

## DR DAVID CONNELLY

### WRITTEN SUBMISSION

This letter contains a number of my observations on the Scottish Government's draft budget, particularly on sections relevant to the ICI Committee.

My name is Dr David Connolly. I am:

- Director of Innovation in a leading UK Transport Planning Consultancy;
- A Director and Board Member of the UK's Transport Planning Society;
- A member of the ScotStat Board (representing the Transport and Travel Statistics Committee);
- A member of Environmental Protection Scotland's Air Quality Expert Advisory Group
- An Edinburgh resident (having lived here most of my adult life);
- A regular user of my car, my bike, Edinburgh's buses, ScotRail (and other UK) trains and a range of domestic and international air services;
- A regular hill-walker and lover of Scotland's wild places.

My comments represent my personal opinion and not the views of any of the organisations listed above.

My comments relate to Chapter 10 (Rural Affairs) and Chapter 12 (Infrastructure, Investment and Cities) of the Scottish Government's draft budget, as downloaded from SG's website on 24 October 2014. These comments are grouped by these two Chapters below.

#### **Chapter 10 – Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment**

I fully support the aim to 'improve digital connectivity, particularly to remote and rural areas', but would ask that this is not used as excuse to cover every hill-top with unsightly phone masts.

**Funding for Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES)** - The Scottish Government should NOT provide money to farmers and land managers to install any renewable energy projects which have a damaging impact on the SG's stated objective to deliver '*a high quality environment for local people and visitors*'. In particular, taxpayer's money should not be spent encouraging the installation of wind farms in areas in, or visible from, any of Scotland's wild and/or scenic coastal or mountain areas.

## Chapter 12 - Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

I welcome the explicit linkage between the transport system and digital infrastructure and the recognition of the importance of both within the budget document. However, I question how slashing the budget for the latter from £13.8m to £1.0M in 2015/16 will allow us to ensure that our digital infrastructure keeps pace with other leading and emerging industrial nations. The text implies that 'the bulk of the fund is shown in the Rural Affairs, Food and Environment portfolio', but the £12.8m reduction in Chapter 12 is only partially-matched by the £8.2M increase in the 'Next Generation Digital Fund' in Chapter 10, implying a significant net Scotland-wide reduction of £4.6M in this area. In addition, the £1M which remains in the urban 'pot' is not sufficient to do anything meaningful to enhance the digital infrastructure in our towns and cities.

This apparent lack of government investment in our urban digital infrastructure and the cut in the combined urban/rural spend are worrying, given the importance of this infrastructure to our economy. Can I therefore suggest that the committee investigates carefully what the Government's plans are in this important area, considering a) the combined rural and urban digital infrastructure spending and b) the split between urban and rural aspects of these plans.

The provision of completely free bus travel to anyone over the age of 60, regardless of their income, is, in my opinion, a waste of taxpayer's money and should be reviewed.

It would be helpful if the budget document could provide a few more details regarding what benefits Prestwick Airport is delivering to the Scottish taxpayer and/or will deliver in the future. In particular, is it the Scottish Government's aim that they will be able to recoup their investment by returning Prestwick to the private ownership at some future date?

Does the 'Roads Depreciation' entry in Table 12.06 imply that our road network will be worth £110.8m less at the end of 2015/16 than it does at the start, or is this amount offset by some of the structural repairs and routine maintenance expenditure? In general, is the Committee happy that we are spending enough to maintain or improve the current state of the Scotland's trunk and local road network?

The draft budget's claim that the Government is going to '*continue to invest in infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling*' appears to ignore/hide the 14% cut in the 'Support for Sustainable and Active Travel' budget (from £29m to £25m). A more-honest form of wording highlighting and explaining this cut would be preferable here, or perhaps a transfer of some of the concessionary travel budget to maintain the 2014/15 funding level? If the £4m funding gap is

being filled using funds from elsewhere then this should perhaps be stated more-explicitly.

The Regional Transport Partnerships are currently seriously under-funded and should, in my opinion, receive significant additional funding, to enable sensible joined-up planning of transport across the relevant local authority boundaries.

Finally, there are an incredible number of almost-empty trains running round the ScotRail network, particularly in the Strathclyde area. The recent tender for the ScotRail franchise encouraged the new operator to try to fill some of these empty seats, but did not allow for any rationalisation of the services (eg reduction in frequency of the worst-offending services). This requirement for the new ScotRail operator to continue running loads of empty trains (and getting paid by the taxpayer to do so) should be reviewed.

I hope you find these comments helpful.

**Dr David Connolly**  
**24 October 2014**