



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 14 March 2012

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab)

John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Brandon (Friends of the Far North Line)

David Climie (Transport Scotland)

Anne MacLean (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland)

Robert Samson (Passenger Focus)

Lawrence Shackman (Transport Scotland)

Ken Sutherland (Railfuture Scotland)

Bill Ure (Passengers' View Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Wednesday 14 March 2012

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Rail Franchise 2014

The Convener (Maureen Watt): Good morning, everyone. I welcome you to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's sixth meeting in 2012. I remind members of the public and committee members to turn off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys, as they affect the broadcasting system. All committee members are here and we have no apologies.

Agenda item 1 is our first evidence session on the Scottish passenger rail franchise, which is due to be renewed in 2014. The committee will undertake a brief and focused scrutiny of the issues that relate to renewal of the franchise and will hear from several panels of stakeholders at this and forthcoming meetings. On the basis of that evidence, we will consider whether to feed into the "Rail 2014" consultation process.

We begin our inquiry with evidence from groups that represent rail passengers' interests. I welcome Robert Samson, passenger manager, Passenger Focus; Bill Ure, member of Passengers' View Scotland; Anne MacLean, convener, Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland; Ken Sutherland, research and media officer, Railfuture Scotland; and John Brandon, convener, Friends of the Far North Line.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming to the meeting. I thank the Friends of the Far North Line and Railfuture Scotland for their helpful written submissions.

In "Rail 2014—Public Consultation", Transport Scotland suggests structuring the franchise to have two levels of service. Economic services, such as the one between Edinburgh and Glasgow, would be run by the franchise holder on a purely commercial basis, subject to minimum requirements specified by Transport Scotland, whereas social services on rural and less well-used routes would continue to be strictly specified by Transport Scotland. What impact might such a structure have on passengers?

Robert Samson (Passenger Focus): When we surveyed passengers on the type of franchise or railway that they wanted, the answer was that they want a railway that delivers value for money,

punctuality and frequent services and that they want to be able to get a seat. How the franchise is run is of no great concern to the average passenger.

However, if we look more closely at the idea of a social railway, we find that in England a number of community rail partnerships deliver localism, identify local needs and enhance the service so that the timetable is better. Such partnerships have introduced new fare structures on their lines. A degree of localism can deliver benefits.

The key point about having a social railway and an economic railway, which we stressed in our response to "Rail 2014", is that it would mean a duplication of management structures and would add cost. For community rail partnerships and localism to succeed, there must be funding, and we would want to know where the funding would come from. Localism can deliver benefits for rural lines.

John Brandon (Friends of the Far North Line): We do not favour two franchises. As we said in our response, our concern is that the economic franchise would walk away with the profits, whereas the social one would always be scratching around for money and would always be short of it.

Bill Ure (Passengers' View Scotland): Passengers' View Scotland takes a different view. The economic franchise, if we want to call it that, would allow the franchise operator greater freedom to innovate. We always hear a great deal about how the private sector is good at innovation—let us give it the opportunity to do that and see whether it can innovate, increase revenue and decrease the subsidy. Financial targets would probably be set for the economic railway and the operator would be given considerable freedom.

The targets for what is called the social railway would be different. The aim would be to increase the number of passengers who use the railway in rural areas and so on.

Two different styles of management would be required. It would be for the franchise holder to structure or organise itself so that it could do both tasks efficiently. A one-size-fits-all franchise is not the way to go. There should be some separation.

As ever, the devil is in the detail. How do you figure out what is a commercial service and what is a social service? Each contains elements of the other. If we consider the service into Inverness, for example, we see that some parts of a social service can also fulfil a commuter role. That would have to be sorted out.

To go back to the original point, yes, there should be a dual-focus franchise that contains different objectives and targets. However,

everything should be underpinned by the need to deliver a value-for-money service that gives passengers what they want.

Ken Sutherland (Railfuture Scotland): Railfuture Scotland would tend to agree with the points made by Passenger Focus. Having one franchise removes the number of interfaces, and localism leads to a better understanding of the needs and expectations of people in communities.

I draw members' attention to page 2 of our submission, which quotes from page 45 of the Government's "Infrastructure Investment Plan 2011", from November 2011. The plan states:

"The emerging consensus is that a more joined up approach to delivering services, with key decision making taken locally, is the best way to ensure that rail services become more efficient and more attuned to local needs."

It should be easy to accommodate a local dimension within a unified system that had fewer interfaces.

Anne MacLean (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland): As members of the committee will know, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland advises Scottish ministers on the needs of the disabled passenger, and I have to start by saying how disappointed MACS was with "Rail 2014". We have written to the head of Transport Scotland to point out that the needs of the disabled traveller receive only a passing reference, and I raised the same point with the minister last week when he discussed our annual report with me.

I will not comment one way or the other, on whether the franchise should be a multiple franchise. However, we would be concerned if there were a lack of consistency across the rail service for disabled passengers.

MACS sits on the Scottish rail accessibility forum along with a number of other bodies—including PVS, I think.

Bill Ure: Yes.

Anne MacLean: The forum has enormous difficulty in getting information on rail services and stations. We would not like to see a system that broke up, in any way, our ability to approach the franchisee about the treatment of disabled rail passengers in access to stations, in the training of staff, in the assistance offered—I could go on for ever, although I will not. Committee members will be able to see why, for us, multiple franchises could cause a problem.

Aileen McLeod: I want to pick up on a point that John Brandon has raised. The submission from the Friends of the Far North Line talks about the idea of community, not-for-profit ownership. Have you done any work on that?

John Brandon: No.

Aileen McLeod: Will you be doing any work on it?

John Brandon: It went into our submission, but it is not an issue that we have discussed in great detail. However, we would like local communities to be much more involved in the line. The railway is 170-odd miles long, so it may be that someone from outside the Friends of the Far North Line would have to take the stations on. Our organisation is not geared up to do that—there are too many stations.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Robert Samson has mentioned community rail partnerships. As far as I am aware, such partnerships operate mainly in England and Wales. We do not appear to have the same set-up north of the border. When you talk about a localised element, I presume that you are talking about the consideration of a particular line, for which some forum or partnership could be established to take local decisions that could feed into overall decision making.

Robert Samson: In Scotland, if we consider somewhere other than the Highlands, a specific example would be the Stranraer line. The viability and potential of that line have been much discussed. How best do we serve the populations of Dumfries and Galloway—Stranraer, Girvan, Barrhill and so on—now that Stena has moved to Cairnryan?

We have been involved in various forums with the west of Scotland transport partnership, and an idea would be to involve Dumfries and Galloway Council with community rail partners to create a partnership with local people delivering what is best for that railway. Just now, the timetable falls between two stools. The railway is very much resource driven, and trains go down there when they are not needed in Glasgow, to a large extent. The timetable is not best suited to local needs. The regional transport partnership could create a community rail partnership that can deliver what is best for the local community and for tourism in that area. We could also have special ticketing.

The Convener: Do the regional transport partnerships, such as the north east of Scotland transport partnership and the Highlands and Islands transport partnership, form a basis for the localism that you are proposing?

Robert Samson: They could be a basis for localism because they have regional transport strategies and so on, and that could be a basis for community rail partnerships. We represent rail passengers across Scotland, England and Wales, but local people on the ground will have a far greater knowledge of local needs than we do and

community rail partnerships might be one way of getting to that knowledge.

Adam Ingram: How would that work with the franchisee? The franchisee has won a bid but might not know what to expect from the community rail partnership. How do you build that in?

Robert Samson: It is working very successfully with the various franchises in England and Wales. There is the base timetable and community rail partnerships come up with various ideas such as group save tickets and ideas to boost tourism in the area. All those initiatives add value to the rail network and get more people travelling on the local line, which also adds value for the franchisee. The franchisees and the partnerships are working in harmony at the moment.

Adam Ingram: I am sorry to pursue the point, but are you including issues such as fares? There could be an argument that we need to establish a Ryanair-type approach to railways to slash fares in order to get people using the trains on the kind of line that you are talking about, such as the Ayr to Stranraer line. The way to encourage modal shift would be to slash fares, which would increase passenger numbers fairly dramatically. Would what you are advocating be able to accommodate that approach?

Robert Samson: It would, but it would also require a review of the fare system. On the Stranraer line, for example, for historical reasons, Strathclyde partnership for transport sets the fares as far as Barrhill. I think that a passenger can get from Glasgow to Barrhill for £10, but Barrhill to Stranraer is another £15 to £20 because of the different fare structures. The fare is a deterrent for passengers who are travelling to or from Stranraer by rail. We would need a thorough review of the fare system to make it fair, open and transparent for passengers.

The Convener: We will move on to achieving reliability, performance and service quality. That is something that the media tends to home in on when we are talking about the railways. I am looking for opinions on the public performance measure on train performance and reliability. Are the proposed measures robust or could they be improved? What are your general opinions of the PPM?

10:15

Bill Ure: The existing measures have been pretty well validated and they give a reasonably clear indication of how a franchise is performing, but they are not particularly useful from the passenger point of view. Most people want to know how their train service works. Is it an average of 3.5 minutes late every day, so that

someone can factor that into their plan for the day? Does it always run to time? We do not know those things. Paradoxically, the information is available. In building up the PPM, rail companies use existing real-time information, but they do not tell the passengers any of that, because they have not been asked to do so. What passengers want to know is the daily performance, the reliability and so on of their service between Tillietudlem and Inversneckie.

The PPM provides a measure of reliability and performance and is useful in, for example, calculating where compensation might be required. However, there is a split. First, there is the information that people really want to know about how their service operates; secondly, there is the financial bit that shows a particular franchise's overall performance and whether the Government is getting value for money; and thirdly, there is performance information that determines whether compensation should be paid to season-ticket holders. The picture is reasonably complex and we think that work needs to be done on that.

Ken Sutherland: In response to question 10 of the consultation, Railfuture Scotland suggested that, beside having an index of late-running trains with a five-minute threshold for local suburban services and a 10-minute threshold for intercity services—which is probably okay—the number of people on the train should also be factored in. After all, a late-running Glasgow to Edinburgh train carrying 500 people will have a much greater impact on society and employers than a lightly loaded train. As a result, we think that there should be a mechanism to reflect the total inconvenience or disturbance with incentives to maintain better punctuality.

The Convener: But will that not lead to disincentives on less well-used lines? Surely, as a direct result of such a move and given the concentration of rail services and investment in rail in the central belt, people in rural areas would be less well off.

Ken Sutherland: I do not think that the two things are mutually exclusive; I am simply suggesting that we reflect the real world. A late-running train carrying 400 or 500 people should not have the same single index factor that a lightly loaded train has. Rural areas would not be disadvantaged, because the late-running index would still apply.

The Convener: But what would be the benefit of such a move?

Ken Sutherland: I simply think that we need a more sensitive reflection of the impact. If all you show is that X number of trains ran late, it does not show the magnitude of the impact or the

number of people affected. It is just another weapon in the toolbox for measuring reliability and punctuality.

Anne MacLean: Reliability and punctuality are very important, as is comfort. However, we think that, for disabled rail passengers, a whole range of other factors should be measured. For example, is the rail company meeting their assistance needs? If you book assistance, does it turn up? If trains are running late, are allowances made for people with disabilities who had booked assistance and need to transfer to another train, bus or what have you? Are the staff well trained?

One of the outcomes sought by the Scottish Government is that more people are encouraged to use public transport. Of course, we are not talking about only disabled people; Scotland's population is ageing, so we are also talking about older people who are slower on their feet—and I speak as someone who is 70 herself. However, if you are seeking to encourage people to use public transport, those sorts of things have to be measured as well. I am not saying that reliability and punctuality are not important—they are—but I think that other things need to be measured. If you fail to measure those things, you will be failing to make the argument that you are mainstreaming disability.

The Convener: So last-minute changes of platforms, for example, are a problem.

Anne MacLean: Indeed.

The Convener: Are such things measured at the moment?

Anne MacLean: No. I am not having a go at Passenger Focus, but we have just written to that organisation pointing out that its annual national passenger survey does not ask for disabled rail passengers' views, that it could do so in future and that MACS would be very keen to help in that respect.

John Brandon: Our view on punctuality is different from Mr Sutherland's, in that we believe that being on time should mean being on time. That was the case before the passenger's charter came in in 1991 or 1992 and we think that that should still be the case. Passengers expect trains to be on time; they do not want trains that are up to five minutes—or even up to 10 minutes—late to be regarded as being on time, particularly given that, in England more than in Scotland, the final arrival time of many trains is artificially padded out to ensure that they have more chance of arriving within the terms of the charter. We think that we should return to the previous three categories: on time; between one and five minutes late; and more than five minutes late. That system worked very well. Indeed, it has been argued that the slacker you make the timetable, the less people are

bothered to run things on time. The tighter you make the turnaround at the terminus, the more likely you are to be on your toes and get the train back on time. Things just slip.

The Convener: Is that the reason why, as you say in your submission, the journey time from Inverness to Wick is longer than it was so many years ago?

John Brandon: There are a number of reasons for that. It is partly to do with the fact that the performance of the class 158s was not quite as good as the calculations suggested it would be, and partly because the recovery from speed restrictions going into and out of loops and at level crossings takes a bit longer than was calculated. As a result, the journey times were not realistic. We still think that some time could be taken out of them, but the issue needs to be examined intelligently. The loop speeds and level crossing speeds are the key. Although there is certainly some merit in increasing the line speed—after all, the units can do 90mph, but it is a 75mph line—you do not gain a great deal on greenfield; in fact, in order to save two minutes, a train would have to run at a constant 90mph rather than 75mph for 15 miles. By improving loop and level crossing speeds, you can gain many more odd half-minutes here and there, all of which can add up and shorten journey times dramatically.

Robert Samson: I support what Bill Ure from Passengers' View Scotland said about the PPM. Our research shows that passengers want performance to be reported on individual routes; indeed, they want detail on the trains on which they usually travel. However, there is no correlation between the PPM's five and 10-minute threshold for late-running trains and passenger experience. Commuters going into Glasgow, Edinburgh or indeed any city centre in the morning measure punctuality and performance to the very minute; for every minute of delay, passenger satisfaction falls by 5 percentage points. The industry might judge a train reaching Edinburgh nine minutes over time as being on time, but hundreds of passengers will be getting off that train dissatisfied at arriving nine minutes late.

The Convener: As well as the PPM, there is the service quality incentive regime, or SQUIRE. How could that be improved?

Bill Ure: It has been very effective. As you know, it was introduced by SPT and it was interesting to watch SPT inspectors crawling all over stations, measuring sizes of sweetie papers and so on. The regime is rigorous and, indeed, has been extended.

From time to time, the industry has complained that the regime is too onerous, so you have to think that it must be doing something right and

must be pretty good. As “Rail 2014” makes clear, stations are a key part of the passenger experience, so there should be no slackening in efforts to make stations more desirable places to visit. Indeed, if, as the paper suggests, third parties get involved in running stations, it is even more important that they conform to a consistent and rigorous regime. They might even excel in that environment.

We very much support SQUIRE and how it has been implemented on Scotland’s railways. Quite frankly, parts of England are extremely envious of what is happening up here in that respect.

Robert Samson: SQUIRE is quite a good quantitative measure. However, in its report “The First ScotRail Passenger Franchise”, Audit Scotland suggested that there should also be a qualitative measure. What is missing is what the passengers think about the franchise. How satisfied are they? What do they think about punctuality?

We suggest that the national passenger survey gives a good qualitative measure of passengers’ experience of journeys. The information can be broken down into commuter, business and leisure travel, and it can be broken down into building blocks, such as the Strathclyde network and interregional transport partnership networks.

The Convener: Is it fair to say that the rail franchisees take more account of SQUIRE measurements than they do of feedback from passengers on an individual, if not an anecdotal, basis?

I have been trying to get ScotRail to put in a timetable board and a ticket machine at Portlethen station, but there are not enough passengers. It is a catch-22 situation. The station is so near to Aberdeen that people do not have time to get tickets while they are on board the train. Therefore, people do not use the train to commute, as they should do, because there is no ticket machine or timetable information at the station. Such issues do not show up on SQUIRE targets or the PPM, so nothing happens.

Anne MacLean: We have similar issues with SQUIRE. We think that it is good, but it does not measure everything that is needed. For instance, it does not measure accessibility. As I said, I was very disappointed by how little reference to the disabled traveller there is in “Rail 2014”. About the only instance is where it says that 73 per cent of stations in Scotland are step free. Well, I know where you live, convener, and you know where I live, and I reckon that most of the stations that are not accessible or step free are between Perth and Aberdeen, Perth and Inverness, Inverness and Wick, Glasgow and Mallaig, and Aberdeen and Inverness. There are lovely, old-fashioned

bridges—they are beautifully scrolled and what have you—but they are totally inaccessible.

That sort of thing is not measured, nor is how good the signage is or how many stations have low-level booking areas that someone with a wheelchair can use. All that has to be part of providing a good service to passengers, because it does not help just the disabled passenger. A lot of those things help mothers with buggies—or fathers; I will not be sexist—people with heavy luggage and so on. We all know what it is like trying to get across one of those iron bridges in bad weather, in snow and ice. None of that is measured, but it all puts people off using the railway service.

When we use it and it works well, the railway service is good—I really want to say that. When the service works well for the disabled passenger, it can be very good; when it does not work, it is horrid.

The Convener: Do the witnesses have other issues to raise about the reliability and performance of the current franchise? What other improvements are required, from the passenger’s point of view?

Robert Samson: The SQUIRE regime can create perverse incentives, given the fines that can be levied on ScotRail. Passenger satisfaction at a particular station might be quite low, for various reasons, such as a lack of information, an inability to purchase tickets, a lack of ticket vending machines and so on. The operator’s focus is not on such issues; it is on how many sweetie papers are on the platform, because if there are too many it will get fined. SQUIRE is a good regime but it can have the wrong focus. Because of the nature of the regime and the fines involved, passengers’ major concerns are not being addressed at stations in the way that they would be if there was a more qualitative aspect to the regime.

10:30

Ken Sutherland: In relation to consultation question 14, we think that improvement is needed in the ways that passengers can communicate their rage and uncertainty at the time when something happens. The majority of people get frustrated when a train runs late and they are given no information or conflicting information. When they get back home, they could and perhaps should put something in writing to Passenger Focus or the operator. Some form of modern technology—BlackBerrys, smartphones or whatever—and signage to tell people that they can register a problem would at least give customers the satisfaction of knowing that they could do something at the time when the problem occurred.

Bill Ure: Steps have already been taken in that direction. For the Strathclyde area, there is a passenger control centre at Paisley—there is now also a centre at Dunfermline. All the stations have a help point with a call button. If a person is standing at a station and the train does not appear, as happens to me sometimes at Fairlie station, they can press the button and ask where the train is and a guy in Paisley will tell them. If the guys at the control centre are really smart, as they frequently are, they will tell you before you have pressed the button that the such-and-such from Largs is running five minutes late.

On Ken Sutherland's other point, experience seems to vary around the country, but some of the London commuter services, such as C2C, have quite complex networks for communication with people via their mobile phones and BlackBerrys. People can sign up for an alerts service, which tells them that the 12.10 from Shenfield is running five minutes late—the message comes up automatically. Such things can be done; it is a case of moving forward on them.

There is a good basis for what the SQUIRE regime does, but I think that the consultation paper acknowledges that SQUIRE does not measure all the things that affect passengers, some of which have been mentioned today. There is a case for a revised SQUIRE regime—maybe we should promote it from squire to knight—which would include more qualitative issues. The basis is sound, but let us make it better.

Robert Samson: It is interesting to disaggregate ScotRail's results on how well passengers think that it deals with delays. Overall, only about 37 per cent of passengers are satisfied, but if we disaggregate the results and look at rural lines, where services are less frequent, there is 90-odd per cent satisfaction. People get good information because the service is less frequent. However, in Strathclyde, to a large extent—despite the help points and the control centre—when things go wrong the information does not get out there. Only about 20 per cent of passengers on the Strathclyde network are satisfied with how ScotRail deals with severe delays.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The consultation document deals with one or two old chestnuts. One is that the big problem with rail services is that everyone wants to travel at the same time. There were suggestions in the consultation document about how to deal with overcrowding. What is the extent of the overcrowding problem on the Scottish rail service? How might we tackle it? I genuinely want to know what you think, taking account of suggestions in the consultation document and any ideas of your own.

Bill Ure: PVS did quite a bit of work after the document was published. We did an analysis of all the train services in Scotland. Permitted standing time is currently about 10 minutes—except between Paisley Gilmour Street and Glasgow Central, where it is 12 minutes. We looked at the issue and asked what the effect would be if the permitted standing time was increased to 15 minutes.

There must be a realisation that the overcrowding problem cannot be resolved just by providing equipment, unless that is done at enormous expense. It is very expensive to provide modern equipment that is fully utilised only in the morning and evening peaks and which might run at 20 or 30 per cent capacity at other times.

The operators themselves cannot solve the congestion problem. There is a social issue, too. Does everyone need to start work at 8.55 am, 9 am or whatever? There are places where people probably have to do that, but much can be done, through initiatives such as travel planning with major firms, to endeavour to reduce congestion during peak times.

Fares can be adjusted, but it has been demonstrated that there probably has to be a pretty substantial fare reduction—25 per cent, or something of that nature—if we want to encourage people to move from a peak service to an off-peak service. The difference has to be visible, but fares can be used.

On the question of the operator trying to solve the problem by providing more equipment, it is seriously daft to strengthen a train from Aberdeen—which is 160 miles from Glasgow—in order to deal with congestion from Larbert and Lenzie, which are 23 and 16 miles from Glasgow respectively. However, that is what is happening just now.

The improvement programme of electrification between Glasgow and Edinburgh is coming along. That will lead to a cascade of surplus diesel units, and it may be that they will be used as congestion busters, or crowd busters, during peak times. Instead of strengthening a train from Aberdeen, another train could start from Larbert. Assets could be used on that route at peak times, and on the line from Inverkeithing to Edinburgh. The problem will never be completely resolved, but some measures can be taken.

I referred to our analysis and to extending the permitted standing time to 15 minutes, which would cover many of the problem areas. The only overcrowded routes that would not be covered are the ones from Larbert or Inverkeithing, which would go beyond that time. However, a separate overcrowding issue also arises. I do not know how many of you have done this, but on the Inverness

route passengers can get off at Perth to change on to an Aberdeen to Glasgow train. There will be a goodly crowd on the platform and a three-car 170 will come staggering in, loaded to the gunwhales. Two people will get off, and 32 will try to get on. That sort of overcrowding also has to be dealt with—and, in some ways, dealing with that is more important than dealing with, say, the 10 minutes between Cambuslang or Rutherglen and Glasgow Central low level.

I will try to summarise this long peroration. Yes, some things can be done, but they cannot all be done by the operator. Businesses and the economy come into it. A good incentive is required to move people away from travelling at peak times. People have to see a real saving. Sometimes, equipment can be used as a congestion buster on short-range routes, but we must not forget the long-range routes—and it is a long stand from Dundee to Edinburgh or from Perth to Glasgow.

Ken Sutherland: I largely agree with what Bill Ure said. Many of the problems with overcrowding arise from decades of underinvestment in the rail system. That started in the 1960s and 1970s, but we are paying for it today.

Sometimes, overcrowding at peak times in commuter areas is simply a fact of life that, to some extent, we have to accept. That does not take away from the need to try to spread the peak, but suggestions that were made last week worried us—and may have worried some committee members as well. Severe and punitive increases in fares during peak hours were suggested, to encourage people to travel outside those hours. Using the railways, in isolation, as a weapon for societal change is wrong. There should be modest encouragement to travel off-peak if possible, but crude and blunt instruments should not be used.

Alex Johnstone: If we introduce punitive fares at peak times, we might push people to use the trains at different times—or we might push them back into their cars.

Ken Sutherland: It would depend on the threshold. It may be for the McNulty report to suggest ways of driving down the cost of running the UK rail system, but there is a limit to what can be done. People have alternatives, and I feel that it is unfair to single out rail passengers in efforts to change how we live and work. People make demands at peak times on electricity, water and all sorts of other things—all of which are underused at certain periods. All kinds of measures should be tried.

Anne MacLean: I wanted to raise a point about rural commuting. Not all commuting is between Edinburgh and Glasgow; people commute to Aberdeen and Inverness, for example, and

because there are so few trains, people may have no option but to use one particular train. A train leaves Kingussie at a certain time, and it is the only one that people can use to get to Inverness for 9 o'clock.

In rural areas, if people are priced out of the market, I think that they will revert to their cars—assuming that they are able to use a car. A whole range of disabled passengers cannot drive; it is not just me and my guide dog. Guide dogs are very clever, but we have not taught them to drive yet. There are people who have epilepsy or cognitive problems, and a whole range of other people who cannot drive. In rural commuting, those people would be forced to pay the higher fares. The fares would be high even for those who have a disabled rail card, because there is only one train for them to use.

John Brandon: Our response to “Rail 2014” is that the same rules should apply in Scotland as apply in England. Standing should only be for 20 minutes and off-peak passengers should expect a seat. That was mentioned when we talked about changing at Perth, because people should expect to be able to get a seat at Perth.

We are, a bit perversely, rather pleased that there is overcrowding on the far north line into Inverness in the morning and back out in the evening, because it means that people are coming to the trains. However, as Anne MacLean said, the situation is a lot more sensitive there than it is in Glasgow or Edinburgh or any other large city. Some passengers will say that they will not stand every day and they will go back to their cars. We must provide the right number of services for them.

Another disincentive for commuting into and out of Inverness is that the service is inflexible; there are not many trains, although there are a lot more than there used to be. We have proposed that there should be an hourly service between Inverness and Tain, because we think that there is a completely untapped market. Stagecoach runs a lot of buses between Tain and Inverness, and Dingwall and Inverness, so it must think that there is business to be had there. There would be business for the railway, too, if the level of service was better.

If someone who goes to work in Inverness in the morning needs to go home at some time during the afternoon to go to the doctor, for example, they do not have much choice. They will probably have to drive to Inverness, because they will need to get home at a time when there is no train. If the service was more frequent, they would use the train.

Robert Samson: Our research with rail passengers in Scotland has demonstrated over

and over again that their top four priorities are value for money in ticket prices, a punctual service, a frequent service, and the ability to get a seat when travelling. One of the things that will deter modal shift is the constraints on the network's capacity. Yes, it takes 10 minutes to travel at peak times from Paisley Gilmour Street to Glasgow, but if more and more people who are travelling on the trains are unable to get a seat, that will be a deterrent to modal shift.

Alex Johnstone: To some extent, we have covered the issue of journey times and punctuality. I know how to run trains faster and more punctually—run them from start to finish and do not stop in between. That is very easy, but the trouble is that no one gets on the train. Do ScotRail's long-distance services provide the right balance between stops and achieving short journey times?

Bill Ure: I have done quite a lot of work on that area in the past. The answer is no, they do not. Things are much better than they used to be, but the services do not provide the right balance because it is a resource-led railway. That is a jargon way of saying that we have a certain number of trains and we have to make the best possible use of them. That is why we have happy things like 11 stops between Glasgow and Aberdeen on an intercity service that is meant to be competing with the car.

We need to divide the services into intercity services and those that feed into and out of them. That brings its own problems, such as capacity on the track and signalling. For example, between Glasgow and Aberdeen we would be looking at stops at Stirling, Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen. What happens to the people at Montrose and Arbroath and so on? The answer is to have a train that connects into and out of the fast service. With the increasing improvements in electronics, we want the passenger who is going from Montrose to Glasgow to get his ticket at Montrose, but to have a seat booked for when he joins the train at Dundee. That will give the passenger confidence.

"Rail 2014" talks about interchange stations, but I did not like the way that it said that trains would be run to Perth and people would have to change to another train to go from Perth to Aberdeen. The purpose of an interchange station should be to allow passengers to change from a fast service to a slower service in order to get off at intermediate stations such as Arbroath or Montrose, or to change from the slower service to get a faster train; for example, people coming from Montrose change at Dundee to get a fast train to Edinburgh. The target in that respect should be to ensure that that journey time is no longer than the journey time for a through train. That would act as a real incentive to make the whole thing work.

10:45

In fact, picking up on Anne MacLean's comments, I note that there are relatively few such interchange stations in Scotland—the key ones are Perth and Dundee—but, all the same, that is where you should focus on putting in place well-trained staff and good directional signs. If you make the interchange work properly, you will take away people's fears. After all, people do not like changing trains. In Germany, for example, platforms are painted in different colours to show passengers where the different coaches stop and where they should stand. It is not rocket science; exactly the same thing could be done here.

That is what Transport Scotland is endeavouring to do: to improve journey times between the main urban centres by reducing the number of intermediate stops while, at the same time, providing people coming from intermediate stations with a good service to and from the faster trains.

Anne MacLean: The interchange stations have to be good though. Perth is a nightmare. Please do not misunderstand me: I am not criticising the staff; the station itself is a nightmare, for example signage is poor and there is a long journey between platforms.

Interestingly, question 16 in the consultation asks about interchange with rail or other modes of public transport, and I come back to the needs of certain disabled rail passengers. Unless the interchange is with an accessible bus—I believe that such buses have to come in by 2015—there will be no interchange at all. If the bus is not accessible, what do passengers do?

For passengers who are changing from faster to slower trains, interchange stations must be well signposted and have good assistance available in order to give people confidence. Incidentally, I note that the consultation document does not list Inverness as an interchange station; nevertheless, from there, people can go to Aberdeen, Wick and the Kyle of Lochalsh. In fact, Inverness is not a bad interchange station, because it is completely flat—there are no horrible bridges and what have you—and the assistance available is reasonably good.

Interchanging works only if people have confidence in the system and—in cases where there are no intermediate trains—if the buses are accessible. It is no good shoving people off a train in Perth if there are no accessible buses to take them to Pitlochry, for example.

John Brandon: Picking up Bill Ure's comments about journey times, I note that the 2008 strategic transport projects review promised an hourly service on the Highland main line with improved journey times. Indeed, when he visited Inverness,

the First Minister confirmed that it would be introduced in the December 2011 timetable. All we got in that timetable was two extra trains but, because there have been no infrastructure improvements and because the Highland main line has long sections of single line, the move has had a deleterious effect on journey times—and will continue to have such an effect unless the infrastructure is improved. Originally, we were promised that the Highland main line would be upgraded with more loops—I think that there were to be three reinstatements and the extension of a double-track section from Culloden Moor to Daviot by 2014, which was then extended to 2016. The latest date that we have been given is 2025, by which time, under current plans, England will have nearly 140 miles of brand-new railway, including substantial tunnelling, almost ready to open. All we are talking about here is upgrading an existing railway.

The upgrade of the Inverness to Aberdeen line, which was originally promised for approximately 2016 or 2017, will now happen in 2030. By that time, the two top-end legs of the Y of the high-speed line will be nearly ready. This is an incredibly sudden change of plan. It just does not seem credible for the First Minister to promise one thing, only for it suddenly to disappear.

Ken Sutherland: Following on from our discussion about through services and interchange stations, I think that we need to ensure that we do not send out mixed messages. One thing that passengers dislike about rail journeys is having to change. For many years, British Rail maintained the quite coherent argument that it lost 25 to 30 per cent of its passengers if they had to change during their trip. It is vital that the committee does its best to emphasise certain red lines, such as the maintenance of through trains from London to Aberdeen and Inverness.

There is also an excessive emphasis on squeezing out every single minute of journey time savings. The fact is that people prefer to take a through service from Glasgow to Bristol and the west country; even if it takes longer, they want to sit on the same seat on the same train instead of changing at Birmingham New Street. As a more local example, people in Helensburgh, Milngavie and the western part of that particular conurbation are benefiting substantially from a through service to Edinburgh and from not having to change at Glasgow Queen Street. In contrast, very few people travel by rail from Inverclyde, Ayrshire, Paisley or other parts of Renfrewshire to Edinburgh, because they have to break the journey at Glasgow Central. Although the onward service is from the same station and although all the platforms at that station are on the same level, that change of trains is still felt to be a massive

break in service and we have been pushing for years for the incorporation of the Glasgow city union line—or what is called the crossrail link—to give passengers from Paisley and Ayrshire a direct service to Edinburgh via the new Airdrie to Bathgate line.

Sometimes you have to ask whether more money should be spent on infrastructure just to improve the mix of through and interchange services. Transport Scotland has claimed that adding an extra station to a service has a very substantial negative effect on end-to-end passengers; however, if you scrutinise the details, you will find that, for example, the number of people travelling from Glasgow or Edinburgh to Aberdeen has not been reduced by the fact that some trains now stop at Laurencekirk. Indeed, that in itself is a success story, because the service is carrying about twice as many passengers as the estimates suggested. We have to be careful and examine the issue case by case. There is a case for focusing on interchange stations, but there is a feeling that that is being used as a quick fix to save investment.

Anne MacLean: That is right. Mr Sutherland made the case for through services from London to Aberdeen and Inverness. Disabled passengers do not want those to go; in fact, I should also say that they do not want the sleeper—

The Convener: We are coming to that.

Anne MacLean: Okay. I just thought that I would mention it in case there was no time later.

The Convener: Of course, time is marching on. Members and witnesses need to be quicker in asking questions and giving responses.

Alex Johnstone: How well do members of the panel think that rail services connect with other forms of public transport?

Ken Sutherland: I can answer that in two words: very poorly.

Alex Johnstone: Are things improving or do we still have a lot to do in that respect?

Ken Sutherland: I do not think that there has been any discernible improvement that anyone out there in, say, Princes Street could point to. We have been talking about the holy grail of integration for decades now; indeed, I remember a former transport minister saying that a person should be able to buy a through ticket from Paisley to Peterhead to use on buses, trains and so on.

The various systems do not link up. Bus stops are not situated near stations; timetables do not link together; and there is no through ticketing. I appreciate that that is all because of the deregulated framework but I think that we could do a lot more if we resolved to make travel on public

transport as seamless as the travel experience in private cars.

The Convener: And that is all despite the fact that certain companies provide both bus and rail services.

John Brandon: Of course, that does not apply only in Edinburgh, Glasgow or other large cities. In our patch, if you took the train to Kyle and wanted to catch the Portree bus, you would not just stumble across the bus stop. Although the matter has been raised with the Highlands and Islands transport partnership, no bus stop sign has been put up. I know—and others around the table probably know—where it is because we have been to Kyle, but the average traveller would not. That is the case in many other places.

Robert Samson: As a quick example, I point out that the Scottish Government controls both the ScotRail franchise and the Caledonian MacBrayne tendering process. However, the ferry does not meet the train and vice versa because, under the performance regimes for both services, the companies involved are liable to be fined if the ferry or the train runs late. Passengers are standing at Wemyss Bay watching the rear end of the ferry as it goes to Rothesay because CalMac does not want to be fined. Who is disadvantaged there? It is Scottish passengers and tourists who have come to the country. It does not make sense as far as passengers are concerned.

The Convener: Let us crack on.

Alex Johnstone: Yes. I have two questions but I will combine them so that I can get one answer and we can get on.

We have already touched on the fact that the fare structure in Scotland is complex, and we are also aware that, for historical reasons, fares in Strathclyde are lower and the structure is run differently from in the rest of Scotland. Do rail passengers in Scotland understand the fare structure? How could it be improved?

Ken Sutherland: As we have said in our submission, the fare structure is quite grotesque. The price of a single journey from Edinburgh to Glasgow is 99 per cent of the price of a day return. If someone travels from Glasgow to Edinburgh and wants to stay overnight in Edinburgh, there is a £12 penalty. Those are two of the anachronistic aspects of the fare structure. I do not know whether ScotRail thinks that it is living with a 19th century captive market and that there is no competition, but someone who wants only a single journey is being punished. Perhaps ScotRail or the other rail companies think that they can milk a lot of money from customers who are forced to do those things, but the fact is that such people go by car or bus. Also, why should people be penalised if they do not come back on the same day? Those

are two very simple things that the rail companies could consider so that they would get more people on to the trains.

Anne MacLean: Some disabled rail passengers have complained that the only way to get some of the cheaper fares is online, but a range of disabled people cannot use computers.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I was going to ask the witnesses whether they think that people get value for money for their fares, but they have kindly answered that.

Ken Sutherland: Value for money is a mythical concept. What do we mean by it? We must set the value for money of fares against the alternative, which for many people is the car. Companies quote fares between two cities, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, or Aberdeen and Perth, or wherever, but the additional cost to the passenger of getting to Perth station or to Edinburgh Waverley from Dunbar or wherever is not counted. The question is about value for money in relation to the alternative, which is door to door in the car's case.

Robert Samson: Value for money is linked not just to the price of the ticket but to the quality of service. Is my train clean? Is it punctual and reliable? Am I able to get a seat? Passengers use all those criteria when looking at value for money and deciding whether they are satisfied with the price of a ticket. It is not just about price; it is about all those other factors.

Margaret McCulloch: You are talking about the whole experience.

Robert Samson: Yes.

Margaret McCulloch: We have already heard Anne MacLean's suggestions about improving Scotland's stations to make them more accessible. Anne, you mentioned excellent ideas such as lower machines that would help people who are in wheelchairs—selfishly, I had never thought of that. You also talked about access over stairs and bridges. Do you have any other suggestions?

11:00

Anne MacLean: As you will have seen, the 2014 consultation talks about the whole question of stations. One idea is good audio and visual signage. If someone cannot see, like me, they need to hear good and clear announcements. Someone who has a hearing impairment needs to have good, clear visual announcements.

“Step-free” is an interesting expression. It is not good having a low counter for people in wheelchairs if the station is not step-free. If members think that that does not happen, they

should trust me—it does. We need joined-up thinking.

The other thing that we need has nothing to do with the physical design of stations but is about assistance, which is usually very good, as I have already said. When it works, it is wonderful, but what about when it does not work and someone who has a visual or hearing impairment or cognitive problems—it does not matter what it is—is just left? That is a problem.

I have travelled through England into Scotland with different providers and if a person has booked assistance from a particular franchisee but the train is late and they have to get a different train—let us say that they must change from CrossCountry to East Coast, which is as good an example as any—they are left not knowing what to do. The train is late and the people from CrossCountry cannot tell the traveller anything about the other train service, because they have no responsibility for it. That is my strongest argument against multiple franchising.

People want good, clear information and accessible stations—with no iron bridges. The height of platforms is another issue. On the Perth to Inverness line, which I know well, there has just been a huge hoo-hah in Kingussie. Trains used to come in and go out on the same platform, but southbound trains are now coming in on the other platform, which is feet lower than the other side. As a result, the only way that someone can access the train, even if they are really able bodied, is via two yellow steps. Going up might not be so bad, but going down is a nightmare and, because the platform is quite narrow, the angle for the wheelchair ramp is difficult. I am glad that I do not have to try to negotiate it with my dog, because I think that she would have to jump. I accept that there are trains only every two hours, but Kingussie is a tourist destination and we want to encourage tourism in Scotland. VisitScotland is doing a lot of work on disabled tourism and what have you—and then at Kingussie we have that bizarre situation.

I want the experience of the disabled rail traveller to be made as smooth as possible. I am not expecting the earth, but if there is no physical accessibility at a station, the staff must be trained to help people better. Nothing says more about our railways than the way in which the staff treat the passenger and the disabled passenger. I am not saying that the disabled passenger is any more important than anyone else, but training in how to deal with disabled passengers is crucial, because staff can make all the difference to a journey—they can make it or break it.

Margaret McCulloch: In the “Rail 2014” consultation document, it is suggested that the cross-border services that currently extend north

and west of Edinburgh could terminate at Edinburgh Waverley station, which would necessitate a change to a ScotRail train for through passengers. What impact would such an approach have on the Scottish franchisee?

John Brandon: We are totally against cross-border services terminating in Edinburgh Waverley. The approach would be a major disincentive for through passengers. Edinburgh Waverley is not—and will not be, even when the building work is finished—the easiest station to negotiate. Not every platform is at the same level. Some platforms are accessed through a barrier; others are not. Let me pick an example out of the air. If someone arrives at platform 7 and their connection goes from platform 10, they will probably wander halfway across the station before they realise that platforms 7 and 10 are the same platform.

Bill Ure: The short answer is no, cross-border services should not terminate at Edinburgh Waverley. Part of the reasoning behind the suggestion, according to “Rail 2014”, is that if cross-border services terminated at Waverley and ScotRail provided services north and west of Edinburgh, there would be more revenue and therefore less subsidy for ScotRail. Surely a financial adjustment can be made instead of stopping services at Edinburgh and running additional trains north and west of Edinburgh. A financial adjustment is the answer, rather than an approach that would severely disadvantage the passenger.

Anne MacLean: It would be a nightmare for the disabled passenger. You have heard it all; I will not repeat it.

The Convener: We have got the message, Anne.

Adam Ingram will move the discussion on to rolling stock.

Adam Ingram: Bill Ure mentioned that a new fleet of electric trains would come in through the EGIP programme, which will enable a lot of diesel units to be cascaded to other parts of the network. I have a three-part question. Does the current rolling stock meet the needs of passengers? Could the diesel units be altered to address the current limitations of the rolling stock and so meet their needs? Alternatively, do we need to invest in new rolling stock to improve accessibility for disabled people or address other issues?

Bill Ure: The rolling stock is a bit like a curate’s egg: it is good in parts and bad in parts. For example, in Ayrshire, where I am fortunate enough to live, the excellent new class 380 Siemens electric trains have been brought in. People who are usually critical of everything comment favourably on them.

On the displacement of diesel units and the cascade that we talked about, there is a mixture of units. In the late 1980s, the then regional railways brought into service the class 156 and class 158 trains. It is much cheaper to refurbish and seriously do up an existing train than to build a new one, so there is certainly scope for doing something of that nature, particularly if the trains were used for congestion busting at peak times or to strengthen some services, such as the commute to Inverness that was mentioned.

The Department for Transport no doubt has plans, in its great scheme of things, to take all those units away and replace rail buses around Manchester and so on. The Scottish Government might have a role to play in hanging on to some of the rolling stock. One would suspect that in future there would be some need for new build, because although the existing diesel multiple units that operate from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Aberdeen, Perth and Inverness are basically fit for purpose, in the longer term we want something better.

That is a slightly incoherent answer, but the picture is mixed.

Anne MacLean: I love it that all these men can tell me what sort of trains they are. I did not have a train set when I was a kid.

Bill Ure: It is a chap thing, Anne.

Anne MacLean: It must be.

Rolling stock includes the carriages. The carriages that sometimes run on the Inverness to Edinburgh line have wheelchair space, bicycle space and other disabled traveller space all in one place, so there is competition between cyclists and wheelchair users. As somebody who is visually impaired, I get dirty from the bikes' wheels, because I do not see them. Nobody thought of that when they designed the train.

The issue is not only the rolling stock but the services provided. For example, is there a trolley service on the train? If not, do you have to go to a central point? If you are in a wheelchair, have a guide dog or have cognitive problems—I will not go through all that again—that is a problem. On the other hand, if the staff are well trained, somebody will help you. It comes back to that.

I am probably wishing for the moon, but why not? I do not often get the opportunity, after all. The assumption seems to be that only one wheelchair passenger wants to travel at any one time. I know that my friend Anne Begg has raised the same point about buses. Sometimes there are two wheelchair users, but there ain't room for two wheelchairs in many trains.

I have gone through access to the train, access to the station and so on. As I have said, on-board

information in stations must be oral and visual. I travelled up from North Berwick this morning on a newer type of train. There was plenty of room for my dog, plenty of disabled space and a disabled lavatory. I had a comfortable journey and there was clear oral and visual information. What else could I ask for? Because of that, I came here in a good mood.

The Convener: Do you agree that the type of train that we need for an hour-long commute is very different from the one that we need for a journey of more than an hour and a half?

Bill Ure: Yes.

Anne MacLean: Yes.

The Convener: People who are travelling from Aberdeen who are not time constrained opt to take an east coast main line train because the carriages are better. Why are we not urging ScotRail to use a different type of carriage from Aberdeen and Inverness to Edinburgh and Glasgow? It has to be a different type of train that is more comfortable and more suitable for a longer journey. Quite frankly, the type of carriage that ScotRail is running at the moment is horrible.

John Brandon: We have suggested that Scottish intercity trains should be of at least mark 3 quality. Much of the intercity rolling stock that has been introduced since privatisation is nothing like the quality of the mark 3. It is not at all comfortable. Its ambience is wrong and it does not look right, whereas a mark 3 does.

Anne MacLean: I have to say that I prefer to use the east coast service but I advise people not to try to get a guide dog and a human being into one of the lavatories.

Bill Ure: I am not here to defend ScotRail, but when the franchise was let originally, there was urgency to get moving quickly and there was a fair shortage of cash. That is why we ended up with the class 170 diesel multiple unit trains that service Aberdeen. Transport Scotland and ScotRail have long recognised that those trains are not designed for long intercity journeys of two to three hours, and they want to do something about it.

The Convener: Nothing has been done about it, though.

Bill Ure: Nothing.

Robert Samson: We did some research with passengers on those routes and asked what they wanted from the rolling stock. The research was published last year, in conjunction with Transport Scotland; I will send the committee a copy. Passengers want different things, depending on the type of journey. Business users travelling from Aberdeen want wi-fi, power sockets at all seats,

coat hooks, comfortable seats and so on. Leisure passengers want luggage space and so on. All the information is on our website and we will send the committee our report.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I want to ask about the passenger journey—in particular, about comfort and safety. To save time, I will roll my questions together, then witnesses can come back to me. What are your views on catering services, on-train wi-fi and first-class seating? Are there safety concerns? We know that there is closed-circuit television in most stations and on some trains. Is there any way of improving rail-travel information, especially during delays when things happen on the line?

Robert Samson: One of the major bugbears for passengers is how well the train operating company deals with delays. We are working with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and ScotRail to try to improve that. Passengers want information as soon as possible, so they need a joined-up response from Network Rail and ScotRail. Things are improving, but they should and could be much better. There is nothing worse for a passenger than sitting while time goes by on a train that has come to a halt. They need information. Even if there is nothing more to tell passengers, they should be told that the train is delayed and that the crew will get back to them as soon as they can with a reason: passengers want reassurance. The train operating companies can improve on that and I hope that they will.

Security is mostly about antisocial behaviour of passengers. There is a bit in the “Rail 2014” consultation about alcohol-free trains and catering, particularly on busy trains that people use to go to concerts, football matches and so on. We can see the need for an alcohol ban on such trains, but why should passengers who are travelling home to Aberdeen and who want a small bottle of wine or a can of beer be penalised? It is horses for courses.

There should be adequate catering on all long-distance routes. Last week, I had a three-hour journey to Stranraer for a meeting. I knew from experience that I had to get coffee at Glasgow Central station before I got on the train. That is a very long journey without the chance to buy a sandwich or a cup of coffee or tea.

11:15

Anne MacLean: I have said my bit about catering. If it can be delivered for disabled people, that would be fine.

I will say something interesting about behaviour on trains. The United Kingdom Equality and Human Rights Commission did a study—I am not going to look at my colleagues sitting behind me, because they will kill me—about 18 months ago

on the safety of disabled passengers, which the committee might be interested in having a look at. Obviously, it covered the whole UK, but I think that you could extrapolate for Scotland, so it might be useful. The study was not just about train travel and I do not have the information about it at my fingertips, but I am sure that the committee can find it.

The Convener: If you can get somebody to pass that on to us, that would be helpful.

Anne MacLean: Okay.

Ken Sutherland: I have a point on a micro-sized item, if you like, regarding passenger information. I have laboured for years to get ScotRail to do something to bring its train timetable notice boards into the realm of real life. If you go to any station, you will see people looking at the timetable board and within seconds their eyes glaze over and they then go and ask somebody. It is stone-age technology; you get a red marker line under the home station, and it is as simple as could be. I am not denigrating the steps that have been taken on electronic signboards for trains, platforms and so on. However, the basic paper notice on a board is absolutely incomprehensible in its present form. That could be remedied by the stroke of a pen, literally.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): The last section of “Rail 2014” is on environmental issues. Obviously, in general terms rail travel is environmentally friendly, but there are still issues about carbon footprint, waste and so on. What more could be done to reduce the environmental impact of rail services?

John Brandon: Electric trains are more environmentally friendly than fossil-fuel trains. We suggested in our response to “Rail 2014” that any line that has an hourly or more frequent passenger service should be electrified.

Bill Ure: Network Rail’s document “Initial Industry Plan Scotland” recognises that the industry must endeavour to think holistically. It is true that electric trains produce less carbon than diesel trains, but it is recognised that the whole situation must be looked at—for example, what happens in depots regarding engines idling or disposal of waste. There is a substantial opportunity if all the rail industry’s activities in that regard were pooled, because they are separate at the moment. Those who manage depots have no concern about waste or about what happens at stations. However, the industry is starting to recognise that the whole situation must be looked at. If responsibility for the whole carbon footprint is given to one part of an organisation, the footprint can be reduced substantially. That is really a job for the industry and it is starting to recognise that.

Malcolm Chisholm: Anne MacLean will be pleased to know that my last question has a specific point on the Caledonian sleeper. Events have moved on since “Rail 2014” came out; the UK and Scottish Governments’ announcement of the £100 million support is relevant to the discussion on the sleeper service. You will know of the options that have been outlined. How should the sleeper service be developed?

Bill Ure: Can I respond on that? I have been doing some work in the area. I am sorry, Anne.

Anne MacLean: That is all right. I know my place.

Bill Ure: It is on the sleeper, in a first-class berth.

Anne MacLean: Okay.

Bill Ure: A window of opportunity is opening. The £50 million contribution from each Government is primarily to renew rolling stock. At the same time, with construction of the high-speed line out of Euston, we will lose the platforms there. Euston is the only station north of the Thames that has platforms that are long enough to accommodate the sleeper service. Waterloo International station is lying idle at the moment. It has four very long platforms that are used occasionally—one is sometimes used by a three-car Windsor service—but which are basically sterile, and it has been suggested that the Caledonian sleeper service operate into and out of that station, which can be accessed from the west coast main line through Kensington and so on, and that the Penzance sleeper service come out of Paddington. That would, in effect, create a UK sleeper hub at Waterloo.

However, as you will be aware, Waterloo International was also the terminal for Eurostar trains. I have been in correspondence with *Modern Railways* and others, and have suggested that if sleeper services went into Waterloo and we had this sleeper hub, we could run at least one Eurostar train into the station mornings and evenings. That would allow the sleeper service to connect with the nearer parts of western Europe and would substantially expand the market. The UK market would not change—the same services to Fort William, Aberdeen and so on could be operated. However, at a time when we are being forced to change the originating station—as will happen because of the reconstruction of Euston—we should explore the good access to Waterloo from Europe and consider whether we can open the sleeper market to the nearer parts of western Europe. Just think: you could leave Cologne at 4 o’clock in the afternoon and wake up next morning and have your breakfast as you head towards Fort William. What more could you ask for? That would be good for tourism.

Alex Johnstone: There is great symmetry in connecting Waterloo with Brussels.

Bill Ure: Indeed. There is a good historical precedent.

Let us not get carried away: the sleeper service will still need to be subsidised, but the approach that I have suggested could at least reduce the subsidy per passenger. Given the tourism opportunities that it would create for Scotland and the UK Government, the issue is certainly worth picking up and investigating.

The Convener: We will certainly take that on board.

Anne MacLean: This is not necessarily a point about disabled people, but one might ask whether tourists who are going to Aviemore for skiing want to get off a train and cart their equipment across Waverley station when they could leave London at half past 9 at night and be on the slopes at half past 9 the next morning.

The report is not yet published, but VisitScotland has been carrying out some interesting work on transport and visitor attractions. When that is completed, the findings might add to the committee’s discussions because they will show the extra tourism money that can be brought in by encouraging disabled tourists to visit.

John Brandon: We want the sleepers to run as they do at the moment; indeed, we do not think that the introduction of high-speed rail will necessarily mean the end of the lowland sleepers. When high-speed diesels started to run on the east coast line in 1978, we were told that there would be no need for sleepers any more, but we still have them because they are still valuable to people who need to be at their destination cities for 9 o’clock in the morning or earlier and who have to make a journey before they get on the train. After all, not everyone lives in the middle of Edinburgh, the middle of London, the middle of Glasgow or the middle of Inverness; many people have to make an initial journey and the sleeper is the only way they can get to their destination to be ready for a meeting the following day.

We have been told that the sleepers cost £21 million a year to run. However, in paragraph 24 of our submission and in response to question 39 in the “Rail 2014” consultation, I suggest three ways of making economies. First, the Highland sleepers could be split and joined at Carstairs. Secondly, they could run in push-pull mode while under electric power and thirdly—here I risk our annual general meeting being picketed by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union—they could run, at least in part, without guards. After all, there are plenty of staff on the train.

Moreover, the length of the trains is critical. The reason why they run with mark 2 seating and lounge vehicles is because, if they did not, they would not fit into Euston station. They have to run with four shorter vehicles. We have been told that those vehicles are virtually at the end of their lives—the bogies themselves are life-expired—and, as we understand it, there is nothing to replace them. However, if they ran in push-pull mode, they could be replaced with mark 3s, because at Euston you would have to measure only for one locomotive rather than two.

We certainly do not want the sleepers to be withdrawn, because they are very important for connectivity. It has been suggested that the Fort William service run only in the summer, but I think that such a move would give rise to staffing issues. How, for example, would you staff those trains for only part of the year? I know that they are not often full in the winter, but they are still very useful over the winter.

Robert Samson: The sleepers issue is a kind of Pandora's box; all these wonderful ideas come out when it gets raised. From passengers' perspective, money could be spent on improvements such as en suite toilet and shower facilities but we should not forget price sensitivity with regard to seated accommodation. Many passengers are travelling on a budget, want to get bargain prices and do not necessarily want to upgrade to some totally swish Orient Express class.

Bill Ure: I will make a final remark. As I touched on earlier—this is raised in "Rail 2014"—there is a question whether the sleeper services should continue to be part of the ScotRail franchise or be separate from it. My idea of moving sleeper services to Waterloo International, which I mentioned earlier, would create an opportunity to have a separate sleeper franchise. Such companies have started on the continent; for example, a Paris to Madrid sleeper has been in operation for the past two years and a sleeper to Milan has been introduced. I believe that, among other things, the £100 million for new rolling stock that is floating around could attract the entrepreneur, and we should examine the possibility of putting together a separate sleeper franchise for the United Kingdom, particularly if it incorporated the European element. Such a move would allow ScotRail, for which the sleeper service is a bit of an aberration, to concentrate on delivering services in Scotland.

John Brandon: I have done some research on that. The sleepers in Scotland are all maintained in Inverness, whereas Night Riviera Ltd sleepers are maintained in Penzance. The formations of the trains are completely different because the business is completely different. For a start, the

Penzance train has five seating vehicles, which apparently are often full, and only four sleepers, whereas all the Scottish sleepers have six sleeper segments, one seating vehicle and one lounge. On the face of it, the synergy looks good, but the formations of the trains and where they are maintained might cause employment problems in Inverness and Penzance.

The Convener: The problems are not insurmountable.

I thank all our witnesses for their very helpful evidence and look forward to receiving the various bits and pieces that have been mentioned. With that, I suspend the meeting for a very short comfort break and to allow the witnesses to leave the room.

11:29

Meeting suspended.

11:35

On resuming—

Forth Replacement Crossing

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is the committee's second update from the Forth replacement crossing project team. We thank the team for its written update, which includes information on the progress of the project. Some of us have visited the project since we last took evidence from the team. I welcome our witnesses from Transport Scotland: David Climie, the project director; and Lawrence Shackman, the project manager.

Margaret McCulloch: When Transport Scotland officials last appeared before the committee on 7 September 2011 they gave an oral update on the progress of the Forth crossing project. Will you update us on the three main contracts?

David Climie (Transport Scotland): Since we last appeared in September, we have made considerable progress on the project. In September, we were mobilising on the site and ready to start the work. In the past six months, the bulk of the design work has progressed extremely well and we have made a considerable start on the physical works for the project on the ground.

The principal contract is the largest one and includes the main crossing itself and the roads immediately to the north and south of the Forth. We have done considerable ground clearance in that area in order to get started on the line of the roads. We have also done work on Beamer rock in the centre of the Forth, including removing the lighthouse and doing blasting work to break up the rock so that we can remove it and excavate it down to foundation level. We have included some pictures in our report. The work is progressing extremely well.

We now have an excavator on Beamer rock. It is working 24 hours a day, removing the rock and taking it to the Ferrytoll embankment works on the north side of the Forth. Therefore, the material from Beamer rock will be recycled into the foundations for the roadway on the north side. Dredging work on the foundations of the south approach viaduct started at the beginning of March. We mobilised dredging equipment, which is now also working in the Forth.

In parallel with that, we have done a lot of work on the Fife intelligent transport system contract for the north—that will have been visible to the public. The traffic management for that was put in place in September, including 40mph speed limits in preparation for carrying out work on the

foundations of the new ITS gantries and to put in the bus hard-shoulder running on the southbound carriageway. In the past six months, a lot of preparation work has been done for the erection of the gantries, which are currently under fabrication in England.

There has also been significant traffic management to the south of the river on the M9 and the M9 spur. We are fortunate that it has been a fairly dry winter, so we have made good progress in preparing for widening the M9 spur and erecting the first four ITS gantries, which were put in place during a night-time closure in early March. The first four gantries are now in place on the M9 spur.

The remaining gantries will be put in place during the summer, and their fabrication is progressing well. That contract is also on programme and running exactly as we want it to. Overall, the project is exactly where we would like it to be. It is nearly a year since the signing of the principal contract, and the initial mobilisation has taken place, the design work is progressing well and there is a lot of physical progress on the ground.

Margaret McCulloch: Can you highlight any key events that are likely to occur over the next six months of the project?

David Climie: We publicised one such key event yesterday, namely the significant traffic management work on the north side of the Forth on the M90. There will be paving work on the southbound M90—we will completely repave the southbound carriageway and the hard shoulder, to allow for bus hard-shoulder running. That will involve putting in place a contraflow in the middle of April.

The southbound carriageway will be limited to a single lane on some weekends, to allow for the paving work. We will apply the surfacing via the echelon paving method, which will require us to close down the entire carriageway in order to pave the entire width of the carriageway at once. That eliminates joints in the surfacing and, therefore, creates a longer-life surface. That should mean that far less maintenance will be required in future. Those are the key things coming up on the north side.

On the principal contract, the caissons for the tower foundations will arrive on the site in about May. They will initially go to our marine facility in Rosyth for final work to be carried out on them before they are installed in the Forth itself. This is very much the year of the foundations as far as the main crossing is concerned.

We will also carry on with the dredging work on the south side of the Forth and progress all the

remaining earthworks and roadworks on the M9 junction 1A contract.

Margaret McCulloch: Before I ask my question on the three contracts, I want to confirm that you are in a position to answer it. Do you manage the other two contracts for the intelligent transport system and John Sisk?

David Climie: Yes, we do.

Margaret McCulloch: Our briefing notes tell us that a payment of £790 million to the principal contractor was a fixed cost, but they do not say whether the £12.9 million contract for the intelligent transport system and the £25.6 million contract with John Sisk are fixed costs. Are they fixed costs?

David Climie: They are also fixed-price contracts. The only difference between the three contracts is that the principal contract for £790 million has an allowance for inflation. Because of the duration of that contract, it was not felt reasonable for the contractor to take the risk of inflation over the six years of the contract. The Fife ITS and the M9 junction 1A contract are of a much shorter duration, so the inflation risk is taken by the contractors and those are truly fixed-price lump-sum contracts.

Margaret McCulloch: Right. Sorry—which one did you say has inflation built into it?

David Climie: The principal contract for £790 million.

Margaret McCulloch: So, the overall total of £828.5 million could rise through inflation.

David Climie: Yes. That is right. We monitor inflation carefully from month to month, and the overall range for the final outturn cost of the project of £1.45 billion to £1.6 billion allows for a range of inflation in the principal contract from 2 per cent, at the low end, to 8 per cent, at the high end. Inflation has been allowed for in the cost ranges that have been published.

Margaret McCulloch: So, there will be no more to pay above the £828.5 million other than the 8 per cent inflation cost. Do you foresee inflation being higher than 8 per cent?

David Climie: No, we do not. When we reported to the committee in September, inflation was trending towards the high end of the envelope. However, since then, inflation has very much come down and is now trending slightly below the mid-range on the project to date.

Malcolm Chisholm: There has been a lot of interest in subcontracts. Transport Scotland has released information on the main contracts, but it seems that Transport Scotland is limited in the detail that it can release on subcontracts. My questions are about the ability that you either have

or do not have to release details on the subcontracts. Before I begin my questions, it would be helpful if you could explain exactly how the subcontracting system works. To what extent does the main contractor have to subcontract, or does it have flexibility around what work it subcontracts? That is my first question. Secondly, to what extent did you know who the potential subcontractors were when the main contracts were awarded?

David Climie: I will focus on the principal contracts—the largest ones that we are talking about here. When the contracts were awarded, we asked both bidders to include in their tender documents whether they would have any key subcontractors and key suppliers. At that point, they were completely at liberty to supply names or not—it was not compulsory—but we asked them to include the information within their tenders if they had decided during the tender stage that there were specific subcontractors to which they intended to subcontract. As far as the on-going strategy is concerned, it was within the control of each bidder to decide how they would carry out the work—whether they would self-perform it, subcontract it or put it out to supply orders. They had complete flexibility in how they would use their supply chain. We wanted to use these large global companies to ensure that we were getting the benefit of the synergies that they could get from their global supply chains. That was one of the key reasons why we were able to get the bids down to the level that we did, which is low in comparison with the estimates that we had received. We were transferring the risk to the contractors and to get them to accept that risk, we had to give them the flexibility to manage the project and deliver it in whatever way they chose.

11:45

Malcolm Chisholm: Are you saying that the contractors are completely free agents when it comes to any work that they get someone else to do and where they get their supplies from? If they decide to subcontract, do they have to follow any rules for that, such as public procurement rules?

David Climie: They would not have to follow public procurement regulations.

Malcolm Chisholm: Do they have complete flexibility and freedom in those two areas: who, if anyone, they get to do work for them; and where the supplies come from?

David Climie: They have flexibility as long as they meet the technical requirements of the project. We laid out in our employer's requirements the fundamental requirements for the various materials and so on. They must comply with the employer's requirements to

ensure that the technical requirements of the final bridge are met—that is fundamental. That is the principal point. Where they go to and so on is completely open to them.

Malcolm Chisholm: I was about to ask you who the subcontractors are but you seem to be saying that the contractors could have awarded subcontracts without going through any formal process. They could simply say, “These are people we use all the time. We’ll use them,” or, “These are people we always get our supplies from. We’ll go there.”

David Climie: In some cases they could certainly have done that, if that was the most beneficial route for them.

We did have control over the form of subcontracts that the contractors used—we vetted that, but only to ensure that it did not conflict with the requirements of the principal contract and that all the obligations on the principal contractor flowed down to the subcontractors.

Malcolm Chisholm: Can you explain why Transport Scotland cannot release full details of all subcontracts let by the main contractors?

David Climie: The information that we receive from the contractors is purely a list of subcontractors and suppliers. Their monthly report lists which companies they have subcontracted to and who their supply orders have been placed with. We are unable to get the commercial details of the financial side of those subcontracts. That information is commercially confidential to the contractors.

Malcolm Chisholm: You cannot release them or you cannot get them?

David Climie: We do not have them.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thought that some information had been released about the value of subcontracts going to Scottish firms.

David Climie: Due to the good will of the contractors, we have been able to get a running total of what has been awarded to date, but that is as far as we have been able to go. We have been able to split that into Scottish companies and anyone else.

Malcolm Chisholm: Can you require them to give that information or did they provide it voluntarily?

David Climie: We cannot require it. We have no contractual ability.

Malcolm Chisholm: They have given you that information. Is that what the £21 million or whatever is based on?

David Climie: That is correct.

Malcolm Chisholm: You have got the contractors to agree to release that additional information. Could you get further information or more detail?

David Climie: No, I do not think that that would be possible. We have gone as far as we can go with the contractors in terms of what they are prepared to release.

Malcolm Chisholm: It would not be possible because they would not agree to it or because there is some legal bar on it—

David Climie: We have no contractual leverage to get more information.

Malcolm Chisholm: And you do not think that they would want to give it.

David Climie: I do not believe so.

Malcolm Chisholm: My final question is whether you can release all the information on subcontracts in a single place. Obviously, the information is very limited but, in so far as you have any information, is it on your website or elsewhere? I do not know.

David Climie: We intend to publish on our website lists of the companies that are working on the project. Also, in the written update that we provide to this committee every six months, we can give you an update on the running totals of where we stand on the project.

Malcolm Chisholm: My colleague Margaret McCulloch is very interested in this. I think she wants to ask about it as well.

The Convener: Before Margaret comes in, I wanted to ask another question about the contractors. You said that they can get whatever they want, wherever they like, but if the value of the contract is over a certain amount, surely they must be subject to European Union procurement rules and other rules.

David Climie: No, I do not think so. In effect, it is no longer a public procurement. The public procurement stopped when we placed the three contracts for the FRC. Beyond that, it is no longer a public procurement.

The Convener: Is that a loophole in the regulations?

David Climie: I am not an expert on that area. It will be covered, I think, in the review of procurement, which I believe the cabinet secretary is considering at the moment.

Margaret McCulloch: On subcontractors, you said that you do not go through the procurement process to allocate work to other organisations that have been used before. Is that correct?

David Climie: The principal contractor may have its own procurement processes, which we are not party to. How the contractor chooses to split up the work—whether it is subcontracted or performed in house—is entirely up to it. We have no input into or knowledge of that process.

Margaret McCulloch: Do you go through the procurement process for your subcontractors?

David Climie: Absolutely. I should emphasise that that process is now complete. All the contracts for the Forth replacement crossing have now been placed—they were all placed in 2011. There are no further contracts or subcontracts to be placed by ministers for the Forth replacement crossing.

Margaret McCulloch: Throughout the procurement process, when you have been allocating work to subcontractors, has any consideration been given to building in initiatives to help sustain the employment of the individuals who are working on the project? It is brilliant that Scotland is benefiting by about £20 million but, in the procurement process, is there an allowance so that people will not find themselves out of work when the project comes to an end? Are there initiatives or projects built in that will sustain those individuals within the community or in other work?

David Climie: The total amount placed with Scottish firms so far is £36 million. The principal contract works are being undertaken by the Forth crossing bridge constructors—FCBC—consortium. Morrison Construction, which is a firm based in Scotland, is one of the four contractors in that consortium. Obviously, any work that it does in house will have a Scottish element. Also, in the supply chain of orders that might have been placed outside Scotland initially, there is potentially a tremendous amount of work that could trickle down and result in local opportunities.

The overall approach to contracting and subcontracting work on the project is very much multi-tiered. We now have more than 400 people on site working on the project. They are all working and living in the area, and bringing money into the local economy. We also built into the contract requirements for training places—an annual average of 45 Scottish vocational qualification places, 22 professional places and 45 places for the long-term unemployed. We have passed down obligations to the contractors to try to ensure that we deliver a legacy from the project.

Margaret McCulloch: Is it not sad that the Scottish Government did not have the courage to put the welfare of Scotland first and allocate the whole contract to a Scottish company? You say that you employ only 400 people just now. How many people would have been employed if we had managed to allocate the whole contract in

Scotland? How many unemployed people would have benefited?

David Climie: That is a hypothetical question because, under the regulations, that approach to the awarding of contracts would not have been allowed.

Gordon MacDonald: I will move on to community engagement. I was a resident of South Queensferry for many years. When there was work on the existing road bridge, the two principal complaints were about noise levels and road congestion. Will you highlight the key concerns that have been raised by communities in the past six months, and how those concerns are being dealt with?

Lawrence Shackman (Transport Scotland): At the meeting in September, I mentioned that we had set up community forums as a means of communicating news about the project and upcoming events for the local areas and of gathering feedback from communities on how the work was progressing. We also have the contact and education centre as part of the project. It is currently based within the Forth road bridge offices on the south side of the Forth. That has given the general public a means of communicating their concerns—whether general inquiries or complaints—to us through the website, e-mail or our hotline phone number. There are a variety of means of communicating with the project team.

Since the project started back in August we have been tracking inquiries and complaints, which are running at between 40 and 45 a month, with about five of them being complaints. Noise is one of the issues that we have complaints about. For example, a lot of piling work was going on at the Buie Rigg estate in Kirkliston recently. The contractor was out talking to the residents when the work was going on. He gave notice of it before it started and tried to pacify the people as best possible. I think that he offered some residents who work at home alternative locations to work if they wanted. So, those sorts of things were dealt with pretty amicably.

There have been various complaints about landscaping or environmental matters, such as at Parklea on the Fife intelligent transport system part of the project, where we have undertaken to put in additional screen fencing, which was part of the project update report. Planting is going on at that location as we speak.

Those are some of the issues that we have had to address through our community liaison officers, who are appointed by each of the contractors.

Gordon MacDonald: On road works that will take place shortly, you referred to the north side of the existing bridge. Road congestion was a serious issue in the 20 years that I lived in South

Queensferry. At times, the town was virtually cut off; people could not get out because of the congestion. How will you address such issues when you start working on that end of the bridge?

David Climie: We are very conscious of the impacts that there have been in the past. We have worked closely with the Forth road bridge people to ensure that we learn from the lessons that they have learned. We also have our traffic management working group, which involves the local authorities and the police, to try to ensure that we work to minimise our impact on the local communities. Work has to be done, but we are conscious that we must find the best possible way of doing it.

We want to ensure that we have an integrated approach, particularly given the recent announcement of the work that needs to be done on the Forth road bridge. We have tried to ensure that we are joined up on that and that, rather than work against each other, we work together to ensure that we can get the maximum amount of work done for the minimum amount of disruption.

A lot of time and effort is going into that work. Originally, the traffic management working group met monthly, but recently it has met every two weeks to ensure that, because of the developing situations with the Forth road bridge, we are looking at the issues and implementing traffic management with the least amount of disruption.

Lawrence Shackman: In addition, a press release came out yesterday about the Fife ITS works that David Climie described earlier. We have also worked with ScotRail, which will provide a number of additional services over the weekends of those works to provide further means of getting across the Forth. When we have major traffic management works within the project corridor, our key message to people is if you can avoid travelling when those works are on, please do; use another route if you can, or use public transport to try to alleviate the problems. However, we obviously cannot avoid disruption completely.

Gordon MacDonald: We have touched on Kirkliston and South Queensferry, but other communities such as North Queensferry, Inverkeithing and Rosyth are affected, too. How effective have the contractors' community liaison officers been in addressing the issues that members of the public have raised?

12:00

Lawrence Shackman: I think that they have been very effective so far. We have had quite a few compliments about the turnaround for dealing with inquiries or complaints.

There is no such thing as a good number of complaints, but the number has been relatively small to date. Our working to the code of construction practice, which is the set of rules by which contractors must abide, together with the working groups that have been set up through the bill process, has worked pretty well in ensuring that things are sorted out before they actually happen. That is helping to reduce the number of complaints.

Gordon MacDonald: You said in your update to us that the contact and education centre is "on schedule to be completed in autumn 2012".

Is it likely to be completed by then? What role will it play during the construction phase, other than the role of contact centre?

Lawrence Shackman: The centre is still on course to be completed in the autumn and we very much hope that the facility will be the means of educating people about the project. We are planning to set up a booking system—that will happen as we go into 2013, if I am being realistic—so that school trips, students and interest groups from all backgrounds can book up and come to the contact and education centre, where they can experience what is happening with the project.

We can tailor the experience to suit visitors, depending on whether they have an interest in engineering or are schoolchildren, so that we pitch it correctly. There will be plenty of means of communicating with visitors through webcams, display boards and models of the bridge, which will be in the exhibition space—we have discussed the models in this committee in the past—and we will be able to do presentations. We want to ensure that people can understand the engineering of the project, as well as the communication aspect and other aspects of it.

The Convener: Can you summarise the impact of current traffic management measures on journey times and traffic flows?

Lawrence Shackman: Currently we have a 40mph section on the M90 from the Halbeath junction to Admiralty, and on the junction 1A section we have a 40mph limit from the Scotstoun junction with the A90, along the M9 spur all the way towards Newbridge. The increase in journey time for people, given that a 70mph limit has been reduced to a 40mph limit—although there are sections on the M9 spur where drivers would not go at 70mph, such as the loop and the section at the northern end of the spur, which has a 50mph limit—is about three minutes or so on the M9 spur and two to two and a half minutes on the Fife ITS scheme.

The Convener: Have many people been caught going over the 40mph limit?

Lawrence Shackman: A press release went out—just before Christmas, I think—about junction 1A. A fair few people were caught speeding, but I am not part of the safety camera partnership, so I cannot tell you.

The Convener: Where would we get that information?

Lawrence Shackman: It is held by the safety camera partnerships.

The Convener: Are you getting a lot of complaints about the 40mph limit? Some people have said that the restricted section is far too long and could be reduced to cover the area where you are working.

Lawrence Shackman: We have had some complaints and inquiries. The speed limits are put in place to protect not only the workforce, who are working very close to the live running traffic, but drivers themselves. It is about setting the right balance, from a safety perspective. Safety is paramount when construction contracts are being carried out.

Sometimes, when people are travelling through the Fife ITS project—for example, on a Sunday—there does not appear to be any work going on. That is because the code of construction practice does not permit it unless there are certain circumstances, such as the weekend closures that are coming up to do discrete pieces of work. That can be frustrating to the public.

The Convener: Have alterations been made by the contractors to reduce delays, or is that not possible?

Lawrence Shackman: It has not been possible to date. Of course, getting the works done as quickly as possible, to cut the amount of delays, is the only way forward. Sometimes that is dependent on the weather, for example, and sometimes the sheer logistics of the construction do not allow us to bring forward the opening of a restricted piece of road. We have not had much opportunity to take the speed limits off.

David Climie: We were surprised that, when we put in traffic management and the 40mph limit on the M9 spur, which goes down on to the M9, that improved the traffic flow. A 70mph two-lane section went down to a single 40mph curve on to the M9. As the contraflow came into place earlier, that allowed better funnelling in of the traffic. It was noticeable that Kirkliston residents commented to us that the arrangements had improved the traffic flow there. We will want to maintain that when we put the two lanes into the final project at M9 junction 1A. That is one area where traffic management has caused an improvement.

The Convener: Given that we have had a fairly open winter, is that part of the project ahead of schedule? Might the finishing time for the 40mph limits be nearer?

David Climie: M9 junction 1A has certainly benefited from the dryish winter and the lack of snow—that has helped. The contractors indicate that they are optimistic that they may well finish early, but there is a long time between now and then and there are unknowns. The best that we can say is that the situation looks positive.

Adam Ingram: Will you provide details of recent activity on the development of the Forth replacement crossing public transport strategy and complementary public-transport-related schemes?

Lawrence Shackman: Since we last appeared before the committee back in September, the public transport workshop has had five meetings—two main meetings with all the stakeholders and three sub-meetings. Producing a refreshed public transport strategy has taken slightly longer than we might have envisaged, but the next draft is pretty well finished and we are nearing the stage of getting the minister to endorse that and getting public involvement, to see whether the public have any comments on the strategy. That will take a little bit of time. I like to think that we will certainly have a refreshed public transport strategy in place by the end of the summer.

Having said all that, I think that things have moved forward quite positively, particularly for the Halbeath park-and-ride site, which is out to tender—all the land issues for that have been resolved. Fife Council is taking the project forward and expects the facility to be built in the middle of next year. That is a good and positive aspect of the public transport strategy that is going ahead and which will dovetail nicely with the bus hard-shoulder-running scheme in the Fife ITS.

We have engaged considerably with the bus operating companies. We have looked at the types of bus that will use the hard-shoulder-running strategy. The companies have commented that they would like us to change from using buses of 28-plus seats down to using buses of 24-plus seats in our strategy, to align more closely with the types of bus that they might want to use. We are looking to take that forward as we go into the latter stages of the Fife ITS, so we hope to permit buses of 24-plus seats, for example.

A lot of discussion has taken place at the workshop meetings about the southern end of the project corridor—the terminal junction at Newbridge. A host of problems seems to be associated with bus movements through and across that junction. That is one area on which the refreshed strategy will focus. Additional bus lanes will be provided on the east and west sides of

Newbridge junction, in conjunction with West Lothian Council and the City of Edinburgh Council. Together with other park and rides in the area, that is part of a larger potential improvement to get buses through and across the junction.

Adam Ingram: Thank you. We look forward to seeing the refreshed strategy and hearing the public's views on it.

Alex Johnstone: We heard previously from Transport Scotland that a decision on the future management of the new bridge and involvement of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority would not be made until 2013. However, a headline in *The Scotsman* on 19 November read, "Forth Bridge privatisation plans meet with anger". In the story it was suggested that the Scottish Government intends to abolish FETA and let the management and maintenance of the two bridges to the private sector. I think that that might be a tremendous idea. Is there any truth in the story?

Lawrence Shackman: The minister announced that FETA would be dissolved through a parliamentary bill and a competition would take place to find a maintenance operator who would look after both bridges. The competition would be undertaken so that a new operator was in place well before the new bridge opened and there would be a chance for the new operator to have a handover with the contractor and Transport Scotland, in relation to the operation and maintenance of the new bridge.

On FETA staff, colleagues in Transport Scotland are working to ensure that there will be no job losses through the dissolution of FETA and that an arrangement under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations will be in place to transfer staff across. That is a positive step forward, and I think that the FETA board and staff have been pretty positive about it, in view of that information.

Alex Johnstone: Will there be an open tendering process?

David Climie: I believe that it will be a fully competitive tender. A timetable needs to be established for that, because there will need to be legislation to dissolve the existing FETA arrangements. I think that the idea is that the whole process could take about three years, so it will be 2014 or 2015 before the competitive tender goes out and is fully in place to enable the new operator, whoever that might be, to come in and take over the existing bridge and work with us to understand the maintenance requirements for the new bridge, in advance of it opening to traffic in 2016.

Aileen McLeod: I understand from news reports last week that an independent advisory board is to be established to choose a shortlist of

names for the new crossing, and that there will be a public vote in 2013 to choose the new name. Can you give us more detail about the process? What is the timetable likely to be for choosing a name for the new crossing?

David Climie: We can give some initial indications, although the minister made the announcement only last week. The minister said that the advisory board will be appointed in the summer. The concept is that the timing will tie in with the opening of the new contact and education centre, around September, because we want to use that as the focal point for the exercise.

There is keen public interest in getting involved in naming the bridge, as the feedback from the press announcement showed. The intention is that at the time when the contact and education centre opens, we will open the competition for receipt of names. The panel will choose a shortlist from the suggestions, which will be put out for some sort of public vote in 2013. The idea is to try to have a name in place in advance of there being a lot to see of the bridge itself.

The Convener: If there are no more questions, I thank both witnesses. We look forward to hearing about much progress when we see you in about six months' time.

12:15

Meeting suspended.

12:16

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2012 (SSI 2012/32)

Bus Service Operators Grant (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2012 (SSI 2012/33)

Home Energy Assistance Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2012 (SSI 2012/34)

Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2012 (SSI 2012/38)

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of four Scottish statutory instruments, which are all subject to the negative procedure. I refer members to the cover note on the instruments, which is paper ICI/S4/12/6/5. No motions to annul have been received in relation to the instruments. If there are no comments from members, does the committee agree that it does not wish to make any recommendation on the instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 (Commencement No 6, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order 2012 (SSI 2012/39)

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is consideration of an order that is not subject to parliamentary procedure. I refer members to the cover note, which is paper ICI/S4/12/6/6. I draw the committee's attention to the Subordinate Legislation Committee's comments and note that the concerns appear to have been dealt with to that committee's satisfaction. Is the committee content to note the instrument?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting.

12:18

Meeting continued in private until 12:36.

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