



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 20 May 2015

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 20 May 2015

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION.....	2
Enhanced Enforcement Areas Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2015 [Draft].....	2
MAJOR URBAN RAILWAY STATIONS (ACCESS).....	7

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE
11th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Margaret Burgess (Minister for Housing and Welfare)

Anne MacLean (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland)

Hussein Patwa (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland)

Robert Samson (Transport Focus)

Jolin Warren (Transform Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Wednesday 20 May 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Jim Eadie): Good morning and welcome to the 11th meeting in 2015 of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. Everyone present is reminded to switch off their mobile phones, as they affect the broadcasting system. As meeting papers are provided in digital format, people may see tablets being used during the meeting.

Under item 1, do members agree to consider the committee's stage 1 report on the Harbours (Scotland) Bill and its report on freight transport in Scotland in private at future meetings?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Enhanced Enforcement Areas Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2015 [Draft]

10:01

The Convener: Item 1 is consideration of the draft Enhanced Enforcement Areas Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2015. The committee will take evidence from Margaret Burgess, the Minister for Housing and Welfare, and from Scottish Government officials Linda Leslie, housing strategy team leader, and Jacqueline Pantony, principal legal officer.

The draft regulations are laid under the affirmative procedure, which means that the Parliament must approve them before the provisions can come into force. Following the evidence session, the committee will be invited to consider a motion to recommend that the draft regulations be approved, under item 3.

I welcome our witnesses and I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): I welcome the opportunity to give evidence on the draft Enhanced Enforcement Areas Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2015.

Drew Smith lodged an amendment at stage 3 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill introducing the provisions on enhanced enforcement areas and requiring draft regulations to be laid by 1 April 2015. He made it clear in his remarks supporting his amendment that the power to designate enhanced enforcement areas would be used only in exceptional circumstances. On that basis, I was happy to support his amendment to the bill.

The regulations, if approved, will enable local authorities to apply for new discretionary powers to assist them in tackling acute problems in a geographical area.

In order to make an application, the local authority must consider that the area has an overprovision or a concentration of private rented sector accommodation that is characterised as being of a poor environmental standard, being overcrowded, and having a prevalence of antisocial behaviour.

I was clear throughout Parliament's scrutiny of the bill that I want to raise standards across the private rented sector. That is why the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 includes a number of new measures that were supported by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee and by Parliament. The act introduces regulation of letting agents; enables disputes in the private rented sector to be transferred to the first-tier

tribunal for Scotland; gives local authorities discretionary powers to report breaches of the repairing standard to the private rented housing panel, along with the power to enter a house to establish whether there is a breach; and places duties on landlords to provide carbon monoxide detectors and carry out electrical safety checks every five years.

I also want to see local authorities making effective use of their statutory powers for landlord registration. Work is under way to revise the landlord registration guidance to support them to do that.

We published our consultation on the policy approach to the regulations in autumn last year, following discussions with individual local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We received 33 responses, including from 13 local authorities, the Scottish Association of Landlords, Shelter Scotland and a number of registered tenant organisation networks. All were all broadly supportive of our approach.

Enhanced enforcement area designation is intended to be used to tackle only the most difficult and extreme circumstances where a local authority has not been able to improve conditions in an area by using its existing powers. That is why the draft regulations require a local authority, when applying for designation of an area, to set out its wider strategy for improving standards in the private rented sector.

I want to ensure that we take a proportionate approach to the process, so the draft regulations give local authorities the flexibility to bring forward the most relevant evidence of the three criteria specified in the 2014 act to support an application.

Local authorities have a wide range of existing powers to tackle poor standards in the private rented sector. When an area is designated as an EEA, the local authority will have a number of new discretionary powers that it can use in that area and which will give it a new set of tools to tackle an exceptional set of circumstances.

The powers will enable local authorities to require a landlord who is applying for registration or renewing their registration to provide an enhanced criminal record certificate to evidence that they are a fit and proper person; to require landlords to produce the documents that are specified in the draft regulations for inspection by local authority officers to evidence that they are complying with their related duties and responsibilities as landlords; and to authorise a person to enter a house or building to ensure that the accommodation is safe, well managed and of good quality.

As set out in the 2014 act, the draft regulations also set out the purposes for which local

authorities can use those powers. They are: to enable the local authority to exercise its functions under landlord registration legislation; to ensure the safety and upkeep of the house; to ensure that information is available to tenants; and to enable the local authority to decide whether the house and the building that it is in are safe, well managed and of good quality.

In drafting the regulations, the Scottish Government has tried to give local authorities additional powers to respond flexibly and proportionately to exceptional circumstances. I am happy to answer any questions.

The Convener: Thank you.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I have criticised some of your previous regulation of private landlords, minister, on the ground that often the good landlords engaged and the bad landlords did not and, as a result, we simply regulated the good landlords and not the bad ones. However, the draft regulations seem to go a step further and allow local authorities to take action against the bad landlords. Are they the step in the right direction that they appear to be?

Margaret Burgess: I very much hope that they are a step in the right direction. They are about a local authority identifying, even within its existing powers of regulation, when landlords simply do not play ball and therefore have an impact on the whole area and community. The local authority is being given discretionary powers to take action against landlords that do not follow the rules and to bring the area up to standard.

Alex Johnstone: Is there any danger that when the regulations are put into practice we might fall into the trap that we have fallen into previously by simply putting further pressure on the good landlords and failing to pursue the bad ones?

Margaret Burgess: I do not imagine that happening with these regulations. They are targeted and concern instances in which a local authority and a community have identified a problem. They relate to exceptional circumstances and will affect only bad landlords. The Scottish Association of Landlords and the good landlord organisations are supportive of our action.

Alex Johnstone: I believe that we might achieve that with the regulations, so I support them.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Good morning, minister. I very much support the thrust of the regulations and what they seek to do. However, I have often been aware in the past of local authorities using their existing enforcement powers disproportionately.

When I questioned council officers to try to discover whether there is any rhyme or reason to

their actions, they suggested to me that they were often reluctant to use their powers to serve repair notices because they feel that if the council undertakes the repairs and then attempts to recover the costs, their chances of recovering those costs are pretty slender. Do the regulations deal with that concern? Some private sector landlords are, in effect, companies that are based outwith Scotland—indeed, some are based outwith the United Kingdom.

Margaret Burgess: The powers are additional and discretionary. It is for the local authority to determine whether using them would improve a difficult situation in its area. We envisage that the powers will not be used in every local authority area in Scotland and that they will be used only when a local authority wants to tackle a problem in the private rented sector as part of its overall strategy for improving an area. In those circumstances, the local authority would gather evidence and request that ministers designate the specific area as an enhanced enforcement area in which it could take enhanced action. The local authority would apply to take the action.

The Convener: You said that the powers are “additional and discretionary”, so it is likely that they would be used only in exceptional circumstances and that only a limited number of local authorities would seek to invoke the regulations. How will the Government keep the matter under review to find out what the practical impact of the regulations has been?

Margaret Burgess: We keep all legislation under review. The powers are discretionary powers for local authorities. They are an additional tool in their toolbox. As I said, I do not expect them to be used often. I think that we are already working with Glasgow City Council, which, if the regulations are approved, is looking to have an enhanced enforcement area as part of its overall strategy for improving part of Glasgow. That will give us an indication of how the regulations work in practice. We will certainly examine that example. The committee will be kept informed of what is happening, and it can always review the situation too.

The Convener: There are no further questions so we move on to item 3, which is formal consideration of motion S4M-13157.

Motion moved,

That the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee recommends that the Enhanced Enforcement Areas Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.—[Margaret Burgess.]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: That concludes consideration of the draft regulations. We will report the outcome of our consideration to the Parliament.

I will allow a short suspension for a changeover of witnesses.

10:13

Meeting suspended.

10:15

On resuming—

Major Urban Railway Stations (Access)

The Convener: Item 4 is evidence on access to Scotland's major urban railway stations. I acknowledge the incredible response to the committee's survey, which received close to 5,000 responses. The committee is encouraged by interest in the work among members of the public and other interested stakeholders. We thank all those who took part. A detailed analysis of the survey responses will be produced in the coming weeks.

I welcome Anne MacLean, who is the convener of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, and Hussein Patwa, who is a member; Jolin Warren, who is the head of research at Transform Scotland; and Robert Samson, who is the passenger focus manager at Transport Focus.

Two of our witnesses have visual impairment, so I will introduce myself and ask committee members to do likewise. I am Jim Eadie, the committee's convener.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Cathcart.

Mike MacKenzie: I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am a Labour MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I am a Labour MSP for West Scotland.

Alex Johnstone: I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

The Convener: I will kick off with the first question. Respondents to the committee's survey highlight that provision for onward travel from major railway stations is often confusing for passengers, with limited information, poor signage, and bus stops and taxi access often being located far from station entrances. What is your perspective on that? How has the situation come about and what should be done to prioritise, address and improve matters?

Robert Samson (Transport Focus): Over the years, there have been significant accessibility improvements to major and small stations. We have been involved in that work with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and ScotRail, and it is to be welcomed.

Throughout that time, we have noticed that the work is, to a certain extent, done in silos. The rail industry is concerned about accessibility

improvements at stations, but the improvements end at the station entrance and exit. A more joined-up approach is needed with regional transport partnerships and local authorities to look at connectivity, including walking routes to railway stations from bus stops or bus stations with consideration of the en route lighting. That approach, to look at the issue more holistically, is lacking.

In the new franchise agreement, a number of improvements are to be made at stations. For example, improvements must be made at Inverness station. We are working with HITRANS—Highlands and Islands transport partnership—to survey passengers at the station who also use bus stops in order that we can examine connectivity and identify problems. That will inform the spend to improve the station's facilities.

As I said, a number of accessibility improvements have been made, but a more joined-up approach is needed. The journey does not just start or end at the station entrance. That is a problem.

Anne MacLean (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland): We have submitted written evidence, but we did not mention in it an issue that is quite important in relation to the question that you asked, convener. In Scotland, and across the United Kingdom as a whole, there is a service called passenger assist. A person rings up in advance—I think that it can be up to two hours in advance—and can get assistance at the railway station. The service is not just for people with disabilities, but it is used predominantly by people with disabilities. It is an excellent system, which I have used probably for about 20 years.

However, the problem is that passenger-assistance staff are not supposed to work outside the curtilage of stations. The taxi rank at Haymarket station, for example, is across the tram track on the other side of the road. You might be lucky and get a taxi by waving your arms about, but you might not. I do not think that station staff are supposed to help, because of concerns about insurance and liability, but some of them will get a taxi for you. It would be good, certainly for disabled people, if something changed so that passenger-assistance staff could help disabled passengers and others. As well as being good for disabled passengers, it would be good for people with heavy luggage, children or what have you. They could be helped to get to their next mode of transport, be it a taxi, a tram or a bus. I assume that that would mean that some work would have to be done on liability and insurance, but I do not think that that is beyond the wit of the railway

industry, the bus industry, local authorities and so on, and it would make a great difference.

Jolin Warren (Transform Scotland): I will give just two examples at this stage. Last year, we completed a study called the interchange project that looked at cycle integration with public transport. Many issues that we found mirror issues that MACS has mentioned in its written submission—lack of consistency in signage and so on.

To echo some of what has been said, we found that there are significant boundary issues for pretty much every station that we looked at. For example, the situation at Aberdeen station involves ScotRail, Aberdeen City Council, the developers who own Union Square and NorthLink, which runs the ferry terminal to which some passengers want to get from the station. There seems to be no mechanism to enable sufficient co-ordination among the bodies that need to work together to provide a seamless experience for passengers.

The second example is the Queen Street station redevelopment in Glasgow. A year ago, we submitted a response to the consultation on the redevelopment plans, in which one of our points was that the project needed much greater focus on improving the station's integration with other public transport services. The response that we got from Network Rail Scotland was:

"Strategic transport integration is outwith the remit of Network Rail in terms of redeveloping the station."

That may be the case, but we should not forget that a huge amount of public money is being spent on redeveloping Queen Street station. For the body that is responsible for the redevelopment to say "We'll just make a nice station—it's not our problem to figure out how it integrates," is just not viable if we are to have a really good high-quality public transport infrastructure.

The Convener: Thank you. That is certainly a point that we will put to Network Rail when it appears before the committee. Mr Patwa, do you have anything to add?

Hussein Patwa (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland): Thank you, convener, and members of the committee. My colleague Anne MacLean mentioned the importance of assistance for disabled people. If I may, I will talk a little bit about infrastructure. I respectfully submit to the committee that the infrastructure in many of our urban stations does not lend itself to be used efficiently and effectively by disabled people or, for that matter, by anyone. I will draw on Aberdeen as an example, that being my home station. There is a very busy shopping complex there that has varying obstructions and varying lighting that one must navigate through. Orientation to get from the

railway station to the bus station is an issue, as is getting on to one's onward mode of transport at the bus station.

Colleagues have already spoken about the importance of connectivity; another example of poor infrastructure is at Stirling station. The bus station is within sight of the railway station, but people must cross a busy access road to get there. When I checked a few days ago, I found that there are no ground-level indicators to show the crossing point and where it is safe to cross by lining up with the correct point on the other side of the road to access the bus station. If people do not orientate themselves correctly, they risk walking on the slip road, which leads down to an underpass at that point.

I could cite various examples of walking distances and poor markings at many stations. Therefore, although one can look to attitudinal adjustment to provide service, one must also look at the physical ground-level obstructions that might be a hindrance to connectivity and intermodal change.

Alex Johnstone: My first question is fairly simple. How proactive are Network Rail and ScotRail with organisations in relation to needs?

Anne MacLean: There is a body called the Scottish rail accessibility forum, on which Network Rail and ScotRail sit, as do MACS and a number of other disability organisations, including the Scottish Disability Equality Forum, which is the overarching body for all local access panels, and the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance, which is a pressure group. We all sit round that table, so we have regular meetings with ScotRail and Network Rail. I am not criticising either party for not consulting us.

I will give an example that is very dear to Hussein Patwa's heart. When work was being done at Waverley station, we asked for ground-level lighting. At the meeting, Hussein made the point that many visually impaired people tend to look downwards, and that it is therefore very useful to have lighting at ground level to help people get around. However, Waverley station is an historic monument and comes under Historic Scotland, so we were told that that would spoil the aesthetics of the building. I leave members with that comment.

Alex Johnstone: It is interesting to hear that historic buildings have to indulge in historic practices.

Anne MacLean: Yes. That is literally what was said. We have it in the minutes of a meeting that that is what Network Rail said. It manages only two stations—Waverley and Glasgow central. The rest are managed by ScotRail.

Alex Johnstone: When you bring up a subject, how responsive are Network Rail and ScotRail? Even if they understand it, how quickly can they act?

Anne MacLean: Sometimes, they act fairly quickly. I keep going on about Waverley, because it was a nightmare—although I am not saying that it has improved all that much; people have to go up and down lifts and across bridges and all the rest of it. The distances are very long, especially for people with physical mobility problems, so we asked for seating to be provided. There is now seating outside the lifts, although there is still no seating at the Calton Road drop-off point and there is no shelter there. However, seating is going to be put in on the route from the Calton Road drop-off point to the concourse. We are waiting for that, although Network Rail has put in the other seating, so I am sure that it will do it.

There are times when Network Rail or ScotRail are quite responsive. Sometimes, the issue is not necessarily to do with Network Rail or ScotRail; it is the interface with another body, for example a local authority. MACS had endless problems finding out who owns the land outside Haymarket station, when it was being redeveloped. Haymarket is now a very good station. After weeks, we eventually found that the land belongs to the City of Edinburgh Council, but it was difficult to find that out. That sort of thing is frustrating, because things that could improve and which do not necessarily need a lot of spending—just a bit of thought—are delayed, because we do not know whom we need to talk to.

Alex Johnstone: A moment ago, we heard about co-ordination responsibilities. Network Rail and ScotRail are largely funded through Transport Scotland. Does Transport Scotland do enough to co-ordinate?

10:30

Anne MacLean: Transport Scotland provides the secretariat for the Scottish rail accessibility forum. I have to say, from the dealings that I have had with the rail directorate—I can speak only for MACS—that I believe that it does as much as it can. The rail directorate can help up to a point and so can the sponsoring division for the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, but at the end of the day it is Network Rail and ScotRail that take the decisions.

Jolin Warren: I have two points to make. It is sometimes difficult even to talk about Network Rail, for example, as a whole. When we were looking at Waverley station, a lot of good changes were being made there by the station manager, particularly for cyclists—repair kits were put in, cycle parking was made better and all that sort of

thing. Then Network Rail—I do not know whether it was Network Rail in Scotland or Network Rail down in London—made the decision to close off the access ramps. Until that point the station team had been developing the north ramp as a specific cycle route into the station, but suddenly both access ramps were closed to bikes, which undermined the very good work that had been done at the station. There are clearly issues even within a single organisation.

My second point is that in some ways it is difficult to answer the question because we now have the beginning of the new Network Rail-ScotRail alliance. We hope that that is the solution to the problem—that we will see much better co-ordination between ScotRail and Network Rail. We hope that we will also see more responsiveness, because our experience has been—not just at Waverley—that station managers and the teams who run stations are very responsive, friendly and helpful. It is when we get up into the corporate level of Network Rail that there has just been a block. An example is Network Rail's response to the Queen Street station consultation and its engagement with us on that. We hope that the new alliance with ScotRail will result in a more engaged Network Rail that takes on that approach from ScotRail.

The Convener: Are you referring specifically to the new ScotRail franchise that Abellio has won?

Jolin Warren: Yes.

The Convener: Do you see opportunities arising to take a different approach?

Jolin Warren: I do, because of the “deep alliance,” as they call it, between Network Rail and Abellio ScotRail, under which there will be an overall management team for both Network Rail Scotland and Abellio ScotRail. We hope that, with one managing director and one management team overseeing both organisations, there will be a more co-ordinated and engaged approach.

Alex Johnstone: Is there a role for stronger direction from Transport Scotland in co-ordinating at that higher level?

Jolin Warren: I would not like to say that Transport Scotland should be doing more before we see how the alliance works out. Transport Scotland was instrumental in specifying and awarding the franchise and in working out its details with Abellio and, I presume, Network Rail Scotland. I do not know whose idea it was to create the deep alliance, but Transport Scotland has certainly facilitated it and made sure that it happened. Maybe the alliance is what was needed and will be sufficient, or more than sufficient.

Robert Samson: Transport Focus sits on the Scottish rail accessibility forum as well. Listening

to the evidence, I think that part of the problem may be in the name, “Scottish rail accessibility forum”. Transport Scotland, Network Rail and ScotRail are involved, but should it not be a Scottish transport accessibility forum, with more partners? It could co-ordinate activity with bus companies, and regional transport partnerships could be involved at appropriate times. If it is only a Scottish rail accessibility forum, we are looking at accessibility issues in a silo, to an extent. A recent accessibility conference addressed those issues, but thinking about overall transport accessibility rather than rail accessibility is a new way to look at the matter.

I will mention Glasgow Queen Street station. Transport Focus was also concerned about Network Rail’s formal consultation, but since then we have worked with Network Rail and ScotRail and, only today, we published on our website a survey of what passengers want out of the Queen Street redevelopment. We surveyed more than 1,000 passengers about what the station is like now and on accessibility issues, in order to inform the redevelopment. There is now a partnership group that includes Network Rail, ScotRail, Buchanan Partnership, Strathclyde partnership for transport and Glasgow City Council. They all sit round one table now. I hope that lessons have been learned from redevelopments in Edinburgh and from other issues so that the Queen Street redevelopment will deliver what passengers want.

Anne MacLean: I would like to say something about the idea of having a transport accessibility forum. There is a roads for all forum and a bus stakeholder group. The two forums are external bodies; the bus stakeholder group is an internal Transport Scotland committee on which MACS sits, as do the Confederation of Passenger Transport, the Community Transport Association and others.

Since the accessible transport summit, which most people found useful and productive, the question has been how we take forward what came out of that. The reason I say “we” is that the MACS sponsor team organised and ran the summit in conjunction with Inclusion Scotland. A steering group has now been set up, on which MACS sits, as do other disability organisations, Patrick—I will not try to pronounce his surname—the equalities and access officer for ScotRail, and George Mair from the Confederation of Passenger Transport.

In that group, we are examining how we can address accessible transport issues and improve the infrastructure that supports accessible transport. We are talking about bus stations, train stations, roads and pavements because, to be frank, the issue is not only with the public transport. Many disabled people—whether they

have a physical, sensory or cognitive disability—do not leave their houses, because the way for them to get to the nearest bus stop from their house is along bad pavements with no bubble paving to show them when they are at a crossing.

Everyone has to work together. A number of local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities were at the accessible transport summit. We hope that, following that conference, a more joined-up way of considering transport accessibility will come out of the steering group. We have had only one meeting, so I will not predict what will come out of it—that will depend on the good will and the time of all the people who sit around that table.

I hope that, as Robert Samson said, some steps might be being taken.

Mary Fee: Signage within and around stations is crucial to helping passengers make onward journeys and find their platforms. What improvements could be made to signage in stations to help people, particularly those with visual impairments, to get around? Are there any examples of good practice of which the committee should be aware?

Hussein Patwa: Thank you for recognising the importance of signage. I could wax lyrical all day about examples of signage, but I will attempt not to.

The first point to make about signage is that the environment in which it is located is variable. For example, you could give me a large-print sign with good contrast here and now and I would tell you that it was excellent because I could just about make it out. If you then took the sign outside into the corridor, where the lighting conditions are completely different and natural light comes into play, that sign could suddenly become unreadable.

That is one of the points that I made to Network Rail consultants when they were looking at signage in Waverley back in 2013. I said that they had to perform the testing in a variety of conditions. Lighting levels fluctuate between summer and winter and that has a big impact on the ability of people with visual impairments in particular to use signage, as you pointed out.

The other issue is the lack of appropriate signage, particularly for intermodal change. We cited Perth station in our written submission. The bus station is about a 10-minute walk away from Perth train station. The lay-by for long-distance coaches is even further away. I have yet to be told that there is signage in Perth that tells people which station they must use, depending on their final destination, which services go from that station and how to get there. Even the signage to connect between the rail station and the bus

station is either non-existent or very unreliable. That has a big impact on the ability of disabled passengers and passengers who are not familiar with the local landscape to connect confidently. Let us remember that a desire of many disabled people is to be as independent as possible and for them to be able to manage signage without assistance, the signage must be of satisfactory quality.

Because of my level of visual impairment, I am perhaps not the best person to cite examples of good practice. I will say, though, that any attempt to look at signage or to regulate it by creating standards and so on must put disabled people and the people who will use that signage at the heart of the matter and at the centre of the planning.

It would not do to simply follow a series of apparently logical guidelines when their implementation in practice may well result in the signage not working. That is one point that the rail industry—indeed all transport—needs to take up. It is always more cost-effective, more useful and more efficient if we can tackle problems at the outset rather than waiting until after implementation, which could result in a costly redesign.

Anne MacLean: The signage also has to be at different levels, because somebody who is standing will see signage at one level, whereas somebody who is sitting in a wheelchair will see it at another level. That is very important.

Mary Fee: So do transport organisations not currently consult people with disabilities in relation to signage in stations? I use Glasgow Central station quite often and some of the signage there is very high up and some of it is very low down. Frankly, some of it is quite confusing. It is difficult to follow where you are meant to go, particularly if there are late platform changes or if your train is at the front of a platform or at the rear of a platform.

Something that came to mind just before the committee meeting started—again, this relates particularly to Glasgow Central—is what happens if the weather is particularly bad. In Scotland we get a lot of bad weather and the concourses can get very wet and slippery. The signage for slippage is quite often an A-board, which is situated on top of the slippery bit. I am interested in your thoughts on how that could be improved as well.

Hussein Patwa: You have just highlighted an issue that I raise all the time with station staff. I have often wondered why we have yellow signs indicating slippage on white or cream floor tiling. From my point of view, that would appear to be poor judgment for appropriate contrast. I cannot see the signs, because I have no central vision. A number of people must walk into them or trip over

them. Is that not the very thing that staff are attempting to avoid by putting the signs there?

I recall asking my local station staff one day whether I could come in with a tin of black paint and outline the signs in black so that people could see where they were. I do wonder about the rationale behind that colour choice.

10:45

Anne MacLean: A number of stations work with their local access panels. I live in the Highlands and I know that my local stations—Aviemore, Newtonmore, Kingussie and so on—some of which are unstaffed, work with the local access panel.

However, there are occasions when things are done by someone based in Inverness, and the person from Inverness who comes to do something at Aviemore station does not talk to the local access panel. It is a question of reminding people about what access means. There are 15 of us in MACS, and we work for one day a month—I work for two days, but the rest work for one—so there is no way that we can cover all the stations in Scotland. That is what local access panels are there for, and they have a lot of very good information. To help them, MACS can provide the sort of information that they might need to do that job more efficiently.

Robert Samson: On the subject of station signage generically, there is a code of practice—which I think runs to 300 or 400 pages—on accessibility at stations, which gives guidance on signage. The previous document was from the mists of time—it was originally produced by the Strategic Rail Authority. Prior to that, there was a consultation that included the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. There is a generic set of standards or guidelines in place, but it does not meet everyone's individual needs, as the other witnesses have pointed out.

Mary Fee: Is there a process in place to update that guidance and those standards?

Robert Samson: Yes, there is a process in place. I believe that it is the responsibility of the Department for Transport, because accessibility is a Great Britain-wide matter. The DFT is responsible for updating the code of practice, in consultation.

Anne MacLean: It consults the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, which is the UK equivalent of MACS—I ought to say that MACS is the Scottish equivalent of DPTAC, but I prefer it the way I first said it.

Mary Fee: How often is the guidance updated? Do you know?

Anne MacLean: MACS has a member on the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, and I would have to seek advice on that, but I am very happy to do so and to let the committee know.

Mary Fee: Another thing that was highlighted in evidence was the difficulty in managing station concourses when stations are quiet, given the large open spaces, or when stations are unmanned and barrier gates are left open. How could improvements be made to help that situation?

Hussein Patwa: I will take that question, as I have run across this situation. I will comment from a VI perspective, but I have no doubt that people with other disabilities might be similarly affected. The principal problem with open spaces involves the process of way finding by landmarks and way points. To take a parallel with a global positioning system—GPS—people might decide to go from point A to point B and then to point C and so on, until they reach their final destination.

I and, no doubt, many others use a similar process. I will enter the station and make my way to a certain point. It could be a landmark such as the WH Smith, for example. I might then turn right and walk across the station from WH Smith to the next point. When you couple large open spaces with reduced long-distance vision, that process breaks down.

It is a bit of a balancing act. We do not want to make the station so crowded that it affects the pedestrian flow. However, as I have just said, we want to have those landmarking abilities. It is a matter of adopting a case-by-case approach to the local infrastructure. It could be something as simple as changing the contrast so that, for example, the supporting pillars become more visible and one can use them as landmarks, or it could be a case of arranging the lighting in such a way as to give people something to latch on to.

Many stations are very good when it comes to barrier gates being open, because there is a change of tactile surface. However, one also has to remember that not everyone will be skilled in the ways of using the various techniques. Not everyone uses a long cane, and many visually impaired people, people with autism, people who have difficulty reading signage and those with learning difficulties may find themselves vulnerable to risk when they appear on a platform that looks as if it is unstaffed. Those risks have to be managed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the usage of the station and the staff rotas. It is certainly a problem.

If I may, I will digress briefly. There has been talk on the grapevine about increasing the number of unmanned stations and reducing the number of

hours for which manned stations are manned. That is a major concern for the future from the point of view of accessibility and people's ability to use our rail infrastructure independently.

Mary Fee: You have touched on lighting a couple of times. Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street stations have upper and lower levels. When you go from the upper level to the lower level, it becomes darker and the lighting in the lower level is at a different level. How much of a problem is that? Is it just a case of standardising the brightness of lighting throughout the station?

Anne MacLean: That is not just a problem for visually impaired people. We have spoken very little about cognitive disability. Things such as lighting and signage can be a real problem for people who have cognitive difficulties, who want to live as independent lives as they can. If you have a learning disability or autism and you cannot relate to the place that you are in, things such as good and consistent signage and lighting are very important.

James Dornan: You have mentioned the problems that passengers have when they travel between rail and bus stations without receiving assistance or receiving assistance only through the good will of the staff. Further to what you said earlier, are there any other ways in which you think that the situation could be remedied? For example, Mr Samson mentioned a partnership group for Queen Street station. Would it be a good idea to replicate that around most, if not all, stations where the local authority bus services and train services are brought together?

Robert Samson: When improvements to stations are planned, everyone must be involved: the rail industry, the local authority, the bus operator and the local taxi firm. They all have their part to play.

Ann MacLean mentioned the passenger assist service. Transport Focus carries out a survey of passenger assist to see how ScotRail and every other train operating company in Britain performs and whether the service delivers what people require. To be fair, most of the time it works very well and, when we point out that it is not working, the rail industry is quick to act. However, one criticism that we have heard from the passengers who use passenger assist is that, although it is a wonderful system and they have confidence in the rail staff, who are friendly, efficient and helpful, they are left 10 yards outside the railway station and do not know where to go after that. That has been borne out in our evidence.

James Dornan: That is the sort of thing that I suggest should be discussed at such a forum.

Jolin Warren: One of the recommendations that came out of our interchange project was that

thought should be given to what we call an active travel-friendly standard for cyclists and pedestrians. It would not be about the industry doing lots of great work at the station and the station getting the badge; it would require the overall area to be considered more widely. Something along those lines needs to be done, because it would address issues such as the need for consistency in signage at stations, the need for good signage between different transport modes and the links being thought through to make sure that they were convenient and accessible. It would encourage co-ordination between bodies.

There is a balance to be struck. We do not want new standards and new certification programmes for everything, because that would become unmanageable. However, there is an argument to be made about the problems that we have with different work being done in silos and standards varying within and between cities. We need a high-quality standard across Scotland and a mechanism that allows us to recognise when that standard has been reached. That would involve not individual facilities but working together to provide high-quality environments for pedestrians, cyclists and all the people that the standard would encompass.

Hussein Patwa: I support partnership working between bodies and between different modes of transport. It is in everybody's interests to make the system as usable as possible. Disabled people wish to travel, and that does not stop at the entrance to the railway station, because rail is an accessible means of travel. I support the involvement of disabled people in that partnership. We must spread the onus and responsibility for providing an efficient, meaningful and useful service to disabled travellers.

Anne MacLean: This committee was called the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee when I first appeared before it, which is a long time ago now. It is interesting that we have been talking about passengers and travellers when, in fact, anything that the transport industry and local authorities can do to encourage the use of public transport is good for Scotland's climate change aims. Because we are from MACS, we have been concentrating on the disabled traveller, but there is a wider perspective about encouraging people to use good-quality public transport, and in order to do that you have to get the connectivity right.

James Dornan: How good is accessibility to taxi ranks? I can speak only for Glasgow, where it is not bad. At Queen Street station—at least, at the upper level; I am not so sure about the lower level—a traveller can go straight out to the taxi rank. However, I cannot speak for many other stations, and I know that the changes might make

the situation slightly different. I see Anne MacLean shaking her head. Perhaps she would like to respond first.

Anne MacLean: I suppose that it varies all over Scotland. We have barely touched on the removal of access for cars and taxis to Waverley station. We were told that it was under the UK Government's security measures that taxis and cars were banned from Waverley, but I have heard all sorts of different stories since then, so who knows? Taxis used to be able to come into Waverley but the taxi rank is now at Calton Road, and I have complained about that. There is no shelter, there are no seats and someone who is waiting for assistance could be there for some time. Please do not misunderstand me—that is not the fault of the assistance people, who get there as quickly as they can. The taxi rank at Market Street is on the left-hand side. We are told that it will change to the right-hand side, so that the first taxi is nearer to the station exit, but at the moment it could be all the way up the road.

In Inverness, there are spaces for three taxis in the station square. If there are no taxis there, people have to walk two sides of the square and along Academy Street to get to the taxi rank. The pavements are shocking, but that is a different issue. For somebody who has a mobility problem, is in a wheelchair, is visually impaired or has a disability of whatever kind, or even for somebody who is carrying a lot of luggage or has young children in a pushchair, that is a long way to go. To be fair, there are usually three taxis in the semicircle outside the station.

At Haymarket station, the taxi rank is on the other side of the road and people have to cross the tramlines and the road to get there. The taxi rank in Perth is just outside the station. In Stirling, it is on the other side of the road—sometimes, there will be a few taxis outside the station, but you never know whether there will be.

11:00

Hussein Patwa: In Aberdeen, the station has a taxi rank that is under the station roof, on the station premises. It is not a problem. The issue that we have concerns the fact that taxi firms must apply for a permit to use the taxi rank. One of the larger taxi companies in Aberdeen has decided that it does not want to pay for the permit, which is understandable, and its pick-up point is, technically, outside the station premises.

That brings in the issue that colleagues have already touched on of insurance and liability with regard to any assistance that is offered by someone to get you to that point. There is also the issue of security. That point is not on station property; it is on council property outside a

shopping centre, with teenagers and young people hanging around and various people there on a Friday night. It is not the most confidence-inspiring area in which to wait for a taxi. It is also probably not the safest place to get to, because one must cross an access road that does not have a manned crossing and it is on a blind spot for vehicles. Those issues mean that, although a taxi rank has been provided, it is not entirely usable or accessible, and it is down to the whims of taxi companies whether they use it.

James Dornan: That goes back to the requirement for various bodies to work together to ensure that there is a joined-up approach.

Hussein Patwa: Absolutely. Even the installation of a controlled crossing at that point would inspire confidence, as one could at least get across the access road to wait for a taxi.

I do not profess to be an expert on infrastructure, but the infrastructure changes that we are talking about do not seem to be vast. However, the rewards and returns would be, as they would create a more usable environment.

Anne MacLean: Queen Street station has an example of a really accessible taxi rank. It is on the flat, directly outside the station. You walk out of the left-hand side of the station—the exit is on your left as you face the trains—and the taxis are there. You are also under cover.

The Convener: Ms MacLean and Mr Patwa, you deserve full marks for seeking to provide us with an overview of taxi facilities at all the stations in Scotland, but I would like to bring you back to Waverley station, which serves the capital city and is the gateway to the whole of Scotland. What level of consultation was there with your committee prior to Network Rail imposing the ban—either the initial ban or the ban that was imposed after the first ban was temporarily lifted—on vehicle access to the station?

Anne MacLean: There was no consultation with us at all. Apparently, Waverley was the only station where there was taxi and vehicle access right into the station. Whether that is true, I do not know. As I understand it, the order to ban vehicular access came from the Department for Transport at the UK level and was made on security grounds.

Sarah Boyack has spoken about the issue—she is the local MSP and will have had complaints from constituents about it—and she, too, says that there was no consultation. As far as we know, there was no consultation with the Edinburgh access panel. One of our colleagues in MACS is on that panel, too.

The Convener: We will raise the issue of consultation with Network Rail when it appears

before us. That is why I was keen to have your views on the record this morning.

On the issue of disabled access to the taxi ranks that have been relocated on Market Street and Calton Road, how difficult or onerous has that been for disabled passengers? What is your view on the signage arrangements that have been put in place? Network Rail has said that it has invested in lifts at either side of the station to improve access for disabled people. Is that arrangement working?

Anne MacLean: There is no taxi rank at Calton Road; there is merely a drop-off point. If a person knows the number of an Edinburgh taxi firm, they can ring it and that is where the taxi will pick them up. However, a lot of people who are just passing through Edinburgh will not have such a number.

It is a long walk to the Market Street rank, but there are seats beside the lifts. There are no seats on platform 19, the long platform, which is where passengers wait for a lift up from the concourse. Once they have done that, they have to walk over the bridge and there are then another two lifts. It is all a bit complicated. I only know my way around because I happen to know my way around, if you see what I mean. If someone uses a station often enough, they will know where to go. I do not know how people who do not know Waverley station and want to get to Market Street do so. I do not know whether there is signage in Waverley station that says that the taxi rank is in Market Street—I am, of course, visually impaired—but I do not think that there is.

This is anecdotal evidence. I was travelling with the head of MACS's sponsor team, coming back from a meeting, and we met a woman who was standing outside the Market Street entrance to the station. She had a stick, and she saw me with my stick and my guide dog and said, "Excuse me. Do you know how I get down there? The lift isn't working." I can manage to get down the stairs, with my stick and my dog, but not everyone can.

The head of Network Rail Scotland—I think that that is who it is; I would have to check—says that Waverley station is now more accessible than it has ever been, but I have not met a disabled person who agrees with that statement. We have asked Network Rail about its contingency plans for when the lifts do not work, and the answer is that they will be repaired quickly. That is all right if a train that you want to get runs every 15 minutes. However, if, like me, you live in the Highlands and your train arrives every two hours, you will have two hours to wait until the next one—it is not funny.

The other answer to the question of what can be done when the lifts are not working is that, in certain places, people can use the escalators.

However, I usually travel with a guide dog and—I am sorry—I cannot take my guide dog on an escalator. You might have seen signs in London saying “Dogs and pushchairs must be carried” but I do not fancy carrying my guide dog—he is a very large black Labrador.

There is no satisfactory answer. If there is a breakdown at Market Street, the nearest exit with a lift is at Calton Road, and I would not want to walk there. I would not know where to go, and I know Edinburgh reasonably well.

My choice—if there is not work on Waverley bridge, which there is at the moment—is to ask the taxi driver to drop me at the top of the ramp at Waverley bridge and then just walk down. That, to me, is by far the easiest access. However, Network Rail recommends that anyone who is accessing the station by taxi should be dropped off at Calton Road. I think that Calton Road is the most uncomfortable place. It is also dark and unpleasant.

The Convener: Have you asked your members what solution they would like to see to the problems that exist at Waverley? Do they think that taxis should be readmitted to the station?

Anne MacLean: I have not asked them that but, judging by the number of people with disabilities that I speak to who say, “Wasn’t it good in the days when the taxi would take you right into Waverley,” there is no doubt about what most people want.

Hussein Patwa: I agree. We must take account of the increasing strain on resources that there has been since the taxi ban was implemented. I am probably too young to use this phrase, but in the good old days, when taxis were allowed in Waverley station, the taxi dropped you off outside the assistance service office and it took only a minute or two for the driver to help you out of the taxi to the office door. The taxi then moved on and that intermodal change was sorted. That also meant that the number of assists per hour was significantly higher than it is now.

I add my plaudits to those of my colleague Anne MacLean for the assistance staff at Waverley station and, indeed, the other Scottish stations that I have used. Those staff do a fantastic job and cannot usually be held responsible for any delays that happen. However, an assist to a platform that used to take, say, two minutes now takes roughly seven minutes because of the increased travel time to the taxi rank and back again. When I am travelling, I often find that assistance staff have to manage two or three passengers at once from trains that are back to back on the same platform, so the staff have to multitask. I am not saying that that reduces the quality of the service, but it certainly increases the strain on the staff involved.

I think that, generally, the taxi ban has not helped anybody and, with the utmost respect, I cannot agree that it makes Waverley an accessible station. If I had a wish list, one wish would be to have the taxi situation back to how it was.

The Convener: I accept that there are other, competing pressures such as air quality, but it is important that we get the perspective of people who have mobility issues.

Anne MacLean: I think that, if you spoke to people with children in pushchairs or people who have lots of luggage because they are going away on a nice long holiday and have decided to take something fresh to wear every night, you would find that they, too, struggle in stations. I have watched, as much as I am able to, people with children in double buggies and have seen that the situation is just as bad for them, especially if they have a toddler in tow as well.

The Convener: If the committee will indulge me, I will ask a final question on Waverley station. If you had a message for Network Rail, what would it be?

Anne MacLean: It would be that it should bring the taxis back in—and not just the taxis but cars, because people used to come to Waverley in their cars, too. At the moment, anyone who wants to take a car to the station can park in New Street car park, but it is still a fair haul from there to the station and the waiting time for a car is, I think, half an hour.

Hussein Patwa: It is 40 minutes now. They indulged us and increased the waiting time to 40 minutes. However, to assist a frail passenger, for example, from the car park to a platform might take 10 to 20 minutes—that is no exaggeration—compared with three or four minutes for a fit adult. If you then found that your train was running late, the person assisting you, who might wish to wait with you until you were safely on board the train, might face being penalised for exceeding the waiting time in the car park because of a delay that was not their responsibility and that they could not have foreseen.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): As we are discussing Edinburgh Waverley station and issues of access and signage, I have a question for Mr Samson. Transport Focus has done work with passengers to assess the improvements that have been made by Network Rail. Do you have any comments to add to the observations that we have received about Edinburgh Waverley?

Robert Samson: After the completion of the recent work at Edinburgh Waverley, we did a

survey of about 1,000 passengers to see what they thought of the improvements. We found that most of the improvements had been noted by people and that they were more satisfied with the station but that there were still problems relating to signage and accessibility in terms of the lifts and escalators working. Overall, however, passengers felt that it was a better station after the investment.

Adam Ingram: Is the evidence that you have heard here reflected in the passenger surveys?

Robert Samson: Yes, because passengers' experience of taxis is variable across Scotland. Passengers want a taxi as close to the station as possible with a flat walking surface to it. The situation at Edinburgh Waverley before the change was better for passengers than the current situation. People now have to go up steps or via lifts and the taxis are uncovered. Passengers want taxis to be as close to the station entrance as possible. Therefore, if there are taxis in the station, that is better for passengers.

11:15

Adam Ingram: In short, access and signage issues—

Robert Samson: They remain.

This is not an accessibility issue, but the late platform changes at Edinburgh Waverley are also a concern for passengers. Having to go from one end of the station to another can result in passengers missing trains, and the situation will be even worse for the passengers that MACS is here to talk about today. That is still a great problem at Waverley, and signage is still a problem there, although it has improved.

Jolin Warren: Our big concern about the changes at Waverley is that, frankly, it is ridiculous that there are two access ramps with, in effect, just a handful of delivery vehicles using one ramp, while pedestrians and cyclists have to use the walkways—well, everyone is a pedestrian on the walkways, because people cannot cycle down them. People with luggage, people with bikes, people in wheelchairs and people with prams or whatever are corralled on to the narrow walkways while there are newly resurfaced and wide roadways next to them lying empty. It is astounding.

We do not have a particular view on whether taxis should be allowed into the station, but there is certainly plenty of space. There are two ramps. Why cannot one of them have a wide walkway and a two-way cycle lane? That is beyond me. The space is there and the ramps are nice. People who are walking and those with bikes prefer to be able to walk or cycle into the station without having to use stairs and lifts.

It should be noted that the new ScotRail alliance is going to deliver cycle hubs at Waverley and in Aberdeen and Glasgow. It would be crazy to deliver a cycle hub at Waverley and have such severely restricted access to the station. The other thing to note is that Network Rail is reconfiguring the south ramp because it is extending platform 12. That is an opportunity. The work on a cycle hub and to reconfigure the south ramp is going to happen anyway. It should be thought through so that access conditions for pedestrians and cyclists are improved.

David Stewart: Mr Warren, you have outlined some of the recommendations of your interchange project. I am interested in those recommendations, particularly those on active travel hubs. Will you give the committee a little more information about that?

Jolin Warren: The idea of active travel hubs is now established in the UK. We have a handful in Scotland. There is a cycle hub at Stirling and one at Pollokshaws West in Glasgow. What they offer varies depending on the location. In a station that is primarily for commuter traffic, the hub might provide parking and quick repairs. At bigger stations, there might be a larger facility that offers sales. For instance, the one at Stirling helps with route planning and provides bicycle hire and that sort of thing. We recommend that that should be extended so that the hubs cater for not just cyclists but pedestrians—people who arrive in a place and want to know easy ways to get around, whether that is walking around the town or how to get to the bus station or ferry terminal.

It goes back to what Anne MacLean was saying. People do not just take the train or bus; they go on somewhere from the train or bus. The hubs would facilitate that and take away people's concern that, when they arrive somewhere, they will not know where to go or how to get to their next transport option.

By their nature, the active travel hubs would vary, based on the station. We are not suggesting that Transport Scotland, ScotRail or whoever operates the network of active travel hubs. ScotRail will have some and other providers will have others, but there should be co-ordination between them so that they create a support network for pedestrians and cyclists across Scotland and can recommend the next station to people who are travelling on. People will know that they will have some sort of support, in the form of the information and facilities that they require.

David Stewart: Are you looking for Transport Scotland to respond to you?

Jolin Warren: Yes. Transport Scotland has been positive, in general terms. There is European funding to develop active travel hubs and, as I

said, the new ScotRail franchise has a commitment to three main cycle hubs and some smaller facilities at other stations. What has been missing is that we have not been asked to engage in the process. We are not clear on what the process is for use of the European funding, how Transport Scotland is developing the active travel hubs concept or whether there are any plans to create a more comprehensive support network.

David Stewart: I am interested in utilising European funding and I have been nagging the Scottish Government about funding for TEN-T—the trans-European transport network—and other things that involve ferry services, such as the Marco Polo fund. I believe that more work needs to be done to utilise European funding.

What about future franchise arrangements? Recently there have been awards for the sleeper service and the London service. Should there be more definition in franchise agreements? Should they say, “There will be the following hubs in the following stations” as a condition of the franchise?

Jolin Warren: It is difficult to say. I would not want to make a blanket statement that Transport Scotland is better at specifying where the hubs should be. The existing active travel hubs have been developed at the local level and are therefore appropriate to where they are. To date, Abellio’s approach with its plans has been to engage with the various stakeholders who understand what the needs are. We welcome that approach.

If we look at other modes of transport, we can see that more work can be done. As far as I am aware, there is no impetus to improve cycle provision in ferry franchising. I know that that is slightly outwith what we are discussing, but we look at transport in very segregated modes. The fact that the bus system is deregulated makes it much more difficult. Bus stations are chaotic due to there being different owners and managers, et cetera. There are no standard levels.

Transport Scotland should be thinking about the other areas where it can bring its influence to bear. We should not have the situation in which, as long as someone can get to where they want to go by rail they are okay, but if they have to change to the bus station or the ferry, all bets are off.

David Stewart: That is a good point. Anne MacLean mentioned the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, which a number of the members who are here were on. We did a major inquiry into ferries. When we consulted in Oban, we were told that the ferry arrives just as the train or the bus departs. Everyone at transport conferences talks a good game about integration, but my experience is that that does not happen that well. As has been mentioned, that is partly

because of internal integration issues. In other words, buses have to meet other buses, and sometimes communication with other modes does not work.

With the convener’s indulgence, I will give one example. That previous inquiry showed how we do not have integration. Indeed, different travel modes do not even co-ordinate when the winter season ends and the summer season starts. If they cannot even get that right, we have a problem.

Will the witnesses comment on Jolin Warren’s comments?

Anne MacLean: I am not going to say that no disabled people cycle, but more will walk.

Jolin Warren: Most people are pedestrians.

Anne MacLean: Yes. I support Jolin Warren’s comments.

Returning to Waverley, as I said, my preferred method of getting into Waverley station when no work is being done on the bridge is to be dropped off and to walk down the ramp. Jolin Warren is right. The ramp is narrow and you are competing with people who are coming up it as well as those who are going down it, yet there is all that unused space.

I presume—I may well be wrong—that the fear is that someone may try to drive down the ramps. I am only assuming that that is the reason—I am not here to speak for Network Rail.

David Stewart: I have a final question, but first I flag up the committee’s survey work. We had almost 5,000 responses to our online survey, and I thank the clerks for all their work in that regard. That is one of the highest returns that any committee has ever had. If there is a time to be self-congratulatory, it is now.

Our survey suggests that there is a lack of cycle parking in stations and that the parking that is available is not easy to access or particularly secure. Does that chime with your research, Mr Warren?

Jolin Warren: Yes, it does, by and large, although there are examples of ample cycle parking that is good, covered and secure.

Aberdeen is a good example of the issue. There is no cycle parking in the station, despite there being plenty of space to enable that. The local station staff had heard rumours that parking would perhaps be put in place, but it was another of those matters that was being dealt with higher up, and that does not seem to be happening. The nearest parking to the station is in a dark, dank area, so it is unused. There is cycle parking in Union Square and the surrounding areas, but it is completely oversubscribed because it feels

secure, and there are convenient objects, so bikes can be chained to railings and suchlike.

That is an example of a major station where the issue is not even space; rather, the parking is just not being provided, even though the demand is there.

Waverley has good quality cycle parking. We did not manage to audit Glasgow Central, but when I was last there it was full. Therefore, capacity is also an issue. We hope that, with the cycle commitments in the Abellio franchise, the issues will be addressed, and that the quality will be improved at the minor stations, too.

Robert Samson: The provision of cycle parking is like the provision of taxis—it is variable. In the previous ScotRail franchise, which was operated by FirstGroup, there was a commitment to put cycle parking facilities in most, if not all, ScotRail stations. Bearing in mind that a large number of those stations are unmanned, I would query whether that would have been the best use of funds. A good number of cyclists will not leave their cycle at an unmanned station for a long period. They would rather take it on the train or hire one at another point. Therefore, the question is about providing not just facilities, but facilities that are adequate for the cyclists' needs.

Jolin Warren: Yes—the provision has to be adequate. I must say that, even at smaller stations, I often see at least one of the cycle racks in use. The bigger problem is not thinking it through, which we have found with a number of cycle facilities.

One example is Oban station. It has cycle parking, but the car park goes down the length of the platform with the cycle parking at the far end, so people have to walk the length of the platform, go in the entrance and then walk back down. Also, the cycle parking area is uncovered. Right by the station entrance there is a pay-and-display machine with a big canopy over it and a trolley rack. Of course, there is a bicycle chained to the trolley rack, because people do not want to walk all the way down. Details such as that are an issue.

11:30

Another issue concerns lifts and the need to optimise access. Something simple that can be done for cyclists would involve installing wheel wells on stairs. A lot of cyclists would prefer not to have to wait for the lift and contend with people who have luggage and that sort of thing. It would be fairly simple to put in wheel wells so that people could wheel their bikes up easily. That has been done at the Calton Road entrance to Waverley station, but the wheel well is right next to the wall,

so if someone tries to wheel a bike up, the pedals hit the railings and they cannot do it.

Improvements such as cycle parking and wheel wells are put in, but the specification is not done by someone who is thinking about how those things will actually be used. That means that they are not used, which is a waste of money. That waste is more of a concern for us than people not using them.

David Stewart: In summary, then, you are saying that some of the active travel cycle facilities are designed by people who have never been on a bike in their lives, which is not too clever. You raised the idea of having an architect.

Jolin Warren: Yes—that is why we think it would be good to have an architect. Going back to Anne MacLean's comment about designing for people with disabilities, I note that designing to enable convenient access for people with cycles—and for pedestrians—should be right at the heart of the process.

For the Queen Street development, for example, there should be someone on the design team from the beginning who is responsible for thinking about travel issues such as cycling and walking access. Those elements can then be designed in, which will make a huge difference to effectiveness and to the cost.

The Convener: Following on from that line of questioning, I want to ask about the recommendations in Transform Scotland's recent research on the active travel-friendly standard, the active travel hubs and the appointment of an active travel architect. What level of engagement have you had with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government in order to take those recommendations forward?

Jolin Warren: We sent them the draft report and the final report. As I said, we have received a positive response on a general level, but nothing specific in terms of taking the recommendations forward.

The Convener: What are the next steps, if the report is not just to be another that gathers dust?

Jolin Warren: I will go through the recommendations separately. On active travel hubs, there is already clear movement. I will run a workshop on active travel hubs at next week's active travel conference. We will, I hope, get some of the stakeholders engaged so that we can consider what the best next steps are.

As I said, Transport Scotland has some funding, and Abellio—or the ScotRail alliance—has a commitment to deliver cycle hubs. There is already movement there.

Transport Scotland needs to become involved, not necessarily in micromanaging the implementation details of every active travel hub but by providing a broad overview to ensure that there is a connection between the different operators of travel hubs; that the process for developing the hubs is appropriate so that they fit with local needs and are appropriate to the location; and that there is a decent spread of hubs so that they are in reasonable locations.

The Convener: What specifically are you doing to ensure that we secure access to the European funding that you mentioned?

Jolin Warren: I am not involved with that specifically. I am aware that Transport Scotland has been working on it, and my understanding is that it has secured the funding. I can certainly get back to you with the details if that would be of use.

The Convener: I will stick with questions to you, Mr Warren, if I may. As you have said, the new ScotRail operator, Abellio, has committed to significant investment in new cycling facilities. How important will that be in improving accessibility for cyclists at our major railway stations? Are there any measures that you want Abellio to address in addition to those that the company has already highlighted?

Jolin Warren: It is not so much about additional measures. A lot will depend on the detail: the broad strokes of what Abellio is planning are excellent, but—to go back to what I was talking about earlier—there are issues such as where cycle parking is placed and whether it is covered. If cycle lockers are put in, do people even know how to use them and where they can get a key from, and are they able to reserve them?

The details are important. So far, as I said, Abellio has been very engaged, not just with us but in general. If it continues along that path and listens to feedback, there is a good chance that the improvements that it has planned will make a significant difference and raise standards.

The Convener: I want to return to the issue of Waverley station, just for completeness. I would like to ask you the same question that I asked Ms MacLean. What level of consultation was there with your organisation prior to Network Rail imposing the ban on vehicles entering the station, given that, as you outlined earlier, that has had a knock-on effect on cyclists and pedestrians?

Jolin Warren: There was none at all. In fact, we were auditing Waverley at the time as part of the interchange project, and we had very good communication with the station manager. As I said, she and her team created the route on the north ramp, and she was doing a lot of proactive good work. The ban must have come as a surprise

to her, because clearly it was not in the plan. It was a surprise to us as well.

The Convener: Do you think that that illustrates Network Rail's attitude—to which you referred in the context of Queen Street station—in that it does not consider transport integration to be part of its remit? Is what happened with Waverley station another example of that approach?

Jolin Warren: Yes—only up to this point, I stress, because I hope that things will change with the new alliance structure. However, up to this point, Network Rail Scotland has not been very receptive to our input and to the idea of considering the wider integrated transport implications.

The Convener: Thank you. Mike MacKenzie has some questions.

Mike MacKenzie: Yes. I have a great deal of sympathy with pretty much everything that I have heard this morning. Living as I do on a tiny island on the west coast with no roads and no cars, I do not tend to use public transport very often. When I occasionally go—

The Convener: I caution members against having too much sympathy for Mr MacKenzie.

Mike MacKenzie: I am not seeking sympathy, but I understand how the witnesses feel, in as much as I find, on the few occasions on which I go into stations, that they are confusing and quite frightening places.

Anne MacLean made a very powerful point when she said that, when the access arrangements are good for people who suffer from disabilities, they are good for pretty much everybody. Bearing that in mind, has any research been done more generally among rail passengers to see if accessibility is important to people?

We all grasp the importance of accessibility for people who suffer from disabilities, but how much importance do people more generally place on accessibility?

Robert Samson: We published a report last year on passenger priorities on Britain's railways. The results of our research were broken down by country and area, according to what passengers wanted to see in Scotland and in the north, south-west and south-east of England. We found that passenger priorities were very much the same in all areas.

Most of the priorities related to train factors such as reliability and punctuality. When it came to stations, they were about the availability of station staff—passengers like to see a staff presence at stations—being safe and secure at stations and accessibility.

I cannot give you the priorities off the top of my head, but there is a list on our website that prioritises what passengers want at stations. One of the top priorities, which is nothing to do with our discussion, was wi-fi at stations.

We have a priority matrix that I can share with the committee.

Mike MacKenzie: Thank you very much.

In your study, did any groups, other than people with disabilities, place a higher emphasis on accessibility? Anne MacLean mentioned mothers with prams and people with luggage.

Robert Samson: Basically, I would say the groups that you picked out. A commuter might go to work on Monday with only their briefcase but, at the weekend, travel with their children and have a buggy and luggage, so passengers' needs change depending on the purpose of their journey. Accessibility benefits not only people with mobility access issues but all passengers, especially groups such as the elderly and young mothers and fathers.

Mike MacKenzie: I absolutely agree with you, but are people aware of the issues? Are there any particular groups who are aware of them—such as mothers of young families—and who, when they respond to consultations, place a higher importance on accessibility than passengers in general do?

Robert Samson: We break our surveys down by age profile and the purpose of the journey—whether people are travelling on business, for a commute or for leisure. We do not break them down in the way that you are looking at the matter. Perhaps we could consider it in those terms, but we do not have that information to hand, I am afraid.

Mike MacKenzie: The issue was brought home to me when some of us were on a committee trip to Gothenburg in Sweden in connection with another inquiry. As part of our journey, we went to the railway station, which I thought should have been called something like tranquillity central because it was quite unlike any of the railway stations in this country, which are chaotic, noisy and confusing. If you were to conduct a survey of passengers in Sweden, you might find a different emphasis in what they place importance on.

Are you aware of any examples of good practice from other countries or other parts of the United Kingdom? We are increasingly embracing technology as the solution to some of the problems that we face. Are there any technological solutions—perhaps information technology solutions—to the problems that we have been talking about?

Robert Samson: We have done work with passengers that shows that one of the barriers to using not only the rail network but buses is uncertainty. For people who use public transport day in, day out, it is easy to go up to the ticket counter in a station and buy a ticket—they take that for granted. However, a lot of people do not know the system: they do not know, for instance, that it is exact fare only and that you pay on the bus. They do not know how to purchase a railway ticket or a bus ticket because they have not used public transport for many years and do not know how to go about it.

That is one of the barriers that have to be overcome. Perhaps technology will have a part to play in overcoming it, but the barrier is not being au fait with the system for any type of public transport.

Mike MacKenzie: Thank you.

11:45

Jolin Warren: One of the solutions is to have a properly integrated smart card, as any of you who ever visit London will be aware. When I visit London, I use an Oyster card. I do not need a season ticket or whatever—the card just stores an amount of cash on it, which makes using public transport a lot less stressful. For me, it is easier to do that than to go to Glasgow and use the buses there. As a resident of Edinburgh, I know how the buses work here, but in Glasgow I walk instead of taking the bus, because I am not exactly sure which bus to get and whether I need the exact fare or whatever. In London, you do not worry about that, because you have the card that you just touch on the reader.

I go back to how Transport Scotland could bring some sort of order specifically to the ticketing situation. That is where technology could be used. Readers are installed on buses across Scotland because of Transport Scotland's investment, so the infrastructure is largely in place. There are issues, however, with the logistics of getting multiple companies to accept the same thing. We would have to work that out, but it is an area where there could be a lot of improvement.

Mike MacKenzie: Does anybody else have examples of good practice from elsewhere or of the use of technology?

Anne MacLean: I would like to give some examples of good practice that are helping disabled people here in Scotland. This started with the south east of Scotland transport partnership, then the Tayside and central Scotland transport partnership became involved, and now HITRANS, and I am hoping that it will spread all across Scotland. It is a card for use on the bus or the train that says what someone's disability is and what

kind of help they need. That is excellent. The Confederation of Passenger Transport has a similar card.

The more regional transport partnerships introduce such measures, the more people will be at ease using public transport. People just have to show the card; they do not have to go into lengthy explanations. The cards say things like, "I have a mobility problem. Please wait until I sit down," or, "I cannot see. Please show me which way to put my card into the machine." It is quite simple, and I am told by SEStran, Tactran and HITRANS that it does not cost a great deal. It is cost effective, and it makes people more willing to use not just trains, but all public transport. That is good practice in Scotland, and we ought to be quite proud of it.

Mike MacKenzie: You have reminded me about the taxi rank situation at Queen Street station, which is an example of good design and good practice.

Anne MacLean: I do not know what it will be like once the station is redone. It is good at the moment.

Mike MacKenzie: Sure.

Given that we are talking about accessibility, are there stations that are a joy to use from the perspective of the difficulties that people with disabilities experience?

Hussein Patwa: I will highlight Stirling station, which I use quite regularly. It is what I like to call a clean station, as opposed to one that is filled with obstacles. It is straightforward, bright and airy. One walks in at the front and goes straight up to the gate line. There are staff waiting there to assist you. Fewer than half the platforms at Stirling are used for frequent services. Although there are quite a lot of stairs, as is highlighted in our submission, the depth of each step is very shallow, which makes things a lot easier for people who have trouble climbing stairs. It also means that people can get up the stairs faster if they need to or wish to.

I could consider using Stirling station independently, if I had to. There are no real areas of concern, where one could get lost. Lift access across the tracks is available. The station ticks a lot of boxes. There are issues outside the station, but when it comes to the station infrastructure itself, Stirling is a joy to use—to use your term.

Anne MacLean: Some smaller stations in Scotland are a pleasure to use, and some of them are unstaffed. I would like to say something about unstaffed stations, because I have been talking about the passenger assist service; our sadness is that not as many people as we would like to know about it do know. One of the things that passenger assist does is pay for a taxi to your nearest

accessible station if your nearest station is not accessible or is unstaffed and you would feel unsafe. That is another example of very good practice.

Mike MacKenzie: Thank you. That has been very useful.

The Convener: I invite members to ask any final questions.

Mary Fee: I have a brief question about signage. I am thinking specifically about signage in stations that are undergoing a major refurbishment: one that is undergoing major refurbishment but has not been mentioned this morning is Dundee station. The waterfront in Dundee has been undergoing major refurbishment for a number of years, and I know that there are difficulties in accessing the station even for people who have absolutely no disabilities. It is a confusing station to get in and out of because of the amount of work that is being done. Similar work will be done at Glasgow Queen Street as part of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme. Do Network Rail or Transport Scotland consult MACS about what could be done to make it easier for passengers?

Anne MacLean: I recall all the upheaval in Waverley, which we hoped would produce lovely things. It did, by the way, while the taxis were still allowed in—I cannot resist getting that dig in every time. At that time, Network Rail and the station manager and staff consulted MACS about signage while the work was going on. Indeed, you can still see in some places the yellow lines on the ground that we asked for, because visually impaired people need to look down. Yellow is an advancing colour so it is good in that respect. We also asked them to put signs on the hoardings at the right levels for different people, and I have to say that they were very good about that. I must compliment them on the work that they did at that time, which is going back a few years, as Waverley is now finished. We are also being consulted about Glasgow Queen Street.

Hussein Patwa: We are. Our colleagues have been working on that station from close to the outset. They are working to get exactly what we referred to earlier, by attempting to solve problems from the outset rather than coming back to deal with them later.

Mary Fee: Could that be highlighted as an area of good practice?

Anne MacLean: Yes.

Jolin Warren: Conversely, Network Rail's consideration of cycle needs at Haymarket was not good. We have a strong local cycle group in Edinburgh that could have provided a lot of useful input, which would have been easy to do at the

early stages and would have made a big difference, but Network Rail was not receptive to that. A lot of public money is being spent, and the Government has set a 10 per cent target in the cycling action plan for Scotland. We are spending millions of pounds of public money; I do not see how that is compatible with not finding the most integrated solution possible.

The Convener: Could each of the witnesses reflect for a moment on the single outcome that they would like to result from the work that the committee is undertaking, and share it with the committee?

Robert Samson: Regarding accessibility, what is needed is a more joined-up approach. We should not look at rail in a rail silo, bus in a bus silo or taxi in a taxi silo. We need a partnership approach to connectivity and integration, and we need at the same time to encourage modal shift.

Jolin Warren: My point is along similar lines and goes back to our recommendation about having an active-travel architect. When we are spending big, or small, amounts of public money on major redevelopments or on reconfiguring stations, the needs of pedestrians and cyclists should be fully considered and integrated into the plans. The overall integration with the public transport infrastructure should be considered; that should not be outwith the remit of the project.

The Convener: And Spokes should be consulted—

Jolin Warren: Yes, Spokes in Edinburgh, Go Bike in Glasgow and—more generally—local groups should be consulted. It is not just about cycling. It is clear from MACS that there are a lot of well-considered experts who have high-quality knowledge in local communities. Writing off those experts because they are not doing the work five days a week for a high salary is just not acceptable. Those are people who really know what they are talking about and can make a big difference to the outcome.

Anne MacLean: I echo the point about interconnectivity. It is not just an issue in major stations; it is an issue in stations all across Scotland. I regularly use Aviemore station, which is relatively small; it is my local station. There are taxis and buses available, but people who do not know the station would not know where to go to get either. We must make sure that it all links up. It is not that the buses or taxis are difficult to find at Aviemore station if you know where to look for them. However, if someone walks out of this strange station, they are in the beautiful Highlands, in the Cairngorms national park—very good—but where is the bus stop and where is the taxi rank? That sort of thing is very simple to fix and not a lot of money is needed to do it. In bigger

stations, in cities, interconnectivity is an issue, but we also need to look at stations right across Scotland and see where they connect, if they do, to buses. It is the same argument except on a smaller scale.

The Convener: Thank you. Mr Patwa—you have the final word.

Hussein Patwa: Thank you. I will not repeat what colleagues have said, which I completely endorse. My biggest wish would be more marketing of information on how life can be made easier to the travelling public. My colleague Anne MacLean mentioned the passenger assist service, so I will not dwell on that. It is a service-level feature and I realise that the committee's remit is to cover infrastructure.

There are cases in which getting from one side of a station to the other side—at some small Highland stations, for example—can require walking a considerable distance and over a bridge. If the travelling public do not know that there is a quicker way to access that other side, it puts them at a considerable disadvantage and inconvenience.

Very often, information for disabled passengers seems to be isolated either in websites or within stations, or you can get the information if you know who to ask. With respect, I do not see why that should be the case. If we can market information for tourists, for cyclists and so on widely in the public domain, where anyone can see it and access it, I fail to see why the same cannot be done for information relating to disabled travellers. It goes back to what colleagues were saying: if it works for one, it works for all. That is a major gap in the infrastructure.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses for their evidence. That concludes today's business.

Meeting closed at 11:58.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78568-607-8

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78568-621-4