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Convener of the Local Government and
Communities Committee
T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Councillor David Ross

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Dear Mr Doris

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee on the issue of City Region Deals and for the opportunity to clarify and add to the discussion on the day.

By way of clarification, the following statement in the Official Report is attributed to me:

- Councillor David Ross:

We have been hammering, hollering and goodness knows what to get around the table with you. As you know, there is complete cross-party and cross-community support for the Levenmouth rail link in the local area. We have been doing our best. I am not involved in the detailed prioritisation, but the clear understanding that we got from Government officials was that the project would not meet the specific criteria they were looking for in the city deal. We insisted that at least the funding for the first stage and the feasibility work should go into it.

The first sentence mistakenly gives the impression that it concerns Jenny Gilruth MSP whereas I meant to convey our commitment to the project and our desire to promote the project to the Scottish Government.

I believe there was also a degree of confusion regarding whether or not the Levenmouth Rail Link was refused by the Scottish Government. The full project was put forward by the Council as part of the initial bid. The total cost of the bids included in this submission was beyond what both Scottish and UK Governments were likely to fund. In discussions between Scottish civil servants and council officers it was made clear to us that the full project would not score highly under the criteria on which the Scottish Government would consider the bid. Given that clear direction, it was only the first phase of the project – for feasibility and design work – that was included in the final proposals. However the Scottish Government did not agree to fund even that element of the project in its response to the Deal.

There is one other matter that did not arise at the evidence session that I believe the Committee should be aware of. This concerns the funding of the Sherrifhall junction improvements on the Edinburgh City By-Pass. I believe the funding from the Scottish Government for these improvements is around £120m – representing around 40% of the Scottish Government’s investment in the City Region Deal. Whilst few people would argue that this work is not needed, it was not a project that was submitted by the local authorities as part of the City Region Deal and as a consequence of the Scottish Government including this project in the overall funding, it may have been that other projects that had been prioritised by the local authorities were not funded.

It is open to conjecture as to whether national political considerations influenced the final rush to announce the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal – e.g. the desire of the UK Government to be seen to be investing in Scotland to offset criticism of the funding going to Northern Ireland under the deal with the DUP – and whether this rush to conclude the ESES Deal meant that it suffered as a consequence.

I hope these points are of help to your Committee in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Cllr David Ross
Co-Leader of Fife Council