cunningham MSP

Law Officers

LORD ADVOCATE—Right hon Elish Angiolini QC

SOLICITOR GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Frank Mulholland QC

PRESIDING OFFICERS

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP

DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICERS—Trish Godman MSP, Alasdair Morgan MSP

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP

MEMBERS—Alex Johnstone MSP, Tricia Marwick MSP, Tom McCabe MSP, Mike Pringle MSP

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP

MEMBERS—Bruce Crawford MSP, David McLetchie MSP, Michael McMahon MSP, Mike Rumbles MSP

COMMITTEE CONVENERS AND DEPUTY CONVENERS

Committee	Convener	Deputy Convener
Economy, Energy and Tourism	Iain Smith	Rob Gibson
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture	Karen Whitefield	Kenneth Gibson
Equal Opportunities	Margaret Mitchell	Marlyn Glen
European and External Relations	Irene Oldfather	Michael Matheson
Finance	Andrew Welsh	Jackie Baillie
Health and Sport	Christine Grahame	Ross Finnie
Justice	Bill Aitken	Bill Butler
Local Government and Communities	Duncan McNeil	Alasdair Allan
Public Audit	Hugh Henry	Murdo Fraser
Public Petitions	Mr Frank McAveety	John Farquhar Munro
Review of SPCB Supported Bodies	Trish Godman	Jamie Hepburn
Rural Affairs and Environment	Maureen Watt	John Scott
Standards, Procedures and Public		
Appointments	Gil Paterson	Marilyn Livingstone
Subordinate Legislation	Jamie Stone	Ian McKee
Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change	Patrick Harvie	Cathy Peattie

22 April 2009

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 April 2009

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good afternoon. Welcome back from the Easter recess. The first item of business this afternoon, as always, is time for reflection. I am pleased to say that our time for reflection leader is Rabbi Mendel Jacobs from Newton Mearns in Glasgow.

Rabbi Mendel Jacobs (Newton Mearns, Glasgow): Man was given the power to conquer the whole world and to rule over it. Our sages teach that when God created Adam, his soul—his divine image—permeated his whole being, by virtue of which he became ruler over the entire creation. All the creatures gathered to serve him and to crown him as their creator, but Adam, pointing out their error, said to them, “Let us all come and worship God our maker!”

The world conquest given to man as his task and mission in life was to elevate and refine the whole of nature, including the beasts and animals, to the service of true humanity—humanity permeated and illuminated by the divine image, the soul, which is a part of God above—so that the whole of creation will realise that God is our maker.

Needless to say, before a man sets out to conquer the world, he must conquer himself and his ego, through the subjugation of the earthly and beastly in his nature. That is attained through actions that accord with the directives of the Torah—the scroll of the law or Old Testament, which is the practical guide to everyday living—so that the material becomes permeated and illuminated by the light of the one God. Herein lies the profound yet clear directive that each and every person is potentially capable of conquering the world. If a person does not fulfil that task and does not utilise their divine powers, it is not merely a personal loss and failure, but something that affects the destiny of the whole world.

One of the main distinguishing features of the creation of man is that man was created as a single being—unlike all other species, which were created in large numbers. That indicates emphatically that one individual has the capacity to bring the whole of creation to fulfilment. The rabbis teach us that Adam was the prototype and example for every individual who was to follow:

“For this reason was man created single, in order to teach us that ‘one person is equivalent to an entire world’”.

That means that every human being, regardless of time, place and personal status, has the fullest capacity—and the duty—to rise and attain the highest degree of fulfilment and to accomplish the same for creation as a whole.

Business Motion

14:33

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3941, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for this afternoon.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 22 April 2009—

after

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Review of Equal Opportunities in the Work of Committees

insert

followed by Announcement of Nomination of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland

followed by Ministerial Statement: Update on Vale of Leven Inquiry—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

“The Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act (asp 1): Proposed Standing Order Rule Changes”

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-3924, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on its report “The Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act (asp 1): Proposed Standing Order Rule Changes”.

14:35

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the clerking team to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for their very valued work.

In my capacity as convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I am pleased to open the first debate on the three reports that the committee has published in recent months. As all the reports relate to the procedural aspect of the committee’s remit and propose what, I hope, are viewed as straightforward rule changes to standing orders, I do not intend to speak at great length on any of the issues involved.

The first report, which is on the Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act 2009, sets out the rule changes that the committee believes are required to give effect to the provisions of that act.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 3rd Report 2009 (Session 3), *The Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act (asp 1): Proposed Standing Order Rule Changes* (SP Paper 230), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: No other members have indicated that they wish to speak, so we will move to the next item.

“Members’ Bills—cut-off date for introduction”

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3925, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on members’ bills—cut-off date for introduction. If anyone else wishes to speak in the debate, I ask them to press their request-to-speak buttons now. Again, I call on Gil Paterson to speak to and move the motion.

14:36

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): The second Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee report to be debated this afternoon relates to the deadline for the introduction of members’ bills. At present, the deadline for introduction is the end of September in the year before a general Scottish Parliament election. The change that is recommended by the committee will move that deadline to the beginning of June in the year before an election.

The committee recommended that change following concerns raised by the Health Committee and the Communities Committee at the end of the previous session. Both committees had been referred members’ bills, but decided that they could not consider the bills due to their existing work programmes. The deadline for the introduction of members’ bills meant, in those committees’ view, that they did not have enough time to consider the legislation properly.

Following consultation, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee concluded that the deadline for introduction should be brought forward to the beginning of June. The committee noted that the recommended change may provide committees with only an additional eight weeks of sitting time to consider members’ bills. However, it would also provide an opportunity for consultation to be undertaken over the summer recess and for committees to schedule work on a member’s bill when drawing up their autumn work programme.

The committee considered whether there should be a mechanism to allow for the introduction of a member’s bill beyond the deadline in exceptional circumstances, for example due to political impetus for a particular issue to be taken forward in a particular session. The change that is recommended by the committee therefore gives the Parliamentary Bureau the option to extend the deadline, if that is considered appropriate. We will be happy to work with the bureau to consider further what the criteria should be for extending the deadline in exceptional circumstances.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 1st Report 2009 (Session 3), *Members’ Bills – cut-off date for introduction* (SP Paper 205), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: Again, no one has indicated that they wish to speak in the debate, so we will move to the next item.

“Review of equal opportunities in the work of committees”

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3926, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on its review of equal opportunities in the work of committees. Again, I optimistically ask whether any member wishes to contribute to the debate; if they do, they should press their request-to-speak buttons. Again, I call on the convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, Gil Paterson, to speak to and move the motion—take your time, Mr Paterson.

14:39

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank you for that, Presiding Officer. The final motion that I wish to move this afternoon is on a rule change in relation to the work of committees and equal opportunities. The promotion of equal opportunities is a key principle of the Scottish Parliament. To support it, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's fourth report in 2009 recommends a rule change to require committees to report in their annual reports on how equal opportunities have been taken into account in their work.

Consideration was given to alternatives to a rule change. For example, the Equal Opportunities Committee has the discretion to ask other committees to carry out equalities reviews and to report the results of those reviews to that committee so that it can publish the compiled results in the form of a report. However, on balance, we felt that having a rule, even though it is not the only way of achieving the desired result, would emphasise the importance that is attached to equal opportunities issues in the work of the committees.

Our fourth report notes that, if committees report annually on equal opportunities, there will be scope for the Equal Opportunities Committee, under its existing remit, to produce a compiled report that covers the work of all committees. We have left it to the discretion of the Equal Opportunities Committee when and how to undertake such work.

Our committee also felt that it would be helpful for the rule change to be supported by guidance. At the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's request, such guidance has now been drafted and approved by the Equal Opportunities Committee. The guidance, which is contained in annex B to our fourth report, includes examples of how committees might

consider equal opportunities in their work on bills, inquiries and budget scrutiny.

From the outset of its inquiry, the committee wanted to increase awareness of the need to mainstream and monitor equalities issues in the work of committees. Therefore, in order to achieve the maximum benefit from the rule change, the committee has recommended:

- “• a rule change which would require committees to include in their annual reports details of how equal opportunities had been mainstreamed in their work over the past parliamentary year (detailed in Annexe A);

- a compilation report (either on an annual or a sessional basis) which would be produced by the Equal Opportunities Committee to provide a single source of reference for all committee work on equal opportunities; and

- further guidance for committees on how they could incorporate equal opportunities in their work, which would help secure greater committee involvement in reporting equalities issues.”

Finally, our report notes:

“the importance of committees considering how to take account of equal opportunities at an early stage when agreeing their work programmes.”

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 4th Report 2009 (Session 3), *Review of equal opportunities in the work of committees* (SP Paper 244), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: Tricia Marwick has indicated that she would like to speak. I can offer her up to five minutes.

14:42

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Mr President, five minutes will not be necessary.

The proposed rule change is very sensible indeed. In the previous two sessions, I argued—as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee and as a member of other committees—that equal opportunities seemed to be getting lost within the Parliament. Part of the reason for that was that committees seemed reluctant to take responsibility for such issues as long as we had an Equal Opportunities Committee in place. It is very sensible that the proposed rule change will require all committees to take equal opportunities into account in their work and to refer to that in their annual report. The Parliament has a very good reputation on equal opportunities, but the proposed rule change is an improvement because it will ensure that every committee—not just the Equal Opportunities Committee—addresses equal opportunities in its work.

The Presiding Officer: Our recent visit has obviously rubbed off on Ms Marwick. In the

National Assembly of Québec, the speaker is called "Mr President". I offer no further comment.

Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-3922, in the name of Karen Whitefield, on behalf of the selection panel, on the announcement of the nomination for the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.

14:44

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I speak to the motion in my name, on behalf of the selection panel that was established under our standing orders, to invite members to agree that Tam Baillie should be nominated to Her Majesty as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland. The selection panel was chaired by the Presiding Officer. The other members were Michael Matheson, Christina McKelvie, Cathy Peattie, Elizabeth Smith and Margaret Smith.

Although the Parliament is not subject to the code of practice on ministerial appointments to public bodies, we follow the guidelines to ensure that best practice is observed. On behalf of the panel, I thank Louise Rose, the independent assessor who oversaw the process and who has provided the Parliament with a validation certificate that confirms that it complied with good practice.

We received 22 applications and shortlisted five candidates for interview. It is worth saying that any of the five candidates whom we interviewed would have made an excellent choice for children's commissioner and that each of them would have brought their own experience and energy to the job. Given the nature of the post, in addition to being formally interviewed by the panel, the candidates had to interact with children and young people. On behalf of the panel, I would very much like to thank the children and young people who travelled from all over Scotland to assist us with the selection process, in which they played an important part. It was valuable to see how the candidates interacted and engaged with young people. In addition, the young people asked their own questions, which it is fair to say were some of the most thought-provoking and challenging questions that the candidates faced.

Members will be aware that the Parliament has established the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee. Given that that review is ongoing, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body determined that the appointment would be for a period of two years and that reappointment for a further year would be possible.

The candidate whom the panel wished to nominate, Tam Baillie, is currently the director of policy for Barnardo's Scotland, where he has worked since 2003. He has worked as a manager and practitioner with children and young people for 30 years, working primarily with young offenders, young people in or leaving care, and young homeless people. He has worked in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. He has extensive experience of Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament processes and recently made key contributions in the fields of child poverty and early years developments. He is the chair of the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights.

On a personal note, I am convinced that Tam will be an enthusiastic, energetic and independent advocate for children and young people in Scotland. His track record speaks for itself. I know that the panel is looking forward to seeing him fulfil some of the commitments that he made during the interview on developing innovative ways to engage with young people through the use of new technologies and Scotland's music and cultural scene—we have not forgotten about them. I am sure that he even mentioned something about using "River City"; we will see about that.

The general function of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland is to safeguard the rights of children and young people, and I believe that Tam Baillie will do that admirably.

I think that the Parliament would wish to record its thanks to Kathleen Marshall, who was appointed as the first Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland in 2004, for all her work.

It gives me great pleasure to move the motion. I move,

That the Parliament nominates Tam Baillie to Her Majesty The Queen for appointment as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.

14:48

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I thank Kathleen Marshall for the job that she has done. She has served this Parliament and Scotland's children very well, and I wish her all the best in her future plans. I believe that she will be a really hard act to follow. She leaves the organisation in great shape for Tam Baillie to take over.

I thank and commend everyone who was involved in the nomination process, including Louise Rose, the clerks and all those who helped the selection panel. In particular, I thank the kids who were involved, who were absolutely fantastic. I would be a bit feart to be interviewed by some of them, who asked pretty probing questions.

I thank all the other applicants. The standard was extremely high. As my colleague Karen Whitefield said, any of the five shortlisted candidates could have made a fantastic commissioner. All five of them are engaged in practice with children and young people. It is good that there are amazing people working in that field.

Tam Baillie's career is exemplary, as Karen Whitefield mentioned. He has worked in social work and the voluntary sector for a number of years. Recently, I kicked off the social work champion project for the next year. I was honoured to be one of Scotland's first social work champions, but in my opinion, with all his front-line experience, Tam Baillie is a true champion of children's rights.

Tam Baillie's commitment is demonstrated by his long career in children's services, and by his involvement in a cause that is close to my heart, which is the incorporation into law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. His job is a virtuous one, and it is one in which he will be required to make us politicians feel uncomfortable. That is a good thing. We will work well together, and I welcome Tam Baillie to the post and look forward to the work that we will do together. I wish him and his organisation all the best.

I support the motion in the name of Karen Whitefield.

14:50

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am pleased to support the motion, which welcomes Mr Tam Baillie to the post of children's commissioner. Mr Baillie's considerable experience working as a practitioner with children and young people—most recently as a director of policy at Barnardo's Scotland and as chair of the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights—will bring enormous benefit.

The role of the children's commissioner is a difficult job at the best of times, but especially at a time when children, parents and all those who care for children face many challenges, particularly in relation to child protection issues and the neglect and abuse that affect far too many young people. The horrific cases of neglect that have featured widely in the press and, I am sure, in the public mindset over recent months have emphasised the need to ensure that we work together to provide the best possible security for children in Scotland, particularly our most vulnerable children. We simply cannot afford to get that wrong.

Likewise, the children's commissioner inevitably has to work hard to articulate legislation that bridges three different Parliaments. That is no

easy task, and nor is dealing with the public scepticism about the job, especially when people feel that there is already too much intervention, which challenges the individual responsibility of parents and children.

With those not inconsiderable challenges in mind, I once again wish Mr Baillie very well in his new role and wish Kathleen Marshall all the best for her retirement.

14:51

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): As Elizabeth Smith said, being the children's commissioner is not an easy job at the best of times. For a number of reasons, this might not be the best of times when it comes to the issue of the children's commissioner.

Being the champion for children and young people is an important job. It is essential to remind adults of children's rights and why they are so important. I pay tribute to Kathleen Marshall on the job that she has done in her time as commissioner. She certainly made us all feel slightly uncomfortable at times. That should be part of the job description for the role.

I have no hesitation in recommending that Tam Baillie should be Kathleen Marshall's replacement. Tam's experience speaks for itself. He has relevant experience from a 20-year career working directly with children and young people, among them the most vulnerable and deprived children in our country, including young offenders, young homeless people and those leaving care. He has sharp-end experience of the issues that face our most vulnerable young people.

Crucially, however, Tam Baillie also has experience of networking in the sector. He is chair of the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, which he undertakes in a voluntary capacity while doing his main day job as director of policy at Barnardo's Scotland. Over the period of the Parliament's existence, he has given evidence to parliamentary committees and he has probably engaged with each and every one of us, as well as with ministers. He is a well-kent face around Holyrood and, most important, he is well kent for caring passionately for children and young people, and being an advocate for them. He is well respected in the field and I am sure that he will be able to work in partnership with the voluntary sector, with the Parliament and with Government to help improve the lives of Scotland's children.

The panel was left in no doubt about Tam Baillie's passion for children's rights and his determination to tackle the problems that our children face. As members have said, not only did Tam Baillie and the other candidates have to convince us MSPs that they could do the job, they

had to convince a group of children and young people, which would probably have taxed most of us. It was clear from the interaction between the children and Tam Baillie that he was at ease in their company. That is an important part of the commissioner's job.

I thank the children and young people who took part in the process. Some of them took time out of school to take part, which I am sure was a big sacrifice. I hope that they enjoyed the experience. I am not sure whether I am meant to do this, but I looked back at the comments from the children about Tam Baillie, one of which was, "He knows his stuff." We probably cannot ask for more than that from a commissioner.

Another of the children said, "Make him commissioner now." I would go along with that. Tam Baillie will be an excellent commissioner, and he will be a strong, enthusiastic and able advocate for Scotland's children and young people.

14:55

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I wish to place formally on record the congratulations of the Labour Party to Tam Baillie on his appointment as commissioner for young people. We all know Tam from his work with Barnardo's over the years, and we have come to admire his many qualities—his enthusiasm, drive, energy and sense of humour. He will need all those qualities as he engages with us as commissioner.

The Parliament has prioritised children and young people over the past 10 years, and I believe that we will continue to do so. I hope that we will establish a constructive working relationship with Mr Baillie, as we did with his predecessor, Kathleen Marshall. I wish her very well in her next moves, and I wish Tam Baillie very well in his.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes our brief debate on motion S3M-3922, on behalf of the selection panel, on the announcement of the nomination for the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.

Vale of Leven Inquiry

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon, providing an update on the Vale of Leven inquiry. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so, as always, there should be no interventions or interruptions during it. It will be a 10-minute statement.

14:56

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I undertook to make a statement to Parliament when the Crown Office had received the area procurator fiscal's report on the police and Health and Safety Executive investigations into the tragic deaths from *Clostridium difficile* at the Vale of Leven hospital last year. I received an update from the Crown Office during the Easter recess and I am therefore taking the first opportunity available to me to update Parliament.

Before I do so, however, I want to reflect on the improvements that have been made at the Vale of Leven since the publication of the independent review team's report last August. The report's recommendations have been taken forward as an action plan by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and the recommendations have also informed the national health care associated infection action plan. The independent review team, supported by representatives of families and patients, assessed progress at the Vale of Leven at the end of last year, and the team published a follow-up report in February. I was encouraged by the findings. The team reported documented evidence of rapid and significant progress on all the recommendations, and a much improved and more direct organisation for the control of infection at the Vale, which is now fully integrated with the rest of the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area.

Building sustainability in each of the seven areas covered by the original report will be crucial to maintaining the significant progress that has been made. Also, as the report confirmed, the long-term commitment of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to the Vale of Leven will contribute to the sustainability of the achievements that have been made so far. Of course, monitoring of the hospital will continue, and I expect the progress that has been made to be maintained.

Members will be aware that, in parallel with those substantial improvements at the Vale of Leven hospital, the police and the Health and Safety Executive have been conducting investigations into the circumstances surrounding the *C. difficile* outbreak. The investigations are

being undertaken at the request of the Crown Office. I have been informed by the Crown Office that interim reports from the police and the Health and Safety Executive were submitted to the area procurator fiscal for Argyll and Clyde at the beginning of this month. The reports have now been fully considered by Crown counsel, and certain further inquiries have been instructed. The Crown Office has advised me that it expects the further inquiries to be completed by the end of May. It is expected that a decision on whether to instigate any criminal proceedings will be taken by the end of June.

I turn to how this information affects my deliberations about a public inquiry. As members know, I have never ruled out a public inquiry. Indeed, I have said on many occasions that I fully understand the demand for such an inquiry. However, it has always been my judgment that a public inquiry running in parallel with a detailed and complex police investigation could both restrict the work of the inquiry and pose a risk of prejudice to any criminal proceedings that might follow. That remains my view.

I have also, until now, judged that to announce an intention to have a public inquiry in future would not be appropriate while there was still considerable uncertainty about when it might be able to begin its work. However, it is now clear that the investigations have made significant progress and that the Crown Office is much closer to the point at which a decision about criminal proceedings can be taken. I therefore consider that the time is right to confirm that there will be a public inquiry into the *C. difficile* outbreak at the Vale of Leven hospital following the conclusion of the on-going investigations. The public inquiry will be held under the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005. It is also appropriate that I announce that decision to Parliament now rather than await the decision of Crown counsel, which is expected by the end of June, because, depending on the precise timing of that decision, that might not have left me enough time to make a statement to Parliament before the summer recess.

It remains the case that the inquiry will be able to start its substantive work only when the current investigations and any prosecutions that might arise from them have been concluded. However, the decision today to hold a public inquiry means that preliminary work can be done to ensure that the inquiry is able to start its substantive work at the earliest opportunity.

To that end, I am pleased to announce that the Rt Hon Lord Coulsfield has agreed to chair the inquiry. Lord Coulsfield is a highly respected former judge. He will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the task, having previously served as chairman of the Medical Appeals

Tribunal for Scotland. He has also acted as chair in a number of influential reviews, including the review of the law and practice of disclosure of evidence in the Scottish criminal justice system. I am sure that I speak for the whole Parliament in expressing my thanks to him for agreeing to undertake this important task.

Work will now be undertaken to frame the terms of reference of the inquiry, which may be influenced by the findings of the current investigations. I will report back to Parliament on the terms of reference as soon as possible. It will also be open to Lord Coulsfield to do any other preliminary work that he considers appropriate in accordance with the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005 and consistent with the obligation not to prejudice the on-going investigations.

I am sure that everybody in the chamber agrees that it is essential that we learn all the lessons from the C difficile tragedy at the Vale of Leven. I hope that my decision to hold a public inquiry once again highlights the Government's determination to learn those lessons.

I will briefly update Parliament on the range of actions that are being taken across NHS Scotland to tackle and drive down rates of infection and the impact that those actions are having. The national HAI action plan, which was developed following the publication of the independent review team's Vale of Leven report last year, is being used to ensure that NHS boards have the necessary infection control policies and practices in place across the key areas of governance, leadership and surveillance. Over the past few months, I have announced a range of initiatives that will help us to drive down infection rates in the long term. Those include the toughening up of cleaning standards; a policy of zero tolerance of non-compliance with hand hygiene protocols; a new national uniform and dress code; additional funding for anti-microbial pharmacists; a new health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment target for the reduction of C difficile rates; the establishment of the new care environment inspectorate, headed by a chief inspector, to police standards in our hospitals; and the provision of 100 per cent single rooms in all new hospitals.

I have commissioned a study of the electronic bed management system that is being piloted in NHS Grampian and which is supported by the Scottish Conservatives, to ensure that lessons that are learned from its use are available to other boards quickly. I have also asked the HAI task force to consider how Labour's 15-point plan might contribute to the 57-point action plan that we already have in place. More recently, I have announced that a national MRSA screening programme will be rolled out this year throughout Scotland, targeting most elective admissions to

acute specialities and both elective and emergency admissions to the four specialities of nephrology, vascular surgery, dermatology and care of the elderly. To ensure that the highest standards of cleanliness are maintained in our hospitals, I have announced more than £5 million of recurring funding to employ an additional 600 new cleaners across the national health service.

More will always require to be done to beat infection in our hospitals. I have said before that that is and will remain my top priority. Nevertheless, I hope that members will welcome the fact that the action that we are already taking is beginning to show results. MRSA rates over the two most recent quarters were at the lowest level since surveillance reporting began. The most recent statistics on C difficile show a drop of 11 per cent from the previous quarter and a drop of 19 per cent in comparison with the same quarter last year. That is promising progress, but we must continue to be focused and vigilant. I hope that my statement today, my confirmation of a Vale of Leven public inquiry and the continued concerted action of the Government demonstrate our determination to build on that progress. I look forward to the support of the chamber as we do so.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for giving me an advance copy of her statement. I want to put on record our welcome for the announcement of the public inquiry and pay tribute to the families who have campaigned for it, with the support of their local MSP, Jackie Baillie, who has put a tremendous amount of effort into working with them. It is important for the families that a timescale has been identified. I am sure that Lord Coulsfield will adopt as thorough an approach to this inquiry as he has done in relation to other issues. I also thank him for taking on the task of chairing the inquiry.

I appreciate that the cabinet secretary said that she will issue information on the precise terms of the remit of the inquiry as soon as possible. However, can she tell us whether she intends to await the decision of the Crown Office before announcing the detail of that remit, or will she be in a position to give us that detail sooner? Can she at least confirm that the remit will ensure that, while the primary focus is, rightly, on the Vale of Leven, any lessons that can be learned from incidences of C difficile that have led to ward closures in other parts of Scotland will be taken account of?

The cabinet secretary outlined a number of areas in which work has been taken forward,

including work that has been done around the 15-point action plan that was produced by Labour. Can she tell us when the results of the HAI task force's deliberations on that plan will be reported to Parliament?

Nicola Sturgeon: I, too, pay tribute to the Vale of Leven families. They have gone through an agonising time in the past months and have behaved with great dignity. For reasons that I have alluded to before in the chamber, I have a great deal of empathy with them, and I hope that today's decision will give them some comfort.

I will consider the terms of reference in consultation with Lord Coulsfield, in keeping with the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005 and good practice. Therefore, it would be wrong of me to say more at the moment about their content or exactly when they will be finalised.

I want to ensure that any relevant lessons or messages that come out of the police or Health and Safety Executive investigations can be included in those terms of reference. That means that we either wait until the conclusion of those investigations before finalising the terms of reference or finalise them earlier and then amend them later if necessary. That is a question that I will discuss with Lord Coulsfield.

On the question about broader lessons, I have taken the view all along that lessons that are learned from the Vale of Leven should be applied more generally. That is why the independent review team's report influenced the HAI task force action plan. I am clear that the focus of the inquiry must be on what went wrong at the Vale of Leven—that is particularly important from the point of view of the families of those who died—but, clearly, any lessons that are learned in the course of the inquiry that are of relevance to other NHS boards must be learned by everyone in the NHS.

Cathy Jamieson's final question concerned Labour's 15-point action plan. As I previously committed to doing, I have asked the HAI task force to consider that. Those deliberations are under way, and I expect to receive a full report with recommendations by the middle of May. I will update Cathy Jamieson, the Labour Party and Parliament as soon as possible after that point.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. Scottish Conservatives have shared her analysis of how best to proceed in the aftermath of the tragedy at the Vale of Leven, and we welcome the approach that she has announced today and the fact that there is now a clear timescale ahead for the families, given that the investigation will take a little longer yet.

Although the cabinet secretary will not be party to the detail, is she nonetheless satisfied as a

result of her discussions with the Crown Office that the further inquiries that it has instructed are justified, in the sense that they may yet affect the outcome of the investigation rather than simply substantiate a decision that has already been reached? Can she confirm that, although lessons will be learned from elsewhere, she expects that the principal objective of the inquiry will be to focus on the tragedy that occurred at the Vale of Leven and the circumstances that led up to it during the preceding decade?

Scottish Conservatives welcome the cabinet secretary's comments on progress on infection control, and Mary Scanlon and I look forward to participating next week in the workshop to take forward electronic bed management and infection control systems. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that she will act urgently to ensure that that technology is brought into use throughout the NHS to help prevent future loss of life?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Jackson Carlaw for his questions; I will respond to them in order. With regard to the first question, I have—as he understands—been updated by the Crown Office on the progress and the process of the investigations, rather than on their substance, as that would not be appropriate. I am not party to the detail of the further inquiries that the Crown Office has instructed; it is the Crown Office's decision, based on the interim reports that it has received, to determine what further inquiries are necessary.

I am grateful to the Crown Office for the update on the timescales to which it expects that it will now be working. Decisions on any further process following those investigations will be entirely for the Crown Office to make, acting independently of ministers, as I know members on all sides of the chamber understand very well.

In response to Jackson Carlaw's second question, I think that—as I said in response to Cathy Jamieson—if we are to do justice to those who died at the Vale of Leven and their families, we must focus clearly on what went wrong there. As I said to Cathy Jamieson, we need to draw up the terms of reference, but I make it clear that the public inquiry must examine all factors—whatever they may be—that contributed to the outbreak of *C. difficile* at the Vale of Leven. Lessons that are learned in the inquiry should be applied more generally, but I repeat what I said in my statement: I am not saying by any means that we can take our foot off the pedal, as much work still needs to be done, but I am heartened that we are beginning to see a downward trend in the incidence of not only MRSA, but *C. difficile*. My focus is on ensuring that the NHS continues that trend.

Jackson Carlaw's final question was on electronic bed management. I thank him and Mary Scanlon for the constructive way in which they

have sought to work with us on that issue. I am glad that they will take part in the workshop next week. They may get some useful insights and certainly we will welcome their input.

It is important that we act as quickly as possible. However, I am sure everyone would agree that we must ensure that the work we do is robust, that the pilot in Grampian is properly evaluated and that the lessons that can be learned are properly disseminated. That is what we are seeking to do as quickly as possible.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement. Although the Liberal Democrats did not share her analysis, it would be churlish to do other than welcome the fact that a public inquiry will be held under the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005. Like the cabinet secretary, we also welcome the fact that Lord Coulsfield has agreed to undertake the inquiry.

I will press the cabinet secretary a little more on section 5 of the 2005 act and the terms of reference for the inquiry. I understand perfectly why you are not able to announce the terms of reference today. However, you quite rightly pointed to the fact that you need to make a statement today rather than await the decision of Crown counsel because that might cross over into the summer recess. I am not quibbling with that—it is a perfectly acceptable position.

However, I put it to you that the circumstances that have caused you to make the announcement now could create difficulties for you in announcing the terms of reference in a way that allows Parliament properly to adjudge whether they address the requirements of the 2005 act. I am not expecting an immediate response to my question, but it would be helpful if you could reflect on whether, given the difficulties that you have outlined, there would be an opportunity for the terms of reference to be brought to Parliament for comment before the matter is concluded between you and Lord Coulsfield.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a fair question. However, I say as a matter of fact, not as a statement of intent, that there are many ways of putting an inquiry's terms of reference before Parliament. For example, I announced the terms of reference for the hepatitis C inquiry in response to an inspired parliamentary question. I am not saying that I intend to do so in this case; I am simply pointing out that such an option is available.

I take on board Ross Finnie's comments. I do not mean to dodge his question in any way—indeed, quite the reverse—but for the reasons that I set out to Cathy Jamieson I do not think that it would be right for me to comment on the terms of

reference beyond what I have already said about where I feel their focus should lie. It is right and proper that I have that discussion with Lord Coulsfield and give his views due deference before I reach any further decisions.

Finally, I do not mean to blow my own trumpet but, whatever else I might be criticised for on this or any other issue, I cannot be criticised for not coming before Parliament in an open way. Members can take it that I will ensure due and appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of all my decisions on this matter.

The Presiding Officer: I did not want to interrupt that question or the answer, because they were on a serious subject. However, I remind all members—and perhaps Mr Finnie in particular—that I have always asked that questions be addressed through the chair and for members not to ask other members direct questions.

We come to open questions. As a number of members wish to ask questions, brevity will be important.

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I very much welcome the announcement of a public inquiry into the tragic events at the Vale of Leven hospital. Given that, as we all know, the outbreak was not the result of any short-term decision and that the problem itself dates back many years, will the cabinet secretary ensure that the inquiry is long term in scope and will look not just at this specific outbreak?

Nicola Sturgeon: Gil Paterson has, with Jackie Baillie and other members, very assiduously pursued this issue on behalf of the families involved. Some of my response to his question will inevitably repeat previous responses but, as I have said, it is important that I consult Lord Coulsfield properly before I reach a final determination of the terms of reference. However, as I said in response to Jackson Carlaw, if we are to get to the nuts and bolts of what went wrong at the Vale of Leven and to ensure that all lessons are learned, we must ensure that every factor that might have contributed to the tragic events at the hospital is available for inspection by the public inquiry. I will certainly do my best to ensure that the terms of reference enable that to happen.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement of a public inquiry, which is, of course, something for which the families from the Vale of Leven have consistently campaigned. I consider the decision to be a victory not only for common sense but for the families' persistence and courage in pursuing the matter. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for listening to their case.

That said, will the cabinet secretary ensure that the families in the C Diff Justice Group are involved in shaping the public inquiry's terms of reference and that they can participate fully in the hearings—for example, by leading evidence and cross-examining witnesses—by enabling the costs of solicitors and counsel to be covered by the state?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I did with Gil Paterson, I pay due credit to Jackie Baillie for her pursuit of this issue.

On the question about the terms of reference, I realise that I am beginning to repeat myself endlessly. As I have said, it is important that I discuss them. However, deciding in consultation with Lord Coulsfield what those terms of reference will be is one of my responsibilities.

From the moment that the outbreak came to light and from the publication of the independent review team's report, I have sought to be as open with the families involved as possible. I think that I have met them on three separate occasions. I will continue to be as helpful to them and as open with them as possible and to allow them to make their views known in a way that is consistent with my ultimate responsibility to decide the inquiry's terms of reference.

On Jackie Baillie's wider question, the conduct of the inquiry will not, of course, be a matter for me; rather, it will be a matter for Lord Coulsfield. The Inquiries Act 2005 is clear about that. It will be for him to make decisions about the kind of questions that Jackie Baillie raised. As Cathy Jamieson said, given Lord Coulsfield's experience and pedigree, we can all be assured that the inquiry will be rigorous and robust and that everybody who has something to contribute to it will be allowed to contribute to it.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): How long is the public inquiry expected to last? Irrespective of whether proceedings or prosecutions will take place following the Crown Office and Health and Safety Executive inquiries and the public inquiry, is Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board taking any action that it deems necessary through disciplinary procedures against NHS personnel, in relation to gross misconduct, for example? What progress is being made to tackle infections in the care home sector, given that many elderly residents are admitted to hospital?

Nicola Sturgeon: On Mary Scanlon's first question, it is not possible for me to estimate the length of the inquiry at this stage. Estimating its length may become more possible once it gets under way, but it is impossible to know at this stage how much documentary evidence may be submitted or to judge how much oral evidence

people might want to take. Of course, that is entirely a matter for Lord Coulsfield and the inquiry team. That said, as with all inquiries, we want the inquiry to be conducted as quickly as possible, but we also want it to be rigorous and robust. That is important, and those two desires must be balanced.

On Mary Scanlon's second question, there are no on-going disciplinary proceedings in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde as a result of what happened at the Vale of Leven hospital. Obviously, I cannot comment on what might or might not come out of the Crown Office and Health and Safety Executive reports; that is a matter for others. What flows from that will also be a matter for others.

Mary Scanlon's third question about how we deal with infections not only in our acute hospitals but in community hospitals and care homes is important. The HAI task force is concerned with that issue as well. It is important, for example, that we are getting to grips with antibiotic prescribing in hospitals, but we are also ensuring that the guidelines and guidance apply in primary care and more broadly. I assure Mary Scanlon that we are trying to pursue a holistic view of tackling infection.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I welcome the significant progress that has been made on tackling the prevalence of HAIs, which has been described, but there is no cause for complacency. The causative factors for one HAI may differ from those for another HAI. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that all health boards not only concentrate on hygiene standards—important though those are—but rigorously review antibiotic prescribing procedures, as they play an important role in fighting *C difficile*?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with Ian McKee. Over the past number of months, I have reluctantly reached the conclusion that we will probably never conclusively and decisively win the battle against infection because as we get on top of one infection, another infection or another strain of the same infection will appear. The battle is on-going. That means that we must try to get ahead of the curve and not just be catching up. That is very difficult, but I am trying to ensure that such a culture exists in the NHS. I cannot stand here and say that we will have no outbreaks of infections, but it is important that we learn lessons so that we do everything that we can to prevent infections and infection outbreaks, and that we have in place the right surveillance systems and control procedures to ensure that we minimise their impact. All lessons must be learned, and they must be learned over and over again.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Along with all other members, I welcome the public inquiry, which the families have long

campaigned for. I look forward to seeing the terms of reference, which I hope will be broad and will incorporate lessons from elsewhere.

On the generality of tackling HAI, the cabinet secretary has announced a move to 100 per cent of beds being in single rooms in new-build hospitals, but there is a priority need now to be able to isolate affected patients. Has an audit been undertaken of the shortfall in isolation rooms? What progress does the cabinet secretary expect on delivering that?

Two members have referred to anti-microbial prescribing. The figures for general practice prescribing are absolutely level, at just over 14 million scripts a year for the past three years. What specific action will the cabinet secretary take beyond encouraging general practitioners on that? What steps will she take to remove the public pressure on them to prescribe antibiotics?

Nicola Sturgeon: In response to Richard Simpson's first question about single rooms and isolation facilities, we want as many isolation facilities as possible in our hospitals, but neither I, nor Richard Simpson, nor any other member, can reinvent our hospital estate overnight. The considerable investment in our hospital estate will allow us to ensure that 100 per cent of beds are in single rooms in new hospitals. In relation to refurbished hospitals, the guidance contains a presumption that 100 per cent of beds should be in single rooms and states that at least 50 per cent should be in single rooms. As we modernise our hospital estate, which is an on-going programme, provision will improve. In the meantime, we must do as much as possible to maximise isolation facilities. Where isolation facilities are not available, that puts an absolute premium on ensuring that the right infection control policies are used to minimise the risk of infection spreading. There must be a focus on all those issues to ensure that we do everything possible to stop the spread of infection.

Richard Simpson also asked about antibiotic prescribing. From the member's portfolio interest as well as his professional interest, he will be well aware of the existing anti-microbial guidance and the obligation on all NHS boards to have in place anti-microbial teams. I believe that that work will have an impact, although I cannot prove that it will. I am not an expert on the issue, but I suspect that the work that is being done on antibiotic prescribing is already beginning to have an impact, particularly on the rates of *C difficile*.

Richard Simpson is right to point out that there are two sides to the coin. We must ensure that clinicians are not being irresponsible or prescribing antibiotics inappropriately, but we must also educate the public about appropriate use of antibiotics. I cannot do that alone. Every member

and everybody in the NHS has a responsibility to ensure that the public understand the dangers of overuse of antibiotics and the need to use them appropriately. That work will not be a magic-wand solution—there is no such thing—but it will contribute to a continuing reduction in infection rates.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): The cabinet secretary referred to the provision of an additional 600 cleaners in the NHS, which will mean an extra 32 cleaners in my health board, Forth Valley NHS Board. However, she will be aware that quality is as important as quantity. Will she therefore ensure that tackling or assisting in tackling HAI will be a key priority for the new cleaners?

Nicola Sturgeon: That is an important point, although I should say that quantity also matters and that having 600 more cleaners to do the job will help greatly in ensuring that our hospitals are as clean as the public expect them to be. However, Michael Matheson is absolutely right that we must ensure that the new cleaners, as well as the existing ones, see their job as part of the overall infection control agenda. One reason why we will be able to ensure that the 600 additional cleaners have that very much in mind is that, because of a previous decision that there will be no further contracting out or privatisation—call it what you will—of cleaning services, the cleaners will be unambiguously in the NHS, working for the NHS and part of the NHS family. That is extremely good news.

High-speed Rail Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3883, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on behalf of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, on its report on its inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services.

I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I tell members that I can allocate them one more minute than they hitherto expected.

15:30

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): In speaking to the motion and committee report, I begin, as is traditional, by thanking my committee colleagues who contributed to our work, the various witnesses who gave us evidence both written and in person, and the clerking team who supported us in producing the report.

The inquiry and report are timely. If I remember rightly, when we looked at our work plan originally we thought that we had a little more time than we ended up with. We thought that we would have a little time on our hands, so we looked for a topic that would fill a slot before deliberations began on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. In the end, we were tighter for time than we expected, but I am glad that we alighted on the topic of high-speed rail when considering our work plan. Given the announcements from the United Kingdom Government during our inquiry, it could hardly have been timelier.

The question of high-speed rail stretches far back—as far back as the 1960s. While the UK was busy ripping up its railway system, other countries, including some of our European neighbours, were looking forward to a high-speed rail future. By the 1980s and 1990s, high-speed lines were being built and services began to operate. However, the UK's only connection to that emerging high-speed rail network was the Channel tunnel, and that remains the case.

For years, there has been no answer to the question of the future of investment in new high-speed routes, but that question is now rather closer to being answered. After the various studies conducted by Greengauge 21, Atkins consultants and others, the case began to be developed more fully. Last year, Network Rail announced a strategic review of the case for new lines, and in evidence to our inquiry expressed the hope that it would develop a business plan for one or more new lines with the option for them to operate as high-speed lines.

Soon afterwards, the House of Commons Transport Committee criticised the UK Government's position, which up until that point had not supported the case for high-speed rail. Then, towards the end of last year, as our inquiry was on-going, a welcome change of tone emerged from Whitehall. Just into the new year, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that a new company, called High Speed Two, would be established to consider the case for new high-speed rail services between London and the north-east of England and Scotland.

As those events gather pace, it is essential that Scotland fights its corner and makes the case clearly that if high-speed rail is to be built, it should be built all the way to achieve the maximum possible gain in journey times. Journey time was one theme of many witnesses' evidence. The idea was put to us with some force that a journey time of around three hours could be regarded as something of a tipping point, because it would encourage people to move from less sustainable modes of transport—aviation in particular—and start using the railways.

I think that I speak for several members in the chamber when I say that I already find the railways a convenient and comfortable way of getting down south. However, if we want to encourage modal shift and increase the use of that railway route, we should consider seriously that three-hour journey tipping point as well as the other factors that improve the case for high-speed rail.

How does that case break down? An economic case was put to us very clearly. Like many witnesses, many members will want to emphasise it. For some, it is a question of simply increasing all forms of connectivity, as the jargon puts it; for others, it is a straightforward transport case, more to do with improving the network—a natural extension of an incremental improvement in the existing network, which already faces congestion. However, it is possible to reduce journey times on the existing conventional network by only a small amount. We can carry on reducing journey times and improving reliability, but that will take us only so far, given the capacity problems that we already face. Before we even think about the economy or the environment, the transport case for a rail network that meets people's needs is clear.

I turn to the environmental case, on which there have been differing views. My attitude changed during the inquiry. There are questions to ask in considering whether high-speed rail is the best investment to make, given that it could cost tens of billions of pounds and take decades to get the system up and running. It occurred to me that people might ask whether their local commuter route or station should be the priority for

investment. On a day when we are seeing increases in fares, we should ask whether reducing fares should be a priority.

People referred to the more-of-everything approach. It is clear that increased high-speed rail plus increased aviation does not result in a carbon saving. There was a question about the CO₂ impacts of high-speed travel itself. The different technologies have different impacts on the environment. However, I am pleased that the committee agreed, without dissent, that high-speed rail can deliver environmental benefits. At paragraph 59 of our report we agree that

“High-speed rail will only deliver environmental benefits if it is introduced in the context of other policy initiatives such as proposals to reduce our reliance on aviation and the use of renewable sources of electricity to power trains.”

That is a clear conclusion. It is clear that there is an environmental case for high-speed rail, as well as an economic case, in addition to arguments about simply keeping the transport system working properly. High-speed rail should not be seen as the environment versus the economy. In fact, this is one area in which we should say that environmental and economic initiatives can be taken in conjunction.

The committee appreciated the opportunity to engage with the UK Government. I am sure that the minister will say that the Scottish Government is also engaged in dialogue with the UK Government. Long after this committee report is debated, we will have to keep making Scotland's case in the debate about the UK's high-speed rail network. If we are serious about building high-speed rail from Scotland to the south—to England and on to the continent—we will need a business case, political consensus and a delivery process that makes sense not just on day one; we will need them to be capable of withstanding several changes of Government at UK and Scotland level to maintain the momentum and ensure that the idea becomes a reality. That is not straightforward or easy, but if we can begin to develop and express that consensus, we will have a chance to make the case.

The committee's report has raised questions about the details of routes, such as whether we go for an upgrade of existing routes or a new route, and how we get into city centres. I am sure that members and the minister will want to cover those points. I thank all those who contributed to the production of our report, which is a useful starting point in a debate that I hope will be consensual not just today but in the months, years and decades that it could take to get a system of high-speed rail from Scotland to the south up and running.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's 1st Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Report on the Inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services* (SP Paper 219).

15:38

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I thank Patrick Harvie for securing the debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to present my thoughts on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's report on the potential benefits of high-speed rail services.

The committee is to be congratulated on the quality and depth of its report, which is comprehensive and far reaching, and presents a number of challenging recommendations and actions for Government and others. I very much welcome the committee's findings.

The report sets out clearly the environmental benefits to be realised from the development of a high-speed rail service between Scotland and London—and onward to Europe. It presents compelling evidence not only that high-speed rail services offer lower per-passenger carbon emissions than does aviation, but that their shorter journey times can create a shift from air to rail travel. There is no question but that the air route from central Scotland to south-east England is one of the most densely operated anywhere in Europe, and that much of the traffic on that route is a prime candidate for conversion to high-speed rail. I also note the committee's conclusion that it has

“no doubt that high-speed rail would bring significant economic benefits to Scotland.”

When I gave evidence to the committee on 16 December 2008, I stated my agreement with those points. I fully believe that high-speed rail will deliver substantial economic benefits and key climate change advantages.

In that evidence session, committee members were keen to discuss the role of the Scottish and UK Governments in supporting the development of high-speed rail. It is right that Patrick Harvie focused in his speech on the need for neighbouring Administrations to work closely together. I agree with the committee's recommendations that the Scottish Government should articulate clearly a long-term vision for the planning, funding and construction of a high-speed rail network and that we should take a strong role in promoting high-speed rail and supporting any project through to completion. They hit exactly the right policy buttons.

The committee recommends that it is essential that the Scottish Government makes further

progress in articulating a detailed policy vision for a high-speed rail scheme. We agree that having a policy vision is absolutely key to developing the case for high-speed rail. Of course, in working towards that vision, it will be necessary to consider many of the issues that are raised in the committee's report in closer detail and with the involvement of the many stakeholders who gave evidence to the committee.

Patrick Harvie spoke of the need for political consensus, and I am pleased—as I am sure others are—by the broad support for high-speed rail in the submissions to the committee from people outside politics who engage in the life of wider Scotland. I acknowledge the report's comment that, at this early stage, consensus might not exist on the proposed route or any potential development options, but a shared agenda seems to be emerging. Many stakeholders recognise the benefits that are associated with high-speed rail and support its development. If we have principled agreement, we have the environment in which to develop the detailed responses to the requirements.

In developing a clear policy position, the Scottish Government will, of course, reflect the committee's position that we need to consider the most suitable routes for high-speed lines and how they could serve both Edinburgh and Glasgow city centres. We must ensure that any high-speed rail network connects effectively with the existing rail network to allow the whole of Scotland to benefit from any new high-speed link and we must be ambitious for it to reach every corner of Scotland eventually—perhaps Kyle of Lochalsh will be a little while away. At the same time, we must ensure that the development of a high-speed line does not divert resources and attention from investment in improvements to the current rail network.

Having considered the proposed second national planning framework, the Parliament recommended to the Government that a high-speed rail link between Scotland and London should be designated as a national development. Current and continuing investment in the rail network can help to pave the way for high-speed rail, so I note the committee's recommendation that the west of Scotland rail enhancements that are proposed as a national development in NPF 2 should take account of the potential for future integration with a high-speed rail network. We are considering carefully all those issues in relation to NPF 2 and our findings will be published later this spring. We will set out in a statement the changes that are to be made to NPF 2 in response to Parliament's recommendations, and it will be laid before Parliament when we publish the final NPF 2. Policy will also be informed by continuing studies, particularly Greengauge 21's high-speed

rail development programme and High Speed Two's first report, which is due later this year.

Of course, we are working very closely with High Speed Two at official level to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard, including in the decisions that have to be made on line upgrading, totally new routes and how to connect both of Scotland's significant central belt cities to the network. A range of options are involved. We need serious and informed debate on the subject.

We will influence policies beyond our borders. Indeed, there is an open door in that regard. I note that the committee will meet Sir David Rowlands of High Speed Two in the near future and Lord Adonis, whom I will meet tomorrow. Those are important connections for us to make. In Lord Adonis, we have an enthusiast for the railway network. I, too, am an enthusiast. I will follow with interest members' speeches today.

15:46

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like Patrick Harvie, I congratulate my fellow committee members and the committee clerks on the production of an excellent report. As Patrick Harvie and Stewart Stevenson emphasised, the report was consensual. It is important for us to recognise the political consensus on high-speed rail. We all need to put party politics aside, so far as we can, and drive ahead in the best interests of Scotland.

The committee cannot claim ownership or authorship of the move towards high-speed rail. A series of organisations in Scotland put forward the case. That said, I commend my colleague Charlie Gordon, who pushed particularly hard for the committee to undertake the inquiry. As an old railwayman, I am sure that he believes in taking forward the rail agenda at every possible opportunity.

The committee can, however, claim credit for advancing the argument about high-speed rail forming part of the national planning framework. As members will recall from the plenary debate on the framework, the chamber agreed to the Labour proposal that high-speed rail should be added to the list of national projects. I listened to what the minister said about the publication of the finalised NPF 2 later in the spring. I urge him to ensure that high-speed rail has a prominent position in the framework.

There are three main arguments in saying that the time has come for high-speed rail, the first of which is the core economic argument. If Scotland wants to be a player in international economic development terms, its connectedness is crucial. It is important that we acknowledge that high-speed rail cannot cut distance, but it can cut the time that

it takes businessmen, tourists and others to travel between the south-east and Scotland.

High-speed rail is vital for Scotland, which has more to gain from high-speed rail than almost any part of the UK. It is crucial for Scotland to have links with our markets. Access to Scotland's markets in the south-east of England—one of the key metropolitan cores of the world—and continental Europe and other places is vital. We must be able to access and speak to our customers. The economic argument for high-speed rail is central.

Secondly, there is an environmental argument, which is unique to Scotland. As Patrick Harvie said, a time issue is involved. At present, it takes significantly longer to travel by train from Glasgow or Edinburgh to London than it takes to do the journey by plane. As a result, about 85 per cent of travel currently is by plane. Shortening rail journey times is the way to reverse the percentages. That is a significant incentive for pursuing high-speed rail, especially given the resulting emissions reductions.

Patrick Harvie: I do not disagree with anything that Des McNulty has said, but does he agree that we could do a great deal with the existing system? For example, we could simplify the fares structure for the railways, so that people knew what they were buying and that they would get a seat. Such changes would increase the attractiveness of the existing railways.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Mr McNulty to watch the clock.

Des McNulty: I agree with Patrick Harvie's point, which is particularly salient in light of today's announcement of fare increases between London and Edinburgh. Environmental arguments are very important.

The third dimension—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member must conclude.

Des McNulty: In that case, I will do so.

15:51

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I begin by saying how much I enjoyed taking part in the inquiry. In some committee inquiries, the usual suspects come forward and can be rather on the weary side—I am not referring only to the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change. On this occasion, we took evidence from a cross-section of groups, some of which I did not know existed. Many of them came forward and made their arguments in a cheery way. They did so because many people believe that high-speed rail is an idea whose time has come.

We need to get on with joining Scotland, as well as other parts of the United Kingdom, to the European high-speed rail network, and to do so fast. Essentially, our railway network was developed to meet 19th century needs. Even the east coast main line north of Edinburgh, up to Aberdeen, is not a main line but a collection of branch lines that have been joined together to get trains from one end to the other. The time has come for us to take a 21st century approach to railways.

The need for that was clear when we took evidence. We heard about the economic arguments for providing Scotland with faster links to Europe and London, but we also heard about the environmental arguments. Interestingly, although the economic advantage of high-speed rail lies predominantly with us at the Scottish end of the line, the evidence that the committee heard suggested that the environmental benefits may lie at the other end of the line, in London. We took evidence from the 2M Group, which represents councils and other public bodies in the west end of London and is motivated primarily by the need to cut the number of aircraft movements over the city of London. The group believes that, ultimately, investment in high-speed rail will cut the number of flights.

High-speed rail north to Birmingham, Manchester or even Leeds—one of the current Tory favourites—will not cut many flights over the west end of London. That can be achieved only by getting the railway right into the centre of Scotland, because only then will we replace domestic flights with train journeys. That is why the environmental imperative in the development lies at the London end of the line, not the Scottish end. That is the motivation for London to become involved in developing high-speed rail.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I am encouraged by Mr Johnstone's comments. Will he confirm whether it is now the policy of the UK Conservative party to support a high-speed link up to Scotland?

Alex Johnstone: I can confirm that. The announcement that was made at the time of the Conservative party conference last year concerned proposals to take the line north to Leeds, as I mentioned. However, it has always been the Conservatives' intention that the line should progress north to Newcastle and, ultimately, to Scotland. The policy appeared in the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto for the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections.

However, a couple of issues need to be pointed out. The first is the route. The justification for a west coast route might be viable in the south as far as Manchester, but Scotland's interests would be served by a longer extension north. Scotland

might be better served by a route that extends north from Leeds and takes in Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. I know that that is controversial—I see Charlie Gordon shaking his head—and I am not saying that that is what should be done, but we need to discuss the route and the costs that are likely to affect it.

The other issue, which the committee inquiry addressed, is the nature of the technology. We are talking about conventional high-speed rail as per the European model. Magnetic levitation is an idea whose day has not yet come. Of course, Professor Eric Laithwaite will be whirling in his grave as I say that, but it is inevitably the case.

I want to touch on a point that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change raised about the need to develop rail networks north of the central belt to Aberdeen and Inverness to ensure that the whole of Scotland benefits from high-speed rail when it comes north. We might not be able to guarantee that high-speed trains will make it to Aberdeen and Inverness, but we can certainly speed up the services that link to them.

15:56

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank the convener of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, fellow committee members and the committee clerks for their work on the inquiry.

In the 19th century, Daniel Burnham, the architect of modern Chicago, said:

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistence.”

We should take that approach to high-speed rail. It is time to act and make a big plan. What better way for the UK Government to signal confidence in the country than to embark on a major infrastructure project to unite the whole UK?

High-speed rail promises economic development benefits through opening up new markets, reducing travelling time and incidentally harnessing travelling time as useful working time. It promises rail capacity improvements on new and existing lines, and would of course have significant environmental benefits. A high-speed line connecting London to Edinburgh and Glasgow, with journey times of around three hours, and with good onward connections into our existing rail network, would inspire confidence, create jobs and provide a viable alternative to domestic and European air travel. We have witnessed the

benefits of high speed 1; let us be ambitious about high speed 2.

I would like to turn some of the current thinking on its head. As the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:

“It is only when greater distances are travelled that the speed element truly gives benefit. It makes a very large difference to lop two hours off journey time from Edinburgh or Glasgow to London (85% travelling by air currently) compared to (say) Newcastle (under 60% using air) which already has that two hour advantage. By the time we regard Birmingham to London the time savings are minimal.”

How, then, can it be that while all parties undoubtedly are interested in high-speed rail, some parties plan to treat Scotland as an afterthought at a later date? I believe that any high-speed blueprint must be comprehensive and plan for Anglo-Scottish links from the outset, so that they are properly integrated.

Until recently, as has been said, Westminster was lukewarm about the benefits of high-speed rail, but the agenda has moved on a little, although I believe that that change was driven more by the need to soften the blow of a third runway at Heathrow than by a genuine commitment to a more sustainable transport pattern. Lord Adonis, despite seeming to have a genuine interest in rail, has let Scotland down by instructing High Speed Two to concentrate on a new line from London to the west midlands. However, perhaps his recent rail odyssey around Britain will have encouraged him to think again—I hope so. I know that we will all press the case with him tomorrow.

The committee report makes a number of recommendations: we should aim for a three-hour, capital-to-capital journey time; any new line must serve both Edinburgh and Glasgow in order to maximise the benefits for Scotland; and the termini must be in city centres, which will be a challenge, but we must overcome it.

The majority of the evidence that we heard suggested that high-speed rail should use conventional rail technology rather than maglev. I agree, because maglev is a distraction. Conventional rail is more flexible and will allow us to maximise connections by using existing rail where necessary.

It is worth emphasising that the development of a new link to London must go hand in hand with improvements to our regional rail networks. As someone from the north-east, I suggest that a high-speed link from London to the central belt will be of little use to businesses in Aberdeen and Inverness if the connecting journey takes just as long. All of Scotland must benefit from the high-speed link—I welcome the minister’s comments on that—otherwise we will relegate our northern towns and cities to economic marginalisation.

The SNP manifesto pledged that the Scottish Government would

“match the best on offer elsewhere in Europe”.

However, when questioned about his commitment to high-speed rail, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change recently said that the Scottish and Westminster Governments

“are starting to engage in parallel.”—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 16 December 2008; c 1206.]

As the minister knows, parallel lines do not meet.

The minister's enthusiasm for rail is well known, but we need him to roll up his sleeves. As we say in the north-east, we need him to get yokit on the issue. Rivalries with Westminster need to be set aside. Real and sustained dialogue is required if Scotland is not to be shunted into a siding for many years. Edinburgh and Glasgow must be included in the blueprint from the outset. I look for a pledge on that from the Scottish and UK Governments.

When the American vice president last week announced plans to invest in high-speed rail, he said:

“This is a giant environmental down payment.”

Can Britain match that? I believe that we must.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:01

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank the clerks for bringing together an excellent report and for keeping us on the rails.

In debating high-speed rail, we need to take into account how the existing rail network is laid out and how it currently works. The east and west coast main lines from Scotland to London are at capacity. That is the fact that drives us forward to see the essential need for a new route, which we must start to build from both ends.

As other speakers have said, the benefit of such a route would be that it would pick up commuters who currently need to fly. According to the Department for Transport in London, between 2002 and 2006 some 64 per cent of journeys between Scotland and London were made by air. We need to reverse that, just as the French have done with their TGV between Paris and Marseille. Therefore, both Glasgow and Edinburgh need to be served by the new line. It cannot serve Edinburgh then Glasgow or the other way round. We need to look at the route carefully and think about the use of Carstairs on the way south.

Some important technical issues are raised by the report. At the present time, the continental

trains that might be best for such a route cannot fit on our railway system. Therefore, as well as building the new route, we need to adapt the railway system in other parts of the country to cope with those trains. I know that, to make it possible for certain sizes of container to be transported from Elgin to Mossend, Network Rail had to spend about £4 million in accommodating bridges, lowering tracks and modifying particular parts of the line. We are not talking about a cheap piece of work, but we need the high-speed trains to be able to go far beyond the proposed high-speed line.

A second technical point is about the quality that is required on the new line. Over the past week or so, a campaign in *The Herald* has highlighted the problem of the quality of our railways. Anyone who has travelled on the Eurostar recognises that there is a step change in the customer experience. We need to ensure that we deliver that for high-speed travellers across the whole of Britain in due course. To bring high-speed rail to Scotland, we need to be able to promise people that they will receive that quality of service. Therefore, it cannot be the case that the service runs just from London to Birmingham.

As the committee convener mentioned, certain things can be done just now, including tackling the important issue of the fares structure. On the Eurostar, I have experienced situations in which only first-class seats are available on particular days. To attract people to use the railways, we must simplify the fares structure. We must not exploit people by charging them more on Fridays and then have them return on a terribly slow journey on a Sunday because weekends are notorious for interruptions to the service. If we are to have a high-speed rail system, it needs to be able to deal with those issues. It is appalling that First ScotRail currently allows a lucky few on the internet to book a £19 single on the Caledonian sleeper to London while it charges 10 times that amount for a first-class seat and bed on the same route.

We have to have a simplified and cheaper system to get people travelling. We should sort out the present complexities now, so that when high-speed rail arrives, the system is much better. When my stepdaughter wanted to go to Inverness, she had to pay £50 because a cheaper fare was not available. She then found out that if she travelled with three friends, she could get all four tickets on the same route, travelling on a Friday, for £42. The present situation is an outrage and needs to be sorted out. I make those points in the context of a debate on the high-speed rail report because they have to be made. That is the background to the problems that we are trying to deal with.

Ultimately, Scots need to have a European rail network of a high standard, with a route that takes us from the north of Scotland through to St Pancras so that high speed 2 links up with high speed 1. That is what we were denied so long ago—a route that would join Scotland to the continent. High speed 2 is a means of doing that. UK policy must not be focused on rail travel between London and Birmingham. If the union means anything, it means that Scots should not remain at the end of the line. Instead of being served by a branch line, we should be in the main stream of Europe. The debate allows us to make progress in that direction.

16:06

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I, too, welcome the debate. I congratulate Patrick Harvie and his committee not just on an excellent report but on—rightly and not before time—moving high-speed rail up the Scottish Parliament's agenda. I was somewhat disappointed by the minister's speech. He was reading what seemed to be a rather cautious civil service draft—presumably because the warm words that he tried to introduce are not reflected in the strategic transport projects review. Until they are, we will not believe that the Scottish Government is serious about high-speed rail.

I found an article on the subject in *Holyrood Magazine*, the house magazine of the Scottish Government; it was one of the more sensible articles in that publication. In it, my old friend Mark Bostock, who is consultant director for Arup, said:

"the Scottish Parliament needs to be getting very much more active in this debate".

I agree, which is why I welcome today's debate.

However, it is not just the Scottish Parliament that needs to be more involved; Scottish MPs and Scottish peers at Westminster should take up the issue, too. I had the opportunity to hear Lord Adonis speak on the subject. I have never heard anyone be more enthusiastic about the railways than Andrew Adonis. He is a genuine enthusiast for high speed 2 as well as for the railways in general. As Alison McInnes said, when one reads his blog—she used the word "odyssey", which is a much nicer word than "blog", particularly these days—as he went around the whole of the UK from Cornwall up to Inverness, one can feel his enthusiasm coming out. We must capitalise on that, and Scottish peers, in particular, who sit with him in the same chamber down in Westminster, have an opportunity to do so. I will argue the case for high speed 2 down in Westminster as well as up here.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member agree that it would be extremely difficult to carry out that

project if Scotland and England were two separate countries? Does he agree that it is a project for the union?

George Foulkes: Absolutely. Alex Johnstone and I are again at one on the issue. Of course, he is absolutely right. I found the minister's use of the phrase "neighbouring Administrations" extremely strange. We are talking about overlapping UK Administrations, not neighbouring Administrations.

I strongly support the high-speed rail proposal. I am a regular commuter between London and Edinburgh. Like Patrick Harvie, whenever I have the opportunity to do so, I use the train, for all sorts of reasons—as well as train travel being more environmentally friendly, I believe in it and find it more comfortable. I am convinced that more people would be able to use the train if we had a new high-speed rail link. We are way behind other countries in Europe. I regularly use the TGV in France, which has had high-speed rail for decades. We are also way behind Germany and Spain in that regard.

Patrick Harvie: Could George Foulkes confirm that those are separate countries that have managed to get over the issue of providing high-speed rail across borders?

George Foulkes: But those countries have separate companies—France has a different railway company from Spain, for example. However, Patrick Harvie makes a good point, which Alex Johnstone and I will have to agree with. Patrick Harvie will be my nominee for debater of the year if *The Herald* survives long enough to make that award this year.

There is a strong environmental and economic case. We need to consider integrated transport links, which is why I am in favour of a link at Heathrow similar to the one at Charles de Gaulle, so that we can get off the high-speed train at Heathrow and then take an aeroplane overseas. We need to do a lot of work to ensure that high speed 2 links up with high speed 1, which is not as easy as it looks—just look at St Pancras and King's Cross. I am in favour of a completely new line rather than upgrading the existing ones. There is a big demand on the existing lines at the moment. High speed 2 will free up the existing lines to meet the growing demand by people who want to use the railways.

Like a number of other members, I favour the conventional high-speed trains rather than maglev. We need the trains to be able to move off the high-speed line and on to other lines, particularly if they are going up to Aberdeen, Inverness and other places, as happens with some of the existing trains.

I am very enthusiastic about this. I am glad that even the nationalists are not taking the opportunity

to bash Westminster on it—the temptation must be great and I hope that subsequent speakers resist it. There is great leadership from Andrew Adonis on the issue. Rather than be churlish about it, we should accept, build and capitalise on his enthusiasm and give him all the support that he deserves.

16:11

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): The evidence that was presented during its inquiry has left the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee in no doubt about the compelling case for a high-speed rail link for Scotland. I hope that the report will play a pivotal role in shaping policy in this area.

After decades of neglect, Scotland's creaking infrastructure is simply not up to the job in the 21st century. Many of Scotland's businesses feel that the network does not meet their needs. Given that the first step to finding a solution to a problem is to admit that there is a problem in the first place, what a shame that Lord Adonis—who I have no doubt is a rail enthusiast in a personal capacity—told the Scottish Affairs Committee yesterday that he wanted to maintain the existing “excellent” road, rail and air links between Scotland and England. We perhaps need to do slightly more on rail, and the report goes some way to make the case for that.

Throughout Europe, the benefits of high-speed rail have been recognised for some time. Nearly 3,500 miles of high-speed line are in operation and major expansions are under construction. As Patrick Harvie pointed out, many services manage to cross country boundaries. London to Paris or Brussels is one of many examples. By contrast, the United Kingdom has only the 67 miles connecting London to the Channel tunnel. It takes twice as long to get from Glasgow to London as it does from London to Paris. In Spain, one can travel the 621km from Barcelona to Madrid in just two hours and 38 minutes, but Edinburgh to London—roughly the same distance—takes an average of four and a half hours. Perhaps life in the slow lane is the mysterious union dividend that opponents of independence are so keen to point out. If our European neighbours have what it takes to connect via high-speed rail networks, so does Scotland.

Unfortunately, it is only recently that the UK Government has woken up to the strength of the case for high-speed rail. I welcome the UK Government's recent announcements on the issue. I welcome its establishment of High Speed Two Ltd and its commitment to consider the case for a new high-speed rail service between London and Scotland.

However, I am still seriously concerned that Scotland remains very much on the periphery of the plans for new high-speed services in the UK, rather than at their heart.

George Foulkes: Geography.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes, geography is a factor, but we are talking about principles and whether the Labour Government in London is interested in the principle of a high-speed rail line straight to Glasgow and Edinburgh. That is not something to which the UK Government is committed.

People with a nature more cynical than mine have said that the mention of high-speed rail in Labour's announcement of support for the third runway at Heathrow is a sweetener. However, as the proposed new line will go no further north than Birmingham, it is perhaps a bitter-sweet pill for Scotland to swallow. There remains no clear commitment from the UK Government to a high-speed line that extends to Scotland. Lord Adonis has said in recent interviews, and at the Scottish Affairs Committee yesterday, that he believes that high-speed trains to the midlands could continue to Scotland on a slower, existing track, and that an extension of the line is possible at some unspecified later date. Shaving some time off the journey is no doubt welcome, and I am very pleased that Lord Adonis has made the announcements that he has to date, but a high-speed route that ends at Birmingham is simply not going far enough.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Given Shirley-Anne Somerville's enthusiasm for high-speed rail, does she think that it should have been in the strategic transport projects review?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There is no reason why it cannot be in future strategic transport project reviews, and it has been discussed and included within the draft national planning framework, which is an important document covering some of the strategic—

Des McNulty: Will the member take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am still dealing with the previous intervention.

The draft national planning framework covers some of the strategic planning issues that are going through. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has said that more will follow.

Although shaving time off the journeys is welcome, the 10-year construction time for the initial phase means that Scotland will have to wait too long for another decision to be taken at some time in the future. If the UK Government must act now to commit fully to a low-carbon and

sustainable transport solution, it must also commit to serving the whole of the UK. Its commitment to Scotland will not be demonstrated simply by holding one Cabinet meeting in Glasgow; it will be demonstrated by how far north it is willing to raise its sights on major infrastructure projects such as high speed 2.

Despite the fact that some of my points may be considered—by Lord Foulkes in particular—to be partisan and childish, I will end by welcoming the report that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee put together in a consensual manner. I would particularly like to thank the clerks for the excellent work that they did in assisting members of the committee.

16:17

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):

The report of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee is indeed very welcome but, of course, it does not stand alone among the recommendations of the Parliament. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee considered the national planning framework earlier this year, and we, too, heard a lot about the importance of strategic rail connections to sustainable economic growth. We, too, agreed across the parties that there were three national developments that should have been included in NPF 2 but were not. One was the subject of today's debate: a high-speed rail link between Scotland and England, including facilities for rail freight. Another was the enhancement of rail services in the north of Scotland, in parallel with planned enhancements in the west, and another was strategic rail connections between the north of Scotland and the central belt.

Good reasons were given for promoting high-speed rail to England alongside improvements to services in the north of Scotland and to services between the north and the central belt. Those improvements, if not the high-speed rail link, were acknowledged by ministers as desirable, as we saw in their inclusion in the strategic transport projects review. Specifically, there is the building of a direct dual-track rail link between Inverkeithing and Halbeath in Fife, with new rail junctions at both ends to improve journey times between the north and the central belt. It was precisely that project that was raised with the committee by Confederation of British Industry Scotland, which had pressed for strategic transport projects to be included in NPF 2 and wanted to know why Inverkeithing to Halbeath was not one of them. I would be interested to hear more from the minister on that important point when he replies to the debate.

If we are serious about bringing the benefits of high-speed rail to the north of Scotland, another

valuable improvement would be a new bridge and dualling of the railway at Montrose. That, too, would bring strategic benefits by cutting out avoidable delays. It is in the strategic transport projects review, and it would be useful to know how much priority the Government attaches to the scheme, and when it believes that the scheme can be taken forward.

Today, I am interested above all in how ministers intend to affirm the relevance of a high-speed rail link to travel to and from the north of Scotland. We have heard that high-speed rail can compete with air travel on the routes from London to Glasgow and Edinburgh if it can achieve a three-hour journey time—as on the Paris to Lille route, or the Barcelona to Madrid route. High-speed rail is clearly less well placed to compete directly with air travel between Aberdeen or Inverness and London, but a high-speed link could certainly make rail travel a more competitive alternative than it is now. It is currently possible to travel from Aberdeen to London by sleeper, going via Carstairs and Crewe, and getting into Euston station in good time for an early-morning meeting. Likewise, the sleeper service provides a good alternative for people who are travelling to the north—it is especially well used by leisure visitors to Kyle of Lochalsh as well as to Aberdeen and other destinations in the north. A high-speed link could surely offer other options for long-distance rail travel in both directions.

We have heard that the high-speed rail link between London and Paris has a journey time of just over two hours. We also know that there are existing rail links for freight between Scotland and Europe, for which the journey times are slower but which show the potential connections that might be made for passenger travel. If a high-speed rail link can be made a priority by both the British Government and Scottish ministers, overnight services that would bring benefits to the north of Scotland could surely be achieved along with benefits to the central belt.

At the moment, a rail journey from Aberdeen to London takes upwards of eight and a half hours, or longer overnight. An onward rail journey to Paris involves a walk of only a few hundred yards between King's Cross or Euston and St Pancras for someone wanting to take the high-speed train from there. Given the straightforward alternative of a two-hour flight from Aberdeen to Paris by Air France, not many people travel from Aberdeen to Paris by train. However, if it were possible to link up the high-speed train connections that exist south of London and those that are being discussed for north of London and to upgrade the strategic links between Aberdeen and the central belt, the opportunity of joining a sleeper train in Aberdeen and waking up in Paris might not be so far away as it currently seems.

I hope that, in responding to the debate, ministers will consider all those opportunities to secure benefits for the whole of Scotland. In that context, improving links to the north must be considered as a priority from the outset. In addition, all the operators of Scottish railway services—including National Express and CrossCountry Trains—must not only take their franchise commitments seriously but maintain their rolling stock, make their services user friendly and not sacrifice the customer experience in the pursuit of marginal savings here and there. The minister will know that it is, in part, his job to hold franchise operators to account. He will also want to be involved in planning the enhancement of all those services for the future. I hope that he will do so in the context of the benefits that are available for Scotland as a whole.

16:22

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I thank the committee for its encouraging report. I am also pleased with the atmosphere of general agreement during the debate this afternoon. I declare an interest as the president of the Scottish Association of Public Transport. My interest in the subject goes way back to the 1960s when Barbara Castle—as she informs us in her memoirs—on being appointed Minister of Transport, was approached by Harold Wilson's Minister of Technology, Frank Cousins, who wanted to tear up the entire railway system in favour of buses and lorries driven by his union members.

Since then, there has been a revolution in railway technology and control, and national survival and economic development in the present crisis are roughly proportionate to the sophistication of countries' railway systems. Let us take, for example, Japan, without which we would not have had our cyber world—someone has to build the gadgets, computers and systems of data retrieval. Japan's high-technology breakthrough followed the first Shinkansen lines, which were planned more than 50 years ago. We can, therefore, see the value of transport improvement as what the Victorians called social saving—it reduces costs and expands the resources that can be devoted to industrial and social modernisation. That is even more pressing now because we are already within sight of the ominous future of peak oil. Henry Ford could, quite soon, become history whether he would have liked it or not.

There is a direct way forward. It is an expensive one, but it must be taken. How can we accelerate progress without accelerating the cost? The critical time for Scotland's renewables future will come very soon, but the high-speed railway lines might not be here until the middle of the 2020s. By that

time, I will be around 82, so I have a personal interest in wanting to see all of this turn up a bit earlier.

Certain preliminary things must be done. We have to create a dedicated freight network to take standard continental wagons, and we have to do so soon so that we can quickly accommodate renewable energy traffic and diversionary routes. Why not create a spinal freight line running up the middle of Britain and exiting via the Waverley line to Edinburgh?

Secondly, we must reduce the pinch points on the existing system, provide for a viable, variable-speed railway with non-stop or selective-stop trains that can, if necessary, bypass areas of gridlock such as York, Newcastle, Durham, Crewe and Preston. We have to get rid of the last of the level crossings on the east coast line. We have to install flyover junctions and centralised signalling. We might need to get special powers to do that, but we should strike while property is relatively cheap and lawyers, for once, are off their perches.

We must introduce—at least pro tem—overnight sleeper services from central Scotland to Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam. Such services were foreseen in 1993, but John Major flogged the trains to the Canadians.

Finally, we must integrate our arterial routes with the European dimension. We are entering an age of barter, in which even *The Economist* rejects the markets as a means of determining transport priorities. Scotland has energy to sell, and we need technology and training. We know who can deliver, and I am afraid that, these days, it is Paris, Berlin, Berne or Stockholm, not London. However, we can use our energy advantage to give real weight to the nations of the British islands, organised confederally.

We stand before that bleakest of summits: peak oil. Car companies are failing like falling leaves, and we wait for the airlines to join them. We have a chance of doing deals and getting our own manufacturing, but only with the right infrastructure. In the longer term, that means that we will need dedicated high-speed lines, but there is still quite a lot that we can do with the system that we have. If we do not do so, we will come to resemble the fine portrayal of decadence that we find in Giuseppe di Lampedusa's portrait of Sicily in *The Leopard*, as we, too, will be

"looking at the modern age like an ancient in a wheelchair being propelled round the Crystal Palace".

We have what it takes to get out of the wheelchair and into a proper, fast, cheap, reliable train.

16:27

Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): The case for high-speed rail and high-speed ground transport is unanswerable, and I warmly congratulate the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee on its acknowledgement of that fact. I was genuinely disappointed that the Scottish Government's STPR failed to recognise the urgency of the case and effectively kicked high-speed rail and high-speed ground transport into the long grass.

I agree with what George Foulkes said a few moments ago. I listened attentively to the minister's warm and encouraging words, but in no sense are they reflected in the STPR. It is time that we started to mean what we say and say what we mean, given how far behind some of our competitors we are.

Our current situation attests to the nonchalant approach that has been evident in the United Kingdom. The issue has been discussed from every conceivable angle, committee after committee has been set up, and long-winded glossy reports have been produced, but little tangible progress has been made.

Our people in Scotland deserve better. Our Scottish determination should see that the benefits of high-speed rail and high-speed ground transport are spread across the whole of the UK. Our approach to high-speed rail and high-speed ground transport speaks volumes about our ambitions for our economic competitiveness, the seriousness of our approach to climate change and our determination to ensure that Scots are as economically mobile as they can possibly be while playing their part in protecting the environment for future generations.

To say that we are behind continental Europe and the rest of the world is an understatement of crass proportions. In 1981, France unveiled the TGV, which, with speed, comfort and competitive prices, interconnects France and travels across Europe to countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Switzerland—and now, through high-speed rail, the United Kingdom.

In less than 30 years, high-speed rail has to a large extent supplanted air travel as a fast and cost-effective means of transport between major cities in western Europe. By 2003, TGV had carried 1 billion domestic passengers, and it is predicted that by 2010 that figure will rise to 2 billion. We should stop to consider the fact that, in 2009, we are still discussing high-speed rail while some of our nearest economic competitors have enjoyed its benefits for almost 30 years. How many more debates, commissions and reports will we have before someone is big, ambitious and

bold enough to get the work started and completed?

High-speed rail and high-speed ground transport present an enormous opportunity for our citizens. People such as us in places such as this exist to turn those opportunities into reality for our citizens: to let them be all that they can be and to exploit to the full not only their economic capability but their capability to enjoy the best quality of life. High-speed rail and high-speed ground transport will prove an enormous political advantage to those politicians who stop their chattering, back up their warm words and start building the infrastructure.

The fact that we stand here, in 2009, so far behind continental Europe and other parts of the world, is nothing short of a disgrace. It demonstrates the low level of our ambition. We need to raise our horizons, stop talking and start building to give our citizens the advantage that they deserve and have awaited for far too long.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to the wind-up speeches, and I call Jim Tolson. I can give him four and a bit minutes.

16:32

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer—I was aiming for five minutes but never mind.

It has been an interesting and largely consensual debate, and I will try mostly to be likewise. Despite the high-speed rail network love-in we seem to have had, we should not be afraid to challenge the status quo and aim high, as Alison McInnes said.

Many members spoke about the benefits of a high-speed rail network between Scotland and London, and the economic benefits are significant. They were highlighted in the committee report and emphasised by Alison McInnes, Alex Johnstone and, in particular, Des McNulty, who outlined the greater benefits of covering a greater distance.

The environmental benefits were also welcomed. Alex Johnstone said that they are gained mostly by London, and he makes a very good point. He should make it to David Cameron, and in doing so he may have more influence on him than his Scottish leader seems to have. A Conservative commitment to building a high-speed rail link from London to Leeds is half-hearted—Mr Johnstone should remember to aim high.

Shirley-Anne Somerville sought the inclusion of the high-speed rail network in NPF 2. I will not tell her what her boss said at that point, but perhaps they should have had a chat before today's debate to clarify what can and cannot be included in NPF 2.

I am glad to hear that Lord Adonis has been on a tour of the UK. I understand from a recent diary piece in *The Times* that he had a very pleasant two-hour meeting with Danny Alexander MP in a grand hotel next to Inverness station. He has been convinced by the good points that Mr Alexander made with regard to the journey times for rail and road. I hope that when the minister meets Lord Adonis tomorrow he will back Mr Alexander's dedication to connecting the Highlands to a future high-speed rail network.

Patrick Harvie was right to say that the report is timely for many reasons, and I believe that it makes its points eloquently. The three-hour tipping point that Mr Harvie referred to is extremely important. If our constituents are to move from air to rail travel, they need to see that rail is much faster; after all, we have to bear in mind that, with air travel, aside from the flight time, we spend time waiting in airport departure lounges and so on. In that respect, the case for high-speed rail is strong. The minister also rightly pointed out the report's comprehensive nature, and we should thank the committee convener and everyone else, down to and including the clerks, for their work.

Connectivity is essential, so we should aim high and ensure that we get a commitment at the outset from all parties in this Parliament and from as many as possible of our Westminster colleagues not only to extending the high-speed rail network to Scotland but to ensuring that we maximise the benefits of that network within Scotland.

As many members have said, Scotland has most to gain from such a move. The point about improved journey times has been well made, particularly by Des McNulty, who seems to have disappeared for a moment. Indeed, as members made clear, extending the high-speed rail service to Scotland would allow the number of flights to London to be significantly cut.

As I say, today's debate has been mostly consensual. That is only right, but we must continue to challenge our colleagues here and further south.

16:36

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I agree with Jim Tolson that the debate has been fairly consensual, particularly on the principle of high-speed rail services. It is critical that we have broad consensus on how we move forward because, as Patrick Harvie made clear, a project of this magnitude will outlive several sessions of Parliament and several Governments both north and south of the border. If there is one thing that the people and the businesses in this country hate, it is the stop-start approach that has

characterised certain transport projects in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The Scottish Conservatives are extremely positive about the prospect of high-speed rail services. Our 2007 manifesto contained a commitment to it and, more than six months ago, the shadow transport minister Theresa Villiers met the Scottish Government, showing our belief in and commitment to genuine partnership working on the matter. The UK party also has a firm date for construction to begin. It believes that things can start in 2015, after we get various consultations out of the way.

The project is different from many others because of the various economic and climate change benefits that members have strongly highlighted. The first benefit is faster travel and reduced journey times between London and Scotland. Speeds on UK railway lines are currently limited to 125mph but, with high-speed rail, trains could reach 200mph in some—but, of course, not all—parts of the line. As Tom McCabe has pointed out, we are far behind most European countries and many countries in the developed and developing parts of Asia in this work, so there is an urgency to get the project moving. Importantly, the prospect of a three-hour journey time between London and Scotland could achieve the modal shift that we all desire.

As for economic benefits, the project seems to have a high cost benefit ratio. The figures have not been confirmed but, from what I have seen, they look on balance to be very strong. The project will ensure that Scotland is not seen as being geographically peripheral and will lead to far better productivity north and south of the border. One simple example is that people on a three-hour train journey from London to Scotland will be able to do three hours of work while, if they travel door to door by air, they will be able to do only one to one and a half hours of work.

Many climate change benefits have been put forward. The 2M Group said in evidence to the committee that the energy consumption of high-speed rail travel is around a fifth of that of air travel—and it added the caveat that that is possibly an underestimate. Given that, UK-wide, more than a quarter of CO₂ emissions come from transport, there can be potentially enormous CO₂ emissions savings. Around 80 per cent—some have said 85 per cent—of the journeys in the London to Scotland travel market are by air travel. I think that a member contrasted that with the position for Newcastle, which is within the three-hour travel limit from London. They said that less than 60 per cent of travel from Newcastle to London is by aviation.

There are challenges. We need clarity about costs—that point was well made by the committee.

An estimate of £31 billion is bandied around, but if we peel underneath that, we can see clear differences in the costs per mile that various witnesses gave. There will be environmental challenges on the visual impact side and, of course, there is a debate about the tipping point for modal shift. We need a long-term strategy: we are enthusiastic and we will continue to be so. Let us hope that we can get the project moving further and faster.

16:41

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): As the convener of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee said, the debate has been timely. When I suggested to the committee that we look into the issue, I wanted to raise the stakes in the debate. I had no idea then that the UK Government would break its policy logjam. If I had known how much work the pesky Climate Change (Scotland) Bill would generate at the same time, I might not have suggested what I suggested—indeed, I might have resigned from the committee.

The debate has been timely; it has also been important. As Des McNulty said, the idea is one whose time has come. I welcome the minister's commitment, as far as it went, that he will say a bit more about the matter in an announcement that he will make soon on national planning framework 2.

Des McNulty called me an old railwayman. I plead guilty on both counts. I think that he meant it as a compliment.

While the country is in a recession, a project of such significance and magnitude could be our Tennessee valley project. I find that interesting.

Alex Johnstone made good points about the environmental drive from the London end, which will mean that many UK opinion formers will not regard Scotland's particular case as being near the back of the queue. He also made the welcome announcement that the Tories think that the railway should come to Scotland. Of course, he was wrong to say that it should go via Leeds, and I will tell members why it must go via Manchester and then up the west coast. It is true that there are no great population centres in the 100 miles between Carlisle and Edinburgh or Carlisle and Glasgow, but, as Rob Gibson said, there is Carstairs junction, which is a significant piece of railway infrastructure. If the Scottish Government's commitment to a 35-minute end-to-end journey between Glasgow and Edinburgh can be adapted, that can be an incremental phase in a high-speed railway, with trains serving both Glasgow and Edinburgh. High-speed trains to both cities would maximise the interchange opportunities for all the

other communities in Scotland. It should not be a case of either/or.

Alison McInnes was right: the minister must roll up his sleeves and get a bit more high speed. Rob Gibson was also right about starting the project at both ends. We should not build it from one end in the way that conventional railways are built. Let us build it as we would build a bridge by starting work at both ends and meeting not necessarily in the middle but eventually.

George Foulkes was a wee bit hard on the minister—but hey, that is what he does. He was right to quote the vastly experienced Mr Bostock, who has 30 years' experience of high-speed rail, from the recent issue of *Holyrood Magazine*. Mr Bostock is in no doubt that the line must go to Scotland via Manchester.

Shirley-Anne Somerville, who is a member of the committee, should have read the committee's report rather than read out lines that party whips give to hacks. For her to say that Scotland is peripheral in the issue is to ignore the compelling logic of a point that Alex Johnstone reminded us about, which is that the people in London who do not want the expansion of Heathrow—I will not go into the merits of that argument—understand that high-speed rail must benefit all parts of the UK before it brings the benefits that they seek in relation to Heathrow. The High Speed Two company has been asked to build a fast track between London and Birmingham, which would reduce the journey time between Glasgow and London by half an hour. That development would bring early benefits to Scotland without rail infrastructure physically coming anywhere near Scotland, and it would get us close to the tipping point in journey times that would shift aviation traffic on to the rails.

Lewis Macdonald made excellent points about connectivity with the rest of Scotland, and Professor Harvie was his usual erudite self. I am sure that he is right that the shrine of high-speed rail will be not France or even his beloved Germany but in fact Japan. I share Tom McCabe's passion for the issue, as well as his frustration. Scottish Labour is committed to high-speed rail, as is the UK Government. When the Scottish Government makes its announcement on national planning framework 2, it should steal a march for Scotland by adapting its current plans into phase 1 of high-speed rail. Let us be high speed about this.

16:46

Stewart Stevenson: I thank members throughout the Parliament for a pretty clear affirmation that, despite some disagreements on details, we want high-speed rail to be taken forward. The project can be of fundamental benefit

to Scotland and, as Alex Johnstone said, deliver key environmental benefits in the south-east of the UK. I am glad that Lord Adonis is an enthusiast for rail generally and is now in charge. Charlie Gordon is an old railwayman, but his thinking is nonetheless still fully engaged.

I invite members to consider the thread that has run through the debate: that travel by air is significantly faster than travel by rail. Actually, city centre to city centre, the difference is arguably only about one hour. The times are much closer than we imagine. I do not say that to dispute the three-hour tipping point, which is absolutely right. I once had occasion to leave a committee meeting in the Parliament at 12:10 for a 15:30 meeting in London. Heroic efforts got me door to door in two hours 45 minutes, but it included using a motorcycle between Heathrow and Whitehall, which took 32 minutes. I commend that for its excitement if not for its environmental friendliness. The point is that the times are closer than we sometimes think.

Equally, we do not want to talk down rail in relation to fares. It was disappointing to hear today about rail fares between Edinburgh and London going up by 11 per cent, although I understand that National Express fares in Scotland are not affected, which is relatively good news. If people are prepared to book as far in advance on the railway as they are generally prepared to do to get a good fare on the airlines, the difference in fare is not all that substantial. Rob Gibson's plea for simplification of the fare structure was a well-made point. Steps have been taken at UK level, but more can be done.

Alison McInnes said that parallel lines do not meet. I am sorry but, as a mathematician, I suggest that the member put her parallel lines on opposite sides of a Möbius strip and she will find that they actually do. That is one of those mathematical tricks that is always interesting to debate. Rob Gibson made a point about Sunday service breaks. I am slightly surprised that other members did not make that point, because one of the key challenges for Network Rail is to deliver a true seven-day service throughout Great Britain. I know that, north and south, the neighbouring Administrations are engaged fully with Network Rail on that.

I will compare and contrast the roles of the STPR and the NPF. The NPF is about planning, so it is appropriate to consider incorporating high-speed rail into it, to facilitate and ease the way for planning. The STPR is about the Scottish Government's spending plans, but high-speed rail is, in financial terms, the responsibility of the UK Government—I wish it were otherwise, but that is how it is.

It is interesting that British Waterways is a cross-border authority, which means that two ministers, north and south of the border, share responsibility for canals. It might be interesting in future to explore whether that would be a good model for railways. Adjacent Administrations can work well together. Dublin and Belfast—a sovereign Administration and a devolved Administration—have worked tremendously well to improve the railway connection between the two cities. There are good models for us to consider. We need to ensure that as development spreads out from London, as it is likely to do, there are benefits for Scotland. That is important, and we will push for them.

I wish that I had the flexibility that Jane Davidson, the Labour member of the Welsh Assembly Government who has responsibility for the environment, enjoys. She can go everywhere by rail because she does not always have to be back in the Assembly for votes. She even managed to go by rail from Cardiff to Poznań last year. The round trip took her four days. In parts of Europe the challenge remains substantial.

We hope to work on the Scottish aspects of HS2 at the turn of the year. We will work enthusiastically with colleagues in the south. I welcome the debate as a useful contribution, which will inform everyone who has a role to play in the matter.

16:51

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): The committee's report and the debate on high-speed rail are well timed. During the past year, high-speed rail has moved up the political agenda in the UK and in Scotland. I hope that the committee's report has in some way helped to push the agenda forward.

I thank the many organisations and individuals who took time to provide us with their views, formally or informally, and I thank my fellow committee members and the committee clerks for their hard work, support and, at times, patience.

I ask members to forgive me if I do not have time to mention everyone who spoke in the debate. I hope that what I say will reflect their views. The committee found widespread support among witnesses for high-speed rail to Scotland and the debate has demonstrated the broad political consensus in favour of a line. Members highlighted the benefits of high-speed rail, which would bring much-needed increased capacity to our rail network and important economic and social benefits, and could allow more sustainable travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK and Europe.

I particularly mention the need to take account of the views of the travelling public. The committee took written and oral evidence from two passenger representative bodies: Passenger Focus and Passengers' View Scotland, who told us that passengers would warmly welcome high-speed rail. They also told us that rail users have other priorities, which include punctuality, value for money and increased frequency of services. It is important that those other priorities are not forgotten. For that reason, the committee recommended that the development of a high-speed line should not divert resources and attention from investment in improvements to the current rail network.

The committee highlighted the need to encourage public support for high-speed rail during the long and potentially costly construction phase. We urged the Government to give strong support to and champion high-speed rail projects and to see projects through to completion. The process might not always be straightforward, but it is essential that the Government articulates the advantages of a scheme, to ensure that its substantial benefits are not overshadowed by short-term problems that arise.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has welcomed the report so positively. I am particularly pleased that it has taken on board some of the committee's key recommendations on the need for further work to identify the most suitable routes for high-speed trains; the need for a line to serve both Glasgow and Edinburgh city centres; and the importance of connectivity to the existing rail network.

The Scottish Government has said:

"We will endeavour to ensure that the High Speed Two Company works up a fully developed case for a high-speed route extending to Scotland."

The committee recommended that in its report. I hope that the Scottish Government acts as soon as possible to finalise its policy on high-speed rail and that it inputs into the work of High Speed Two in advance of its finalising its report to the UK Government.

I do not doubt that the committee will continue to take an interest in the Scottish Government's progress on high-speed rail; it might want to return to it in future evidence sessions with the minister or the cabinet secretary.

The committee is also pleased that Lord Adonis, the UK rail minister, and David Rowlands, the chairman of High Speed Two, have read the committee's report and understand the strength of feeling that a high-speed rail link should extend to Scotland.

The Scottish Government's response to the committee's report calls for

"robust long-term partnership working – with partners across the UK rail industry and the UK and Scottish political spectrum."

I was pleased to read the minister's comments that the committee's report represents "compelling evidence" that high-speed rail services not only offer lower passenger carbon emissions than aviation but shorter journey times, which can create a real shift from air to rail travel.

The committee's report has helped to gather strong arguments in favour of a high-speed rail link to Scotland. The committee will also pursue those important issues with Lord Adonis tomorrow and with the chairman of High Speed Two the following week.

Today's debate is just the start of the process. I hope that the Scottish Government will take forward the process of engagement with the UK Government and High Speed Two as a matter of urgency.

It is important that the Scottish Government builds on the cross-party support for high-speed rail and ensures that Scotland's interests are represented properly. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is far too much noise in the chamber.

Cathy Peattie: The report highlights areas in which there is broad agreement, such as the desirability of a three-hour journey time between Edinburgh or Glasgow and London, and areas where decisions will still have to be taken, such as routes for the new line.

I welcome the Scottish Government's response, which is positive in tone. The committee will now monitor the work of the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish interests are taken into account fully in the development of a new UK high-speed line.

The committee's report has highlighted the substantial environmental, social and economic benefits that high-speed rail could bring to Scotland. I believe that the report has helped to move forward the debate on high-speed rail in Scotland and I commend its recommendations to Parliament.

Business Motions

16:58

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3942, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): It gives me pleasure to move business motion S3M-3942, in the name of Bruce Crawford—that is me—on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau. I ask the Parliament to agree the programme that is laid out in the *Business Bulletin*.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 29 April 2009

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Housing
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Thursday 30 April 2009

9.15 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Liberal Democrats Business
11.40 am	General Question Time
12 noon	First Minister's Question Time
2.15 pm	Themed Question Time Health and Wellbeing
2.55 pm	Scottish Government Debate: Budget Implications for Scotland
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Wednesday 6 May 2009

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Thursday 7 May 2009

9.15 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
11.40 am	General Question Time
12 noon	First Minister's Question Time
2.15 pm	Themed Question Time Justice and Law Officers; Rural Affairs and the Environment
2.55 pm	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for explaining that so clearly.

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3943, also in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out an extension to the deadline for consideration of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Bruce Crawford: On this occasion, I am happy simply to move the motion, Presiding Officer.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 4 September 2009.

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

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-3944, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Health Care and Associated Professions (Miscellaneous Amendments and Practitioner Psychologists) Order 2009 be approved.—
[Bruce Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S3M-3924, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on its report "The Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act (asp 1): Proposed Standing Order Rule Changes", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2009 (Session 3), *The Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act (asp 1): Proposed Standing Order Rule Changes* (SP Paper 230), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3925, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the SPPA Committee, on members' bills—cut-off date for introduction, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 1st Report 2009 (Session 3), *Members' Bills – cut-off date for introduction* (SP Paper 205), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3926, in the name of Gil Paterson, on behalf of the SPPA Committee, on its review of equal opportunities in the work of committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 4th Report 2009 (Session 3), *Review of equal opportunities in the work of committees* (SP Paper 244), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 24 April 2009.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3922, in the name of Karen Whitefield, on behalf of the selection panel, on the appointment of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament nominates Tam Baillie to Her Majesty The Queen for appointment as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3883, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on behalf of the Transport, Infrastructure

and Climate Change Committee, on its report on its inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's 1st Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Report on the Inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services* (SP Paper 219).

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-3944, 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 Health Care and Associated Professions (Miscellaneous Amendments and Practitioner Psychologists) Order 2009 be approved.

Project Linus UK

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3333, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, on congratulating Project Linus UK. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that Project Linus is a 100% volunteer non-profit organisation that aims to provide a sense of security and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatised or otherwise in need, through gifts of new, homemade, washable blankets and quilts created by volunteer blanket makers; congratulates Project Linus on producing 75,000 quilts and blankets in the United Kingdom since April 2000 and specifically commends the Lanarkshire branch, which delivered 748 quilts and blankets in 2008 and has delivered a total of 2,508 since the creation of the group in 2004, and considers involvement with the organisation either by making quilts or donating materials and supplies to be extremely worthwhile and worthy of encouragement.

17:02

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I extend a warm welcome to the Project Linus UK co-ordinators and volunteers from Scotland who are in the public gallery, and the members who have stayed behind to listen to the debate.

The members' business debates after 5 have been a great success story of the Parliament, because they raise awareness about and stimulate debate on a vast variety of subjects. This evening's topic for discussion is a good-news story that provides us with the opportunity to recognise the superb work that volunteers who are members of Project Linus are doing throughout Scotland. Project Linus is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to provide a sense of security and comfort to children and others who are seriously ill, traumatised or otherwise in need through the gift of soft, comforting and attractive handmade quilts and blankets.

The idea originated in America following the publication of a magazine article on Christmas eve 1995 that featured a small child who was undergoing chemotherapy and who said that her security blanket helped her through her treatments. The article inspired Karen Loucks to make homemade security blankets and provide them to Denver's Rocky Mountain children's cancer centre, and Project Linus was born. The project was named after Charlie Brown's best friend in "Peanuts", the security-blanket carrying Linus van Pelt.

Project Linus was established in the UK in 2000. All the quilts that are donated to the project remain

in Britain and are, as far as possible, distributed in the area in which they are donated.

The quilts are made in various sizes to cater for all ages, from neo-natal babies to young children and teenagers up to the age of 18. The Project Linus label is sewn into every blanket and quilt before project co-ordinators deliver them to staff in various organisations and hospitals to distribute to the children for them to keep.

Since the project's establishment in March 2004, in excess of a staggering total of 100,000 quilts have been distributed in the United Kingdom. Sixteen co-ordinators cover Scotland, from Shetland to the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. Last year, the Scottish group delivered more than 4,000 quilts—a quarter of the UK total.

Since its establishment in 2004, the Lanarkshire group has delivered more than 2,500 quilts to organisations such as Wishaw hospital, Motherwell Women's Aid and the Haven, a children's bereavement group. Quilts are also provided to hospices and neurological wards. In addition, children and young people with, for example, cerebral palsy or leukaemia or who are undergoing chemotherapy treatment can make a request to receive a quilt. As the numerous thank-you letters to volunteers testify, the project decidedly achieves its aim to deliver a huge hug through the medium of the quilt. Through the gift of a quilt, the recipient knows that someone out there cares for them.

Earlier this afternoon, a number of parliamentary colleagues called into committee room 3 to meet and chat with co-ordinators and volunteers. They were also able to see for themselves the huge variety of beautiful handmade quilts, all of which are unique and many of which are designed on a requested and specific theme.

Clearly, there is a huge demand for the quilts, which bring comfort to children in difficult times and provide a tangible and personal bond for parents and others who lose a loved one. Demand is increasing on a daily basis. It is my sincere hope that, by raising awareness of this hugely worthwhile project, more people will be encouraged to think about becoming volunteers, to donate the materials that project volunteers always desperately require, and to spread the news to other organisations or groups that work with children who are very ill or who are experiencing a difficult time in their lives and who would benefit from such a wonderful gift.

I look forward to the minister's comments, together with any suggestions that he may have for promoting the project.

17:08

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): I did not think that I would be speaking as early as this in the debate, Presiding Officer. That said, I am happy to respond to the points that Margaret Mitchell made. I congratulate her on raising the subject for debate today and on bringing to the attention of the Parliament the work of the organisation.

If I may, I will concentrate on the work that the Scottish Government is doing in the areas that are relevant to the organisation. We are committed to providing the best possible care for children and young people in Scotland. It is perhaps a truism to say that children are our future—in fact, it is a line in a song, as much as it is anything else. Nonetheless, it is true. Investing in our children is a way in which to invest in our future; it pays dividends in the long run.

Investing in a child's earliest years pays dividends in terms of their physical and mental health. It is for that reason that we have worked with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other partners and stakeholders to develop the early years framework. Our aim is to maximise the opportunities for all children to get the best start in life, no matter their background or circumstances.

We also have a commitment to improve the mental health of children and young people. We work closely with NHS boards and partners to continue to address and progress the recommendations that were made in "The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion, Prevention and Care". Full delivery of the framework by 2015 will ensure equity of access across Scotland to services that are designed to meet the particular prevention, care, transition and recovery needs of children and young people.

Our aim is to ensure that the right care and treatment are available for children and young people in the right place and at the right time. Our attention to child and adolescent mental health services is also underlined by a new target for NHS boards to deliver faster access to those services. The target will prepare the way for a new waiting time target for 2010-11. To support that, we are focusing attention on the workforce, services, data collection, quality of care, referral protocols and information systems. We have also offered NHS boards £2 million of new money to accelerate the development of specialist CAMHS in-patient services and to support intensive community services.

We are investing in children and young people in other ways. In January this year, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing

launched the “National Delivery Plan for Children and Young People’s Specialist Services in Scotland”, as guidance to the national health service in Scotland on the planning of sustainable specialist children’s and young people’s services throughout Scotland.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The services to which the minister refers are welcome; I also endorse the excellent work of Project Linus UK. Does the minister agree that the identification of mental health problems in pre-school children and schoolchildren is the biggest issue and that we need to do more to identify children who are at risk of developing mental health problems, low self-esteem and a low sense of wellbeing?

Keith Brown: I concede that the identification of mental health problems in children is an issue. As Mary Scanlon knows, it has recently been discussed in the Parliament; in fact, it was discussed this morning at the Health and Sport Committee. I recognise that identification of children’s particular needs is crucial if we are to provide the right services for them.

We are investing in children and young people in many ways. I mentioned the “National Delivery Plan for Children and Young People’s Specialist Services in Scotland”, which will provide guidance to the NHS. The plan was developed following a review of 12 specialist paediatric services that examined many issues, including accessibility of services, future service demands and workforce challenges. We are also committed to the development of two new children’s hospitals, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and are continuing to support the recently built Royal Aberdeen children’s hospital and the recently opened children’s hospital in Dundee.

The Government acknowledges the need to provide sustainable children’s services in local district general hospitals throughout Scotland. To that end, last year we announced additional investment of £13 million over three years—from 2008 to 2011—to implement the recommendations of the national delivery plan.

We also recognise the commitment to raise the age of admission to children’s hospitals to 16 and that the needs of the 12-to-15 age group are different from those of both children and adults. Further guidance on that topic will be published next month; a national conference to address the issues will take place on 6 May.

We are also providing funding to voluntary organisations—of which Project Linus UK is a good example—that provide services for children and young people, including those in hospitals and hospices. We have set up initiatives such as the Scottish investment fund, the social entrepreneurs

fund and the third sector enterprise fund to support an enterprising third sector.

From the examples that I have given, I hope that it is evident that the Scottish Government supports in many ways the health and wellbeing of children and young people throughout Scotland. Like Margaret Mitchell and others who are aware of the work of Project Linus UK in Lanarkshire, who represent the area and who have a great regard for the organisation and the work that it does on behalf of young people, I have great pleasure and no hesitation in commending, on behalf of the Scottish Government, the work of Project Linus UK and wishing it continued success.

Meeting closed at 17:13.

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