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Official Report

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 May 2010

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2010, Session 3

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)
*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Anthony Aitken (Scottish Chambers of Commerce)
Garry Clark (Scottish Chambers of Commerce)
John Halliday (Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation)
Allan Lundmark (Homes for Scotland)
George Mair (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK)
Mark Savelli (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK)
Ian Shearer (Scottish Retail Consortium)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 25 May 2010

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Transport and Land Use Planning Policies Inquiry

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 15th meeting this year of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. I remind members, witnesses and everybody else present that all mobile devices should be switched off. I record apologies from Marlyn Glen and Charlie Gordon.

We have just one item on the agenda today—continuation of our inquiry into the relationship between transport and land use planning policies. We will hear first from representatives of trade and business associations and developers. Later, we will hear from a separate panel of transport and infrastructure organisations.

I welcome our first panel of witnesses. We are joined by Allan Lundmark, director of planning and communications at Homes for Scotland; Garry Clark, head of policy and public affairs at the Scottish Chambers of Commerce; Anthony Aitken, a member of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce; and Ian Shearer, interim director of the Scottish Retail Consortium. Thank you for joining us today and for submitting written evidence. Would any of you like to make some brief opening remarks before we begin the questions?

Ian Shearer (Scottish Retail Consortium): I am covering for Fiona Moriarty, the director of the SRC, who is returning from maternity leave in the summer. You could say that I am minding the shop at the SRC.

We are the representative body for retailers, and a constituent part of the British Retail Consortium, but we have our own advisory board in Scotland, which represents Scottish interests in retail. Our members include many well-known high street names in both grocery and non-grocery retail. Also under the consortium's umbrella are some sub-sector associations that represent smaller, independent retailers. For example, we include the Booksellers Association; the British Hardware Federation, which represents ironmongers; the Scottish Grocers Federation, which represents convenience stores in Scotland; the National Federation of Retail Newsagents in Scotland; and the Association of Charity Shops. We try to speak for a very broad range of retail. It is estimated that, throughout the United Kingdom, the BRC represents about 80 per cent of retail sales or 30,000 businesses of all kinds. Our members sell things in town and city centres, in suburbs, in edge-of-town locations, out of town and online.

I should say at the outset that I am not at all a planning expert. I can probably count on the fingers on one hand the number of occasions on which I have got involved in planning issues and policy in the few months for which I have been with the SRC. Generally speaking, retailers look after their own planning affairs on an individual company basis. They also tend to have different views and emphases, depending on where they are located—whether in town centres or out of town, and so on. For today, I have spoken to one or two of our members who have in-house planning experts and have sought to comply with your request for some examples. In our written submission, we have provided some examples of situations that have occurred in individual planning cases. We thank you for the opportunity to provide that information on work that does not always get reported.

The Convener: Thank you very much. As no one else wants to make any opening remarks, we will press on.

In earlier sessions, we have heard a range of views on the extent to which national planning guidance has emphasised the importance of locating new developments in places that are easily accessible by public transport and by active travel—by walking and cycling. Some witnesses have said that that is strongly the case; others have said that that is nowhere near clear enough in planning guidance or that the guidance is not followed. What is clear, however, is the fact that developments continue to go ahead either that cannot be accessed by public transport, by walking or by cycling or that, realistically, are profoundly dominated by the car as the only practical mode of access. Why is that happening? Why, after years of having guidance with that emphasis—to a greater or lesser extent—do we still see such developments taking place? Who would like to begin?

Garry Clark (Scottish Chambers of Commerce): I will start. Scottish Chambers of Commerce has picked up the fact that transport plans in some parts of the country are not as up to date as those in other parts are—that varies a bit. We have 32 local authorities that often have 32 ways of looking at matters.

A modern planning system must take account of all transport modes, in particular public transport. If possible, it must be ensured that public transport is a viable option for developments. The

infrastructure in council plans varies up and down the country according to how well plans have been updated to take notice of changes in how public transport has developed in the past few years.

The Convener: You say that you expect the planning system to ensure that developments can be accessed by public transport. Is that happening?

Anthony Aitken (Scottish Chambers of Commerce): That is the practice for new developments. By and large, any developer that looks to secure planning permission considers the key transport policies, which encourage public transport and connectivity via walking and cycling, as you outlined. We also have historical sites that do not have that range of access options, but by and large new developments seek to ensure that the full range of public transport options is available.

The Convener: I highlight the fact that "by and large" and "seek to" are a bit different from "ensuring". One term means that the practice always happens; the others do not. Is that fair?

Anthony Aitken: In most instances, it is the local authority's responsibility to ensure that public transport options are provided, in line with its planning and transport policies. I believe that local authorities ensure that that occurs in most cases. Most responsible developers submit transport assessments that consider the policies and seek to ensure that new developments meet the policies' aims and means of delivery. Public transport has been emphasised only in the past 10 years, so perhaps that has taken a little time to get up to speed.

Allan Lundmark (Homes for Scotland): Paragraph 79 in the housing section of the Scottish planning policy contains a requirement that

"New housing developments should be integrated with public transport and active travel networks, such as footpaths and cycle routes, rather than encouraging dependence on the car."

That is almost a straight lift from previous planning policy that was in place not quite for a decade but certainly for a considerable number of years. Such thinking is meant to have influenced how land is driven into land supply.

If we read the Scottish planning policy further, we see that the transport section says:

"A transport assessment should be carried out where a change of use or new development is likely to result in a significant increase in the number of trips."

It is almost self-evident that any housing development of 10 or more houses will significantly increase the number of trips, so any proposal to a planning authority to promote a housing development must as a matter of course demonstrate the impact that the development will have on transport infrastructure. The challenge is either to use existing capacity in our transport infrastructure to service the development or, when the development will threaten capacity and will need additional capacity, to adopt an investment programme that results in no net detriment to the transport infrastructure once the development is complete, which can mean that significant investment must be made in our road systems or our public transport systems for some developments.

Such thinking has guided most land releases under the most up-to-date development plans and it certainly sits at the heart of any work to promote development opportunities. There are two issues behind that. The first is that the existing transport infrastructure often is not heavily weighted in favour of public transport, which can create issues. The second is that over the past few years, it has increasingly been in developers' interests to deliver solutions that depend largely on public transport. An ability to show that owners will not be car dependent if they buy a house from us has become a selling point for some of our developments.

The difficulty that we now face is that we have come through a period of almost a decade in which there was an expectation on the part of the public sector—which was probably encouraged by the private sector—that if it was identified that a development would have a significantly detrimental effect on transport infrastructure, the developer would fund most of the investment to mitigate that detriment and to improve and enhance the transport infrastructure.

As a result of the downturn since 2007, the ability of developers to generate value out of developments has disappeared completely, and the ability of the private sector to deliver that up-front investment in infrastructure has almost evaporated. That does not take away the fact that we need such infrastructure to make development successful. We are now moving into an era in which we will have to talk to public sector providers about how they can provide or upgrade such infrastructure up front, with developers paying contributions towards those costs out of revenue once projects start to run.

From my perspective, the issue that is before my industry as far as transport infrastructure is concerned is no longer whether we can identify the detrimental effects of development and the investment that is necessary to create the infrastructure that we need; it is whether we can put in place an arrangement whereby that infrastructure will be upgraded by the public sector, with developers contributing, when they

can, out of revenue to support some of that expenditure.

The Convener: Given the constraints that the public sector is expecting to experience in the next few years, the conclusion of that is surely that we should approve only developments that do not have a detrimental impact and which are inherently compatible with sustainable transport systems.

Allan Lundmark: No. My view is that the difficulties that the public sector now faces with funding such projects simply confronts us with the challenge of coming up with a business model that allows us to put some of the required infrastructure in place through joint support from the public sector and the private sector. If we were to be dependent on releases of housing land for which there was existing transportation infrastructure capacity, our land supply would dry up very quickly indeed.

The Convener: Other members have specific questions for the different industries that are represented here, but before we move on to those I have a general question on the national picture as regards policies, agencies and the various parts of Government that are involved in land use planning. Is the structure of the planning system appropriate to deliver the objectives? Is sufficient political leadership provided at national or local level? I invite the witnesses to give an overview of that before we deal with the specifics.

14:15

Ian Shearer: One thing that has changed while I have been in post at the SRC, following the publication of the new, simplified, streamlined and consolidated Scottish planning policy, to which Allan Lundmark referred, is the new emphasis on sustainability and the overarching climate change requirements that are coming in because of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

There is a gradual evolution in national planning policy that recognises the increasing trend towards those kinds of transport needs. In our submission, we have given some examples of that. Certainly, when planning for a major retail development, my members tell me that transportation is often the number two thing that they have to think about. They have to do a detailed transportation assessment, provide green travel plans for their staff and so on. Our submission has a number of examples of developments where the retailer has had to or has offered to fund bus services and provide access for people by foot, cycle and so on. Those developments have gone ahead. There is a gradual evolution; things are moving in the right direction.

The Convener: Does any other panel member want to comment on the questions that I posed, particularly the question on where political leadership is required, nationally or locally, to try to deliver this kind of change?

Garry Clark: A joined-up approach needs to be taken. At the time of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, we began to see moves in the right direction in the Scottish planning regime. One of the tricks that we may have missed at the time was to bring transport and planning closer together. For example, we could have done more to bring together Transport Scotland and local transport partnerships and local authorities. The relationship between them is still a bit disjointed. If we are going to make progress in bringing together planning and transport, we need leadership at the local and national level.

Obviously, as others have mentioned, financial considerations will make it far more difficult than it has been thus far for developers to fund the infrastructure that may require to be put in place. Where a local transport plan contains commitments to various transport improvements, a degree of certainty is needed to ensure that they are certain and funded in that context. The improvements could be done through some form of developer contribution or by way of the local authority or Transport Scotland. However they happen, we need some form of certainty that, where transport improvements are referred to in a local plan, they are guaranteed. At the very least, a plan has to be put in place to ensure their funding.

As Allan Lundmark pointed out, developers do face challenges, as do the public sector and Government, in going forward. We need to find a mixture of public and private financing that makes possible such improvements. Clearly, the Scottish Futures Trust is looking at issues such as this. We want to continue to work with the SFT to find solutions and to develop a bit more certainty in planning as we go forward.

Allan Lundmark: It is probably quite important to recognise the changes that have taken place in the past 18 months or so. Prior to October 2008, developers had to deal with the planning and transportation authorities. It was sometimes difficult to get those authorities to agree on priorities, even when dealing with officers from the same authority, let alone those from a national agency such as Transport Scotland. Since October 2008, when we had the planning summit and the planning modernisation programme was put in place, planning authorities have made significant changes to their approach. That is also evident in the approach of local authority engineers. There has most certainly been a change in the approach of Transport Scotland.

The environment in which we have to negotiate solutions to projects has changed significantly since October 2008. A much greater emphasis is now being placed on corporate working.

The Convener: Before we move on, I notice that we are getting a bit of interference on the sound system. I ask everyone to check that their mobile devices are switched off.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): My question is on an area that may be less familiar to the panel. What is your view on the ability of current land use and transport planning structures and systems to ensure adequate transport provision for remote rural and island communities, including ferries and air services? Who wants to start?

The Convener: No one apparently.

Rob Gibson: Indeed. It is unfortunate that the world is not round and that everybody is not in a little circle. Our country has an extended geography, and we would expect chambers of commerce in Caithness and others in the north to reflect on such things. We would expect Homes for Scotland to be involved in projects in small, remote places. I do not know whether the Scottish Retail Consortium gets past Inverness. Perhaps the witnesses have views on my question.

Anthony Aitken: The Scottish Retail Consortium certainly does get past Inverness. There is a non-food retail park in Wick.

Rob Gibson: I am very familiar with it.

Anthony Aitken: Indeed. It has been proven that there are market opportunities to provide services in such areas—obviously, that includes on islands such as Shetland and Orkney, which certain developers are looking at closely. The provision of national chains in more remote areas with which members are familiar will have the beneficial effect of preventing people from having to travel significant distances to the mainland. A few opportunities have come to fruition over the past five years, and I know that certain developers are looking closely at a few more opportunities.

Garry Clark: In the rural communities certainly and the island communities to an extent, it is about ensuring that a proper mix of services is available to the local population. Asda, which is one of our members, was recently successful in getting planning permission for a new store in Tain and, I think, for a store in Inverness, which will add to the options for local people in those areas. However, it is important that a balance is struck in maintaining the viability of businesses in remote towns and areas and rural communities and providing the additional choice that the large multiples can bring. There is certainly a role for both types of business. The Scottish Retail Consortium will probably want to talk about the importance of ensuring that large developments can anchor local businesses in areas and reduce the distances that people must travel to meet their needs.

Allan Lundmark: The responsibilities that lie with developers, whether they are in the heart of our biggest conurbations or in island communities, are the same. If we are seeking to use our public infrastructure to add value to a project and make it successful, we carry the responsibility of ensuring that we do not overstretch that infrastructure and exploit it negatively. If public transportation facilities are being stretched because of a development, we carry the responsibility to ensure that the system's capacity is maintained.

Developers in island communities carry the same responsibilities that developers in our large cities carry, but I suspect that the difficulty in rural areas is that smaller developments find it difficult to bear some costs. Costs in a city, for example, can undoubtedly be spread across a number of developments to mitigate their commercial impact. If we are promoting a development opportunity in the private sector, we should seek to use the existing capacity in our infrastructure; where that infrastructure is being pushed to the limits, we have a responsibility to find with the public sector ways to ensure that capacity is reinstated. Aside from the issue of scale and the volume of investment that could be generated, I do not see that the approach should be any different in our island communities and in the heart of our conurbations.

Rob Gibson: People's attitude to retail is such that they will travel many tens—perhaps even hundreds—of miles to access the bigger selection of shops that they can find in a large centre. Setting up a small retail park in Wick, for example, will not stop people taking the bus, the train or—most likely—the car to Inverness and its much wider range of shopping. The issue of transport in the kinds of developments that we are discussing really needs to played differently, and surely it is simplistic to suggest not only that you can use existing facilities and transport links but that people will be satisfied with a smaller, more local development. The fact is that they will not be.

Anthony Aitken: In catering for a degree of local demand, local developments will assist in reducing the number of journeys, say, to Inverness, but I entirely agree with your overall assumption that people will not be satisfied solely with local developments in all instances and that such developments will not stop all journeys. People will always want to exercise choice, but providing local facilities will, as I say, reduce the number of journeys, which can only be beneficial.

Ian Shearer: My colleagues on the panel have stolen some of my examples from the Highlands,

particularly those relating to Wick and Tain. However, going to the other end of the country, I should highlight the example that is mentioned in our submission of the effects of the opening of a retail development in a small town in Galloway and how it stopped people having to travel further afield.

I suppose that we should also mention another trend: the development in recent years of online retail. People in rural areas can now order their shopping online and have it delivered. That means that, instead of people getting into their own cars, all the deliveries are made from one truck, which is more efficient and reduces emissions.

I have no specific comments about ferry services because we have not been involved in those consultations.

Rob Gibson: I am sure that the people on our 90 inhabited islands are waiting with bated breath to hear what these captains of retail development and industry have to say.

Is local authority implementation of national planning and transport policies being hampered by a lack of resources, particularly with regard to links between transport and the kinds of developments that you have talked about? After all, this is not just about large and small centres; we have to think about all the outlying populations that have to travel to the small centres in the first place.

Ian Shearer: Members have not raised any specific examples with me, but, like everything else, implementation will clearly be affected by the impending constraints on public sector expenditure. I know that, after previous complaints, there have been strenuous efforts to look at the resourcing of the planning system and that John Swinney is leading work on that. However, I do not have any specific comments to make today.

14:30

Allan Lundmark: As far as housing land use is concerned, there is no doubt that in areas with dispersed settlement patterns, that are dependent on large urban centres for employment and where there has been public sector investment in transportation systems, there will be mounting pressure from the private sector for housing land to be released. It is not in our interest to tell someone to whom we are selling a house, "It'll take you an hour and 10 minutes, not 30 minutes, to commute to Inverness," or wherever.

If investment in the Borders railway goes ahead, one big challenge and opportunity will be to ensure that housing land that is close to the railway and its halts is released. We may even want to consider creating additional halts, as that would allow land to be released and people to be moved. For example, it will be possible to get from the Midlothian halts on the Borders railway to the centre of Edinburgh in less than 20 minutes. That is clearly a selling point. I am not sure that the times down to the heart of the Borders are a selling point, but it is not difficult to see how the line could be used positively to deal with the fact that the city of Edinburgh decants a lot of its workforce.

Will investment in the Aberdeen western peripheral route in the north-east mean that we can find more efficient and effective ways of moving people about? Should we release land that is linked to the route, so that we can get the maximum benefit out of public investment and reduce peripheral travel? Can we invest more in public transport on that road system, which would allow housing development to become more effective than it might otherwise be?

Rob Gibson: Thank you for those thoughts.

The Convener: We move to questions for specific witnesses, rather than the whole panel.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): My questions are directed specifically at Homes for Scotland. It has been mentioned several times that you attach great importance to transport issues, especially good public transport links, when deciding where houses will be built in the future. Exactly where in the list of important issues does transport fit? We have heard that it may be difficult for developers to produce the resources that are necessary. In years to come, there may also be a shortage of public sector funding for transport development. At what stage in the process does transport begin to become less important, if the need for houses remains and we cannot find the money to develop transport links?

Allan Lundmark: The process by which land is driven into development plans involves people submitting proposals to planning authorities, which assess whether they are prepared to see development in particular locations. One of the issues that must be taken into consideration as sites are filtered out is the ability to service those sites—the ability to move people on to and off sites, and the relationship between housing developments and sources of employment and retail facilities. Planning authorities take that issue into consideration when considering bids to have land driven into the land supply. They certainly take account of it when assessing planning applications.

Consent for a housing development will not be granted if the planning authority believes that it will create enough traffic movements to produce gridlock on a junction or a trunk road, or if the proposals are heavily dependent on car transport,

where a public transport option is available. Developers are aware of that from the beginning to the end of the process—there are issues that they must address. I know of no development that has been promoted in recent years for which a transport impact assessment has not been carried out or for which the developer has not had to mitigate any detriment to existing transport infrastructure.

Alex Johnstone: Another issue that has been raised is walking and cycling infrastructure. Do you see the inclusion of walking and cycling infrastructure in developments as a positive feature and as tied in any way to the other transport opportunities that exist? Is it possible that, over time, walking and cycling infrastructure may play an increasing role in the total transport picture in new developments?

Allan Lundmark: Absolutely, yes. I spent most of yesterday at one of our planning authorities dealing with a housing development at an edge-of-settlement location that is extremely sensitive because of its landscape features. The developer's approach is to make use of those features, to use the existing informal movement patterns as people move through the countryside and to ensure that they are incorporated into the development for pedestrians and cyclists. That applies to usage of the site by both owners or residents and visitors.

Provision for walking and cycling is now taken into account. That has been driven partly by planning policy and partly by a recognition that the people who buy our houses now expect those things to be taken into account. We are expected to ensure that, where possible, we facilitate pedestrian links to local shopping centres or town centres and facilitate cycling across sites. Some authorities have stringent requirements for the storage of bicycles, right down to the way in which houses are designed.

We absolutely take account of the issue, not just because that is a planning requirement but because our customers and clients expect it to be dealt with in our developments.

Anthony Aitken: In addition to what Allan Lundmark said about the means by which provision is secured, the matter is dealt with through development plan releases. Local authorities expect responsible developers to come forward with development briefs or master plans. The matters are all assessed at the outset of any proposal to ensure that connectivity, desire lines and pedestrian and cycle movements are incorporated at the outset of the development proposal and that they flow through it. Allan Lundmark's members will, no doubt, pick that up in the manner in which they develop the land in accordance with the master plan or development brief, where transport issues are key.

Ian Shearer: Retailers have mentioned to me that, as well as the transportation assessment that they have to do with their development plans, they have to do a green travel plan. I gather that that is mostly about staff travel plans. I suppose that it is more likely to be staff who walk or cycle to retail outlets rather than customers, because people tend not to walk or cycle when they are making bulky purchases or doing the weekly grocery shop, for example. The green travel plan is all about how the staff get to the store and it takes walking and cycling into account. There are incentives for staff—for example, changing facilities are provided, and walk-to-work schemes are promoted.

We have discussed out-of-town retail, but let us not forget city and town centre retailing. We should think of Glasgow, for example, which is the UK's second-largest retail destination. There are major plans to improve still further the retail offering in Glasgow around what is called the style mile. I would have thought that, in town and city centres, there is always scope to improve facilities for walking and cycling to the shops.

Alex Johnstone: My personal experience is of living in a 200-year-old house in the centre of a Scottish market town, where homes, shops and work spaces are all intermixed. That seems to solve a lot of the problems that we are discussing. Why do developers not develop in that way any more?

Anthony Aitken: Developers have been encouraged to develop in that way in so far as there has been an emphasis on brownfield development. That has been in place in Scotland for at least 20 years. Gap sites can be redeveloped, which helps to ensure that towns and cities remain sustainable in their own right. In some instances we require an increased number of houses because of population increase and household formation rates. Not all brownfield releases can cater for that. The market demands a range and choice of housing types. In some instances it is appropriate to have greenfield development. As I outlined previously, any greenfield release would be accompanied by a design brief or master plan to ensure that it locks into existing sources of connectivity so that walking, cycling and transport connections can be easily accessed from it.

Allan Lundmark: Anthony Aitken is absolutely right. Something in excess of 80 per cent of houses that are built in Scotland are now built on brownfield sites in redevelopment areas—not edge-of-settlement, peripheral development. All those brownfield sites will take advantage of the existing mixed-use structure of many of our

settlements. I suspect that what you are asking is why no one promotes mixed-use development. It is because it is notoriously difficult. It is much easier to promote a housing development next to existing mixed uses, where everyone knows what is on the adjacent sites and has some kind of understanding of the impact that they will have on their lifestyles. To promote new development that has housing next to retail and industrial development is very difficult, because—this is a subjective judgment on my part—people rarely take a positive view of what an adjacent site might look like if it is developed; they are more likely to think of the detrimental impacts. If you say that there will be industrial units across the road, people will think the worst.

Mixed-use developments, particularly at edge-of-settlement locations, are notoriously difficult to promote successfully. They require very long time horizons. The funding models for residential development and commercial development are completely different. It is very difficult to pull them together and promote them successfully. There have been very few examples of that, in my view.

We are paying the price for something that has happened for the past 150 or 200 years in our settlements, whereby parcels of land have been released for specific purposes. That has certainly been the case since the advent of the planning system after the second world war. The planning system encourages specific releases of land for a particular purpose. If you look at any development plan, you will see that land is released for residential, industrial and commercial purposes.

Alex Johnstone: You seem to be telling me that there is public resistance and resistance within the planning and development system, and there may be an additional source of resistance, which is essentially administrative and relates to funding. Of those three forms of resistance, which is proportionally the biggest barrier to mixed development?

Allan Lundmark: I am not sure that I know the answer to that. The difficulties are caused by a combination of all three. It takes very bold action to decide to have mixed-use development in a particular area. I rather suspect that the only way that we will ever crack that is if such bold action is public sector driven—if an area is properly master planned by the public sector and the private sector is offered the chance to commercially exploit some of the development opportunities on the site. It would require very long-term strategic views to be taken and an organisation with the will to see the development through some of the difficulties in investment at times and not trade off for short-term gain. If a developer sees that part of a mixed-use development is successful and part is stalling, it takes a lot of bottle to stick with it through the lean times to protect the site for that purpose. At present, it would be incredibly difficult to put together any funding package to promote a mixed-use development in Scotland.

14:45

The Convener: May I press you further on the point about public perception? You asked how people would feel if they thought that their part of the development was going to be next to an industrial estate, which conjures up pictures of corrugated iron sheds or something ugly. That is probably not a feature of the 200-year-old market town either. If people think that there will be a corner shop near them, a pub or something that might turn into a pub, cafe or restaurant, that is the kind of thing that makes a place more liveable in and desirable, yet many of the new developments are just house after house with no space for those kinds of amenities to spring up or for small businesses to locate.

Allan Lundmark: I apologise if this sounds like prejudice masquerading as informed opinion but, for me, it comes back to the way in which we approach land use planning in this country. We release land in parcels for a specific single use and, when nothing happens, the site sits fallow and people speculate about what might happen there. That is in marked contrast to the way in which planning authorities in Nordic countries approach land use planning. They will see an area that requires development and the planning authority will go in and master plan it. If you look at any of our local plans, you will see in any of our settlements that a part of the land is released for housing, a part for commercial and industrial use and so on. Nobody knows what it will look like at that stage. In many of our European cities, especially in Scandinavia, you will see a master plan and you might even see a physical three-dimensional model. In that way, people get a feel for what it will look like. If we started to plan in that way, it might change the environment in which you are trying to promote—

The Convener: Without storing up transport problems for ourselves that become intractable or lock in car dependency.

Allan Lundmark: From my perspective as a planner, given the issues to do with multiple land use, the phasing of land release, and the integration of public transport systems with development opportunities, I think that we are crying out for stronger planning and far greater involvement of our planning system in the proper master planning of our settlements. We do not need weaker planning; we need stronger planning. We need planners to be clear about the way in which our towns and cities will be shaped and the movement patterns in them, and we then need to

encourage developers to go in and take advantage of some of those powerful decisions. We need stronger planning, not less planning, and certainly not weaker planning.

The Convener: Does Alison McInnes have a supplementary question for Homes for Scotland?

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): Yes. Alex Johnstone said that some of the most sought-after and desirable properties are in mixed-use developments. I am thinking about the garden city movement, which did not entirely come from the public sector. What kind of vision do Homes for Scotland and your developers have of offering a greater choice to home buyers? You travel round the country and see the same residential estates, more or less, in every market town. If people are looking for something different, they do not have the opportunity to purchase it. What is your role in providing some of the vision and drive for change?

Allan Lundmark: Earlier, I said that in excess of 80 per cent of our developments are on brownfield and redevelopment sites. Almost exclusively, the housing designs on those sites are bespoke. When we build in urban areas, away from hard edges, we cannot fit a standard product on to those sites. Where we use a so-called standard product is in edge-of-settlement developments. In the past decade, the industry has faced big design challenges in such sites.

I encourage you to look at a study that was recently completed with one of my member companies, which parked an existing consent and went through a whole new design process. The so-called regulators, the planners, and the transport and water engineers were all embedded into the design team. Out of that came a proposal that reduced the amount of tarmac, increased the number of units on the site, and completely changed the layout of the development and the design of the buildings. The interesting thing for me is that every one of the buildings on that project is a standard house type, although the facades and roof treatments have all changed. That is a new product and a new approach, and that study—the Polnoon study—is certainly worth reading.

The building standards changed in 2007 and will change again in October this year. We are trying to make our buildings more sustainable; we now build structures that are six times more energy efficient than anything that was built during the last century, and that will change again. We have to find ways of getting generating systems into the houses. The look and feel of a house will be quite different in the future. To see that, you only have to look at some of the units at the Building Research Establishment, where some of my member companies have projects, or at the stuff that Dawn Homes has done with South Lanarkshire College. Companies such as Mactaggart & Mickel and CCG Construction are using new methods to make construction more efficient, and the look of their buildings has changed quite dramatically. I also encourage the committee to look at the outputs of the Scottish sustainable communities initiative. You could ask me where all those houses are being built—well, they are not because we are in the process of changing, but that is where the Scottish house building industry will be during the next five years, and certainly during the next decade. The product that we will put on the sites and the way in which we orientate buildings will change dramatically.

Homes for Scotland is involved in a lot of work with our member companies, trying to deliver new products, services and forms of customer care. We will see very significant changes in the way in which the industry operates.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): My questions are for the Scottish Chambers of Commerce. Do you think that local and national economic development priorities are compatible with the development of sustainable settlements and transport networks?

Garry Clark: As I have said before, there must be far greater co-operation and integration in terms of both the policies being proposed at the Scottish level and local leadership issues. We see scope to drive that forward by ensuring far greater predictability and commonality in the standards that are promoted locally across Scotland. At the moment, we have 32 different local authorities, which is a bit of a challenge for the planning system. Over the years, we have spoken about the need to ensure that local authorities are resourced in order to provide effective planning services and, where different local authorities are using different standards, to develop a greater commonality. We certainly believe that there is scope for local authorities to co-operate more closely.

At the Scottish level, we have the national planning framework, the strategic transport projects review and the national transport strategy. There could be a lot more integration between those elements, which are often seen as different policy areas rather than as being part and parcel of the same policy. We need to bring them closer together and ensure that there is a far more standardised approach on the part of local authorities across the country.

Cathy Peattie: You are saying that there is no strategic overview or joined-up thinking on the part of agencies. Who could facilitate that discussion and take issues forward? You are right that it might be difficult to get the 32 authorities to work together. How can we get to the stage at which

people at the local and national levels work together properly? That might be a difficult question, but I would be interested to hear your thoughts.

Garry Clark: You are right to say that that is a difficult question. The obvious body to ensure that a more standardised approach is adopted throughout Scotland would be the Scottish Government. However, issues arise to do with the democratic accountability of local government and the Scottish Government in that regard. Local authorities and the Scottish Government are equally valid democratic institutions and it is difficult for the Scottish Government to impose anything on local authorities. Certainly, there would be a role for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

We need to examine what is working and what is not working and ensure that, where something is not working, we find a way of building in best practice from another area of Scotland, perhaps by asking another local authority to take leadership in the joint delivery of a service.

Cathy Peattie: That is not happening at the moment, but it needs to happen—is that what you are saying?

Garry Clark: It is probably not happening enough at the moment.

Cathy Peattie: Your written submission raised concerns about leadership in Transport Scotland. In it, you say:

"Transport Scotland needs to fully understand its role in facilitating an effective planning process".

What has caused you to reach that view, and what does Transport Scotland need to do to ensure that it works effectively in the planning system?

Garry Clark: At the time of the consideration of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill, there were no plans to include Transport Scotland as a statutory consultee in the local planning process. That omission arose as a result of a failure to recognise the link between the planning process and the transport system, and the need to ensure that the two elements are joined up at a Scottish level.

Transport Scotland needs to take more of a leadership role. More important, when local authorities draw up their own local plans, it should act as a guiding force on what is doable and what is not. It is easy for a local authority to say that it would like certain things to be in place but, even though we now have the strategic transport projects review, very few of the 29 projects that it contains are fully budgeted and costed. It is important that, when they draw up their plans, local authorities have in mind a realistic view of the Scottish transport system and where it is going over the coming decades.

Cathy Peattie: Are you saying that Transport Scotland could take on that strategic overview role? Should Transport Scotland be doing something to facilitate some kind of action?

Anthony Aitken: We want Transport Scotland to feed into the development plan system effectively by stating, when a local authority comes up with a plan for local development, what can be delivered and what cannot. Transport Scotland should be able to say, "Guys, of the half dozen transport programmes that you have, we believe that two can be funded over a period of 10 years, so we should take a closer look at the four that can't and decide whether they should, realistically, remain in the local development plan."

Cathy Peattie: You do not believe that that is happening yet.

Anthony Aitken: I do not believe that it is happening effectively.

Cathy Peattie: Does the national transport and planning guidance pay sufficient attention to the needs of freight transport? If not, what needs to change?

15:00

Anthony Aitken: The consolidated SPP document does not have as much information on freight transport as the previous SPP that was specifically on transport. It is always important to improve freight transport and transport hubs and, where we have natural resources for freight transport to ensure that any improvements to docks and so on are looked at from the point of view not just of how things are delivered by sea, but of interconnectivity with other modes of transport in and out of such facilities. I think that we need an overview of that, given the importance of freight transport.

Cathy Peattie: The overview is that everyone says that freight transport and transport hubs are really important, but they are not actually a priority. Stores such as Asda and Tesco depend a lot on freight transport, but they have no real commitment to develop things further, as far as I can see. Has Scottish Chambers of Commerce had any thoughts about extending, or at least highlighting the need to develop, freight transport throughout the country?

Garry Clark: It is important to consider the changing nature of freight transport and the developments that have taken place in recent years. Clearly, there is room for further investment in freight transport facilities, but there has been a growing move towards transporting as much freight as possible by rail. Certainly, I know that supermarkets such as Tesco now use the railways to move freight to Inverness, but there are issues

about how that can be developed further. As far as I am aware, transporting the freight north to Inverness is fine, but there are obviously costs in moving the empty containers back down south. Clearly, we need to take the opportunity to consider more inventive ways of making use of that spare capacity in the freight system.

On another front, a reasonable amount of shipping is moved in and out of ports—principally Grangemouth but other ports as well—but we have the opposite problem there because, as we export more by sea than we import, our exporters carry the additional costs of getting the empty containers back to this country. We are certainly making progress on taking advantage of the lower-carbon options for freight transport in the longer term, but I agree that more thought needs to be given to how we fully exploit that.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): Cathy Peattie has already discussed some of the unrealistic plans at national level that involve Transport Scotland. I want to ask a similar question about the local level. Are councils still producing plans with unrealistic transport expectations for their areas? Is enough detail being provided about how developments will be funded and when they will happen?

Anthony Aitken: I believe that people are starting to grasp the nettle at local level. One product of the new development plan system is that a number of main issues reports have been published by authorities throughout the country. For example, Stirling Council has gone for a consolidated and sustainable Stirling as the growth option for the area over the next 10 to 15 years. Because that is a sustainable city model, no major transportation infrastructure will need to be funded by the private sector or by the public sector, which is inherently sound planning. The "Main Issues Report" on the Stirling local development plan is currently out to consultation.

If you had asked me that question a couple of years ago, I would probably have given you a different response. With the new planning system and new development plans, and given what has happened over the past 18 months to two years, some local development plans are starting to look for more sustainable local solutions, ideally without major infrastructure investment in transportation being required.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: A challenge to the committee is that there is often good practice that can be pointed to—in Stirling, in this instance—but we want to know what makes that happen there when it does not happen elsewhere. Will the other 31 local authorities catch up with Stirling? Is that happening in Stirling due to its local leadership, while the leadership elsewhere cannot make that happen? What is driving that good practice?

Anthony Aitken: It could be a combination of all the factors that you mentioned. You are correct in that we must highlight areas of good practice and that local authorities that are still struggling to get it right should be pointed towards them. Our talking through such examples more at national level and focusing more on them can only assist, particularly—to go back to a point that the convener made at the beginning—as we are entering a period of more austere public finances when the public sector might struggle to fund such provision. I know for a fact that the private sector can no longer fund it either, so we need more inventive solutions. Good practice should therefore be pointed out and highlighted.

Allan Lundmark: One difficulty is that our land use planning system is not good at responding quickly to changing economic circumstances; it is a slow and cumbersome process to change our land-release policies. In housing, that will create difficulties, particularly in the parts of the country that have, ironically, the most up-to-date development plans—I am thinking particularly of south-east Scotland—because what characterises most of those plans is that they have so-called strategic land releases, which are either very large single releases of land or amalgamations of numerous sites that are characterised as a single release. They all depend for their success on major private investment to upgrade infrastructure—that is, the physical infrastructure relating to water, sewage, roads, transportation and community infrastructure, in particular schools and recreation facilities.

The model that emerged during the late 1990s and the early part of this decade was one that said that you could use the uplift in development values and the commercial success of these projects to capture value that would fund the infrastructure. That model fell apart in spring 2007 and I do not think that planning authorities have quite understood that such land releases are now at risk. The challenge is that some of those releases may have to be removed, or reconfigured so that the infrastructure is provided jointly between the public and the private sectors; it could perhaps be provided by the public sector with the private sector paying for it later out of revenue.

There is no evidence yet of any planning authority anywhere in Scotland coming to that understanding, let alone starting to change the position. That is certainly a problem when it comes to funding transportation infrastructure; I would encourage the committee towards the view that the problem is that the model in the large land releases depended on infrastructure being totally funded by the private sector.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will follow up on the convener's previous comment about someone

having a phone on; it may be on silent, but it is seriously interfering with the sound system and it is difficult to hear some of the answers. You can all check again while I ask the next question about the relationship between local authorities in different areas and across boundaries.

There are examples of new developments in the Lothians, in Fife—outside Dunfermline—in West Lothian and in Edinburgh that severely impact on Edinburgh and its transport planning. How good are we at joining up local authority decisions so that we can get people across those boundaries, which they do not necessarily consider in relation to retail developments or their own housing?

Anthony Aitken: The strategic development plan—formerly the structure plan—provides a forum in which those cross-boundary situations can be examined together in a wider context, rather than in isolation. There is some joined-up thinking there.

The example of Edinburgh is particularly interesting. The local authority in West Lothian has been happy to accommodate growth, but other authorities—including the City of Edinburgh Council—have been less happy to do so. To go back to my previous example, a big debate is needed on how to make Edinburgh a sustainable city. We need to decide whether Edinburgh should consume more of its own smoke than it has historically done, because the city has always exported its housing demand. A debate is needed on Edinburgh's city limits and green belt, and tough choices must be made. The creation of a more sustainable Edinburgh, which accepts more of its own growth within its city boundaries, might reduce the export of housing demand to outlying areas, which encourages commuting—particularly by car, which is less sustainable.

Alison McInnes: My questions are for the Scottish Retail Consortium. In written evidence, and earlier in the meeting, you made it clear that retailers normally consider town centre locations before out-of-town locations. If that is the case, why are so many new developments sited in out-of-town locations?

Ian Shearer: I am aware of new developments for which developers have taken up historical consents; consent has been given to a retailer previously, and then a new retailer comes in, takes up that consent and develops a newer, better and brighter store.

The Scottish planning policy makes it clear that there is a hierarchy, through the sequential test. However, it also makes it clear at the end that there are opportunities where there is demand but no suitable sites in town centres. Rigorous conditions are set for that, and there must be—it is rather a mouthful—a quantitative and qualitative needs assessment of the impact on the surrounding areas. If all that is done, and there is consumer demand for such a retail development, there are opportunities, and there are examples of that.

As I said earlier, such developments do not always have a detrimental impact on transport; they can reduce the need for people to travel further afield to reach other shopping facilities.

Alison McInnes: I do not doubt that the sequential test is carried out, but I query whether it is always carried out properly, and whether it is clear where the developer wants to get to at the end of the test. How independent is that work? It is obviously commissioned by the developer, who has an idea of where they would like their supermarket to be.

Ian Shearer: It is for the planning authorities to apply the planning policy and the local development plan, and it is ultimately for Scottish ministers to make a decision, if it goes to that level. The planning authorities must verify that the policy is applied vigorously.

Alison McInnes: Do factors such as land availability and pricing become dominant at the start of the process, when retailers make decisions about where they would like to put their new supermarket? There is no evidence that developers come with a completely open mind and no idea of where they would like to locate. They will have identified the site on which they would like to locate, and they work backwards from that, through the sequential test, to explain why they cannot put it anywhere else. Is not that the case?

15:15

Ian Shearer: I am not an expert on that, but my understanding is that there are several examples in which it is the other way round, and that the site becomes available in the local development plan. The local authority identifies parcels of land—usually brownfield sites or town centre sites, but also out-of-centre sites—that may be suitable for development. That is what retailers are thinking about when they are looking at the development plans; they try to find out where those parcels are available, and then they enter into discussions with the local authorities.

Alison McInnes: When major retailers—I am thinking of the supermarkets—consider the provision of public transport, they seem to be thinking about road networks because their outlets are always well placed on the trunk road network. Is the provision of public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure integral to their thinking or is it very much a burden that they need to meet to get planning permission?

Ian Shearer: What they have said to me is that the transport surrounding the development is the second priority. After the sequential test and the retail needs assessment, the second most important issue is the transportation assessment, and the green travel plan, which I mentioned earlier. The green travel plan is especially relevant to walking and cycling because, as I said earlier, people do not often do their bulkier shopping on a bicycle or when they are walking. I suppose that the most popular and best alternative to using a car is the bus. We have provided some good examples of situations in which retail developers have funded bus services attached to retail developments. An integral part of the transportation assessment that is done with a development is to look at bus services, and new bus services are sometimes laid on to ferry people to and from the retail outlet.

Alison McInnes: You touched on online shopping and how that might change things in the future. How significantly will it impact on the location and nature of new retail developments? I am thinking of the scale of retail developments in the future, for example if many of our bulky purchases are made online.

Ian Shearer: Although online shopping is a retail channel that has been growing strongly, I should emphasise that it still represents less than 7 per cent of total retail sales; I think that is the UK figure. Town centre retailing is still the largest single retail channel. When I talk about "channels", I am using jargon. You have town centre, edge of town, out of town, mail order shopping and so on. As a share of total retail sales, town centre retailing has been in slow decline as it has tried to compete with online retailing, but the absolute amount of sales has gone up. People are spending more than ever in town centres, even though their share of the total cake has declined in competition with online and other channels.

Alison McInnes: That is very helpful. Thank you.

The Convener: How easy is it for the SRC to address those issues? You mentioned your wide range of members, including large and small retailers, and retailers of many different types. If the committee were to put an argument to you about sustainable communities that have room for newsagents, fishmongers, barber shops and so on to spring up, would it be possible for the consortium to take a view on that without setting the interests of one group of members against the interests of another?

Ian Shearer: As I said in my introductory remarks, because we represent a broad church, that is sometimes difficult. We have small, large, in-town, out-of-town, online—you name it—retailers in the consortium. There are planning issues on which we comment, for example when the Scottish Government consults on its new overarching planning policy, but when it comes down to local detail and nitty-gritty, we simply do not have the capacity to get involved. Indeed, we would end up having competing interests within our membership. I am sure that it is the same for the other membership organisations.

Anthony Aitken: I want to come back to Mr Harvie on that point, which is an interesting one. In negotiations with local authorities when one mentions retail in an out-of-centre location—even if it is a fishmonger or newsagent—they immediately think of one of the big four arriving on their doorstep. There has always been a great difficulty in accepting smaller stores.

In the past 18 months, however, I have seen a more pragmatic approach by a few local authorities in so far as through the development plan system a neighbourhood centre is provided for when there is a big land release for housing. In the plan for that centre will be defined a convenience store for which the floor area is limited, and a range of smaller shops alongside it. The argument is evolving, and local authorities are accepting that neighbourhood centres alongside strategic housing releases are good. They are also sustainable and improve transportation, because people have the option to walk and cycle to their local shop. As Allan Lundmark will tell you, the classic question is: can you walk from a new house to buy a pint? The answer is a good barometer for whether it is well located.

The Convener: We just have to hope that a neighbourhood centre is as pretty as a proper high street, but there we go.

There are no further questions for the panel, so I thank you for your time and for answering our questions.

15:21

Meeting suspended.

15:23

On resuming—

The Convener: We continue the one and only item on our agenda with our second panel of witnesses on the inquiry into connections between transport and land use planning.

I welcome John Halliday, a director of transport planning for the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, and George Mair, a director for Scotland at the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK. George Mair has asked to be joined by an additional witness—Mark Savelli, who is managing director at First Glasgow and chair of the CPT. I have agreed to that late addition to the agenda on the understanding that we cannot allow

the meeting to extend past its normal time. It will therefore be helpful if we hear one answer from the CPT, rather than two, on each question. We have a few questions for both organisations, before we come on to some separate questions.

For years, perhaps up to a decade, planning guidance has to a greater or lesser extent placed emphasis on the priority for locating new developments in places that are easily accessible by public transport, by bike and on foot. During our inquiry, we have heard that the go-ahead is still being given to developments that do not place enough emphasis on accessibility, or which, in practice, rely overwhelmingly on private car use. Why are we still in that situation after years of guidance saying that it should not be so?

John Halliday (Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation): I guess the real answer is that the responsibility lies nowhere. A lot of good words are said—"such and such a body should take account of", "one should consult with" and so on—but, to be honest, over the years I have seen no single place where a strong responsibility is placed; hence, it becomes a fudge. Do not get me wrong; I think that all the professionals enter the process with a good will and that they want to achieve what is set out in the policy aims, but the wherewithal—the powers and finance—to deliver those aims sits all over the shop. It is not clear whose responsibility it is to join up and provide a public transport infrastructure. Accessibility for walking and cycling can be created by putting in cycle paths, footpaths and so on, and that is done fairly well. Public transport really is the black hole, and I fail to see how it can be properly delivered by any of the planning institutions that we have got.

The Convener: So, there is a fundamental disconnect between the two functions of transport and planning. The left hand and the right hand do not know what the other is doing.

John Halliday: In effect, yes. My past career was in local authorities, the passenger transport executive and Strathclyde Passenger Transport over in the west of Scotland. I have seen the process in action and how it works. Believe me, all the professionals have a good will and everybody wants to see what is set out in the policies, but there is a disconnect.

I will give you an example from the development of the regional transport strategies under the umbrella of the relatively new regional transport partnerships. It is a statutory obligation for the RTPs to develop a regional transport strategy, but there is no obligation anywhere else to make those aims and objectives a requirement. People consult, talk and so on, but there is no connect all the way through the planning system and the transport system—the two really are not joined up.

Mark Savelli (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK): We agree with everything that we have heard this afternoon. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of the relationship between land use and transport planning, which certainly affects the long-term moulding of our society as a whole. We have heard about a disconnect and the need for overarching powers, but we have local transport plans that contain the words. For example, the local transport plan in one famous city states that the priority is to put public transport first; yet, there is a free parking policy for cars at Christmas, which is a time when people who have cars might try using buses. In one city, an area was earmarked for development by a famous retailer but it has now been put forward for additional car parking space. There is a disconnect. There is no incentive for local transport plans to be delivered and seemingly no accountability for their delivery.

We see examples on the ground of decisions that absolutely do not serve public transport. The Strathclyde business park is surrounded by great, attractive bus services but people cannot get at them—they have to go to the local authority and beg for a tendered service that runs three or four times a day, even though the industry has many good bus services in the vicinity. I go to David Lloyd Leisure—I will not say where—and I cannot even get through the gate without using the road because there is no pedestrian access. Buses seem not to be considered seriously in the planning of developments. The industry should be a statutory consultee when it comes to big developments and greater weight should be afforded to ensuring that developments serve the objectives of local transport plans.

15:30

The Convener: Is the issue who takes responsibility for the matter—where the political leadership comes from? Should it be everyone's job, at local as well as national level? If so, will the issue fall through the cracks, as it will be the job of no one in particular to deal with it? Should responsibility lie with Transport Scotland, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change or the councils?

George Mair (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK): Everything is out there. Policy and guidance are clear, and the most recent Scottish planning policy document is an excellent piece of work. However, leadership is needed. In some areas of Scotland, public and private partnership is delivering good results on the ground. At the Robert Gordon University development in Aberdeen, the local bus company and the university worked together well, with local authority involvement, to come up with a travel plan that

included a dedicated service to transport students from the city centre to the campus. There are areas where things are working, but leadership and drive are needed at local authority level. The Scottish Government has issued policy and guidance, but it needs to enforce them and to ensure that they are delivered. That is the one thing that may be missing.

John Halliday: I re-emphasise George Mair's point. Good guidance is available in all policy areas. The missing link is enforcement, to ensure that the policy is set down as a requirement and not just a consideration for local authorities and regional bodies. You asked who should take responsibility for that. That is an interesting question. A division of responsibilities is required. I argue that Transport Scotland has a nationally strategic role to play. We should ensure that it has the ability to consider matters at regional level, but there are definite regional, as opposed to national, considerations. We must ensure that the three tiers of policy are right and must apportion responsibility appropriately.

The Convener: George Mair mentioned a travel plan relating to a university. Does anyone else have experience of the implementation of green travel plans? How successful are they? Do we need to use more of them or to make them work better? Are they sufficiently prevalent?

George Mair: More work needs to be done on green travel plans. There are few good examples that we can bring to the committee. From partnership working with the Scottish Government and local authorities, we know that even many of those bodies do not have green travel plans. There is something amiss in the area.

The Convener: You said that there are few good examples of green travel plans. Do you mean that there are few examples, or that there are many bad examples?

George Mair: There are few examples that I can bring to the committee. Enforcement of the guidelines and policies is needed. That may be a role for the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland. A bottom-up approach to the development of partnership working is needed for projects in local areas, but within the confines of policy and guidance.

The Convener: Your point is that travel plans are not being done enough, rather than that they are being done wrong.

George Mair: Yes.

John Halliday: Travel planning is definitely a way forward. Let us think about what that means. One difficulty is that it is much easier to put tar, concrete and surfacing—hard things—down on the ground. The softer issue of travel planning and behaviour is much more difficult for everyone, including developers and local authorities, which must tie down what it means. The issue is also difficult to tackle in the long term.

Often, a developer puts in place a travel plan that is all vetted and—it is hoped—subsequently approved, but what happens over the long term? Where does the travel plan go after five years? Whose responsibility is that? From examining the issue, I think that the cost benefit ratio for softer measures is far higher than that for hard infrastructure building. Given the congestion and so on in our cities, it is likely that travel planning will produce the answers over the longer term. However, travel planning is all about travel behaviour. Public transport is needed to back that up and give people the means to move about.

The Convener: In the current context, it is arguable that such an approach is more affordable than building infrastructure will be in the next years.

John Halliday: That is very much the case when one thinks about climate change, which is a big agenda, let alone the state of the public finances. In the long run, the approach simply makes good sense.

Cathy Peattie: Is the implementation of national planning and transport policies by local authorities hampered by the lack of resources?

Mark Savelli: The issue is not necessarily a lack of resources but a lack of will and a lack of belief. The public transport industry can do much to provide excellent public transport services if it has the right environment in which to prosper.

We talked about changing behaviour. To achieve that, we could take simple measures that do not cost much money. For example, we have a conflict to deal with in the off-peak usage of bus lanes. We already have that space and we do not have much money to spend on building infrastructure, and a conflict exists—vested interests want bus lanes to be used for parking cars in off-peak hours. We must consider what infrastructure we have and whether we can make it more able to facilitate a prosperous development of public transport usage.

The public transport industry is very commercial—up to 98 per cent of the miles in most of Scotland's big cities are commercially provided. We should celebrate the success of that part of the market economy that is working well, but much could be done to facilitate the sustainable future of public transport.

Infrastructure is the answer in the long term. We heard about travelling behaviour being changed in the short term. The best way of changing behaviour in the long term is to have more dense

populations and green buildings, as in Dublin. We have heard the innovative idea of ensuring that, if out-of-town supermarkets are to be built, they are on bus routes and a park-and-ride facility for the city centre is integrated into them, so that people drive once to the supermarket, use the park-and-ride bus into the city and stock up on their way back with bulky items from the supermarket. All that is incredibly visionary but, in the long term, infrastructure is the answer.

Cathy Peattie: You say that the issue is not necessarily resources but lateral thinking.

Mark Savelli: In the short term, we can do much that does not cost much money by using the existing infrastructure. In the long term, we must change how we plan and build and ensure that the relationship between land use and transport planning is much stronger for new developments.

John Halliday: I am not sure whether I wholly agree. Problems are littered all over the place in the record of our transport infrastructure and land use planning. If we simply build a few more roads, we will still be in the same position. I accept entirely that seeking to integrate everything goes another step forward, but I suspect that we will not be much further forward.

I was struck by what a witness on the previous panel said about how some of the Nordic countries approach development. There we have an example of control being taken of development planning from the outset. I see no problems with experience in the UK, where how we approach things is radically differently from how our continental cousins approach things—although when we go to the continent I think that every one of us says, "What a marvellous system they have." The approach on the continent is to pump prime, to get the infrastructure and systems in place—and the private sector still operates quite well. We should consider the role of the local authority in ensuring that all the building blocks are there for development in the long run, as opposed to just setting out a master plan on paper and leaving everything to the free market thereafter.

Cathy Peattie: Do local authorities have the resources to do that?

John Halliday: They certainly do not at the moment.

Cathy Peattie: Should Transport Scotland play a more prominent role in supporting local authorities in transport planning and decision making on development applications? If so, what would you like the agency to do?

George Mair: As I said, our view is that a local planning application is a local authority issue. The partnership approach to dealing with the many and varied challenges that arise from planning applications is best dealt with at local level. Could Transport Scotland provide assistance? I am not sure.

We need a bottom-up approach. People are working by the rules, guidelines and principles, which are being enforced, but at local level they must get on with working in partnership with the many people who need to be involved in planning decisions, to get the best results for the community, whether we are talking about private or public sector activity. That is the key objective.

John Halliday: Local planning and the delivery of local plans should happen at local level. However, there is a disconnect between the strategic levels and I suspect that Transport Scotland is seeking to plug a gap by getting involved in activities, perhaps sometimes to the detriment of local development. In other words, national issues might be brought down to a local level, and the consequence can be a slowing up of the process. That is a warning sign.

Cathy Peattie: The previous panel said that there is an issue to do with there being 32 planning authorities. Mr Halliday said that there are many professionals who are keen to move things forward. There seems to be a lack of strategic overview or body that can facilitate what needs to happen, rather than just plug gaps. If there is good will and there are good plans and organisations, how do we ensure that people work together? It is clear to me and perhaps to other members that that is not happening, which is why we are having this inquiry. Will you help us? Give us some ideas.

John Halliday: Your question is really about system design. At one end, we have the local authority, which looks after the local base—that is sensible. At the other end, we have Transport Scotland. Neither has a statutory requirement—I will come back to the word "requirement"—to consult; there is guidance but no requirement. Whether we have something in between is a question of system design. Currently the regional transport bodies and the structure plan teams or strategic development planning authorities fill the structural level across a region. If you were to put in place requirements for connections between those bodies, you might get there.

The alternative is to get rid of the regional bodies. I would not agree with such an approach, which would require a national body to be put in place to join Transport Scotland and local authorities. I think that there is a very good case for regional planning at regional level, but the way to make it work is to put in requirements; good will is not sufficient when one is dealing with such issues.

15:45

Mark Savelli: I am glad to say that I can agree with John Halliday on that. I think that requirements are absolutely necessary. If I write a plan, I am accountable for delivering that plan. Too many plans are being written, and with many of them there is no accountability. For example, in cases in which people have said that they will prioritise public transport, we could require them, by statute, to provide evidence that they have done so and that they have not taken diametrically opposed action, as we have found in many cases. Such a requirement can be made by statute or by mandate.

We should also look at incentivising—at using carrots, not just sticks. I do not know whether Transport Scotland can offer carrots to local authorities to deliver on their local transport plans or to better integrate transport and land use planning. A number of things that could be done have already been mentioned. The industry could be brought into statutory planning consultation and proper weight could be given to the potential benefits of properly considering public transport. If all the talk about those measures is just words and does not carry much weight, and no one requires anything by way of outcome, it will not happen.

Cathy Peattie: Do you think that the provision of realistic funding and support for transport partnerships would help to progress that?

Mark Savelli: It would help if those partnerships could be facilitated or incentivised. In the present climate, money is not something that we can necessarily get a lot of. The issue is how we value the benefits of what the market could do if proper transport planning decisions were made. Perhaps we are discounting too much the benefit of what the commercial marketplace could provide if the right transport planning decisions were made.

For example, a tendered bus service would not have been necessary in Strathclyde business park if there had been a bit of planning and transport use co-ordination at the beginning of the design process. I spoke about infrastructure changes, which do not need to be highly expensive or to involve the building of big roads. Ensuring that the frequent bus services that run around Strathclyde business park can be accessed is a matter of common sense.

We have another example of the numerous little mistakes that are made, which George Mair might be able to say more about. The turning circle at Girvan railway station was built in such a way as to facilitate only cars. In an era in which everyone, in every plan, is talking about bus-rail integration, a turning circle has been built at a railway station that cannot even accommodate a bus.

If anything is to come out of today's meeting, let it be that the public transport industry is a statutory consultee on development plans. That should take place well before those plans come to fruition, and sufficient weighting should be given to the views of the industry, given that, in many cities, it provides such an important service to society at very little cost to the public purse.

The Convener: Before we move on, Alison McInnes has a brief supplementary.

Alison McInnes: It is on that point. You said that you would like your industry to be a statutory consultee on development plans and on large developments. I am interested in the suggestion, but is your industry resourced to be able to play such a role?

Mark Savelli: The size of the prize is so high that we could find resourcing to do that. As a rule of thumb, a 1 per cent decrease in car usage in a city can generate a 10 per cent increase in bus usage.

There is a need to destigmatise the bus and to embed use of it in people's worlds. The bus is becoming irrelevant in many people's worlds—I gave the example of the David Lloyd centre that I go to. Park and ride is a key part of the infrastructure solution that we are proposing for the medium term. Even with the existing alignments of bus routes, the unrestricted parking that exists around bus stops on the periphery of cities means that we could just paint a few lines on the road, perhaps put up some closed-circuit television cameras and invite people to park their cars there. We could tell them not to bother taking their car the final 3 miles, which is a bit of a hassle. They could enjoy their time on the bus. It might take them 5 minutes longer if they were unlucky or it might get them there 5 minutes earlier if there were bus lanes. We could say to people, "Instead of just sitting at the wheel, use your time constructively. On the bus, you can read or sleep—and you never know who you might meet!"

John Halliday: That was an impassioned plea from the private bus sector but, speaking as a dispassionate professional in the field, I think that we in Scotland still have a chance. Roads are getting congested but, by goodness, they will get more congested if the situation is left unfettered and continues as it is at the moment. If a lot more emphasis is put on providing the necessary powers, some of which will need to come through statutory consultation or will be statutory requirements, we will have a better chance. Ten or 15 years from now, those bus stops will not be able to be moved. We must think about the whole infrastructure if we want the UK bus industry to work properly.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: My questions are for the Confederation of Passenger Transport. Whenever the committee examines public transport provision, it is often told that central and local government have no real control over the issue and that that impacts on the effective integration of land use and transport planning. Do you think that that is a problem, and if not, why not?

George Mair: That brings us back to the question of partnership working that was mentioned earlier. Throughout Scotland there are many cases of bus operators and local authorities sitting down with each other and agreeing frequency of service, types and standards of vehicles that might be used and so on. We would love such discussions and negotiations to take place more frequently than they do at the moment, because partnership working is the way forward and can be achieved. In fact, we are working with the Scottish Government on guidance on competition issues that we hope will be released in the next few months and will provide operators and transport authorities with good information on, for example, headway management on common corridors. The clarification that we are seeking to make on such issues will enhance partnership working further in the years ahead.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am also interested in the sections of our communities for whom the market does not deliver. In a variety of places in my region of Edinburgh and the Lothians—I am sure that other members feel the same about their own areas—the market is tremendously successful in serving some residential and commercial developments but does not touch other parts at all, particularly after certain hours. How do we get past that aspect of transport planning and ensure that the market picks up some of our more socially disadvantaged people?

Mark Savelli: Earlier someone suggested that there was a lack of control. Actually, there is quite a lot of control over the provision of socially necessary bus services, with absolute power in the state or in local authorities for the provision of services where there is deemed to be social need. In the cities, where the market provides rather nicely, such control does not mean many extra miles.

In any case, we have to be careful about the concept of control, because markets usually know where the people are. For example, one bus service that was tendered to meet social need went out of our gate, spent a day on the road and came back without picking up anyone. One might say that those invisible passengers are the equivalent of the old European Union wine lakes and butter mountains. We do not want that to happen; we have to strike a balance, and George Mair is right to say that that will come through a proper and constructive partnership between the private and public sectors. We will be able to do so much if we can leverage the advantages of such partnership.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I disagree with you that the cities are well catered for, because there are certainly some areas of Edinburgh where those of us who depend on public transport have little or no opportunity to use it. I think that other members would agree with me. I am slightly sceptical that the market is the answer to everything in that regard.

On transport and land use, you seem to be telling the committee that the transport structure that we have is guaranteed to be able to deliver and that if only we consulted the private sector more, everything would be okay.

George Mair: It would be wrong of us to sit here and say that on every occasion we would get it right because of partnership working—of course we would not. However, we are pretty convinced that if we could get earlier intervention in the way that Mark Savelli suggested—if we were consulted and involved early on—greater success would be inevitable. The CPT and our members are not against development. Why would we be? If development is going to deliver potential new passengers, we want to be involved. What we find too often is that we get called in too late, no planning gain has been brought to the table in terms of pump priming services and no thought has been given to the infrastructure that might be needed to encourage buses to go into what are, in some locations, dead-end corrals, which is just ludicrous. Our early intervention and involvement could bring a lot more to the table, but we would never sit here and say that that would resolve every issue and ensure that every area was served with a bus.

There are two fantastic projects in the sustainable communities initiative—everyone would say that they are cracking. The design process lists a number of people who are going to be involved, but public transport is not even mentioned. That cannot be acceptable. We need to be there from the start to understand the development, to provide ideas and suggestions and to ensure that transport is involved from day one. Through that process, we would achieve better results than we are perhaps achieving now.

Cathy Peattie: Villages in my communities would be really upset to be called dead-end corrals. It seems to me that you are keen to get new passengers. I agree that we need to do that, but you do not seem particularly interested in the people who need the bus services. It is not enough to say that the bus went in but no one used it. Surely you have some responsibility. You

are saying that the private sector can deliver. Can you convince me of that, because I cannot see that happening in villages in my constituency where the private sector does not seem to be interested?

George Mair: Mark Savelli might respond, too, but I apologise if my terminology was perhaps inappropriate. What I meant was that quite often developments are a dead end and it is extremely difficult for public transport to serve them meaningfully. If people initially consulted public transport providers so that the development could be connected back into the main network, it would make life so much easier. I apologise if I have offended you—I did not mean to do that—but it is extremely difficult to serve some of those areas.

Mark Savelli: We are very hungry for all those passengers, so if there is a good commercial solution, we will absolutely chase them.

Cathy Peattie: Okay. We will wait and see.

The Convener: Leaving aside the public-private arguments, I think that you are arguing for an approach to housing development that would obviate some of the problems that this inquiry is designed to look at.

Mark Savelli: That goes for retail developments or other developments, too.

Alison McInnes: I want to follow up that final point before I ask my other questions. Are there any constraints in relation to, say, competition law that prevent your being consulted in the way that you would like to be, provided that local authorities talked to the CPT rather than—

16:00

George Mair: A sensible approach is to deal with operators on an individual basis. That is standard practice in many areas across Scotland. The guidance that the Scottish Government has said that it will issue will further help the discussions as things go forward.

Mark Savelli: We are talking about consultation on public transport issues not only with private sector operators but with public transport professionals generally. We have good people in the public sector, including consultants, who have good ideas on issues such as how big the bus turning circle at Girvan railway station should be.

John Halliday: If I picked up the question correctly, one issue was competition. I understand that consideration is being given to that area. It is absolutely crazy for public transport operators to be constrained by that strange word “integration” from working together for the good of the general public. There are very few cities in the UK where integration works well, although where it works well, it does so superbly. There are some good examples of integrated bus services actually working, but there are competition constraints around that. It is right and proper that policy makers should give good consideration to anticompetitive tendencies in the private sector but, provided that those can be dealt with, the general approach should be to encourage operators in the free market to work together to provide services. For example, one bus operator might like to work one patch, whereas another operator’s depot might be in a better location to service another area. We have not yet properly worked out integration.

Alison McInnes: I think you know that we heard evidence—you were in the room at the time—that many of the transport projects identified in local authority plans are speculative or out of date. What is your view on the public transport-related content of development plans? I know that you have good involvement in regional transport planning, but is the situation different in development planning? Clearly, the plea that we heard earlier was for greater involvement. I take it that you do not think that the content is appropriate.

Mark Savelli: We do not have the involvement that we think is desirable. What do you mean by “speculative”?

Alison McInnes: The witnesses from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said that such plans contain projects that are ill thought out or not properly funded and costed.

Mark Savelli: I think that I said this earlier, but I will repeat it: the ability of the market to provide excellent transport for well-planned developments is perhaps discounted. As was said earlier, planners want a lot of control. The developer of the well-planned development will have kept in mind the facilitation of commercial bus operation. George Mair mentioned that earlier. Why does a development need to be located down a dead end? Why cannot it be on the line of route of an existing bus service or integrated with a new park-and-ride facility? There seems not to be a full appreciation of what the market can do for a well-planned development.

Rob Gibson: My question is for the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation. We are interested in looking at co-ordination in relation to transport and development plans. You have given us food for thought in saying that they are not well integrated. How can we better join up such plans?

John Halliday: At the risk of repeating myself, I say again that if directions that are given at local, regional and national levels place a requirement on officers, we might get there. There is a lot of good will. The gap happens when there is a

disconnect. There is a lot of consideration, and then in the minutiae or detail of the plans as they are formulated, the other frameworks within which they need to sit—the national or regional contexts—tend to get diluted.

The other issue is monitoring. I suspect that we are quite good at developing lovely plans, and then that is it for a period of time. The plans look good, but what happens after five or 10 years? I suspect that that is a danger of this fast-moving world in which we live. What are the actual outcomes? Have we delivered on the objectives that we set out? In the long run, are we putting the money where we want to get the best outcomes? Do not get me wrong; I think that I could point to where the monitoring is in relation to all those questions. I am talking about the application of monitoring and a requirement for authorities to report on outcomes in three to five years' time.

Rob Gibson: We have strategic local plans that are going to operate on a five-year rolling basis, so transport plans should be on the same cycle.

John Halliday: Absolutely. We need to integrate the framework of all the bodies involved and the documents that direct them. In our written submission, we make the observation that we have seven regional transport partnerships and four regional development planning agencies. That might be a slight disconnect, and the committee might want to consider whether there should be a bit of alignment there. I go back to the point that there is a very good case for having strategic authorities for our strategic areas, but they really need to be integrated. Land use and transport are two sides of the same coin.

Rob Gibson: You have underlined your points very clearly indeed, and I thank you for that.

I come back to the question of freight, logistics and so on. Do you want to add anything to what we heard earlier? Do local authority transport departments ensure that their plans and policies meet needs in that regard?

John Halliday: I hesitate to answer, simply because I do not like to put words in the mouths of local authorities. From my observations, those departments consider such needs, but one of the strange things is that freight is an unknown factor for a large part of the transport industry, because we have been so focused on passenger transport and passenger movements, and on cars, buses and trains. However, certainly in recent years, I have become a lot more engaged with freight, and that has opened up quite a vista of problems and issues.

I might be able to give the committee a little bit of advice about one of the problems with freight. We do not know much about what freight goes where. I cannot say who it is for, but I have recently been doing a project in which I was charged with getting a lot of data on that question, but it was incredibly difficult. I have to say that I more or less failed to get detailed knowledge about what freight goes where. How can we plan any system if we do not know what movements are happening? We have a good handle on people movement and on vehicle movement, but we do not know what freight goes into which lorry and what its destination is.

We have a lot of data for the national level, but perhaps Transport Scotland could require from companies, gather and provide good, sound data. I am sure that mechanisms could be worked out to do that. In that way, we might start to understand better where the hubs should go and what purpose they might have.

That is an important point because one of the issues that is under consideration is the role of vehicles and fuel. The damage that a lorry does is exponential when compared with that of a car. We could run cars for ever and the roads would be fine, but lorries and heavy goods vehicles damage the roads. What about the role of our cities in relation to electric vehicles? There is a huge vista of opportunities but we cannot grasp them until we have the data.

Rob Gibson: Will we be able to get information about where lorries with freight go, bearing in mind commercial confidentiality?

John Halliday: That is the key issue. I think that there are mechanisms that can be used. That is probably a role for the likes of Transport Scotland. If confidential matters are properly cloaked, there should be no good reason why information cannot be aggregated in the planning system. People such as me and consultants who are employed by regional and local authorities could then tap into that information. We would not need to know what an individual company transports from A to B, but we could tap into aggregated data to allow us to plan.

Rob Gibson: There has been quite a bit of talk about the need to integrate pedestrians' and cyclists' needs. Do you have any further thoughts about whether due regard is paid to that when the transport elements of new developments are being considered? Could the situation be improved?

John Halliday: Although we quite often bash ourselves, there is no doubt that many new developments in recent years have shown the right way forward. Earlier, we heard from the representative bodies the good reasons why that has happened. House builders and developers are seeing commercial advantage and pounds and pence—after all, it is a commercial world—in providing a good, well-connected environment that is attractive to people. We need to keep

hammering home the health benefits of all the softer issues.

I talked about travel planning. It dismayed me a little to think that travel plans are only for businesses. Can we not encourage development travel plans so that households are given opportunities? We need local authority mechanisms and perhaps mechanisms at the structure plan level to help developments to lock in benefits that are accrued right from the start. That is the key issue and one of the themes of my written evidence.

The Convener: What about training and career development for people who work in design or engineering in planning and transport? Is there enough cross-disciplinary work? Are there enough opportunities for people to understand one another's work and priorities, to talk the same language and so on?

John Halliday: Things are certainly a lot better in 2010 than they were 10 or 15 years ago. There is a better broad understanding across the disciplines. However, a theme of our written submission is that an education process is needed.

Transport planning and land planning have quite different backgrounds. One is far more to do with engineering; the other is potentially more arts based. The science of transport planning is very advanced. We now talk about minute differences in travel behaviour and what drives decisions that people make at junctions, and we broadly know how people move around. It is a matter of putting everything together in a modelling environment and taking out the results. Despite what some people might think about transport models, they are very good at predicting movements.

That is not really true for land use models. Only the other day, I was reflecting that the modern land use models that are being built, which integrate with transport models, are probably still in their first generation of development. The science is still fairly young. Cross-fertilisation will be better achieved in the long run through better integration and sharing of knowledge through educational establishments and also perhaps by a requirement in the planning process.

16:15

The Convener: Does anything else need to be done to improve that way of working, as well as the understanding that you mention? You might shoot me down in flames on this, but it seems to me that planners can write all the plans that they like, which might involve sustainable communities, support for local businesses in order to reduce demand for transport, a reduction in demand for transport in general and so on, but there is still a bit of a mindset on the transport side that transport is about moving people around more. Do you agree that transport policy is seen as being about meeting people's need to move around rather than reducing that need?

John Halliday: That is a fair observation, and education is important in that regard. However, as I have said elsewhere, transport is not just a derived demand; it is part and parcel of the land use function. From a land use planning perspective, it is important to appreciate that transport can choke off land use, in the long term; it has a direct influence on land use. Equally, from a transport perspective, if land use is not properly dealt with in the long term, the transport systems will be compromised. More and more people are beginning to understand those points, so I have some hope for the future.

The Convener: Do we need to start thinking of transport in the same way as we think about issues such as energy and waste management, which is that there is a finite capacity in the system, if it is going to work properly, and that we must therefore think about how we manage that capacity, rather than thinking that we can just build in ever more capacity?

John Halliday: I have been paying close attention to the debate about money, how we can cater for growth, whether growth is a necessary requirement of our way of life and how we can manage growth over the long term. That debate will run for a good while yet. While we are in a resource-constrained era, there will be a lot of pressure to get best value out of our existing resources. I do not know whether that answers your question.

The Convener: It has brought us on to a topic about which I would like to speak for another hour or two but members will be glad to hear that we do not have time for that today.

I thank our panel members for their time and for answering our questions. We will continue to hear evidence on our inquiry over the next couple of weeks, and we will publish a report after that.

Meeting closed at 16:17.

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