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Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 30 May 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 May 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

General Question Time

Geese (Economic Impacts)

1. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to minimise the negative economic impact on farmers and crofters of the presence of large numbers of geese in the Outer and Inner Hebrides and the northern isles. (S4O-02185)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): As the member may have seen on the recent television programme, "Hebrides: Islands on the Edge", geese can be a wonderful spectacle. However, I recognise the impact that geese have on farmers and crofters in certain areas of Scotland. I have met farming representatives from Islay to discuss their concerns, and a Scottish Natural Heritage project officer is currently undertaking research on Islay to evaluate options for management of the impact of geese on the island.

We are working with stakeholders including farmers, crofters and their representatives, as well as environmental non-governmental organisations, to achieve a long-term balance between our conservation obligations, the needs of sustainable agriculture and value for money.

The Scottish Government funds a number of goose-management schemes and other initiatives in the affected areas. We have committed more than £1 million in 2013-14 to support management of geese, and we are developing a number of initiatives, including trialling adaptive management techniques.

Mike MacKenzie: I agree with the minister about the wonderful television programme that he mentioned. I am sure that he shares my concern that it was not broadcast to a wider audience across the whole United Kingdom.

The minister will be aware that farmers are reporting problems in use of steel shotgun pellets, which often wound rather than kill geese, and otherwise merely scare geese from one farm to another, and that they would, therefore, prefer to use conventional lead pellets. Can the minister suggest any solutions to that problem?

Paul Wheelhouse: I accept that we need to avoid merely scaring geese from one farm to

another or, worse, shooting and merely wounding birds.

When problems with steel shotgun pellets were first reported, Scottish Natural Heritage organised a workshop with local farmers to explore the problem. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation was commissioned to provide a report on the practicalities of non-lead alternatives. The report concluded that, although it is reasonable to use steel shot at shorter distances, longer ranges require that steel shot be used with specialised shotguns, or that more expensive alternatives such as tungsten, bismuth, HEVI-Shot or lead shot loads be used when that is legally permitted, as would be the case on non-wetland sites. SNH subsequently commissioned BASC to organise a practical workshop with local farmers and shooters who are participating in the pilots, to explore their capacity to use alternatives to lead and steel shot. That will be undertaken before the next pilot starts.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have recently chaired meetings in Shetland with the agriculture industry, Shetland Islands Council and environmental bodies including RSPB Scotland, all of which agree that the population of geese in Shetland is growing too rapidly and needs to be addressed. Will the minister ensure that the agencies for which he is responsible bring their energy to bear on the issue so that we can find a proper way of reducing the goose population to a level that does not have the kind of economic effect that he mentioned in his earlier answer?

Paul Wheelhouse: I am certainly happy to engage my officials in considering the particular problems that exist in Shetland, and to engage with Tavish Scott on them.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister will be aware of the extent of the concern in the crofting counties. Will he pledge to meet the Scottish Crofting Foundation and NFUS Scotland on the subject?

Paul Wheelhouse: I have already met the NFUS, but I am happy to do so again, and to meet the Scottish Crofting Federation, if that will be of assistance to its members.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The minister will be aware of the meeting that I organised between his predecessor and the Orkney branch of the NFUS in spring last year, as a result of which an adaptive management scheme was put in place, albeit that it was a little later than was hoped for.

At that time, the possibility of using decoys was discussed, as well as the potential to sell the meat of at least some of the geese that are killed. Can the minister update Parliament on either or both of those aspects?

Paul Wheelhouse: Jamie McGrigor will be aware that we have put in place measures in Orkney to tackle the greylag goose population and that we have authorised the lethal control of 5,000 greylag geese in the Orkney islands. We are engaged in discussions on how we will deal with the carcasses. I am aware that there is great sensitivity about the perceived waste of the carcasses that are left after such control measures have been taken.

Independence (Benefits to Edinburgh)

2. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits would accrue to Edinburgh as the capital city as a result of Scottish independence. (S4O-02186)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): Independence offers benefits not just to Edinburgh as the capital city of an independent country, but to Scotland as a whole. The best future for our country, including its capital city, can be achieved only with the transfer to Scotland of the levers that we need to make the right decisions to generate economic growth and a fairer society for all.

Marco Biagi: Edinburgh is currently home to just 11 international consulates, whereas Dublin hosts 61, with more than 300 accredited diplomats and hundreds of local staff all employed by other governments contributing tens of millions of euros in wider economic impact. Does the minister agree that the likely expansion of the consular corps in Edinburgh could mean an economic windfall for the city, as well as making the capital even more outward looking on the global stage?

Humza Yousaf: Marco Biagi makes an excellent point. The consular corps in Scotland does an excellent job, wherever staff are based, and I record my thanks to them.

A number of consulates have been in Scotland for a long time. The Danish consulate recently hosted a reception to mark its 250th anniversary and the Norwegians have had a presence here for 200 years. The number of consulates has been increasing, with recent additions including the permanent Romanian consulate, which was set up in December 2012, and an honorary Croatian consulate.

We expect that, with independence, we will see a significant expansion in the number of diplomatic missions and the scale of diplomatic representation in Scotland. The benefit to the Scottish economy of the creation of those additional jobs is likely to be incredibly significant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): If we have brief questions and answers, we will get through everyone's questions.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the small number of extra diplomats—which would be matched by the expense of Scotland having to pay for diplomats abroad—would be far outweighed by the threat to financial services, among other jobs in Edinburgh, as a result of independence?

Humza Yousaf: Whether in respect of the economic levers that could help to protect us against damaging United Kingdom policies such as the bedroom tax, or the economic levers for growth that would, for example, allow us to reduce corporation tax to incentivise businesses to come to Edinburgh, I encourage Malcolm Chisholm to look on the bright side of life and to see the glass as being half full, as opposed to half empty.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Edinburgh relies heavily on financial services. When will the Scottish Government's plans for financial services regulation be published?

Humza Yousaf: There will be a white paper on financial services regulation later this year.

Lothian NHS Board (Discussions)

3. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with NHS Lothian. (S4O-02187)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Scottish ministers and Government officials regularly meet representatives of all national health service boards, including NHS Lothian, to discuss a wide range of matters of current interest to local people.

Sarah Boyack: Is the cabinet secretary concerned about the serious capacity issues at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh, where in March one in five patients waited for more than four hours in the accident and emergency unit? Given that the ERI could, due to staff shortages, soon be taking in extra patients from St John's hospital, what assurance can the cabinet secretary give that the staff, who are working flat out, will be given the resources that they urgently need in order to serve patients to the best of their ability?

Alex Neil: We are not only concerned but have taken action, along with NHS Lothian, to deal with the accident and emergency situation throughout the NHS Lothian area. Additional consultants and nurses have been recruited, which will continue. The fundamental strategic problem with capacity issues in NHS Lothian is a result of the fact that, when the previous Administration planned the construction of the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh, it grossly underestimated growth in the population of Edinburgh by 20 per cent. We are now having to deal with failures resulting from decisions that were made when Sarah Boyack was a minister.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston)

(Lab): Has the cabinet secretary discussed with NHS Lothian or any other health boards the recent shortage of liothyronine, on which many thyroid patients in Lothian and throughout Scotland are dependent for survival? Will he look into the reasons why one company has a monopoly on supply of the drug, at what happened to stop the drug's production and at why the NHS is, it seems, being charged a massively inflated price compared to the price abroad?

Alex Neil: Elaine Smith raises a very valid point. As she knows, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is the responsible body for the safety, equality and efficacy of all United Kingdom-licensed medicines. On 21 May, it issued advice to healthcare professionals regarding alternative arrangements for a continued supply of triiodothyronine, or T3. The issue is very much a reserved matter, particularly in relation to pricing, but I share Elaine Smith's frustrations about the inflated prices. We are taking up the issue with the relevant authorities at United Kingdom level.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): In his discussions with NHS Lothian, did the cabinet secretary make it clear that any proposal to reduce 24/7 doctor-led accident and emergency services at St John's hospital will be completely unacceptable to the people of West Lothian?

Alex Neil: We have invested in St John's and I have made it clear—and Tim Davison, who is the chief executive of NHS Lothian, has made it clear—that we are totally committed to 24/7 good-quality services. I absolutely deplore the scaremongering by Neil Findlay and his Labour colleagues about the future of St John's. It is highly irresponsible of them.

Public Procurement Contracts (Small and Micro Businesses)

4. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that public procurement contracts are open to small and micro businesses. (S4O-02188)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): As part of our drive to achieve sustainable economic growth, we have quite significantly increased the ease of access to public sector contracts, especially through the introduction of the public contracts Scotland service, which provides suppliers with free access to Scottish contracting opportunities.

In 2012, the PCS service issued more than 11,500 contract opportunities. Of the businesses that won contracts through the PCS service, 82 per cent were registered as small and medium-

sized enterprises. Information from the service indicates that the percentage of suppliers that were awarded contracts and which are registered as either small or micro businesses has increased from 55 per cent in 2011 to 61 per cent in 2012.

Alison Johnstone: I am pleased to hear the cabinet secretary's enthusiasm on the issue and I welcome that progress, but it is important to focus on the value, rather than the number, of contracts that are going to small companies. I am concerned that recent answers to my parliamentary questions suggest that, although the number may have increased, the value of public contracts going to small and micro companies fell from 26 per cent to 18 per cent between 2010 and 2012. What action is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that that decrease does not become a trend? Can she advise whether, within European Union rules, the Scottish Government can set an aspirational target for small-business procurement?

Nicola Sturgeon: I welcome Alison Johnstone's support on the issue and I reassure her that a key objective of our procurement reform agenda is increased access to opportunities for Scottish businesses, in particular for small, medium-sized and micro businesses.

In my answer I quoted some statistics from the PCS service, but let me also give some statistics from our spend data, which comes from the procurement information hub. I am also happy to provide more information in writing on this.

If we look at micro businesses, small businesses and medium-sized businesses, we see that about 46 per cent of the approximately £9 billion annual spend on public sector procurement goes to SMEs, which account for about 37 per cent of Scotland's turnover. I am not standing here saying that we are doing well enough—particularly for micro businesses, whose share we want to increase—but our performance already compares well with the United Kingdom figure of about 25 per cent. That gives us a good base to build on; I assure Alison Johnstone that build on that is exactly what we intend to do, which is why we are taking forward such an ambitious programme of public procurement reform.

North Sea Prawn Landings (Decline)

5. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the reasons are for the reported sharp decline in North Sea prawn landings. (S4O-02189)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): There is, as yet, no conclusive explanation for the reduction in the availability of prawns in the North Sea. Scottish Government scientists advise that the reduction may either be part of a longer-term trend or is

being affected by short-term factors, including the recent cold winters.

Given the £82 million value of the nephrops catch to the Scottish fishing fleet and the importance of the species within Scotland's marine environment, the recent reduction is clearly a concerning development. The Scottish Government continues to work closely with the fishing industry to assess the impact of declining landings and the wider significance of the apparent decline in prawn numbers for the marine environment.

Angus MacDonald: It is clear that the North Sea nephrops fishery is well managed and sustainable. However, with prices for whole trawler-caught prawns at around £4,000 per tonne, which is 17 per cent below 2012 prices, what can the Scottish Government do to encourage new marketing initiatives aimed at consumers in the United Kingdom, given the reduced demand from the southern European market?

Paul Wheelhouse: Angus MacDonald is right, and the people of Scotland should have the opportunity to buy fresh high-quality Scottish seafood right on their doorsteps. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment met industry representatives only two weeks ago to discuss the issue, and agreed to build on the work that is already under way.

Since April 2012, the Scottish Government has invested more than £0.5 million in ways to promote our seafood. That support has included £90,000 for the UK food services project to develop our seafood service sector—which is a completely untapped market—and to map the opportunities in the sector, to develop networks with buyers and to provide support and educational programmes. We have also provided £360,000 to support the new and emerging markets project in order to maximise opportunities for seafood in emerging markets, and £25,000 to support a market intelligence project. Since April 2012, we have supported with £100,000 the seafood in schools project, which teaches children about the benefits of eating seafood.

We should not forget the work of the Scottish seafood partnership, which the cabinet secretary established last year. It seeks ways to add value to the seafood supply chain, and is due to report later this summer.

Independent Television Production Sector (Assistance)

6. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it provides to the independent television production sector in Scotland. (S4O-02190)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):

Creative Scotland has announced the commencement of its £4 million film and television funding programme for 2013-14, which is now open for applications.

Other assistance has included on-going advocacy by the Scottish Government in relation to raising the level of network production in Scotland, which translates into increased opportunities for the independent television production sector. From a low base in 2006 in which 2.6 per cent of network production was sourced from Scotland, the sector now produces 4.9 per cent of the television content that is watched on screens throughout the United Kingdom.

Patricia Ferguson: The minister will be aware that I have raised that question on a number of occasions with the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs.

I am still of the opinion, through conversations with people in the independent television sector, that there is not enough support for the sector. That is certainly the view that the sector has put to me, and its representatives have also raised issues about their ability to access information on funding through Creative Scotland.

I note the commencement of the new £4 million film and television production fund, but I would be interested to know what proportion of that fund will be available specifically to the television sector.

Humza Yousaf: As Patricia Ferguson knows, that fund is open to the independent sector for applications.

I agree that more can always be done. The cabinet secretary's announcement last week on assistance for a possible film studio—which would be of great benefit and use to the sector—was broadly welcomed. Furthermore, I assure Patricia Ferguson that, following the hoped-for new appointment of the chief executive of Creative Scotland, that project will be a priority for the organisation.

I am happy to keep Patricia Ferguson updated on further developments, particularly on the film studio project, which will be a welcome and encouraging step in the right direction to support the independent television sector in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has not been lodged, and an explanation has been provided.

Group B Streptococcus Screening Programme

8. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it

will introduce a group B streptococcus screening programme for pregnant women. (S4O-02192)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is given independent advice by the United Kingdom national screening committee. In November 2012, the NSC undertook a review of the policy for group B streptococcus, using all the available medical evidence on the risks and benefits of screening all pregnant women. The committee agreed that a national screening programme for group B streptococcus should not be introduced. The NSC will continue to keep screening for group B streptococcus under review, and will consider the policy again in 2015-16—or earlier, if significant new evidence emerges.

Margaret McDougall: Is the cabinet secretary aware of the tragic case of baby Lola Young from Kilwinning, who died after Crosshouse hospital failed to pick up the fact that she had a group B streptococcus infection?

It is estimated that, in the United Kingdom, 340 babies will develop early-onset GBS infection each year, and one in 10 will die. I hear what the cabinet secretary says with regard to the fact that the decision has been taken and the issue will be kept under review. However, routine testing for streptococcus B is carried out in America and Australia.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must come to the point.

Margaret McDougall: Given that a test costs approximately £15, will the cabinet secretary at least consider whether NHS Scotland should offer the option of a test to pregnant women, to ensure that no other family has to endure the loss of their baby from streptococcus B? Will the cabinet secretary meet me and the baby's parents to discuss the matter?

Alex Neil: I am always happy to meet a member to discuss a constituency case. Obviously, I am aware of the case that Margaret McDougall cites and all our thoughts are with the family.

The concerns that the NCS raised regarding screening of all pregnant women followed the submission of many hundreds of pages of evidence, as well as consultation of experts and the clinical community throughout the UK. Its conclusion was that national screening would not prevent all deaths and disability from EOGBS. The potential harm that could be caused by administration of antibiotics to many thousands of pregnant women was a major factor in its decision, given the very low risk of harm from the disease.

The NCS has considered the matter in a great deal of detail. The balance came down in favour of

not screening all women, because that would not be appropriate.

I am obviously happy to meet Margaret McDougall to discuss the issue and to fill her in on any more details that would be helpful to her and her constituents.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01418)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Does the First Minister think that George Osborne has cut corporation tax enough or is he urging the Chancellor of the Exchequer to go further?

The First Minister: George Osborne is, of course, following the footsteps of Gordon Brown, who as chancellor cut corporation tax.

The Scottish Government has modelled the results of a corporation tax rate in Scotland 3 percentage points below that prevailing in the United Kingdom. The results of that show an additional 27,000 jobs over the medium term and an increase in Scottish gross domestic product of more than 1 per cent.

When it controls corporation tax, this Government's policy should be to set a competitive rate and then collect the corporation tax. The policy of successive UK Governments is to set the corporation tax rate and then not collect it, which seems a strange thing to do.

Johann Lamont: That answer sounded like one of Mike Russell's bus trips from Campbeltown.

Gordon Brown indeed said that he would cut corporation tax when it could be shown that we could afford it. The difference is that Alex Salmond says that, if we were independent now, he would cut corporation tax 3 percentage points more than George Osborne whether it makes sense or not.

However much George Osborne cuts taxes for his mates in banking, Alex Salmond would cut them further. However deep Osborne could be seen to be in the pockets of corporate greed, Alex Salmond would be that bit deeper. He says to Google, Amazon, Starbucks and anyone who wants to evade tax that they should come to Scotland because there will be less tax to evade.

If Alex Salmond would set corporation tax 3 percentage points lower than whatever rate George Osborne set, does it not follow that he would have to cut schools and hospitals deeper than George Osborne, too?

The First Minister: I will introduce a number of corrections for Johann Lamont.

Gordon Brown did not say that he would cut corporation tax; he cut it and then boasted about doing it, saying that it was one of the great achievements of his term as Chancellor of the Exchequer. I mention that merely because it does not put Johann Lamont in a strong position to complain about the policy of cutting corporation tax when Gordon Brown did that in office as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Johann Lamont should have referred to my first answer. I thought that an argument whereby we would have a 3 percentage point differential in the rate of corporation tax between Scotland and the rest of the UK would be a good one for Scotland because we have analysed it and the analysis said that it would create 27,000 jobs and an increase in GDP of more than 1 per cent over the medium term.

I also said that it seemed to me that the task is to set a competitive rate of corporation tax and then collect it. I know that this will come as a surprise to Johann Lamont, but the non-collection of corporation tax across a range of companies did not start under George Osborne as chancellor; it started when the Labour Party was in government. Our policy of setting a competitive rate of corporation tax and then collecting it is substantially superior to the Labour-Tory policy of setting a rate of corporation tax and then forgetting to collect it from key companies.

Johann Lamont: I think that we have come to a pretty pass when the First Minister imagines that he is in a strong position on the issue, given that response to the question that I asked him.

If the First Minister is in a strong position, perhaps we should ask who agrees with his corporation tax policy. We know that he agrees with it and we assume, by their silence, that his back benchers also agree with it. [*Interruption.*] Yes—the only place where there never appears to be any debate is on the Scottish National Party back benches.

However, we know that neither Scottish business nor the unions support the First Minister's position. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the nation's accountants—the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland—do not support it. This week, we found out that the Scottish Council for Development and Industry does not support it. Not even the chair of the yes campaign supports it.

Members will be glad to know that the First Minister does have one supporter—his tax exile Jim McColl. Does the First Minister agree with his one supporter, Jim McColl, that in an independent Scotland capital gains tax should be abolished?

The First Minister: I correct Johann Lamont on the SCDI report. I refer her to page 22, which points out that a low rate of corporation tax could have

“a positive effect in attracting further investment to Scotland.”

If it had a positive effect in attracting investment to Scotland and if, as the Scottish Government’s analysis suggests, it would create 27,000 jobs in Scotland and would over the medium term increase Scotland’s GDP, I presume that the Labour Party would not oppose it. The Labour Party would not seriously oppose creating 27,000 extra jobs in Scotland or increasing Scotland’s GDP. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Order.

The First Minister: If, as the modelling shows, it is correct that those things will happen, that is a substantially good policy, especially since the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer implemented a cut in corporation tax when he was in office.

As for the attack on Scotland’s leading job creator—Jim McColl—if the Labour Party and the no campaign are reduced to attacking serious figures in Scottish job creation and entrepreneurship, that shows exactly why 500 businesses have signed up to the yes business campaign over the past two weeks.

Johann Lamont: The most important word there was probably “if”.

The First Minister calls to his defence his own figures, which some of us might think do not really stand up to scrutiny. The fact of the matter is that the SCDI said:

“There is no great desire to participate in a race to the lowest tax environment”.

We know that the First Minister thinks of himself as a talented economist; not only that, he likes quoting real economists, too. How many times has he told the chamber about his adviser, Joseph Stiglitz, and all the Nobel prizes that he has won? What does Joseph Stiglitz say about the policy? Just a month ago, he said:

“Some of you have been told that lowering tax rates on corporations will lead to more investment. The fact is that’s not true. It is just a gift to the corporations increasing inequality in our society.”

I agree with the Nobel prize-winning Joseph Stiglitz and the businesses, the unions and the professionals, who all say that the First Minister is wrong. Will the First Minister tell us who is right?

Members: Gordon Brown!

Johann Lamont: I cannot believe that SNP back benchers are calling in aid Gordon Brown, when I am telling the First Minister that his own

economic adviser said that the policy was wrong. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Can we have a bit of calm, please?

Johann Lamont: Will the First Minister tell us who is right? Is it the First Minister, the ex-Royal Bank of Scotland economist and renowned adviser—nay, pen friend—to Fred Goodwin, or is it his Nobel laureate economic adviser, Professor Joseph Stiglitz, who says that he is wrong?

The First Minister: Johann Lamont cannot really divorce herself from Gordon Brown, because he is now the leader of the Labour no campaign, which is of course separate from the Tory-Labour no campaign led by Alistair Darling.

Joseph Stiglitz is indeed his name. He is a Nobel laureate. He is on the Council of Economic Advisers. He has pointed out that the vast disparity in income levels in the United Kingdom under the Labour Party is not an efficient way to run an economy. He is part of the fiscal commission, which recommended the post-independence sterling area. I am delighted that Johann Lamont is now going to accept the wisdom of Joseph Stiglitz and the other Nobel laureates on the commission.

The important thing about the policy is to set a competitive rate of corporation tax to benefit the Scottish economy, and then to collect it. That is a substantially better position than the position under the Labour Party—and now under George Osborne—where corporation tax is not collected. Having a competitive rate for a tax that is collected is somewhat better than having a rate of tax that is not collected.

If Gordon Brown implemented that policy, I do not think that Johann Lamont can divorce herself from it. It is good for the Scottish economy, and it is going to generate jobs and investment in Scotland, as is contained in the SCDI report. If we have based our policies on what is best for jobs, investment, growth and the Scottish people, that is why this Government is in office and why Johann Lamont’s party is over on the Opposition benches.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-01420)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No plans in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: Last year, people were shocked by the Mortonhall baby ashes scandal. We now know that the issues that arose in Edinburgh have spread to Glasgow and Aberdeen. Calls from the increasing number of affected parents for a public inquiry are growing ever

louder. Will the First Minister order a full public inquiry?

The First Minister: As Ruth Davidson knows, the position is that the Edinburgh inquiry is proceeding, and there is co-ordination from councils across Scotland to give an explanation. That is an effective way to proceed, but the cabinet secretary is always prepared to listen to positive suggestions on the matter. The inquiry in Edinburgh is proceeding, and there is confidence in how it is being conducted. Other councils have now responded sympathetically and with understanding to the concerns of parents across Scotland.

The issue is being handled sensitively. If Ruth Davidson wants to make the case for why a national public inquiry would benefit the bereaved parents, we will of course look at that. However, there is a big argument for proceeding with the inquiry in the way in which it is now being carried out, for the sake of speed, in order to give people the answers that they want and so that we can have the correct policies, which have now been released in guidelines across the country.

Ruth Davidson: I appreciate the steps that have been taken, but they are increasingly being overtaken by events. The Edinburgh inquiry is indeed proceeding. There is also Lord Bonomy's commission, although it has no direct representation from parents, despite their being promised as much. On Friday, Lord Bonomy said that parents would be able to make written submissions until 19 July. However, it has emerged this week that the independent audit of what went on in Aberdeen will not be presented until 24 September. That means that affected parents in one area of the country will have no voice in the process.

I agree with the First Minister that new protections have to be put in place, but parents are asking for answers about what happened to their children, and the commission is not designed to provide that. In light of the new information, the only way to get what everybody in the Parliament wants, which is justice for the affected families across Scotland, is a full public inquiry. Will the First Minister please reconsider?

The First Minister: I will correct a couple of things that Ruth Davidson said. The Bonomy review's purpose is to get proper procedures in place, which we think is the overwhelming priority. Procedures should be put in place now that should have been but were not in place in some local authority areas. There should be no delay in correcting that position.

I do not think that Ruth Davidson is correct about parental representation for the Bonomy review. I can give her information about that—she

should be aware of it. That review is not the same thing as the investigation that is taking place in Edinburgh or the measures that might take place elsewhere. Those investigations are intended to look at the past and find out exactly what happened.

There is a role for what Lord Bonomy is doing, which is to correct the position right now to ensure that, in the future, procedures are correctly applied, and not to wait for the inquiry to recommend that, because it is pretty clear on the basis of the evidence that exists what the correct procedures should be. That should be done. We will by all means look at the arguments on the nature of the inquiry, but there is a substantial advantage in proceeding as quickly as we are doing and meeting the concerns of parents and the wider community.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Jenny Marra has a constituency supplementary.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of reports that police staff without the appropriate qualifications have been taking fingerprints in Dundee and Arbroath. Has he had reports of that happening anywhere else in Scotland? Will he reassure people in my region that the review will be conducted as swiftly and as thoroughly as possible, as there is a grave danger that evidence could be dismissed in serious cases because of that breach of protocol?

The First Minister: Yes, I can provide that reassurance. The review will be conducted as swiftly as possible, and any lessons that are learned from it will be applied across the country. I hope that Jenny Marra will accept that reassurance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Neil Findlay has a supplementary question.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): BAM Construction and Balfour Beatty are contractors that are bidding to build the new Edinburgh sick kids hospital. Those two companies have been up to their necks in the blacklisting of more than 3,000 United Kingdom and 500 Scottish construction workers. Will the First Minister use his influence with those companies to get them to own up to what they have done, apologise to those involved and agree to pay compensation for ruined lives and careers? Does he agree that, if those companies do not do that, they should not be awarded any public sector contracts?

The First Minister: I do not know whether the member is familiar with the points that I made at the Scottish Trades Union Congress conference, but I am happy to send him a copy of the remarks. I addressed in particular what we believe that the Government can do in terms of public sector

contracts to ensure that blacklisting is eradicated from the Scottish labour market.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01416)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: Scottish National Party MSPs say that they are prepared to back the closure of their local court in return for a new justice centre for their area. The courts at Cupar, Peebles, Dingwall, Arbroath, Stonehaven and Rothesay have histories that stretch back 500 years. With only 12 days before the Parliament decides those courts' future, will the First Minister tell those back benchers when and where the new justice centres will be built?

The First Minister: SNP MSPs, including constituency representatives, are making strong representations on behalf of their constituents, as we would expect them to. If the Liberal Democrats had employed that approach, perhaps they would have more constituency members than they have.

Willie Rennie: I expected some sort of explanation about the new justice centres, but nothing was forthcoming. It is ridiculous that the First Minister does not have worked-out plans for the justice centres. He cannot give us even one single date and one location for those justice centres, which his back benchers say will come. He already has a justice centre in Cupar, but he plans to shut it down. He already has one, but that is what he will do.

Last week, we heard from the Scottish Court Service that more courts could close before any justice centres are built. This week, the Law Society of Scotland spoke out.

The clock is ticking. There are 12 days for SNP members of the Justice Committee to make a big decision on whether to back their Government or back their community—whether to back 500 years of local service against the Government's cavalier and chaotic approach. Would it not be safer for SNP members to stand up for their communities and reject the First Minister's court closures?

The First Minister: Or alternatively, should they represent their constituents and look for the most effective way to ensure justice across Scotland?

I know that Willie Rennie lives in a world in which the public expenditure restrictions imposed by his colleagues at Westminster in conjunction with the Tories do not exist and that he likes to believe that public services in Scotland should somehow be immune from Westminster cutbacks,

but there is nobody in Scotland who does not understand the position. That is exactly why the Liberal Democrats used to have a football team in the Parliament and now have a subs bench.

Air Services (Highlands and Islands Airports)

4. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what economic value the Scottish Government places on services from Highlands and Islands airports to hub airports with worldwide connections. (S4F-01423)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond):

Maintaining capacity on services from Highland and Islands airports with worldwide connections is essential for that area's economic development. The effect of the United Kingdom Government's air passenger duty has been amply demonstrated by Flybe's recent announcement of the sale of its slots at Gatwick. The chairman of Flybe, Jim French, said:

"with the absence of a regional aviation strategy and the government's penalistic and ludicrous policy of charging Air Passenger Duty (APD) on both legs of a domestic flight, I'm afraid it's inevitable that high frequency services from the UK's regions will ultimately be squeezed out".

That is a significant warning statement, and it underlines the absolute necessity for air passenger duty to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the First Minister recall that, in 2008, air services from Inverness to Heathrow were ended? In light of that, is it not important to say that

"Protecting the links from Inverness to Gatwick is now even more essential"?

Of course, those are not my words but those of the local MP, Danny Alexander, in 2008. Is it not rank hypocrisy that the local MP had one opinion in 2008 but has done nothing in government to support air services from Inverness?

The First Minister: Well, we should remember the context: Danny Alexander is a Liberal Democrat, so adopting two positions at the same time might itself be party policy. It is a rather invidious position to be in to be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the local member for Inverness and to be responsible for the very air passenger duty that is threatening services from Inverness while complaining about it and posing as their defender. Perhaps if we agree on devolving air passenger duty to this Parliament as a policy that benefits the Scottish economy, Danny Alexander will be relieved of the difficulty of having to be the Treasury's man in Inverness while pretending to be Inverness's man in the Treasury.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the First Minister hold talks with the UK

Government, Flybe and easyJet, which now has the flights from Inverness airport? Will he look at having a public service obligation on routes to Gatwick airport? Will he also speak to the airlines about connectivity from the islands through to Gatwick, which used to be booked through one operator and will now require to be booked through two?

The First Minister: Talks are going on between the Minister for Transport and Veterans and the airport carriers at present. The member should direct her attention to what Flybe has said and the extent of studies across Scottish airports and carriers, which are looking at the differential impact that air passenger duty is having on Scottish flights. That is the key to and source of the difficulty. I hope that the member will join the Government in calling for APD to be devolved to this Parliament so that we can produce an airport and passenger policy that benefits the Scottish economy as opposed to threatening vital services.

Public Sector Early-Departure Schemes

5. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to Audit Scotland's report, "Managing early departures from the Scottish public sector", which states that the public sector is spending £280 million a year on early departure schemes. (S4F-01432)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The report goes on to note the effective savings that have been made by the voluntary service arrangements conducted by the Scottish Government. Under the funding pressure from Westminster, it is inevitable that there will be reductions in the number of those working in the Scottish public service. Our policy of no compulsory redundancies is the right one, not just because it treats people who are in that position humanely and with respect but because it gives security to those who remain in the public sector. The policy is supported by our unions and pursued by the Government, and it is not available elsewhere in these islands.

Michael McMahon: I thank the First Minister for his response, but I am not sure whether he agrees that Audit Scotland is right to criticise the extensive use of early exit packages. Does he at least share my unease about the concerns raised with me by civilian staff in the newly created Police Scotland that a pool of money has been allocated to provide for exit packages for a tranche of senior police officers in order to reduce their numbers through enhanced redundancy settlements? As it is not unheard of for senior officers in the police and fire and rescue services to take exit packages only to return in the same or similar capacity, will the First Minister today give the Parliament a commitment that if and when senior police officers

take golden goodbyes, they will not thereafter be able to say a golden "Ello, 'ello, 'ello" to new and similar jobs in Police Scotland?

The First Minister: I can give an absolute assurance that the police and fire services in Scotland will be managed rather more effectively than many Labour local authorities have been, in terms of exactly the things that the member is speaking about.

I do not think that the member should be allowed to set the Audit Scotland report in the context in which he set it. For example, on page 4, Audit Scotland said:

"Early retirements and voluntary redundancies, for example, can be a useful way of avoiding the delays and costs of compulsory redundancies ... Once the initial outlay has been recouped, they can provide significant savings for organisations."

The member should reflect on the balance of what the Audit Scotland report had to say about that. He should also reflect on the range of cases—cases that I could quote to him—in which the practices and policies of some of his colleagues in local government have been brought seriously into question.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): When I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth yesterday why the Scottish Government was spending 10 times as much on pushing people out of the door as it is on trying to find people employment, he gave in his defence the same excuse that the First Minister has just given: the Scottish Government has a policy of no compulsory redundancies and, furthermore, uses compromise agreements only in a minority of cases. Labour's freedom of information requests on the subject reveal that, since Mr Salmond came to power, the Scottish Government has spent £10 million on compulsory redundancies and £45 million on compromise agreements. Can the First Minister explain that?

The First Minister: As Ken Macintosh knows, we introduced a no compulsory redundancies policy over the past two or three years, progressively across central Government in Scotland. Is the Labour Party saying that it would not have a no compulsory redundancies policy? If so, it had better tell the public sector unions, which are firmly in favour of the policy.

Ken Macintosh should also compare the public service in Scotland with the service in the rest of the United Kingdom. Public service numbers are down less in Scotland than they are across the UK, because of the sensitivity with which we handle the policy.

It is right and proper to have a policy of no compulsory redundancies. If Ken Macintosh, as the Labour Party spokesman who looks after the

welfare of public sector employees, would have compulsory redundancies, let him say so. Our policy meets the requirements of the public services in Scotland and is much more in tune with what the Scottish people demand than anything that Ken Macintosh could come up with.

Higher Education Funding

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the opinions expressed in the briefing paper, "The funding of higher education in Scotland, the UK and internationally". (S4F-01414)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We welcome contributions to the debate. In that light, I am sure that Ms Smith will have noticed this morning's contribution from Universities Scotland. Universities Scotland has published legal advice from solicitors Anderson Strathern on university fees post-independence, which explains why, under European Union law, it could be permissible to continue to charge students from the rest of the United Kingdom tuition fees. That shows that a real debate is going on in Scotland. This Government has delivered free education in the face of the naysayers who said that it could not be done. We are confident that we will continue to deliver free education in an independent Scotland.

Liz Smith: In light of the legal advice that Universities Scotland published this morning, will the First Minister confirm exactly which groups of students would and would not pay fees in an independent Scotland? Will he say whether the Scottish Government has received legal advice that confirms that the European Parliament would agree to any exemptions from current EU law on the matter?

The First Minister: I do not think that Liz Smith has got her European authorities correct, as far as the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice are concerned.

I would have thought that Liz Smith would have bothered to read the legal advice that was published this morning. It is unfortunate that her question has been somewhat overtaken by events, but the art of asking questions is to adapt to changing conditions in the debate that is going on. I would have thought that Liz Smith would have welcomed legal advice from Universities Scotland that shows that, based on equity and residence, the policy of free education could be pursued in an independent Scotland.

Of course, to have a policy of free education, you first have to want education to be free. The other unionist coalition that is emerging in the Parliament between the Conservatives, the Liberal

Democrats and the Labour Party is that each of those parties wants to impose tuition fees on the students of Scotland. The first requirement is to have a Government like this one, which believes in free education and therefore spells out why that free education policy will continue to be pursued in an independent Scotland.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Perhaps the art of answering a question is actually to give an answer.

I have read that legal opinion, and it does not give the unequivocal answer that the First Minister seems to suggest. Could he tell us whether, if it is correct and if he accepts it, it means that European Union students will now qualify—sorry, will no longer qualify—for free tuition and could in fact be charged for university tuition in Scotland?

The First Minister: I think that Hugh Henry should have a bit more practice in asking questions before he criticises the answers.

I know that this is inconvenient for the Labour Party, the Tories and the Liberal Democrats, the parties that want to impose tuition fees on the students of Scotland—[*Interruption.*] I see Johann Lamont shaking her head, but she said on 17 December last year that tuition fees were "the most obvious option". What is "the most obvious option" if it is not an attempt to impose tuition fees on the students of Scotland?

The legal advice today and the firm resolve of this Government to base our policy on residence and equity give assurance that, as long as this Government is in power, there will be no tuition fees imposed on the students of Scotland and education will be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

National Concessionary Travel Scheme (Extension)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-06035, in the name of Alison McInnes, on the still waiting campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the Age Scotland campaign, Still Waiting, which calls for the national concessionary travel scheme to be extended; recognises that many older or disabled people, particularly in rural areas such as Aberdeenshire, rely on community transport services to attend medical appointments, go shopping or engage in leisure pursuits; understands that up to 70% of people over 60 in these areas either do not have or cannot use a free travel pass, and notes calls for the scheme to be extended to include all demand-responsive community transport services.

12:33

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I am very pleased to have secured a debate on Age Scotland's still waiting campaign and I thank other members for supporting my motion.

Age Scotland believes that the current bus pass scheme should be extended to include community transport routes, with the fares charged by community operators fully reimbursed. I back its campaign for a better bus pass scheme. This is not the first debate that we have had on extending the national concessionary travel scheme to community transport schemes, but we are still waiting for the Government to listen, understand the problem and take action.

The issue is fundamentally one of fairness. The national concessionary travel scheme that was introduced by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive has largely been a success. The scheme's objectives were twofold: to allow older and disabled people, especially those on low incomes, improved access to services, facilities and social networks by free scheduled bus services to promote social inclusion; and to improve health by promoting a more active lifestyle for the elderly and disabled.

By and large, the majority of our elderly and disabled citizens have indeed reaped the benefits of the scheme. They can get out and about and travel without worrying about the cost. For those who are on fixed incomes such as pensions, that is a real advantage. But here is the rub: for a significant minority, their bus pass is invalid on the services that they rely on. They cannot travel for free; they have to keep counting the pennies, which limits their opportunities to remain involved in their community and means that they struggle to

get out to the shops, their general practitioners or social clubs.

Too many elderly and disabled people are at a financial disadvantage—they have a bus pass that is worthless. In remote rural areas, people cannot use their bus pass because there are no scheduled buses for them to travel on. Throughout Scotland, people with mobility problems find that they have a bus pass that is valid only on buses that do not meet their accessibility needs.

Setting up such an ambitious scheme from scratch could not have been easy. I do not criticise the previous Executive for the anomalies that have since become apparent. After all, it had the foresight to say that the scheme would need to be reviewed after three years to see what needed to be amended. Sadly, the review that was carried out by the Scottish National Party a few years ago did not take the opportunity to make the national scheme more inclusive and address the problems that I have mentioned. However, we can make the scheme fairer. I urge the Scottish Government to commit to doing so.

It is worth considering some facts from Age Scotland's research. While 87 per cent of people in Scotland aged 60 or over have a national concessionary travel card, in large urban areas that figure rises to 91 per cent of older people, compared with just over three quarters in rural areas. The majority of older people have an NCT card, but a significant proportion of them do not use it, particularly those who live in rural Scotland. Almost half—47 per cent—of those who live in remote rural areas and 43 per cent in accessible rural areas do not use their card, compared with about a third throughout Scotland and a fifth in large urban areas. In remote rural areas, more than two thirds—70 per cent—of those who are aged 60 or over either do not have a card or do not use it. That is a lot of people being short-changed by the current system.

It is clear that the full benefits of concessionary fares are not felt in rural areas and areas that are less well served by traditional bus services. That problem is likely to grow. As commercial bus operators continue to withdraw from routes on the grounds of cost, it will become more of an issue in our cities, too. Those elderly and disabled people who rely on the lifeline that is community transport have to pay their own fares. Who can say that that is fair?

Meanwhile, there are many people still in work who benefit from free bus travel. I am sure that we can all recall how the previous transport minister liked to wave his pass around in the chamber. Is that fair?

Age Scotland has costed its proposals and identified how to fund them. It asks us here in the

Parliament to take a mature and consensual approach to tackling this issue.

Around 3.5 million community transport journeys are made each year, and the average price of a single community transport journey is approximately £3.20. Reimbursing that at a full 100 per cent reimbursement rate would cost around £11.2 million. It is entirely sensible and fair to suggest that that additional cost should be funded by adjusting the eligibility criteria for the existing scheme in line with changes to the state pension age. I emphasise that I do not suggest that we change the criteria retrospectively. The change would not affect anyone who has a bus pass at the moment.

When money is tight, we must make it work hard for us and ensure that it is spent wisely. There is a chance to refine the scheme to make it fairer. Who could really object to such a change? It is a virtuous proposal—equal dibs for all our elderly and disabled citizens, wherever they live. Our elderly and disabled would be able to afford to use community transport services more often, which would lead to a more secure future for our community transport providers, which in turn would be able to provide more services. The result? More active, less isolated people and reduced demand on health services.

Research has identified that loneliness and social isolation carry a higher risk than lifelong smoking. Isolation is linked to depression, and a lack of social interaction with the onset of degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. We know that nearly a fifth of older people do not speak to friends or family on a daily basis. We also know that by keeping older and disabled people independent, active and connected in their communities, community transport makes people's lives better and improves their health. That is well in keeping with the aims of the national concessionary travel scheme.

Community transport meets social needs like no other transport service can. It is a cost-effective way of supporting some of society's most vulnerable people, which we must maintain. Extending the bus pass to community transport will help to make it more sustainable. More important, it is the fair thing to do.

Age Scotland's case study booklet illustrates that very well. Let us hear from some of the people in it. Margaret from Dumfries says:

"I have a bus pass but it's of virtually no use to me. I've spent most of 2012 sitting at home waiting to die."

Another Margaret, from Carradale, says:

"A lot of the discussion these days is about keeping older people 'interested in things'. We are interested in things—we just can't get to them!"

Helen from West Lothian says:

"I don't want to be a prisoner in my own home as I get older but the current bus system doesn't allow me to do many of the things I want to do."

Tina from Kingussie says:

"Just being on the bus was a social occasion. I miss that side of things. There should be link ups, I can't be the only person around here who can't drive."

Surely we owe it to the Margarets, to Helen and Tina, and to all the others out there to try to make the situation fairer.

12:40

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate. It highlights the important contribution of the national concessionary travel scheme, as well as the contribution that is made by community transport services in urban and rural communities across the country. I am proud that the Scottish Government has safeguarded and funded the scheme and community transport services during its time in office. It is clear that that investment makes a real difference to the lives of thousands of older or disabled people, allowing them to live active, healthy and independent lives.

Community transport services, as we have heard, are a vital lifeline service for many people. Whether people use them to attend a medical appointment, to go shopping, or to travel to a lunch club or other social activity, community transport services make an invaluable contribution to many people's lives. Empowering people to participate in the life of their community, tackling social isolation and loneliness—as Alison McInnes said—and contributing to good mental health are all benefits of the concessionary travel scheme and of community transport. We should therefore all unite in celebrating them.

I pay tribute to Lothian Community Transport Services, which operates in three local authority areas—Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian. In Edinburgh, it operates a fleet of eight accessible minibuses that are available for hire—with a driver or on a self-drive basis—to other voluntary and community organisations. It provides that lifeline service to about 130 different groups.

The motion in the name of Alison McInnes talks about the merits of extending the scheme to include all demand-responsive community transport services, but it does not refer to how that would be paid for. Age Scotland has recognised that cost implications would arise from extending the scheme and it has made a specific suggestion about how those costs would be met. The Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, of which I am a member, received a range of

written and oral evidence on the subject as part of its current inquiry into community transport.

John MacDonald of the Community Transport Association highlighted one of the obstacles that would have to be overcome. In evidence to the committee, he stated:

“Concessionary fares in community transport and section 19 services could only ever work where there is a fare-paying passenger. There has to be an individual on the bus, paying a fare. However, on many services, individuals do not pay fares.”

However, in discussing the proposal it is important to recognise that although cost is a factor, it is not the only factor—indeed, it may not be the only barrier to the extension of the scheme. A number of witnesses indicated that concessionary fares are not a priority. It has been suggested that the biggest challenge for community transport is an ageing fleet and that investment should be focused on funding for vehicles. John MacDonald also stated:

“replacing vehicles is a big problem for well-established organisations that have been around ... for 20 or 30 years ... If one thing should be a priority, it is vehicles.”—[*Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee*, 17 April 2013; c 1624, 1629.]

John Moore of Lothian Community Transport Services stated:

“Funding fleet renewal is the biggest challenge that faces my organisation ... We have an ageing fleet, which ... is getting more expensive to maintain”.

When it was suggested that

“the national concessionary scheme is not the right vehicle because of the ... costs involved”—[*Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee*, 1 May 2013; c 1650, 1663.]

witnesses from a range of organisations replied in unison, “Yes.” The organisations were Lothian Community Transport Services, the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service, Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company and South West Community Transport.

The evidence that we have received suggests that there are a number of practical and logistical challenges—including introducing ticket machines to read the bus pass, which could cost more than £5,000 and possibly up to £10,000 in each case—and that there may be more pressing priorities at the moment, such as investment in an ageing fleet of vehicles.

Age Scotland has made a welcome contribution to the debate about the future of the national concessionary travel scheme and community transport, but its report should not be the final word. We should await the conclusions and recommendations of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee; we should seek to build consensus on the way forward; and we should

continue to listen to the providers and users of community transport services across Scotland in order to provide that lifeline service to the many older and disabled people who need it.

12:44

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to contribute on the important subject of Age Scotland’s still waiting campaign, which promotes the extension of the existing national concessionary travel scheme.

First, I congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the time in the chamber to highlight the campaign’s work. I commend Age Scotland for the excellent work that it has done to support Scotland’s older people. Members throughout the chamber will recognise the benefits brought by the advice, advocacy and assistance provided by Age Scotland to older people across the country. My experience of working directly with that exceptional charity’s volunteers has made me understand the difference that such support makes to older people in both urban and rural areas of the region that I represent.

It is clear to the volunteers and the staff at Age Scotland that the needs of older people living in different areas are rarely the same. That is particularly true when we talk about the provision of transport and the availability of local bus services. The still waiting campaign aims to challenge the differing levels of available public transport by extending the national concessionary travel scheme to include the community transport provisions that are often far more accessible for the 188,000 disabled people in Scotland who are entitled to concessionary travel.

As Age Scotland’s case studies show, extending the free travel pass scheme to include community transport providers would have profound benefits for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is easy to forget that a bus fare can mean the difference between a person feeling isolated and their being able to identify as part of a wider community. Including demand-responsive transport services, such as those that are provided by the South West Community Transport scheme in Glasgow, which I visited only last month, would help older and disabled people to feel part of their local communities when otherwise they would not.

More than 180 community transport providers in Scotland have provided, in the past year, more than 3.5 million journeys. Therefore, the proposal to extend the scheme seeks not to help a handful of people, but to address the needs of communities.

Our rapidly ageing population means that demand for transport services among older people will increase substantially. That increase will

inevitably require politicians to look again at how we provide concessionary travel to the growing population of vulnerable older and disabled people. We should take action now to ensure that tomorrow's generation of retired and disabled people can enjoy the highest possible level of support and not be restricted from using the most accessible and beneficial transport services available to them in their communities.

12:47

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the debate. I declare an interest as the deputy convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on older people, age and ageing, and as the holder of an NCT card. I extend my thanks to my fellow North East colleague, Alison McInnes, for bringing the matter to the chamber.

Governments—of whatever political composition—would be unwise to ignore the elderly lobby, given that we are all living longer. Indeed, the average life expectancy for Scottish males born today is around 78.4 years, which is only a few years shy of Japan, which tops the international table at 82.7 years. In comparison, in 1900 male Scots were likely to live to 45, and the projection is that, by 2035, men in Scotland will live to nearly 81 years of age.

For those reasons, the role of charities such as Age Scotland is increasingly more relevant, and the various campaigns that they have conducted over the years have highlighted the needs and demands of our ageing population.

The motion focuses on the still waiting campaign, which seeks to end isolation of the elderly by extending the national concessionary travel scheme to include all demand-responsive community transport. Doing that would mean that the older people who depend on community transport rather than commercial transport, especially in rural areas such as Aberdeenshire, would not have to pay any fares for their bus services.

The key benefit of including community transport in the NCT scheme relates directly to the aim of helping older and disabled people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible but, at the same time, providing the means to allow individuals to get out and about to do their shopping, attend medical appointments and socialise with friends.

We have heard of the research results that show that loneliness and social isolation can be more dangerous than a lifetime of smoking, with isolation leading to depression. A lack of interpersonal interaction is also a factor in the onset of degenerative diseases such as

Alzheimer's. Community transport might have a role in delaying the onset of such conditions by enabling older and disabled people to continue to play a full role in their communities. Age Scotland is of the view

"that the resulting improvements in health and social care outcomes of investment in community transport are wholly commensurate with the preventative spending agenda, and would deliver substantial savings to the state."

The motion draws attention to the astonishing statistic that more than two thirds of those aged 60 and over in remote rural areas do not have, or cannot use, a free travel pass. Various reasons have been suggested for that, but the most obvious is that commercial bus operators are withdrawing from routes on the grounds of cost, which means that more and more elderly people are cut off from others. Community transport services, which are often run by local charities, are crucial in filling that void. However, as they cannot register with the traffic commissioner, they are ineligible for reimbursements under the NCT scheme.

Age Scotland estimates that to extend the NCT scheme as proposed would cost in the region of £11.2 million, and it suggests that that cost

"should be met by adjusting the eligibility criteria for the existing scheme."

Clearly, what Governments fund is a matter of political choice, but I hope that the minister will give serious consideration to the still waiting campaign, which, if successful, could bring significant benefit to many older and disabled people in Scotland.

I commend Age Scotland's work on behalf of Scotland's older population and I look forward to welcoming representatives from the charity at the Scottish Conservative Party conference in Stirling next week.

12:51

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I enjoyed that wee trailer for the member's conference.

I, too, congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate and congratulate members on its tone. I endorse everything that members have said about the benefits of the concessionary bus pass: social, health, wellbeing, psychological—you name it. The scheme benefits people who would otherwise be stuck in their home and see nobody all day long, because they can get out and meet people on the buses. Indeed, sadly, sometimes people keep warm on the buses during the winter when they cannot afford to heat their homes.

We all recognise the merits of extending the national concessionary travel scheme to all

community transport, but I think that we also recognise the financial constraints on the Scottish Government's purse, which we know are set to get worse over the coming years. They will tighten because the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London has announced the cutting of hundreds of millions of pounds from domestic services in England, and those domestic portfolios affect ours because of the Barnett consequentials. We might therefore see less for transport, local government and so on. We know that local government is one of the backers and supporters of community demand transport.

I am very sympathetic to the case that the motion presents, and I have said so to the minister. Indeed, I recently visited Tweed wheels in my constituency and Teviot wheels in another part of the Borders, which do excellent work in providing transport to those who are disenfranchised from using their concessionary pass because, as other members have said, there is no regular, scheduled bus service or route to where they live. In some places, services are being withdrawn because of lack of demand.

I also visited Age Scotland in Galashiels to support its campaign, but it too is aware of the financial implications. The subsidy for the concessionary bus pass is 60p in every £1 fare, but community demand transport would require a 100 per cent subsidy, which is a different matter entirely—the rub, as others have said, is the cost. As I understand it, Nanette Milne's estimate of £11 million is based on current usage of community demand transport. However, if that transport were to be made free at the point of need, demand would go up. There is no doubt at the moment that people are self-denying and not using the service because it is too expensive. Age Scotland admitted to me that it will need to get more robust figures.

However, I have sympathy with the proposal to raise the age for the concessionary pass so that, as we go along, it falls in line with the increased age for the state pension across the United Kingdom. I agree with Alison McInnes that that should not be done retrospectively and that there should certainly be no means testing for it. There are always winners and losers from means testing, and the losers would be those just above the level that a means test would set, because they would lose their pass. I therefore do not agree with means testing. It is interesting to note that not everyone who has a bus pass uses it, which happens for a variety of reasons.

In conclusion, I congratulate Age Scotland, as well as Tweed wheels, which does a grand job in taking people to doctors' surgeries, GP clinics and so on. However, what we require—from either Age Scotland or the minister, if he can tell us—is an

indication of the cost. We need to know that, as well as the savings that could be made if the age of eligibility for the concessionary bus pass were raised.

12:55

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I wanted to speak in the debate because of two personal connections with the issue. One is old—it goes back more than 10 years—and the other is current, but both have some relevance to the Age Scotland campaign and this debate.

I it was who, as the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, introduced the national concessionary scheme all those years ago. However, it was not the scheme that we know today because, over time, the bus pass has evolved. For instance, in the early days, there was a charge for using the bus pass at peak times. The equalisation of ages was another change: when the scheme was set up, men and women had different retirement ages. Further, when the bus pass was first put in place, one of the greatest complaints about it was that it could be used only locally and that people could not cross boundaries with it, so some work had to be done before the scheme became truly national. I remember one meeting at which members of pensioners organisations complained bitterly that the bus pass could not be used on tour buses. Over time, the scheme has strengthened, although never enough to enable it to be extended to tour buses.

We have come to realise that the greatest weakness of the scheme is that there is no point having a bus pass if there is no service on which it can be used. That is exactly the gap that is often covered by community transport, which provides a day-to-day link in a way that tour buses, for example, do not. It seems clear to me that, as Alison McInnes said, that aspect is unfinished business in terms of the evolution of the scheme, and that the scheme should be extended to cover community transport services.

I also agree with Alison McInnes and Christine Grahame that it is entirely legitimate to debate age eligibility for the bus pass and the possibility of perhaps reducing that because of changes over time, but, at the same time, to discuss the extension of eligibility in terms of making the bus pass usable where the service is provided by community transport.

The second connection that I have with the issue is that I currently have out for consultation a proposal for a member's bill to change the regulatory framework for buses in Scotland. That is designed exactly to try to find ways of facilitating more and more accessible bus services, primarily through a new franchise power for local authorities

but also through ways of allowing greater use of local authorities' own fleets and encouraging more community transport to fill the gaps. I believe that my bill could well provide a legislative vehicle that could be used to extend the concessionary scheme to community transport. I encourage Age Scotland and any supporters of the still waiting campaign to make submissions to my consultation that make exactly that case.

I say to Jim Eadie—gently, because this has been a very consensual debate—that the argument for the extension to community transport is made by those elderly and disabled passengers who currently have to pay for community transport, rather than by the community transport organisations themselves. I am sure that, if we said to commercial operators, “We’re going to put £190 million into the bus industry. Would you like us to do that through a concessionary travel scheme?” they would say, “No, that’s not our priority. Here are some other ways in which we would much rather you pursued that.” Of course, they would be wrong. We pursue that route because of the benefits that our older and disabled citizens get, and those people should get those same benefits when they use community transport, too.

13:00

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I, too, congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate. I am pleased to support the still waiting campaign in calling for the inclusion of all demand-responsive community transport services in the national concessionary travel scheme.

Local community transport providers play an important role in our communities, keeping people who might otherwise be very isolated connected to their friends and the services that they need. Most important, they enable many people to maintain their independence. However, as Alison McInnes’s motion recognises, the concessionary scheme is not benefiting as many people as it could or should.

The flexibility of the community transport model means that it fills the gap in rural areas, where the public transport system cannot reach every person who needs a lift into town, to the doctor’s surgery or into the village to attend a social event. It is timely that Age Scotland, Leonard Cheshire Disability and others are working harder than ever to raise awareness of the need for greater support of and investment in a sometimes overlooked service.

The Community Transport Association’s state of the sector report highlights the growth in demand as a result of our changing demographic. The number of people aged over 75 is projected to rise

by 23 per cent by 2020 and by 84 per cent by 2033. We know that commercial bus operators are withdrawing from routes on grounds of cost, isolating even more older and disabled people. We have also heard, in earlier debates on the subject, that the number of Scottish Ambulance Service lifts to non-emergency appointments has been reduced. Leonard Cheshire Disability notes that 43 per cent of respondents to its disability review had to miss a hospital appointment, and 18 per cent were forced to turn down a job, due to a lack of accessible transport.

Access to community transport is essential because it gives us the opportunity to tackle problems before they become a crisis. Therefore, investment in community transport is commonsense preventative spend. Substantial savings will be delivered through improved health and wellbeing, and many people’s quality of life will be increased. We all know elderly and less mobile friends and family members who do not want to depend on us to get out and about and who may decline offers of lifts, and many families do not have access to private transport. Many community transport initiatives are delivered by volunteers, and the state of the sector report demonstrated that volunteer time of some 278,000 hours annually is worth almost £107 million a year, if valued at the minimum wage rate.

Community transport is invaluable to those who use it. If someone is over 60 and able to reach a bus stop, they can use their concessionary pass. If, however, they are physically unable to reach a bus stop or live too far away from one, they cannot take advantage of that potentially life-changing entitlement. Local people, communities and high streets will all benefit from an extension of the concessionary scheme.

It is important that we do all that we can to make it possible for everyone in Scotland to live a fulfilling and engaged life. The still waiting campaign is actively seeking to engage in discussions about how the increased cost of providing the service will be met. It is not acceptable that, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, people are excluded from opportunities due to a lack of affordable and accessible transport. We can and should address that. Jim Eadie spoke of challenges, but I believe that, in this day and age, it is possible for community transport vehicles to read passes.

All older people in Scotland are entitled to concessionary travel, and I look forward to the day when all those who want to use their concessionary bus pass can do so.

13:03

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate. I also congratulate Age Scotland on pursuing its campaign on behalf of the users of community transport services.

Many years ago, I raised the issue of the use of concessionary bus passes on community transport vehicles with the transport minister in the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive. I have supported the idea since, and support for community transport was part of the Labour debate in the chamber on 26 January 2012. I raised the matter because it had been raised with me by the Annandale transport initiative after the nationwide concessionary fares scheme was announced in 2004 by Tavish Scott, if I remember correctly. ATI was one of the first organisations to take advantage of the Government's rural community transport grants scheme, securing about £90,000 for a new bus in August 1999. Since then, with a number of vehicles, it has provided an invaluable service to many of my constituents across Annandale and Eskdale.

The issue of support for community transport has also been raised by organisations such as the WRVS. The same issue has been the subject of previous members' business debates that were initiated by—to mention just two—Karen Gillon and Jim Hume.

It has always been clear to me that pensioner residents in rural parts of my constituency are disadvantaged by having poor or non-existent bus services because, although they may be eligible for a bus pass, they have no opportunity to use it. However, it took the still waiting campaign to make me realise that the problem does not affect only rural pensioners. At its launch, the campaign highlighted the predicament of a lady living in Leith who, because of her disability, is unable to access the—normally very good—services provided by Lothian Buses because she cannot get to the bus stop. She is therefore reliant on community transport provision.

We know that community transport is also essential for many pensioners when they attend hospital or visit patients in hospital. Community transport operators provide an essential service for many parts of the health service.

As Jim Eadie said, the issue of concessionary bus pass use on community transport vehicles has been raised in the evidence given to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. Under a permit issued under section 22 of the Transport Act 1985, community bus operators are permitted to run public services on which passengers can use their free bus pass, which is of course very welcome. However, many buses

that are used by individuals or groups, such as for trips to the shops or for medical appointments, have only a section 19 licence, under which the operator is currently not eligible to participate in the concessionary bus pass scheme. The Age Scotland campaign seeks to address the needs of users of those services.

Having listened to the evidence to the committee, I appreciate that the issue might not be as simple as it initially sounds. The reimbursement to operators for passengers who use their free entitlement is set at around 60 per cent of the adult fare. Therefore, if all the passengers on a trip were eligible to use their bus pass, the income for the community transport operator would be only 60 per cent of the fare that it had previously charged. To avoid that loss of income, Age Scotland proposes that community transport operators should be able to reclaim the cost at 100 per cent of the charge.

One problem is that the concessionary transport scheme is—and always was—intended to assist users rather than subsidise operators. Arguably, if more people started using community transport because they could use their bus pass, the commercial operators might complain that the community transport operators were being subsidised. I am not sure whether that would be permissible. However, it should not be impossible to get around that obstacle, and I think that the issue needs to be looked at.

Perhaps we need to consider a more innovative solution that I hope will take into account the fact that the contribution that community transport can make to the wellbeing of older people is surely a form of preventative spend.

13:07

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): I thank Alison McInnes for having succeeded in raising the issue in a members' business debate.

As a Government, we have invested around £8.3 billion in transport since 2007. I mention that because it is the largest transport investment programme that Scotland has ever seen. That has happened in difficult economic times and despite substantial cuts to our budget, including a cut of around 26 per cent to our capital budget. Despite that, our current investment in transport directly supports around 12,000 jobs across Scotland.

The successful Scotland-wide concessionary bus travel scheme provides free local and long-distance bus travel throughout Scotland for older and disabled people at any time of day, on any route and for any number of journeys. In January this year, we reached an agreement with the bus industry that will safeguard the concessionary

travel scheme for the next two years. The two-year agreement provides fair reimbursement for bus operators and secures the financial sustainability of the scheme—something that we were urged to secure by parties in the Parliament and by the Public Audit Committee.

This has been a generally consensual debate, but there was something of a gibe at the start from Alison McInnes, who said that

“we are still waiting for the Scottish Government”

to take action. I point out that no action was taken on the issue by the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, which she specifically exonerated from any criticism despite the fact that—as we have just heard from Elaine Murray—representations were made during that period for such a change, which was not made.

It is also worth pointing out that no party in the Parliament has made a budget proposal for such a change. I mention that because we know that parties are serious about a proposal when they say how they will pay for it. Given the speeches that we have heard from members today, this is obviously a very live issue.

The Scottish Government’s concessionary travel scheme is very successful but it is not the first such scheme. When I was leader of Clackmannanshire Council, we introduced Scotland’s first ever concessionary bus travel scheme that was fully free—as opposed to one that was free just during off-peak periods. I think that it is great that the previous Administration and the current Administration have extended that scheme to cover the entire country.

Jim Eadie raised some important points, and I am interested in the extent to which the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee will examine those in its consideration of the issue.

There are real issues, some of which we have heard about today, not least the fact that many community transport journeys are made in cars.

As I have said, we will look at the provisions in the proposed member’s bill that Iain Gray mentioned, and I repeat that we will look at the cost. If the issue is to be addressed in the bill or to be supported otherwise, we must consider the question of cost.

Last year, I enabled community transport organisations that run services under section 22 registrations, which are open to the public, to be part of the concessionary travel scheme. I acknowledge that it is not an option for all providers.

I recognise that such demand-responsive registered services are not the answer for everyone, but I can see that community transport

has an important part to play in filling the gaps. The Government supports—as previous Administrations have—the Community Transport Association.

I add my tribute to the dedicated volunteers who make up the backbone of community transport organisations and provide those services—sometimes over many years—to their local communities. I admire the commitment that is made by each and every person who becomes a driver or a passenger escort.

Alison McInnes: Does the minister acknowledge that there is an inherent unfairness in the system, given that a significant minority of elderly and disabled people have to pay for their bus fare simply because of market failure?

Keith Brown: In response to Alison McInnes’s intervention and her previous comments, I state that that will be the case unless transport is provided free for everyone, which I do not think that anyone has proposed. I acknowledge that some groups will not have the same access as others.

Alison McInnes indicated support for raising the age of eligibility in line with pension ages, which is the first time that that has been proposed.

Alison McInnes: No, it is not.

Keith Brown: It has been mentioned, but it has not been proposed. If that is the Liberal Democrats’ position, it is an honest one, because Alison McInnes is saying that some or all of the additional costs of an extension can perhaps be paid for—

Alison McInnes: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I will try to make some more progress.

Alison McInnes: It is not the first time that that has been proposed.

Keith Brown: Well, it is the first time that I have understood it to be the position of a party. If it is the Liberal Democrats’ position, it is—as I said—more honest, because Alison McInnes is suggesting that she can find the money from another place.

I make clear to every member who has mentioned the issue that the Scottish Government does not intend to change the age of eligibility. We believe that, in the times in which we currently live, it is important that we continue our current provision for people at that age. However, I acknowledge the point that Alison McInnes makes.

We made changes to bus registration legislation from 1 April 2012 to allow demand-responsive transport services that are available to the general public to qualify for concessionary travel and for

the bus service operators grant. At the same time, changes were made to the BSOG so that it will be calculated on the basis of distance travelled rather than fuel used. It would appal some people to know that the previous scheme allowed bus service operators grant to be paid in respect of buses that carried no passengers, but the position has now been changed, at least in respect of what is known as “dead running”. I know from discussions with operators that the change has benefited many rural bus operators, including eligible community transport operators.

Age Scotland recognises in its research that transport services are crucial and are appreciated by older people, which is a point that all members in the chamber have highlighted today. Age Scotland also presents some useful information from the CTA on the scope of the sector. Its research provides the following estimates: 100,000 people benefit from CT in Scotland each year; there are currently 70,000 older CT users and 3.5 million CT trips per year; 62 per cent of CT users are aged 60 or older; and 16 per cent of users are disabled. Overall demand may rise—as Christine Grahame noted—to an estimated 83,500 older users by 2022, which does not take into account the potential exponential rise if the service is provided as a free good.

The Government provided local authorities with resources for the provision of community transport services through the local government finance settlement following the concordat between local authorities and the Scottish Government. That is the right approach, because councils will have a better understanding of transport needs in their immediate areas.

Local authorities can also commission bus services that go further in meeting the needs of people throughout Scotland and in more rural, isolated areas. Strathclyde partnership for transport is already co-ordinating a forum for community transport operators, which will help to develop the sector. That is to be welcomed.

We have also worked closely with local government to provide fair and equitable settlements. Between 2007-08 and 2012-13, the resources available to the Scottish Government from departmental expenditure limits and non-domestic rates increased by 6.4 per cent. Over the same period, local government’s budget increased by 8.9 per cent, which is a strong financial settlement and allows local authorities to do things on community transport if they choose to.

We are also maintaining the revenue funding that is available to local government. The total funding from the Scottish Government to local government next year will amount to around £10.3 billion, which is roughly a third of our whole budget. That will provide resources to allow

councils to support community transport provision in their areas.

Age Scotland has proposed the extension of concessionary travel arrangements to community transport. Over and above affordability, there are some practical issues around that, although many were not raised in the debate. However, a number of issues were raised, not least by Jim Eadie.

I will listen to the points that are made as the campaign progresses and will study with real interest the findings of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee’s inquiry into community transport when it reports later in the year.

13:15

Meeting suspended.

14:29

On resuming—

Scotland's Railways

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways. We are extremely tight for time, so if members could stick to their time limits, that would be hugely helpful. Minister, you have 14 minutes.

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Scotland's railways are in the midst of a transformation and there is a real success story to tell. Now is the right time to take account of our achievements as we plan for the next franchise and rail investment periods.

The network performance is up and passenger satisfaction reached a high this year, which confirmed that rail's performance impacts significantly on passengers' opinions of the rail system. I congratulate Network Rail and First ScotRail on their efforts. Although we have benefited from a relatively mild winter, that reflects their successful collaboration. Whether it is in services, lines, rolling stock or performance, we recognise that there is more to do, but there is a good story to tell about what has been done so far.

An example is that passenger figures today are higher than they were in the last golden age of rail in the 1920s and 1930s. Last year, there were a staggering 83 million passenger journeys in Scotland, which was a 33 per cent increase since the start of the current franchise. That figure undermines the Beeching assumption that rail would lose out to the car and rail passenger numbers would wither. This Government has been instrumental in reversing some of the Beeching cuts and creating for Scotland the possibility of a new golden age of rail. Nothing illustrates that more clearly than our commitment to the new Borders railway line: a link that has been broken for 40 years will reconnect communities in the Scottish Borders and Midlothian with our nation's capital.

We have recently seen the positive impact of bringing communities together, with the reopening earlier this year of Conon Bridge station in the Highlands. We have also completed phase 1 of the Highlands main line project, which has provided two additional services from 2011 and has meant, from December 2012, journey time improvements of up to 18 minutes on some services.

Further south, in the central belt, the Airdrie to Bathgate line project, which received cross-party

support in Parliament, has provided a new through line from the west of Scotland to Edinburgh, with new stations and new travel opportunities. We have ensured that our new stations are accessible by offering step-free access for people with reduced mobility, and we have increased the number of accessible stations in Scotland.

We have made passenger journeys more comfortable by investing more than £430 million in new electric and refurbished rolling stock.

We are enhancing the passenger experience by providing wi-fi and modern, appropriate facilities. We are making strides towards better integration of rail services, and between rail services and other modes. Our commitment is manifest in the recent opening of Scotland's first rail-cycle hub in Stirling. That exciting three-year pilot will offer expert knowledge on local roads and cycling facilities. It will also raise the profile of greener active transport options to reach our rail stations.

In respect of cross-border rail, there have been huge successes, with unprecedented passenger growth—more than 144 per cent on the Glasgow to London route since 2008. Last year, after much pressure from Scotland, we finally saw the introduction of a full hourly service between Glasgow and London. We have also seen the extension to London of Edinburgh to Birmingham services, which has opened up new connectivity for passengers. The recent announcement of an additional 2,500 seats a day on services between Scotland and Birmingham underlines the importance of Scotland to the United Kingdom rail market and dispels the myth that we do not need more passenger and network capacity north of Preston.

Yet, despite huge passenger growth between Scotland and Birmingham—more than 261 per cent since 2008—the role of the Scottish people in determining the specification of the franchise on the arterial east and west coast main lines is extremely limited; we remain at the mercy of Westminster. I have long argued that the prevailing UK legislation prevents me from being empowered to act in the interests of Scotland. On cross-border issues, rather than Scotland being treated in a subordinate manner, we should be equals.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the rail improvements that have been made between Belfast and Dublin, where there is equity of interest? Cross-border rail services can therefore be planned in a way that is of mutual benefit, as distinct from the one size—London size—fits all approach that we currently experience?

Keith Brown: The example that has been given by Stewart Stevenson illustrates that cross-border

services can be organised in the mutual interest of two countries if the will exists to do so. I have heard general reports about the success of the line that he mentioned. There is no reason, of course, why an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK could not collaborate in that way on cross-border services.

On cross-border issues, we should be treated as equals, which is the point that Stewart Stevenson made, rather than being treated as subordinates. This is the first time I can remember having any say whatever in the east coast and west coast main lines and the future franchises. I see Gavin Brown shaking his head. Perhaps he prefers the outcome of the west coast main line franchise process to one of collaboration, in which the Governments can talk about these things and get it right first time.

In the immediate future, we face challenges in the lead-up to 2014, when our country will host the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, and there will be an increased focus on Scotland with another homecoming Scotland year and, of course, the forthcoming referendum. We are in a good place to deliver transport services that meet the expectations of Scotland's residents and their visitors during what will be a milestone year. There have been significant investments in Gleneagles and Dalrnarnock stations, along with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport subway improvements, which will result in better connectivity for Scottish visitors during 2014, as well as increased access to economic and cultural opportunities for residents.

Affordability is another issue. I know that the cost of travel is very important for the people who live and work in Scotland, so I am determined to offer some relief from the current pressures on household budgets. That is why, in December 2012, as part of my statement on the franchise continuation, I announced a freeze on off-peak fare rises, and peak fare increases were restricted to the retail prices index. Since then, my officials have worked with ScotRail to identify and eradicate fares anomalies to make our fares fairer.

Although the UK Government has promised to put an end to inflation-busting fares, we are taking action now and from 2016 we will be going further by ensuring that regulated peak fares cannot rise above inflation and that regulated off-peak fares will be restricted to RPI minus 1 per cent.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome what the minister has done so far in sorting out anomalies with regard to Dundee. However, does he accept that there are still major anomalies on the Dundee to Edinburgh route that are having a big impact on people's household budgets?

Keith Brown: In dealing with about a quarter of a million journeys on which anomalies had occurred, we made substantial progress. That progress could have been made many years ago, but it was not. I am convinced that we have made great strides, but the next tranche of dealing with anomalies will have to come when we renegotiate the franchise, which will happen soon. I am pleased that Jenny Marra has acknowledged the work that this Government has done—work that was not done by previous Governments—to address anomalies.

On the future of the ScotRail franchise, which is due to be renewed in 2015, I confirm again that we will let two new franchises—the main ScotRail franchise and a separate sleeper franchise. We had the largest-ever rail consultation in Scotland, which has helped us to shape the specifications for those franchises. More than ever, we are able to specify services that will best meet the needs of our cities and rural communities.

I have also been mindful of the Laidlaw inquiry and the Brown review into the UK's west coast main line fiasco in the franchising process. We have learned lessons from them. Where appropriate, they have informed our franchising process, so I am confident about the competence of the officials and about the process that has been followed by Transport Scotland to ensure that we secure a contract that meets our needs and offers value for money.

The sleeper franchise process has already commenced; pre-qualification questionnaires were returned by four potential bidders this month and the draft invitation to tender will be issued in August. For the main ScotRail franchise, the questionnaires will be issued to potential bidders in July this year. That contract is still the biggest that the Scottish Government procures.

We have learned what Scotland can achieve through the successes of the current franchise and I intend to ensure that we build on those successes for the future. I look to the next ScotRail franchisee to work closely with Network Rail to drive down costs and to improve the passenger experience.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): What can the minister do to encourage bidders—either co-operative bidders or mutual or not-for-dividend bidders—to come forward and bid for the franchise?

Keith Brown: I think that I answered that question from Ken Macintosh last week. I am interested to know what the Labour Party's position is. I reiterate that I cannot encourage one bid over another bid. That is how the process goes and that is what is laid down in law. If the Labour Party would encourage one bid over another, it

would be useful for it to confirm that today, because its doing so would be in breach of the procurement regulations.

I am happy to discuss—as, I am sure, we will as we go through the debate—the issues related to public ownership of railways. However, I repeat what I said last week: from when the previous Labour Government took office in 1997 right through to 2010, it did not change the Railways Act 1993, which leaves us in the position in which we can accept public sector bids, but only from foreign countries: we cannot allow one of our public bodies to bid. I do not know why the Labour Party supported that position. I do not support it, but that is where we are. We have asked the UK Government to change the act, but it has said that it will not.

In the meantime, it is important that we drive down costs where we can. The alliance between ScotRail and Network Rail delivered the Paisley canal electrification scheme in record time and significantly below the original cost estimates.

I am pleased to announce that—subject to approval by the Office of Rail Regulation—Network Rail and First ScotRail will work together, through the alliance, to accelerate the electrification of the Whifflet route. Through close collaboration and application of the approaches that we used for the Paisley canal scheme, we expect that the costs of delivering the project can be reduced below Network Rail's planning estimate of £29.6 million. That will be the first major output of the next five-year rail investment period—known as control period 5—which starts on 1 April 2014. The route, which runs from Glasgow to Coatbridge, was originally planned for full electrification by 2018-19. We now plan to deliver that by summer 2014, which will give us greater flexibility to support passengers for the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup.

Last year's high-level output specification set out more than £3 billion of capital investment for control period 5, which put us on the cusp of the most transformative rail programme ever in Scotland. We also have a £30 million stations fund, in which there is a huge amount of interest.

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I want to make more progress, but I will see if I have time at the end to give way.

The £30 million fund will provide investment for new and improved stations. In addition to that, I will fund substantial enhancements to the line between Aberdeen and Inverness. There will be further work on the Highlands main line, which will reduce journey times and support more efficient freight operations. Those investments, along with road improvements including the A9 upgrade, will

ensure better connections between our cities and beyond.

To ensure that our rail services meet the expectations of our communities, I have made available up to £200,000 over the three years to 2015 to establish community rail partnerships. On the west Highlands line, we are improving connections to the islands and boosting tourism. We have already provided additional Sunday services and, from May 2014, the number of trains between Oban and the central belt will double in the summer from three to six services each way.

In July last year, I announced our £650 million investment in the first phase of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme. Since then, EGIP has made significant progress, delivering new services on the Edinburgh to Glasgow via Carstairs line a year earlier than planned.

A £27 million redevelopment of Haymarket station is making excellent progress towards opening to passengers later this year. The electrification of the main Edinburgh to Glasgow line is scheduled for completion by December 2016. We will also fulfil our commitment to electrification of the Cumbernauld line in time for next year's Commonwealth games.

I intend to publish our EGIP business case soon. That will set out the delivery of EGIP improvements for the next rail control period, starting with electrification of the Edinburgh to Glasgow route by December 2016. By December 2018, we will complete electrification of the Stirling, Alloa and Dunblane lines, and we will have delivered a 42-minute fastest journey time between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform one of Scotland's most iconic stations, and will enable eight-car train operation to increase capacity on our busiest route. A potential future high-speed rail line will further increase capacity and offer speeds of 140mph and journey times of less than 30 minutes. The additional rail capacity will bring benefits for the rest of the rail network in the central belt and beyond.

I am impatient for change, so I am bringing forward an additional £5 million for shovel-ready projects in stations. Those include car park expansions, cycling facilities and bus interchanges. Through that fund, and along with the future Scottish stations fund investment, bus connectivity to the Borders railway and the Stirling cycle hub, the Government will ensure better transport integration across our rail network in the next franchise period.

To summarise, we are in the midst of a transformation of Scotland's railways. We have made substantial improvements to date with

passenger numbers growth, increased passenger satisfaction and better performance. Our plans for investment in the network and our considered approach and plans for new franchises underline our commitment to rail. To that end, I ask the Parliament's support for my motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes record passenger numbers of 83.3 million on Scotland's railways, high levels of passenger satisfaction and improved performance; recognises the benefits of a collaborative approach by the Scottish Government and industry in achieving value for money for passengers and the taxpayer; commends the Scottish Government's action to make fares fairer by reducing anomalies; welcomes the measures to reduce pressures on hard-pressed household budgets while still investing to enhance services, improve stations and build new stations; acknowledges the measured approach taken by the Scottish Government to refranchising and welcomes franchise specifications that will better meet the needs of the people of Scotland, and acknowledges that, although further improvements will always be necessary, significant investment has been made by the Scottish Government in rail to support communities, improve connectivity, reduce car use and encourage sustainable economic growth.

14:44

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): This Government never really fails to disappoint on the height of the complacency and self-congratulation to which it aspires. There are really only two themes for Scottish Government debates: either "We are fantastic" or "The United Kingdom is rubbish"; it varies, but ministers just repeat one of those mantras.

I am not arguing that nothing has been achieved in the railways, because that is patently not true. However, the Labour amendment is intended to counteract the rather vainglorious tenor of the motion and to present a reminder of what the Government has not done with regard to projects that it has not fully delivered, has delivered more slowly than it promised or has not delivered at all. It is important that the amendment also serves as a reminder of the opportunity that was not taken, but was presented by the end of the current ScotRail franchise, to discuss more fully what we expect of our railways and to examine whether a different model of delivery could be developed that would recycle profits back into real service improvements rather than into shareholders' pockets.

We agree that rail services in Scotland have improved, but that is because there has, since the Scottish Parliament was reinstated 14 years ago, been a welcome focus on rolling back the damaging effects of the Beeching cuts. That has been due to the attitude of successive Governments, supported by members of the Scottish Parliament.

May 2007 was not year zero and just because a project was completed during the reign of the Scottish National Party does not mean that its achievement is solely to its credit. For example, the re-opening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line in 2008 was due largely to investment by Clackmannanshire Council and the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive of 2003 to 2007, and the Airdrie to Bathgate line was also initiated by that Administration. The Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill was passed in 2007; and the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill was passed in 2006.

Some improvements have even taken place despite Transport Scotland and Scottish ministers. For example, the electrification of the Paisley canal line was achieved through an initiative by ScotRail and Network Rail, without Transport Scotland's involvement. That was just as well, as Network Rail and ScotRail achieved the upgrade for £12 million, and Transport Scotland had estimated that it would cost £28 million.

Stewart Stevenson: Will Elaine Murray take the opportunity to congratulate the young engineer who came up with the idea for that project, which I had the privilege of adjudging in a competition to be the best project of the year, which shows that Scotland has the real engineering initiative to deliver real value in railways?

Elaine Murray: I am more than happy to congratulate that young engineer; I just do not particularly want to congratulate the Scottish Government.

Of course, there are the projects that have not happened. The Edinburgh airport rail link was scrapped shortly after the SNP took over Government in 2007, and the Glasgow airport rail link bit the dust in 2009. Glasgow crossrail, which would have brought benefits not only to Glasgow, but to rail links to the south-west, including to Dumfries—in my constituency—Ayr and Kilmarnock, was abandoned in 2007, despite having been assessed as presenting a good business case in 2006 and having been about to move to a parliamentary bill. Ironically, Network Rail intends to electrify that route, but only to enable empty electric stock to access the Shields Road maintenance depot. Does not that seem to be a missed opportunity to use investment to achieve additional benefits? Furthermore, Aberdeen crossrail was also abandoned in 2007.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Elaine Murray accept that there are things that we would all like to see for the railways, but that there are realistic options and then a wish list? Can she suggest what she would have cut in order to fund some of those other projects?

Elaine Murray: Glasgow crossrail was actually in the infrastructure plan. In fact, it had gone as far as being moved to a parliamentary bill, so it was a little bit further on than being on a wish list at that point.

There are the projects that have been delayed or deferred. Thanks to a debate in Labour time last year, Parliament got the opportunity to discuss the changes to the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme, which were trumpeted then and now as efficiency savings by the Scottish Government, but were in reality a scaling back of the project that was promised in the SNP manifesto of 2011. The parts of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme that were “deferred”, as ministers described it, included electrification of the Falkirk Grahamston loop, the Cumbernauld-Falkirk-Grangemouth line, the Stirling, Alloa and Dunblane lines—I believe that is now coming forward—the Dalmeny chord, which would have linked the Edinburgh to Glasgow line directly with the Edinburgh to Fife line, and the grade-separated junctions at Greenhill and Polmont. In addition, of course, there was the earlier scrapping of the Garngad chord link in 2011.

The journey time between Edinburgh and Glasgow on the electrified route will be reduced by only six to eight minutes, rather than the promised 13 minutes. In addition, although Transport Scotland and Network Rail protest that there will be no delay in its delivery, others report key obstacles, including the need to close part of the route for three months to undertake work on a tunnel and the requirement to reach a deal with the owners of the Millennium hotel, part of which will need to be demolished to enable the platforms at Queen Street to be extended. Maybe I am being a bit cynical, but I am suspicious of the reasons why Transport Scotland’s website now contains scant information about the EGIP project or its progress, despite more than £70 million having been spent on it.

However, it is not just with EGIP that there are problems. The Perth to Inverness main line upgrading was originally promised for December 2011, but has now been deferred until 2025. The Aberdeen to Inverness line upgrading was scheduled for 2016, but has been deferred until 2030. The Borders railway, too, has been subject to delays, thanks to confusion over its funding mechanism. It is now projected to be up and running by September 2015—four years later than was the plan when it was approved by MSPs in 2006, following the scrapping of the tender process and the project being handed over to Network Rail for development.

The second part of our amendment highlights the opportunity that the ending of the current

ScotRail franchise could have presented for a wider discussion of how our rail services could develop in the future, and for the exploration of how other models of delivery, such as not-for-profit or mutually owned companies, might be developed.

Keith Brown: Will Elaine Murray give way?

Elaine Murray: I will not just now; I want to develop my point.

When he was asked by Ken Macintosh last week whether the Scottish Government would encourage a not-for-profit bid for the next ScotRail franchise, Keith Brown stated:

“On the substantive point, the Railways Act 1993 prevents the Scottish Government from encouraging a public sector bid.”

He made the same point earlier today.

In an answer to Alex Johnstone, a couple of minutes after he had responded to Ken Macintosh, the minister admitted that the legislation that he had mentioned

“specifically prohibits public sector bids, not not-for-profit bids.”—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2013; c 20222.]

The Welsh Government, however, is not so timid. It is currently considering the consultation responses to a report that was written by Professor Paul Salveson and was produced by the Co-operative Party, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, Co-operatives and Mutuals Wales and Co-operatives UK, in advance of the Wales and borders contract coming up for renewal in 2018. That document argues that franchising does not work well for railways, and instead proposes the establishment of a not-for-profit enterprise—rail Cymru—operating as an arm’s-length enterprise, with the Welsh Government as its principal funder.

Instead of hiding behind the Railways Act 1993, the then Welsh transport minister Carl Sargeant—now the Minister for Housing and Regeneration—was able to advise the Welsh Assembly during a debate on 28 November that he had

“already raised with the Department for Transport the issue of a fair level playing field for all franchisees, whether they be not-for-dividend or profit seeking.”

He continued:

“There should be a fair opportunity for people to bid, because the upfront costs are sometimes prohibitive for organisations to create the right business case to move forward. I have already raised that with the Secretary of State for Transport.”—[*Official Report, National Assembly for Wales*, 28 November 2012; p 134.]

If the Welsh transport minister can raise that issue, why cannot the Scottish transport minister do the same?

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I would welcome that kind of development. However, does

Elaine Murray accept that, in order for a not-for-profit bidder to materialise, what is really needed is Government leadership, and that, at present, there is a barrier to that support being given?

Elaine Murray: I agree that that needs leadership. What I am saying is that that leadership is being shown in Wales. Indeed, the Labour Party at UK level is also considering a similar document.

The minister said that state-owned rail companies in other countries could bid for the Scottish franchise. If he feels bad about that, I am surprised that he is not prepared to pursue options to encourage the submission of a mutual and co-operative bid as an alternative to private sector bids from elsewhere.

Keith Brown: I have said a number of times that I have approached the Secretary of State for Transport about changing the terms of the 1993 act to allow us to open up the bidding process. I have said that we will, of course, consider a not-for-profit bid—I said that to Kenneth Macintosh last week. The issue is simply that we could not encourage one bid over the other. I have also said why we are prevented from having a publicly funded railway bid. Can Elaine Murray say whether Ed Milliband agrees with her notion of a publicly owned railway in Scotland or the UK?

Elaine Murray: Quite honestly, I do not believe that it is for Ed Miliband to tell the Scottish Labour Party what it believes. He can consider what he wants for the United Kingdom.

I am not saying that either the model that is being considered by the UK Labour Party or the model that is under consultation in Wales is necessarily correct, but what is disappointing is that the Scottish ministers seem to have no interest in having that wider debate. Instead, any time that anyone asks a question, as Kenneth Macintosh did last week, we get prevarication about the 1993 act, rather than a willingness to discuss matters in more detail. I suggest that, instead of patting themselves on the back about their achievements, Scottish ministers need to use more imagination to envisage what a successful future for Scotland's railways might look like.

I move amendment S4M-06766.2, to leave out from "high levels" to end and insert:

“; believes that this is due to the importance attached to improving rail services by successive administrations since May 1999; is disappointed however that the first phase of the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme has been scaled back, that projects such as the Borders Railway have experienced significant delays and that others, including the Glasgow Airport Rail Link, have been cancelled altogether; notes that the level of public subsidy for Scotland's railways in 2013-14 will be £511.5 million; further notes the publication of *Rail Cymru - A People's Railway for Wales* and *Rebuilding Rail* in 2012, and

believes that the renewal of the rail franchises in 2015 should be an opportunity for discussion of the future development of rail services in Scotland, including the option of a not-for-profit or mutual company running Scotland's railways.”

14:55

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The Government's record on transport differs from that of the Government that preceded it. The previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration's reluctance to invest in roads has been corrected, and the SNP Government has made the roads investments that many people thought were required. However, the importance of rail should never be underestimated, so we welcome the opportunity to talk about rail investment and services.

It was, nevertheless, with some disappointment that I read Keith Brown's motion. In my view it is self-congratulatory and claims many successes that in fact belong to Scotland's rail franchise holders. I pay tribute to the work that has been done by the various franchise holders in Scotland to achieve the significant improvements in the level of passenger satisfaction and performance that stand as a credit to the system.

Patrick Harvie: Will Alex Johnstone give way?

Alex Johnstone: I will not, at this stage.

The achievements demonstrate the benefits of the existing industry structure, and I am determined to ensure that we do not make any of the mistakes that are suggested in the Labour amendment, which would interfere with a process that will allow continued effective rail services in Scotland.

The ScotRail franchise is an example of how such success can be achieved. Through working in collaboration with the Government, new services and new stations have been developed, which genuinely demonstrates the effectiveness of the current system. The Government will, of course, point out the difficulties that have been associated with the west coast main line franchise, but any criticism of that will be put to bed when we eventually come to a conclusion on the Clyde and Hebrides ferries contract, on which the Government seems determined to drag its feet over the long term.

There are a number of key issues that it will be necessary to address during the debate. First, there is an issue surrounding the balance of the contributions of the fare payer and the taxpayer in provision of public rail services. We heard from the minister, in his opening remarks, about the efforts that are being made to keep fares down. I acknowledge that the minister has pursued that policy objective in a quite obvious fashion.

Nevertheless, I am repeatedly contacted by people who are concerned about the figure of £511.5 million—it is cited in the Labour Party's amendment—which is the cost to the public purse of maintaining rail services in Scotland. We must keep that balance in mind and remember that we cannot criticise the level of support at a time when the Government is increasing its support in order to keep fares down. We cannot criticise both sides without realising that there is a balance to be struck. Although I may, at times, argue about the nature of that balance, I am not prepared to condemn the level of support when it is obvious why the Government has chosen to increase it at this time.

Secondly, I turn to the efforts that have been made by Scotland's rail operators to produce new services. There are a number of examples of how profits that have been made by the ScotRail franchise holder have been ploughed back into provision of new services. In fact, the franchise extension that took place during the current franchise is an example of how a deal can be done with the Government to take money from the profits of the company and invest it back in services. When that was addressed in Parliament at the time, we supported the action of the Government in pursuing that aim.

The third and final issue that I will address is the key issue in the Labour Party amendment, and which is covered to some extent by the Green Party amendment, that somehow we should find a way to take Scotland's rail industry either partially or totally back into public ownership.

I believe that many of the improvements that are mentioned in the Government's motion are genuine examples of how the current system can work. Of course there have been difficulties with the west coast main line and east coast main line franchises, but the quality of service that the franchisees provide is a credit only to those who provide it. At the end of the day, ensuring that the current system is properly administered will deliver rail services that will continue to improve, continue to provide higher levels of passenger satisfaction, offer improved performance and, if managed correctly, provide better value for money for the taxpayer and the fare payer alike.

Only if we persist with the current system will we be able to see those improvements take place. If we fall back on a system that is designed to run on a nationalised or not-for-profit basis, we will run the risk of making all the same mistakes that were made in previous decades.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be drawing to a close, please.

Alex Johnstone: I invite the Government to see sense and to ensure that it does not listen to the

Labour Party and the Green Party during the course of today's debate.

I move amendment S4M-06766.1, to leave out from "high levels" to end and insert:

"; congratulates First ScotRail and other franchise holders on their high levels of passenger satisfaction and improved performance; believes that this demonstrates the benefits of the existing industry structure; supports the collaborative approach by the Scottish Government and industry in achieving value for money but acknowledges the need for greater public understanding of the balance of contribution between the passenger and the taxpayer; recognises action taken by the Scottish Government to improve the fares structure; welcomes the efforts made by Scotland's rail operators to introduce innovative new services; notes with interest the success of recently opened new stations on the network, but urges the Scottish Government to address public concern over some recent investment decisions, including the reduced scope of the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme."

15:01

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): One thing on which I agree with Alex Johnstone is that there was a complete reversal of policy in 1999. The budget that the Liberal Democrat-Labour Government inherited was aimed entirely at roads rather than at rail, and we turned that around. I do not expect nationalist ministers ever to give that Government credit for anything, but that was the most dramatic change in transport policy that could possibly have happened. That change proved the point of devolution because it proved that Scotland could take a completely different route.

The Conservatives' lead spokesman at the time was Murray Tosh, who I remember excoriated Sarah Boyack, who was the first transport minister in that Administration. I thought that Murray Tosh was just plain wrong about that. The shift in policy towards a more sustainable transport system was made by that Government, and those of us who were around at the time are very proud of that fact.

Keith Brown has taken on many of the good initiatives that he inherited. As Elaine Murray said, he has been able to take the credit for opening stations that were started under the previous Government. That is the nature of politics so there is no point in being churlish about that, but occasionally it would be nice if the current Government gave some credit—even a smidgen of credit—to those of us who were brave enough to stand up against the roads lobby and all the rest at the time who said that we were completely wrong to make that switch in policy.

Stewart Stevenson: On 19 December 2002, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, Lewis Macdonald, said:

"Congestion remains the key challenge that faces us".

He thus put roads, rather than rail, at the heart of the then Executive's policy. Is that not indicative of a degree of schizophrenia?

Tavish Scott: That intervention absolutely gives the game away. I was trying to remember what the Scottish National Party position was on the big policy change that we made in the budgets. To be entirely fair, the Conservatives said that they did not support our position, but I now remember that the SNP's then transport spokesperson Kenny MacAskill seemed to say that we were right while the SNP attacked us at a local level—as usual with the nationalists. Stewart Stevenson has just given the game away.

Since the nationalists want to talk about their record, let us look at that, but first let me pick up Keith Brown on what he said about ticketing. I applaud his efforts to simplify the system, and he is quite right to do that. However, he should not claim all the credit—perhaps the claims are made not by him but by the people around him—because, as a correspondent from Kincardineshire wrote in *The Scotsman* the other day,

“ending the practice of split ticketing ... benefits precisely 0.3 per cent of the travelling public and First ScotRail has ... a £2.28 million subsidy from the Scottish Government to cover downturn in revenue as a result of ending split-ticketing.”

In considering the minister's sensible moves to try to end that process, we should recognise that it is not without its costs by comparison with the benefits that it brings.

In today's transport world, the Government's record on train journey times bears some scrutiny. We can have important debates on how we should procure the services and whether, instead of using franchises, we should look at the other models that Elaine Murray and Patrick Harvie have proposed—as they are quite entitled to do so—but I suspect that what matters most to the travelling public is journey times.

Through answers to parliamentary questions that I have lodged—not through anything that I have done—we find that the Government's record, particularly in the north-east, is pretty lamentable. In the period from 2007 to 2013, in which the SNP has been in government, average journey times for Glasgow to Edinburgh, Edinburgh to Glasgow, Edinburgh to Aberdeen, Aberdeen to Edinburgh and Inverness to Aberdeen have increased rather than fallen.

It is no wonder that people in the north-east and the Highlands wonder why their Government has left them behind in all the rail investment. The north-east of Scotland is the economic powerhouse of the Scottish economy, as oil and gas is one of the few sectors—sadly—in Scotland and the United Kingdom that is moving ahead at a

rate of knots. It should benefit from rail investment that is proportionate—at least to some extent—to what is happening elsewhere.

Cuts in journey times are needed to allow the people in that economy to make connections to the places that they need to go. However, the record—I am reading out the Government's own statistics from its parliamentary answers—illustrates that the situation has got worse.

The transport minister has mentioned a cut of 17 minutes. I presume that he was referring to the services from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Inverness, because, in answer to a parliamentary question in December, he said:

“Journey times for some services operating between Glasgow/Edinburgh and Inverness will be reduced by up to 17 minutes”.—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 4 December 2012; S4W-11393.]

I looked into that and lodged another question. It turns out that, of the 266 services over seven days between Glasgow and Edinburgh and Inverness, one service is 18 minutes faster and one service is 17 minutes faster. That is 0.8 per cent of the services. Although the Government is congratulating itself and patting itself on the back, those figures suggest that it has an awful lot more to do to help people who genuinely want to travel by rail to and from Aberdeen and the Highlands.

The Transform Scotland briefing neatly sums up the challenge that the Government still faces, not least in persuading those of us who believe strongly in a renaissance in rail. I applaud the minister's language in the debate and his general approach to talking up a golden age of rail, but the figures that I mentioned strongly suggest that he has a long way to go.

Transform Scotland said just this week that

“railways north of the Central Belt remain uncompetitive with the roads—and are due to worsen”.

I fear that the Government has an awful lot more to do.

I move amendment S4M-06766.3, to leave out from the first “acknowledges” to end and insert

“notes Transform Scotland's observations that ‘railways north of the central belt remain uncompetitive with the roads and are due to worsen’; recognises that some rail journey times between Glasgow/Edinburgh and Aberdeen have increased since 2007; further notes the failure of the Scottish Government to take forward the Aberdeen Crossrail project, which included the reopening of the Kintore station and recognises the ongoing overcrowding on services between Inverurie, Dyce and Aberdeen, and calls on the Scottish Government to focus on improving journey times and rail links to, and in, the north east.”

15:07

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the debate, and I see positive things to celebrate

about the state of our railways, which is why the Green and independent amendment does not seek to delete the whole of the Government's motion. However, we part company with the Government on the issue of franchising. Although there may be benefits to the collaborative approach with the industry that the Government's motion sets out, we see the possibility of greater benefits from another approach.

There is a need for the travelling public to be much more fully involved in future decisions about franchising. Current train operating companies may be private sector profit-seeking businesses, but Scotland's railways are public services, and the public should be centrally involved in setting the priorities.

I want all the options to be open for Scotland in restoring a public service ethos to our rail business. We on the Green side of the chamber hope that Scotland will soon take on the powers to change UK legislation and open up new possibilities, which would include Labour's option of a mutual or not-for-profit franchisee. Such a bid could be made at the moment, but realistically it will not materialise out of thin air. That option needs Government support, which would at present be inhibited. Private sector bidders would be able to oppose such Government support for a not-for-profit operator, but we could in future remove that barrier.

We could go further and look again at the whole concept of franchising or at least permit publicly owned bodies to bid against other competitors. Against a public subsidy of just over £300 million in 2011-12, more than £20 million was taken out as profit in the ScotRail franchise. As Alex Johnstone said, the Scottish Government is then beholden to a haggling process to see whether any of that money can be put back into reinvestment. That is a substantial proportion of the public subsidy that we are paying.

The ideological obsession with privatisation reveals itself in relation to the east coast franchise. We have seen two private sector failures, and we have seen public sector rescue followed by broadly successful public sector management. Punctuality levels are up, and customer satisfaction on the line is at its highest ever level. More than £800 million has been returned to the taxpayer. The state-run east coast rail service requires less public subsidy than any of the 15 privately run rail franchises in Britain. That is according to the rail regulator. In April this year, it reported that the net subsidy for the east coast line was 1 per cent of its income compared with an average of 32 per cent.

As far as we understand, the UK Government has invited bids without reference to the Scottish Government or the interests of the travelling public

in Scotland. That is a damning indictment of the ideological obsession with what should be a public service being run for private profit.

I very much welcome the briefing paper from Transform Scotland and I welcome the Liberal Democrat amendment, which refers to it. If we want rail to continue to grow not as part of a more-of-everything approach but to reduce car use—which the minister's motion claims as a priority—there is a real need to ensure that rail services are not only reliable and affordable in absolute terms but competitive with road journeys on cost and journey time.

The Transform Scotland proposals are of direct relevance to that issue. For example, Transform Scotland's proposals on the Highland main line cite the Edinburgh to Aberdeen comparison alongside the Edinburgh to Newcastle comparison. Those train journeys are of roughly the same distance—124 miles and 130 miles—and yet the one from Edinburgh to Aberdeen is 50 minutes slower than the one to Newcastle.

Transform Scotland said that it might have been a wee bit too conservative in the figures on the Perth to Inverness journey times in its briefing. The figures that it used, which are based on the AA's figures, suggest that the leg from Perth to Inverness should take two hours and 33 minutes by car, but Transport Scotland's figures suggest that the journey is typically 90 minutes to 110 minutes by car. That compares very poorly with the train service.

We need to prioritise the relatively modest investment that would be required to improve the Highland main line and make those services competitive for the future. Transform Scotland has also made proposals for the Edinburgh to Perth direct line. Reinstating that would not only give the chance for shorter intercity journeys within Scotland but free up capacity for improved local services in Fife.

Notwithstanding Tavish Scott's assertions about the early days of devolution, for years we have seen a heavy emphasis on road investment. We need only to follow the money. Successive Scottish Administrations have prioritised road spending. The M74 was extended while Glasgow crossrail plans gathered dust on the shelf. The Aberdeen western peripheral route was pushed through on spurious cost projections while the Aberdeen crossrail suffers the same fate as its Glasgow comparator.

Current spending on the A9 and the additional Forth road bridge not only represent resources being diverted to road when they could have improved our rail infrastructure but could lead to a threat to the long-term competitiveness of rail services in the future.

I urge the Scottish Government to acknowledge not only what is good but what needs to be much better.

I move amendment S4M-06766.4, to leave out from first “acknowledges” to end and insert:

“recognises the constraints under which the ScotRail franchise must operate as a result of UK legislation, but considers that the Scottish Government could ensure greater transparency in its franchise decisions; believes that, when Scotland is able to remove the constraints of UK legislation, renationalisation of the railways or the use of a non-profit franchise holder would deliver better value for the public investment in Scotland’s railways; condemns the UK Government’s plans to reprivatise the profitable East Coast line, a decision that it understands was announced without reference to the Scottish Government; expresses concern that the Scottish Government’s road-building priorities risk making rail uncompetitive on price and journey times for routes north of the central belt, and believes that the public money currently committed to upgrading the A9 would be better spent on rail infrastructure, including the comparatively modest upgrades required to improve the Highland main line.”

15:13

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): We have heard a lot of politicians’ opinions about Scotland’s railways, so let us hear from one or two other people.

I happened to meet James Abbott, who is the editor of *Modern Railways*, at Waverley station on Tuesday this week—it was a fortuitous, not planned, meeting. He is up having a look at the improvements that are being made at Waverley and which have been made in Scotland’s railways.

About four years ago, *Rail* magazine published a beautifully drawn cartoon of a train in ScotRail livery with the logo “ScotRail England” because it thought that, if the rail services in England got a little bit of the respect, investment and treatment that they got in Scotland, that would do extremely well south of the border.

In a discussion of rail fares in this month’s issue of *Rail* magazine, the point is made to the rest of the UK rail network that Scotland is simplifying rail fares via a fair fares service. The magazine asks why passengers cannot have that south of the border. The objective commentators—who are quite distinct from us politicians—are very clear about the achievements that have been made in Scotland.

Elaine Murray said that it was a great achievement that the £28 million Paisley canal project was brought in for £12 million; I absolutely agree with her. However, our improvements to the costings for the EGIP project were miraculously transformed into a cut, whereas taking £16 million out of the Paisley canal project was not.

Elaine Murray: Would the member like to remind us what *Rail* magazine had to say about the cutbacks to EGIP?

Stewart Stevenson: We can all choose our quotes. [*Laughter.*] When Iain Gray was transport minister, he promised us that nobody in Scotland—it was not a promise that applied to 95 per cent of people—would have to stand for more than 10 minutes anywhere on the ScotRail network. I do not think that that is either possible or practical, but it was one of the promises that the Labour Party made, on which I have yet to see the faintest glimmer of delivery.

Tavish Scott, quite reasonably, focused on journey times. I think that journey times are a good point to focus on, but we all recognise and share the understanding that there is a tension between how many stops are made on a journey and the journey time. That is why it is a little invidious to compare journey times between Edinburgh and Aberdeen and those between Edinburgh and Newcastle—the distances are similar, but the stopping patterns are very different.

When Tavish Scott talked about journey times to Aberdeen, he quoted averages. They might well be correct, but they conceal something very important. If we look at the median times, we find that there are more trains and that more of them stop in Fife but that most of the ones from Aberdeen to Edinburgh stop hardly at all in Fife. Therefore, the availability to people in Aberdeen of faster journeys to Edinburgh has increased substantially. Simultaneously, there are additional stops in Fife that increase access to rail.

I see that Mr Scott wishes to intervene.

Tavish Scott: I am grateful to Mr Stevenson for giving way. I take his point, but I was simply quoting the Government’s own figures on average journey times.

I also looked at the SNP’s manifesto from 2011, with which I am sure that the member is entirely familiar. It says:

“Our proposals will also mean faster and more-frequent connections between Inverness and Aberdeen, and between these cities and the central belt.”

That did not happen, as the figures that I used show.

Stewart Stevenson: I simply return to the point that Tavish Scott is correct about average times but that median times are a better way of looking at the issue, because we have introduced more fast journeys between Aberdeen and Edinburgh. That is the point. We only get the answer to the question that we ask; sometimes we have to modify the question to understand what is going on.

I turn to rail fares. One of the great benefits of old age—there are not very many of them—is having access to the senior railcard, which costs £30 a year and is an enormous bargain. That, coupled with offers from ScotRail, has meant that this week the cost of my return journey from Huntly to the south is a mere £17—provided that I travel off-peak of course. That is very good. There are many opportunities for people to get such bargains.

It is important that we look at the fare structure. For example, I have been advised that, when travelling from Keith to Inverness, one should buy a ticket to Muir of Ord, which is beyond Inverness, because it is cheaper to do so. That is the sort of anomaly that I hope we will continue to work on.

In relation to the railway line from Aberdeen to Inverness, it is worth looking at what has happened at Inverurie. A great proportion of the trains that previously stopped at Dyce now continue to Inverurie. We are paying the penalty for success. Patronage has been driven up at Inverurie. We now have the longest operational train anywhere on the ScotRail network—a seven-carriage train—running between Aberdeen and Inverness. That part of the network is important to my constituents and others.

Jenny Marra: Will Stewart Stevenson take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry—I am out of time.

Finally, I congratulate the Scottish Government on the introduction of wi-fi, which I am finding highly useful. On my daily commute, I see dozens of people in each carriage using the wi-fi. I congratulate the minister and the Government on everything that they have done.

15:19

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The point that I wanted to put to Stewart Stevenson was that I am glad to hear that he feels that the remaining anomalies on the railways should be sorted out. Perhaps we will get the chance later in the debate to hear whether he thinks that they should be sorted out during this franchise, or whether people will have to wait until the next franchise, as the Scottish Government has indicated.

Nearly two months ago, the Scottish Government answered Labour's calls to end the Tay tax for Dundonians by pledging to lower the cost of 275,000 rail journeys into and out of the city. My campaign to end the Tay tax began in July 2011. For years, Dundonians were unfairly

penalised at the train station, simply because they did not live in the central belt, inside the Government's subsidised zone. On journeys to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, it was cheaper for Dundonians to split their tickets across different legs of a journey and thus make a modest saving. At new year this year, a return fare from Dundee to Glasgow hit £50.50, making it cheaper for four people travelling from Dundee to Glasgow to take a taxi there and back.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the member aware that the advance fare to Dundee at peak time, bought by 6 o'clock yesterday evening, is less than £15?

Jenny Marra: Yes—I am aware of the myriad of fares across our system and of the fact that they are incomprehensible. The Government has made some moves to sort out the anomalies, but there are still many anomalies in existence, which I will come to.

It is now exactly two weeks since lower fares kicked in, and I am pleased to say that many Dundonians are benefiting. Not all of them are, however. Some are still being hit with the Tay tax—the one that we wanted to abolish. Will the Government finish the job that it started at Easter and commit to ending all rail fare anomalies for Dundee within the current franchise?

It is still cheaper to buy a return ticket from Dundee to Leuchars, at £7.80, and a return ticket from Leuchars to Edinburgh, at £23.20, than it is to buy a direct return from Dundee to Edinburgh, at £31.40. It is 40p more expensive to travel with a direct ticket. That is not much, members might say, but it makes no sense at all—and this is my point. The cost per mile between Dundee and Leuchars over the Tay bridge is far higher than for the journey between Leuchars and Edinburgh. Why is that, when Alex Salmond said that he would sort out the Tay tax?

For someone travelling from Edinburgh to Dundee, the last 14 minutes of their journey home, across the beautiful Tay, puts their fare up by 35 per cent. It is a beautiful view, as I am sure the Minister for Transport and Veterans will agree, but people still have to pay through the nose for it, even after the intervention at Easter. Furthermore, I am told that it is cheaper to travel from Leuchars to Edinburgh in first class than it is to travel the longer journey from Dundee to the capital city in standard class.

Patrick Harvie: I share the member's frustration. Does she recognise that that situation also applies in many other parts of the country? I say that with a little irritation, having recently been stung for £12 for the convenience of a single ticket between my home and the centre of Glasgow, on my way to Perth.

Jenny Marra: I agree with the member that there are anomalies across the country, but he will forgive me for coming back to my pet topic and talking about the situation facing my home city.

As I have said, I welcome the alterations to fares that Alex Salmond made at Easter. I am glad that he listened to our campaign and made commuters' lives a bit easier. However, I am asking the transport minister to consider this issue again today.

Dundee to Edinburgh is a well-used commuting route. The rail subsidies are designed to encourage business and investment; that is what the subsidised zone is for. Many people travel from Dundee to Edinburgh for business and work purposes. When the new Malmaison opens on our waterfront this autumn, we will want to make it attractive to visitors and potential investors in our city from Edinburgh as well as from Glasgow.

We cannot wait until the next franchise period to tee up investment opportunities for our important waterfront project. I am asking the transport minister this today: he has sorted the Clyde tax and the Don tax; will he now be true to his pledge and abolish the iniquitous Tay tax for my city, once and for all?

15:25

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It seems fair on such occasions that we should both comment on the current situation and express hopes for the future. I would like to do both.

We have had two useful receptions at Holyrood recently, one with the Office of Rail Regulation and, on Tuesday, one with Virgin. I thank both for the opportunity to have extremely interesting discussions with a number of experts. At the Virgin reception, there was a reminder that there was a suggestion not that long ago that the only railways in Scotland would be between Glasgow and Edinburgh and between each city and London. When we think about what might have happened, we can be extremely positive about where we are now and about the fact that, for example, ScotRail had 83.2 million passengers in 2012-13.

It is not only that there have not been the closures that were suggested at one stage; there have been some real steps forward. Members will not be surprised that I want to mention the Airdrie to Bathgate railway line, which is obviously my favourite railway line. Based on the points that were made earlier, I accept that the legislation was passed under a previous Administration and I understand that the final funding decision was made under the current Government—there was a combination of the two. That rail link has meant that the east end of Glasgow and, further west,

Milngavie and Helensburgh have direct routes through to the capital.

Dalmarnock station is even more local for my constituency. That station is to be the main one for the Commonwealth games. It was very run down and poorly used, but it has had an £11 million refurbishment, I think, and has recently reopened, although the building is not quite finished. If I picked up correctly what the minister said, the electrification of the Whifflet line is being sped up, which is tremendous. Three stations in my constituency—at Carmyle, Mount Vernon and Baillieston—are included.

On a wider scale, perhaps one of the best improvements on the railways over recent years has been the availability of much better information to passengers—I do not like the word “customers”. Even at a relatively small station, such as mine at Garrowhill, there are now screens on both platforms that show the next three trains, estimated times of arrival and major announcements on storm damage or flooding, for example. On top of that, there are announcements over the public address systems. The situation is much better than it used to be. The announcements on the trains vary a bit, and some drivers volunteer much more information than others do, but there is no question but that there has been an improvement over recent years.

It is clear that a lot of this debate will be about future projects—things that we would like to happen. We can split those into three categories: projects that are beginning to happen now, such as EGIP and the Borders line projects; the high priorities for the future; and the wish list. We all have a wish list of pet projects that we would like to happen if we had pots of money.

On the projects that are beginning to happen, I recently drove down to Galashiels to take part in a meeting with Murdo Fraser. I confess that that was the first time that I had been down that way for a while. I was hugely impressed when I was driving down the road. It seemed that every few hundred metres, there was a sign about the work on the railway that was going on and the access to the work sites. It is clear to me that a dramatic amount of work is going on there.

I will mention a few improvements that I would like to see. I would certainly welcome the electrification of the lines into the Queen Street high-level station. I think that the Jacobs report on the issue came out around the same time as we previously debated the railways, so we did not really have time to look at it properly. I also welcome the idea of having longer platforms at Queen Street that would allow four eight-car trains per hour rather than six six-car trains, which was originally suggested and which would have meant much more complex signalling. As one of my

colleagues said, if the same result can be produced for less money, that is surely a success. If the minister could give us an update on the timescales for the work at Queen Street, I would be interested in that.

The idea of more through trains has been a theme. For a number of years, more through trains have been seen as a good thing to take pressure off city-centre termini. The route from Helensburgh to Edinburgh via the Queen Street low-level station has already been mentioned. The Argyle line was previously reopened, of course, and that gave routes from Lanarkshire to Dunbartonshire via Glasgow Central low-level station.

The next obvious through route would be from Ayrshire and Renfrewshire—which, for Mr Adam's information, includes Paisley—via crossrail to Edinburgh, using an existing line. For those who are not familiar with that line, it used to serve St Enoch station in Glasgow. Those lines are currently in use and available but they are not electrified. For relatively little cost, the necessary 1.8 miles could be electrified. I accept that it would be more expensive in the longer term to put in a station at Glasgow Cross, but doing that would also have a tremendous economic impact on the east end of Glasgow.

I have a few other pet projects, such as a station at Parkhead on the Airdrie to Bathgate line. I want also to mention ticketing, which has been referred to already. The letter that Tavish Scott read out from *The Scotsman* went on to talk about triangular journeys, which is a particular interest of mine. Sometimes I go from Glasgow to Perth to Edinburgh and then back to Glasgow in the one day and there seems to be no way of coping with that within the ticketing system. Similarly, many members travel to Edinburgh three times a week but we cannot get vouchers and have to pay cash every day on the train. More widely, people say to me that the bus is cheaper than the train, and we need to consider that.

In conclusion, I am very enthusiastic about rail. Of course we all have our wish lists of what we want to see, but we have to accept that there have been huge improvements in recent years.

15:31

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I will focus on rail developments in South Scotland and I hope to draw some Scotland-wide conclusions. The developing success story of Carstairs station is testament to the tenacity of the Clydesdale rail action group and many others who fought for the station for many years. Now there are trains every two hours throughout the day, and the station is being used again to such an extent that a car park feasibility study is being

undertaken. There are, of course, other successes that have gone beyond expectations, such as new ventures, new stations and lines that have been opened.

However, at a recent Office of Rail Regulation presentation, I was concerned to identify a gap or a lack of balance in priorities from the Scottish Government in relation to people connectivity. Under the heading of "Journey Times" the ORR stressed that

"Scottish Ministers have made it clear to us that fast and efficient rail services across Scotland, between Scotland and the rest of the UK and beyond are vital to opening up new markets and business opportunities, driving up competitiveness and increasing access to employment and education."

Thus, the ORR states,

"we will be asking Network Rail to develop a process to identify opportunities for journey time improvement".

Speed is, of course, necessary, not least because rail has to compete with road, as highlighted by Transform Scotland.

However, the ORR presentation failed to mention another ministerial priority, which has been highlighted today and which is in the Scottish ministers' high-level output specification. One of the commitments is to delivering rail services

"which support our businesses and communities by connecting towns, cities and rural areas",

and I emphasise the phrase "rural areas". Fast journey times are good only for those who are already on the train. How can the potential conflict between those two ministerial priorities be evaluated if one of them is not highlighted in the periodic review for control period 5? Will the minister reassure members about my concern in his closing remarks?

Keith Brown: One way to reconcile those two priorities is to look at our commitment to the new high-speed line between Edinburgh and Glasgow. When that is established, the other four lines will be more accessible to the opening of other stations. If journey time is important to people, they can use the fastest line, but others can use the other links. That is how journey time improvements and more accessibility can work together.

Claudia Beamish: I understand what the minister says, but my point is that, if the priority of people connectivity is not in the CP5 review, there is cause for concern.

The work of the Co-operative Party, SERA and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen in Wales for a people's railway for Wales—I commend the document "Rail Cymru: A People's Railway for Wales" to everyone in the

chamber—is really significant. Although I have listened to the arguments and concerns about the new franchising process, I hope that the minister will press forward with that approach as a consideration.

The approach could lead to what is described in the document as

“a new kind of railway company, whose main commitment would be to the people ... not to a group of shareholders. Its values would reflect this wider social mission and it would aim to set new standards of outstanding customer service and community benefit. To succeed in being regarded as an outstanding social enterprise, full involvement of its employees would be essential ... Close and positive relationships with local authorities and their regional consortia are equally essential.”

The document goes on to say that rail Cymru

“would also build on the outstanding work of the Welsh community rail partnerships”—

I understand that the minister is interested in such partnerships for Scotland—

“and station friends groups to ensure that Rail Cymru would be strongly focussed on working with the local communities it serves.”

I commend the document to members. It is very interesting indeed.

A debate that is entitled “Transforming Scotland’s Railways” would not be complete without a reference to the long-awaited Borders rail project. I am pleased that Network Rail has arranged a number of community drop-in sessions, so that it can hear local people’s views. That is the way forward. Tomorrow, the Scottish Borders tourism partnership will host a conference at the Tweed horizons centre, to explore tourism opportunities from the Borders railway.

I acknowledge the minister’s sensible adjustment to the Borders rail spec in relation to charter trains, and I hope that he will look again at Saturday trains, which are a big concern. The Campaign for Borders Rail has asked me to raise the issue of the line going to Hawick and perhaps, in the distant future, to Carlisle.

A regeneration issue that is intimately connected with rail relates to Stranraer station. There are concerns about busing people from Cairnryan to Glasgow, and the station’s dilapidated state is a worry. The local community rail partnership is keen to meet the minister, and I hope that he will respond to requests to meet the partnership and the Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association.

On a more general point, will the minister say whether more provision will be made for taking bikes on trains?

On behalf of my colleague Dr Simpson, I ask about the health impact of night freight trains in the

minister’s constituency. I know that the minister is looking into the issue, but surely he can ask the chief medical officer at least to study the effect on households and consider mitigation measures.

In the context of climate change, I praise ScotRail’s encouraging steps to reduce our impact on the environment. However, there is much more to do if we are to enable people to get on the train and off the roads whenever possible.

15:37

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I will take on board the Presiding Officer’s remarks at the start of the debate and do my best to stay on time—and, of course, on track—*[Interruption.]* Oh dear. It gets worse.

My constituents have much to be pleased about, given the proposed improvements for north-east Scotland. We are delighted to have confirmation that Kintore station will at last reopen, which will happen by 2019.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I am pleased that the Government has finally listened to our campaign and agreed to reopen Kintore railway station. Does Mr Robertson agree that it would be much more ambitious to reopen the station sooner and that a wait until 2019 is far too long?

Dennis Robertson: I am glad that Alison McInnes believes that her campaign alone was the reason for the decision to reopen the station—I think not. There is cause for celebration about the decision to reopen the station, but much work needs to be done to ensure that it provides the best link, not just between Aberdeen and Kintore but between Aberdeen and Inverness. I am sure that she is aware of that.

Also in my constituency, we look forward to Inch station having step-free accessibility and additional car parking. I understand that the discussions between Network Rail and the landowner are going well; we look forward to their conclusion and an improved service for constituents in Inch.

The improvements at Kintore and Inch will enable far more car drivers to leave their cars at their local station when they travel to the city and beyond. As a non-car driver—which I am sure is a great relief to many here—I take the train from my home station of Stonehaven to Edinburgh on a weekly basis. On those journeys I am becoming more aware of the increasing number of passengers using their laptops on the train, just as I do. The inclusion of the wi-fi service is certainly making my job much easier, given the connectivity. However, we must acknowledge that

there are black spots on the line, although that is no fault of First ScotRail or the Government.

I hear and accept the cry for better train journey times. However, we have to take cognisance of the fact that not everyone lives in the major cities. Some people rely on trains stopping at intermediate stations. I said that I use the station in my home town of Stonehaven. I certainly appreciate the fact that, with the new timetabling, more trains are stopping there. However, in looking beyond the peripheries of our cities, we sometimes need to be a bit more imaginative if we want more car drivers to leave their cars at home and take the last few miles, or even 20 miles, into the city centre by train. I urge First ScotRail to look at its timetabling to see whether more trains can stop at the likes of Stonehaven and, indeed, Inverurie.

Perhaps we could be more imaginative when it comes to the franchise. Perhaps the minister could discuss with First ScotRail or any other provider the possibility of having a shuttle service—I am not talking about the express train between Aberdeen and Edinburgh or Glasgow—for commuters going from Stonehaven to Inverurie. That would provide a fantastic opportunity for more people to leave their cars at their home station and would provide better connectivity for passengers in those areas.

The journey from Stonehaven to Edinburgh is just over two hours. It is not a long journey, but it is much more comfortable when I take the East Coast train or the CrossCountry train. First ScotRail needs to look at the comfort of its passengers, which I know could be looked at in the franchise for 2015. As we are trying to encourage people on to rail services, it is important not just to cut journey times but to improve comfort on the journeys.

15:42

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak on Scotland's railways and to underline the importance of our rail infrastructure to our economy, communities and potential as a nation.

Scotland's rail network is a tremendous asset that we can get much more out of than we do. The most underdeveloped part of the rail network, at least outside major cities, is our local train stations. I acknowledge the station improvements that have been achieved through the Scottish Government, Network Rail, SPT, First ScotRail and others. I can think of plenty of examples from my region of new car parking, new shelters, new signage and new toilet facilities, but we are still not realising the full potential of our train stations.

I know that the minister is aware of the adopt-a-station programme and the difference that it has

made to communities the length and breadth of Scotland. Through the scheme, volunteers or start-ups commit to sprucing up their local train station, often with flowers or artwork, but also with more ambitious landscaping and outdoor projects. There are more examples of communities successfully adopting stations than I could possibly name this afternoon, but I will draw particular attention to South Lanarkshire College, Crosshouse primary school in East Kilbride, Hamilton grammar and the staff and patients of NHS Lanarkshire's Beckford lodge. Although the efforts of volunteers are welcome, our rail stations have a strategic importance that could be developed further.

By growing the tourism trade, promoting active travel and regenerating town centres, good stations can support Government priorities at local and national levels. Every train station is a gateway to a community and a crucial transport link—not just part of the rail network but part of a bus route, local road or cycle trail. We should use our stations and rail services to sell Scotland and destinations in Scotland to businesses, tourists and our own people.

I stress the benefits to the economy of sustained capital investment in infrastructure. In my area, improvements to the greater Glasgow suburban network would not only reduce journey times but create opportunities for people to work and to train, all of which helps to support growth.

We have waited for some time for the electrification of the East Kilbride line. I am concerned that the knock-on effect of last year's cuts to EGIP is that we will wait even longer. Scotland's towns need reliable connections to Scotland's cities, which is why I emphasise to members the importance of upgrading the rail network in such areas.

I will focus on the needs and the experiences of passengers, which Passenger Focus, Transport Scotland and others set out in evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee over several months. Passenger Focus's report "Designing the Future—Rolling Stock Design" looked at the design of rail carriages and found that Scottish passengers' requirements include safety, ease of access, comfort, luggage space and general cleanliness. Peak-time travellers emphasised their concerns about overcrowding and the capacity of our trains to cope during busy periods.

Looking beyond rolling stock and design issues, I am sure that we all understand the importance of accessibility, multimodal transport links, reduced journey times and good wi-fi coverage. I hope that all those who bid for the ScotRail franchise will understand the breadth of the passenger's experience. It is not just about getting on or off a

train; it is about booking tickets, planning a journey and spending time in a station. Increasingly, it is about comparing trains with cars.

I do not doubt that good work is happening on our railways—I have seen plenty of examples of it—but we have to raise our game to ensure that our entire rail network improves and will one day rank among the best in the world.

15:47

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):

Regardless of who deserves the credit, rail is a success story in Scotland, as the minister said. The passenger numbers on ScotRail, which manages 95 per cent of train services in Scotland—more than 750,000 journeys—continue to rise, with a 33 per cent increase in nine years. In 2013, journeys were up 2.6 per cent on 2012. Whether it be to get to work or education or for leisure purposes, more and more Scots are, as the old slogan said, letting the train take the strain.

Just as the number of services being provided is rising, so are passenger satisfaction levels high. We must build on that. I will look to the future. I welcome the Government's commitment, through phase 1 of the high-level output specification, to deliver extra commuter services through a programme that runs until 2019.

From a perhaps more parochial perspective, I welcome even more warmly proposals that are being looked at for control period 5, which is 2014 to 2019, and control period 6, which is 2019 to 2024, which would have a direct impact on my constituency. I understand that a number of track and signalling works are being considered for control period 5 that would improve capacity between Aberdeen and the central belt. I look forward to the outcome of the feasibility study into that, which I believe is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

In control period 6, and the Aberdeen to central belt rail enhancement scheme, we have the prospect of further enhanced signalling and, more significantly, doubling the track section at Usan. That move would have a significant price tag, but rail experts tell us that it could greatly enhance rail provision down the east coast and, of course, through Angus.

There has already been welcome investment in rail provision through my constituency. With more to come over the next decade, we are very much on the right track to get more and more Angus residents out of their cars and on to trains. However, we will fully realise the potential of that only with a change in emphasis, which I will come to in a moment.

The recently delivered additional weekend services that are benefiting Arbroath and Carnoustie are good news for commuters, as is the fact that Carnoustie now has facilities from which prepaid tickets can be collected. That affords locals the opportunity to make advance, money-saving purchases. I will return to that later.

In the past few months, Carnoustie has installed new platform seating. Although the station is in good nick, despite the ravages that sea air can inflict on metalwork, it is in line for the provision of signage, paint works and rebranding later this year.

I further welcome the fact that wi-fi will shortly be available on many of the trains serving the Angus route, although, as the minister knows, I have raised with him the issue of Carnoustie being omitted from the first tranche of in-station wi-fi provision. None of the Angus stations may tick the boxes for footfall and time spent in the location, which were criteria for the initial deployment of the provision, but Carnoustie is hosting a Commonwealth games event, which was another criterion.

Achieving a transformational change is not just about infrastructure and service delivery. We as service users also have to change how we approach utilising and accessing our railways if we are to derive the full benefit from them. For example, it is surprising that in this day and age, 75 per cent of ScotRail's custom remains walk up. We buy our food and our white goods and we book our holidays to far-flung places online yet, when it comes to purchasing a ticket for a train, we still wander up to the station and pay top dollar. If we go online, there are not just savings to be made; we can also reserve a seat on many services with a click of a mouse, which ensures that there is no need to make the journey standing up.

Dennis Robertson: On seat reservations, does the member accept that one of the confusing things for passengers, especially on First ScotRail trains, is that they are not terribly sure which carriage they are going to? Better signage on carriages would enable passengers who have reserved their seats to go to the right carriage.

Graeme Dey: That is a valid point. The savings can be significant. I know from experience that booking online can save up to 13 per cent on the cost of a standard return from Angus to Parliament. A recent journey to and from Parliament that involved a detour via Glasgow—interestingly, for a meeting with a rail service provider—cost 25 per cent less than I would have paid on the day. Unlike Stewart Stevenson, I do not possess a senior citizen railcard.

According to ScotRail, by booking a specified Aberdeen to Edinburgh train—on or off-peak—in advance, people can save up to £36.90 on the walk-up-and-go fare. Of course, not everyone has access to the internet, but most do, so why would we not act in a way that is beneficial to the pocket and helps rail providers to better gauge just how many carriages might be required on particularly popular services?

More important, we need to strike a balance in what we demand of our rail services. We are all guilty of casting our eyes down the timetable to see just how long it will take us to get from our starting point to our intended destination. As we as a society strive to behave in an increasingly environmentally responsible manner, what is rail transportation meant to deliver? Is it only to get us from point A to point B as quickly as possible, or is it to get as many people on board as possible and so reduce the use of private vehicles? If it is the latter, fitting in as many stops as possible along the route or linking in more services—without creating havoc with the timetable—must surely be an increasingly important consideration.

I accept that there is a balance to be struck. However, outwith the central belt, we will get more people on the trains only if the trains stop locally or if the connections are in place to take passengers into central points for city-to-city transfers. To be fair, that seems to be the direction of travel that we are on.

People who live in Arbroath or Carnoustie in my constituency have good access to rail services. However, just two trains a day stop in Monifieth—and only on weekdays. I hope that the positive dialogue that I have been involved in with ScotRail will lead, before long, to an improvement in that situation, and I commend all those who are engaged in the process for the solution-seeking approach that has been adopted. However, the Monifieth case highlights the need to transform our thinking about rail—to tolerate sometimes slightly extended journey times because there is more traffic on the rails, linking in small towns, or because more stops are being made to ensure that more of our fellow citizens can get on the train and in so doing reduce Scotland's carbon footprint.

15:53

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The debate has been interesting although, rather like Elaine Murray, I regret the rather self-congratulatory tone of the Government motion, because the reality for many people in Scotland is somewhat different. I am sure that the transport minister has seen the popular film franchise "Back to the Future". That is exactly what some passengers experience on Scotland's railways

today. If I was travelling between Perth and Edinburgh in 1913, I would arrive sooner than a passenger who was making that same journey today. If I was standing on the platform at Edinburgh Waverley in 1895 to get a train to Dundee, I would arrive in Dundee at least 5 minutes quicker than I would if I made that same journey this afternoon.

This is 21st century Scotland and we need 21st century rail links. There is a good case to be made for high-speed rail, but it would be a start to have rail travel that matched the standards of the Victorians. The Scottish Government should bridge the gap between the standard of rail links that are offered in the central belt, which can be very good, and the rail links that serve much of the rest of Scotland.

If the country is open for business, efficient rail services are critical in ensuring that we make the most of our economic opportunities. For example, Aberdeen is emerging as the employment capital of Britain, with two jobs to every jobseeker but, as we have heard, travel between Edinburgh and Aberdeen takes 50 minutes longer than the journey between Edinburgh and Newcastle, which is 6 miles longer in distance.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: No, because we have had a long discussion on that point. I want to develop other issues.

Increasing the connectivity between our major cities will encourage businesses to relocate from the central belt into the more peripheral areas—Perth, Aberdeen, Dundee and Inverness. I therefore make no apology for concentrating my remarks on the Perth to Edinburgh rail service.

I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with much of what Patrick Harvie said. However, I do not agree with him on the nationalisation of the railways. I am old enough to remember British Rail; I am even old enough to remember the British Rail sandwich. I have had a few of those in my time and I do not think that we should go back to those days. Those who travel on the railways have seen dramatic improvements in the intervening period.

I agree with Patrick Harvie that better connectivity is needed between our cities and that applies to Perth, too—Scotland's newest city. Whether it is through digital infrastructure or speedier rail links, we should make Perth a better place in which to do business. As the gateway to the Highlands, Perth is perfectly situated to take full advantage of a variety of economic opportunities but, as I have said, railway journeys between Perth and Edinburgh are slower today than they were before the first world war. By no

stretch of the imagination can that be called progress.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Murdo Fraser must recognise that Richard Beeching's cuts, including the cut to the line that went up through Kinross, had a significant impact on journey times.

Murdo Fraser: I agree entirely. I thank Mr Crawford for that helpful introduction, because I am about to come to my solution to that very problem.

A direct rail link between Perth and Inverkeithing was mooted in the 2008 strategic transport projects review. However, significant financial and engineering hurdles were in the way of that. As Patrick Harvie said, an amended plan put forward by Transform Scotland for an intercity express to link Perth to Halbeath would have the potential to reduce journey times to Edinburgh by 35 minutes, and it would be less costly than the originally proposed plan because it would avoid the need for expensive tunnelling between Halbeath and Inverkeithing. That would have a knock-on reduction in journey times to Inverness and the north. Indeed, trains up the east coast to Aberdeen could be rerouted via Perth rather than taking the journey through Fife, with a consequent time saving.

Clearly, there would be a capital cost to that plan but, as with any large-scale infrastructure project, economies of scale could reduce the costs. Utilising the expertise used to construct the new Borders railway, to which John Mason referred, could also decrease costs substantially. I would like to see that project being considered for the Scottish Government's third national performance framework.

Keith Brown: Murdo Fraser mentioned the Transform Scotland proposal. Its spokesperson said today that there is no shortage of money. However, Transform Scotland also says that the proposal would cost around £1 billion. Does he have any idea where he would find the money for the project?

Murdo Fraser: I do not suggest that we should start doing that work tomorrow, or even next year—such forward plans are for the long term. However, in planning Scotland's infrastructure for 10 or 20 years' time, we should be looking at and seriously costing that project to see whether it is viable, given its advantages.

I turn my attention further north. I am not surprised that the Greens oppose dualling the A9 in their amendment, but I am disappointed that we have Highland MSPs who appear to be doing that. I do not think that dualling the A9 or improving the Highland main line rail service is an either/or question.

Back in 2008, the First Minister stood up at the SNP conference in Inverness and committed his Government to improving by 2012 the journey time between Inverness and Edinburgh by 35 minutes. That has not happened. It is 2013 and the line is still single track, it is still not electrified and the journey still takes longer than he promised. When will the SNP honour the pledges that it made to the people of the Highlands and improve the Highland main line service? Scotland deserves a first-class rail network, not the second-class ticket that is offered by the SNP.

15:59

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): The aim of any railway industry must be to place the railway at the centre of a transport system that helps to drive economic growth. That is easy to say, but the challenges of providing the capacity to drive that economic growth while at the same time improving safety, reducing carbon emissions, delivering better value for money for the passenger and cutting the level of public subsidy in a very complex industry should not be underestimated. The challenge means all those involved in the rail industry in Scotland—the Government, Transport Scotland, Network Rail and contractors—exploring new ways in which to deliver greater efficiencies and generate more revenue.

That challenge is exemplified by the fact that Scottish towns and cities have changed significantly since the regrettable public transport policies of Richard Beeching in the 1960s, and that how people use public transport and the distances that they travel and what they expect from their journey are also very different. Rail passenger numbers, as members have noted, are at record levels on a network that is half the size that it was pre-Beeching. That is to be celebrated, but I think that it is true to say that overcrowded trains, peak-time congestion and little spare capacity on the network are evidence that the railway system is perhaps a victim of its own success.

That is why I am delighted that the Government is committed to the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme, and I will tell members why. The programme represents one of the most significant investments ever made in Scotland's rail infrastructure and its aim is to address the capacity issue that I mentioned. Wholesale electrification, extending right across central Scotland, is the key to unlocking additional capacity, reducing congestion and ensuring longer trains with more seats for passengers.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Does the member accept that what we are getting with EGIP is less than what was promised?

Bruce Crawford: Some of us live in the Holyrood bubble and some of us live in the real world of what is actually going on in the economy, with the impact of the reduction in public services brought about by the UK Government. I wish that the Tories would reflect on that in some of their comments. Programmes inevitably have to be adjusted to take the real world into consideration, but significant work is going on in the EGIP programme; I will come on to that. We sit here in the Holyrood bubble, but real things are happening out there on EGIP.

Getting the central belt work right will provide the solid foundation for improvements to the line to Perth, Inverness, Fife and the north-east. Stirling, which is in my constituency, will also benefit, with the prospect of faster journey times to both Edinburgh and Glasgow and more reliable and resilient train services on quieter, greener trains.

Unfortunately, projects on that scale do not come without some disruption. I will give an example of that from the Stirling area. Faced with the significant constraints of a Victorian infrastructure, Network Rail has embarked, as part of EGIP, on a programme of clearance works to ensure that bridges are high enough above the rails to run electric cables. All that is to help facilitate the electrification of the line through Stirling and on to Dunblane and Alloa.

In 2012, Network Rail invested £26 million, as part of EGIP, in clearing bridges to prepare for electrification, including upgrading the Carseview bridge near Cowie, which cost £2.3 million and involved the original 1848 structure being replaced by a modern structure, through partnership working with Stirling Council. That work delivered improved approaches and a safer road alignment at the same time. Preparing for and delivering electrification between Larbert and Dunblane will represent an investment of almost £90 million. A further £15 million will be invested in modernising track works and signalling in and around Stirling station.

That volume of activity during the construction phase will bring immediate benefits to the city of Stirling through providing contractors with food and accommodation, and providing opportunities for local businesses to sell their services. At a time when we need investment, those programmes of work and infrastructure improvements will be of significant importance and will provide a welcome economic boost for the area. The work that will start soon in Stirling will see the replacement of the Seaforth Place bridge, the main access point to Riverside and Forthside. That will be a huge undertaking that will involve closing a road and bridge from June this year to February 2014. It is not as if nothing is happening on EGIP, because

real work in a real part of Scotland is going on right now to deliver those changes.

Obviously, the work will create unfortunate disruption for the people who live in Riverside in going about their daily business. However, I have been impressed by the work that has been done not only by Network Rail but by Stirling Council to seek to minimise disruption for all and to provide additional assistance for those who need it during the bridge closure. I am aware that Network Rail has provided detailed information to the communities and businesses affected.

In my experience of all levels, from Government down through Network Rail to community councils and local businesses, both the vision and the delivery plans have been well laid out. That has led to a general acceptance that while there is disruption in the short term, the long-term benefits are there to be achieved by the local people and Scotland as a whole. EGIP is already progressing on the ground for real in Scotland, and that is how to do business in modern Scotland. I support the Government's motion.

16:05

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Since 2004—I give credit to previous Administrations—there have been many improvements to Scotland's rail network. It is, therefore, no surprise that those improvements have led to a significant increase—of about 30 per cent—in the number of passengers who use Scotland's railways.

In my constituency, a good number of improvements have already been delivered. In December 2012, the new timetable was launched, which added two extra services a day between Inverness and the central belt, which is to be welcomed. The Beaully station is now a mandatory stop and has gained a couple of stops—one in each direction—between Monday and Saturday.

Earlier this year, I was delighted to be present at the reopening of the Conon Bridge station, which is an excellent improvement to the transport links with Inverness, the west and Kyle, as well as Nigg and Caithness. The size of the platform there is indicative of a refreshing approach. It is possibly the smallest platform in Scotland, at around 7m—

Stewart Stevenson: It is not quite the smallest.

Dave Thompson: I bow to Stewart Stevenson's superior knowledge, but it is very small indeed. In the past, we would have put in great, lengthy platforms at any new station, so we are making progress in terms of how people think and innovate when it comes to improving railways. If we can think a wee bit out of the box, improvements do not always have to cost a

fortune. The reopening of that station has helped to alleviate the congestion resulting from the maintenance work that is taking place on the Kessock bridge.

We have made progress in eliminating open level crossings on public roads. Following a campaign that was started by me just over five years ago, Network Rail has started putting barriers on all 23 of Scotland's open level crossings. Barriers have been installed at the crossing in Ardrossan—that was the pilot project—and at the one in Corpach, and the project is being rolled out across the others, which are mainly in the Highlands. Further, Network Rail will do the same thing to more than 100 open level crossings in England and Wales. I am extremely pleased about that.

Other improvements that are in the pipeline have been spoken about already today. Phase 2 of the Highland main line improvement will increase capacity on the line and decrease journey times in due course between the Highlands and the central belt, with a target of reducing the shortest journey time to two hours and 45 minutes.

It has been announced recently that 25 stations around Scotland, including Inverness and Fort William, will have free wi-fi. I am pleased about that. Wi-fi is also being rolled out to all class 170 trains, which run between Inverness and other Scottish cities, and to the class 380 trains. Soon, a third of Scotland's rolling stock will have free wi-fi.

The planned and delivered improvements are welcome and will significantly improve transport links between the Highlands and the central belt. I was encouraged by what today's motion says about the use of franchise specifications to better meet the needs of the people of Scotland. I am sure that that will be the case. However, I want to mention a couple of points that I think are important.

As I am sure will be the case, the specifications must improve the rolling stock. As has been said, many of the journeys to the north can take three or four hours, so it is important that we have rolling stock that is equipped with adequate luggage and cycle storage, and comfortable seats. That is important from the point of view of our tourism industry, and from that of the people in Scotland who use these trains.

We must encourage people on to the trains. Time is not the only important factor in that regard; comfort and the ability to take pleasure in the journey are important, too. That includes the ability to get something decent to nibble on as well. Murdo Fraser mentioned the infamous British Rail sandwich. I occasionally take the sandwiches that are offered by ScotRail, but I prefer the bacon rolls

on the East Coast service. I think that that is a better service. That is what we should aspire too—the old buffets, and a bit of comfort. That will encourage more people back to the trains.

We must continue to improve station facilities in the Highlands. For example, we still have anomalies and problems with stations such as Kingussie, where one of the platforms on the other side from the main station is about a foot lower than the one on the station side, which means that people cannot get disabled access. As we can now have two trains at a time coming in, which is an improvement, that is causing a problem for disabled passengers in getting on the southbound train at the other platform. They have to be taxied to the next station, which could be many miles down the road. We need to look at such things in the long term.

Murdo Fraser mentioned Transform Scotland's proposal to use the Glenfarg line to run a service directly from Edinburgh to Perth and save up to 35 minutes on the journey. That would be great. We need to look at that in the long term, but it might be better to spend any money that we have on dualling the line up to Inverness as much as possible and on electrifying that line. That might gain almost as many minutes as reopening the Glenfarg line would.

We are doing very well on the railways in a difficult period, and I am sure that we will do even better after we get independence.

16:10

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): This week, we have enjoyed our usual robust debate on Scotland's future. Much of the discussion in the newspapers and in the chamber has focused on our approach to tax—in particular, on whether our shared vision of a progressive Scotland is compatible with a race to the bottom on corporation tax. I suggest that that is a fairly straightforward question to address, although the First Minister managed to avoid doing so earlier. The answer is clearly no—the two are not compatible.

A more contentious issue is whether we need to become an independent country to pursue progressive policies. I believe that the debate on transforming Scotland's railways can shed some light on that question. We could bemoan the political settlement and blame the constitution for our inability to reform the way in which we run our railways, or we could set about using the powers that we already have to make a difference now. I understand that the minister and his colleagues were initially quite sympathetic to the idea of establishing a not-for-dividend operation to run the Scottish rail passenger franchise. I am not entirely

sure why that sympathy has, so far, not been translated into action.

I appeal to the minister and the SNP to join us in a new approach to rail in Scotland. There is quite strong public support for reform of the overcomplicated, expensive and downright inefficient rail system that we currently have. The recent collapse of the bidding process for the west coast main line franchise, which the minister mentioned, has highlighted just how farcical the franchise structure has become. The Scottish Government's motion mentions some of the improvements that we have made in recent years, including a welcome increase in passenger numbers through prioritising this form of public transport, but I believe that we could do more.

The previous Labour UK Government commissioned a review of rail from Sir Roy McNulty to establish value for money. His report found that the cost of operating the rail network throughout the UK was around 30 per cent more than the operating costs of its counterparts on the continent. He identified a number of additional costs that account for the discrepancy, such as interest payments on Network Rail debt and the expense of managing the relationship between the train operators and Network Rail. What also emerged were the extra costs of the profit taken by train operators and the dividend payments to shareholders. We can address that issue when the minister puts the current Scottish passenger franchise out to tender by insisting that the successful franchisee operate on a not-for-dividend basis.

The Labour Party has secured legal advice that has confirmed that the legal powers to do that exist. If the minister and his SNP colleagues wished to do so—he would have our political backing—the Scottish Government could insist not just that any tender include various community benefit clauses, which I hope that he is already doing, but that the service be run on a not-for-dividend basis.

Section 26ZA of the 1993 act allows ministers to stipulate that only a not-for-dividend service will be considered by them to be sufficiently economic and efficient. That would not require any expansion of the devolution settlement and the franchise would still go out to tender.

Patrick Harvie: I am genuinely interested in the proposed approach and I do not want to blame constitutional legislation unnecessarily, but can the member tell us where such a not-for-profit bidder would materialise from? We need to achieve not just the possibility but the practical reality. Where would such a bidder materialise from without Government support in establishing such an organisation?

Ken Macintosh: It is absolutely the case that a number of hurdles would need to be overcome in putting together a credible bidder. However, models already exist. For example, the fact is that, in the absence of a successful franchisee, the Government currently takes over the operation of the franchise, as happened with the west coast main line. Such things are possible, but, given the huge bond that is required of the companies, we cannot even get to the stage of putting together a successful bid if the Government will not indicate its political support.

I think that there would be an appetite among various bodies, such as Strathclyde partnership for transport and some private sector organisations, to form a co-operative to operate the franchise on a not-for-dividend basis. However, we need to show political leadership. We should not use the constitution as an excuse for inaction; we need to show what we can do now.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ken Macintosh: I want to make some progress.

At the moment, rail services in Scotland enjoy around £800 million of public investment. The rail franchise accounts for the lion's share of that, with last year's £447 million rising to more than £511 million in the future.

Tackling the issue of the ownership of businesses and services goes to the heart of how we rebuild a successful, sustainable and progressive economy in Scotland. I have talked recently about how we should pursue a community ownership model for wind farms, and I believe that a co-operative rail franchise would be a similar step. The minister would enjoy not only Labour's political support in this Parliament but the partnership of the Welsh Government in Cardiff. The Welsh franchise is not up until 2018, but the Welsh Government has already indicated in its consultation that it wishes to pursue such a model. We could offer a similar proposal to that put to the people of Wales.

Our proposal offers value for money not just to the devolved Government but to rail passengers and the wider community. The ethos of the new organisation that ran the service could reflect co-operative principles of social responsibility, accountability and equity—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): You must draw to a conclusion.

Ken Macintosh: There are many significant benefits, which I clearly do not have time to go into now.

This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity, given that the franchise will be awarded for 10 years, so we cannot wait for the referendum. We certainly

do not need to wait for the referendum, so let us act now. Let us not put Scotland on hold, but let us act together to ensure that the franchise operates on a not-for-dividend basis.

16:18

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I welcome what the Scottish Government has been able to achieve. I will be very parochial in this debate because quite a lot has been achieved in my constituency. I welcome the Government's continuing investment in stations—I highlight the three at Stonehaven, Laurencekirk and Montrose—and I welcome the fact that we now have more train services and more stops.

I also note that most of my constituents who travel by train go to one of our big cities—Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh or Glasgow—whereas relatively few journey between the other towns. As Stewart Stevenson noted—he was the first to do so, although others have continued the discussion—there are different stopping patterns. I think that we can see that. On my route from Stonehaven or Aberdeen down to Edinburgh, I see two different kinds of train: one stops frequently and the other is essentially a fast train. Without going into all the details, I think that we now have the balance in the timetable about right. We have some fast trains and we have some trains that pick up or drop off passengers at a large number of stops, particularly as they approach their destination first thing in the morning or last thing at night.

One change that no one has yet mentioned is ScotRail's introduction of rules on the consumption of alcohol. I discussed that issue with ScotRail many years ago, and I did not think that anything would happen, but it has. That change has been appreciated.

The improvements at Stonehaven are significant. We already have automatic doors and a variable-height ticket counter, and new customer information screens are on their way. I agree with Dennis Robertson that Stonehaven would be a good park-and-ride location for Aberdeen; the trouble is that there is not enough parking space. If the minister had a magic wand and could generate more parking space, that would be wonderful. Such a facility would reduce the number of cars on the A90, which would be good for everybody.

Moving down the line to Laurencekirk, we have a new station, which opened in May 2009. I pay tribute to those who campaigned for it before I was elected. It has completely overwhelmed expectations: I think that they were talking originally about 30,000 passengers a year, but in 2010-11 there were 73,000 and a bit. The station has given the town a huge boost, and prospective

developers have written it into their plans as it is obviously an enormous advantage.

Further down the line at Montrose, there is a new footbridge, along with the lifts that mean that there is now disabled access to the northbound platform. That is long overdue and very welcome. I note—as I used to live there—that the view at Montrose is far better than Jenny Marra's view over the Tay at Dundee. If members come and use the lift at Montrose station, they can look out over Montrose basin. It is a fabulous view and far better than anything on the Tay, to be honest.

If members look the other way—although I would not—they would see a 5kW wind turbine. Montrose is apparently the first station in the network that has its own power generator, which is remarkable and perhaps an indication of things to come.

Margaret McCulloch mentioned tourism, which is really important. At places such as Montrose, people can get off the train with their bike and cycle off into the Mearns and north Angus. That is something that we must develop.

The moment that someone heads south from Montrose they hit a bridge—well, they go over a bridge—that is single track, and go through the Usan section. We are well aware that that short stretch represents a significant timetabling constraint, and it would be good to do something about it. I understand that there are moves to see whether something can be done about it in control period 6, which starts in 2019. I suggest to the minister that some signalling work might be helpful even now. I am sure that such things are being worked on.

I recognise the Government's work on fairer fares. Although that work has not been finished, it has made a significant difference to folk in my constituency. There was a huge amount of public frustration in that regard. I do not know quite how people feel about 40p between this and that—perhaps most people feel that it is not an unreasonable amount—but significant sums were involved in splitting the journey from Montrose to Glasgow into three tickets. That is now a thing of the past, which is very welcome.

Finally, I will pick up on an issue that concerns the wider system. We are still in a position, as I have picked up from my local constituency base, in which trains and buses do not connect.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Nigel Don: Someone cannot get a bus from Brechin—which is all of 10 miles inland from Montrose—that will get them into Aberdeen before a quarter to 9. It is simply not possible for a person to commute by bus and train from Brechin unless

they have a 9 o'clock start in the middle of Aberdeen. That needs to be addressed. I have said so on paper to everybody concerned, but I still have not got a result—I suppose that I could be blamed for that. I would like to change such anomalies in my constituency, and I suspect that one or two other members would like to change similar anomalies in their constituencies, too. Over time, we need to do some work on such issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am disappointed to note that a couple of members who have participated in the debate are not back for the closing speeches. We are tight for time. I call John Finnie, who has six minutes.

16:24

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): The debate has been interesting. The minister mentioned Borders rail, and I think that all members recognise the benefits that are associated with such an expansion. There was mention of the introduction of two additional trains to the north at the tail end of 2011, which was very welcome, but that line is now at capacity, which is an issue to which I will return.

Rail and cycle hubs were mentioned, but—as my colleague Dave Thompson said—we need to get the coach design right for that.

There has been a lot of talk about the Aberdeen to Inverness service and the Highland main line, and it would be helpful to hear some clarification on definitive timescales from the minister in his closing speech. However, enhancements to the Oban service—the Sunday services—are welcome.

A practical example that my colleague Dave Thompson also mentioned is the opening of the Conon rail link. It is a modest construction in which Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Highland Council and the Scottish Government were involved.

Two additional carriages were provided during the significant road works at the Kessock bridge.

Elaine Murray and Claudia Beamish mentioned Wales. The principles that Claudia Beamish outlined are commendable. I certainly agree that more imagination is required.

The independent/Green amendment talks about recognising the constraints that are placed on the ScotRail franchise. Those constraints come in the form of section 25 of the Railways Act 1993, which states that the public sector cannot be a franchisee. Of course, as the minister mentioned, there is no corresponding ban on foreign public sector bodies being able to bid for and operate UK franchises. That explains why there is a German state-owned Deutsche Bahn locomotive in

Waverley now and again, courtesy of Deutsche Bahn's involvement with Arriva.

The amendment also talks about the Scottish Government ensuring

“greater transparency in its franchise decisions”.

Stewart Stevenson: Just for clarity, I think that the locomotive that John Finnie mentions is actually on lease to ScotRail rather than being directly used by Deutsche Bahn.

John Finnie: I think that Stewart Stevenson will find that Deutsche Bahn operates with Arriva. Whatever—the principle stands.

Ken Macintosh and others mentioned greater transparency in franchise decisions. Section 30 of the 1993 act says:

“The Authority shall provide, or secure the provision of, services”.

Our amendment certainly talks about providing, rather than securing the provision of, services.

There is an obvious way to remove constraints. Our amendment also talks about

“better value for the public investment in Scotland's railways”.

In 2010, the dividends paid to ScotRail's shareholders could have paid for a 7 per cent reduction in fares if the service had been under public ownership. I think that that would enjoy widespread public support.

On a number of occasions, I have asked the minister about nationalisation and received the reply that we heard today, and have heard many times, that it is for individual bidders to come forward. Indeed, he has mentioned the Strathclyde partnership for transport previously in that regard.

Like my colleague Patrick Harvie, I am interested in what Ken Macintosh said. I hope that the minister will listen to the proposal and engage in the detail, because we all want to ensure the best possible service, in which, to my mind, there is no room for profit.

The Brown review was also touched on. In a previous reply to me, the minister said that the extent to which it would have an impact was not yet known. Perhaps he could let us know about any lessons that have been learned from that.

In our amendment, we condemn the UK Government's plan to reprivatise the east coast line. As has been said, the east coast service requires less public subsidy than the 15 privately run franchises in Britain, according to a report from the rail regulator. I commend that report to my colleague Alex Johnstone, who rightly said that it is important that we do not make the same mistakes. It is clear that the UK Government is intent on making a mistake by returning the east

coast line to private hands, with a new operator taking over by 2015.

The line has been in the control of the Department for Transport since 2009. My colleague Patrick Harvie has given members the figures: in the past three and a half years, £640 million has been returned to the taxpayer, and it is estimated that the figure will be £800 million by the end of the current year. As has been said, the operator is perfectly capable of providing fine fare for Mr Fraser and others. It was discourteous that reprivatisation was not mentioned to the Scottish Government.

In our amendment, we express concern about the road building programme. It is clear that vast sums for road building are available to take minutes off journeys and that the priority remains the motor car—the motor car is king.

Bruce Crawford: Given John Finnie's comments on the road network, does he also object to the upgrading of the A9?

John Finnie: If Bruce Crawford reads the amendment, he will find out that it refers to that.

The Scottish Government is committing £3 billion to the dualling of the A9 to reduce journey times, and it is our view that that money could be better spent. Indeed, there are people who believe that it would be better spent on the A82.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will John Finnie give way?

John Finnie: No. Sorry.

More freight being taken off the roads and put on to rail would mean less pressure on the roads.

In the short time that I have left, I will mention a few additional concerns, of which one is the carriage by rail of exotic nuclear fuels from Dounreay. Another is the fragmentation of ScotRail services, with a separate franchise for the Caledonian sleeper, which concerns many people. The clauses in the franchise that allow the reimbursement to private operators of revenue lost as a result of industrial action is also a matter of concern.

The First Minister was quoted in *The Herald* on 6 August 2008 as saying:

“Railways must at least compete with the roads”.

That is certainly not the case. The minister has been asked about the Railways Act 1993, but as yet there are no plans to remove profit from the public service that is Scotland's rail network. That is not transformation; it is the status quo. The public must be central to the provision of public services.

16:30

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): It has been an interesting debate. Unusually, we have four separate amendments, each ripping large chunks out of the motion, so there are strong views that all is not well. It is disappointing, therefore, that that was not reflected in the contributions from SNP back benchers. Listening to them, you would have thought that everything was hunky-dory.

I do not wish to be too churlish. The Liberal Democrats welcome the fact that Scotland's railways are currently enjoying record passenger numbers and high levels of passenger satisfaction, and the Government is right to continue working towards achieving better value for money for rail passengers. However, as Elaine Murray and Murdo Fraser noted, it is all too often the case with the Government that limited achievements are accompanied by a large helping of complacency, and in what could have been a more useful debate about the future of our railways, there was no need for such a large dose of self-congratulation.

The truth is that the Government's plans for our railways show a remarkable lack of ambition. Although I cannot agree with the vast bulk of Patrick Harvie's amendment, he is correct on one aspect—that, for this Government, railways are all too often the poor relation in transport priorities. In the SNP's six years in government, decisions on the ScotRail franchise have been taken with little consideration and little vision for the long-term needs of the network. Improvements between Edinburgh and Glasgow—the Government's flagship rail project—have been scaled back and delayed, the reopening of the Borders railway is behind schedule, and other projects too numerous to count have been handed off, sidelined and left to lag, forever in the dreaded planning stages.

As Tavish Scott's amendment points out, the north-east is once again bearing the brunt of the Government's complacency. Trains between Edinburgh and Glasgow and the north-east have become slower, more overcrowded and more expensive.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Alison McInnes: Aberdeen is Scotland's third largest city, our energy hub and an international centre of excellence, but instead of rail being the first choice for getting there, it remains a last resort.

Stewart Stevenson: The trains are faster and have more seats.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Alison McInnes: I remind Mr Stevenson that what was once the Aberdeen crossrail project lies

in tatters. We are left with the Government's vague Aberdeen to Inverness line improvements, with unquantified benefits to be introduced at unspecified dates.

As I said earlier, I am delighted that, after years of campaigning, the Government has finally backed the building of a new station at Kintore.

Patrick Harvie: Does Alison McInnes share my regret that so many politicians beyond the SNP supported the road priorities for that part of the country, with the spiralling costs of the AWPR, when they could have supported public transport investment?

Alison McInnes: I am delighted that we supported the AWPR as part of a package of integrated transport improvements, and it is disappointing that we are still waiting for that to be delivered.

Despite the unprecedented level of local support for the new station at Kintore—96 per cent of local residents backed the station in a comprehensive survey that I recently carried out—even that Government pledge comes with caveats: that it will be delivered by 2019 and that the Government will help partners to deliver it. The Government should open the new station at Kintore sooner than that. It would help to alleviate the traffic congestion at the Haudagain roundabout, which is another transport project that the people of the north-east are just expected to keep on waiting for.

Nestrans is currently being frustrated in its attempts to continue planning work for Kintore while it waits for the GRIP—governance for railway investment projects—3 report to be completed. It is already behind schedule, yet the Government does not seem concerned about encouraging Network Rail to get on with it.

Local services continue to suffer. Anyone who has tried to use the train to commute in Aberdeen will know all too well just how busy the trains are. Evening trains from Dyce into the city are regularly at almost 150 per cent capacity. If the Government was truly serious about transforming Scotland's railways, it would have made reducing overcrowding a priority in its franchise discussions, rather than leaving it solely up to the franchisee to decide where to direct resources.

I find the Government's attitude towards our railway services genuinely concerning. The fundamental problem is that passenger numbers are at record levels not because of the Government's work but despite it. The opening of stations at Alloa and Laurencekirk and on the Bathgate link have shown just how much people want to use the railways. Passengers are flocking to the new stations in numbers that are far in excess of what any projection suggested. People

want an alternative to expensive petrol, and to sitting in traffic jams.

The sad thing is that, if the Government was not so concerned with congratulating itself on a job half done, there would be a real opportunity, but that opportunity should be for all. "Mind the gap" is advice that we often hear on trains. The gap between rail services in rural Scotland and those in the central belt is growing ever wider under the SNP Government, and it is time that it decided to redress the balance.

16:35

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives have today attempted to take a balanced approach to the debate. In our amendment and in our speeches, we have emphasised the positives for rail and for the Scottish Government; we have also touched on some of the negatives and challenges in areas where the Government's performance has not been up to scratch so far.

On the positives, it is fair to say that the Scottish Government has done some good things, both in its first term and over the past couple of years. It is also fair to say that the previous Scottish Executive did some good things during its time in office. It was not perfect, but it did some good things in relation to rail. Most important, we should congratulate, as Alex Johnstone did, the franchise holders, who have done the bulk of the work in getting many of the positive results that we have heard about from members throughout the chamber.

There are some good-news stories. We went all around Scotland over the course of the afternoon, hearing about good developments all over the country. There has been improved performance by and greater satisfaction with ScotRail, and we heard from a number of members about the record passenger numbers, which are up at 83 million, according to the minister. Everybody should welcome that.

We support the collaborative approach between the industry and the Scottish Government. A number of members have rightly commended the Government on the superior fares structure that we now have, compared with the position a decade or so ago. Although there is clearly work to be done on that—we heard about some specific examples—what we have now is clearly better, and it is set to improve. We heard about new services and stations, too.

I particularly welcome the update that the minister gave us about the four bids that there have been so far for the Caledonian sleeper and about his plan to take that to the next stage—in August, I think he said. We also welcome the

minister's announcement in relation to Whifflet. There is plenty to be satisfied with.

On the other hand—and although I hate to use this term again, which has been overused in the debate—the suggestion that the motion is a little self-congratulatory has been a fair criticism by members from all the Opposition parties in the debate. Where anything has gone wrong, the Government's position appears to be that it is entirely Westminster's fault, because we are

“at the mercy of Westminster”,

according to Keith Brown, or it was the fault of the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive. We did not hear a single admission from any Government party member that some of what has gone wrong over the past couple of years is actually down to the Scottish Government. It would have been a better, more objective debate if it took some responsibility for some of the failings.

Murdo Fraser commented that the First Minister made a pledge in 2008 that the journey time between Edinburgh and Inverness would be cut by 35 minutes by 2012. Clearly, that has not happened. We heard specific information from Tavish Scott in that regard, and I have a letter from my colleague Mary Scanlon that gives a similar picture. We have not heard any explanation from the Scottish Government—perhaps the minister can provide one in his closing speech—as to why that pledge from the First Minister has not happened. We would be very grateful for an explanation in that regard.

There was fair criticism of the Scottish Government last September, and there has been again today, over EGIP. Bruce Crawford is right, in that it is not true to say that nothing is happening on the ground—it clearly is—but, compared with what was promised, as I pointed out to Mr Crawford in an intervention, we are not getting what the SNP said it would deliver in its 2011 manifesto. We were told in that manifesto that we would have train journey times from Edinburgh to Glasgow

“of just over half an hour”

and that much of central Scotland's rail network would be electrified. It appears that the size of the project has been scaled back and when it will happen on the ground has been put back.

John Mason: Will the member accept at least one point: that the longer trains are an improvement on what was planned previously?

Gavin Brown: I do not disagree with that at all, but picking out one area in which there has been an improvement compared with dozens of areas in which the project has been scaled back is small comfort to many of those who will lose out. The minister and Bruce Crawford again blamed

Westminster for the fact that the project was scaled back.

When I look at the SNP's 2011 manifesto, I see time and again that the SNP would deliver “despite” the reduction in Scotland's capital budgets. That was in 2011, which was the year after the year of the comprehensive spending review, of course. The SNP knew exactly how much money it would get for each year in the comprehensive spending review, so any pledge that it made in 2011 can be held very carefully. The SNP knew exactly what was coming; indeed, in various budgets, it has been given more money than it thought it would receive. It is therefore not acceptable for SNP members to blame anybody for those failings other than themselves.

16:41

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

We have welcomed the chance to debate the future of Scotland's railways. Many of us have found the Government's motion to be cloyingly self-congratulatory, but it has been good to debate a substantive issue in Scottish Government time, and none of us has said that there has been no progress on our railways.

Under devolution, we have had the opportunity to bring a new focus to our rail services. Tavish Scott was quite right to say that that started with the first Scottish Executive under the coalition, when we looked at the transport policy that we inherited. There was a greater focus on rail than there previously was; there was not a myopic focus on new road provision. Devolution has a great deal of credit on its side in developing rail policy and some of the benefits that we now see.

Nevertheless, we have voiced concerns about a number of areas of rail policy. We have, for example, voiced concerns about the limitations of the current franchise arrangements—I will return to that issue—but we have welcomed aspects such as the new wi-fi services that First ScotRail provides. A number of members, such as Margaret McCulloch, have referred to the investment in station facilities, and I am sure that we all appreciate the readiness of ScotRail staff to engage with us in the Parliament on issues that we take to them on behalf of our constituents.

It is right to recognise progress where it has been made, but it is also right to acknowledge where concerns exist. We still do not know what the provisions of the next franchise will be. We should be relieved that so much of the “Rail 2014” consultation document was dumped, as it included proposals for closing stations, ending cross-border rail services and introducing longer journey times. It is good that, after the campaigns by trade unions and the concerns that were raised in the chamber,

many of those proposals have gone, but the fact that they were even under consideration shows that the Parliament must scrutinise the Government's plans for the franchise carefully to ensure that we achieve improvements and not a diminution of services.

When we consider the rail infrastructure in Scotland, we see that the Scottish Government's record is distinctly underwhelming. The Liberal amendment refers to the fact that was reported yesterday by the Aberdeen *Evening Express* that, over the past six years, journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt have increased. Members have mentioned the commitments on journeys from Inverness to the central belt that have not been fulfilled either.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Richard Baker: Perhaps Mr Stevenson will explain to us why the Government has not fulfilled those commitments.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member acknowledge that, by taking many of the stops in Fife off key connections between Aberdeen and Edinburgh, we have delivered faster journey times and, of course, additional rail services between Edinburgh and Dundee to fill in the gaps thus created? Averages and medians are different things.

Richard Baker: Mr Stevenson loves his averages, medians and statistics, but he is being very selective with them. What was highly regrettable was the decision that was made when he was transport minister—he will correct me if I am wrong—to scrap the Aberdeen crossrail project. As Dennis Robertson quite rightly said, we should have an ambition for a much higher frequency of through services from Stonehaven to Inverurie. It was a disgrace that, having campaigned for Aberdeen crossrail for so long when in opposition, and when plans were far advanced, the SNP unceremoniously dumped the project. Given the importance of Aberdeen to our economy, as Mr Scott said, that was a hugely regressive decision.

However, Aberdeen crossrail was not the only victim. There were the Edinburgh and Glasgow airport rail links and, of course, EGIP, which has been cut by a third, which means that gains from that proposal have been lost. We will not realise all the advantages that we could have had, and that, too, was an extremely regrettable decision. That was a shovel-ready project—we keep hearing about shovel-ready projects—that would have been funded through Network Rail borrowing capacity and was not therefore subject to the swingeing cuts in capital investment that we have heard about. That decision was bewildering and it

serves Scotland and our economic progress poorly.

The Scottish Government has been keen to blame others for delays. In last week's debate on its failure to progress work at the Haudagain roundabout in Aberdeen, it had the temerity to blame Opposition parties for delays with the Borders railway when it is the minister's own failed procurement process that has resulted in the huge delays to that project. That was quite breathtaking stuff, even from this Government.

Everything in the garden is not rosy. All the opportunities for an improved rail service in Scotland have not been secured by ministers. Indeed, the cuts to EGIP will result in longer journey times in some cases. Given the tough targets that the Scottish Government has set itself on CO₂ emissions, which it has failed to achieve so far, I am interested to know what assessment was made of the environmental impact of not implementing EGIP in full, because that would have done far more to attract more people on to our rail services.

The award of the new franchise presents the Government with an opportunity to secure improved services. That is why we have said in our amendment that it is vital to look at all the options for how the new franchise will be operated, not least because of the huge sums of public money that the franchise receives—£511 million this year. As Elaine Murray and Ken Macintosh said, it is time for ministers to look seriously at the potential for a mutual option for the ScotRail franchise. We have had warm words from ministers on that but no practical action, and it will not happen on its own. If limitations are being placed on what the Scottish Government can do around a potential mutual bid for the franchise, I hope that ministers will join their counterparts in the Welsh Government, who have already raised with the Department for Transport the issue of a level playing field for all franchisees, whether they be not for dividend or profit seeking.

As Ken Macintosh said, the legal advice on this is not as clear cut as the minister would have us believe. We do not believe that it has been tested in any way by ministers, although we know how reluctant they are to tell us about their legal advice. From the legal advice that we have certainly received, we believe that ministers have a greater capacity than they say they have to explore alternative options for the delivery of rail services in the future. It is our intention to work with our colleagues in the Co-operative Party and the trade union movement to promote such an option and greater accountability in the provision of our rail services in future.

When it comes to the future, we remain in the dark about the Scottish Government's proposals

for our railways under its unpopular plans for separation. Perhaps the minister will enlighten us on those proposals during his closing speech. It is important, because our rail services are crucial to our country and economy, and we believe that there is no cause for ministers to rest on any laurels. They need to get on with the work of delivering the better rail network to which we should all aspire in Scotland.

16:49

Keith Brown: I thank members who have participated in the debate, which has been interesting and has demonstrated that rail services play a crucial part in connecting people and businesses across Scotland and, therefore, deserve the Parliament's attention and recognition.

In the motion, I had the temerity to point out one or two things that I think the Government is doing quite well. That was a misjudgment on my part, because I understand from what members of other parties said that if I had only pointed out all the areas in which we still need to make progress, instead of just acknowledging that "further improvements" are needed, the other parties would have said, "Well done. What a great job the Government is doing." Only my not pointing out all the areas for improvement stopped the other parties recognising the progress that we have made.

As I said, the Government is not doing it alone, but is playing a part in transforming the railways. The benefits have been recognised by passengers, as the high levels of passenger satisfaction show. That is not to say that everyone is getting the service that they should get; of course, we must improve things. However, at a time when public spending is massively constrained by the cuts that the Westminster Government has imposed—there is no question about that; it is a fact—we have managed to increase our commitment.

Suggestions have been made about how we might further enhance the network, reduce fares and provide services and projects. In the context of Murdo Fraser's comments about the Perth line, I noted that this morning someone said that there is no shortage of money. I am afraid that there is a shortage of money.

Members talked, quite rightly, about the improvements that they would like in their areas—I think that one member referred to wish lists. I understand that; I have done the same thing in the past in my area, when I was on the council.

Mary Scanlon: My wish list includes the journey time between Edinburgh and Inverness. Nicola Sturgeon said that journey times have been

reduced by 35 minutes. However, the man who runs the trains, Steve Montgomery, who is the managing director of ScotRail, confirmed in a letter to me that one train's journey time has been reduced by 11 minutes. Will the minister apologise for misleading Parliament and make the record clear?

Keith Brown: I do not believe that I have misled Parliament, so I have no intention of apologising.

Members have wish lists, and in many areas their long-term ambitions have been realised as a result of projects that the Government has undertaken. However, we must acknowledge that there have been decades of underinvestment in the railways. That is also true of the roads network—anyone who wants to disagree should feel free to intervene. We are trying to roll back on that underinvestment.

In the presentation in Parliament from Virgin Trains—I think it was on Tuesday night—we heard that in the early 1980s the Serpell report proposed that the railways in Scotland should comprise the Edinburgh to Glasgow line and should point south, with nothing else. The chap from Virgin said that there was no fanfare of opposition to the proposal to limit the railways in Scotland in such a way. In his view, no one was interested in railways or in expanding the railway network.

Tavish Scott said that we should acknowledge what previous Governments did. I am always happy to do that. In 1999, when I was leader of Clackmannanshire Council, I approached the first transport minister, Sarah Boyack—I do not think that she is in the chamber—about the proposal to reopen the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line. To her credit, Sarah Boyack allocated the largest-ever sum of money under the public transport fund, as it was then called—around £6 million—to the council, at the second time of asking. By the time Tavish Scott was minister many years later, the cost was £85 million and the line had become a freight line. However, foresight was shown in making money available.

Previous Administrations, particularly since devolution, have advanced the case for rail travel in Scotland, but I think that we are now seeing much greater improvements than we have seen up to now. That might be because, as Tavish Scott hinted, there has been a major shift. There was perhaps a slow start and then a change of direction. We have invested massively in rail and we are seeing the benefits of that.

We are accelerating the investment that is planned for the next control period. I mentioned the Whifflet route electrification, which will take place by summer 2014. Work on that will start next month—years ahead of what was previously proposed. That demonstrates the importance that

we accord the rail industry and our confidence in its ability to help us to realise sustainable economic growth. We will not price that growth off the network, but will support and sustain it.

Members expressed views about the state of the railways in Scotland. I did an interview recently for the BBC in Yorkshire, where people say that they are envious of us in Scotland, because we are bearing down on fares in a way that the previous Westminster Labour Government did not and the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government has not. The current Westminster Government made changes recently, but we acted much faster. As members have said, people in other places in the UK are envious of what is happening with railways in Scotland.

I have said that there is a transformation going on. I repeat that that is not entirely due to the Government—of course, other partners are involved. However, it would be nice to have that transformation recognised in the chamber, because it has certainly been recognised outwith the chamber.

Industry alliancing and industry regulation are starting to ensure that we get real value for money. The investments that we make in control period 5, from 2014 to 2019, will offer faster and better-connected services on improved infrastructure, and will connect more and better stations.

I spoke earlier about large-scale projects, many of which have been mentioned by other members. The £650 million investment in the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement project, or EGIP—which should not really be characterised as “Egypt”, as I have no responsibility for Istanbul or Cairo—is a huge investment that will deliver significant benefits for Scotland, plus major refurbishments at Haymarket station. Members who get the train regularly at Haymarket station will have seen how it is being transformed. Queen Street station will, of course, be transformed in the longer term.

We are looking forward to implementing our ambitious plans for high-speed rail, which will ensure resilience and better journey times between our two largest cities. It would have been nice for some of the UK-based parties to have said what they think about the UK Government's attitudes to high-speed rail coming to Scotland. There was no commitment from the previous UK Government and there is no commitment from the current UK Government. Why not? Why are we not seeing productive work happening between—

Jenny Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I am going to come back to Jenny Marra's points shortly, but I will make more progress first.

In the shorter term, the recent announcement that I have made of £5 million to fund station improvements will help us to improve stations such as Gleneagles ahead of the Ryder cup in 2014, and to make lasting improvements that will benefit passengers across the network.

Improved integration between rail and buses, in particular, was mentioned. There is a problem that is not easy to solve, in that several operators are involved. However, we have already said that within the franchise agreement, we will oblige bidders to lay out their plans for ensuring proper integration between modes of transport.

On the amendment that was lodged by the Green and independent group, I was quite surprised to find that there was virtually nothing that I could agree with in John Finnie's closing speech—I say that not least in relation to the A9. We are committed to upgrading the A9 and will fund that; it should have been done many years ago. We will do it at the same time as we invest in our railways.

I turn to the Liberal Democrat amendment. I think that Alison McInnes basically said that the improvements in our rail services and the 83 million passenger journeys last year had nothing to do with the Government. I do not know how she can reach that conclusion. I am not saying that it is all down to us, but new stations, bearing down on fares, the new lines and the exponential growth in patronage must have had something to do with the Government. We have done things that have encouraged that growth.

We heard essentially the same line from Gavin Brown, who said that it is really all down to the franchise holders. He offered some recognition of some improvements for which the Government is responsible, but he said that it is basically down to the franchise holders.

The Labour Party made a number of points; I will return to Ken Macintosh's point. I am not talking just now about the not-for-dividend model proposal, but the publicly owned model proposal. The only way we can get that is if Scotland becomes independent. I know that there are people in the Labour Party who prefer the idea of 100 years of Tory rule to the idea of Scotland making its own decisions. On the specific proposal that Ken Macintosh made, I have tried to address that issue before, but I will look into it further because he has asked me to do it. The specific point that I have tried to make to him is that we have always said that we will look favourably on proposals that relate to not-for-profit or mutual-based models.

There are, however, practical strictures—one of which is that the bidder has to show evidence of experience of running railways, which makes

things difficult. Also, we are not allowed to favour one form of bid over another and, equally, we cannot accept only one kind of bid. Those are the issues. I have listened to what Ken Macintosh said and will look further into the matter.

Richard Baker in summing up referred to capital works. I do not think that he has the basic understanding of how capital projects are funded.

Jenny Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I am making a point just now.

I do not think that Richard Baker understands that with resource accounting and budgeting there is not just a shelf full of money that we can pull down with no cost. The money has to be paid for; it has to be paid back with interest rates. If Richard Baker wants to propose further spending, he can do that when it comes to the budgets.

Jenny Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding.

Keith Brown: Labour has never done that in previous discussions, but it has the chance to do it.

Throughout the period for which we have had control, there has been continuous improvement and major step-change projects.

I realise that I did not come back to Jenny Marra, but I will write to her on the point that she raised.

Jenny Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Marra, the minister is concluding.

Keith Brown: I believe that this Government has transformed Scotland's rail system to deliver integrated services that are affordable and responsive to Scottish passengers' needs. In that light, I ask Parliament to support the motion.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion on suspension and variation of standing orders for the purpose of considering the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to speak to and move motion S4M-06781.

16:59

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick):

When the Minister for Environment and Climate Change made a statement on 27 March on crofting, he said that it was his intention to propose a timetable for the bill that would enable Parliament to consider carefully the proposed changes while ensuring that the matter is resolved quickly. The motion allows for suspension of a number of standing orders for the purpose of parliamentary consideration of the expedited process of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees, for the purposes of its consideration of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill—

(a) in Rule 9.6.3A of the Standing Orders, that the word "fourth" be substituted for "fifth" where it first occurs;

(b) under Rule 9.6.3A of the Standing Orders, that the Parliament shall consider the general principles of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on the fourth sitting day after publication of the lead committee report;

(c) that Rules 9.5.3A and 9.5.3B of Standing Orders be suspended; and

(d) in Rule 9.10.2 of the Standing Orders, that the words "except on a final lodging-day, when amendments may be lodged only until 12:00" be suspended.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that there are a number of possible pre-emptions should amendments to motion S4M-06766, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to.

If the amendment in the name of Elaine Murray is agreed to, all subsequent amendments on the motion will fall. If the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Tavish Scott and Patrick Harvie will fall. Finally, if the amendment in the name of Tavish Scott is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-06766.2, in the name of Elaine Murray, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 69, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-06766.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 11, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S4M-06766.3, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S4M-06766.4, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 4, Against 105, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S4M-06766, in the name of Keith Brown, on transforming Scotland's railways, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 49, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes record passenger numbers of 83.3 million on Scotland's railways, high levels of passenger satisfaction and improved performance; recognises the benefits of a collaborative approach by the Scottish Government and industry in achieving value for money for passengers and the taxpayer; commends the Scottish Government's action to make fares fairer by reducing anomalies; welcomes the measures to reduce pressures on hard-pressed household budgets while still investing to enhance services, improve stations and build new stations; acknowledges the measured approach taken by the Scottish Government to refranchising and welcomes franchise specifications that will better meet the needs of the people of Scotland, and acknowledges that, although further improvements will always be necessary, significant investment has been made by the Scottish Government in rail to support communities, improve connectivity, reduce car use and encourage sustainable economic growth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S4M-06781, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the suspension and variation of standing orders be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees, for the purposes of its consideration of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill—

(a) in Rule 9.6.3A of the Standing Orders, that the word "fourth" be substituted for "fifth" where it first occurs;

(b) under Rule 9.6.3A of the Standing Orders, that the

Parliament shall consider the general principles of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on the fourth sitting day after publication of the lead committee report;

(c) that Rules 9.5.3A and 9.5.3B of Standing Orders be suspended; and

(d) in Rule 9.10.2 of the Standing Orders, that the words "except on a final lodging-day, when amendments may be lodged only until 12:00" be suspended.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

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