

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 29 January 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 January 2009

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Forestry

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3325, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on forestry. We have a little flexibility on time, but not a lot, so I ask members to stick closely to the time that they have been allocated.

09:15

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): The widespread and clearly expressed concerns that have been raised throughout the country about the Scottish National Party's proposal to lease substantial areas of the most commercially successful parts of Scotland's national forest urgently need to be brought before the Parliament. The contracts will last for decades, deprive the Forestry Commission Scotland and 18 future Scottish Governments of the revenue from forest that was planted at public expense and, in the process, damage the Forestry Commission's ability to manage the strategic change that is needed in our forests.

We are not opposed to all the suggestions that the minister has made. Indeed, the proposal to enable the Forestry Commission to enter into joint renewables ventures to plant more forests was in our manifesto and we strongly support it. However, we are opposed to the main proposals on leasing, which are set out in the policy memorandum and financial memorandum to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. They are ill thought out and lack a published business plan. Moreover, the Government has given no substantive answers to a series of questions on fundamental aspects of the proposals.

It is unacceptable that ministers, who have had 22 months to work up proposals for the bill, have suggested the major leasing proposals at the 11th hour. As people in the industry have put it to us, they are a bolt from the blue. The Rural Affairs and Environment Committee will be put in an unacceptable position because, in two weeks' time, it will be expected to consider the implications of those huge proposals in one brief meeting without having seen the full results of the hurried consultation, which was put together at the last minute.

The consultation closed on Tuesday and we waited until then so that people could pass us their

comments. The Scottish Parliament information centre tells us that ministers will not see a full report of the consultation until the end of February and the responses will not be made available to everybody until March. When we have asked questions, we have been told that we are scaremongering and being deeply misleading, but we have referred back to the initial consultation document, which gives no detailed information.

The minister keeps attempting to reassure people by saying that the leasing proposals are just ideas, but it is stated clearly in the financial memorandum to the bill that the Government intends to secure powers through the bill to make secondary legislation on the release of capital from the national forest estate through the letting of timber-cutting rights. The memo is clear that it would be

"a 75 year lease over about 100,000 hectares (or up to 25% of the national forest estate)"

but is extremely vague about the income: it could be an up-front payment or an income stream. That is a pretty basic issue to pin down at the start.

Without guarantees, this is money up for grabs by a cash-strapped Government. The proposals would mean the SNP borrowing from the future. It would take at least two years for a lease even to be drawn up. At a conservative estimate, the steady income stream to the Forestry Commission is £10 million to £15 million in today's money, so we are talking about a minimum loss of £750 million for a paltry income of perhaps £200 million—if there are no plans to spend it. The sums simply do not add up. It is a bad deal for Scotland but a really good deal for one lucky private investor.

The proposals are a damaging diversion from the debates that we should be having on the other parts of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. We are concerned about biodiversity, the promotion of access and the loss of jobs, particularly in fragile rural areas. Understandably, forestry workers are deeply concerned about jobs, but they are also concerned about the integrity of the Forestry Commission and the sustainability of Scottish forestry for the years to come. They are not reassured by the minister's comments about their jobs. Many of them work in our most remote rural areas and they understand employment law and the financial imperatives of a single employer that would want to recoup the money that it has paid up front as fast as possible.

Industries that rely on the long-term contracts that the Forestry Commission manages are also deeply concerned. They know that, even when wood prices drop, they have long-term contracts with the commission that deliver a steady stream of wood. They believe that the proposals will

cause irreparable damage and cost jobs. The sawmill sector is made up of successful Scottish family businesses that want to expand but which worry about the implications of one big company coming in and vertically integrating the whole operation.

The processors are not the only ones who are worried. Climate change means that we need more wood for our sustainable construction industry, and the renewables industry needs more wood for local supply. There is no point in developing local biomass plants if the wood pellets are imported while Scottish wood is exported abroad. The Forestry Commission guarantees that that does not happen, but that guarantee would be lost under the proposals.

Environmental non-governmental organisations are also worried about the loss of biodiversity and the loss of the strategic management and experience that the Forestry Commission brings to our forests. They would rather that the commission focused on other challenges, such as the stewardship of our peat bogs, which is vital if we are to tackle climate change.

Forestry expansion must be underpinned by a coherent land use strategy—we must put the right tree in the right place at the right time. We have mountain biking facilities that simply would not have been developed without the Forestry Commission's long-term partnership, investment and expertise. Multi-use forests are in the public interest and we must not damage that interest in the future.

The plans do not add up and are deeply unpopular. The Forestry Commission trade unions' petition has already been signed by more than 3,000 people and the Labour Party's petition has attracted more than 800 responses. People have expressed their views strongly. I will quote one comment from our website:

"As a lifelong member of the SNP, I am appalled and embarrassed by this proposal. If money is needed to fund an extra 10,000 hectares of new plantations, then it should come from the Carbon Emission Reduction Target program (CERT) funded by the energy utilities who are the major CO2 polluters, and not from a flawed, irresponsible and uncostered adventure to privatise our greatest national sustainable asset, ie our land and all that grows on it."

Our motion asks for the plans to be dropped now. They will be deeply damaging to jobs not only in future but now. We are in a deeply difficult national financial situation and the last thing that the Government should do is make that worse. Alternatives exist, so let us focus on them. Let us sort out the rural development plan. Less than £1 million out of the £14 million woodland challenge fund has been allocated so far this year; that is not good enough. We should look at the new revenue

streams from renewables and look at community participation.

The SNP Government must do the right thing: dump these unpopular, ill-thought-out, damaging proposals. Let us focus on the way forward.

I move,

That the Parliament notes widespread and clearly expressed public concern about the potential effects on biodiversity, access, employment and the ability of Forestry Commission Scotland to continue to carry out its functions effectively as a result of the Scottish Government's proposals to lease large tracts of the forestry estate to the private sector for decades into the future; notes that the Parliament is being asked by the Scottish Government to scrutinise a proposal that it has now said does "not necessarily represent the best or only option" to achieve its objectives; also notes that the Scottish Government has not set out what it believes would be the other or better options; further notes the lack of published detail or business plan and the inability of the Scottish Government to answer a series of questions on the full implications of its proposals at this time, and calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider its plans to proceed with the leasing proposal and end the uncertainty surrounding the proposals by dropping the provisions that would permit this from the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

09:22

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I will deal with facts, which were in short supply in the speech that we have just heard from Sarah Boyack and will be in short supply in the speeches that we will hear from the Liberal Democrats, who made an entirely fact-free contribution to the consultation.

I will start with some facts that might be hard for the Labour Party to take. The great defender of Forestry Commission jobs is the party that, when in power, lost 1,000 of them from 1999. Those jobs were lost under Labour and the Liberal Democrats; our proposals would increase employment in rural areas.

Alas, the other fact with which I must deal is the history of consultation under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, in which the decisions were made before the consultation papers were issued. I understand those people who have difficulty taking my assurances at face value. For years, they have had ministers in Scotland whose assurances meant nothing, so I say at the outset that my assurances are to be trusted. *[Interruption.]* I know that it is an unusual concept for Labour to think of trust and ministers in the same sentence, but the reality is that there will be no loss of jobs, biodiversity or access.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD) rose—

Michael Russell: I will not take an intervention from Mr Hume at any stage today.

There will be no difficulties of the type that has been talked about. It is scaremongering.

Let us go to the facts. Scotland's forests represent one of our biggest assets in terms of natural and financial capital. A lot more forest needs to be planted to help us achieve the world-leading climate change ambitions on which this Administration has led and which the United Kingdom Government is merely following.

On what basis can I say that? The 2006 Stern report on the economics of climate change, which highlighted the importance of effective, early action, said:

"Encouraging new forests, and enhancing the potential of soils to store carbon, offer further opportunities to reverse emissions from land use change".

The AEA Technology report on policy options, "Mitigating Against Climate Change in Scotland", identified increasing woodland area as a high-priority, cost-effective measure. A total of 10,000 hectares of new woodland each year would lock up an additional 4.4 million tonnes of CO₂ a year by 2050. For comparison, 4.4 million tonnes of CO₂ is equivalent to 44 per cent of road transport emissions in Scotland in 2006. It would make a significant contribution. It is a pity that the Labour Party talks about action against climate change but is not prepared to do anything.

Let us talk about how the proposals came about. For years, people have approached the Forestry Commission and asked to buy its land. As forestry minister, I will not sell Forestry Commission land. However, we need to consider creative ideas. When Rothschild came to us with a creative idea, I considered it and rejected it, because it was a proposal for 100 per cent of the forest estate. I needed to find a creative way to deal with the issue. The creative way is to take the 25 per cent package, get the value from it and invest that money so that we can grow more trees in Scotland. That is essential. Moreover, by putting that in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, we guarantee that it will be used in that way because it would be ultra vires if it were not.

We have a win-win situation in Scotland. We have the potential to meet the target of 10,000 hectares, which existed throughout the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration but was never even approached. We can meet that target. Because we have access legislation, we can guarantee access. Because the proposals deal with specific areas, we can ensure that things such as the 7stanes and rallying are maintained and enhanced. We can ensure that leisure access takes place. All those things are guaranteed.

Where are the downsides? There is a downside for scaremongers and for those who want to make political capital out of the proposals. The reality is

that there are no downsides for Scotland and none for those who work in forestry.

The biggest criticism that the Labour motion makes is of being open-minded. I find that fairly astonishing. Of course, I am prepared to consider alternative ideas. That is what a consultation is about. I have invited those ideas, and I am grateful to the trade unions, for example, for coming up with the idea of increasing the amount of repositioning. However, there is a problem in that, because some of the arguments that we have heard against leasing, for example to do with the potential danger to the Galloway forest park, would, if they were true, be exactly the same if the land were to be sold, yet those are the precise areas that Labour is proposing to sell. Its proposal is not worked through or worked out.

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Minister, you must agree that—

The Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please.

Elaine Murray: I am sorry, Presiding Officer.

The minister surely agrees that he already sells forest—there is already an income stream of £15 million per annum in the budget for the Forestry Commission. It has already happened.

Michael Russell: An agreed repositioning package was started by Labour, which we have continued. The solution to the problem of how we plant 10,000 hectares of new woodland each year is not to sell more land to do so, because that will endlessly diminish the forest estate. The solution is to use the resource imaginatively and boldly, which is what the senior lecturer in forestry at the University of Aberdeen, Andrew Cameron, suggested. He said that if we invest the money in that way, we will plant trees.

There are three classic ways of increasing tree planting. First, there are tax concessions. The Government cannot offer those. The second is borrowing. The Government cannot borrow—that restriction was imposed on us by Labour. Thirdly, there is this proposal. We need more trees. If there is a better proposal in the chamber, let it come forward. If not, let us ensure that we do something about climate change instead of just talking about it.

I move amendment S3M-3325.1, to leave out from "widespread" to end and insert:

"the consultation on climate change and forestry that has just closed; welcomes the widespread agreement that there must be a significant planting increase to assist the process of combating climate change; is grateful to all those who brought a variety of ideas and views forward, and looks forward to a report to the Parliament on the outcome of the consultation."

09:29

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and a member of NFU Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives support the Government's target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. We acknowledge how difficult that will be. However, that is a long-term problem that requires thought-through solutions so, although I understand the Government's desire to make a start on carbon reduction, I remain as yet unconvinced that the proposal to lease 25 per cent of Forestry Commission land in Scotland is the best way forward. However, we shall see.

First, it is important to note that the short consultation on the proposal ended only two days ago, and it has so far been impossible to examine the responses. Indeed, as Sarah Boyack said, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee wrote to the minister expressing its

"dismay and frustration"

at being

"asked to commence scrutiny of the proposals without any awareness of how consultees have responded to them".

The Parliament finds itself in that position today.

Of course, as one would expect, the Scottish Conservatives approach the proposal with an open mind, unlike the Liberals who, in their uniquely childish way, memorably claimed that Christmas trees and Christmas cards would be a thing of the past if the Scottish Government pressed on with its plans to sell off Scottish forests.

I have sympathy with the concerns that Sarah Boyack raises in her motion, although it is tempered by the knowledge that she and her party voted down the budget yesterday, which will reduce the Forestry Commission budget this year by £3.5 million. Calling on the Government to drop the leasing proposals today without even taking note of the responses to the consultation smacks a little of a knee-jerk response and shows little respect for the consultees. I would have expected a more reflective and open-minded approach from her of all people.

What is needed is not a poorly thought-through scheme from the Government, a knee-jerk response from Labour or scaremongering from the Liberals, but a joined-up, thought-through proposal, to be put on the table and set in the context of an integrated and strategic land use policy. A spatial planning exercise and full land use review need to be conducted and should, if possible, reconcile all Scotland's competing land uses.

Michael Russell: I entirely agree that land use is a substantive issue. I am sure that the member will acknowledge that the work that has been done by the Scottish Government in its land use research and the land use policy that will come to fulfilment later this year in a land use event are useful contributions.

John Scott: Absolutely. I acknowledge that, but the proposals are ahead of that, and need to be part of that integrated approach.

Increasing forestry cover by 50 per cent by 2050 has to be reconciled with the need to produce more food from our land. Make no mistake—that planting target, if met, will be at the expense of food production on our hills and uplands, because that is where the trees will be put. The concerns of the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association about the timing of secondary legislation, about how many leases might be entered into, about how viable the remainder of the Forestry Commission becomes, if the proposals materialise, and about the future of the timber processing sector all need to be answered.

RSPB Scotland and others have concerns about how the Government can ensure, over the 75-year period, that the £200 million raised by leasing will be reinvested in forestry and not used, say, to help pay for the new Forth bridge. At the moment, the bill gives no guarantees on that. The RSPB and the SRPBA are concerned that extra forestry planting on the land on which that planting would take place may not be the most efficient way of combating carbon emissions. They believe that a more detailed scientific and cost-benefit analysis is needed.

The legitimate concerns of the unions, the staff of the Forestry Commission, and others in road haulage and downstream industries must be addressed—I hope that the minister can do that—as must the concern about continuity of timber supply to processing industries in good times and bad. Those are just a few of the questions that I would have liked to pose to the minister in the short time available.

The proposals thus far are not well enough developed to enable us to take a view. We do not know what views have been expressed in response to the consultation, but sufficient criticism and doubts have been aired for us to question the viability of the proposals. That is why the Conservatives remain to be convinced of the merit of the leasing proposals. However, we await with bated breath the answer to the questions posed by us and by the consultees and other parties, and thereafter we will come to a view.

I move amendment S3M-3325.1.1, to insert at end:

“and to subsequent detailed parliamentary scrutiny of any proposals brought forward as a result of the consultation.”

09:34

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): The Labour motion reflects what, for many weeks, Liberal Democrats have been calling for, and it has our support. Our amendment simply expands on how hard the SNP proposal would hit Scotland.

The Government’s proposal to auction off one of Scotland’s most prized natural assets for a one-off, bargain-basement sum, under the guise of perhaps using the money for climate change measures, does not add up. What is in effect the sell-off of the most commercial part of the public forestry estate will not benefit Scotland, nor will it solve the many issues of climate change. It is at best naive and at worst reckless. There has been widespread opposition to the proposal from environmental groups, business and the public. Community groups could be left out in the cold as their local woods are snapped up by investors, and there is also a question mark over the future of leisure tourism. The economic future of rural communities is under threat.

No one can guarantee that sawmills and other companies that have been dependent on wood as their raw material for 75 years will have the same cutting contracts with private landlords that they currently have with the Forestry Commission. The minister cannot guarantee that there will be no redundancies in the commission. The jobs guarantee that he talks about, and the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, mean nothing.

Michael Russell: What does Jim Hume mean when he says that they mean nothing? That is nonsense.

Jim Hume: The minister should listen. He might learn something.

The TUPE regulations state that employees’ terms and conditions may not be changed unless for an

“economic, technical or organisational reason”—

that is, for every reason under the sun. How can the Forestry Commission guarantee its workers’ jobs if 25 per cent of its most commercial land is no longer in its management and up to 40 per cent of its timber income is lost overnight? That will leave it in a vulnerable position.

Under the proposal, we could not have the level of woodland investment that we have had under the Forestry Commission, so there is no prospect of new tourism initiatives such as the 7stanes

project and no prospect of expanding or maintaining existing facilities. We have been told that it is okay because only remote areas will be leased off, such as the Galloway forest and parts of Argyll, but that is a centralist attitude. Are those not the areas that need the most economic stimulation?

What is the point of having a not-for-profit trust? Surely the Forestry Commission acts like a trust anyway and is fully accountable. The proposal is “unnecessary and overbureaucratic”—not my words but those of the trade unions. In an answer to a parliamentary question from Peter Peacock, Mr Russell even admitted that leasing might bring a lower return than joint ventures, so why propose leasing? The proposal is nothing more than an instant cash-generating scheme that involves selling the nation’s family silver. I remind members that £200 million equates to only £2.66 million a year for 75 years, but we would lose £17 million a year in timber income. That is absolute madness. In addition, the private lessee might have access to Scottish rural development programme funds and therefore cost the Government even more. That is poor maths.

One of the thousands of people who replied to my forestry survey said:

“If I’d had any inkling of what we were in for, Alex Salmond and his cronies would never have got my vote. Being a party to their vainglorious appropriation of the Scottish Parliament will be a thing I regret for the rest of my days.”

Michael Russell: It is the way he tells them.

Jim Hume: It is. Here is another quotation:

“The authors of this consultation have grossly underestimated the effects on investments and jobs. There’s a significant risk to the supply chain and there’s been a suspension of major capital expenditure, risking rural employment.”

Those are the words of 19 major timber companies that need their wood supply if they are to survive.

The proposal is madness and I call for it to be dropped. I move amendment S3M-3325.2, to insert after “future”:

“; recognises with concern that the loss of potentially 100,000 hectares of estate earmarked for this lease option represents 35 to 40% of Forestry Commission Scotland’s (FCS) timber income and 25% of its land mass; notes that diminishing FCS income by such a significant proportion could lead to the loss of investment for new leisure and tourism facilities, other woodland initiatives and research and development on renewable energy and could, in the longer term, threaten existing facilities and projects due to a restricted maintenance budget; further notes the potential detrimental impact that giving away full cutting rights could have on sawmills, smaller timber contractors and timber companies that often rely on cutting contracts granted to them by FCS to sustain their businesses; believes that the lease option has been drawn up without considering the

impact on rural and remote communities and without considering other land uses and land-use policies in an integrated approach.”

09:38

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This morning’s debate is an important one for many of my constituents. In rural areas there are not many permanent full-time jobs. Those that are created by the Forestry Commission are often the backbone of fragile rural communities and make them sustainable. We should also take into account the boost that forestry activity gives through temporary work at felling time and the commission’s work to encourage public access and tourism.

The Minister for Environment has said again and again that Forestry Commission employees need not fear for their jobs and that they can either transfer to the lease company or remain within the Forestry Commission. However, in many of the areas that I represent, that is not an option. There will be no local forestry jobs with the commission if cutting rights are leased. Forestry Commission staff who have attended information workshops were told that the position for all staff was just as stark. If they refuse to transfer to the new company, they will be deemed to have resigned—no redundancy, no choice, no option.

However, it is not just commission staff who face an uncertain future. Employees in the downstream industries such as wood processing and sawmills also face uncertainty. Those industries need a stable supply of wood if they are to continue to operate. A private company with cutting rights will have no loyalty to those industries. It could be argued that the company will be dependant on the industries if it is to sell its timber, but things can change quickly. The timescale that is being discussed makes it impossible to predict what the economic position will be, or indeed what the needs of the industry will be. On today’s figures, Scotland is being sold short, but how short time alone will tell.

Cutting rights are not the only concern of the downstream industries, as they are also concerned about research and development in relation to timber products. Many processors do not have the resources to fund research, and anything that affects the budget and scope of the commission will certainly affect research. The uncertainty that the proposal has created is causing problems now. A few weeks ago, I spoke to someone who works in the processing industry, who told me about an exciting new project that uses Scottish timber in construction. The project was in the early stages of development, but it has stalled because of the uncertainty that the proposals have created. How many other projects

have stalled? At a time when the Government should be providing stability and security where possible, it is causing needless concern and insecurity. It is costing us jobs at a time when it should be protecting them.

The UK Forest Products Association says in its response to the consultation that the policies

“could irreparably damage the forest products sector”.

That is a real concern. We should consider the experience of other countries that have gone down the same route and regretted it. For example, Sweden lost more than 20 sawmills after it sold substantial parts of its forestry.

Our rural economy is fragile. Many areas never experience the economic boosts that come to our more urban areas. Jobs are interdependent. The loss of one job can undermine a teaching job or even the local school, and that can have a knock-on effect on the local shop or post office. Many of the jobs that will be lost under the proposals are in our remote and rural areas. The fact that the Forestry Commission provides public access and encourages tourism in its forests means that the proposal will have further job implications, but I do not have time to discuss those today. Tourism is important in remote and rural areas, but private investors do not have a social responsibility to protect those jobs.

We are in the middle of a severe economic downturn. Is this the time to tell people that their jobs are at risk and create uncertainty in our wood processing and sawmill industries? This is the time for the Government to provide leadership and stability. I ask the minister to do that by withdrawing the proposals and investing in our forestry industry to provide security. I support Sarah Boyack’s motion.

09:42

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): This is a silly and premature debate, but I am grateful to Sarah Boyack for one thing: she seems to agree that this is a “cash-strapped Government”. I hope that the minister will ensure that that is extracted from the *Official Report* and quoted back at Labour as often as necessary, because those were her words. I am fascinated by the Labour Party’s opposition to private investment. Strangely, we do not hear Labour express that opposition when it comes to hospitals and schools, so I am slightly confused about where the principle lies at present.

Let us cut to the chase. Are Labour and the Lib Dems now saying that increasing forest cover from 17 per cent to 25 per cent is not to be welcomed? In any case, how do they imagine that that can happen without an increase in employment? I do not know how on earth we could increase the

forest estate without increasing the number of jobs.

At no point in the last year has there been the slightest cheep from Labour to the effect that it does not agree with the afforestation proposal, so I am puzzled. I remember that the sale of forest estate was included in the budget projections as a way of raising capital to start the process. I do not remember any Labour or Lib Dem member questioning the principle at that point. Indeed, when I checked, I could not find any Labour or Lib Dem member even asking a question on the subject. Who did? Well, I did, and so did John Scott.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: We queried the view that, to increase the estate, the Government has to sell. On the face of it, that is a paradox. The minister thinks that he has come up with a cunning plan and he has put it out to consultation. That means that it is out to discussion and that nothing is set in stone. Labour must not apply its own notion of consultation to what the Government does. What we have is a real consultation.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: I agree that the timing is bad. I have already written a grumpy letter to the minister in my capacity as convener of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, but committees in the Parliament have been put in impossible positions since 1999, so there is nothing new in that.

If Labour is not opposed in principle to sale, and if it has only just discovered that principle, why is it so opposed to leasing?

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: There have been so many red herrings so far that the debate should have been on fisheries instead of forestry.

Labour members might well argue that such a long lease—which, by the way, is very typical of commercial leases—is tantamount to a sale, but they can take it from me that a lease is not a sale. If they do not believe me, they need only look at any legal text book for the reality.

However, we have already established that Labour is not opposed in principle to sale. This is the problem: what the Government is proposing is not a massive sell-off at all but the fact is that if we do not raise substantial amounts of money, we cannot undertake the new planting. The proposal is in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill for a reason, and I note that Labour has avoided that context completely in this debate.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: Although carbon sequestration is not the only component in the approach to meeting emissions targets, it is an important one.

If I raised some of these questions with the minister, he would no doubt ask me how I would raise the money. In turn, I ask Labour whether it has a cunning plan for raising £150 million to £200 million for carbon sequestration.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way on that specific point?

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: If we have to take carbon sequestration out of the equation—which is what Labour members seem to want to do—its members really have to say what they would do in its place. I have not heard a single word about that from either Sarah Boyack or Jim Hume—and that is what is missing from this debate.

09:46

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): In 1918, in the dying days of the first world war, the country was ravaged by conflict, our young people had been sacrificed on the battlefield, and our economy was in free-fall. That was the context in which the Forestry Commission was born, with the aim of replanting, rebuilding and renewing a crucial asset that appeared impossible to replace.

Of course, the idea seemed oxymoronic. How could we replace native Caledonian pine forests that were hundreds of years old? However, in the 1920s and 1930s, those foresters of old did what it said on the tin: they replanted our forests with fast-growing and mainly, though not exclusively, non-native species.

As we all know, the picture today is very different. Our living forests play a number of roles in climate change mitigation, industry and construction, job creation, biomass, housing, leisure, and biodiversity. That is why this debate is so important.

Politicians meddle with the structure of our forest assets at their peril. As many of us will recall, the Conservative Government of the mid-1980s decided—to its credit, I have to say—not to sell the Forestry Commission. That is why it beggars belief that the Scottish Government has effectively resuscitated a totally discredited idea under the guise—

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

David Stewart: I am sorry—I do not have time to take any interventions.

Today, the minister, who has always struck me as intelligent, diligent and hardworking—

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Oh, for goodness' sake. [*Laughter.*]

David Stewart:—has the opportunity to reject a proposal that has even the staunchest Scottish National Party supporters scratching their heads in disbelief. I thank my colleagues for their support for that part of my speech.

Where on earth did the idea come from? What evidence is there that there is any support for the idea of leasing vast areas of Scotland's public forests to speculators for the next 75 years? I am not saying that we should not explore how to maximise the ways in which our public forests can work for us—indeed, Sarah Boyack has already suggested joint ventures for renewables projects—but I must challenge the minister to explain in his winding-up speech how the overall figures stack up. For example, we have been told that the national forest estate is worth about £850 million and that the Government wants to raise £200 million from leasing vast areas of forest. However, £850 million is the most optimistic valuation of the estate in a stable land market. The market reality is that, by flooding the market with an enormous area of land, the Government will lower the price and value of the assets.

Moreover, the creation of leases with the highly restrictive clauses that the minister mentioned will have a negative effect on the value of the assets, which might mean that even greater than expected areas of Scotland's forests have to leave public ownership in order to raise the necessary cash. If the idea is pursued, any future Government's ability to manage the forests will be hamstrung for 75 years, irrespective of new knowledge or developments in climate change, land use or any social, economic or environmental policy. A quarter of our national forest estate will effectively be exempt from public intervention until 2084. That cannot be right.

The minister tells us that this is not a back-door sale, because only trees will be sold; the land itself will remain in public ownership. However, the land is relatively worthless without the trees that are planted in it. That fact, coupled with the length of the proposed leases, shows that this is asset stripping of almost eye-watering magnitude.

Will the minister explain in his winding-up speech why the Government felt it necessary to discuss the proposal with Mrs Thatcher's favourite privatisation consultants, the City of London merchant bankers Rothschild? Will he also confirm that it was Rothschild that suggested that 75-year leases were the best way of selling off the management rights to Scotland's national forests?

I hope that the minister is genuine in his repeated assurances that the leasing proposal is not set in stone and that he will indeed consider the pros and cons.

The Presiding Officer: There seems to be a marked reluctance by members to take interventions. Of course, they do not have to give way to other members, but I hope that they will not allow time constraints to prevent them from doing so. Time is available, and the Presiding Officers will be flexible.

09:51

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In this debate on the Forestry Commission, we should get a few things in perspective. The commission owns about a third of Scotland's forests, which means that, under the proposals, 25 per cent of a third of the existing forests might be leased. Over the past 10 to 15 years, the organisation has been cut back again and again, and 1,000 jobs have been lost. However, no debate has been called on that by those on the Labour benches who were in power at the time. Because of those losses, the Forestry Commission's ability to carry out its work is now underpowered, and the vast majority of its 1,400 workers are now in the business not of planting trees but of managing the forest in the public interest. As a direct result of that, however, those jobs have been saved.

Nevertheless, we have to try to extract some value and create the potential for more planting. We should remember what happened in the past. Dr Andrew Cameron, for example, has pointed out:

"In 2006, only 4,000 hectares of new forest were planted in Scotland, the lowest level in more than 60 years. At this rate, achieving 25 per cent forest cover would take ... 150 years."

We have to accelerate that process and, as Dr Cameron has made clear, the Government has to be creative and imaginative in that respect.

I find the false prospectus in the Labour motion and the Liberal Democrat amendment absolutely reprehensible, because it does not address how we have reached this point and how we should move forward in a devolved situation in which we have very limited means of raising cash.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I might give way to the member in a moment, but I want to make some progress.

John Scott spoke about where we might plant and suggested that planting should not interfere with our food supplies. We have lost a lot of stock, particularly cattle and sheep, but that has happened in areas where the soil has a high peat

content and where trees do not need to be planted. The land use strategy that we are introducing must consider the parts of the country where planting is both likely and necessary. To put that in context, I believe that the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill provides the guarantee—the lock, one might say—that we will make a creative judgment and ensure that the money will be reinvested.

If Sarah Boyack wishes to talk about that, I will be glad to take her intervention.

Sarah Boyack: I made it clear in my opening speech—and have made it clear from day one—that we strongly support measures such as joint ventures for renewables that ensure that money is recirculated back into our forests. However, the current grant system needs to be sorted out. There are opportunities for increasing the number of trees that are planted, but the work needs to be carried out properly.

Rob Gibson: As Dr Cameron made clear, the method that the member has proposed will take 150 years.

Creative leasing has been trialled in other countries. In fact, the environmental management of leased forests in Alberta in Canada has been acknowledged as being of a higher standard than that of state forest services.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

We are set in a debate full of the scaremongering that puts words into the mouth of John Farquhar Munro, who is not in the chamber. He said:

“A century on from the date George Orwell imagined, we are being offered destructive privatisation, thinly disguised by Ministerial double-speak.”

That kind of piffle leaves Parliament in a position in which there can be no forestry development, so I cannot accept the motion or the Liberal amendment. We must support the Government’s position.

09:55

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): When I first heard of the proposal to lease Scottish forest land for 75 years, I could not believe it; I found it mind-boggling, and immediately lodged a motion. I recognise the Government’s commitment to increase forest cover from 17 to 25 per cent, but I am dismayed by the proposal to lease Scottish woodland to commercial companies for up to 75 years.

I want to explain to the minister my problems with the policy, and I want to hear answers,

particularly while the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill is still going through its committee stages.

If we lease land to a company for 75 years, and it invests heavily in that land—with, I hope, a policy of planting some deciduous, late-maturing timber—it will never reap the benefits, unless it has a guarantee that it will be able to renew the lease in 75 years’ time. Realistically, however, we would not have the opportunity to change our minds about the leases in 75 years’ time; we would be committing ourselves to selling off our Scottish forestry land for ever. Once we leased the land, it would be almost impossible to get it back.

I will quote from the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s consultation response a couple of times. The minister and other members have talked about the lack of access to consultation responses, but they are now available.

Sweden has been mentioned as an example. The SWT says:

“the Swedish Government sold a substantial part of its NFE to a single company in 1992. A decade later the same company were experiencing extreme financial difficulties and ended up raising timber prices using its power as a semi-monopoly. Since then an estimated 20-30 sawmills have gone bankrupt, or been sold to Russian or Baltic owners, reducing forestry employment and capacity within Sweden. The Government has since offered to buy a 30% shareholding in the forests and subsequently the remaining 70% under certain conditions.”

The Swedish Government would have to raise an awful lot of money to buy back its forestry estate. I am not scaremongering, because that actually happened in Sweden. I would like to know the Government’s answer to that point.

The SWT consultation response gives some answers to the question that the minister flung back at members this morning. He asked how else the money could be raised. The SWT’s proposes, first, that we

“ringfence the money raised from joint renewables ventures ... for woodland creation. Estimates suggest that annual net income from joint ventures might be expected to be £10m/yr by 2012 and 30m by 2020.”

Over a period of 75 years, that would raise £750 million times two—at least—which is a considerable sum. We would be into the billions of pounds after 75 years.

The SWT continues:

“These sums would be easily enough to ensure an increased rate of woodland planting to over 10,000 ha/yr”.

Another of the SWT’s proposals is that we could “ensure better take up of future woodland grant schemes through better and simpler SRDP scheme design, adequate per hectare payments and reduction of administrative ‘red tape’”.

I know that the SNP is very keen on reducing red tape.

We could also

“continue to run the National Forest Land Scheme, reinvesting the money from sales into land purchase in priority woodland creation ...

take more opportunities to deliver low cost woodland creation on the PFE through measures to encourage extensive natural regeneration (‘re-wilding’) ...

negotiate the abolition of the charge which FCS pays on the capital value of the NFE to HM Treasury. This charge is currently a significant financial burden”—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The member should consider winding up.

Robin Harper: I will give it my immediate attention, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am grateful.

Robin Harper: There are some answers for the minister and the Forestry Commission Scotland in the SWT’s response.

Finally, the SWT strongly advocates

“the development of an ‘integrated land use strategy’”,

and integration is what I want to come out of the debate. Recently, we have had debates on flooding, which should be considered as part of an integrated strategy. We have not yet had a debate on the provision of timber for construction purposes. We are desperately short of wood for construction in Scotland, and I would like that issue to be addressed, too.

10:01

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Scotland’s forests are among our most precious natural resources. They are an integral part of the landscape in many parts of the country. Those of us who have a personal, political or geographic rural hinterland might sometimes take the forests for granted. For those with a more urban perspective, there is always the possibility that more can be done to make sure that they have access to, and an appreciation of, our woodlands, which are so healthy for body and soul.

I know how popular with tourists from across the country and around the world some of the Forestry Commission land is in my South of Scotland region. Those forest spaces include smaller areas, such as the West Forth woodland near Lanark, which are popular with day-trippers from the cities because they are within easy reach of major population centres and provide important opportunities for outdoor recreation, fresh air and exercise.

The Forestry Commission plays an important role in managing those tracts of land; in total, it manages about one third of Scotland’s woodland. The land that the commission controls is much

loved and well used. Therefore, it is a little bit disappointing that the motion on our forests is so negative, offering, as Roseanna Cunningham noted, little constructive vision for the future of Scotland’s woodlands.

There is no doubt that Scotland’s forests face a challenge. The previous Administration set a target of increasing forest cover by 25 per cent, and we all accept that an ambitious target is necessary if we are to protect our natural heritage and ensure that we get the full benefit of the carbon emission reductions that forests can provide. That is why the Scottish Government has embarked with an open mind on the consultation, which outlines the different options for managing and growing our forests in the years to come.

Members will be aware of newspaper reports of plans to sell off to private hands publicly owned forests for ever as a way of earning a quick buck for the Government. However, the Labour Government in London is consulting on proposals for private involvement and ownership of Forestry Commission land in England that are far more radical than those of the Scottish Government. The Labour Government is giving far fewer assurances and guarantees than our Minister for Environment has given about jobs, access and biodiversity, which are mentioned in Labour’s motion.

These days, the default Opposition tactic seems to be to scaremonger rather than to promote any positive or constructive alternative approach. Labour claims that jobs are at risk under the Government’s proposals. However, the effect of allowing the Forestry Commission Scotland to enter into joint ventures for the development of renewable energy projects could generate up to £30 million per year by 2020, and leasing the land could generate up to £200 million, which could be reinvested in woodland. We know that the Labour Government likes to pump cash into banks and businesses so that they can turn round and lay off staff, but here in Scotland, the investment proposed by the Scottish Government will safeguard and most likely generate jobs in the forestry industry.

There are practical jobs to be done on the land, as well as a range of important management and promotional functions, such as those that are carried out from Braidwood house in Lanarkshire. That work could also benefit from the investment.

I will address the leasing issue in a bit more detail because it is perhaps on that issue that the scaremongering of most Opposition politicians has been extreme. In 1998, the National Audit Office explicitly recommended leasing over privatisation, citing the success of the New Zealand model in guaranteeing public access under the new management arrangements. The Woodland Trust

Scotland has indicated its support for that option, subject to safeguards, and Scottish Environment LINK has not rejected it. I am pleased to hear that Mike Russell will continue to keep an open mind throughout the consultation, and I hope that he will continue to work with others as he seeks a way forward.

I am tempted to accuse the Labour Party of not being able to see the wood for the trees in its motion. Labour members claim to be outraged at consultation options that will safeguard jobs, access and biodiversity through continued public interest in land that is owned and operated by the Forestry Commission Scotland, but they are content to let colleagues in London consider outright privatisation of forests elsewhere in the United Kingdom. They seem to reject everything that the Government's consultation suggests, but offer nothing constructive as an alternative.

Scotland's forests are far too important to be turned into sticks for political parties to beat one another with. I support the Government's attempts to find sensible and viable ways in which to manage and grow our woodlands, and I encourage members of all parties to do likewise.

10:05

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I regret to inform my friends in the Scottish National Party—I have some—that I rise to my feet as a scaremonger. David Stewart rightly touched on the history of the Forestry Commission. On 1 September this year, it will be 90 years since the Forestry Act 1919 came into being. As David Stewart mentioned, the act was about securing the nation's interest in a strategic reserve of forestry products.

The theme of my speech will be that, alas, the Government is not taking the people who know about forestry—or the people of Scotland—with it. I will read several quotations. The first is from a gentleman who lives in my constituency and who is very knowledgeable about forestry—Reay Clarke. He will be known to many members with Highland connections. In a letter, he states:

"I think the proposal is that forestry companies will pay rent for forest lands where they will fell trees and sell them. The rent money will then provide cash for government to give out grants for more planting or re-planting. However why should the F.C. not fell and sell these same trees from these same forests and so gather in equal amounts of money for future grant aid?"

The letter continues:

"The Forestry Commission is grossly under rated. Despite operating under the whims of ever changing government policies"—

I accept that point—

"in just 80 years F.C. has created a national asset of great forests".

Mr Clarke says that forests are a "national reserve" of great value to the nation. He continues:

"This leasing proposal is the latest whim and it distracts all in the F.C., from commissioners to forest workers, from their primary task of tending Scotland's forests."

I am grateful to Robin Harper for referring to the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which has produced detailed proposals on how the money could be found, which the Scottish ministers should consider closely. David Grundy of the SWT has said:

"We firmly believe that the wildlife living within our national forests will be safer under the expert stewardship of the Forestry Commission Scotland as opposed to a large commercial company which will naturally put economic considerations first".

Almost every year since I was first elected in 1999, I have made it my business—and it has been my pleasure—to join the Forestry Commission in the summer to see different aspects of its work. I have seen with my own eyes the time and trouble that it puts into creating walks for the general public—I am thinking of the Morangie forest near my home town of Tain. I have also seen its work on wildlife conservation, such as the efforts to maintain the number of capercaillie, again in Easter Ross. I have come to appreciate the Forestry Commission's expertise and knowledge. I have also come to appreciate the fact that a finely balanced sum is involved in which the money coming in equals the money going out. It would be dangerous to remove a large part of the capital or the resource, even if for only 75 years.

Highland Council has come out against ministers' proposal to lease forests. The RSPB has doubts about it, as does Reay Clarke, whom I quoted earlier. I have had representations from people who work in forestry and who are deeply concerned about the proposal. A good Government has to take people with it. At this stage, that is certainly not happening—it is not happening with my constituents, at any rate. When the company Balcas decided to come to Invergordon to make wood pellets, the amount of forestry in the area and the activities of the Forestry Commission were part of its calculations. The decision might have been different if the situation had been different. Reference has been made to the timber processing sector. There are grave doubts out there.

I hear Rob Gibson using the word "scaremongering" from a sedentary position—I will use it myself. If representing the comments of Highland Council, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and my constituents is scaremongering, so be it. I am happy to stand up and be counted on that. The

minister is in a hole and he should stop digging. The proposal is a Thatcherite policy and it ill behoves him to wrap himself in the lady's mantle.

10:09

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

The debate has provided a useful opportunity to air the arguments pertaining to the Government's proposals for leasing a significant part of the forest estate to the private sector, which have provoked strong reaction from many quarters. As John Scott made clear in his opening remarks, the Scottish Conservatives have an open mind on the proposals, but we remain to be convinced that they are the right way forward. There are serious issues to be considered, many of which we have heard about this morning.

We accept that forestry can play a significant role in tackling climate change, not only by locking up carbon, but by providing the wood that is increasingly used by the construction industry as a substitute for concrete and steel. Wood is also important as a fuel, with biomass now regarded as having the potential to make a serious contribution to the achievement of Scotland's renewable energy targets. We also accept that significant new forestry development is needed to bring Scotland's tree coverage anywhere near the level in Europe. Woodlands are home to numerous species of insects, plants and animals, thus benefiting the country's biodiversity. Thanks to the Forestry Commission and others, many forests have been opened up in recent years for valuable recreational activity and sporting events.

The 39 per cent growth of commercial forestry in the past decade is indicative of its economic potential. We can understand the Government's interest in exploring a possible role for the private sector in the future management and development of some commercial aspects of the Forestry Commission's work. The commission has done a great deal of excellent work over the years, but there are concerns that some of its activities do not always give good value for money and may sometimes hinder rather than help the private forestry sector. On the other hand, we fully appreciate the legitimate concerns that have been expressed by the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders. We would need stringent conditions to be applied to any leasing arrangements to ensure that Forestry Commission standards were maintained; that employees were retained under present conditions; and that the environmental and social benefits of our woodlands were secured.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Nanette Milne: I do not have time to take interventions.

We would also need to be sure that the funds that were raised from any leasing arrangements would be used for climate change mitigation.

An issue of particular concern, which has been raised by the RSPB and the NFUS, is that the proposals that are under discussion have been made in a policy vacuum and in the absence of any overarching land use strategy. However, we acknowledge that, as the minister said, the Government is considering that point. An increase in Scotland's forest coverage from 17 to 25 per cent would have significant implications for agriculture, as good agricultural land would be likely to become woodland. In a nation where much agricultural land has already been used, and is still being used, for housing and industrial development, and in a world where demand for food is escalating, any plans to divert major tracts of land from primary food production will have to be thought through carefully.

It would be foolhardy to consider forestry in isolation. Instead, it should be considered in the round, alongside other competing land uses, in developing a strategy for the future. For now, we remain open minded about the Government's proposals in its consultation on the forestry provisions in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill and will therefore support the Government's amendment at decision time, together with the addendum to it in John Scott's name. We look forward to considering the various views and ideas that emerge in response to the Government's proposals; to discussing the outcome of the consultation in due course; and to detailed scrutiny by the Parliament of any proposals that the Government produces thereafter.

10:13

Michael Russell: I will briefly address some of the points that have been raised. John Scott and Nanette Milne made points about the important issue of woodland creation at the expense of productive land for food production. We need a more systematic approach to land use. Activity for farming enterprises to diversify and increase sustainability should focus on planting lower-quality land. We remain aware of the issue and will continue to consider it.

David Stewart made a thoughtful speech, although I did not agree with all of it. The Forestry Commission's role has always involved operating in conjunction with the private sector. A public-private balance has always been necessary to increase woodland in Scotland, so it is not a new thing. He also raised the spectre of Rothschild on the horizon, which he called "Thatcher's favourite privatisation" organisation. Of course, it is also new Labour's favourite privatisation organisation, so perhaps that is not a fruitful line of inquiry for Mr

Stewart. It is important to point out that the idea of leasing did not originally come from Rothschild. In 1998, under a Labour Government, the National Audit Office said specifically on forestry that

“the idea of leasing should be considered in any future programme”.

Therefore the idea of leasing in this context has been around for more than 10 years. It has always been around—as Elaine Murray admits from a sedentary position—and was in the previous forestry strategy. Although leasing is not a new idea, I believe that its time has come.

I wish to make one or two keen points in response to Robin Harper. He asked important questions and I want to answer them, but some were lengthy, so I offer him the opportunity to sit down and discuss the answers. I will address two of them briefly. We saw an example in Sweden of what not to do and how to do it on far too big a scale and in a way that monopolises the market. We have a mixed forestry in Scotland, which will produce much better results. There are other possibilities, of course, as I have said constantly during the consultation. I have also said that we need action now and resources as soon as possible. If we can take a mixed approach to planting trees, I will be happy, but we need to plant trees. That is an absolute that must be understood in this debate. Unfortunately, although Robin Harper and others made some good suggestions, we have heard none from Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

I will now offer some clear guarantees. We have heard scaremongering on a grand scale this morning, so I will put the facts on the table: first, long-term contracts will be honoured; secondly, biodiversity and access are guaranteed by law; thirdly, there will be no effect on leisure and tourism; and fourthly, triple assurances on jobs have been given, and there will be new jobs. Those are all facts.

As I said, we have heard scaremongering on a grand scale: if I may pick out an individual for dishonourable mention, it is Mr Jim Hume. I offer Parliament three brief cameos of the campaign since 4 November. Those who are connoisseurs of such things will remember seeing a stunning photograph of a group of Lib Dems wearing helmets in a forest in the south of Scotland. I presume that the helmets were worn to keep the ideas out rather than the brains in. Remarkably, the Lib Dems were in a forest that is not even affected by the proposal. They were led by a man—Mr Tavish Scott—who posed fetchingly like a young Viking on a bike. It is baffling why a man with no forests in his constituency is fighting against a plan to sell forests that does not exist. That is liberal democracy for you.

It goes further. Unfortunately, I was struck down by the lurgy after Christmas. I was lying in bed on 6 January feeling rather sorry for myself when I was cheered up by Jim Hume. He appeared on Radio Scotland in an interview after he had issued a press release about the threat to the Christmas tree that our proposals would produce. I have in front of me a transcript of the interview. I ask connoisseurs of such things to listen to this. In response to Mr Hume’s assertion that there would be no Christmas trees next year, Gary Robertson said:

“Yes. But it’s just not true is it?”

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I will not take an intervention from the former minister for forestry; I want to finish my point.

Mr Hume said:

“Well the main point whether that is. I mean, most people will relate to the Christmas tree that they see in their houses, so what better way to alarm them”.

Jim Hume: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am not taking an intervention. I thank Mr Hume, but I do not need any alarming this morning.

Finally, let me bring in—gone but not forgotten—Mr George Lyon, who has been stamping round Argyll with that poor craitur Alan Reid, stirring up apathy everywhere he goes. I want Mr Hume to think about what the news website for Argyll says.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not. The news website says

“There is nothing so tired, so dispiriting and so empty-headed as politicians focused only on scoring party-political points rather than doing their best for Scotland. There is nothing so dishonourable as politicians who don’t do their homework while confidently trotting out wildly inaccurate statements for political benefit. ... In every respect”

they do

“not trouble themselves with the documented facts and it is a dilution of the currency of trust on which democracy depends. And it is irresponsible to frighten and destabilise people about the security of their jobs when no threat to them exists.”

That is true. That is what the Liberal Democrats and Labour have done; it is dishonourable. Let us now speak the truth about this great proposal that will plant trees in Scotland, fight climate change and preserve jobs. I commend the proposal to the chamber.

10:20

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): That was an excellent example of defence by attack. Yet again, those of us who raised legitimate concerns about the proposals have been accused of scaremongering by the minister and his colleagues. Indeed, in answer to oral questions last week, the minister stated that our behaviour had been “disgraceful”. Unfortunately for the minister—Jim Hume alluded to this—a diverse range of individuals, local and national organisations oppose the proposals. Trade unions, the UK Forest Products Association, Scottish Environment LINK, RSPB Scotland, NFU Scotland, the Scottish Tourism Forum, the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, the organisers of the Merrick car rally in Galloway, Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce and Tory-controlled Dumfries and Galloway Council are just some of those who have expressed concerns. Are those organisations scaremongering? Are they behaving disgracefully?

As Sarah Boyack described, the forestry trade unions are not convinced by the minister’s so-called triple guarantee. Forestry workers who do not wish to be transferred to the private investor’s employment have been told that the Government will “make every effort” to find them another post in the Forestry Commission. However, many forestry workers live and work in remote locations with few employment prospects and it might not be easy to find alternative employment in the same locality. My colleague Rhoda Grant illustrated the consequences for remote and rural communities of the loss of those jobs. Workers who transfer will do so under the TUPE regulations, but TUPE is in force for only three years after transfer and so will not protect them from the potential that they will be made redundant after transfer has happened.

What about the effect on the Forestry Commission’s income? Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce—hardly a Labour-controlled organisation—has calculated that implementation of the proposals could reduce the commission’s income by £10 million a year. Other calculations have put up that loss to £17 million a year. Over 75 years, £0.75 billion that could have been spent on forestry will have been lost to the Forestry Commission. Dave Stewart described to us the reasons why even the £200 million that the Government thinks it might get will probably not be realised.

Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce asks, what are the consequences of the loss of that income for the management and planning of forests? What are the consequences for mountain biking, car rallies, sled-dog competitions and a range of other activities? Those are not my fears, but those of the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber

of Commerce. What are the consequences for all the activities that have been developed so successfully in the Ae and Galloway forests? The world mountain biking championships are coming to Dumfries and Galloway this year because of that success—what are the consequences of the loss of that income?

Although the biodiversity duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 would apply to land in the public forest estate that is leased to private interests, private investors will not have the same motivation to encourage and cherish biodiversity as the Forestry Commission, which is directly accountable to Scottish ministers.

NFU Scotland and Scottish Environment LINK are both also seriously concerned that private investors would be eligible for grant payments under the Scottish rural development programme. That is because a large company might have expertise that would make it more likely to get those difficult grants.

The lease of 25 per cent of the forestry estate is proposed—the most productive and commercial part of the estate. It is estimated that around 50 per cent of production on Forestry Commission land could be controlled by the private investor.

Forestry science is complex and I would not like decisions to be made without the science being properly considered. I understand that around half of the carbon that is sequestered by trees is in the root system and therefore remains in the soil after the timber has been harvested. Early disruption of the soil can cause the carbon to be released back into the atmosphere. The Scottish Woodland Trust has therefore raised concerns about the rapid cycle of replanting. The private investor, keen to maximise the profits obtained from the land that it has leased, is more likely to replant areas shortly after harvesting, disturbing the root systems of the harvested trees and releasing carbon into the atmosphere, therefore acting in opposition to the purpose of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

A large company would be at an advantage compared with small organisations. The Scottish rural development programme is very difficult to access.

The UK Forestry Products Association is concerned that small local Scottish businesses such as sawmills could be under threat if the proposals are implemented. Robin Harper explained extremely eloquently the problems in Sweden, which we cannot guarantee would not arise here. We are concerned about the future of our sawmills. Would a private investor be able to guarantee the stream of product in the way that the Forestry Commission has done? There have been no assurances that anything other than the

existing contracts of up to five years will be honoured.

The Minister for Environment has stated that he is entirely open to other ideas, so I will conclude by giving him some other ideas, not just for forestry but for carbon sequestration, which is important in relation to climate change. The Government could first consider protecting and, where necessary, reinstating organic matter-rich soils, such as peat land and blanket bog, which can sequester and store carbon. Secondly, it could encourage the use of wood for fuel and construction and—thirdly—the use of local timber wherever possible in order to minimise carbon emissions from transport. Fourthly, it could extend crop rotations to maximise carbon storage and promote the use of high-quality hardwoods. Fifthly, the SRDP could be reformed to maximise support for planting woodlands, timber production and natural flood prevention schemes, which are the sort of things that we talked about last week during our discussion of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill.

My sixth suggestion—in which I agree totally with John Scott—is that the Government could consider developing a comprehensive landuse policy that maximises the potential of the land to tackle climate change and its effects. That would best be achieved if Scottish ministers retained direct control of the forest estate. My seventh suggestion echoes what Sarah Boyack said. It is unfortunate that various members seemed to be deaf to what she said this morning. We could gain income from renewables through joint ventures. We welcome joint ventures and the possibility of not only increasing the amount of renewable energy but increasing the income to the forest estate.

Those are seven suggestions for the minister. He should not say that we, or others, have not offered any suggestions, because we have offered seven alternatives. It is not necessary to lease out the forest. The idea has been around for a long time and it has been rejected repeatedly, even by the Conservatives—even by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Michael Forsyth. It has also been rejected by Labour politicians—it was rejected by some of my colleagues when it came over their desks. I ask the ministers please to reject it again. Let us go forward together with other suggestions for how to combat climate change.

Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3322, in the name of Des McNulty, on transport priorities.

10:27

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): This debate is as much about the conduct of ministers as it is about transport—ministers who tell their constituents one thing but who, once they get around the Cabinet table, do something else; ministers who make promises when they are seeking election, but whose constituents' interests come second to the comfort of the ministerial Volvo; ministers such as Richard Lochhead, who told voters in Moray that he would “always put voters first” and that

“the people of Elgin cannot wait until 2020 or anywhere near that for their bypass”—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2006; c26903.]

but who still signed off the Government strategic transport plans for between now and 2030, which make no mention whatever of the Elgin bypass.

The decision made and the dirty work done, Richard Lochhead went back to his constituents to say that he was still fighting for the bypass—the one that he said in 2006 was a “make-or-break issue” for the social and economic future of the area, but the one that his Government has rejected from its plans.

Last October, Mr Lochhead told *Holyrood* magazine:

“I’ve got a certain attitude to the way I operate as a politician and I try to avoid bullshit when I can and I try to have a frank and open relationship with the people I’m dealing with.”

He should try harder.

When the Scottish National Party was in opposition, the Elgin bypass was a regional priority but, as we can see from its thoroughly dishonest amendment this morning, now that the SNP is in government, the bypass is a local matter.

To be fair to Richard Lochhead, he is not the worst manipulator of the facts. Fergus Ewing told his constituents in 2006:

“The SNP has led the campaign to agree that the A9 and the A96 should be dual carriageways ... Inverness is the only one of Scotland’s five major cities that lacks dual carriageway links.”

Richard Lochhead contented himself with making weak excuses that he was still fighting for a bypass that he and his fellow Cabinet members had rejected, but Fergus Ewing, in his arrogant way, declared his various failures as victories.

According to Mr Ewing, his failure to secure any commitment to the trunk link route through Inverness, his failure to get the Inverness to Aviemore stretch in the first phase of any upgrading of the A9, and his failure to get the dualling of the A96 to go any further than Nairn are all triumphs.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Des McNulty said that there is no provision for the trunk link route in Inverness. Does he concede that the eastern section—valued at £34 million—has been adopted by the Government as part of the strategic transport projects review?

Des McNulty: Is that the limit of Dave Thompson's ambition? It was not the limit of Mr Ewing's ambition in advance of his becoming a minister. Let us be clear: of all the projects that the Government should have supported on the ground of safety—the first of the three priorities that are listed in its amendment—it should have made a commitment to upgrade the A82. Have Fergus Ewing and Jim Mather stood up to be counted? Have they said that there must be no more deaths or injuries on a road that everyone knows needs substantial investment as quickly as possible? No. We have not heard a peep.

Because the SNP failed to keep money aside for the Forth replacement crossing and because it spent the £900 million that it inherited instead of using a substantial part of it to fund the new bridge, every other project on its wish list is shrouded in uncertainty.

In 2006, Fergus Ewing said that the £609 million for the Edinburgh airport rail link should be redirected to a dual-carriageway upgrade of the A9 between Inverness and Perth, to the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, to the A82, which links that road through Inverness to Lochaber, and to building a rail bridge over the Dornoch Firth. The Edinburgh airport rail link was cancelled. Where are all the other projects to which the money should have been redirected?

With no commitments on funding, the SNP's wish list is a mirage. The more it adds to it, the further we get from delivery. The only thing that is certain is that SNP ministers will not accept responsibility for their actions.

When Adam Ingram told the community in Maybole that the chances of securing their bypass were better than ever, he was wrong, because the bypass is not even included in the wish list.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Will the member take an intervention on that subject?

Des McNulty: The minister should just let me carry on for a little while—he will get a chance to respond in a second.

It is not just lowly junior ministers or even cabinet secretaries who have failed to deliver their promises. The great haggis himself, Alex Salmond, stood on the Inveramsay bridge, which brings the busy A96 to a single-lane standstill outside Inverurie, and promised voters in Gordon that he would dual both the A90 and the A96. His election pamphlet said:

“Alex has pledged record local roads investment to dual this stretch, which connects two major Scottish cities, as well as serving local road users”.

Repeated pledges regarding the Haudagain roundabout were dropped, only to be reinstated because of the intervention of my colleague Lewis Macdonald and the fear of the outcry that would be led by the Aberdeen *Evening Express* and *The Press and Journal*. Even so, the people of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are going to have to wait a long time for their roundabout.

Throughout Scotland, the SNP made promises on which it is now reneging. The blame for the dropped projects and the delays lies fairly and squarely with SNP ministers. The choices that they made in government are not what they promised in opposition. They can dodge and weave and claim to be fighting for this or to be leaving the door open for that. If the STPR is not the only mechanism for delivery of surface transport infrastructure, even at an estimated cost of £33 billion, what the hell is it for? What on earth is the bill for the SNP's fantasy commitments? If yesterday showed anything, it was that the SNP's key priority is to keep its ministerial cars, rather than to improve the roads for everyone else.

Cabinet government is based on the principle of collective responsibility, not on the notion that each individual minister should campaign against Government decisions quietly in Moray or Maybole, Inverness or Inverurie while voting for those self-same decisions here in Edinburgh.

Why not accept the thrust of the Labour motion and the amendments that have been lodged by the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives? Ministers should put aside the posturing, end the horse trading and, just for once, do what is best for Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Strategic Transport Projects Review lacks detail on timescales and does not commit the Scottish Government to deliver a programme of expenditure for the vast majority of the projects identified; also notes the concern of communities along the length of the A82, A77, A9 and A96 that no indication has been given as to when their needs for road improvements will be addressed; notes in particular the disappointment of people in Elgin, Inverness and Maybole who were led to believe by the SNP prior to the 2007 election that their bypass schemes would be given priority by an SNP government, and reminds ministers of the principle of collective

responsibility and the need to ensure that communities are not misled about the Scottish Government's intentions.

10:34

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We have just had a perfect illustration of Labour members' reading skills: they have none. Clearly, Des McNulty has read little, if any, of the STPR. The Maybole bypass is in it.

Des McNulty: No, it is not.

Stewart Stevenson: It is in there, under the interventions for the A77. I can confirm that.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Would the minister accept that all that is needed to secure a bypass for Maybole, which would be of benefit to all people in southern Ayrshire, is for the Government to include the project as part of the enhancement of the A77 south of Ayr, as referred to in the strategic transport projects review? Can he give the people of south Ayrshire that commitment today?

Stewart Stevenson: Work for the Maybole bypass is included, and is safety focused.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Stewart Stevenson: In the six minutes that I have, I will address as many points as possible.

Cathy Jamieson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I will make some progress before I—

Cathy Jamieson: On that point—

Stewart Stevenson: Sorry. I beg your pardon. I will take an intervention from Cathy Jamieson, because of her constituency interest.

Cathy Jamieson: On the Maybole bypass, if it is in the STPR, will you give a commitment today on when that work will commence and when it will be completed?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members not to use the second person.

Stewart Stevenson: The STPR will be funded through successive spending reviews. The Maybole bypass and all the other work will be similarly considered, as funds become available. It is included in the A77 intervention.

Reference was made to the Haudagain roundabout. The very first oral answer that I gave, in May 2007, provided an absolute assurance of the Government's commitment to dealing with the issues there. I repeat that assurance—as I appear

to have had to do weekly ever since. Sooner or later, somebody will hear that the Haudagain roundabout will be fixed by the Government, in the interests of the people in Aberdeen.

The STPR is about strategic nationally important projects. It distils a huge number of projects into its 29 interventions, which we as a Government will directly deliver. We are clear about our delivery priorities and about the timescales within which interventions can be delivered.

The Forth replacement crossing is central to our strategic transport priorities. It is a vital economic link, which must be maintained, and I know that there is broad—if not universal—agreement on that point across the chamber. Financially, it dominates what is going on.

In parallel, we are able to undertake a substantial number of rail improvements: between Edinburgh and Glasgow, on the Highland main line and on the route between Aberdeen and Inverness. Those interventions will dominate the period to 2016.

The Government takes responsibility for what the STPR will deliver—and we intend to deliver. I accept that not all the decisions will be welcomed by everyone and that there are schemes that are not in the STPR. In considering 1,000 projects, that was inevitable. Good government is about approaching problems systematically and taking tough decisions.

Let me speak a bit about Elgin. There are some important issues around Elgin that will influence the way forward. There have been a number of studies and they have come up with a range of different conclusions about numbers. The Highlands and Islands transport partnership study suggests an average figure of 20,227 annual traffic movements in the centre of Elgin. However, our monitoring on the trunk road at the edge of Elgin shows 7,000. That is quite a different number that tells us that the congestion issues in Elgin are largely local.

There is also a difference of view in the modelling that we have done and the modelling that HITRANS has done on the transfer effect. We think that only 10 to 35 per cent of the 7,000 vehicles going into Elgin will transfer to the bypass, whereas HITRANS cites a figure of 60 per cent of its 20,000. That numerical difficulty does not mean that there is not a problem to be solved—of course there is. It indicates, however, that further work must be done to understand the distinction between the benefit that could be delivered by upgrading a trunk road with a new bypass to the south of the town, and interventions that would affect local traffic inside the town. That is why we are continuing to work with the regional transport partnership and the local council on the

issue. We will continue to pursue that intervention with energy and commitment.

We are the first Administration to adopt the whole of the A82 route improvement plan. We have done so because 13 people died on the A82 in 2007. It is a road on which engineering interventions can make a very real difference. Safety is our top priority, and we will pursue it right across Scotland. We will continue to engage with communities and regional transport partnerships. I notice that the Labour member appeared to suggest that we should abolish regional transport partnerships, as he said that only the Government should be making interventions. We take a different view, which I think is shared across the chamber. I will be interested to hear from the former convener of the north-east Scotland transport partnership.

I move amendment S3M-3322.2, to leave out from "lacks" to end and insert:

"(STPR) focuses on the three STPR priorities of addressing safety on the network, maximising use of the network and making focused investments that deliver national benefits and notes that the STPR is not the only mechanism for the delivery of surface transport infrastructure supported by the Scottish Government which also involves working with regional transport partnerships and councils and that the Scottish Government is engaging with local communities such as Elgin, Inverness and Maybole to deliver solutions to a range of transport infrastructure issues that have important local benefits."

10:40

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is interesting how context can play a big part in what we discuss in Parliament. Earlier this week, our informal discussions with a number of other parties on what our amendment could be were simply in the context of a transport debate. Today, one day after the budget debate, we have a whole different context. I intend to touch on that, as well as on transport issues, in the limited time that is available to me.

I repeat some of the calls that we have made previously. We believe that the strategic transport projects review, when it was published, served a purpose as far as it went, and we were delighted that it had come along. The problem was one of prioritisation. Priority number 1 was the new Forth road bridge. Priority number 2 was everything else, whenever the Government could get round to finding ways to fund it. I therefore repeat my call to the Government to proceed from the publication of the strategic transport projects review, to prioritise properly, to develop timescales and to discuss funding mechanisms to put the projects in place over time.

The Conservatives will continue to work, in a general sense, with any and all political parties in

Parliament to further the aim of evolving and developing the trunk road network. We know that large improvements are required all over Scotland, and they need to be delivered when they can be afforded. Although budget considerations and funding mechanisms will inevitably play a part in what we can do and when we can do it, we are prepared to explore every possible funding mechanism and arrangement that could be put in place to achieve those aims.

As I look through the motion and amendments, I conclude that the context must be taken into account. I agree that the roads that need to be improved that have been included in the motion are very much the ones that we need to deal with, and I agree with the Liberal Democrat amendment that the A90 should perhaps also have been included. I even agree with some elements of Stewart Stevenson's amendment, but we must take the context into account.

During the budget debate yesterday, I did not hear from Labour members that improving the trunk road network was among its priorities. Having voted against the budget bill, they have effectively reduced the transport budget for next year—unless something can be done—by £217.5 million. As a consequence of that, it is difficult to take into account the position that Labour has taken today.

The Liberal Democrat amendment makes no mention of the Elgin bypass, which has been that party's priority in previous debates, including last week. I look forward to hearing the opening Liberal Democrat speech and to finding out whether it features quite as strongly as it did on previous occasions. It must be taken into account that, yesterday, the Liberal Democrats once again demanded an £800 million per annum cut in Scottish public expenditure. What they have said on transport indicates that they have no intention of taking that amount off capital expenditure, and they have expressed on many occasions the view that it should actually increase, rather than decrease. Their proposal would require an annual cut approaching 6 per cent in revenue spending across Scotland. How can the Liberal Democrats have a list of spending commitments that include investment in road and rail infrastructure, but which do not take into account that proposed cut? There is simply an imbalance in the Liberal Democrats' approach.

I accept much of what is in the motion and the amendments. However, in the context of yesterday's debate, this debate has been rendered inept.

I move amendment S3M-3322.3, to insert at end:

“and, while recognising that the new Forth Replacement Crossing is an overriding priority for Scotland, calls on the Scottish Government to state its priorities by reference to the projects listed in the Strategic Transport Projects Review and others identified by regional transport partnerships and local authorities as having a major regional significance.”

10:45

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

The strategic transport projects review process has been a long haul. It has taken 20 months, which is about the same length of time as the gestation period for an elephant. Of course, an elephant has a lot more substance than the STPR. The longer we waited for an outcome, the more we thought that there was bound to be clarity. Why else was it taking so long? However, those of us who were hoping for a coherent, costed and timed transport investment programme were disappointed.

That is for another day; today I want to focus on what is not in the plan. I want to focus on projects on which the SNP campaigned vigorously and improvements that the SNP told voters were political priorities. The title of the debate is “Transport Priorities”, but in reality it is about the honesty and integrity of ministers. I give members a couple of examples of missing links in the north-east: a bypass for Elgin, and the dualling of the A90 from Ellon to Peterhead. I use those examples because they were given high priority by people who are now Government ministers.

We are becoming used to the SNP’s broken promises, but worse, in this context, Government ministers continue to suggest that certain transport projects will happen, even though the review that ministers signed off in Cabinet and presented to the Parliament excludes those projects. Ministers who have failed to persuade their Cabinet colleagues of the merit of their case have gone back to their constituencies and suggested the opposite.

I wonder why Mr Stevenson did not even manage to convince himself of the merits of dualling the A90 from Ellon to Peterhead. In June 2006 he said:

“it is extremely regrettable that the Scottish Government has not taken the opportunity to extend the dualling of the A90 north of Ellon as part of the same programme of development.”

If Stewart Stevenson could not persuade himself, surely the First Minister would manage to persuade him. After all, Alex Salmond said in February 2007:

“I have already put on record my commitment to bringing forward plans to dual the A90 and A96 if elected Scotland’s First Minister in May”.

Moreover, Alex Salmond’s election address leaflet, which was entitled—members will like this—“The man you know; The man you trust’ said:

“Alex has pledged to lead a step change to bring our beleaguered transport network into the 21st century, including the dualling of the A96 and A90”.

We know now that the dualling of the A90 from Ellon to Peterhead has been ruled out in the STPR. That has left the First Minister clutching at straws. A spokesman for the First Minister has hinted that improvements to the road could still be in the pipeline, but on 19 January Alex Salmond was quoted in *The Press and Journal* as saying:

“It is up to Transport Scotland the nature of what is to be done, but the things which could be done include dualling.”

That is double-speak of the worst kind, which has led to press headlines such as, “New hopes of dualling key road in north-east”, although the truth is that the interventions that are proposed in the STPR—I refer members to page 68 of report 4—amount to no more than road safety improvements and are far short of what was promised. The SNP appears to be haemorrhaging credibility at every turn—and its members know it, because they resort to weasel words when they are in their constituencies.

Despite the SNP’s repeated calls in opposition for an Elgin bypass, the SNP Government has not included the bypass in its investment plans. However, members should not fear: Richard Lochhead says that he will keep making the case. We might ask, the case for what—the project’s inclusion in the next 20-year plan? His credibility is in tatters.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Alison McInnes: I am in my final minute.

The SNP is unwilling to prioritise and unable to admit that it overpromised, but it continues to try to mislead everyone by suggesting that we can have it all. George Orwell wrote:

“Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind”.

Who knew that Orwell had met the Scottish National Party? The STPR has no substance, but how could it, when it was written by the Government?

I move amendment S3M-3322.1, to insert after “A9”:

“, A90”.

10:49

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

When Stewart Stevenson announced the strategic transport projects review, I said that the only certainty that day was that the SNP would be spinning like mad across the country and suggesting that every community's wish for its local road was about to be granted. Sure enough, that was the case. No doubt the spin doctors and the SNP were happy about the following day's headlines.

Since then, however, it has been interesting that local papers have started to use different headlines as the truth has become more apparent and the spin has begun to unwind. The truth is that the STPR is not, as was spun, a transport plan. Nor is it a transport programme, a set of spending commitments or a funding document, as the minister had to admit to me in an answer to a parliamentary question the other day. The STPR is no longer even a credible wish list.

I say to all the people in my part of the world who think that a commitment has been made to dual the A9, to dual the A96 to Nairn, and significantly to improve the A82 that there are no such commitments. It is not just me who says so; the chief executive of our regional transport authority, HITRANS, has clearly made the same point. There are no commitments to fund those projects.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Peter Peacock: I cannot; I have only four minutes.

The minister himself made it clear in the debate that if I could tell him what his budget would be in 2017, he would be able to tell me what projects he would fund. There are no commitments to fund.

The STPR is not a strategic document, as is illustrated by the approach to the Elgin bypass and the Inverness trunk link route. Elgin is a significant urban centre in the north, which suffers from significant congestion. There are projections of traffic growth of 26 per cent to 2022. There has been a strong local campaign for a bypass for many years, which the SNP backed. Prior to the election, the clear impression was given that a bypass would receive the highest priority. As Des McNulty said, Richard Lochhead made it clear that people could not wait for the bypass. However, the so-called strategic document, which covers the period to 2020, makes no serious mention of solving the problem. An answer to a parliamentary question that I asked recently revealed that the Government does not even accept the principle of the need for a new trunk road. The issue has gone from being top priority before the election to having no priority after the election.

There is a similar story in Inverness. Inverness is a key hub, which is rapidly growing and rapidly clogging up. The existing road that connects the A82 to the A9 is grossly inadequate and there are huge tailbacks on the road, particularly in summer. As in Elgin, colossal growth is projected. The SNP campaigned before the election for the trunk link route—I think that Dave Thompson had the honour of chairing the campaign for a time—but in the STPR there is no mention of that key section between the A82 and the A9 being built. An answer to a parliamentary question also revealed no acceptance on the part of the Government that the current trunk route will not be able to cope in the years to 2020. The Inverness trunk link route is another project that has gone from being a key priority before the election to receiving no mention in the STPR after the election. For the crimes of misleading people before the election, Fergus Ewing and Richard Lochhead stand above all others.

However, worse, there is no mention in the STPR of emerging strategic problems in Inverness. There are huge tailbacks every day across the Kessock bridge to the roundabout to the south of the bridge. The problem can only get worse every year that the trunk link route is delayed and traffic at the junction grows.

There is no commitment to fund anything in the STPR. The STPR is not a strategic document or a transport plan, but an attempt at the biggest transport con that we have seen.

10:53

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

For decades, Scotland's transport infrastructure has been a low priority for Administrations at Westminster and Holyrood. It is in a sorry state—the Scottish Chambers of Commerce described it as “dilapidated” and found that almost 70 per cent of Scottish businesses think that the transport network does not meet their needs and that a lack of quality infrastructure inhibits inward investment. The economy and the environment of Scotland have paid a heavy price for that legacy.

The Scottish Government was faced with a difficult challenge, given the creaking infrastructure that it inherited. How do we maintain the current transport network, which previous Administrations have left to fall into rack and ruin? How do we cut accidents on our roads, many of which have been happening at the same black spots for years? How do we improve our infrastructure to deliver sustainable economic growth, given the numerous yawning gaps that there have been in the infrastructure for decades?

One thing is certain: we cannot improve infrastructure by leaving public services in

Scotland with a funding shortfall of £1.8 billion for the next year.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I want to develop my point first.

I am pleased that the motion demonstrates Labour's faith in the SNP Government's ability to fix the transport problems that were created by Labour's neglect without even being able to borrow or invest.

The framework has begun with the STPR, which weighty document reviews projects of significant national importance. It is not the place for the commitment of expenditure, which should rightly be done as part of the budget and the comprehensive spending review process; nor is it the only way in which projects can or should be delivered. RTPs and councils will continue to play a pivotal role in delivering projects that are important to their local area.

One project that has rightly been given priority in the STPR is the Forth replacement crossing. Labour and the Liberal Democrats prevaricated, but this Government has taken decisive action. Perhaps if Labour had moved more quickly on that project while it was the Administration, the other transport projects that are mentioned in the motion, which are vital, could have been built more quickly and completed earlier and could already be assisting the Scottish economy in these difficult times. Unfortunately for Scotland's business community, Labour did not do that.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the proposals for the new Forth crossing, with their lack of a multimodal facility, be future proofed? Will they meet the needs of people in the Lothians and Fife?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The member demonstrates a difficulty in his understanding of what is in the project. There is a multimodal aspect to it. In fact, the crossing will be improved by having a dedicated public transport corridor that will serve the people in his constituency for many years to come.

Where do Labour's transport priorities lie? Recent announcements on high-speed rail suggest that they terminate at Birmingham. To be fair to the Tories, at least they would take the line as far as Leeds. Perhaps Mr McNulty would like to phone a friend in the Scotland Office and see whether they can provide him with a timetable and a committed budget for building a high-speed rail line all the way to Scotland—or perhaps he would not. It beggars belief that Mr McNulty can come to the chamber today and ask the Government to provide detailed timescales for long-term transport

projects, when his party has thrown into doubt the transport projects that are planned for the forthcoming year. That is on top of the threat of £500 million of cuts over the next few years—budget cuts that will be handed down to this Parliament as a result of the Westminster Government's mismanagement of the United Kingdom economy. How will transport fare when Scotland's budget begins to suffer? What transport projects will have to make way to pay for Labour's depression? Only time will tell.

10:57

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In any democracy, it is the duty and responsibility of the Opposition parties to hold the Government to account. That is precisely what we are doing today. The SNP made many promises over the years and in the lead-up to the 2007 election. We are all elected on the basis of our manifesto commitments. I am proud to say that the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto was fully costed and all pledges were costed. Our financial guru, Derek Brownlee, would not allow anything less. However, that is obviously not the case for the SNP.

I appreciate that an inexperienced politician can make gaffes on the way to an election. However, we are not talking about inexperienced back benchers, bag carriers or back-room boys; we are talking about pledges that were made by the First Minister of Scotland, Richard Lochhead, a local MP and previous SNP MSPs to bring forward an Elgin bypass. In addition, Fergus Ewing made a similar pledge for the Inverness trunk link route. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has even said to the local newspaper in Elgin, the *Northern Scot*, in answer to a question about an Elgin bypass:

"Improving the transport infrastructure is the key to unlocking Moray's economic potential".

In the midst of all those SNP pledges and manifesto commitments, I should also mention Tavish Scott's response to a written question that I submitted in November 2005. He stated:

"We have no current plans to construct an Elgin Bypass."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 8 December 2005; S2W-21541.]

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has stated that the Inverness trunk link route and the Elgin bypass would provide poor investment returns. How could there be poor investment returns for congested Inverness from linking the main arterial routes in Scotland from the east, south and west? The minister's statement also begs the question that, if the Elgin bypass would give such a poor investment return, why is the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment allegedly fighting to get funding for it in the face of

opposition from his colleagues in Government? There is no doubt that Inverness is the economic hotspot of the Highlands and that Moray has the lowest average wage in Scotland. We all agree that Moray's potential needs unlocking, but refusing to build the Elgin bypass will make matters worse and not better.

As someone else said,

"What we would like to know is whether the Scottish Executive is committed to help deliver an Elgin bypass. We would like to know how long this will take and where an Elgin bypass stands as a priority for the Scottish Executive."

Those are the words of Angus Robertson, the SNP MP for Moray, which I put to the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change.

In opposition, the SNP slammed Mike Watson for voting with his Cabinet colleagues in favour of the Glasgow hospitals shake-up but campaigning against it at a local meeting. Nicola Sturgeon said:

"He has betrayed his constituents. His position is untenable. He has been prancing around Glasgow for the last few months telling them he would oppose the plans for Glasgow's hospitals and then he goes to Edinburgh and votes for these plans."

The same applies to the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment. I cannot confirm whether they were prancing, but they certainly gave pledges to constituents to deliver an Elgin bypass, dual the A96 and build a trunk link route around Inverness. However, when the chance came for them to deliver, they changed their minds.

11:01

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): What road and rail projects can we expect to be started over the next five or six years? There are the Scottish Government's inherited commitments and its current commitments. Then there is the draft national planning framework 2, which contains eight or nine big projects, although not all of them are transport related. If they are approved, that will amount to them having outline planning consent, which of course amounts to incremental progress, of a sort. There are also 29 interventions—the term that is used by the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change—in the strategic transport projects review.

If members want a project to be started during this session of Parliament or the next, the fact that it is mentioned in the STPR does not necessarily mean a lot. The minister says that the 29 interventions comprise many more individual projects; he is on record as saying that it could take 20 years to deliver some of them. When the minister says yes to a project, he therefore really means that it may be an intervention in 20 years'

time. That is not yes, and it is not even mibbes aye, mibbes naw; it is the unique Scottish vernacular double positive, "Aye, right!"

To be fair to the minister, on the day that we debated the STPR in the chamber, he killed off some of the other projects on the 1,000-long wish list that he mentioned. For example, he appeared to kill off the Glasgow crossrail project.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Charlie Gordon: Sorry, but I do not have time.

The Glasgow crossrail project could provide through rail services from south-west Scotland to Edinburgh, the Forth ports and north-east Scotland. Sadly for the minister, on that day he had to attend a scheduled meeting of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on Glasgow crossrail, of which I, too, am a member. He got a bit of a rough ride at that meeting and has been subjected to further pressure since.

Lo and behold, at a recent meeting of the Parliament's Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, the minister revealed in evidence that the deceased Glasgow crossrail project has a love-child—I will call it son of crossrail—which needs a new Glasgow central rail terminal. It is mentioned, but not by name, in the draft national planning framework 2 and the STPR document. Incidentally, the minister also said that another driver of the need for a new Glasgow central rail terminal was that the new rolling stock that he hopes to acquire will in some respects be too long operationally for the platforms at Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street stations. I have a good memory for transport issues and I say honestly that that was the first time that we had heard that in the Parliament.

Far be it from me to accuse the minister of circumlocution or obfuscation but, in the absence of a timetabled and funded five-year transport programme, he seems to be making it up as he goes along.

11:05

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the STPR; I am sure that that does not surprise members. In the eight years from 1999 to 2007, Liberal and Labour transport ministers did absolutely nothing for the Highlands and Islands—that was eight years of nothing for the Highlands and Islands.

I contacted Tavish Scott when he was a minister and he refused point-blank to sanction the Inverness trunk link route bypass. I know that because I have campaigned since 2002 for the TLR. I made submissions to and attended the public inquiry on it in 2003. I say to Peter Peacock

that I was not just the chairman of the fixed link action group; I founded it. I asked members of other parties such as Labour and the Lib Dems to join the campaign, but none did. The campaign had no Peter Peacock or Mary Scanlon.

Tavish Scott, the Liberals and Labour highlight their hypocrisy. That is also shown clearly by Jamie Stone of the Lib Dems, who recently called for the A9 to be dualled from Tore to Tain. Such a project is worthy, but he did not tell the people of the Highlands that he voted for the 2p tax cut, which would cut £800 million from the budget, and against the budget yesterday. Like the Labour Party, he says one thing in the Highlands and another thing in Edinburgh. The voters will punish them for that in due course.

We now have real progress by the SNP. The SNP minister has approved the eastern section of the Inverness TLR; Highland Council just needs to complete the western section. The minister confirmed in parliamentary answers to me on 15 and 22 January that he will work with the council and all others.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Dave Thompson: I am sorry; I do not have time.

It could not be clearer that Highland Council needs to come on board to complete the TLR's western section. A council report in September 2007 said that the whole TLR from the east to the west would cost £119 million, which would be met by the council, the private sector and the Government. The Government has chipped in £34 million for the eastern section, so it has done a good bit already. The council's capital plan of October 2008—barely three months ago—reaffirmed the capital budget of £119 million. It is surprising that the council looked only for council and private contributions at that stage. However, in December 2008, the SNP Government came up trumps.

The council's capital plan budget between now and 2012—before the STPR applies—sets aside £32.2 million for the TLR. That Liberal and Labour-led council could complete the TLR from the Dores roundabout to Tomnahurich and thereby complete the road section of the bypass by its own hand in the next three years, if it had the will and if it stopped sniping and trying to blame the Government for the problems. The balance of the cost can also be met from the council's capital plan, which sets aside money for future years. We can easily complete the TLR if Highland Council has the political will and if it plays the game with everybody else.

11:09

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Members have—rightly—focused on the SNP's failure to prioritise key projects on the A96 and the A90. The junction of those roads at the Haudagain roundabout is the worst single pinch point on either road, but it is not even mentioned in the strategic transport projects review.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Lewis Macdonald: After I have laid out my argument, I hope that the minister will respond. He will have the opportunity to do so.

When the STPR was published, John Swinney said that the Haudagain was missed out because the problems at the junction would be solved when the Aberdeen western peripheral route was built. He told *The Press and Journal* on 11 December that the traffic bottleneck at the Haudagain was

“essentially influenced by the effects of the construction of the AWPR, which will take an enormous proportion of traffic from the A90. So therefore, it seems to me to be a prudent approach to concentrate on a strategic project of that nature.”

So the SNP said that it would concentrate on the WPR because that strategic project would—apparently—solve all the problems. An SNP Government spokesman backed that up when he told the Aberdeen *Evening Express* that the Haudagain scheme had been superseded by the Aberdeen bypass.

Stewart Stevenson has tried a couple of different explanations. When I asked him about the issue last December, he said that the STPR was about

“strategic transport projects. The Haudagain is an example of a local project.”—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2008; c 13254.]

However, he told *The Press and Journal* something different—that

“the work ... is set to be completed before 2012, which means it does not have to be featured”

in the STPR. He has since confirmed that the WPR will not be completed before 2012. That suggests that work on the Haudagain would have to take place alongside work on the WPR, if work on the Haudagain was missed out of the strategic transport projects review because it would be finished by 2012.

However, that is not the situation according to Alex Salmond. The First Minister told *The Press and Journal* emphatically that work on the Haudagain

“will be done but let's get the bypass done first, it would be daft to do it the other way round.”

The *Evening Express* put Mr Salmond on the front page, saying:

"I will fix the Haudagain ... but work to revamp the Haudagain roundabout won't start until after Aberdeen's bypass is completed."

That is funny, because Mr Stevenson has since told me in a written answer that the A90 between Charleston and Blackdog will be detrunked and that responsibility for it will be transferred from the Scottish Government to Aberdeen City Council on 1 April, following the WPR's opening. That does not suggest that much work is being done by central Government. If the project is local, as Mr Stevenson said in Parliament, perhaps the work is the local council's responsibility.

Stewart Stevenson: No—absolutely not.

Lewis Macdonald: No, indeed—Mr Salmond told *The Press and Journal* on 18 December that

"the key commitment is"

that roundabout improvements

"will be paid for and delivered before the road is detrunked."

That will not be down to

"Aberdeen city. It will be the Scottish Government that will do the work and then it will be handed over as an improved roundabout."

So there we have it. John Swinney thinks that the WPR will take care of things; Stewart Stevenson wants to hand the Haudagain to the council as soon as the WPR is finished; and Alex Salmond says that he will not hand over the Haudagain until the WPR has been built and the roundabout has been sorted out. The three SNP ministers have three different plans. Just for good measure, Brian Adam told the *Evening Express* on 6 January this year that Stewart Stevenson

"was not in a position to give a timescale or say which option would be used."

Perhaps today ministers will finally sort out the party line and tell us what the Scottish Government intends to do at the Haudagain roundabout and—above all—when it intends to do it.

11:13

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is a little over six weeks since the Scottish Government announced in the chamber the results of the strategic transport projects review. Like many members, I welcomed the minister's statement and the scale of the review's ambition and vision. However, I noted in the debate on the review that

"In some ways, I wish that the Scottish Government could go further."

As they have done today, members around the chamber on that day

"described projects that they want to be implemented and which were not in the statement. Of course, they must tell us how those projects could be achieved; often, our hands are tied by the frustrations and limitations of the Scotland Act 1998."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2008; c 13241.]

Members will not be surprised to learn that the position has not changed in the intervening period. What has changed is that we now know about the Labour Party's lack of commitment to making the Parliament and devolved government work—yesterday's events demonstrated that vividly. Under devolution, the budget is the only document in which any Government can make exact spending commitments. Where were Labour's budget amendments to finance the projects on which Labour members have focused today? In bringing its critical and carping motion to the Parliament, the Labour Party is suffering from a political reality bypass rather than showing a genuine interest in building transport bypasses.

Des McNulty: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: No, I will not take an intervention from Des McNulty, given the lack of interventions that members of his party seem to be taking.

It is in the nature of strategic documents that they do not—indeed, cannot—contain spending commitments: "Scotland's transport future" in 2004 and "Scotland's National Transport Strategy" and "Scotland's Railways" in 2006 did not contain such commitments.

The reality of the situation remains that the Government's hands are tied. Even if Labour had lodged amendments to yesterday's budget to pay for the projects that its motion names and they had been agreed to, the finance would have had to come from cuts elsewhere. Labour trusts the Government in London to borrow billions of pounds to bail out banks and the automotive industry, but this Parliament's lack of borrowing powers and its limited fiscal levers inhibit the range of action that the Scottish Government can take.

I would have thought that it would be welcome that the Scottish Government has, within 18 months of being elected, put in place an ambitious, coherent and workable plan for the major development of our strategic transport network. The plan is the launch pad for transforming the travelling experience for people in Scotland, but just because a project is not in the STPR does not mean that it is not a good idea or that it is not worth fighting for.

As for the specific projects that the Labour motion mentions, it is clear that investment is

planned in the A9, the A82, the A77 and the A96. On a bypass at Elgin, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change said at question time last week that he is

“confident that we can work with local interests to develop new proposals”.—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2009; c 14301.]

That demonstrates that work can be undertaken on projects that are outwith the STPR.

People will welcome a Government that continues to listen to their concerns and wants to work with them to find suitable proposals rather than close the door to their transport needs. That is why the other implication in the motion that support for a project that has not been included in the STPR is a breach of collective responsibility or a betrayal of constituents' trust is incorrect. I am sure that members who argue the contrary will understand that individual MSPs can hold opinions and campaign on local issues while still supporting the Government. The fact that those members present their case as if that was not so ill-serves them and, worse, ill-serves political discourse.

If the transport projects detailed in the motion are of such fundamental importance to those who are calling for them today, why have they not called for them in the past? On 23 January, in commenting on the A96, *The Northern Scot* stated:

“Pity these opponents were not as voluble for the bypass campaigning which has been going on for years. A Labour Transport Minister visited Elgin but failed to offer any glimmer of support for the bypass call, a Lib-Dem Transport Minister, as part of the same ruling coalition, did likewise”.

That is more evidence, if any were needed after yesterday's events, of the descent of the Labour Party into the realm of student politics.

11:17

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Today's transport priorities debate is rather thin on transport priorities from the Government, but that is not the only thing from the Government that is thin. The STPR is fundamentally flawed because it does not detail adequate timescales, priorities and costs. As Alison McInnes pointed out during last week's Council of Economic Advisers debate, it is difficult to take a document seriously when the costs associated with it range from as low as £12 billion to as high as £21 billion. The document is so thin that it would not even prop up the minister's wobbly desk.

Alison McInnes agreed with Des McNulty's point that today's debate is as much about truth and honesty as it is about priorities. I add that it is also about the credibility of the Government, which has been severely damaged.

Stewart Stevenson and his colleague Dave Thompson tried to pass the buck to local authorities, but I would have thought that the minister would be well aware that he, not the local authorities, has responsibility for trunk roads in Scotland.

One or two other members referred to the Maybole bypass south of Ayr, on the A77. When in opposition, Adam Ingram said of Tavish Scott, the then Minister for Transport:

“The minister has met the bypass campaigners ... and will be well aware of the strength of the case for the bypass and the depth of feeling in the community, which has been created as a result of decades of fruitless pleading. The campaigners have only one question left: how much longer must we wait? Will the minister be kind enough to give them a straight answer to that question this afternoon?”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2006; c 27423.]

I ask the minister this morning when he will give us a straight answer on the Government's priorities and costs for the projects in the very thin STPR document.

I will now address a project that we all agree—or at least most of us do; the Green members are not here—is the key priority for Scotland: a new Forth crossing. It has pretty much all-party support. A few months ago, it was supposed to be the great multimodal link for eastern Scotland, but that is no longer the case. We now have a cut-down version with no guarantees that the multimodal option will last into the future. The road connections to the south have been cut down in the STPR and are now inadequate—they use the existing but not necessarily the best routes. When I attended one of the public meetings on this new transport project last week, I was told by Transport Scotland officials that the bridge will be a 70mph crossing. That seems strange when the road network to the north has 60mph limits. Perhaps the minister can explain that.

Stewart Stevenson: It does not.

Jim Tolson: The A90 north has a 60mph limit.

Stewart Stevenson: No, it does not. That is factually wrong.

Jim Tolson: We will take that discussion forward in due course.

There are great concerns about the lack of clarity on funding for the new crossing. I would like some information on that.

We have touched on the issue of trust. The STPR does not make the promises that the SNP made in opposition as part of its election campaign. Yesterday, the public began to understand what we have all known for a long time in this Parliament: the SNP Government cannot be trusted.

11:22

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I will be as constructive as I can be and reflect what is said in the Scottish Conservative amendment. The key point in our amendment is prioritisation. Six weeks ago, we welcomed the STPR in broad terms, but we said then—and it is crucial to repeat it now—that now that there is a list of 29 projects, the process must move forward quickly to prioritise which projects will go ahead when. Which projects are planned for the early part of the period after 2012? Which ones will go forward in the middle period, if we can call it that, and which ones are more likely to fit in at the tail-end of the period covered by the review?

The minister said that the projects will be funded by successive spending reviews. Of course, spending reviews take place every three years or so, so the Government must have some idea—or if it does not, it must develop one fairly quickly—of which projects will be put forward at the next spending review and at the one after that. It is important for the credibility of the Government and, indeed, the Parliament that expectations throughout the country are managed properly, because for people in affected communities there is an enormous difference between a project that gets on track in 2012 and one that gets on track 10 or 15 years later.

It has been said that the projects in the STPR are numbered but not ordered. That might be acceptable for the review document, which is not, as Mr Tolson said, a “thin” document. If only it were; I am afraid that it is in excess of 800 pages, much to the chagrin of some spokespeople. We are looking to receive information swiftly—I hope that we can get some guidance today, if not full answers—on the likely costs of the projects, because we currently have only indicative costs from similar projects. Will we get some idea of timescales and perhaps even the funding mechanisms for taking the projects forward? Currently, of the 29 projects, apart from the Forth road bridge, which is clearly the number 1 priority, the other 28 all appear to be equal priorities. The danger is that if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

I do not want to be overly critical of the previous Administration, but a similar lack of focus was typical of it, too. For an example of that, we need only look at an answer that was given to transport oracle David Davidson, a former member of this Parliament, in March 2007. The question was:

“To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will publish a list, in priority order, of its announced transport infrastructure schemes.”

The answer from Tavish Scott, the then Minister for Transport, was:

“The planned programme of transport infrastructure schemes may be found on the Scottish Executive and the Transport Scotland websites ... All these projects are considered as a priority, which is why they have been included in the programme of committed projects.”—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 23 March 2007; S2W-32430.]*

That was the settled position after eight years of the Administration.

We will have to move far faster and far more effectively if the strategic transport projects review is to come to fruition. That will be important to underpin our economy, especially at the present time, but also in the medium and longer term. It is important that we get it right because, as the Audit Scotland “Review of major capital projects in Scotland” showed, too many projects have not been on time or on budget: only two fifths of projects were on budget and only one third were on time. We now need to follow fine words with details.

11:26

Stewart Stevenson: In the limited time that I have, I will try to deal with as many of the points that members have raised as possible.

The STPR deals with surface transport and not merely roads. However, Alison McInnes clearly believes that all interventions on roads should be in the STPR. That is not true—unless she is advocating, as she now appears to be, the abolition of the regional transport partnerships.

Let me draw Peter Peacock’s attention to some of the numbers relating to traffic at Elgin. If we consider an extreme situation, as few as 3,000 of the 20,227 vehicles that go through Elgin every day could divert to the bypass. That should make us focus on the fact that we are not merely talking about a trunk road intervention. It is precisely because different views exist that we are now engaging with HITRANS and the local council to work out the right interventions for Elgin. However, we acknowledge that interventions are needed.

Peter Peacock appeared to suggest that the TLR might resolve issues at the roundabout adjacent to the ground of Caley Jags. I am really not clear why that should be.

Mary Scanlon said that she was holding the Government to account. Quite properly, she said that that was the job of the Opposition, and I have no problem of any kind with that assertion. However, the mature way of making progress is to engage on the issues—such as those affecting Elgin—in order to work out the right solution.

Charlie Gordon asked what would be happening in the next five or six years, and then talked about “son of crossrail”. This is another situation in which various numbers arise. We have commissioned

research work from Jacobs to consider the capacity of the Glasgow stations and the rail network in the approaches to Glasgow. The research will inform a meeting that will take place in the next few weeks. Useful work will enable Strathclyde partnership for transport and the Government to determine the long-term strategy for developing son of crossrail or crossrail-plus, or whatever we choose to call it.

On the question of the rolling stock being too long, if I was misleading in the meeting of the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail I should now be clear and say that the new rolling stock is 23m long as opposed to 20m, and in future trains will comprise eight carriages of 23m. Under those circumstances, the present ability at Glasgow Central sometimes to put three trains at one platform will be diminished—platforms will be able to accommodate only one train. It is not that we will be unable to get the trains in, but there will be an effect on the overall capacity—the overall number of trains. I know that the people who are considering the issue will acknowledge that that effect will have to be dealt with.

I will answer Lewis Macdonald's points very briefly. He brought forward a miasma of obfuscation, distortion, misrepresentation, pusillanimous persiflage, and economy of memory, facts and explanation. It will be done. We will pay for it. The people of Aberdeen will be duly grateful.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: No, he will not. He has got only five minutes, so he does not have enough time.

Jim Tolson described the STPR as a "thin" document. It has 3,800 pages, for heaven's sake! He has given the game away: he has not actually read the thing.

Jim Tolson went on to say that there is a 60mph limit north of the Forth bridge. The first 60mph limit on the A90 north of the bridge, or on any of the roads connecting to it, is at the delimit sign at Dyce airport north of Aberdeen. If he thinks that that will affect—

Alison McInnes: That is wrong.

Stewart Stevenson: Alison McInnes is quite right: I am wrong. The first 60mph limit is north of Inverurie. However, it certainly is not immediately north of the bridge. Let us deal in facts, not hypotheses.

This Government is committed to bringing forward the projects in the strategic transport projects review, and I look forward with optimism to support for our approach at 5 o'clock. We will support the Tory amendment because it makes

sense, but no one else should look forward to our support.

11:31

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Jim Tolson is a former mechanical fitter, so anything with only three and a half thousand pages would seem quite thin to him.

The minister will recall how unsatisfied members were at the way in which the review was first presented to Parliament. We had little time to read the information, and many of us predicted that we would end up having many debates on its contents over the years to come. Many of us were concerned about the lack of focus, and those concerns have been repeated today by Gavin Brown. Many of us were also concerned about the lack of priorities, which most Opposition members have mentioned today. All of us were concerned about how and when the projects would be delivered, because the projects are important to the communities in our constituencies. I am sure that the minister will agree that the STPR's introduction to the Parliament was not the most auspicious, and things have gone a little downhill since then.

Despite the plethora of information, the strategic transport projects review has provided more questions than answers for the Parliament. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change will not be surprised that we are now having our second debate on the STPR since he presented it last month. I predict that we will have many more debates in the months to come.

Debate has been generated across the country, not all of which has been positive. However, the minister will understand that real and legitimate concerns have been expressed about what is and is not in the review.

Peter Peacock highlighted concerns about what exactly the STPR is. On the Labour side of the chamber, we believe that it is a nationally co-ordinated local media campaign, as opposed to a proper review of projects for the next 10 or 20 years in Scotland.

The minister spoke about the Forth road bridge. I would like to respond to comments made by Shirley-Anne Somerville. Our concerns about the plans are well documented. We believe that not enough is known about the condition of the existing bridge for it to be classed as a serious long-term public transport corridor. We have real concerns about the existing cables. We will not know until 2011 whether they will be okay or will have to be replaced. I do not think that the minister was able to give guarantees about that when he last appeared at the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

The Forth Estuary Transport Authority is considering how to examine the huge anchorages that hold the main cables. No one can be 100 per cent sure about the condition of those huge structures. I applaud FETA for doing that work. A number of skilled engineers are at work on the crossing to make it safe for us, and it is right that they are doing that. I encourage Shirley-Anne Somerville to meet FETA to find out about its plans—although she has probably done so already.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have.

John Park: She will share my concerns that we cannot guarantee that the bridge will be fully operational for as long as we would like it to be, so that it can provide a multimodal option.

The funding of the new crossing has been a topical issue. Concerns have been raised about the Government's inability to bring forward a suitable funding package.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If the member is so concerned about the future of the Forth bridge, why did his party, when it led the Administration, do absolutely nothing to deal with the problem in a way that would not affect traffic in the long term?

John Park: If the member cares to look, she will see that our priority was a new bridge—that was in our 2007 manifesto, and there were debates in the Parliament about it. That was a policy objective of my party, just as it was of the member's party.

The SNP's 2007 manifesto said:

"we have concerns ... about the construction cost"

of building a new bridge, which demonstrates that the party knew about the cost issue at that point but did nothing about it until a couple of weeks before it presented the projects to the Parliament. That is unbelievable.

I welcomed many of Alex Johnstone's comments, until he went off on a different track. I understand why the Tories are lashing out this morning, but the reality is that we had extremely constructive discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and other members of the Cabinet. I felt that those discussions were taking us in a positive direction, but we could not reach agreement. The Tories also had constructive discussions, but found that they were able to reach agreement. That is where we are. Our objective was to increase apprenticeships and skills training, which are, of course, vital to the future of our transport network. That is why we focused many of our budget discussions on those issues.

The wider issue that our motion deals with is responsibility. All of us in this chamber have a responsibility to maximise public confidence in

what we say and do. That is why our motion focuses on the actions and words of ministers and the fact that they take collective decisions as part of the Cabinet. A minister cannot face two ways at once and simply cross their fingers and hope that the public will not notice. I do not know why Richard Lochhead has not been in the chamber today to defend his position. It is a convention that, if a minister is so opposed to a Cabinet decision that they feel that they cannot back it, they should seriously consider their position. The minister can either accept that the concept of collective responsibility means that he must say that the SNP is correct to miss out an Elgin bypass from its 20-year plan or consider his position and leave himself free to fight for that bypass. He cannot do both things.

Where is Adam Ingram this morning? Where is Fergus Ewing? We must give the First Minister his due, because when he made his recent faux pas about spivs and speculators he came into the chamber to defend his position. Where are the ministers I have mentioned? They could have participated in the debate.

What we, as politicians, say and what we make happen are equally important. The minister has made a commitment to bring forward an action plan in the new year. We await the detail of that with interest. I hope that the outcome of today's debate will go some way towards making that happen.

11:37

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

Community Prison Facilities (Aberdeen)

1. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to its announcement on 24 August 2007 that it intends to replace the prison in Peterhead and close Craiginches prison in Aberdeen, what plans it has to establish new community prison facilities in Aberdeen. (S3O-5754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Following detailed evaluation of numerous sites, we have decided that the most suitable site for the construction of a replacement facility is at the existing Peterhead prison. The new prison will be community facing and is a new initiative in the accommodation of prisoners from the north-east of Scotland. The facility will have huge benefits across the whole area: it will meet the needs of a full range of prisoners and avoid the necessity for most females and young offenders to be held at Cornton Vale and Polmont respectively in the central belt. Instead, they will be located considerably nearer their homes in the north-east.

There are no plans to have any prison facilities in Aberdeen once the new facility is operational.

Mike Rumbles: The cabinet secretary's deputy, Fergus Ewing, rightly said in *The Press and Journal* on 27 November 2008:

"The family is absolutely key to the rehabilitation process."

If the cabinet secretary agrees with that, can he explain how placing prisoners in Peterhead and forcing families from Aberdeen to make the 60-mile round trip from Scotland's third city to visit them will help prisoner rehabilitation?

Kenny MacAskill: As I made clear, it is significantly easier to get to Peterhead from Aberdeen than it is to get to Stirling, where Cornton Vale is located, or to Polmont, where the young offenders institution is located.

If Mr Rumbles wishes to insist on there being a facility in Aberdeen, perhaps he can tell us—bearing in mind the £800 million-worth of cuts that we would have to bear as a result of the Liberal Democrats' 2p income tax cut—where we would get the £140 million to £200 million to pay for it. He

must explain where that £1 billion-worth of public expenditure cuts would come from.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Has the cabinet secretary discussed the impact of there being no community prison in Aberdeen with local social work agencies and the police? Is he aware of the police's security concerns about the 40-mile journeys for prisoners to the courts and the impact on the rehabilitation of prisoners who are placed further away from key services and their families?

Kenny MacAskill: As the member will be aware, I have numerous meetings with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, local police representatives and the Association of Directors of Social Work, all of whom are supportive of the Government's direction.

I have to say that I am gobsmacked that the member thinks that security implications are greater on journeys from Aberdeen to Peterhead than on journeys from Aberdeen to Stirling, Polmont, Shotts, Barlinnie or other prisons to which prisoners are regularly transferred.

Social Rented Housing

2. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many houses for social rent it expects to be completed in 2008-09 and 2009-10. (S3O-5705)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): We expect to complete around 4,700 houses for social rent in 2008-09. The planned completions for 2009-10 will be announced as part of the programme announcement for that year in due course. In 2007-08, we completed 4,241 social rented units; the estimate of 4,700 for 2008-09 reflects an 11 per cent increase.

Mary Mulligan: I am astounded by the minister's complacency as he must be aware that 600 fewer social rented housing units were completed in the first six months of 2008-09 than in the same period in the previous year. Will he tell us how an additional cost for housing associations averaging £10,000 per unit—which lenders seem very reluctant to pick up—will assist in housing completions in 2009-10 meeting the Government's targets, let alone the urgent and increasing demand for housing?

Stewart Maxwell: Perhaps the member should have listened to the answer before asking that supplementary question. We expect an increase this year of approximately 11 per cent in the number of social rented units that will be completed—the number will go from 4,241 last year to 4,700 this year. To make that absolutely clear, that is an increase of 11 per cent.

The issue is not the impact that the member suggests might occur but the impacts that will occur if we do not pass the budget that the Government brings forward. *[Interruption.]* To make it clear, the impact of that on affordable housing will be a loss of £113 million from the affordable housing budget. If we pass our budget bill, the affordable housing budget will be £644 million, but it will be £531 million if—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. That is enough sedentary intervention.

Stewart Maxwell: It will be £531 million if the Labour Party carries on with its irresponsible behaviour. The total amount of money that would be lost to housing in the affordable housing investment programme, in private housing and in a range of other areas—including the regeneration programmes—is about £135 million. That is the real impact of Labour's irresponsible behaviour on people throughout the country.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): How will the Scottish Government assist organisations in building new affordable housing in the Western Isles?

Stewart Maxwell: I am glad to report to the member that, using part of the third tranche of accelerated money that was brought forward to this year—and which is therefore exempt from the impact of the Labour Party's irresponsible behaviour—we have managed to bring forward two projects in the Western Isles: at Lews Castle school in Stornoway and at Vatersay croft. Both of those were land acquisitions, and we hope to provide 25 new affordable houses on that land.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have been contacted by a housing association that has been given Scottish Government approval for a scheme along with a grant of £88,000 per unit, but only if the rest of the balance can be obtained from the local authority. Meanwhile, a neighbouring housing association has been assessed and awarded a grant of £107,000 per unit. Is the minister aware of that? Can he tell me why such varying grant levels apply in two neighbouring parts of the west Highlands and whether he supports that?

Stewart Maxwell: I support the provision of the appropriate level of grant for a particular project. I cannot speak about those individual projects, but I imagine that the difficulties in terms of geography and land that might affect a project could result in differences in the level of grant. We have stated clearly—despite claims by the Opposition—that the grant level can vary depending on the individual project, and the member has just proved that point.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Is the minister aware that it looks as though the

Government has an extra £33 million? Perhaps he could persuade the Government to put that money into affordable housing in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Is he satisfied that there are a sufficient number of tradesmen to carry out the work that he has outlined?

Stewart Maxwell: I am glad to say that both Edinburgh and Glasgow benefited from the third tranche of accelerated money for affordable housing that was announced this week. I would be delighted to spend the additional money to which the member refers on affordable housing, but that is, of course, a matter for negotiation between the various parties.

Schoolchildren (Physical Activity)

3. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to encourage physical activity among schoolchildren. (S3O-5734)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Physical activity, physical education and sport are key elements of the health and wellbeing subject area of the curriculum for excellence. That will require schools to make provision for every young person to participate in those activities during and beyond the school day and is explicitly reflected in guidance to support the new three-to-18 curriculum. Taken together, the experiences and outcomes for physical education, physical activity and sport will underpin a pattern of daily physical activity, which research has shown is most likely to lead to sustained physical activity in adult life.

Ian McKee: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, during a recent evidence session of the Health and Sport Committee, a witness from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education stated that if a report for an inspected school made no mention of physical education one could assume that there was no cause for concern. That is in spite of the fact that only a tiny minority of schools have achieved the target for two hours of PE a week, five years after it was set.

Can the cabinet secretary assure us that, given the commitment in the curriculum for excellence to children's health and wellbeing, greater emphasis will be placed on the importance of physical education in schools and that more transparent arrangements will be made to monitor progress?

Fiona Hyslop: I am aware of the Health and Sport Committee's evidence session. Every inspection team will ask about progress towards the target of two hours of PE and about wider physical education activities. HMIE was reminded as recently as two weeks ago that that should be the case. In schools where the provision of physical education has been highlighted as an

issue, the inspection team will explore that rigorously, and if it concludes that provision is insufficient or of poor quality, that will feature in the inspection report. Good practice will, of course, also be highlighted. I take on board the points about transparency in the reporting system, and I will pass them on to HMIE for it to reflect on.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Would that problem be allayed if the General Teaching Council in Scotland considered assisting the training of new probationer teachers in outdoor education as well as in specialist PE activity?

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate the member's interest in that general area—physical activity includes outdoor education. The new training and continuous professional development that is provided for existing primary teachers can certainly do that, but we need to ensure that the probationers who are going into education are well grounded in all aspects of physical activity, as that will make a big difference in improving the activity levels of our young people.

Nuclear Weapons

4. Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made by the working group on Scotland without nuclear weapons. (S3O-5730)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): The working group on Scotland without nuclear weapons is progressing with its work plan within the remit that has been set. The minutes of each group meeting are placed on the Scottish Government website.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the working group commit to work with those at an international level—such as President Obama's Administration—who have called for work to halt the progress of nuclear proliferation? Does the minister agree that recent press reports about the huge annual cost of maintaining Trident, and the reports from senior military officials who have called it "irrelevant", make the case for a new generation of nuclear weapons very weak indeed?

Bruce Crawford: I agree with the member—the case for a new generation of nuclear weapons is extremely weak. Trident was recently denounced by Field Marshal Lord Bramall, the former head of the armed forces, who was backed by Generals Lord Ramsbotham and Sir Hugh Beach. They described it as "irrelevant" and "completely useless", and referred to its influence and effectiveness as a deterrent as a "fallacy". They went on to say:

"Nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of violence we currently, or are likely to, face—particularly

international terrorism; and the more you analyse them the more unusable they appear."

I agree entirely with that sentiment.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Has the group identified the redeployment of all 11,000 people who depend on Faslane for employment, particularly given the current economic climate? Does the minister accept that Alex Salmond's promise of a Scottish navy—all seven frigates—related to Rosyth and not Faslane, which would mean that the whole base would close?

Bruce Crawford: We should be careful not to scaremonger over numbers on such a serious issue. We hear the figure of 11,000 continually from Jackie Baillie, so I will tell members what a United Kingdom minister said not that long ago in answer to a Scottish National Party member in the UK Parliament:

"The number of civilian jobs which directly rely upon the Trident programme is estimated to be 936 in Scotland".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 21 February 2005; Vol 431, c 128W.]

It is also clear from the answer from Quentin Davies to a recent parliamentary question that we are talking about a cost of £1.5 billion over 10 years to 2019 for that weapons system. I wonder how many affordable houses that would build.

Schools (Biometric Technology)

5. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on analysing the responses to the consultation on draft guidance for local authorities on the use of biometric technology in schools. (S3O-5739)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): My officials are currently considering all the responses to the consultation, and we aim to publish a report on our analysis of the responses next month.

Gil Paterson: Is the cabinet secretary aware that the East Dunbartonshire parent council forum recently voted unanimously for a moratorium on the installation of biometric fingerprinting programmes in schools? Most parents had been unaware that the local authority was embarking on biometric fingerprinting. Does the cabinet secretary believe that parents have the right to know before such systems are introduced?

Fiona Hyslop: The short answer is yes. The East Dunbartonshire position has been brought to my attention. When it is published, the revised guidance will set out our position on the implementation of any such systems, which is that if an authority decides to use biometric systems in its schools we will expect it to follow the best practice, which will be set out in the guidance, and

to consult parents. I hope that East Dunbartonshire Council will consider fully consulting parents on the use of those technologies in schools, but ultimately it is an issue for the council and the parent council forum to resolve.

Fatal Accident Inquiries (Armed Services Personnel)

6. Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will give an update on what progress has been made with the United Kingdom Government on allowing fatal accident inquiries to be held in Scotland for Scottish armed services personnel and others killed in accidents overseas. (S3O-5718)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Elements of allowing such inquiries are reserved, and questions on those elements should be addressed to the United Kingdom Government. However, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence on 19 November 2008 to propose a way to resolve the issue. Following a subsequent exchange of letters—one from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to me, dated 15 January 2009, and my reply to him, dated 22 January 2009—the Lord Chancellor confirmed to the Westminster Parliament on 26 January that the UK Government intends to table amendments during the passage of the Coroners and Justice Bill to provide for inquiries to be held in Scotland.

The bill committee starts its work on 3 February 2009. Officials from the Crown Office, the Scottish Government's justice directorate, the Ministry of Defence, the England and Wales coroners unit, the Scotland Office and the Ministry of Justice Coroners and Justice Bill team are scheduled to hold a videoconference on 28 January 2009 to resolve the four outstanding details of the mechanism by which such inquiries could be held in future, on which I understand there to be an agreement in principle.

Keith Brown: Will the cabinet secretary continue to impress upon those with whom he is obliged to work on the issue the urgency of a satisfactory and rapid resolution, especially given the recent tragic deaths of a number of forces personnel based in Scotland—not only those who were Scottish but all those based in Scotland, predominantly those from 45 Commando in Arbroath—and the opportunity that a solution provides to alleviate the continuing suffering, stress and anxiety of the bereaved families of such personnel?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I am aware of Keith Brown's interest in the matter. The Government and the Lord Advocate have made it clear that looking after the interests of grieving

relatives must be at the heart of the matter, which is why we are working with the Government south of the border to ensure that the pragmatic solution we suggested some while ago can be introduced and that such matters can be resolved with as little inconvenience as possible being added to the trauma that the families suffer.

HMP Peterhead (Replacement)

7. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what the estimated completion date is for the replacement of HMP Peterhead. (S3O-5749)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Prison Service is currently preparing to apply for outline planning permission from Aberdeenshire Council for the construction of the new prison at Peterhead. Subject to planning consent, the SPS will then conduct a procurement exercise for the prison's construction. It is estimated that planning, procurement, construction and commissioning will take a minimum of four years.

Alison McInnes: The First Minister said in August 2007 that he was ending the uncertainty and indecision about the prison. That seems long ago, as nearly a year and a half later an application for outline planning permission has still not been lodged. Will the cabinet secretary explain why the delay has occurred and what is behind the current uncertainty?

Kenny MacAskill: I am unaware of any delay or uncertainty. We moved swiftly to make it clear that the new prison for the north-east of Scotland—which, as I said to Mr Rumbles earlier, will serve Aberdeen and Peterhead—would be in Peterhead. That announcement ended the uncertainty and was welcomed by the prison officers and their families there.

The Government has acted expeditiously and is doing what it can to drive through the project, and we will do so in the knowledge that what matters is public safety, not private profit. The new HMP Peterhead will be a public prison and will be run to ensure the benefit and safety of the people who work in it and the communities that require to be protected from the people who are incarcerated in it.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Eighty-five per cent of adult male prisoners at Craiginches are from the city of Aberdeen, as are the vast majority of the women and young offenders from the Grampian area who are currently in prison. Can the cabinet secretary offer any explanation for his decision to replace Craiginches with a new prison in Peterhead rather than in Aberdeen?

Kenny MacAskill: As was made clear in my reply to Mr Rumbles, and as Mr Macdonald will know if he was in the chamber and listening, the new prison will be community facing and will hold youngsters who would otherwise be sent to HM Young Offenders Institution Polmont and women who would be sent to Cornton Vale. As a former minister, Mr Macdonald will probably recall numerous instances of female prisoners being sent around Scotland in Reliance vans in great discomfort; they will now be able to go the short distance from Aberdeen to Peterhead. It seems to me a significant improvement for female prisoners and young prisoners from the north-east of Scotland to be dealt with there and not shipped down to the central belt in a Reliance van.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1398)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will meet Opposition leaders who have asked for meetings to discuss taking forward the budget process to completion. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has contacted every local authority in Scotland to explain the circumstances that threaten to disrupt their budgeting. Hopefully, that will concentrate the minds of the Parliament on the jobs and services outside the chamber that depend on the decisions that we make inside the chamber.

Iain Gray: Yesterday morning, John Swinney said:

"The duty for me is to put forward a budget that convinces Parliament."

I agree. Last night, he acknowledged that he had failed in that duty. He failed because the Scottish National Party approached the serious matter of the Scottish budget with reckless brinkmanship and arrogance. Hubris indeed. It chose to seek narrow political advantage rather than broad, constructive consensus. That approach must not be repeated.

I welcome the First Minister's meetings today, and offer him the opportunity to explain to Scotland how he intends to change his approach to secure support for the resubmitted budget bill.

The First Minister: The bill failed because the Labour Party, as the principal Opposition party, decided to put its own narrow interests before employment and jobs for Scotland. That is why we have editorials such as that in today's *Scottish Daily Express*:

"Labour MSPs should be ashamed of themselves".

There were a number of revealing contributions in yesterday's debate, but none more revealing than that from John Park MSP, who responded to the realisation that the SNP had offered the Labour Party one of its key demands—the apprenticeship guarantee, which I think is vital—with the words:

"Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Government would have announced that anyway, regardless of the budget process?"—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14452.]

As if an issue as important as apprenticeships should depend on who was making the

announcement. That is exactly the problem with the Labour Party when it refuses to face its responsibilities.

Iain Gray: Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. There is little sign of the Government having learned any lesson from yesterday. One editorial does not the news coverage make—I suggest that the First Minister reads the editorials in some of the other newspapers—nor does one proposal constitute constructive discussion.

Labour has a series of sincere proposals that we believe will help Scotland through the global economic crisis. A young person in Scotland has less than half the chance of an apprenticeship place that a young person in England has. We want that corrected. Most people would consider that a reasonable and compelling objective. In a budget of £34 billion, no one would believe it to be too much to ask. However, last night the SNP described that constructive dialogue as Labour “playing games”. We have heard more of the same today.

Will the First Minister learn the lesson of yesterday, and promise to set aside such language and give an assurance that he will enter into discussions seriously, responsibly and in a spirit of good faith?

The First Minister: We have entered into discussions seriously, responsibly and in a spirit of good faith. I agree with Iain Gray. Responding to only one constructive suggestion is not enough, which is why, for example, in response to another of the Labour Party’s five demands we announced a town centre regeneration fund of £60 million, when they wanted one for £50 million. I see Labour members pointing at the Conservatives. Because the Conservatives championed that idea, it suddenly becomes invalid. Does that not imply that what Labour wanted out of the budget was not constructive investment for the people of Scotland but to be able to claim for itself ideas that were shared throughout the Parliament? *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): That is enough applause, thank you.

Iain Gray: The First Minister’s responses demonstrate exactly the narrow party advantage that he has brought to and seeks from the process. Let us examine his responses.

In his first answer, the First Minister talked about the consequences of last night’s vote, although he seems to have learned little about the consequences for his own standing. For some time now, the SNP and its loyal servants in the matter, the Tories, have claimed that £1.8 billion would be lost to Scotland if the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill fell and that there would be no increase

in funding next year. In fact, the Tories are claiming today that that has already happened, but it is not true.

I am sure that the First Minister would not wish to allow the Parliament or the people of Scotland to be misled, so let me read from an e-mail from the assistant clerk to the Finance Committee:

“If the Budget Bill for 2009-10 was passed at some point after 1 April and only came into force on, say, 1 June 2009, then the Government would get the full allocation of circa £34 billion”.

[Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: Yesterday, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland reminded us of Burns’s words

“an honest man’s the noblest work of God”.

Is the First Minister honest enough to admit that the claim that £1.8 billion will be lost is just gratuitous scaremongering?

The First Minister: I have heard many questions in my time as First Minister, but that must rate as the most extraordinary of them all. We are now told by Iain Gray that, apparently, it would not cause disruption to Scottish public services if a budget bill did not pass until June. What are the health boards throughout Scotland to do in the meantime? What are the local authorities throughout Scotland to do in the meantime? What is every voluntary organisation in Scotland to do in the meantime? *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Let us put it in terms of jobs: £1.8 billion is 35,000 jobs. Sooner or later, the Labour Party had better realise, as the first ever Opposition party to vote against a budget at stage 3 in this Parliament, that it is jeopardising 35,000 jobs.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gray, a brief final question, please.

Iain Gray: Mr Swinney made it clear last night that the Government intends to seek consensus and lodge a budget bill that the Parliament can support. That is what the Government requires to do in order to avoid the kind of disruption that has been mentioned. That is its responsibility. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: The process has to be about the SNP Government responding to the scale of the economic challenge that we face. Yesterday’s gross domestic product figures simply emphasise the seriousness of the challenge in Scotland. Last night, when Mr Swinney was asked how much of

his budget he had changed, he answered, “£82 million.” That is one quarter of one per cent.

Members: Question!

The Presiding Officer: Order. I will decide on the timings in the chamber.

Iain Gray: We know that more can be done. We have been saying that since October. Our door is still open to discuss the budget that Scotland needs. Can the First Minister promise the same, and can we believe him?

The First Minister: We are now making progress. We have moved from the context of the previous question, where there was to be no disruption at all and we could have a budget through in June, to an acceptance that there will be serious disruption. If the Labour Party starts to understand the consequences of its vote yesterday, perhaps we will get to the solution.

I have pointed out a number of issues on which the SNP had made agreements with, or at least offers to the Labour Party. I have mentioned two already. One was apparently invalid because we were going to do it anyway, and the second was invalid because the Conservatives were also proposing it. How about the promised increased investment in PACE—partnership action for continuing employment? That is another of Labour’s demands that was met, but it is apparently now swept aside because Labour wants to seek some other advantage.

Yes, 35,000 jobs are at stake, as are the apprenticeship places that are going through; the small business bonus scheme; the council tax freeze; the extra police officers; the accelerated capital investment; the help for people who are facing redundancy; the zero waste fund; free personal care; regeneration; capital city costs; the reduction in prescription charges; and the town centre regeneration fund. They are all at risk because of Labour’s attitude, and it is high time that Iain Gray started to face up to his responsibilities, not to his back benchers or to Jim Murphy, but to this Parliament and the people of Scotland.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-1399)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the secretary of state in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: The latest International Monetary Fund figures show that the United Kingdom will suffer the worst slump of all industrialised nations since the second world war and that the Scottish economy is now falling faster

than that of the UK as a whole. It is precisely because of that frightening backdrop that the Scottish Conservatives negotiated in the budget the abolition of or cut in local taxes for 150,000 of our small businesses; secured the continuing freeze of council tax; and got a pledge for a £60 million town centre regeneration fund to address this real, happening crisis.

Sadly, that goal was not shared by every party in this chamber. For Iain Gray and the Scottish Labour Party, this was not about addressing Labour’s recession; instead, it was about trying to stage some bloodless debating chamber coup to ensconce him as First Minister. Let me make it clear: I shall have no truck with such antics. Does the First Minister agree that Scotland is already badly served by one Labour Government and that we certainly do not need two? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. That’s enough.

The First Minister: Do I get time to answer this question? Yes, I agree.

I want to say a little about the town centre regeneration fund. We were unable to put the concept, which did not evolve with the SNP, into last year’s budget; however, in negotiations with other parties, the opportunity presented itself precisely because last August—months before Westminster did it—we accelerated forward housing investment when we realised the extent of the crisis. That allowed us to allocate the consequential capital investment to other projects. I believe that, given the position that the real economy faces and the position of town centres and our communities across Scotland, this is exactly the moment when £60 million of capital investment throughout the country will do some good.

Every constituency MSP—indeed, every MSP—in this chamber should start to think about the projects in their communities that would be valuable this year but that are now at risk. Indeed, we should think about the global total of jobs—a number running well into four figures—that would be created by this one measure alone. It is exactly that type of project, which, as I say, did not originate with the SNP but is now shared by parties across the chamber, that has been put at risk by people not putting the interests of Scotland before their political objectives.

Annabel Goldie: I am certain that all party leaders will have received this morning the public’s views on yesterday’s budget debacle. Our first priority must be to get a budget for Scotland passed in the chamber. We must remove the spectre of council tax increases and public service cuts; we need stability, not uncertainty; and clarity, not confusion. It is no victory for anyone in this Parliament for it to be a laughing stock. In an e-

mail that I received this morning—an e-mail which, I have to say, is humbling—a correspondent who dismisses every one of us said of the budget:

“I don’t care how you do it neither does the vast majority in the country just get it done”.

Does the First Minister agree that the priority is not bloodless coups, debating antics in the chamber or putting parties on a war footing but getting this budget passed?

The First Minister: I agree. We intend to do exactly that, not in the interests of the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives, the Green party or the Labour Party, but in the interests of the Scottish people.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1400)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The next meeting of Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott: Parliament needs a budget bill for private sector jobs and for public services but, more important, the country needs the right budget bill to tackle the economic problems that we face. Yesterday’s economic news was truly disturbing: the growth figures for Scotland are worse than those of the United Kingdom; the UK figures were judged by the International Monetary Fund to be the worst in the world; and a global engineering business with an Ayrshire base is to close. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has been commendably blunt and said that Scotland is in recession. Does the First Minister agree with Mr Swinney?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree that Scotland is in recession. The official figures will not be out for three months because of the time lag in declaring them. In any interpretation of the current economic data, it should be remembered that Scottish employment is higher than the UK average, Scottish unemployment is lower, and Scottish activity rates across the population are also higher.

I say to Tavish Scott that, even if we thought that the 2p cut in income tax proposed by the Scottish Liberal Democrats last September was a good idea, there is not a majority for it in the chamber. [*Interruption.*] I hear members say that that has not been tested, but I have quote after quote from Labour spokesmen attacking it.

In yesterday’s debate, Jeremy Purvis said that the Scottish Parliament information centre said that, under the Government’s input-output model, such a tax cut would generate 9,200 jobs in Scotland. Yes; but the same model shows that if

we reduce public spending by £800 million, we will lose 16,868 jobs, which is a net loss of some 6,000. That cannot be the right measure to take in these difficult times.

Tavish Scott: This is about jobs in the private sector. We need a long-term plan to rescue us from the economic storm. Alex Salmond leads a minority Government and he has to work across all parties. Is the First Minister prepared, as I am, to sit down, roll up his sleeves, and work with others to build a budget and a long-term economic approach that can create jobs and tackle the economic recession? His economic growth target for 2011 was invented in the boom times. What is his assessment of that target now that we are in the bust?

The First Minister: The target was set relative to the UK economy. The Scottish economy has underlying strengths that will enable us to meet the target. For example, yesterday I had the great pleasure of initiating an £80 million investment by Diageo in a new bioenergy plant at its distillery in Fife. That is exactly the sort of project that combines two of our strongest industries—the food and drink industry with the bioenergy and renewable energy sector. We have strong sectors in the Scottish economy that will enable us to meet the target.

I will meet Tavish Scott this afternoon, and I say to him again that I am perfectly happy to have constructive discussions. However, he cannot have the unbreakable condition of a 2p income tax cut that would not command a majority in the Parliament. As I have just explained, neither would it command the sort of economic response that we would all like, even if it could be implemented in the coming year. So, when we have our constructive discussion, I hope that Tavish Scott will recognise that what the Liberal Democrats have made the key to whether they are prepared to support the budget is not tenable.

The Presiding Officer: I will take a constituency question from Michael McMahon.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I am sure that the First Minister will agree with me that, in the current recession, any redundancies are regrettable. I bring to his attention two particular cases in my constituency that were announced this week.

Just this morning, E.ON announced the closure of its retail service call centre in Tannochside in Uddingston. Will the First Minister assist the various trade unions that are trying to talk to Scottish and Southern Energy, which in Cumbernauld is recruiting people who operate in the same sector? Will he bring his good offices to bear to get E.ON and Scottish and Southern Energy together with the aim of transferring to

Cumbernauld the jobs that will be lost at Tannochside?

Is the First Minister aware of the decision by Corus on Monday to close the steel stockholders plant in Mossend with the loss of 78 jobs? That is a particularly difficult issue, because the plant is viable and efficient and is making profit, but it is to be asset stripped, with machinery being taken to a plant in England. Will the First Minister support the campaign of the Community union, which is fighting to save the plant by having it sold as a going concern so that, as happened with a company in Teeside that Corus previously owned, it can go into the market and compete in its own right?

The First Minister: Yes, I will. The announcement of increased resources for PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—is specifically designed to help with interventions in redundancy situations, which, sadly, will become very frequent in the near future.

On the E.ON call centre facility in the member's constituency, I know quite a bit about Scottish and Southern Energy's decision to take over the Barclaycard facility in Cumbernauld, as there was direct ministerial involvement in that. Indeed, I will open the new facility in Cumbernauld. I will raise the point that the member makes but, in any case, we should regard the decision by Scottish and Southern, which saves 800 jobs in Cumbernauld and offers enhanced training opportunities for the valuable and loyal staff there, as a good thing in itself. I will certainly direct the company's attention to the unfortunate developments in the member's constituency.

Manufacturing Sector (Recession)

4. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had with Scottish Enterprise about the impact of the recession on the manufacturing sector. (S3F-1401)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government has had discussions with Scottish Enterprise on a wide range of issues to do with the manufacturing sector. Recent examples include the strategic forum, which last met on 16 December and which involved cabinet secretaries. The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism regularly meets representatives from the manufacturing sector and business organisations. Scottish Enterprise, in taking account of those discussions, and as part of its contribution to the Government's economic recovery programme, has allocated additional funds to the Scottish manufacturing advisory service, with recruitment now under way to double the number of its advisers.

I am aware that the furnace and foundry products company Vesuvius has announced a period of consultation with a view to closing its manufacturing operation in the member's constituency, which would potentially make 170 employees redundant. Officials have offered support: the partnership action for continuing employment team has been in contact with the company and Scottish Enterprise participated in a meeting with the company earlier this week. I understand that a follow-up meeting is planned in the next few days.

Willie Coffey: I will take the First Minister's message of support back to the workforce at Vesuvius when I next meet them. He may be aware that manufacturing jobs in Kilmarnock and Loudoun plummeted from almost 6,000 in 1999 to fewer than 4,000 in 2006. When the First Minister next meets the Council of Economic Advisers, will he ask it to carry out further work on how Scotland's manufacturing sector can best be supported through and beyond the recession?

The First Minister: Yes, I will. The Government applauds the work that the Council of Economic Advisers has undertaken so far, particularly its advice on developing Scotland's areas of competitive advantage. We fully accept the recommendation in the council's annual report to the Parliament that we should focus on strengthening the competitive advantage in key sectors. The council is reviewing each of the high-growth sectors in turn so that it can offer advice on how Government policies can be more supportive. Those sectors, and the manufacturing industries within them, will help to lead Scotland out of the downturn and to drive economic recovery.

Victims Champion

5. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will appoint a victims champion. (S3F-1417)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We have invested record levels of funding in front-line services for victims, including £44 million over the period 2008 to 2011 to tackle violence against women, which is double the amount that was available in the previous three years. We are working very closely with victims organisations as we take forward the justice reform programme, but we have no plans at present to appoint a victims commissioner as part of that approach.

David Stewart: On Monday, Westminster appointed child protection guru Sara Payne as the first victims champion for England and Wales. She has been tasked with preparing the ground for the new and innovative victims commissioner post that will be established in 12 months' time. In Scotland, prisoners have their own commissioner, but who is

the champion for victims? Will the First Minister support my proposal for a member's bill to create a victims commissioner?

The First Minister: Earlier this month, as David Stewart knows, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice answered a parliamentary question from the member. He said that the review of a "Scottish Strategy for Victims" will include consideration of a range of opportunities for improving support for victims of crime. The need for a victims commissioner might be considered as part of that process. The cabinet secretary is happy to discuss with David Stewart his proposal for a victims commissioner once Mr Stewart has published his promised consultation paper.

I know that David Stewart appreciates that we have a range of victims groups and agencies in Scotland that do vital and valuable work and the Government is closely aligned with their objectives. I have already illustrated the funding increases to support that work.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does the First Minister nevertheless accept that the primary responsibility for supporting victims lies with the Government at various levels? Does he agree that the Scottish Commission for Human Rights could play a useful role in examining support given to victims and making recommendations, and that a powerful critique of that kind, based on human rights analysis, could make a significant contribution to improving the treatment of victims in the courts and beyond?

The First Minister: That seems to be a fair point; I offer to give it close examination and write to the member. It should be remembered that organisations such as Victim Support Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid are represented on Government bodies. For example, Victim Support Scotland is represented on the national advisory board on offender management and a witness issues group and is now working with the Sentencing Commission for Scotland. The organisations that do such vital work on behalf of victims are already integrated with and supporting Government and public initiatives in a very close working relationship. Nonetheless, Robert Brown makes a fair point and I will examine it carefully.

Schools (Excluded Children)

6. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government supports children who have been excluded from school. (S3F-1402)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is providing support in several ways. We are promoting more effective approaches to behaviour management through guidance and the work of the positive behaviour

team, currently funded at £500,000 a year. Updated guidance, "included, engaged and involved", is being developed that covers the prevention and management of exclusion. I know that Hugh O'Donnell will welcome the overall yearly fall in exclusions as well as reflecting the continuing concern about the level of exclusions in some key categories.

Hugh O'Donnell: Does the First Minister agree that, through the process that we use to identify exclusions, we label 12 per cent of our children, possibly for their whole lives, and that such labels are given to children who are often the most vulnerable in our society? Will he resolve to ensure that all the local authorities develop a constructive plan to address the issues that such young people face?

The First Minister: Yes, I will. I thank the member for the constructive nature of his question. I was disappointed in some of this week's coverage of the figures, which show a fall in the number of exclusions. It is clear that in certain areas there are still significant problems that nobody would underestimate, but when there is significant overall decline that should be welcomed and, more than that, the initiatives that local authorities have taken to enable that decline to take place should be examined.

It is not good enough for people to say, "We don't believe the statistics", when there are clear working examples of initiatives being taken in which local authorities and schools around Scotland are managing the problem in a constructive way that is leading to good outcomes for schools and pupils alike.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the First Minister commit his Government to having a full-scale debate on school discipline in this Parliament?

The First Minister: I will certainly speak to the business manager to see whether such a debate can be arranged. I do not dictate such matters and instead leave it to the Parliamentary Bureau to set the parliamentary agenda, but my personal view is that such a debate would be worth while. There are many key issues to discuss and great interest in the patterns that we are seeing in the figures and, indeed, in the initiatives being taken in schools throughout Scotland.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Is the First Minister aware from this week's figures on school exclusions of the worrying rise in the abuse of alcohol by some pupils? Is he also aware of the rather frightening increase in the number of assaults by pupils with a weapon? What is he doing to tackle those serious problems?

The First Minister: I am aware of that. Of course, any violence in schools is unacceptable.

We are all concerned by the rise in the number of children excluded from school because of assaults involving alcohol or substance misuse or assaults with weapons. Those are serious problems. That is why the approach that has been taken in so many schools and councils seems to me to be something that is worth supporting.

While acknowledging the seriousness of the problems that the member has identified, let us be prepared to welcome the substantial overall decrease in the number of exclusions, which, in many cases, can be directly attributed to the constructive and positive work that is going on at council and school levels.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Sustainable Growth

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I make members aware that a revised version of section A of today's *Business Bulletin* is now available at the back of the chamber. It includes a business motion setting out a revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 4 February and Wednesday 11 February, along with a Parliamentary Bureau motion suspending standing orders to allow the budget (Scotland) (no 3) bill to be considered at stages 1, 2 and 3 on 4, 10 and 11 February respectively.

Global Economic Downturn (Employment)

1. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I ask my question with a slight sense of déjà vu.

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to tackle the effect of the global economic downturn on employment in light of the latest employment statistics. (S3O-5745)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): We continue to take forward a wide range of initiatives that will support and protect jobs in Scotland as part of the budget and through our economic recovery programme, which in turn is supported by the economic recovery plans of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Members who opposed the budget yesterday voted to block many of those initiatives and threatened the benefits that they will bring to our economy. The initiatives include: accelerating capital spending of £227 million in 2009-10, on top of a £30 million spend in 2008-09, which will support 4,700 jobs over the next 15 months; providing regional selective assistance of more than £16 million in the three months to the end of December 2008, which will create and safeguard a further 1,300 jobs at least; and other measures that are designed to create new opportunities for businesses and individuals in Scotland.

Robert Brown: I have heard that line somewhere before.

In a recent exchange with the First Minister, my colleague Jeremy Purvis pointed out that the Financial Services Advisory Board, which the First Minister convenes, has not met since 2 September. Has a date for it to meet been set yet? When it meets, what proposals will it consider to

help secure the future of financial services in Scotland and safeguard jobs in that industry and the wider economy? Will the minister consider including representatives of small business and local authorities on FiSAB, so that it can act as a jobs task force to an extent?

Jim Mather: FiSAB will meet in the next couple of weeks and already has a membership that is representative of many interests and voices. We will continue to work closely with the financial services sector and small business to bring them together and ensure that Scottish business is advantaged by new moves such as the enterprise finance guarantee and other measures that we believe can alleviate the pressure on small businesses.

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Small and medium-sized enterprises are important employers throughout Scotland and are major contributors to our economy. What contact has the minister had with small business organisations, and what further action does he propose to ensure that our small business sector will be equipped to overcome the current economic difficulties?

Jim Mather: My colleague Mr Swinney met representatives of the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland in November and will have a further meeting with them on 26 February. My officials met FSB representatives on 19 January and will do so again in February and March as part of a continuing pattern of refocusing on small businesses.

On 14 January, I launched the United Kingdom Government's enterprise finance guarantee scheme in the company of small businesses, putting that package in the context of other measures to improve cash flow, credit and capital for business. In addition, we have brought forward to 18 March the next meeting of the national economic forum, at which the FSB and small businesses will be heavily represented.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, given the current economic conditions and what he has said, there should be more scope for modern apprenticeships, particularly in the financial sector? Was it not a mistake for him to drop the number of modern apprenticeships in finance?

Jim Mather: The member will note that the Government's approach to modern apprenticeships is aligned with the reality of the Scottish economy. The Government is pressing forward on that in a seemingly way, and will continue to do so.

Economic Recovery Programme

2. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what the benefits

have been of its six-point economic recovery programme. (S3O-5736)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Our economic recovery programme is already delivering a wide range of benefits, advice and support to individuals and businesses throughout Scotland. Our programme includes action and resources to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency, to freeze the council tax for a second year and to expand the small business bonus scheme by increasing the level of relief by 25 per cent from April. Through our programme, we will also accelerate capital spending of £227 million this year, on top of £30 million last year, to support 4,700 jobs throughout Scotland over the next 15 months. Those measures will be possible only if Parliament supports the Government's budget.

Stuart McMillan: In the light of the narrow, petty party politics of yesterday afternoon's budget vote, does the cabinet secretary agree that the parties that voted against the budget have put in jeopardy further economic recovery in the communities that I represent in the west of Scotland, such as Inverclyde and East Dunbartonshire, to name just two? What extra funding will be lost to those two areas, hampering economic recovery?

John Swinney: Mr McMillan makes a fair point. Many of the initiatives that I spoke about in my answer will be able to proceed only if the Government secures parliamentary support for its budget. I regret the fact that Parliament was unable to come to a conclusion that was favourable to the Government on that issue yesterday. I am, however, today pursuing discussions on the Government's budget bill, which I reintroduced to Parliament just after the decision last night. I remain optimistic that, as a consequence of those discussions, we will be able to create broad consensus around the budget bill.

That is essential because, at the heart of what it is trying to do, the Government is trying to use the interventions at our disposal to accelerate capital expenditure, to give support to the small business community and to maximise the opportunities for employment in what we all acknowledge are very difficult times. The Government will remain absolutely focused on that over the next couple of weeks.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary believe that the extra jobs that have been created in the Scotland Office by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy, have contributed to Scotland's economic recovery? Is it not the case that the cost of those jobs is directly top-sliced from the money that is made available to the Scottish Government?

John Swinney: Mr Morgan speaks with clear authority on the issue, as he and I both sat through the passage of the Scotland Act 1998 and realised the absurdity of the Scotland Office having first pick of the resources that are available to the Scottish Parliament.

We note with interest the expansion of staff numbers at the Scotland Office. Whether there has been an expansion of productivity is a different question. Whether there has been an improvement in the value added to the Scottish economy is deeply in question.

A9 (Dualling)

3. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made since May 2007 on dualling the A9 north of the Drumochter pass. (S3O-5709)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We announced our plans to upgrade the A9 to Inverness in December 2008. We are currently well advanced in our preparations for extending the dual carriageway at Crubenmore.

Peter Peacock: I note what the minister says. People are genuinely perplexed that, against the background of a stated commitment to dual the entire length of the A9, among the first projects on the A9 that the minister has approved is not the dualling of the sections at Moy and Carrbridge but the upgrading of them to three-lane overtaking sections. Will the minister go back to his office this afternoon and instruct the immediate upgrading of the design of the Moy and Carrbridge sections to dual carriageway in line with the promises that were made before the election?

Stewart Stevenson: The member will be perplexed because he is clearly not engaged in the issue. Many of the initiatives that we are taking forward with best speed and energy are constrained by the decisions of the previous Administration. If, however, we are in a position of actually having a budget—well, I leave the rest to the listeners.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the minister explain why we are spending money on two-plus-one lanes at Moy and Carrbridge that will have to be superseded, dug up and tarmacked over again when they become dual carriageways? Surely, if the Government is serious about having dual carriageways on those sections and is not just going through the motions, it will admit that those two-plus-one lanes are an extravagance and that the money should be used for dualling those sections now.

Stewart Stevenson: The key interventions that we are making at the moment are driven by safety.

I do not think that any family that does not suffer loss as a result of those interventions will regard them as an extravagance.

The intervention to dual the A9, which we are fully committed to, is an economic intervention, which we will come to as the funds are available. However, we want to get the maximum bang for our safety buck in the meantime. There is clear evidence that when we put in W2+1s—three lanes—at appropriate places there are significant safety benefits. I am utterly determined to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads and to ensure that families do not suffer the grief and losses that result from too many accidents on them.

Scottish Futures Trust (Chief Executive)

4. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in employing a chief executive for the Scottish Futures Trust. (S3O-5692)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Interviews for the post of chief executive have taken place, and an appointment will be finalised shortly.

James Kelly: The cabinet secretary will be aware that there has been concern about the transparency of appointments to the Scottish Futures Trust. Will the post of chief executive come under the auspices of the Scottish public sector pay policy? What will the salary be? What objectives and performance targets will be set for the post?

John Swinney: I am discussing with the board of the Scottish Futures Trust the chief executive's salary and whether the post will come under the Scottish public sector pay policy. Decisions on those matters will be arrived at in due course. Obviously, the salary will depend on the candidate who is appointed and their relevant experience.

The chief executive's responsibilities and objectives will be a matter for the board of the Scottish Futures Trust, but they will be driven and informed by the business case, which, if my memory serves me right, the Government published in May 2008. They will also reflect the working priorities of the Scottish Futures Trust, which include taking forward in the short term the expansion of health care facilities through the hub initiative, progressing a new schools programme, and ensuring that the improvements in value that we seek from capital expenditure in Scotland are delivered.

ScotRail (Ticket Pricing)

5. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met

representatives of ScotRail to discuss ticket pricing. (S3O-5733)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Transport Scotland officials last met ScotRail representatives to discuss ticket pricing in the context of their franchise agreement obligations on 22 January 2009.

Michael Matheson: I want to bring to the minister's attention concerns that my constituents have expressed about ScotRail's ticket pricing. A cheap day return ticket from Falkirk Grahamston to Edinburgh is the same price as a cheap day return ticket from Dunblane, Bridge of Allan or Stirling, despite the fact that Falkirk Grahamston is considerably further along the line towards Edinburgh. Will the minister ensure that there is greater transparency in respect of how ScotRail sets its pricing structure and that there is greater equity in how it decides what prices should be from given stations?

Stewart Stevenson: I understand the member's point. Broadly speaking, the price per mile is in the 18p to 20p range across the network, although there are variations. Many areas are aggregated together as one destination, which has many advantages for travellers and ScotRail. That said, the pricing structure is largely constrained by the contract that we inherited. We will certainly look at an appropriate pricing structure when we next let the franchise.

Glasgow City Council (Meetings)

6. Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth last met representatives from Glasgow City Council. (S3O-5683)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I meet Glasgow City Council representatives regularly. I last spoke to the leader of that council on 4 December 2008.

Margaret Curran: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will join me in welcoming to the public gallery students from John Wheatley College.

I am also sure that the cabinet secretary will again meet Glasgow City Council representatives. When he does so, perhaps he will discuss with them the Glasgow *Evening Times* campaign to get Glasgow a fair deal—or, more appropriately perhaps, a fairer deal. Does he support that campaign? What does he have to say to the readers of the *Evening Times*, 69 per cent of whom do not believe that Glasgow currently gets a fair deal from the Scottish Government?

John Swinney: I am glad that Margaret Curran added the words “Scottish Government” to the end of her question. If she had not done so, she might have tempted me to speculate on who is not delivering a fair deal to the people of Glasgow. She saved me from making such a mischievous remark.

I associate myself with Margaret Curran's remarks and extend a warm welcome to the students from John Wheatley College, who represent the distinguished contribution that John Wheatley made to Scottish public life.

On the substantive question, I believe that Glasgow gets a fair deal from the Scottish Government. There is a range of interventions—some of which I recounted to Margaret Curran in yesterday's debate—through which the Government is supporting an increase in public expenditure for Glasgow City Council to allow it to deploy effectively its resources. We have removed a significant amount of ring fencing. I know that the leadership of Glasgow City Council welcomes that move, which has enabled the council to deliver greater flexibility in the design of its public services.

The Government is giving significant support to the 2014 Commonwealth games—we were all delighted that the bid was successful in 2007. In addition, the Government has approved major capital infrastructure projects for the city, some of which—the M74 extension, for example—are not universally popular in the chamber, although others, including the Southern general hospital project, are more popular. Those projects represent the Government's contribution to ensuring that Glasgow gets a fair deal from public expenditure in Scotland.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The cabinet secretary might find it worth while to meet the leadership of Glasgow City Council as soon as possible. I draw his attention to the financial implications of the council's plan to close 25 primary and nursery schools, with an estimated cost saving of £3.7 million. Will he impress on Glasgow City Council how many more schools it would have to close if Glasgow Labour MSPs were to vote again against the Scottish budget, which would involve the council in a £205 million budget cut?

John Swinney: As always, Mr Doris puts a fair question. He asks about the difficulties that Glasgow City Council would face if it did not receive the uplift in expenditure that the Scottish Government wishes to put forward. I am surprised that members such as Margaret Curran voted as they did yesterday. I see Mr Butler, another Glasgow member, in his place. I also see Mr Whitton, although I am not certain whether he

represents the city of Glasgow; he certainly represents the outskirts of Glasgow.

The issue that Mr Doris raises is relevant to the question of access to the increased public funds in the budget, which will not be made available if the budget is not passed. Given time for mature reflection, I hope that Labour members who voted against the Government's budget will see fit to support it, to allow the uplift in resources to go to Glasgow City Council.

Glasgow Crossrail Project

7. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress was made in respect of the Glasgow crossrail project at the meeting on 7 January 2009 between Scottish Government officials and the Strathclyde partnership for transport. (S3O-5680)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Following the meeting on 7 January 2009, it was agreed that a workshop will be held in February, which will be attended by Transport Scotland, Strathclyde partnership for transport, Network Rail and Glasgow City Council, at which the development of the west of Scotland rail enhancement proposal will be discussed.

Bill Butler: I thank the minister for his mature response.

I welcome the minister's agreement to the meeting with SPT and to the workshop in February. He knows that the project has passed the Government's Scottish transport appraisal guidance system. Does he agree, particularly given these challenging economic times, that SPT's proposed Glasgow crossrail scheme provides value for money, would greatly enhance the connectivity of Scotland's rail network and would go a long way towards resolving capacity restraints at Glasgow stations? If so, will the Government work constructively with SPT to ensure that Glasgow crossrail—or, as the minister put it in the transport priorities debate this morning, crossrail plus—sees the light of day?

Stewart Stevenson: Of course, the oldest minister in Government will always provide a mature response, if only by virtue of his age.

The question is a serious one, which the member treats in an appropriate way. The issue of capacity is central to determining the nature of the intervention that we should make in Glasgow, to allow connections from one end of Scotland to the other via Glasgow and to support the expansion of the rail network into and from Glasgow. We have commissioned an extra piece of work from the Jacobs Consultancy, which will be a large feature on the table in the discussion that we will have in

February with the range of bodies that I mentioned.

A longer-term issue is the genuine difficulty with capacity at the two existing major stations in Glasgow, Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street. It is imperative that we take account of the long-term needs of railway expansion when coming to a decision. However, I am entirely happy to accept that we need to move as speedily as possible in these difficult times. I look forward to Mr Butler supporting the budget as it moves through Parliament in the next couple of weeks.

Sickness Absence (Public Sector)

8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to reduce levels of sickness absence in the public sector. (S3O-5658)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The management of sickness absence across the public sector is a matter for individual public bodies as employers. Effective absence management is a core discipline for any well-run organisation. We expect all employers to take the issue seriously, and to take all possible steps to reduce absence levels and to increase productivity.

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that many workers in the public sector will be feeling pretty sick this morning at the prospect of losing their jobs due to the antics of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in the chamber yesterday.

Audit Scotland has disclosed that the average sickness absence level in local authorities is now double that in equivalent private sector companies. Given that workers in the public sector also enjoy higher salaries on average, better holidays and better pensions than those in the private sector, what is the Government doing to redress the balance?

John Swinney: As I said in my original answer, this is a significant issue that affects organisations' ability to provide public services and to support the individuals who need to utilise those services. We expect all organisations in the public sector—the core Scottish Government, health authorities and local authorities—to have in place, as part of their organisational structure and working practices, measures to tackle sickness absence. Part of the focus of the efficient government programme is to reduce the amount of sickness absence, which will reduce the cost of bringing in agency staff and other additional costs. The issue will remain a priority, and I will continue to monitor it as part of the efficient government programme.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): As a backbencher who is even older than the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, I will ask a very mature question. Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that in recent years NHS Lothian has reduced sickness absence levels from more than 6 per cent to 4.72 per cent—a substantial reduction in a workforce of more than 30,000 staff? Will he encourage other bodies in the public sector to learn from the experience in Lothian?

John Swinney: Dr McKee makes a fair point in highlighting an example of good performance. One challenge in the public services is to ensure that well-structured good practice in one part of the country is deployed in other organisations. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing will note Dr McKee's comments and ensure that the lessons from NHS Lothian are applied in other health boards. From a broader efficient government perspective, I take on board the points about performance that he has made.

Consultants (Expenditure)

9. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how much it spent on private consultants in 2008. (S3O-5663)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In my answer, I will interpret "private consultants" to mean consultancy services involved in Government activities. The latest information, which is held in the Scottish procurement information hub, indicates that, in the financial year 2006-07, the Scottish Government spent £40.5 million with companies identified as consultants. The figure includes management and business consultancy, along with a range of other external services such as interim staff and information technology services. Comparable data for 2007-08 should be available by March 2009.

Margaret Mitchell: Following the Auditor General for Scotland's criticism that there is a lack of strategy in Government spending on consultancy fees, including spending by bodies such as Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Transport Scotland, and given the simple fact that changes could be made that would lead to a £13 million reduction in the £114 million that was spent on consultancy services in 2006-07, what plans does the Government have to review, improve and change the tendering process and working practices on the use of outside consultants to minimise costs and maximise efficiency and value for money?

John Swinney: I thank Margaret Mitchell for the question and for the attention that she brings to the issue, which concerns me significantly. I welcome the Audit Scotland report on the issue,

which highlights a significant utilisation of consultancy advice and services when I am not sure that that is the best way in which to proceed in every circumstance. Long before the Audit Scotland report was published, I asked the permanent secretary to introduce new procedures to add to the scrutiny of decision making that results in the commissioning of consultants. I often feel that it is a bit of a knee-jerk reaction to commission a consultant to undertake work that could readily be undertaken within the Scottish Executive or its agencies. I assure Margaret Mitchell that ministers are interested in the issue. I certainly do not want inappropriate expenditure on consultancy services when the advice and information could be obtained from within the core Scottish Government staff or our agency staff. I receive regular reports on performance on the matter. New authorisation procedures are in place before consultancy initiatives can be approved in the Scottish Government.

M80 (Steps to Haggs Project)

10. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive to what extent the M80 Steps to Haggs project will improve journey times, reliability and safety. (S3O-5698)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): On current traffic predictions, the project will cut journey times as soon as it is opened by up to 15 minutes, which will increase to 20 minutes by 2025. Upgrading to motorway standard will improve safety through the provision of hard shoulders, which provide a refuge for vehicles in the event of incidents, and junctions with flyovers, which will replace those that are currently controlled by traffic signals.

Tom McCabe: The upgrade will undoubtedly be an important addition to the road network, but equally important is the upgrade to the Raith interchange in Lanarkshire, where fatalities have occurred and where business traffic is curtailed daily. Will the Scottish Government consider bringing forward that project to assist the road network in Scotland further?

Stewart Stevenson: I recognise the importance of the issue. We will certainly give consideration to it within the constraints that we have. I am happy to interact with the member further if he wants to talk to me in greater detail.

Local Authorities (Extra Funding)

11. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive which other local authorities are being considered for extra funding of the kind given to the City of Edinburgh Council to reflect its status as capital city. (S3O-5757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The additional funding that is provided to the City of Edinburgh Council as a capital city supplement is in recognition of factors that are unique to Edinburgh as Scotland's capital city. No other local authority is eligible for that type of additional funding.

Nicol Stephen: Does the minister realise how angry people in Aberdeen are at the cuts that are being imposed because of the poor financial settlement from the Government? Does he realise how that anger rises when they see that extra money has been found for local government, but only for Edinburgh? Does he realise that Aberdeen City Council would receive more than £60 million extra per year if it received the national average payment; more than £100 million more if it received the same per head as Dundee City Council; and more than £150 million more if it received the same per head as Glasgow City Council? Does he agree that Aberdeen City Council, in 32nd place in the funding league table, needs and deserves extra funding every bit as much as the City of Edinburgh Council, which is in 31st place? Why can the rules be changed for Edinburgh but not for Aberdeen? Why will he not take action and provide a fair deal for council funding for Aberdeen now?

John Swinney: The issues that Aberdeen City Council is confronting and the impact that they are having on public services and the design of public services are largely a result of the fact that, for a significant number of years, the council has been living beyond its means. The actions that the council has taken to correct that have been honourable and effective; it has made significant progress on the handling of many difficult issues.

I am aware of the long-standing concerns that have existed in Aberdeen about the level of funding that the city receives through the local government financial settlement. That is why I have commissioned a review of that settlement, which will examine such issues. I remind Nicol Stephen that I have put in place specific measures to help the city deal with the historical problems that have built up over many years as a result of the council living beyond its means. I have given the city as much help as I have been able to, and I remain happy to engage in discussion with the council about how we can work together to address some of the difficult issues that it faces.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): In recent months, the cabinet secretary has taken an interest in the financial challenges that face Aberdeen City Council. Does he recognise that many public services in the city attract as many or more users from other council areas as they do from Aberdeen itself? If he will not replicate the

Edinburgh model for cities that are regional centres, how will he ensure in the next two years that the funding of those regional services is not left to Aberdeen City Council alone?

John Swinney: Mr Macdonald raises a number of issues that take us into the fascinating territory of local government organisation in Scotland. Some of those issues are a hangover from the abolition of the regional councils, the existence of which allowed such matters to be handled in the context of a broader financial settlement that covered a larger geographic area. As Mr Macdonald will know, the Government has said that it will not revisit local government reorganisation, but we encourage local authorities to co-operate in the sharing of services when that will bring financial benefits. There are many examples of situations in which Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council could co-operate to ensure that that happens. I encourage that process.

In addition, I point out to Mr Macdonald what I pointed out to Margaret Curran yesterday in relation to Glasgow: the cities growth fund, which we inherited from the previous Administration, has been baselined into the financial settlement of each of the relevant councils and is available to them to utilise for the improvement of the cities concerned.

Economic Growth (South of Scotland)

12. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is promoting economic growth in the South of Scotland. (S30-5747)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Through our spending, our Government economic strategy and our six-point programme of economic recovery, we have put sustainable economic growth at the heart of everything that we do and are focused on raising skills, improving productivity and safeguarding and creating jobs throughout Scotland, including the South of Scotland. Through our current plans to accelerate nearly £260 million in capital expenditure, we will, for example, generate work and support 4,700 jobs, many of which will be in the South of Scotland.

Jim Hume: What action will the cabinet secretary take to help those Stena workers who face redundancy? Stena recently announced that cost cutting would certainly result in voluntary job losses and would probably result in compulsory ones. What help and training will be on offer to those people?

John Swinney: Mr Hume will be aware from my address to Parliament yesterday on the Budget

(Scotland) (No 2) Bill that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has expanded the resources that are available to the pioneering partnership action for continuing employment organisation, which does excellent work in supporting people who face the prospect of losing their jobs by assisting them with redeployment and reskilling.

As I announced yesterday, the Government has, into the bargain, been successful in persuading the European Union to amend the conditions that are associated with our European social fund programme to allow us to provide support to people in employment who face the risk of losing employment through a system of retraining. Those are important reforms. Of course, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism and I will continue to monitor the effectiveness of those services to ensure that they support people through what we all recognise will be an extremely difficult and worrying economic time.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I recognise the announcements about PACE that were made earlier this week, but it is about delivery, too. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will recognise that we have debated in the chamber the issue of job losses in the financial services sector. Has there been any dialogue between the Government and representatives of the financial services sector about what might happen in the future for workers in that sector?

John Swinney: As Mr Park will know, the Financial Services Advisory Board—the excellent forum that was created by our predecessors, which we have continued—gives the Government valuable input on the health and prospects of the financial services sector. As Mr Mather, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, said a few moments ago, the board will meet shortly, when we expect to talk about the current economic circumstances and the issues that the sector faces. Today's interesting survey of opinion about the prospects for financial services employment in Scotland gives some grounds for optimism, but it also raises some of the realistic considerations that Mr Park raised about the health of the sector and employment, which the Government must consider carefully and seriously—I assure Mr Park that we will do so.

Island Air Routes (Service Levels)

13. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it has taken to monitor the changeover from British Airways to Flybe on island air routes to ensure that service levels have been maintained. (S3O-5716)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We have

monitored service levels on a regular basis, including charges and other arrangements such as the air discount scheme, since Loganair's franchise with Flybe started on 26 October 2008.

Alasdair Allan: I am aware that both Loganair and the Government have gone to considerable lengths to maintain the level of service that was provided by the previous operator. Is the minister willing to take up concerns that constituents have expressed to me anecdotally, for example that a return flight from Stornoway to Edinburgh, which cost £85 last year using the discount scheme, might now cost £160?

Stewart Stevenson: I am certainly willing to engage on subjects of that character. I will make a few points that might illuminate the subject. First, for aviation, the cost of fuel has been fluctuating dramatically, which I know has been part of the difficulty. Of course, Flybe has a different economic model from that of British Airways and, in essence, operates on the basis of trying to maximise revenue depending on the loading on its aircraft. The example that the member gives is one of which I take note. I am happy to engage with him further to ensure that we have the right services at the right price for people throughout Loganair's franchise area.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I welcome the minister's response and echo Alasdair Allan's concerns. I encourage the minister to engage with Flybe on the availability, ahead of time, of connecting flights into Scotland, which he will appreciate are incredibly important, not least in allowing tourism businesses to plan ahead and secure business. The evidence in my constituency is that the lack of availability of such flights is seriously hampering businesses in the current difficult economic circumstances.

Stewart Stevenson: I am certainly willing to assist on that subject. Flybe is now the biggest regional airline in these islands and it has significant services throughout Europe. The member might also be referring to interlining to other operators. If there are difficulties with that, I will be happy for Mr McArthur to draw the details to my attention.

The legal position on the route development fund has changed entirely. We are now following a different strategy, but we are continuing to ensure that we develop our air services, particularly for international connections.

Scottish Futures Trust

14. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what meetings the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has had with Glasgow

City Council to discuss the Scottish Futures Trust. (S3O-5697)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I have not met Glasgow City Council to discuss the Scottish Futures Trust but, in the past couple of days, I have received correspondence on the subject from the leader of that council.

Mr McAveety: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response and hope that, following that discussion, we can move forward. The purpose behind my question, which I hope the cabinet secretary will accept, is the desire for a serious capital and borrowing framework to enable councils to invest intelligently in their school estates.

Given the debate that has taken place in the chamber in the past 24 hours, I hope that the cabinet secretary, in his new role as chief conciliator for the Scottish Government, can ensure that we find ways to bring forward a Scottish Futures Trust that allows investment in school estates. The issue is affecting my constituents as we speak, and I hope that it does not become part of the—understandable—parliamentary knockabout that we sometimes engage in, and that we can develop opportunities for a borrowing framework that allows investment in the school estate to match what has happened in the past 10 years in Glasgow.

John Swinney: Mr McAveety knows that my role as chief conciliator did not start recently; it has been a long-standing position in the Scottish National Party, which I have brought to the Government, where there is ever more requirement for it as the days go by.

Mr McAveety raises a fundamental issue. I accept that there is a need for clear mechanisms to deliver capital investment, and a need to proceed with our capital investment programme, which totals in excess of £3.5 billion. As Mr McAveety will know from his local authority experience and his experience as a minister, there are other opportunities available to local authorities through prudential borrowing.

As I know Mr McAveety will accept, all that must take place within a financial framework and set of rules governed by the United Kingdom's financial structures. In light of recent information, particularly about the incorporation of the international financial reporting standards into our accounting models, that will become more challenging. I therefore look forward to discussions with the UK Government, as well as discussions within this Parliament, on taking forward the most effective borrowing structures—heaven knows, I might be able to create some more consensus on that question, as I aim to do in the next fortnight.

Gaelic Language Plan

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3324, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the Gaelic language plan. [*Interruption.*] Could I have order please? Members who are leaving the chamber—please be quiet.

I have agreed to a request by a number of members, under rule 7.1.1, to speak in Scots Gaelic. Members should note that headphones for simultaneous interpretation are available at the back of the chamber.

I remind members that the Presiding Officers are no longer giving a one-minute warning before the end of each speech.

14:57

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Feasgar math. Is e latha cudromach a tha ann airson Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus cùisean Gàidhlig. Tha sinn air a bhith ag obair gu dicheallach airson taic a thoirt dhan Ghàidhlig ann an tòrr dhòighean—ann am foghlam, ealain, craoladh agus barrachd tron bhliadhna. An-diugh, tha sinn a' dol air adhart le plana Gàidhlig Riaghaltas na h-Alba.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good afternoon. This is a very important day for the Scottish Government and for Gaelic matters. We have been working hard to support Gaelic in many ways: in education, in the arts, in broadcasting and more throughout the year. Today, we are taking another step with the Scottish Government's Gaelic plan.

The member continued in English.

I am pleased to announce today that the Scottish Government has published its consultation paper for our draft Gaelic language plan. I am very pleased with it, and I hope that everyone else in the chamber is, too—apart from with the inevitable drafting error, which has now been corrected. I apologise for that.

Gaelic belongs to Scotland and is a unique and essential part of the rich cultural life of Scotland, so we must ensure that we take the necessary steps to secure its place in the future. The Scottish Government has made its position very clear: we came to Government with a strong programme of ambitious Gaelic commitments, on which we are making good and steady progress. My hope is that those commitments and initiatives, and the increased funding that we are putting in place, will improve the status and appeal of the language. I hope that they will also lead to an increase in use of Gaelic in the home, at school, in the community,

at the workplace, in the arts and in public life generally.

Along with five others, the Scottish Government was one of the initial public bodies to receive a notice to produce a Gaelic language plan by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Scottish Government's Gaelic language plan sets out the measures to be taken in relation to use of Gaelic within Government. It will set out how the Scottish Government will use, and enable use of, Gaelic in delivery of its services.

The Scottish Government's Gaelic language plan will include commitments in relation to our corporate identity, our communications, our publications and our staffing. It will outline measures that we have put in place to support the promotion of Gaelic throughout Scotland, which are aimed at raising the status of Gaelic, promoting the use of Gaelic and encouraging learning of Gaelic.

With our Gaelic plan, the Scottish Government will seek to raise awareness about, and to improve the status of Gaelic. I am pleased to announce that we hope to recruit a new Gaelic language plan development officer, who will have responsibility for implementing the plan and monitoring progress.

I have been impressed with agencies such as Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Library of Scotland, which have begun work on their Gaelic language plans without having received formal notification. I encourage other bodies to do the same. Of course, other Scottish public authorities—Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Parliament—have prepared Gaelic language plans and are moving forward with their implementation. Other bodies, including Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, Glasgow City Council and City of Edinburgh Council, are following suit. I congratulate all those bodies for their efforts. I am confident that Gaelic plans have improved the status and have increased awareness and use of Gaelic throughout Scotland. There will be further progress as more plans are prepared and finalised.

There continues to be a need for expansion in Gaelic-medium education, which is vital to support growth in the number of Gaelic speakers. There has been good progress on Gaelic-medium education and important commitments have been made in Gaelic plans. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Gaelic plan contains a commitment to provide Gaelic-medium education as mainstream primary provision. Highland Council's Gaelic plan contains

a commitment to open a further two dedicated Gaelic schools—it has decided to move forward on the issue in Portree and Fort William. Discussions are also on-going about the possibility of a dedicated Gaelic school in Edinburgh. I take this opportunity to support the proposal and to remind councils of the Scottish Government's support for the establishment of dedicated Gaelic schools. The developments that I have described are good and welcome, and we need to maintain momentum.

The Scottish Government has very much demonstrated its clear support for Gaelic education. We have increased our support for Gaelic-medium education throughout Scotland, and the Government's funding for resources to support teachers and pupils in Gaelic education is at an unprecedented level. A major review of Gaelic early years education was commissioned earlier this month. There can be no question about our commitment to Gaelic education in Scotland. The amendment in Pauline McNeill's name acknowledges the need for

“continued investment in and expansion of Gaelic-medium education.”

That expansion is continuing and should continue in the future.

The presence of Gaelic in our lives enriches us all, so it is essential that there be a living language community to support Gaelic. We must therefore give thought to how we will strengthen and grow that community. The language is in a fragile condition and I believe that we are at a critical point for Gaelic in Scotland. I am encouraged by the desire to support Gaelic that I find in Scottish public life, not least in the Parliament, where the issue enjoys cross-party support. I am encouraged, too, by the commitment and vitality of Gaelic speakers, learners and supporters.

Efforts to keep the language fresh and current can be illustrated by recent developments, including the online Gaelic natural history database, “Faclan Nàdair”, which was launched today by Scottish Natural Heritage. Such developments are encouraging. We welcome the success of MG Alba and we are all working together to ensure that the BBC Alba channel can be seen on Freeview, to the benefit of everyone in the country. There are encouraging signs in the Gaelic education sector, in the ambitious work of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and in the development by Bòrd na Gàidhlig of public authority Gaelic plans. Our duty is to maintain that progress, to use the initiatives that have been put in place and to work to ensure a secure future for Gaelic so that the language has its rightful place in Scotland.

I am aware that I have more time for speaking, but I will not use it because it is important that

other members can contribute fully to the debate. I hope to be able to respond to what they say. I look forward very much to receiving responses from members and others—individuals, organisations and public and private bodies right across the country—about the contents of our plan. We are here to listen to what people say.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that Gaelic is an integral part of Scotland's heritage, national identity and current cultural life; welcomes and supports the launch of the consultation on the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic Language Plan, and acknowledges the work being carried out on the implementation of other Gaelic language plans by Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Edinburgh City Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland Council, the Scottish Parliament and Highland and Islands Enterprise.

15:05

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I congratulate the minister on her Gaelic introduction. I will save my effort for my summing up, to give me a chance to practise. It sounds like the minister has been practising much longer than I have, so well done.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 was instrumental in boosting the campaign to preserve, protect and promote the Gaelic language. Devolution itself has the greatest potential to halt the decline of the language, not only because Parliament has the powers to boost our commitment to the language, but because it creates, as we have seen, a regular forum for MSPs to discuss and monitor the progress of Gaelic development and to practise occasionally their own Gaelic. We have the right to conduct parliamentary proceedings in Gaelic. We can lodge motions or parliamentary questions in Gaelic, or speak the language that is some members' first language, which all adds to the improved status and exposure of Gaelic.

The previous Labour-Liberal Administration was committed to creating a statutory provision to promote Gaelic and so it introduced the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. Members will recall that it had cross-party support. In opposition now, we are pleased to support the present Government in continuing that work. The challenge for the Government is in how to use the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 ambitiously so that it can be as effective as possible.

We all know that Gaelic is in decline. It has skipped generations in some families and there is a battle to maintain the language and, indeed, to reverse the decline. It is not simply that we think that every Scot should speak Gaelic; rather, our objectives are that we do not lose Gaelic as part of the heritage of Scots, that communities who speak

Gaelic as their first language can continue to pass it on with confidence, and that every Scot has the opportunity to be exposed to and to learn the language. The strategy must first be about preventing its decline, and I believe that that is the biggest challenge.

As we have discussed previously, the greatest concentration of Gaelic speakers is in the greater Glasgow area, which is not always people's first thought. We know from the 2001 census that there has been progress because the overall numbers who can read, write and speak Gaelic have increased. I hope that the 2011 census will show evidence of further progress. Two and a half thousand primary and secondary schoolchildren are taught in Gaelic-medium education and we have 700 children in Gaelic-medium nurseries.

It is important to discuss how to reverse the decline in the language and how to promote the idea that there should be more Gaelic speakers, and identifying how we can achieve such growth will be central. The Gaelic language plans that public bodies are expected to produce and consult on are an important starting point for the growth strategy.

The Glasgow Gaelic school in my constituency, which I spoke about in a members' business debate not so long ago, has already made a significant contribution to sustaining the language. The minister talked about the possible establishment of a Gaelic-medium education school in Edinburgh, so we can see that the trend in favour of such education is increasing.

Providing Gaelic-medium education is, however, a challenge for local authorities, particularly its expansion in secondary education. The establishment of the Glasgow Gaelic school is in no small measure due to the work as a minister of Peter Peacock, who will speak later in the debate, and to that of the education authority, which had the will to create the Glasgow school. It could have chosen not to put resources into it, but I am glad that it did.

Provision of resources for the school is a challenge for the authority, but I am happy to say that the school is teaching in Gaelic secondary education maths, history, geography, religious education, French, biology and physics. However, it has not been possible to get Gaelic-medium teachers for other subjects, so that remains a challenge.

I have always been adamant in my view about the school, because it is in Anderston in my constituency—although not many local children go to it. I am, however, promoting the school as an option for local children, because they would benefit from going there. We know that such learning makes children more likely to speak other

languages. That is positive and I am proud of that development.

I will address the Government's plan. The principle of equal respect for Gaelic and English does not mean identical treatment. We have the right principle, which is to support Gaelic development to the greatest extent that is appropriate in each public body. That is why the Government's plan considers whether using Gaelic signage or Gaelic in other forms is appropriate to different aspects of Government departments and Government life.

We must explore other ways of communicating in Gaelic to fit with our objective. We must explore other means of communication in schools and colleges and expanding that on the internet, television and radio. Members might have read in the *Sunday Herald* that an online Gaelic dictionary has been developed. A colossal three volumes have been uploaded, which has taken more than 10 years. Can you imagine that? That is a real achievement for Bauer and Robertson, who also plan to make the dictionary a resource on Wikipedia. That is important because teaching Gaelic in schools will not be enough; we must find other ways to normalise the Gaelic language. The minister e-mailed me about the social networking site *mygaelic.com*, which shows that Gaelic can be normalised. The opportunity also exists for Gaelic speakers to participate in Facebook in Gaelic.

The Labour amendment supports the Government's position and adds our support for BBC Alba and for expanding the provision of Gaelic-medium education, which we have discussed. BBC Alba can significantly normalise Gaelic, because it broadcasts for at least part of each day. It means that Gaelic speakers can access good programmes. Non-Gaelic speakers are also beginning to tune into the channel, because it chooses to broadcast programmes that many people want to see. Good on it for broadcasting women's football and the traditional music awards. BBC Alba is an exciting venture that should be supported. As the minister said, the sooner the service is available on Freeview, the better. Some Gaelic speakers who do not have access to BBC Alba would be able to access it if it were on Freeview, so we support that campaign.

A key objective of the Government's plan is to create the conditions for use of Gaelic in public life and to examine ways of doing that. The policy is not to achieve bilingualism, but to apply the objective practically. I talked about Gaelic signage—the Government's plan talks about Government departments in which using Gaelic signage would be appropriate. The availability of Gaelic-speaking staff in Government departments when appropriate will be an important

development. Having a prescribed list of organisations that prefer in the first instance to communicate in Gaelic is good. The plan also suggests having a Gaelic option on the Government's automated switchboard. We support all those practical measures in the Government's plan, which can be done and which would normalise the language.

Labour believes that it is important to promote and preserve Gaelic in Scottish life. I do not speak Gaelic but, as a significant number of Gaels live in Glasgow and in Glasgow Kelvin, I am proud to be associated with the campaign to keep Gaelic as a part of Scottish life, culture and heritage. If the Government is ambitious and uses the 2005 act to achieve that objective, we can halt the decline in the language and make it an everyday way for Gaelic speakers to communicate, not just in schools, but around the country in everything that is done.

I will support the Government's motion. I move amendment S3M-3324.1, to insert at end:

“; further welcomes the boost to the language provided by the establishment of BBC Alba, and calls for continued investment in and expansion of Gaelic-medium education.”

15:15

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Feasgar math agus mòran taing. Tha mi glè thoilichte a bhith a' bruidhinn air Gàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good afternoon and thank you. I am very happy to be here talking about Gaelic.

The member continued in English.

I will limit my Gaelic introduction to those few words—a hurtful friend from Berneray asked me whether I was trying to speak Japanese in Alasdair Allan's recent members' business debate.

Despite limited personal progress in *canan nan Gaidheal*—the tongue of the Gael—the general revival of the language and culture is impressive, but there is still much snobbishness around. I recall the story of a *Sassenach* who rubbished Gaelic in a bar in Portree: “And why is there no Gaelic word for television?” he demanded, “or photograph, or helicopter?” The bartender confessed, “You're right. We Gaels use the Greek words—just like you do in English.”

Of course, Gaelic is one of the oldest languages in Europe and, like English, it happily borrows words from other languages when they convey modern concepts succinctly, but that does not mean that the language is in any way inferior or less worthy of support. I would argue similarly in support of the Scottish tongue, which Robert Burns called a dialect and which the minister

prefers to call a language—but let us not argue about nomenclature.

I also welcome the opportunity to commend the Government for its commitment to expand provision of the richly diverse mode of communication that is Scots. Any society is poorer and its culture diminished when it loses any of its traditional means of expression: that applies as much to Scots as it does to Gaelic.

Scottish Conservatives have nothing to apologise for in our commitment to Gaelic language and culture. The then Tory Secretary of State for Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind, provided back in 1990 £8 million annually to set up the Gaelic television fund. That sum has now matured into the £12.4 million that the Scottish Government contributes to BBC Alba. The new Gaelic channel has been extremely successful in its first few months and has regularly attracted more than 600,000 viewers. We remain convinced that the best way to maintain and strengthen Gaelic is through the twin pillars of education and broadcasting.

We note that a number of public authorities are preparing or implementing Gaelic language plans, that four of those have received formal approval from Bòrd na Gàidhlig—the official body for promoting the language—and that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament are among those that are currently implementing Gaelic language plans. We welcome the Government's own draft plan and are happy to take part in the consultation.

However, although we support the promotion of Gaelic where appropriate—that includes all the bodies that are preparing Gaelic language plans—we believe that it would not be sensible to force Gaelic on to reluctant communities. That is all the more important during the current economic downturn. There is much good will towards Gaelic: as we have heard, there has been a vast increase in the number of pupils who access Gaelic-medium primary education, not least in the central belt, and we recognise Glasgow's huge Gaelic population. We would not like to see that good will dissipated by spending commitments in communities that have no immediate connections to, or sympathy with, the culture.

We should remember that many schools throughout Scotland, including some that are within minutes of Parliament, are in a shocking state of disrepair, with councils claiming that they do not have the funds to bring them up to basic standards. Any spending on what may be perceived as non-essential initiatives outwith the bodies that are already committed to Gaelic language plans could work against the successful future that we rightly seek for the language and culture.

Although we generally welcome the Scottish Government's proposals, ministers should recall that there is no native Gaelic speaker who does not also understand English. Of course, we want the language to flourish and to be given the same respect as English, and it is desirable that certain front-of-house staff in Government reception areas are conversant in Gaelic. Let the Government, by all means, try to recruit more Gaelic-speaking staff where Gaelic is an add-on to other required qualifications, but it must avoid provoking any kind of resentment from the non-Gaelic or cosmopolitan community. For example, we are less convinced that fluent Gaelic speakers should be available on tap, as seems to be suggested in the draft Gaelic language plan, to answer public queries in Government offices. My advice to the minister in this context is—in the Scottish idiom—to ca canny.

Creative Scotland should be encouraged to build on the excellent Gaelic work that has been done over the years by the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen.

Visit Scotland also has a key role in promoting tourism through the language and culture of the Gael. Few will object to official brochures, press releases and the like being printed in Gaelic as well as English and we should, of course, let the Government work towards a bilingual corporate logo. Gaelic deserves an increased profile in Scottish public life after centuries of discrimination. However, let us be sensible and realistic in our aims and objectives.

Finally, I would like to say another word about BBC Alba. I have watched many hours of its programming, including—I must declare an interest here—a little documentary of my own, which went out on hogmanay, about the sinking of the troop-ship *Iolaire* off Stornoway in 1919. I think that the new channel does a great job, including the promotion of Gaelic song and music. However, as a matter of urgency—as the minister herself has said—the BBC trust must allow the channel to compete on equal terms with other mainstream television providers and must not be limited only to those who have satellite dishes. BBC Alba can play a key role in introducing non-Gaels to the language, which will be a vital part of the continuing revival.

This point is not for lengthy reiteration this afternoon, but I remain convinced that, further down the road, a key ingredient in turning the language round will be immersion education in the Gaelic heartlands. Such strategies have been shown to work in Ireland and Wales, and I am sure that they would work in the Gàidhealtachd as well. That argument is for another day.

I welcome the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic plan, with the provisos that I have outlined.

We shall be supporting the motion and Pauline McNeill's amendment this afternoon.

15:21

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): Tha mi toilichte agus pròiseil gu bheil deasbad againn an-diugh ann an Gàidhlig. Tha mi pròiseil dha-rìribh gun do thòisich am ministear a' chiad phàirt dhen òraid aice ann an Gàidhlig—ceum mòr air adhart. Mòran taing, a mhinistear.

Aig toiseach ghnòthaichean, feumaidh mi ràdh gu bheil mi an comain an Riaghaltas airson lethbhreac den chomhairleachadh a thoirt dhomh ro-làimh. Tha mi toilichte gu bheil e air fhoillseachadh. Tha e follaiseach gu bheil an Riaghaltas air an rathad cheart a thaobh a bhith a' daingneachadh a' chànan—a tha fhathast ann an suidheachadh gu math cugallach—mar phàirt de dhualchas na h-Alba air fad. Tha e a dhìth gun tèid a' Ghàidhlig a neartachadh agus a dhaingneachadh ann an Alba. Nuair a thèid am plana nàiseanta a chur ri chèile, feumaidh nach bithear a' gabhail ghnòthaich ris a' chànan dìreach ann an siud is ann an seo.

Tha e deatamach gum bithear ag aithneachadh nach eil a' Ghàidhlig na cànan a bhuineas dìreach dhan Ghàidhealtachd fhèin—dh'fhairich sinn dhà no trì a thog an aon bheachd nas tràithe anns an deasbad an-diugh. Tha an dàrna cuid de luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig a' fuireach ann an àiteachan eile, leithid na bailtean mòra mar Dhùn Èideann is Glaschu, no ann an teis-mheadhan na h-Alba.

Tha an dreachd phlana Gàidhlig na sgrìobhainn a tha gu follaiseach coileanta—mar a bhios am plana fhèin, tha mi an dùil, nuair a thèid fhoillseachadh agus a chur an gnìomh—ach tha e cudromach ciamar a thèid am plana a chur an sàs anns na h-àiteachan ionadail. Is e an clàr-obrach nàiseanta an t-àite as cudromaiche gus a' Ghàidhlig a thoirt seachad. Ma thèid a' Ghàidhlig a stèidheachadh ann am foghlam, faodar a sgaoileadh ann an àiteachan eile an dèidh sin—tha sin follaiseach gu leòr—mar a tha a' tachairt mar-thà.

Mar sin dheth, tha mi a' cur fàilte air amas Riaghaltas na h-Alba ri bhith a' cur ri ìre luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig ann an Alba. Bu mhath leam tarraing a thoirt air dòigh no dhà anns am faod sin a thoirt gu buil. Ann am foghlam Gàidhlig, tha mi den bheachd gu bheil e gu math cudromach gun tèid barrachd cuideam a chur air comas labhairt anns a' chànan. Is dòcha gu bheil sin a cheart cho buntainneach ri bhith a' teagasg cànan sam bith eile anns an Rìoghachd Aonaichte. Dh'fhaodar a ràdh gu bheil cus cuideam an-diugh ga chur air gràmar is litreachadh agus nach eil gu leòr air a chur air labhairt sa chànan.

Anns na sgoiltean, ma tha sinn ag iarraidh faicinn ann an dòigh dha-rìribh gun soirbhich leinn le teagasg na Gàidhlig, feumaidh sinn a bhith ga cur an coimeas ri cho math 's a tha a' dol leinn le cànanan eile, leithid Fraingis. A thaobh teagasg cànan, tha mise den bheachd gur e an t-ionnsachadh òg an t-ionnsachadh a tha buan agus bòidheach—is coma cò an cànan a tha ann. Bu mhath leam an t-adhartas a thathar air a dhèanamh le teagasg na Gàidhlig a chur an coimeas ris an adhartas ann an cànanan eile leithid clàr MLPS—tha sin a' ciallachadh “modern languages in primary schools” ann am Beurla. An coimeas ri sin, chan eil GLPS—ann am Beurla, “Gaelic language in primary schools”—ri fhaotainn fhathast ann an gu leòr de sgoiltean, fiu 's air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Ach thig sin, tha mi an dòchas.

Ann a bhith a' feuchainn ri an cànan a ghleidheadh airson nan ginealach ri thighinn, bu mhath leam gum biodh ullachaidhean sa phlana gus an teagasg a leudachadh anns na h-àrd-sgoiltean agus ann am foghlam adhartach. Bidh na tha an dàn don Ghàidhlig a' crochadh air na h-àireamhan de luchd-teagaisg na Gàidhlig a bhios rim faotainn. Ged a chaidh an àireamh am meud ann an teis-mheadhan nan 1990an—bho àm fèin-riaghlaidh—tha àireamhan an luchd-teagaisg air a bhith aig an aon ìre. Sin rud a tha dìreach na bhriseadh-dùil. Gus sin a dhèanamh, saoilidh mi gum feum ullachaidhean a bhith sa phlana gum bi riarachadh a bharrachd de chùrsaichean-bogaidh a dh'fhaodas a' Ghàidhlig ionnsachadh do luchd-teagaisg. Tha na h-ullachaidhean a tha ann an-dràsta an crochadh tuilleadh 's a chòrr air luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig a bhith ag iarraidh teagasg. Tha Riaghaltas na h-Alba ag amas air sgoiltean Gàidhlig fa leth a stèidheachadh gus àrainneachd foghlaim Gàidhlig a chruthachadh. Bidh soirbheas a' phlana seo a' crochadh air àireamhan de luchd-teagaisg le Gàidhlig a tha rim faotainn.

Seach gum bi mi a' dèanamh aithris às leth a' phàrtaidh agam fhìn, cumaidh mi orm feasgar. Tha mi den bheachd gu bheil an dreachd a chaidh a chur nur làthair na oidhirp dha-rìribh le Riaghaltas na h-Alba gus prògram Gàidhlig a chur an gnìomh airson na h-Alba. Mòran taing.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am very happy to be taking part in this debate on Gaelic, and I am very proud of the minister, who gave the first part of her speech in Gaelic. That is a big step forward. Many thanks, minister.

First, I would like to thank the Government for giving me an advance copy of the consultation. I welcome its publication. It is clear that the Government is going in the right direction when it comes to securing the future of the language as part of Scotland's national heritage. The Gaelic language is still very fragile and must be strengthened and become embedded. When a

national plan is developed, the language must not just be tacked on as an afterthought.

As was said earlier, it is vital to acknowledge that Gaelic belongs not only to the Highlands. Half of all Gaelic speakers live in the central belt and in cities such as Edinburgh or Glasgow.

Clearly, the draft Gaelic language plan is comprehensive. When the plan is published and enacted, the most important thing will be how it is then delivered. The most important way of delivering the plan will be through the national curriculum. If Gaelic is established through the education system, it can then be sown through the rest of society. As is obvious, that is happening already.

I welcome the Scottish Government's aims to promote a growing number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, and I would like to suggest a few ways in which that might be achieved. In Gaelic education, it will be important to put greater emphasis on the ability to speak the language. That is a basic point that would apply to the teaching of any other language. Too much emphasis can be put on grammar and writing, and not enough on the spoken word.

If we really want to see how we are doing in the teaching of Gaelic, we must remember how well we are doing with other languages, such as French. I believe that the teaching of languages at a young age is the way forward, and can greatly benefit a child's education. I would therefore like Gaelic language provision to be equal to any other language provision. For example, the modern languages in primary schools programme should be compared with its Gaelic equivalent, which still only has limited availability, even in the Highlands. I hope that the situation will improve. In order to secure the language for future generations, I would like the plan to include provisions for the expansion of tuition in secondary and further education.

The long-term future of Gaelic will be underpinned by the availability of Gaelic teachers. Although numbers of Gaelic teachers grew in the 1990s, they have remained at the same level since devolution. In order to ensure that we have more Gaelic teachers, the plan must include provision for more immersion courses that will teach Gaelic to teachers. Current arrangements rely heavily on Gaelic speakers wanting to teach. The Scottish Government is aiming to establish dedicated Gaelic schools. The success of that plan will depend on the number of Gaelic-speaking teachers in the education system.

I will listen to what is said in this afternoon's debate, but I believe that the draft plan represents a serious effort by the Scottish Government to implement a Gaelic programme for Scotland.

15:27

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Tha mi a' toirt fàilte chridheil gu òraid a' mhinisteir, gu plana Gàidhlig an Riaghaltas agus dhan chonaltradh a tha a' fosgladh an-diugh. Tha mi an dòchas gum bi a h-uile duine ann aig a' chèilidh bhig air a' chuspair sin ann an seòmar comataidh 3 aig 6 uairean.

Annas a' chiad dol a-mach, agus ann an dòigh neònach, tha e a' toirt misneachd dhòmhsa gu bheil an Riaghaltas ag aithneachadh anns a' phlana cànan gu bheil suidheachadh na Gàidhlig air leth lag, mar a thuirtear le Fearchar Rothach. Carson a bhithinn toilichte sin a chluinntinn? Uill, a chionn 's gu bheil e fìor agus a chionn 's gu bheil mi toilichte gu bheil am plana a' dèiligeadh ri cùisean mar a tha iad. Mar eisimpleir, chan eil àite sam bith anns an t-saoghal a tha nas Gàidhealaiche na na Hearradh. Tha beul-aithris priseil aig an àite. Tha Gàidhlig làidir anns a' choimhearsnachd fhathast. Tha dealbh eadardhealaichte air fad ann, ge-tà, nuair a bheir sinn sùil air an t-suidheachadh am measg nan daoine òga. Ged a tha tòrr dhaoine ag obair gu math cruaidh airson na Gàidhlig anns an sgìre, seo na figearan: tha 117 sgoilearan anns na bun-sgoiltean anns na Hearradh. Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil 15 no 16 dhiubh a' dol dhan sgoil tro mheadhan na Ghàidhlig.

Tha mi toilichte gu bheil an Riaghaltas ag aithneachadh dè cho cugallach 's a tha cor a' chànan. Bhiodh eagal mòr orm nan robh am plana a' tòiseachadh le sgeul gun robh a h-uile rud gu math agus gu dòigheil ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig. Ciamar a bhios sinn a' tionndadh air ais tancair-ola na Gàidhlig bho na creagan? Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil an Riaghaltas a' dèanamh dà rud glè chudromach an-diugh airson na Gàidhlig. Airson aon rud, tha am plana cànan a' togail suas inbhe na Gàidhlig taobh a-staigh an Riaghaltas fhèin. Nas cudromaiche, ge-tà, tha e a' toirt taic dhan Ghàidhlig taobh a-muigh togalaichean na seirbheis catharra.

Tha e math a chluinntinn gum bi spèis agus inbhe nas àirde aig a' Ghàidhlig anns an Riaghaltas ann an dòigh ìomhaigheil agus barrachd air ìomhaigheil. Tha e cudromach gum bi an Riaghaltas ag ràdh gum bi e a' meudachadh àireamh de dh'fhoillseachaidhean a tha rim factainn sa Ghàidhlig. Tha e soilleir gum bi a' Ghàidhlig aig chridhe "dearbhaithne chorporra" an Riaghaltas agus anns a h-uile template eileagtronaigeach a tha an Riaghaltas a' cleachdadh. Bidh a' Ghàidhlig na phàirt àbhaisteach ann an obair an Riaghaltas, nuair a bhios ministearan a' toirt freagairt gu puist-dealain a tha a' tighinn a-steach anns a' chànan no ann am fiosan naidheachd. Carson a tha an stuth sin cudromach? Uill, na aonar, chan eil e cudromach,

ach tha mi a' smaoinneachadh gu bheil e riatanach. Am measg adhbharan eile, tha cuid de dhaoine òga a' cur an cùlaibh ris a' Ghàidhlig a chionn 's gu bheil iad a' creidsinn nach eil ùidh sam bith aig Alba mar dhùthaich anns a' Ghàidhlig. Mar a bha am ministear ag ràdh, tha BBC Alba ag atharrachadh nam beachdan sin agus tha an t-atharrachadh dhan mholadh ag aithneachadh sin cuideachd. Tha e cudromach gu bheil an Riaghaltas ag aithneachadh an aon rud anns an dòigh obrach a tha aige.

A' tionndadh dhan dàrna pàirt den phlana, tha an Riaghaltas a' toirt taic làidir dhan Ghàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd fhèin, le bhith: a' meudachadh air cleachdadh na Gàidhlig anns an dachaigh; a' meudachadh air na tha ri fhaotainn de dh'fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig; a' meudachadh cleachdadh a' chànan anns a' choimhearsnachd. Mar eisimpleir, tha an Riaghaltas a' cumail siostam thabartasan sònraichte gu foghlam Gàidhlig agus a' toirt airgead a-steach gus aonadan Gàidhlig agus sgoiltean Gàidhlig ùra a leasachadh. Tha barrachd airgid ann airson Bòrd na Gàidhlig airson nam prìomh phròiseactan aige, ma gheibh—thathar a' tuigsinn—buidseat an Riaghaltais taic anns a' Phàrlamaid mu dheireadh thall. Tha e inntinneach cuideachd gum bi an Riaghaltas a' cur stiùireadh a-mach don roinn phoblaich mun dleastanas a tha oirre fo Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005. Tha e na dheagh chomharradh gum bi a' Ghàidhlig air a "mhainstreamadh" ann am poileasaidh an Riaghaltais. Tha taic aig an Riaghaltas airson na Gàidhlig gun teagamh sam bith, agus bha e furasta fhaicinn aig deasbad nam ball a bha agam o chionn goirid gu bheil an aon sheòrsa taic am measg nam pàrtaidhean air fad.

Ann an dòigh, ge tà, tha an Riaghaltas dìreach a' tòiseachadh leis a' phàirt as inntinniche den deasbad seo, a thachras anns a' chonaltradh às dèidh an-diugh. Tha mi cinnteach gum bi an conaltradh a' togail nan ceistean cudromach. Ciamar a bhios sinn a' meudachadh an àireamh de sgoilearan a tha a' dol tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig? Dè seòrsa co-obrachadh a bu chòir a bhith ann eadar an Riaghaltas, Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus comhairlean? Dè na targaidean a tha againn airson àireamh nan Gàidheal aig cunntas-sluaigh ann an 2011 no 2021?

Tha mi an dòchas gum bi saoghal na Gàidhlig air fad a' gabhail pàirt anns a' chonaltradh—bidh mise co-dhiù. Tha mi toilichte fàilte a chur air a' phlana a tha romhainn an-diugh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I give a warm welcome to the minister's speech on the Gaelic plan and the consultation that starts today. I hope that everyone will take part in the associated event in committee room 3 at 7 o'clock.

In a strange way, it gives me confidence that the Government recognises that Gaelic is in a very weak state, as John Farquhar Munro said. Why would I be happy about that? Because we have a plan that deals with things as they are. For instance, there is no place in the world that is more Gaelic than Harris—there is wonderful folklore and Gaelic is still strong in the community—but an examination of the situation among the young people in the area paints a different picture. Although a lot of people are working hard to support the language among young people, only 15 or 16 of the 117 primary school pupils in Harris are going through Gaelic-medium education.

I am happy that the Government recognises how uncertain the state of the language is, and I would have been afraid if the plan had begun with an announcement of the good news that everything was going well in the Gaelic world. How are we going to turn the Gaelic oil tanker away from the rocks? I believe that the Government is doing two very important things today: first, the plan raises the status of Gaelic within the Government; secondly, and more important, it gives support to Gaelic outside the civil service buildings.

It is good to hear that there will be respect and higher status for Gaelic in the Government, and it is interesting that the Government says that it will increase the number of things done in Gaelic—it is obvious that Gaelic will be at the heart of the Government's corporate identity. Gaelic will play a huge part in the work of the Government, such as when ministers are answering e-mails and issuing press releases in Gaelic. On its own, that is not important, but it is necessary because, among other reasons, some of our young people are turning their back on the language because they believe that Scotland as a nation has no interest in Gaelic. BBC Alba is changing those opinions, as the minister said, and the practical recommendations in the plan will support that change. It is obvious that the Government has identified that issue.

I turn to the second part of the plan. The Government will give strong support to Gaelic in the community by increasing its use in the home, the amount that is received in education, and the amount that is spoken in the community. The plan says, for instance, that the Government will maintain the specific grants system to provide funding for Gaelic units and build new schools—if, that is, the Government's budget receives support at long last. The Government will send out a signal that Gaelic will be mainstreamed in Government policy. There is no doubt that the Government supports Gaelic, and it was evident from my members' debate that there was the same support among all the parties.

In a way, however, the Government is just beginning, and the most interesting part of the debate will come after today in the form of the consultation. I am sure that it will raise important questions—for example, on how we will increase the number of school pupils who are learning through the medium of Gaelic; the collaboration and co-operation that there ought to be among the Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and councils; and our targets for the number of Gaelic speakers in the 2011 and 2021 censuses.

I hope that the whole of the Gaelic world will take part in the consultation. I will do so, and I am happy to welcome the plan that is before us today.

15:33

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am happy to contribute to the debate. I have the honour of contributing a very small footnote to the history of this young Parliament—indeed, to the history of the Scottish Parliament in general—as I was the first person to speak in a debate in the Scottish Parliament in the proud language of my forebears. It is a language that played a critical part in the soundtrack of my childhood in Glasgow and Tìree.

In my maiden speech in 1999, I made the point that I spoke haltingly in Gaelic—and I speak it even less well now—because of attitudes to Gaelic in the Scotland that I grew up in. Active decisions were taken to minimise the use of Gaelic and to make no real provision for Gaelic education for the island and Highland diaspora in our cities. There were many like me who lost the language that they listened to and lived with every day, and there were people such as my grandmother, who through politeness and good manners often spoke in not her first but her second language, believing somehow that she needed to be the person who reached out in order to engage with other people.

During my childhood in Glasgow, the only provision for children like me was to go to interminable Gaelic classes, at which we learned exactly where Mary was—in front of the house, to the side of the house, or on the other side of the house—but which bore no relation to, or gave me any capacity to speak to my family in, the language in which they spoke to one another all the time.

I am glad that there seems to be a consensus on the need to address the question of Gaelic. Things were not always this way, and we should remember that. There was hostility, discrimination and lack of understanding that led to people losing the language that their forebears had treasured. While recognising the progress that has been made, we must recognise those problems, and we

need to learn from the journey rather than presume that victory has been won.

I commend those who continue to put pressure on Government at every level in the fight to sustain their language. They have been innovative and creative in how they have tried to take the language forward. They have demanded that the needs of Gaelic-speaking communities be met both in the Highlands and in the cities. They have understood the power of harnessing Gaelic and its culture to address modern culture by giving the language a modern face in music, song and the arts. That has not just provided a renaissance in traditional Gaelic culture but enriched that culture and, indeed, all our cultures. That shows the diversity of cultures that have shaped modern Scotland.

On Ted Brocklebank's point, I think that Gaelic has a richness that Scotland can present to the world. It provides an economic interest for the tourism industry, which is helped by the fact that we have that diversity. As the very proud auntie of a nephew who is the Gaelic voice of Charlie in the children's television programme "Charlie and Lola", I know that Gaelic can exist in many places beyond the traditional ceilidh.

We must listen to those who understand the connection between the need to sustain Gaelic and the need to will the means for that to happen. There is a critical connection between the survival of Gaelic and support for Gaelic-medium education, and at the core of my speech is the recognition that Gaelic's fragility is not accidental and that making it secure cannot be accidental either. That presents a real challenge to every level of Government about how to act.

This is not a time to be feeble. I welcome the draft language plan, but I caution the minister not to listen to the quiet impossibilists who sometimes give advice to ministers. What we need is not assertion or appearance but some guarantees. The phenomenal progress in Gaelic-medium education and the consequential optimism for the language was due to active political decisions by the previous Administration, which are now being built on, and the courage of local authorities such as Glasgow City Council, which now has a Gaelic-medium nursery school, primary school and secondary school. In particular, we should recognise that the introduction of free nursery places accelerated the development of Gaelic by offering a critical place for Gaelic-medium education that has reached out not only to families in which Gaelic had been lost but, in a wonderful way, to families that had no prior connection with the language.

The minister will acknowledge the pressures that are on local government and the anxieties among equality groups generally about the vulnerability of

soft budgets during a time of pressures. It is understandable that there is an anxiety about culture budgets, education budgets and other budgets that have supported the development of Gaelic, and I urge the minister to recognise the vulnerability of traditional Gaelic culture and how young people are reshaping it. Support is required at every level.

In my final minute, I want to make one or two points about BBC Alba. We celebrate the channel's early success, and we recognise its critical role and its potential in sustaining the language. I commend Alasdair Allan—I am not one who is often gracious in the chamber—for becoming an accomplished Gaelic speaker from a starting point of zero.

The minister is a gracious person, but I regret her ungracious remarks about the public appointment of Alasdair Morrison as chair of MG Alba. Whatever her views on his politics, I am sure that she recognises his intelligence, energy and abiding passion for his native tongue. I hope that she will assure us today that the Scottish Government will do everything that it can to support BBC Alba, given its potential to normalise Gaelic in our communities.

The minister must recognise that the evident awareness of Scottishness that Gaelic presents is as much about celebrating the differences in our culture as recognising the commonality of some of our traits and characteristics. This is an opportunity to reaffirm the important role of Gaelic in celebrating what everyone brings to the table and what makes us different and distinct—that is critical to our capacity to celebrate all of Scotland's cultures.

I commend the minister for the consultation on the draft language plan, and I look forward to her continuing energy in supporting this precious language.

15:40

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): Like all other members in this debate, I warmly welcome the motion and the amendment. It is essential that we recognise the importance of the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland today. However, unlike all the other members who have spoken so far, I am not going to attempt to speak any Gaelic. Despite my passion for Scotland's Munros, I have never mastered Gaelic and it would be purgatorial for members to have to listen to my attempts to speak it.

I come from a party that, as Ted Brocklebank rightly said, has given considerable support to Gaelic in the past. The Scottish Conservatives have always understood that Gaelic is an essential part of our heritage and, indeed, our social fabric.

If nothing else, it is important to reassure the 58,000 or so people who speak Gaelic that they have the Parliament's full support. That number is very close to the figure of 50,000, which is regarded as the minimum number of speakers who are needed to sustain a language. In the light of the decline that took place in the 1990s, they need that reassurance for the reasons that Johann Lamont set out in her thought-provoking speech.

It is also important to congratulate all those who have been involved in preparing the draft Scottish Government Gaelic language plan consultation paper—that is as difficult for me to pronounce as the Gaelic—which has been launched today. The plan will join others from various public bodies to ensure that the recommendations of the national plan for Gaelic are met. It is good that the Gaelic board is making such progress. I understand that the next tranche of public bodies to be asked for their Gaelic plans will be the national education organisations. I am pleased about that because education is so important for the future of the language.

On such an occasion it is important to mention the progress of Gaelic-medium education and of Gaelic education in general. The growth in the development of Gaelic-medium education is one of the great success stories of Scottish education in the past 25 years. More than 2,000 children throughout Scotland are now taught through the medium of Gaelic, and the exciting development is the fact that so many of them are in primary schools.

We welcome the development of new Gaelic schools in Glasgow and Inverness. Research has shown the benefits of bilingualism in the intellectual development of young people, and it is critical to the survival of the language that growth continues. The fact that it has taken place largely in the nursery and primary school sectors is a reflection of the marked improvement in the facilities that are available in schools such as Sleat primary school in Skye. That is a perfect example of what can be done.

As members have said, the worry is that, with budget cuts and times of economic uncertainty ahead, that progress will not be continued, so we must ensure that the children who have been taught through the medium of Gaelic at primary school can develop their language skills at secondary school. Much effort has been made in the recent past to recruit more Gaelic-speaking teachers. Although that has been relatively successful at primary school level, we desperately need to attract more teachers into secondary schools, not just to teach Gaelic but to teach other subjects through the medium of Gaelic. We must not lose the momentum that has been built up in the primary school sector; it would be a great

shame if we could not continue it in secondary schools. That is a major area to be tackled, which will depend heavily on improvements in local authority workforce planning.

The Scottish Government's draft education plan mentions its commitment to the adoption of Murdo Fraser's proposal to introduce a legislative presumption against the closure of rural schools. That is very good news for the schools and communities where Gaelic has been a traditional feature.

The Scottish Conservatives are hugely supportive of the Government's ambition to support Gaelic speakers and to promote Gaelic in schools and in our arts and culture. Although it can never be right to force any language on a reluctant community, we believe firmly that parents should have the right to educate their children in the language of their choice. That is why we fully support the motion. I look forward to more success in Gaelic education in the future, and I am pleased that we can lend our support to the minister.

15:44

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

As a Highlands and Islands representative, I realise Gaelic's potential to underpin the recovery of the north, the west and the islands, and realise that we cannot ensure that that heartland has the sustainable future that we want it to have simply by creating businesses. Communities must be created and people in those communities and in the cities must be given opportunities to speak the language that they choose to speak.

Last Monday night, I was at a Celtic Connections concert that celebrated the great Melbost bard, Murdo Macfarlane. The audience was very much made up of Gaels who now live in the central belt. Listening to so many people singing the songs' choruses was fantastic. When we realise that singing is at the heart of Gaelic culture, we realise that that culture is much more special than the experience of certain parts of our country where people are quite tongue tied. That evening made me realise that different parts of Scotland bring different values to our culture, but that that singing culture—the concert got a four-star review—is special. I experienced the joy and pleasure that people get from singing in their own language. People have to experience that for themselves. During the year of homecoming, members should ensure that they at least go to a Gaelic festival or meet up with friends who go to such festivals. I am sorry to preach to people from Gaelic families or those who already do such things, but we should tell the rest of the world about how great such things are.

The Gaelic language plan inevitably falls into the different categories that have been explained. Finding out how we can improve things institutionally will take a wee while, but it is obvious that many people who are not Gaels themselves have moved to the Gàidhealtachd—the Gaelic-speaking areas—and they want their children to participate. They have seen the enthusiasm of Gaelic-medium education teachers and require the back-up services that help parents to learn Gaelic so that they can keep up with their children. If we want to create a whole community, parents who do not speak Gaelic but give their children the chance to learn it must also receive support. We must think about the current education services.

I am interested in the work that has been done on the Gaelic plan for Highland Council. There is an aim to create local Gaelic development plans, which community councils or other interested bodies could take up. Getting people talking about such things at a local level is great. I bear the scars of the consultation process on the national planning framework and know about the criticisms that have been made of that. Gaelic can set a very good example in that context. Support for the language can be built from the bottom up by encouraging people in many parts of the country to see its relevance to their community. I give an example from the area that I represent. In Caithness, which is in the north part of the Highlands—some people would say that it is beyond the Highlands—there is a degree of a jagged edge, but the word "Caithness" is half Norse and half Gaelic. Therefore, some parts of Caithness will be interested in Gaelic. Indeed, there will be a Mod there in 2010, which will mean that there will be heightened interest in Gaelic there. We must try to encourage debate on supporting Gaelic at local level.

I, too, greatly welcome BBC Alba. Some constituents who I met on the north coast and in other places over the Christmas period said, "At last. I've got an environment in my home in which I can have Gaelic all day and evening." Such a service had not been available before. Thanks to the prevalence of television, they thought that they would start to notice a difference in how people live, as there is now parity of esteem that allows people to live their lives more through Gaelic than they were able to do before. That makes the investment in BBC Alba so important. We are talking about a small amount of money, but I hope that we can build on the service in the future.

It is obvious that the Gaelic language plan includes particular structural arrangements. In the Government's support policies for raising awareness and helping people to participate, it is clear that signage of all sorts, including road signs and logos, is important. At the moment, the cash-

strapped nature of things makes it difficult for such improvements to be made to the trunk road network, let alone for its maintenance to be done. We have to find ways of telling people that the money to pay for such road signage comes from a different pot from that which pays for holes in the road to be filled in. That needs to be done carefully if we are to avoid people making the nasty, jagged comparisons that they tend to make in such cases. I hope that we can do that.

I turn to press coverage of Gaelic. Last week, I was saddened to read in a Scottish newspaper a letter from a gentleman in Ayr who wrote, in Scots, that far too much money goes to Gaelic and none to Scots. Let us make it clear: it is not a case of having the one or the other. Scots speakers need a different prescription from that which Gaelic speakers need. Unlike Gaelic, Scots was not legislated against. The Education Act 1872 outlawed Gaelic from our lives. It is true to say that Scots was treated as slang. That said, the prescription for the two languages is different, but they are not mutually exclusive. I beg the chamber to ensure that that is the message that we send out in the year of homecoming to those who are celebrating Robert Burns. For example, we should recognise the fact that Lewis Macdonald's father translated Burns into Gaelic. There is no dichotomy between the interest of Scots and that of Gaelic. Let us celebrate both cultures to the full.

I welcome this consensual debate. I support not only the motion, but the Labour amendment.

15:51

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Following the rather fraught scenes of yesterday afternoon, with ministers scurrying back and forward with hastily scribbled notes, I am delighted to offer reassurance to the Government front bench and extend the hand of friendship across the chamber.

“Aonaichibh ri chèile airson math nan uile”—unite together for the good of everybody; who knows, perhaps John Swinney is saying that right now to Andy Kerr. I hope that today's debate will show that, if the will is there, consensus between all parties can be reached. I hope and believe that that is the case for Gaelic.

I am pleased to see the familiar faces of those who make common cause on behalf of Gaelic, but the members who we need to convince are not in the chamber. The future of the language breaks down not on party lines, but between those who are supportive of the language and those who remain to be convinced of Gaelic's linguistic, social, cultural and historic importance to all Scots.

The application of Gaelic plans by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, local authorities and soon every major institutional organisation in

Scotland will make a real difference to the future of the language. Gaelic plans, such as that which is the subject of the debate, will help to normalise the language in everyday life in Scotland. We may not use the language, but we will see it in use. Through that familiarity, I very much hope and expect that ignorance of Gaelic, which can lead to suspicion and hostility, will be reduced.

The Scottish Government plan is very much what I expected it to be. For the most part, it is a description not of Government policy but of how the institution of Government can use and promote Gaelic. It contains detailed advice on how Gaelic can be used in signage, e-mails, letterheads and publications and at meetings. It also sets out how employment policies and working practices can be modified to give the language a profile that is more fitting to its status.

I am sure that the consultation will help to shore up any obvious oversights or omissions. The intent is clear for the public service to set a public example on the respect to be shown to the Gaelic language. My one critical observation is that the very brief paragraph on how the plan will be resourced is rather bare and unconvincing. That said, if the proposals as outlined are implemented, they will make a big difference to the institutional promotion of Gaelic.

The plan that we are debating today, and those of other bodies, came about as a result of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, which the previous Executive introduced. I hope that we all take pride in this piece of legislation. The steps that are being taken under the act will secure and stabilise the language. We should make no mistake: if we do not see progress, the language will die out. Like many members in the chamber, I have attended too many funerals in Skye and elsewhere at which people have not only mourned a loved one or friend, but felt that we were burying part of the Gaelic language. We need to save the language and do more; we need to grow Gaelic.

The plan touches on the Scottish Government's policy on Gaelic-medium education; we need to make progress in that area more than in any other. Earlier this week, a parent at the Gaelic-medium education unit at Tolcross primary school in Edinburgh told me of the importance of such schools moving on to the next stage. Like other parents of children at Gaelic units in schools around Scotland, she likes and is proud of her school—not just the Gaelic unit, but the whole school. However, she knows that Gaelic-medium education must develop further. The two most important developments are to secure more all-Gaelic schools and to expand what is available and on offer at secondary schools.

In our previous debate on Gaelic, a members' business debate that was secured by Alasdair

Allan, I spoke about the importance of an all-Gaelic school environment—schools in which all pupils are taught through the medium of Gaelic and none through the medium of English. I will try not to repeat too many of the points that I made then, but it is worth noting the clear benefits of all-Gaelic schools educationally, as well as in pupils' Gaelic language development. Children who are taught all their subjects in Gaelic, rather than in English, are known to achieve well and to enjoy all the additional benefits of bilingualism.

Over the past 20 or so years, Gaelic-medium units have flourished across Scotland, attracting ever-increasing numbers of pupils, but many of them are now full or have limited places; in effect, we are capping the aspiration of many families to give their children a Gaelic-medium education. Glasgow, in particular, has shown that by establishing a Gaelic-medium school we can attract more pupils, many of whom—as all members present know—are learners with no Gaelic in the home. We should pay tribute to Glasgow City Council for its record of supporting Gaelic, not only because it is second to none but because the council has pioneered many of the most important developments in Gaelic-medium education. Since it established its all-Gaelic school, the pupil roll has doubled. There is now a distinct possibility of a second all-Gaelic primary to meet the demand that exists. Parent groups across the country—in Edinburgh, Skye, Dingwall, Portree and Fort William—want to follow Glasgow's example.

Such proposals are not without difficulty or even, potentially, controversy; each case will have to be considered and resolved locally. However, the principle of providing central support for such initiatives is crucial. We need to attract successive generations to Gaelic-medium education. I commend the Government on setting up a fund of £2.7 million to assist the capital development of schools, but—to give it a Gaelic welcome—I believe that that is a modest start.

Glasgow has not only expanded Gaelic-medium education at primary level but established a Gaelic-medium secondary school. That is a critical area. At the moment, the promise of many of our youngest Gaelic learners, which was developed and flourishing in primary school, comes up against the harsh reality of high school. The implicit lesson is that, if someone wants to get on, it is an English-speaking world—the serious business of preparing pupils for exams and qualifications is done in English. However, there is every reason to believe that, if we had more Gaelic secondary schools, we would increase attainment further. We would improve the confidence of our learners, not to mention their fluency. Other significant benefits would be an increase in the supply of Gaelic-medium teachers

and improved efficiency; ironically, this is one of the few areas in which we might want class sizes to increase rather than decrease.

Everyone else in the world takes the all-school approach. Worldwide experience of successful minority language development supports the use of the whole-school immersion teaching model. Scotland is unusual in having persisted with units inside schools for so long. In both Wales and Ireland, where there are equally remote and rural communities, the whole-school model has been used almost universally. Our approach to Gaelic-medium education, like our approach to the Gaelic language plan, should be about equality—equality of esteem and equality of access. It should be about treating Gaelic as a normal part of life in Scotland. We are doing this not for the good of the Gaels—not for a small group, however special—but for the good of us all. The traditional Gaelic communities may not be able to keep the language alive by themselves. The future lies with the learners and the support of the wider community. The Gaelic language plan is part of winning that support.

15:58

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Tha mi glè thoilichte a bhith an seo an-diugh, ach cha bhi mi a' bruidhinn anns a' Ghàidhlig. Tha mi duilich, ach chan eil mi deiseil deasbad a dhèanamh anns a' Ghàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am very pleased to be here today, but I will not be speaking in Gaelic. I am sorry, but I am not ready to do a debate in Gaelic.

The member continued in English:

Tomorrow night in Skye, I will attend a Burns supper that will be held in Gaelic. I will give members a wee preview:

Tha biadh aig cuid 's gun aca càil,
Tha càil aig cuid 's gun aca biadh,
Ach againne, tha biadh 's slàint',
Moladh mar sin a bhith don Triath.

That was the "Selkirk Grace" in Gaelic. The supper will be a very enjoyable event.

I welcome the Government's Gaelic language plan. In developing Gaelic, confidence is paramount. That is what the Gaelic plan and all the other measures are about—developing the confidence of native speakers, learners, children and communities. In the past, we have been held back by the lack of confidence among native speakers, many of whom were not literate in Gaelic. When they came across a pushy semi-literate learner asking them all sorts of questions about the genitive case and so on and so forth, they did not want to know. That was a real

problem. The situation is changing a bit, but it needs to change even more. That is why the Gaelic plans are so important. The other measures that we are taking, such as Gaelic road signs, are also important, so that people see the language out there and see that it is part of mainstream life in Scotland, certainly in the Gàidhealtachd areas.

I am a fairly long-time learner of Gaelic, having gone to night school and to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for various one and two-week courses. Eventually, I did a full year at Inverness College, the *cùrsa comais*, and developed reasonably good Gaelic. However, I am still not fully fluent. The problem in Inverness is that the course closed two or three years ago. Parents are sending their children to the new *bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis*—the new Gaelic primary school in Inverness. My daughter sent her daughter—my granddaughter—to the Gaelic-medium unit in Inverness, while she did a two-year full-time course at Inverness College, with the aim of being able to help her daughter with her homework when she came home from school. That worked very well. My daughter is now pretty fluent in Gaelic—fluent enough to be working in the *bun-sgoil* as a teacher's assistant.

That opportunity is no longer available for parents in Inverness. They would have to go to Skye to do a similar course. Parents in Inverness whose children go to school there need a course locally. I know that the college is trying to resurrect the course. Many people who send their children to Gaelic-medium education are not native Gaelic speakers, but they want to help their children, so it is important that they have that ability. Of course, other options are built in, such as other people helping kids with their homework, but it is much better if the parents can do it. As the parents learn, there are more Gaelic speakers and they are more likely to speak in Gaelic to their children at home.

It is a real joy for me to listen to my granddaughter, who is coming up for 11 this year. One tremendous feature of Gaelic-medium education is the amount of music and culture that is built in. It is lovely to listen to her singing to herself in Gaelic, without any hint of embarrassment. That is a fantastic feature that permeates such schools. The *bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis* has been a great success. It is full, as is the pre-school. When people realise that children do very well in Gaelic-medium education and that their cognitive abilities are very good, they want to send their children through that education.

Ken Macintosh compared Gaelic-medium units with Gaelic-medium schools. A full Gaelic-medium school is definitely much better than a unit because a unit, by definition, is located within an English-speaking school. The problem for the children is that, although they get Gaelic in the

classroom, the assembly in the morning has to be held in English because the English-speaking kids cannot speak Gaelic, although the Gaelic-speaking ones can speak English. Out in the playground and in the canteen, English tends to be spoken. There is a dilution of the language when there is just a unit.

The situation with the Sleat primary school was difficult and traumatic. It was a shame when Highland Council decided to have an English-medium unit within a Gaelic school, because that did not remove the effect that I mentioned. The children in the English-speaking unit, who are a minority in the Gaelic-speaking school, still have to be told in English what is going on at the assembly. The same effect occurs in the canteen and playground. There is not the full immersion that is required to allow the kids to utilise the language right across the board. We need to consider that carefully.

I am pleased that Highland Council is considering having Gaelic-medium schools in Portree and Fort William. As I said, such schools are necessary because Gaelic units in English-speaking schools do not provide pupils with the full benefit. The situation is hard enough already. When the children at Gaelic-medium schools come out of school, they tend to slip into English because they are surrounded by it. The more that we can do to make them believe that Gaelic is the normal language to use for everything that they do in school, the better things will be in the future.

16:05

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I will begin where Rob Gibson began and reflect on my experience of interacting with the Gaelic community and coming to recognise just what a precious part of the fabric of our national life Gaelic is. I defy anyone to go to an event such as the one that Rob Gibson talked about, or any gathering of Gaels anywhere in Scotland, and not be touched and deeply moved by their ability to enter into storytelling, to recite poetry, to sing unaccompanied or to play musical instruments and to do so, as Rob Gibson said, with such ease and confidence. Dave Thompson mentioned his granddaughter's ability to sing in Gaelic. Going to any such gathering or event gives one the sense that one is getting access to an entire culture and set of values that are both ancient and very modern at the same time.

No Government of any complexion at any time could ever watch the language begin to die. Every Government in recent times has taken action to help Gaelic. I pay tribute to the work that the Conservative Government of the latter part of the last century did—I do not often do that—to what we did and to what the present Government is

now doing. Every Government must do everything that is possible to ensure that the language does not just survive but has the chance to grow and thrive. We all know that the number of people who speak Gaelic is still declining but, as I have said in previous debates, I am more optimistic than ever that we can turn that situation round.

I regarded it as an enormous privilege to have the chance, as a minister, to help design the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill and to take it through the Parliament, but I always knew that it would not be the final legislative word on Gaelic. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 was a piece of legislation for a particular moment in time and a particular stage in our development. I fully expect that, in years to come, further Gaelic language acts will be passed in an effort to reflect developments, and I hope that that happens.

At the centre of the 2005 act is the notion of language plans and language planning. That is not an end in itself; it is simply a vehicle to drive progress on a shared objective by requiring public organisations, which play a huge part in our private and public lives, to take the lead in beginning the process of further normalisation of Gaelic in everyone's experience. In that context, the position of the Scottish Executive in its language plan is vital to what happens in all other parts of the public sector. The Scottish Executive plan needs to set the standard. If it fails to do so, other people will use the excuse, "The Scottish Executive didn't do that, so we won't do it either."

The Executive's plan is extremely important. It has the benefit not just of impacting on the central administration of the Executive but of having an influence on health, transport, education, the arts, law, housing, policing and so on. I know from my experience as a Government minister that there are many Gaelic enthusiasts in the civil service. Among them are two of the officials who supported me as a minister, whom I can see at the back of the chamber. They are among the genuine enthusiasts who would fight Gaelic's corner in the civil service.

However, it would be unwise not to recognise that in the civil service there are also deep pockets of scepticism about Gaelic and the whole mission on which we are embarked. Some people are completely unconvinced by the arguments for Gaelic, as I have experienced, but they are outweighed by the enthusiasts. The Government's plan needs to make it clear that the present Government is acting, and that successive Governments will act, to promote Gaelic, and that it expects the civil service to deliver on that agenda. The minister needs to set the tone, to take the lead, to drive progress and to brook no foot-dragging on the road along which we need to travel.

The question that needs to be asked about the plan that we are discussing is whether it is ambitious and aspirational enough. I would not seek to take anything out of the plan. All the ground that it covers is extremely encouraging and it makes steady and regular progress. The slight criticism that I have is that it is quite modest in its ambitions. There is a lot of talk about guidance and audits of various things. That is fine and I welcome it, but we need to translate all that into action. There is a lot of talk of maintaining funding, but little about growing activity in the way that Ken Macintosh suggested.

I will suggest five areas in which I hope that the Government will consider strengthening its plan. The first is road signs. Some people think that we get obsessed about Gaelic on road signs, but it is important that the language is visible in our nation, because it gives people a sense of place and cultural identity. I acknowledge that the plan talks about making progress on the signs on the trunk roads leading to the islands. That is fine and I welcome it, but we have to go much further than that. The report goes on to talk about research on the economic, social and environmental effects and the effects on safety of having Gaelic road signs. With great respect, I do not think that we need any more research on that; we need action on it. In my previous life as a councillor and more recently as an MSP, I have seen 20 years of resistance to the adoption of trunk road signage in Gaelic. We have to move beyond that point. As Rob Gibson said, there are costs involved, but we also have to replace road signs and there is a way of doing that without adding to the cost.

We have to take a sensible approach, as Ted Brocklebank said. It is unwise to force Gaelic signage on communities that are sceptical about it or who do not feel an association with Gaelic. However, all the evidence suggests that there are plenty of places in Scotland where we could make progress without offending anyone. I hope that the minister will simply overrule the roads department and ensure that we make further progress on that issue.

Rob Gibson: The experience in Wales shows that people have no problem dealing with bilingual signs. Perhaps we should unite to urge the minister to tell the people who are putting up our road signs to get on with the job.

Peter Peacock: I concur absolutely. I was about to say that, when I was in Canada last summer, I did not see any greater road carnage as a result of bilingual signs. I have certainly not seen any greater road carnage in Wales as a result of bilingual signs. When I visit Wales or other countries with bilingual signage, I get a sense of place, identity and culture. We need to achieve

that in our big cities in Scotland, as well as just on the way to the islands.

The document refers to the importance of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which is a hugely significant institution in the Gaelic world. It has made a huge contribution hitherto, but it still has the capacity to do more. I hope that when the document comes to be revised it can talk about the growth ambitions and the greater role that Sabhal Mòr Ostaig can play, not just as an educational institution but as a cultural institution—it has many other dimensions, too.

I will not labour the point that others have made, but Gaelic-medium education needs to grow. There needs to be a commitment in the plan to grow it not just at nursery or primary level but, critically, in secondary education. That will allow more young people to commit to Gaelic-medium education at nursery and primary school, because they know that they can complete their education in Gaelic.

The other dimension is Gaelic arts, which are hugely important. To see young people in the Gaelic communities moving between modern European contemporary rock and Gaelic music is wonderful to behold. We must allow that to be strengthened. That is important not just in music and singing, but in dance and theatre—the whole range of the arts needs to develop.

Others have made the point that we need to build on the progress that has been made in Gaelic television. We need to move to Freeview. The great advantage of the broadcasting system is that we can have up to 600,000 people watching Gaelic television even though the Gaelic-speaking community in Scotland is only 60,000. That demonstrates that television can broaden the appeal and understanding of Gaelic and people's ability to participate in it.

I hope that the minister will address all those points when the Government comes to review the consultation.

I would love to see some bolder Gaelic signage at Victoria Quay. It would be more difficult to put it on St Andrew's house, because it is probably a listed building. I hope that Victoria Quay never becomes a listed building. Victoria Quay is a symbol of Scottish government and loads of people enter it from all walks of life. Having bold Gaelic signage on the building, as well as inside the building, is an important part of the message from the Government that we take Gaelic seriously.

I welcome the extra time that I was given in the debate and I welcome the plan, although I think that we can do better. I hope that the plan will be improved and strengthened after the consultation.

16:14

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I am so envious of my colleagues who can stand here and deliver a speech in Gaelic as either their first or second language. I ask for your sympathy, Presiding Officer, as I deliver this speech in my second language—English—my first being closer to Ayrshire Scots, which is similar to the language that was spoken in Ayrshire around the time of Robert Burns.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Scottish Government producing its Gaelic language plan, as required under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. It is worth recalling the words of Peter Peacock, who spoke immediately before me, and who introduced the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. During the stage 1 debate, he said:

“It is the first time in recent history that a Government-sponsored bill that seeks to strengthen Gaelic and not to do it down has been brought before a Parliament.”—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2005; c 14089.]

As Mr Peacock reminded us then, using the strength of Government in relation to Gaelic is nothing new. The difference now is that, following nearly 400 years of suppression, the force of law and the power of Government have been turned to its support.

The passing of the 2005 act and the publication of the Gaelic language plan that is before us and those of other public bodies allow us to see clearly how the Gaelic language will be supported in the years ahead. Like many people, I have an interest not just in the development of Gaelic but in seeing Gaelic enjoy its rightful place alongside English, Scots and other languages in a country that is comfortable with linguistic diversity. Through a shared history and experience, is ann leinne a tha Gàidhlig—or, in English, Gaelic belongs to all of us, not just the communities who speak it, as the minister pointed out in her opening speech.

It is worth recalling, in this special year, that Robert Burns, although not a Gael, was familiar with the language, and he would have regarded hearing it spoken and sung as a regular feature of his community life and cultural experience. At least one of Burns's friends, Mary Campbell, or Highland Mary, was a Gael. Members of the Crochallan Fencibles, with whom Burns socialised while in Edinburgh, were regular users of the language, too.

In more recent times, the crossover between Gaelic and Scots has been demonstrated by Hugh MacDiarmid. A leading writer in Scots, MacDiarmid also had a high regard for Gaelic culture, and he translated the poetry of Gaelic bards into Scots.

As the history of language shows, the power of language as a cultural tool is no protection against its decline. If the language is to be strengthened, it must be present in all areas of life—used in the home, experienced in the community and used as a medium of education. If the language is to sustain an economic base, it is critical that it is present in the workplace, too.

I look forward to reviewing the plan that the Government has produced to see how it will address the development of the language in all the areas that we have discussed. The Scottish Government's plan builds on the foundations of the national plan for Gaelic. In drawing up the national plan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig drew on the experience of Wales and Ireland. Both those countries, with their sister languages to Scots Gaelic, have more experience of strongly promoting their ancient languages than does Scotland. They demonstrated that the vision underlying our national plan is achievable. Sustained effort in support of a language can lead to an increase in the number of speakers and learners, and can broaden participation in activities in which the language is used.

Here in Scotland, fewer than 2 per cent of the population now acknowledge any familiarity with the Gaelic language. In Ireland, by contrast, more than 40 per cent of the population regard themselves as competent Gaelic speakers, and a third of them use the language every day. In Wales, about 20 per cent of the population speak Welsh. The depth of commitment to the language in some communities is demonstrated by the very high proportion of Welsh speakers who use the language every day. At more than 60 per cent, that is almost twice the rate of daily usage of Gaelic in Ireland. In Scotland, we are taking small but significant steps forward in supporting Gaelic.

Valuable work is being carried out even in Kilmarnock, in my constituency. Gaelic-medium education at Onthank primary school is now celebrating its 11th year. Having established that base, the Gaelic unit at Onthank is able to extend its work to support the development of Gaelic across East Ayrshire. Earlier this week, the unit extended the Gaelic-Scots crossover by holding a Gaelic Burns supper—I commend my colleague Dave Thompson, who is going to attend such a supper in Skye, but the weans of Kilmarnock have beaten him to it. I look forward to seeing a DVD of the event in the near future. Perhaps I should bring the event to the attention of BBC Alba—I suspect that I have just done so.

In addition to putting plans in place, we need to encourage agencies to be creative in their approach to embedding Gaelic in their activities. High-profile signage, which a few members have mentioned, regular Gaelic-based activities and

continued development of Gaelic-medium education all have a part to play.

The establishment of BBC Alba will provide a welcome boost to the language, as Pauline McNeill's amendment says. I look forward to the channel becoming available to a wider audience.

I very much welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic language plan, which reflects the commitment of the Government and the Parliament to the language and to righting an historic wrong.

16:20

John Farquhar Munro: Mòran taing. Thug mi a' chiad òraid agam seachad anns a' Ghàidhlig, ach tha mi a' dèanamh dheth gum bi mi a cheart cho math dìreach an dàrna òraid agam a thoirt seachad ann am Beurla. Tha e a' cur beagan uallach orm gu bheil mi leam fhìn ann an seo. Chan eil mi a' faicinn ball eile sam bith bhon phàrtaidh agam anns an t-seòmar airson taic a chur ri Gàidhlig, ach is dòcha gu bheil iad trang ann an àiteachan eile a' feuchainn ri sgillinn no dhà fhaighinn airson a' bhuidseat.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I made my opening speech in Gaelic, but I think that it would be better if I gave my closing speech in English. It worries me a little that I am here on my own—I see no other member of my party in the chamber to support Gaelic. Maybe they are busy elsewhere, trying to acquire a penny or two in the budget.

The member continued in English.

I have decided that I should give my closing speech in English. I did not give a written translation of what I am about to say to the parliamentary team, so I have to speak in English.

I am gladdened by the strength of feeling that all speakers expressed in the debate. I do not think that I heard one dissenting voice. Members made various suggestions about how not only the Gaelic language but the communities in which it is spoken might be strengthened. The minister said that a development officer might soon be appointed to promote the Gaelic plan.

It is all very well to have a Gaelic plan—I think that all the public agencies have produced theirs, and I understand that most councils have produced plans—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I am sorry to interrupt, but could you stop clicking your pen? I think that it is causing a problem for the sound engineer.

John Farquhar Munro: Just a slight distraction, Presiding Officer. Thank you.

The Gaelic plans that have been produced are welcome and represent a great stride forward from the situation many years ago, when nothing was happening. However, there is no use in having Gaelic plans if they are not implemented. We must ensure that whatever plans are presented, whether by councils, public bodies or the Scottish Executive, progress is made on implementing them.

I spoke to Pauline McNeill as we came up the stairs. She said that she was looking forward to the debate, and, like others, she talked about how, although there were large numbers of Gaelic speakers, suppression of the Gaelic over the years led to a decline in their numbers. That experience was common throughout the Gaelic-speaking world. When I went to school, everybody spoke Gaelic and every house had Gaelic, so there was no problem. However, there were different factions, although that is not the situation today. We must be careful to accommodate all shades of political opinion. It is no use saying that everything must be in Gaelic.

Dave Thompson referred to the problem that we had down in Sleat, where there was a beautiful, harmonious community and where we have the flagship of the Gaelic world—Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college. There was almost civil war in the wee local school when, because most of the pupils spoke Gaelic, about seven English families wanted to make the school a completely Gaelic-medium school. That was frowned upon. There was terrible strife about that, but it has been resolved. Through good negotiations and a bit of diplomacy, they now have a very harmonious school.

I was pleased to hear that Rob Gibson attended the Celtic Connections ceilidh over in Glasgow to hear the music and songs of the Melbost bard, who is a famous gentleman in the Gaelic tradition. Peter Peacock said that we cannot fail to be moved or impressed if we move within such circles and attend a ceilidh or a fèis. I know that the minister has attended a number of such events. I think that we met at the opening of the Mod up in Fort William, which was a spectacular event. Such events let us experience the ambience and good will that prevails wherever the Gaelic language and Gaelic music are promoted.

Ken Macintosh pointed out, with reference to Gaelic education, that it has been well established that bilingual education produces a better end product. It has been established beyond doubt that those who are taught bilingually have much higher educational achievements. We are proud of that and would like everybody to share in it—why not?

Peter Peacock also mentioned the Gaelic college of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, down in Sleat, which started 30 years ago. There used to be

nothing there but a small, ruined steading. One of the local lairds came up with the idea that we should have a Gaelic college there, but the people he mentioned it to thought that the man was insane and should be locked up. However, he stuck to his guns, the college survived and we have a magnificent facility on the coast that has brought a vibrancy to, and changed the culture of, the peninsula of Sleat, which was almost a dying community.

Anyway, we are here to discuss the Gaelic language plan. I do not think that anyone dissents from what is in the plan. We all look forward with enthusiasm to the suggestions in the plan being implemented. Public agencies and local authorities have plans that are similar to the Scottish Government's plan, and we must ensure that they do not just gather dust on a shelf but are worked on and implemented so that they have an end result.

16:29

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): My great-great-grandfather was a Gaelic speaker, but I regret to say that he failed to pass it on. I am really sad that I do not speak Gaelic, but this immersion thing sounds very good. I have visions of sitting in a hot tub at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, looking down the Sound of Sleat and singing Gaelic songs. We cannot mention Sabhal Mòr Ostaig without paying tribute to Sir Iain Noble, who has devoted a great deal of his life to Gaelic, and without whom that wonderful college might never have existed.

As members have said, it is right and proper that Scotland's Government has a Gaelic language plan. I am pleased to say that our Parliament has a plan—the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's very good plan. That sends out the message that we are serious about Gaelic and committed to its continued development in Scotland.

I am pleased that the council in my native Argyll and Bute is one of the organisations that are leading the way, by implementing its own Gaelic language plan, which Bòrd na Gàidhlig approved in June last year. When he launched the consultation on that plan, the council's leader Dick Walsh said:

"Historically, Argyll and Bute is the heartland of Scots Gaelic and ... The Royal National Mod ... was first held in Oban in 1892."

I welcome the council's commitment to host the Mod in Argyll and Bute every three years and I urge members to visit this year's Mod—in the year of homecoming—which will be held in Oban from 9 to 17 October. I do not know whether Sir Sean Connery will be there, but there is always a good

chance of that. In any case, people will receive a wonderful welcome in Oban, which is the gateway to the Hebrides.

The Mod is one of the best examples of the vibrancy of our Gaelic sector. The number of talented young Gaelic singers and musicians is extremely encouraging. I declare an interest, as my wife, Emma, sings in the excellent Taynuilt Gaelic choir. I take the opportunity to wish that choir every success.

The music and poetry of the Gael mean so much. Two members have already mentioned Murdo Macfarlane—the Melbost bard. On his return from Canada, he said, “There are no ceilidhs on the prairies.”

Recently, I spoke with another MacFarlane—Brigadier John MacFarlane—with whom listeners to Radio nan Gaidheal will be familiar because of his broadcasts with Donald Morrison. He told me that, as a native of Tobermory, where his family had long-established businesses in whisky and chandlery, he spoke nothing but Gaelic in his childhood and in the 1950s, when most conversations were about crofting, fishing, boating and local gossip. He says that the news and current affairs programmes on the Gaelic media now have greatly increased not only his but many others’ vocabulary.

Brigadier MacFarlane also said that the Gaelic media have provoked great interest in Gaelic novels, films and poetry, and that the BBC iPlayer keeps Gaelic programmes for a week, which is useful for people who have missed a programme. He emphasised that the Gaelic of Radio nan Gaidheal is beamed to the diaspora in South Africa and Canada. He has even received fan letters from Gaelic speakers in Australia. On a more negative note, one can lose FM coverage in many places in the Highlands, so increasing the station’s footprint would be important progress.

Brigadier MacFarlane expressed his dismay that BBC Alba is not available on Freeview. Many of my constituents in the Highlands and Islands do not want to pay hundreds of pounds to access the Gaelic channel on Sky. Given that Irish people can watch their Irish Gaelic channel free and that Wales can watch its Welsh channel, why cannot the Scots watch their Scots Gaelic channel on Freeview? That is unfair, and I appeal to others to lobby the BBC trust on the issue.

That subject was raised emphatically last night at the meeting of the cross-party group on Gaelic. Stress was placed on the importance of the media and on the difficulty in sourcing Gaelic teachers, which is key to encouraging the use of the Gaelic language in Scotland, as my friend Liz Smith eloquently and strongly pointed out. She made the key point that, although progress is being made on

the number of children who learn Gaelic through Gaelic-medium education, we need to do more to ensure that they can develop their skills at secondary school. We look to ministers to address that. More must also be done to promote the speaking of Gaelic in our universities and further education colleges. Otherwise, the language will break down.

Ted Brocklebank spoke passionately about the role of broadcasting in sustaining and promoting Gaelic. I am proud of the Scottish Conservatives’ record on that. In a speech in the first parliamentary session, the former Labour MSP for the Western Isles, Alasdair Morrison, effusively thanked the Conservatives for igniting the Gaelic revival by funding Gaelic media and education. In fact, that was the only time that I heard him being grateful or polite to the Conservatives—even Mrs Thatcher’s name sounded all right in Gaelic. Alasdair Morrison was right. I am proud of previous Conservative ministers, such as Malcolm Rifkind and Michael Forsyth, who knew the value of the Gaelic heritage and wanted not to lose it but to encourage it.

Like many others, including Alasdair Allan, whose motion on the subject I was pleased to sign, I was very pleased to learn that the famous Dwelly’s Gaelic dictionary is now available online—I shall certainly use it. I pay tribute to the site’s creators, William Robertson and Michael Bauer, for their hard work. The dictionary, which has 77,989 entries, is by far the most comprehensive dictionary of the Gaelic language ever published. The pilot project was personally funded by its co-creators, and I understand that since it went live on the internet on 14 January there have been almost 60,000 searches. The dictionary has been designed so that it can be easily expanded and updated online, and the creators plan to appoint a team of editors to continue to expand, modernise and update the dictionary’s content by adding new words, full information about word usage and grammar, and spoken examples of word usage. The dictionary is a valuable tool for Gaelic speakers and for those who wish to learn the language, and I commend it to all those who are interested in the language.

VisitScotland has a part to play. I sometimes visit the tourist office in Tyndrum and see on the wall the poems of Duncan Ban MacIntyre and the translations. As he came from the Dalmally area, there is a monument to him there. It is very good that those Gaelic poets are shown in their areas. Tyndrum tourist office has set an example that others would do well to follow.

We have talked about Gaelic signs. Is it all right for me to continue, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I suppose that it depends for how long.

Jamie McGrigor: You will cut me off at some point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A couple more minutes would not go amiss.

Jamie McGrigor: I enjoy seeing Gaelic signs in Argyll, but I sometimes wonder whether they could be translated into English. Underneath the Gaelic sign is the English Gaelic version—the pidgin Gaelic—but I do not know whether three versions could be fitted on to one sign, so I dare say that it is probably not a very good idea. It is marvellous for people who come to Scotland to see on maps the English translations of Gaelic names, because they can understand what the place names mean. For example, Cameron means “crooked nose” and Campbell means “crooked mouth”. There are all kinds of strange but relevant translations.

Finally, we have a very good Gaelic parliamentary unit, but I would like it to be strengthened, so that we can receive English translations of Gaelic documents. Last night, at the cross-party group on Gaelic, I received a document in Gaelic that I have not been able to have translated yet. We get a very good verbal service, but we do not get a written one. I wonder whether someone in the Parliament could address that issue.

In conclusion, the Scottish Conservatives are pleased to support the motion. We welcome the Scottish Government’s draft Gaelic language plan and we look forward to a productive consultation exercise that draws in all the Gaelic expertise and input from as wide a range of organisations and individuals as possible.

16:38

Pauline McNeill: Ciamar a tha thu? Feasgar math.

Each time that we debate the subject of Gaelic, I try to learn at least one new word—I have not yet got to a sentence.

As John Farquhar Munro said, I bumped into him and Jamie Stone on the way to First Minister’s question time and I asked them both for a word that I could say in the debate this afternoon—I chose to trust John Farquhar Munro rather than Jamie Stone.

Another source of Gaelic was the Scottish Parliament shop, where I was presented with “Gaelic is Fun”. I would recommend it as a good read—it enables the reader to learn Gaelic through cartoons. However, the minister may want to have a look at it herself, because phrases such as, “Will you take another drink” and, “Have another drink” feature heavily. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice might want to take a look at it. I picked out a phrase for John Farquhar

Munro—“Tha Gàidhlig mhath agad”—which means “Your Gaelic is good.” I am sorry, but I could not find a phrase for “Your Gaelic is amazing.”

To be serious, the Gaelic language is in decline. As Johann Lamont said, that is not an accident. Other members have spoken about past hostility towards the Gaelic language. The suppression of Gaelic has contributed to its decline and it is important that we acknowledge that. We are trying to address the issue by having a plan for Gaelic.

The Government’s role in setting the tone will be critical. Peter Peacock talked extensively about the role of Government and called for more Government action. He said that successive Administrations would have to acknowledge that the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 might not be the only act that was needed. However, it is an important vehicle for ensuring that we continue to make progress.

Understanding the objectives of the 2005 act and of the Gaelic language plan will be important in giving the language status and respect. We also have to consider the context of the language, as Rob Gibson said. We are not just protecting and preserving a language; we are promoting a culture, of which the language is very much a part.

Ken Macintosh talked about schools where Gaelic teaching is accompanied by promotion of arts and culture. Whether it is the harp, the chanter or unaccompanied singing, we should hold it in very high regard.

John Farquhar Munro pointed out that Gaelic is a language of not just the Highlands, but the Lowlands too. As I have said many times before, there are many Gaels in Partick who are very proud of their heritage. I was at Celtic Connections and saw them jigging to the ceilidh, and I was pleased that the festival was taking place in Glasgow.

We have made important progress. With the 2005 act, we are beginning to work out the areas in which we can take action. Peter Peacock wants to see bolder signs at Victoria Quay, and we should be debating where signage should be, what level it should be at, and what practical steps we can take.

We know from briefings that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has used its powers to issue notices to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and the Scottish Government about having a language plan. I am pleased that it is using its powers in that regard.

Alasdair Allan made some good points about raising the status of Gaelic. He spoke about the opportunity to e-mail in Gaelic and know that the

response would be in Gaelic too. The Government plan addresses that issue.

Alasdair also spoke about mainstreaming. I was not entirely sure what he meant by that, but it will be important to identify resources for Gaelic. If the language were mainstreamed, we might actually lose the dynamic drive to ensure that Gaelic is specifically focused on in our culture plan.

Ken Macintosh mentioned, in Gaelic, uniting together for the good of everybody. He was absolutely right; this issue does not break down along party lines. Ken also talked about normalising the language and seeing it in everyday use. When people see the language in their environment, it will be a way of reducing hostility towards the language.

Dave Thompson and others spoke about the environment in a Gaelic school. There is a difference between having a unit and having a school. I have seen at the Glasgow Gaelic school that the children are sometimes given into trouble when they revert to English. They are encouraged to use Gaelic, even in the playground, so that they are learning all the time.

Peter Peacock talked about the culture giving confidence and about the importance of valuing the culture.

Ted Brocklebank was right to draw lines around what we are trying to achieve. The issue is about sensitivities around promoting the language where it already exists and where we would like it to exist. There are communities that would like to have a connection, but do not. We have to recognise those sensitivities. Having read the Government's plan, I am quite clear that that is what it is setting out to achieve, so I have no particular worries in that regard.

Willie Coffey talked about Gaelic belonging to us all. I believe that that is true. The fact that someone does not speak Gaelic does not mean that they do not value it or want it to be part of Scotland's culture and heritage. We are debating the issue this afternoon not because we think that everyone should speak Gaelic, but because we think that everyone should value it.

John Farquhar Munro showed off by opening in Gaelic and closing in English. Sadly, there was no one here from the Liberal Democrat front bench to hear him. I expect that they are doing other things. Who needs them, anyway?

Gaelic is part of the mix of Scotland's culture, along with Burns, traditional music and so on. A few weeks ago, the minister and I attended the traditional music awards event—which, incidentally, would not have been broadcast without BBC Alba. I was astonished at the ability and the energy that we saw there. As well as

Gaelic singing, there was a range of traditional music, which shows what Scotland has to offer.

Jamie McGrigor spoke with the flair that only he can provide. Although I do not know that Thatcher's name sounds any better to me in Gaelic than it does in English, I take his point.

There is an enthusiasm for this issue in the chamber. Although discussions are taking place elsewhere that, as they deal with the country's future, are arguably more important than the debate, it is important that from time to time we revisit this issue because we need to see what progress is being made. I am sure that the minister will agree that, if we are concerned that not enough progress is being made, we should have an opportunity to say that. Some great challenges face ministers, and we call on ministers to be ambitious about the use of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

The answers lie in education and in the media that we use. Earlier, I talked about using the internet and all the other ways in which we can communicate. The plan needs to be nurtured and monitored, or we will lose momentum.

Labour is pleased to support the Government's motion, and I hope that the other parties will support our amendment, which is intended to be constructive.

16:48

Linda Fabiani: I am delighted by the great degree of consensus that we have had today and by the quality of the debate. I was pleased that Pauline McNeill said that we need to revisit the issue from time to time, as that acknowledges its importance and reflects what many other speakers said. She also said that the Government needs to be ambitious about the use of the 2005 act; we must all be that.

The Government's draft plan is out for consultation and other public agencies—such as the councils, with more to follow—have Gaelic plans up and running. However, as many have said today, we must not say, "Right, we've done that" and put the plans on a shelf. We must use the plans as living documents for a living language and culture and expand them all the time.

Peter Peacock was hugely influential in the shaping of the 2005 act, as he was the relevant minister at the time. While I was sitting being lectured earlier, I was thinking of calling him Captain Peacock. However, I appreciate his input into the process. It is important that everyone moves forward in a spirit of consensus.

That said, Ted Brocklebank always has to get in a wee dig about Scots and English. I have no problem describing English as a dialect of Scots—

no problem at all. There is, however, a serious point in what Mr Brocklebank said. He was quite right when he stated that no native Gaelic speaker does not understand English. That is where we are today—but there are plenty of native Gaels who do not understand Gaelic. That reflects the history, as Rob Gibson pointed out, of the legislation against Gaelic language and culture and of the people who were affected by it. That is one of the reasons—as Pauline McNeill and other members have pointed out—for being proactive and ambitious today.

Johann Lamont's contribution summed up that history, because she comes from a family that is a product of the putting down of the Gaels and the language, and of how people learned to deal with that. The onus is on us all to move forward, and there are many ways to do so. Practically every speaker mentioned education, which shows just how important it is.

It cannot be denied that there are challenges. Secondary education, which was mentioned, is a challenge for many reasons, but the Government is working closely on it and we want to do what we can to move forward. The Minister for Schools and Skills, who is sitting beside me, and I recently met jointly Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to discuss those issues.

I liked the contributions about education from John Farquhar Munro and Dave Stewart, and the suggestions about the importance of the spoken word. That is not to do down grammar, language construction or anything else involved in learning, but the Gaelic language comes from an oral tradition. The absolute beauty of its sound means that Gaelic is something to sit and listen to and enjoy—and laugh and cry about, even if you do not understand it. The spoken word is very important—learning to speak and to sing are as important as other aspects of education.

It is important to reach young people, too, and there are lots of ways to do that. Some initiatives have been mentioned, such as the Gaelic online dictionary. It is great that we have something like that now, and the people who have been instrumental in that project should be congratulated. Bashir Ahmad recently told me that there is a move to translate the Qur'an into Gaelic, which is wonderful.

The mygaelic social networking site that Pauline McNeill spoke about is hugely important in trying to reach young people. I was at a conference on Lewis recently about community initiatives for Gaelic. It was great to hear the young people telling my age group—and some who were older than me—that we have to listen to them about how they want their language to be used. Mygaelic—the Gaelic Facebook, if you like—is a way forward for young people to be able to be able

to use their own language, or their language of choice, to communicate in all sorts of ways.

The subject of BBC Alba—and its vibrancy—has been raised many times. It is not just about having a Gaelic channel, but about everything that is behind that. The production companies such as mac tv, Media nan Eilean and Studio Alba are hugely important. That shows that there is an economy in Gaelic culture and language that can lead, as Rob Gibson said, to the potential for Gaelic to underpin growth in the Highlands and Islands, which is very important.

Jamie McGrigor: In relation to the point that I raised earlier about broadcasting, what does the minister feel about the fact that BBC Alba is not shown on Freeview? Does she think that it would be better if it was, as more people would have access to it? Would she be prepared to lobby the BBC trust on that point?

Linda Fabiani: I have been doing that for many months—indeed, I am meeting the chair of BBC Alba, Alasdair Morrison, again soon to discuss the next step in our joint strategy on that, because it is hugely important for many reasons.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has been mentioned a lot and has received glowing praise. I was delighted when the First Minister opened the Fàs creative centre in the college. Again, that is about encouraging work on the economy in the Highlands and Islands.

It has been interesting to discuss the various cultural aspects of Gaelic. Rob Gibson referred to a jagged edge, and how it can be perceived that Gaelic stops here and Scots starts there. However, part of the beauty of our nation is the fluidity of the way in which all the different cultures fuse and mesh. I was interested in Willie Coffey's contribution about Robert Burns and his familiarity with Gaelic. The other night, I spoke to Margaret Bennett, who has done much good work for the school of Scottish studies. She also told me about Robert Burns's interaction with Gaelic.

We heard about the crossover with Hugh MacDiarmid, who translated Duncan Ban McIntyre's poetry with help from Sorley MacLean. That represented a collaboration of poets of different styles. Just last year, I was delighted to be at the premier of Ronald Stevenson's "In Praise of Ben Doran", which was about Hugh MacDiarmid's translations of the poetry of Duncan Ban McIntyre.

Education is important. Ken Macintosh and many others talked about the benefits of Gaelic schools for education generally, as well as for the bilingualism and, often, trilingualism that is the result of children learning Gaelic at an early age. That has been proven over and over again. I am pleased that Ken Macintosh welcomed the First

Minister's announcement at the Mod about the capital budget for Gaelic schools. The Minister for Schools and Skills has asked me to point out that there are other resources too. We all want education to move on quickly, but we should not get despondent about it. There is glow—the schools intranet—and there is the scholar programme run by Heriot-Watt University, which provides access to Gaelic learning and raises Gaelic's profile in non-Gaelic speaking areas.

Peter Peacock talked about road signage. He is right to say that in our draft Gaelic plan we have discussed Transport Scotland's research on how road signs can affect accidents. Transport Scotland says that once the research is completed it will consider whether to increase bilingual signage on trunk roads and so on. I ask members, many of whom feel strongly about that, to put in submissions about the draft Gaelic plan and let us see that strength of feeling. On the subject of signs, I am delighted to confirm to Peter Peacock that the Scottish Government did indeed ensure that the signage at Government buildings was bilingual. I am delighted to hear that he wants the Gaelic to be much more prominent.

The member continued in Gaelic.

A-rithist, tapadh leibh airson ur taic. Tha mi a' coimhead air adhart ri freagairtean dhan phlana agus barrachd adhartais air feadh Alba. Mòran taing.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Again, thank you for your support. I am looking forward to responses to the plan and to more progress throughout Scotland. Many thanks.

Business Motion

16:58

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3336, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the programme of business.

I call Bruce Crawford to move—not too quickly—motion S3M-3336.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): I am grateful to be given the chance to move the motion. There was a constructive discussion in the Parliamentary Bureau earlier today, which has enabled us to put forward this amendment to business. I am sure that it will help the Parliament to expedite business exceptionally well.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 4 February 2009—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2009

and insert

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill

and (b) the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 11 February 2009—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Business

and insert

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion on the suspension of standing orders.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, in order to consider the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill at Stages 1, 2 and 3 on 4, 10 and 11 February 2009 respectively, the first sentence of Rule 9.16.5 be suspended.—[Bruce Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are 11 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I must make members aware that, if amendment S3M-3325.1, in the name of Michael Russell, on forestry, is agreed to, amendment S3M-3325.2, in the name of Jim Hume, will fall, and that if amendment S3M-3322.2, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on transport priorities, is agreed to, amendment S3M-3322.1, in the name of Alison McInnes, will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-3325.1.1, in the name of John Scott, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-3325.1, in the name of Michael Russell, on forestry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 42, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3325.1, in the name of Michael Russell, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3325, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on forestry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmund, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Hume's amendment S3M-3325.2 has been pre-empted.

The next question is, that motion S3M-3325, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on forestry, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the consultation on climate change and forestry that has just closed; welcomes the widespread agreement that there must be a significant planting increase to assist the process of combating climate change; is grateful to all those who brought a variety of ideas and views forward, and looks forward to a report to the Parliament on the outcome of the consultation and to subsequent detailed parliamentary scrutiny of any proposals brought forward as a result of the consultation.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3322.2, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3322, in the name of Des McNulty, on transport priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 75, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3322.3, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3322, in the name of Des McNulty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)

O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 121, Against 2, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3322.1, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3322, in the name of Des McNulty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 75, Against 46, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3322, in the name of Des McNulty, on transport priorities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)

Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 75, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that the Strategic Transport Projects Review lacks detail on timescales and does not commit the Scottish Government to deliver a programme of expenditure for the vast majority of the projects identified; also notes the concern of communities along the length of the A82, A77, A9, A90 and A96 that no indication has been given as to when their needs for road improvements will be addressed; notes in particular the disappointment of people in Elgin, Inverness and Maybole who were led to believe by the SNP prior to the 2007 election that their bypass schemes would be given priority by an SNP government; reminds ministers of the principle of collective responsibility and the need to ensure that communities are not misled about the Scottish Government's intentions and, while recognising that the new Forth Replacement Crossing is an overriding priority for Scotland, calls on the Scottish Government to state its priorities by reference to the

projects listed in the Strategic Transport Projects Review and others identified by regional transport partnerships and local authorities as having a major regional significance.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3324.1, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3324, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the Gaelic language plan, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3324, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the Gaelic language plan, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises that Gaelic is an integral part of Scotland's heritage, national identity and current cultural life; welcomes and supports the launch of the consultation on the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic Language Plan; acknowledges the work being carried out on the implementation of other Gaelic language plans by Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Edinburgh City Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland Council, the Scottish Parliament and Highland and Islands Enterprise; further welcomes the boost to the language provided by the establishment of BBC Alba, and calls for continued investment in and expansion of Gaelic-medium education.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-3337, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on a suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that, in order to consider the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill at Stages 1, 2 and 3 on 4, 10 and 11 February 2009 respectively, the first sentence of Rule 9.16.5 be suspended.

Diabetes UK

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3200, in the name of Karen Whitefield, on Diabetes UK's 75th anniversary. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Diabetes UK on its 75th anniversary, which it celebrates in 2009; notes, in this year of Homecoming, the particular contribution of Scotland and Scots to the work of Diabetes UK and to diabetes research, including RD Lawrence who founded the organisation with HG Wells in 1934, JJR Mcleod who shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine for the discovery of insulin and John Ireland who co-designed and developed the insulin pen; recognises that diabetes continues to be a major public health issue in Scotland, with 209,706 people registered with diabetes and a projected increase to 350,000 by 2025; commends the improvements in diabetes services over the past seven years arising from the *Scottish Diabetes Framework Action Plan*; notes that the action plan concludes this year, and looks forward to renewed commitment to action on diabetes in Scotland to take us into 2010 and onwards.

17:10

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): The 75th anniversary of Diabetes UK gives cause for both celebration and reflection. We celebrate the commitment that was made 75 years ago by the Scottish doctor, R D Lawrence, and the writer, H G Wells, both of whom had diabetes, to establish a charity—the Diabetic Association—which aimed to ensure that everyone in the United Kingdom could gain access to insulin, whatever their financial situation.

We also recognise the contribution of J J R Macleod through the part that he played in the Nobel prize-winning team that discovered and developed insulin. Today, his descendants, Jack and Sheila Fulton, are in the public gallery for the debate. In marking the 75th anniversary of Diabetes UK's work to improve the lives of people with diabetes, I pay special tribute to Janet Rae, who has fought the condition for 75 years, having been diagnosed with diabetes at just one and a half years old. I am delighted that Janet is also in the public gallery.

Today gives Parliament the opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made over the past 75 years. We can reflect on the availability of life-saving insulin, the birth of the national health service and universal health care, the development of insulin-delivery mechanisms such as the insulin pen and insulin pump, the Scottish diabetes framework, the national screening programme for diabetic retinopathy—one of the

first in the world—and, of course, the 2006 United Nations resolution on diabetes, which states:

“diabetes is a chronic, debilitating and costly disease associated with severe complications, which poses severe risks for families, Member States and the entire world and serious challenges to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals”.

That statement gives the measure of the problems with which we are confronted when we think about diabetes. We have to confront problems such as cost, given that 10 per cent of the NHS Scotland budget of £1 billion goes to diabetes. There is also the problem of associated complications, given that diabetes is the main cause of sight loss in the adult population. Additionally, there is the risk to families, given that Scotland has one of the highest rates of childhood diabetes in the world. However, we can also reflect on the fact that, in Scotland, we are fortunate. As the motion highlights, our contribution to diabetes research and medicine goes well beyond our size as a nation, as does our contribution to the charity itself. We need only to look at the roll of honour on Diabetes UK’s website.

The debate is not only about celebration and reflection; an anniversary such as this also provides a spur to action. We need to build on the progress that has already been made and we need to commit to making even greater efforts in the future. The reality is that the number of people who are at risk of diabetes and those who are diagnosed with diabetes continues to rise. In addition, the number of people who develop diabetes-related complications remains far too high.

I will focus on a few issues. Last year, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and Diabetes UK Scotland published a national overview follow-up report on diabetes in Scotland. The report found that

“All NHS Boards have made changes to their diabetes services since we first reviewed performance against these standards and there was good evidence that these changes have improved the services provided”.

At the same time, the patient experience of services, as documented in the Diabetes UK Scotland section of the report, suggests that, in areas such as patient education and psychological support, service delivery has not matched policy commitments thus far. Diabetes is a condition that is almost wholly self-managed. Given that most patients access only two hours of clinician time and that the effect on a person’s life goes beyond the purely medical, further action on patient education and psychological support is required.

In November last year, the cross-party group on diabetes discussed the issue of diabetes in schools. Information from Diabetes UK Scotland

suggested that parents were being required to attend schools to administer injections, which meant that they were unable to work, that children were being excluded from school trips, that there were problems with access to necessary snacks, and that some very young children were being left to inject themselves. I know from recent correspondence that I have received from the Minister for Public Health that the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all children with diabetes in Scottish schools are provided with the necessary support to enable them to enjoy a full school life, but for that to happen—to enable our children to access the education that is their right—we need more action.

In the run-up to the Scottish elections in 2007, Diabetes UK published a manifesto for the Scottish Parliament. One of its key concerns was to ensure access to treatments and therapies, especially insulin pumps. At a debate on diabetes in 2007, the Minister for Public Health summed up the Government’s position by saying that

“the number of people in Scotland who use insulin pumps is low in comparison with other countries”

but that she expected measures that were then under way

“to make it easier for the people who meet the criteria for a pump to obtain one.”—[*Official Report*, 28 June 2007; c 1352.]

Although some progress has undoubtedly been made, which is to be welcomed, it is clear from answers to parliamentary questions that patients and Diabetes UK are beginning to express concern that progress will soon plateau and that the majority of people who could benefit from pumps may not have access to them.

Patient education—giving patients the tools to self-manage their condition—is a cornerstone of our health care system. In relation to diabetes, considerable activity is under way at strategic level in Scotland to make that happen. However, it is through implementation that the commitments that have been made will be seen to have borne fruit. There has been sporadic activity on the ground, but it does not match immediate and future needs, particularly with a 7 per cent year-on-year rise in diagnoses.

In addition, some of the old cultural barriers—particularly those of the doctor-knows-best variety—are all too often still in place. We need action to support patient access to quality structured education at diagnosis and at all the important stages thereafter. We also need to ensure that simple measures such as clerical and administrative back-up are in place to help courses to run, and we need to challenge the old assumptions. All those issues, and others such as prevention and early identification, can be picked

up in the review of the Scottish diabetes framework action plan, which is soon to be under way. I have no doubt that all of us—Government, Parliament, the NHS, Diabetes UK Scotland and individual patients and carers—will commit to the actions that the review suggests so that we can address the issues that will be important in the second decade of the century.

Finally, the motion is about congratulating Diabetes UK on its 75th anniversary. I ask members and everyone who supports the charity to sign the 75th anniversary card that Diabetes UK Scotland has created for the occasion. Above all, I ask that we all recommit to doing all that we can to help to fulfil the charity's main aim, which is to improve lives and to work towards a future without diabetes.

17:18

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Karen Whitefield not only on securing this timeous debate but on her continuing and long commitment to the cross-party group on diabetes, which survives despite competition from many other cross-party groups.

I became involved with the group at a very early stage, partly because of family members who have diabetes. Almost every member will have someone in their close or extended family with some form of diabetes. I have a brother-in-law, brother, sister and niece with type 2 diabetes and a daughter-in-law and friend with type 1 diabetes—and that is not a full survey of the family. I do not think that we are more liable to diabetes than any other family, so the snapshot that I have provided gives some indication of the extent of the condition.

Diabetes UK is greatly to be praised—I do not say that just because the organisation is represented here this evening—for both the briefing paper that it has produced for the debate and its unstinting efforts in the Parliament over the past nine years to keep diabetes, preventive measures and treatment high on the political agenda. It is tough to catch and sustain the attention of MSPs when there are many other lobby groups for different diseases and illnesses.

I do not mean this frivolously, but I note that three of the criteria for being liable to diabetes are obesity, age and smoking. I tick two of those boxes, so I am not terribly happy, although I was all right when I last had a test. However, that is not good enough—we know that, for some of us, if we changed our diet, took more exercise and looked after ourselves, we would greatly reduce our chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

The Health and Sport Committee's inquiry on pathways into sport is not considering elite sport in

particular; we are doing it because of the shocking evidence on the state of Scotland's health. A lot of that is self-inflicted: in evidence, we learned that 75 per cent of adult Scots are not physically active and that, if we do not do something about Scotland's children, we will have an obesity time bomb, which could lead to a great increase in type 2 diabetes, with all the concomitant illnesses and diseases. They are pretty scary and grim. Karen Whitefield mentioned retinopathy and problems with eyesight. Diabetes can also cause heart conditions and circulatory problems that can lead to impotence in men and amputation. Those are extremes, but they are real.

People cannot fight and beat diabetes. I remember meeting a young man who had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes when he was a teenager and in his rebellious stage. There is no good time to be diagnosed with diabetes, but that is a tough time. He decided to fight it but, of course, he could not. He did everything wrong—he did not control his diet and went out drinking—and very nearly killed himself. For children and adolescents, the issues are not only physical; they are the emotional and psychological challenges of dealing with something that will be with them all their lives. I know how grim it is for people who hate to inject themselves to have to do it six times a day, but they will not be stabilised if they do not.

Diabetes UK estimates that almost 300,000 people in Scotland have diabetes, about 90,000 of whom are thought to have undiagnosed type 2 diabetes. As many members will know, when people start to show the symptoms, the damage has already been done. I therefore commend Diabetes UK, which often tests people in places such as supermarkets to find out whether they are okay. I commend Karen Whitefield for securing the debate. The Parliament will not ignore the issue and I know that the minister does not. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

17:23

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Karen Whitefield on securing the debate, which puts on record the Parliament's recognition of Diabetes UK's valuable work in the past 75 years and the work of the committed researchers who discovered and developed the means of controlling this serious disease and of improving the lifestyles and life expectancy of the many people who suffer from it.

As we know, although the incidence of type 1 diabetes, which develops predominantly in young people, is fairly stable, the much more common type 2 diabetes, which formerly affected mainly older people, is now being diagnosed more frequently in younger age groups. Nearly 210,000 people in Scotland have been confirmed as

diabetics, but another 90,000 probably have type 2 diabetes that is as yet undiagnosed. As the population ages and the number of obese people increases, we can expect more diabetics in Scotland and in younger age groups. Coping with the subsequent complications will put significant strain on the NHS.

Diabetes UK's work, which is already valuable, will become more necessary, particularly its delivery of information, peer support and contribution to service improvement for diabetic patients. The organisation's funding of research projects is crucial, because only by genetic and stem-cell research will we find a cure for the disease. It is also important to find out how to prevent insulin resistance, to consider the issues on the use of insulin pumps and to add to our knowledge of the aetiology of and the best ways to prevent cardiovascular disease. Diabetes UK is a worthy charity, so it is right that we congratulate it on the excellent work that it undertakes and supports financially.

It is quite amazing how the treatment and monitoring of diabetes has changed since my mother first became a type 2 diabetic in the late 1950s. Diet, soluble insulin and—if I remember correctly—metformin were the only options for treating the condition. Testing for blood sugar was laborious and not very patient friendly, and monitoring and controlling diabetes meant regular, time-consuming visits to the diabetic clinic in a hospital out-patient department.

Patients had little real understanding of the condition or its complications; they often said that they had just a touch of diabetes, as if it were some minor complaint, and did not realise how important it was to maintain their blood sugar within normal limits. Responsibility for managing diabetes lay with the medical profession, not the patient. The present-day recognition that patients must have ownership of the monitoring and treatment of their condition is long overdue. It will ultimately benefit many patients and, it is to be hoped, will in due course relieve some of the costs and pressures on the NHS.

It is hugely important that we get to grips with the obesity epidemic that is leading to the rise in the incidence of type 2 diabetes. It is crucial that the condition is diagnosed at the earliest possible opportunity, and I warmly welcome the actions that many community pharmacists are taking in that regard. It is important that patients have a clear understanding of their condition and know how to control it—as Karen Whitefield said, education is of the utmost importance—and that complications are picked up early by investigations such as routine retinopathy, which is now readily available in opticians' consulting rooms.

My mother had never heard of Diabetes UK; indeed, I am ashamed to say that I had not been aware of the full extent of the organisation's activities until I entered the Parliament. Its work has been and is extremely valuable and deserves our support. The improvements over recent years in services for people who have type 1 or type 2 diabetes are in no small measure due to the efforts of Diabetes UK. That work needs to continue, and I agree with Karen Whitefield that the Parliament should commit to further action on diabetes in Scotland to ensure that we cope with the predicted upsurge in its incidence. I, too, look forward to the recommendations of the review of the "Scottish Diabetes Framework: Action Plan".

17:27

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Karen Whitefield on securing a debate on a hugely important issue that offers a timely reminder to us all. I also congratulate the people in the public gallery, whom I do not recognise, but I am sure that they do a great deal of work on the subject that we are discussing, because that is what brings people to members' business debates. I am extremely grateful that they are here and for their efforts on diabetes.

I say that because I have personal experience of the condition. As I get older, I am more and more surprised that I am here. Members will be well aware that I was surprised to be elected, but I am even more surprised that I am alive, because I understand that my father, who was born in the early 1920s, was diabetic more or less from birth and was therefore probably fairly fortunate to survive. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that when he died in the 1970s in his 50s—forgive me, I do not remember how old he was—one of my sisters did not realise that he suffered from diabetes. As an adult, he had got so good at managing the condition through insulin injections that he appeared to live a perfectly normal and active life without any complications whatever. I am sure that there must have been a few, but the fact that he managed to hide them from his children shows just how well diabetes can, in some circumstances, be managed. I am sure that that is thanks to those who have done the research and understood the subject over the years. I am extremely grateful for all that.

Like all members, I am conscious that we must ensure that our health service copes with and provides the best possible care to those who suffer from diabetes, and from other illnesses.

Like other members who have spoken in the debate, I come at the issue from a slightly different angle. As the convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on obesity, I am increasingly aware that the nation's expanding

waistlines will cause more type 2 diabetes. That is not a possibility; it will happen. There is a clear correlation between the incidence of obesity and the incidence of type 2 diabetes, and it will not go away.

The other point that I must make, therefore, is that although we must treat the people who have already been diagnosed as suffering from the condition, and must diagnose those who are already suffering from it but have not yet been diagnosed with it, we must do everything possible to ensure that we do not continue to expand our waistlines and that we prevent the problems in the first place. That is a delicate balance to strike, and the Government cannot possibly do it on its own. Although we sometimes expect ministers to have magic wands and bottomless pits of money, we know that that is not the case. We have to recognise that tackling diabetes is about prevention as well as treatment. We have to tackle both sides of the equation.

I thank those who are listening and those who are involved in the diabetes field for their hard work. I congratulate Diabetes UK on reaching its 75th anniversary. It would be wonderful if, by the time it reached its 100th anniversary, it was redundant and everything had been dealt with. However, I fear that that will not be the case and that the work will have to carry on. It is our task to ensure that treatment is funded and balanced properly.

17:30

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Karen Whitefield on lodging the motion. Over 75 years, Diabetes UK has made an enormous contribution to improvements in care for patients with diabetes. The most important point is that it has demonstrated the need for partnership between those who provide care and those who previously received care but who are now true partners in the management of their condition.

When Banting and Best discovered insulin, diabetes was a killer condition. Unfortunately, it is still a killer condition, in that the complications of stroke, myocardial infarction, renal failure and amputation with complications can all lead to death. Also, figures from ISD Scotland show that the prevalence of diabetes is reaching the level of 3.7 per 100. The management and treatment of diabetes are therefore enormously important.

I remember that when I was a general practitioner in the 1970s, the regrettable death of one of our younger diabetic patients stimulated our looking into the care of diabetic patients in our practice. At the time, we assumed that the type 1 diabetics and the severe type 2 diabetics who

were on insulin injections were being looked after by the hospital alone and that we did not need to concern ourselves with them, other than in making referrals. We were slightly more doubtful about those whose type 2 diabetes was managed by oral medicine, but we thought that those whose condition was managed by diet alone were our responsibility. We carried out an audit, which showed that our assumptions were completely wrong: the hospital was not looking after all the type 1 diabetics, the type 2 diabetics were falling between the stools of primary care and secondary care, and many of those whose condition was being managed by diet alone were not being supported adequately. We then talked to our patients about their care.

The fundamental difference that has been made over the past 25 years is that doctors and those who are responsible for providing care have talked to and listened to patients. Patients become experts in their own care, so our listening to them is of fundamental importance.

We now have the NHS QIS standards of 2002, a framework that was introduced in 2006 and an overview of where we are that was produced by NHS QIS and Diabetes UK. We have improved, thanks to work by groups such as the Tayside medicines monitoring unit and the diabetes audit and research in Tayside Scotland study in Dundee, which have changed fundamentally the co-ordination of primary and secondary care—we now have mini-clinics and a degree of self-management. However, there is still a long way to go. We have to ensure that all the measures to which studies have quite rightly referred are instituted properly.

The Scottish care information-diabetes collaboration project was implemented by only six health boards in 2007. I hope that the minister will tell us that 14 boards have now implemented it.

Single records, whereby an entry by one member of staff goes on to a diabetic record that applies across the whole health service, are still not in place—they have to be implemented. There has to be regular audit, both collectively and individually. The quality and outcomes framework—the new GP contract—has helped enormously in the recording of all the measures around diabetes and its management, but, again, there is some way to go.

I hope that we will have programmes that implement all the recommendations in the action plan. Way to go, which is run in the Forth Valley Health Board area, is an excellent example of an education programme.

As Nigel Don said, we will be faced with the challenge of obesity. It is a fundamental challenge, as it could lead to an explosion of diabetes. If we

do not tackle it, we will have serious problems. We need to consider the use of insulin pumps and other technology, including information systems. On whole-organ transplant, we will need to increase the number of pancreas transplants in particular. Obesity is the main challenge, however, and it must be faced. The Government is going some way to doing that, but the issue must be addressed by the whole community—by the health service and the public alike.

17:35

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I thank Karen Whitefield for securing the debate. I welcome, as she did, our visitors to the public gallery, particularly Janet Rae. I have seen the picture of Janet, from when she was one and a half or two years old; it is remarkable that we have moved so far from those days to where we are now. However, more needs to be done; I will return to that point in a little while.

I congratulate Diabetes UK Scotland on its work over 75 years in supporting people with diabetes and their families and in driving much of the change that has taken place. The motion quite justifiably refers to the “contribution of Scotland” to the setting up of the organisation and to the management of the condition.

I am glad to say that the tradition continues. The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service has been doing pioneering work on isolating pancreatic islet cells. As a result, an islet cell transplantation programme is starting in Edinburgh in April, with an investment of £1 million a year. That will bring great benefits to certain groups of people with type 1 diabetes.

As the motion says, we face the prospect of a substantial increase in the number of people in Scotland who live with diabetes. Getting across the messages about prevention has to be a priority for us all. Prevention is very high on the Scottish Government’s agenda. Our work on tackling unhealthy body weight through better diet and increased physical activity is a key contribution to reducing the incidence of type 2 diabetes; many members mentioned that. There are £40 million of new resources to back up the healthy eating, active living strategy.

We are mindful that there could be as many as 90,000 people whose diabetes has not yet been diagnosed. Ensuring that people get a diagnosis at the earliest stage is essential, so that steps can be taken to reduce their risk of developing any of the serious complications that diabetes can bring in its train.

The UK National Screening Committee advises all four UK health departments on population screening issues. I very much welcome the

committee’s recent decision to reconsider the issue of screening for type 2 diabetes. That will complement work that the Scottish public health network is doing on a needs assessment for diabetes, which the Scottish diabetes group has commissioned. That approach is consistent with the recommendations on the assessment of cardiovascular risk as set out in SIGN guideline 97 from the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network, which is clear that diabetes should be regarded as a type of cardiovascular disease.

Work that was commissioned by the Scottish diabetes group last year confirmed the strong relationship between deprivation and type 2 diabetes, but it also reported for the first time an association with type 1 diabetes. We are therefore all the more determined to tackle the health inequalities that are associated with diabetes. The keep well programme is our main vehicle for that work. Implementation of equally well, our strategy for tackling health inequalities, will also help.

Diabetes UK Scotland is keen to stress the extent to which people with diabetes are responsible for managing their own condition. We fully recognise that, and self-management is one of the main elements of our general work on long-term conditions. In partnership with the Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland, we are implementing the national strategy for self-management, “Gau Yersel”, which is backed up with resources and which the alliance published last autumn. People with diabetes and the organisations that support them will undoubtedly benefit from that important work. Above all, it involves acknowledging people’s expertise in managing their condition. Such an approach is very different from the doctor-knows-best approach that Richard Simpson talked about—I apologise if it was Karen Whitefield who made that comment, which was spot on. We have moved a long way from that position.

The motion refers to research. The Scottish diabetes research network’s 2008 audit showed that 80 academic studies and 37 commercially funded clinical studies on diabetes were being carried out in Scotland. Those studies will make a major contribution to the research base.

I very much welcome the acknowledgement in the motion of improvements in services that have arisen from the Scottish diabetes framework and the action plan that was published in 2006. The Scottish diabetes group, through each NHS board’s diabetes managed clinical network, monitors progress against all the actions regularly and reports to us. The MCNs have a crucial role to play. For that reason, the Scottish Government supports the diabetes voices training programme, which prepares people with diabetes to take an active part in the work of the MCNs. Their input

contributes in a substantial way to the effectiveness of the MCNs' work and we are grateful to Diabetes UK Scotland for developing the programme.

Considerable progress has been made in a number of key areas, such as SCI-DC, the diabetic retinopathy screening programme and the foot care of people with diabetes. There are also areas in which it is clear that more effort is needed, such as structured education, insulin pumps and psychological support.

I give an assurance that we are committed to continuing the action plan approach. I understand that the Scottish diabetes group intends to produce a consultation document that sets out its assessment of progress on taking forward the 2006 plan. The group will also invite comments on priorities for action over the next three years. The group hopes that the revised action plan will be ready for this year's world diabetes day in November. Of course, Diabetes UK Scotland will be fully involved in the work.

SIGN is revising guideline 55 on the management of diabetes. That work will provide the NHS with an up-to-date assessment of the evidence on the clinical effectiveness of all aspects of the management of diabetes. I understand that the new guideline is likely to be published in March 2010.

The needs during school hours of children and young people with diabetes are a matter of great importance to Diabetes UK Scotland. Karen Whitefield mentioned concern about the findings of a survey that considered whether schools have policies in place to support staff to give diabetes medication. Guidance exists on the administration of medicines in schools, and the Scottish diabetes group's short-life working group on type 1 diabetes will consider how the implementation of the guidance can be improved in practice. I await the group's report with great interest.

I applaud the constructive role that Diabetes UK Scotland plays at a strategic level in all the work of the Scottish diabetes group, as well as its important work to support individuals who have the condition. I am particularly pleased that Diabetes UK Scotland will help to refresh the diabetes action plan. Of course, 75 is no age nowadays. I wish the charity very well for the next 75 years and beyond. If we can make the progress during the next 75 years that we have made during the past 75 years, I am sure that we will get on top of a condition that is devastating for some people.

Effort is needed to ensure that people who have the condition receive support, and to ensure that the condition is identified in people in whom it remains undiagnosed. As Nigel Don said, it is important that we take action on issues that have

an impact on diabetes, including obesity, which the Government takes very seriously indeed.

Meeting closed at 17:44.

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