



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 14 November 2018

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

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

Wednesday 14 November 2018

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
RAIL SERVICES.....	2
EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) ACT 2018	36
Exotic Disease (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018	36
Aquatic Animal Health and Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018.....	36
Fisheries (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.....	36

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
29th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)
*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)
*Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
*Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)
*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)
*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alex Hynes (ScotRail Alliance)
Angus Thom (ScotRail Alliance)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 14 November 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting in private at 08:30]

10:00

Meeting continued in public.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Edward Mountain): I welcome the public to the 29th meeting in 2018 of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. I ask everyone to make sure that their mobile phones are set to silent. No apologies have been received, but a committee member might need to leave before the end of the evidence-taking session.

Agenda item 2 is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private item 5, which relates to ferry services in Scotland and is a report back from members on a recent visit to Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd?

Members indicated agreement.

Rail Services

10:00

The Convener: Before we proceed with item 3, I invite members who have any relevant interests to declare them now.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I am honorary president of the Scottish Association for Public Transport and honorary vice-president of Railfuture.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I co-convene the cross-party group on rail, for which the ScotRail Alliance provides the secretariat.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I am honorary vice-president of Friends of the Far North Line.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers parliamentary group.

The Convener: I think that that is all.

This evidence session is a regular update from the ScotRail Alliance to allow the committee to monitor rail services issues. I welcome from the alliance Alex Hynes, managing director, and Angus Thom, chief operating officer.

I invite Mr Hynes to make a short opening statement. Mr Hynes, we have a lot of questions, so I must ask you to keep things brief and not to go into too much detail on specific issues. I am sure committee members will want to question you on those issues later. Please start. You may have three minutes.

Alex Hynes (ScotRail Alliance): Thank you very much, convener, and good morning. I thank the committee for inviting me to give you our regular update on the progress made with Scotland's railway since we last met in May. All of us at the ScotRail Alliance, which is made up of Network Rail Scotland and ScotRail, are working flat out to deliver the best railway that Scotland has ever had, and I am confident that we will do so.

However, that has not been without its challenges. Our punctuality has not been good enough in recent months, and I want to begin by saying sorry to customers for that and for the impact that it has had on their ability to go about their lives. Some of the situation has been outside our control—extreme weather events such as storm Ali have a significant impact on our ability to keep Scotland's railway open for business—but there have been other times when we have just had to hold up our hands. Too often our infrastructure has let us down, and when the

railway does not work as it should, it causes significant inconvenience and disruption to those who rely on us to get to work, to see their family or to visit the rest of the country. That is why we are continuing to build on the Donovan review and are working to understand the root causes of failures, rather than just fixing the symptoms.

Another key focus is ensuring the resilience of our assets and infrastructure, and teams are literally working around the clock on that. In control period 6, there will be an 8 per cent funding increase to enhance our weather-related resilience.

At the heart of our work is what we do for the customer, and earlier this year, we decided to ban skip-stopping. That does not make it any easier for us to hit our performance targets—in fact, it makes it more difficult—but the decision was made with customers at its heart and has been universally welcomed by them.

Since our last evidence session, we have introduced three new types of trains to the network. We have had some teething problems with our brand-new Hitachi electric trains, but they are now operating between Edinburgh and Glasgow and Edinburgh and North Berwick, and the feedback from our customers has been extremely positive. The electrification of the central belt continues apace, with Stirling, Dunblane, Alloa and Shotts entering the final stages. Moreover, customers can now experience our iconic intercity trains between Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Our upgraded intercity network will ultimately connect Scotland's seven cities.

Investment in rural routes will lead to the launch of great scenic railway journeys, and other highlights include the improvements to our timetable that we will make, starting in December and carrying on over the next 12 months, to deliver faster journeys, more seats and more services to our customers.

Building on the progress that has already been made, a pilot is under way on brand-new mobile ticketing.

Finally, across the alliance, we are investing in more than 350 brand-new jobs in Scotland's railways. We are investing in trains, in our infrastructure, in our communities and in our people.

The Convener: Thank you.

Stewart Stevenson: I return to the subject of performance, specifically the performance improvement plans. Before doing so, however, I note that the most recent editorial in *Rail* said that Scotland shows the way, and that although there may be short-term pain, the result is long-term gain. Is that a proper representation of where we

are at the moment? We are experiencing some pain and the improvement plans are not yet delivering what we require, but there will be long-term gain.

Alex Hynes: There is no question but that the closer working between track and train is perceived as a better way of running a railway system. There are lots of challenges across the United Kingdom's rail network. Despite the challenges here in Scotland, we remain above average for customer satisfaction, performance and so on.

In my mind, there is no question but that the level of investment across the Scottish rail network is creating some operational tensions. We are investing £850 million in this 12-month period—that is the most investment in Scotland's railways on record. It is true that some of the issues that relate to performance are a function of the investment programme itself. What makes us very optimistic about the future is that a lot of the enhancement schemes are reaching their final stages. We have now started to deliver the new express trains and the intercity trains, and the customer feedback on both those products has been fantastic. That gives us a great deal of hope for the future.

Stewart Stevenson: I join the crowd who approve of the 385s—I travelled in on one this morning, as I have done on a number of occasions during my 12 to 14 hours a week on ScotRail services.

What are the key challenges that are at the bottom of the list in the improvement plans? What will be done last? What is there still to do that really matters?

Alex Hynes: There are a number of reasons why we are not achieving our target on train service performance. One is the weather. The weather in the past 12 months has been materially different from and more extreme than what is normal, even for Scotland. We have had the beast from the east and the hottest summer on record. All those things have challenged the resilience of our railways.

Infrastructure reliability, particularly in the Glasgow metropolitan area, has not been good enough. That is why, between now and March, we are investing an additional £5 million in infrastructure in that area. The Glasgow area is critical to the whole Scottish rail network, because the effects of any delay there can ripple out across the network.

Believe it or not, the delays that occur in Scotland due to cross-border services have increased by 80 per cent in the past 12 months. That is a function of the timetable difficulties at Northern and Govia Thameslink Railway.

We took the brave decision to ban skip-stopping, which makes it more difficult in the short term to deliver our public performance measure targets.

That is what is happening. We have good plans, combined with the investment programme, to address all those issues. We are working flat out to make sure that we deliver the service that our customers expect.

Stewart Stevenson: I will come back on other matters later, but let me close off these questions. The big increase in difficulty has come from infrastructure. Apart from the weather, which I presume that you as MD cannot directly control, what are the big infrastructure issues?

Alex Hynes: We often deliver the investment overnight, but we are having reliability problems shortly after we have gone in to renew or enhance the network. We are tackling that particular issue at the moment.

We need to get much better at risk assessing those engineering works. Normally, on a Thursday, we review the forthcoming weekend's engineering work. We have strengthened those processes so that we review forthcoming engineering work earlier, and we have set a higher threshold for our delivery teams so that, if they do not think that they can complete the work in time and hand the railway back reliably for the start of service, they should not do it. There is lots of activity in the short term to ensure that the scale of investment that is happening across Scotland's railway network is not negatively affecting train service punctuality.

The Convener: Before Stewart Stevenson continues, Mike Rumbles would like to seek clarity on a comment that has been made.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I just want to make something absolutely clear. We heard previously that skip-stopping had been stopped, but it turned out that it had not. Are you confirming that there is no more skip-stopping with ScotRail?

Alex Hynes: I am confirming that we have implemented our revised policy on skip-stopping, which is that we have banned it, apart from as a last resort. I get a daily skip-stopping report. There are some reasons why we would want to use it. For example, if a station is out of use because of an incident or a lighting failure, clearly we would not call there, and that counts as a failure to stop. The number of skip-stops is down 80 per cent on the previous year and is at record low levels. I am not saying that we will never use skip-stopping, but we no longer use it as a mechanism to catch up and hit the public performance measure.

The Convener: Thank you for clarifying that.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I recently watched a debate in the House of Commons in which an MP went ballistic about a railway and called on the manager to resign. I will certainly not do that with you Mr Hynes, as you are trying to cope. However, my constituents and I want to know who is to blame for delays or when people do not get a train. It seems to me that you are trying to run a railway with one hand tied behind your back by Network Rail. Am I correct or am I wrong? Be truthful—is it Network Rail that is causing your situation?

Alex Hynes: In Scotland, Network Rail and ScotRail work together through the ScotRail Alliance to deliver Scotland's railway. The primary causes of the deterioration in train service performance in the past 12 months are infrastructure-related delays, which of course are the responsibility of Network Rail, and the weather, which is allocated in the delay attribution guide to Network Rail. For ScotRail to do a good job, Network Rail in Scotland has to do a good job, and we are working together on that.

Richard Lyle: You say that you are working together. Is it not the case that Network Rail is a stand-alone organisation and, if it lets you down, you and the Scottish Government have no recourse? Do you have any recourse?

Alex Hynes: Network Rail is regulated by the Office of Rail and Road but, on a day-to-day basis, there is very close working between Angus Thom's ScotRail team and the Network Rail Scotland team, which is also led by me, to improve train service performance. There is a much greater level of co-operation here. Rather than blaming a party, we are focused on understanding why train service performance is below target and ensuring that, together as an alliance, we have plans in place to fix it.

Richard Lyle: Just to finish off, am I correct that Network Rail is controlled by the United Kingdom Government?

Alex Hynes: That is correct.

The Convener: Unsurprisingly, there are lots of follow-up questions.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I will follow on from the topic that Richard Lyle explored. I thank Mr Hynes for his briefing to MSPs, which contains some statistics. I will refer to those, so I hope that you have them in front of you. The briefing mentions the reasons why ScotRail is not delivering on its PPM targets. There is an interesting table that attributes the failure to reach each PPM to Network Rail or to ScotRail or other train operators. Is that not an oversimplistic view?

10:15

What proportion of the 63 per cent of delays that are attributed to Network Rail were a result of infrastructure failures? There is a very helpful pie chart on the Network Rail website that illustrates the reasons why operators do not achieve their PPM targets. According to Network Rail's statistics, 37 per cent of delays can be attributed to infrastructure failures and 23 per cent can be categorised as "TOC on self"—in other words, issues that the train operating company could have prevented, such as defective trains or a lack of staff. Will you clarify your position with regard to the table in your briefing and the statistics in it?

Alex Hynes: Every delay in excess of three minutes that occurs on the UK rail network is attributed to a root cause, such as weather, infrastructure, the train operating company or disturbance. The delay attribution guide sets out whether a delay belongs to ScotRail, another train operating company or Network Rail. It is true to say that external factors, such as suicide, trespass and weather, all get put into the Network Rail bucket, as well as what I would call genuine infrastructure asset failures. That leads to the analysis that is shown in the briefing, whereby Network Rail is primarily responsible for the late running of trains.

I would like to focus on the deterioration that has taken place in the past 12 months, of which about half has been caused by weather and half by genuine infrastructure asset failures. Across the alliance, the focus is on addressing both those causes in the short term so that we can tackle the performance issues. You are right to say that the Network Rail delay bucket picks up things that are not directly related to infrastructure assets.

Jamie Greene: That is an important point, because it forms part of much of the debate on the issue. The 63 per cent figure—the delays that are attributed to Network Rail—captures things such as weather and other external events that are outside anyone's control.

Alex Hynes: Absolutely.

Jamie Greene: Weather was responsible for only 11.7 per cent of delays, whereas 23 per cent—double that amount—were delays that you, as the operator, could have prevented. That is not that far behind the 37 per cent of delays that were caused by Network Rail infrastructure failures. I agree that the figure of 37 per cent is still too high and that the number of infrastructure failures should be reduced. However, it is clear that the picture for Network Rail is not quite as bad as it has been painted in your briefing.

Alex Hynes: I think that that is just a function of the way in which delay attribution works across the UK network.

Instead of focusing on which party is to blame, across the alliance, we are focused on fixing the problem. In the past 12 months, the problem has been down to weather and infrastructure. That is why we have good plans in place to address those issues. At the end of the day, what customers want is a reliable train service; they are less interested in who is to blame.

Jamie Greene: If you could fix the Scottish weather, that would be wonderful.

The Convener: We must move on, because a heap of questions are stacking up.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Is a debate about delay attribution taking place within the industry? It strikes me that the "TOC" and "FOC" categorisation—to avoid that coming out the wrong way, I point out that those terms stand for "train operating company" and "freight operating company"—is not refined enough to enable the public to understand the cause of delays.

I imagine that passengers will be less bothered about a delay that has been caused by network upgrade, as a result of which they will get better trains and a better service, than they will be about a delay that has been caused by something else. It strikes me that the delay attribution system is not sophisticated enough to reflect the fact that many of the delays might be the result of upgrades.

Alex Hynes: It is our job to make sure that we upgrade the network to support a high level of reliability. I will explain what we are doing on that front. The delay attribution system, which has been in existence for 25 years or so, has hundreds of delay codes and is a frequent topic of debate in the UK rail industry.

Across the alliance, we publish our PPM statistics every month and explain to our customers what the primary causes of delay were. For example, in the most recent period on which we published information, we hit a PPM target of 81.8 per cent; 4 per cent of the PPM loss, as we call it, was directly due to storm Ali. That is a great example of the more extreme weather that we are seeing. We are seeing more storms and more severe storm conditions, and storms are having more impact. As you might imagine, we carried out a full lessons learned exercise in relation to storm Ali. We found that every tree that fell on to the railway and disrupted our network came from outside the railway boundary. All the good work that we are doing to improve vegetation management inside the railway boundary did not help us there.

We could try to reform the delay attribution system across the United Kingdom, but that is a job for others. Our job is to make sure that the

customers of Scotland's railway get a reliable service as soon as possible.

Gail Ross: If a ScotRail train is delayed to wait for passengers from a train that is operated by another operator, which cannot make progress because of the weather, how is that delay attributed in your statistics? Is it not a bit ridiculous that, in 2018, a train cannot make progress uphill because of leaves on the line?

Alex Hynes: In essence, the delay attribution system tries to identify the primary cause of delay. Clearly, that is not always possible. Events in Scotland can be due to a late departure from Birmingham New Street station; there is a UK-wide network. In the interests of avoiding a situation in which we are not seeing the wood for the trees, we are focusing on infrastructure-related failures, particularly in the Glasgow metropolitan area. That is not because Glasgow is more important than anywhere else but because the Glasgow network affects the performance of the whole of Scotland's railway.

As you know, autumn creates many challenges for us. This year, our autumn plan went to the ScotRail Alliance board. That was a Donovan review recommendation. It was our biggest-ever autumn plan, and we invested £13 million in it. We run railhead treatment trains across the network, and the number of miles that those trains covered was up 60 per cent on the previous autumn. We had more leaf-fall teams and we fitted more equipment to the track that spreads a glue-like, sandy material that enables the trains to get better traction.

I think that you were referring to the London North Eastern Railway services between Inverness and London. We need to ensure that we review this autumn's performance—actually, it has gone relatively well—to see whether we can do more, working with LNER and on the infrastructure, to avoid the issue that you described.

John Finnie: In the briefing that you provided to us, you said:

"Our Integrated Control works closely with signallers and other operators to ensure we make decisions for the benefit of the majority of passengers when it comes to managing and regulating services in Scotland."

Will you expand on what you said? Does it relate to what we are talking about? For example, is there a head count? Do you give preference to a train that has 200 folk on it over a train that has 30 folk on it?

Alex Hynes: Not necessarily. In Scotland we have a single control centre for the whole of Scotland. The control centre is part of the alliance, so it is responsible for managing the Network Rail bits of the system and the ScotRail bits of the

system. That approach is unique in the UK, and we think that it is better. It is one reason why the delay-per-incident rate is lower in Scotland than it is in other parts of the network. Our approach enables quicker decision making.

Signallers comply with regulation statements. A class 1 train—a fast train—will be given priority, because we do not want fast trains to be stuck behind class 2 trains, which tend to be stopping trains. Signallers make their regulation decisions in the interests of the overall system.

One of the things that the control centre does—and has been doing particularly since May—is look beyond Scotland to see which cross-border trains are coming to us up the east and west coast main lines, to ensure that late-running intercity trains do not adversely impact on ScotRail services or other services on the Scottish rail network. As I said earlier, the delays created by those cross-border services are up 80 per cent in the past 12 months because of performance problems south of the border, so our control centre is having to work harder to mitigate the impact on Scottish rail services right now.

John Finnie: Does that mean that, in effect, you can or would give preference to a ScotRail train?

Alex Hynes: The signallers will regulate for PPM. They will do the best thing for every train operating company and freight operating company in Scotland. They will not give priority to a particular company; they will give priority to the overall reliability of the system, including the sleeper, ScotRail, LNER, TransPennine, Virgin Trains and freight operating companies. The signallers look at the whole picture in real time and make decisions in the best interests of the overall system.

John Finnie: It must be a complicated calculation.

Alex Hynes: It certainly is, and we have a dedicated team in the control centre working 24/7 to manage that—they are doing that while we sit here now.

The Convener: Like all other members, I read carefully your briefing to all members of the Scottish Parliament about the problems facing Scotland's railway. As has been alluded to today, and as you have said, a lot of the criticisms are pointed in the direction of Network Rail. Why is there not a representative of Network Rail as part of the alliance to answer some of those questions? That might have been useful.

Alex Hynes: The briefing is designed to explain the facts about why we are not hitting our punctuality targets. It is not directed at blaming any one party; it is directed at making sure that the

facts about what is going on with train service punctuality are clear.

The purpose of the ScotRail Alliance is that ScotRail and Network Rail work together to deliver Scotland's railway. I am the managing director of Network Rail Scotland; I am also the managing director of ScotRail. I happen to be an employee of Network Rail from a pay and rations perspective and Angus Thom is the chief operating officer of ScotRail. We work together to deliver the best for Scotland's railway. That is the purpose of the Alliance. Abellio's bid set out a deep alliance to deliver Scotland's railway because, like most people, we believe that it is the best way to run a railway for Scotland.

The Convener: I take your point. I am sure that you are very competent in answering all these questions, but if we want to ask questions on specific things, it might be helpful to have members of Network Rail present. I will just leave that comment hanging there and move to the next question, which is from Colin Smyth.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): ScotRail's performance is now below breach level and you have put in the worst performance since the franchise began. Has Abellio been given any penalties for that failure in performance or have you simply been given a waiver to avoid hitting your performance targets until June next year?

Alex Hynes: ScotRail's performance is not below the breach level. The Scottish Government decided to grant a temporary waiver on the breach level in the franchise agreement, recognising that the causes of the increase in delays in the past 12 months are infrastructure, weather and the effect of cross-border operations on Scotland's railway. All those things are outside the direct control of ScotRail. However, believe you me, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government are quite rightly holding us to account and making sure that we deliver the performance improvement that our customers expect.

Colin Smyth: Just to be clear, had the Scottish Government not given ScotRail that waiver, its performance figures would be below what would be classed as the breach level.

Alex Hynes: That is correct.

Colin Smyth: You have touched on the reasons for that, and the debate has already been had on the fact that the problems caused by the extreme weather are attributed to Network Rail in the figures. However, in your application for that waiver, one of the reasons that you gave for failing to hit your performance targets is the fact that ScotRail is now avoiding skipping stops. Do you not think that the public and passengers will find it remarkable that one of the reasons that you are giving for failing to hit performance targets is that

ScotRail is now doing its job by stopping at all the stations it is supposed to stop at?

10:30

Alex Hynes: Skip-stopping is just one of the measures that control centres around the UK use to restore a train service to timetable after an incident. We took the decision to ban that measure except as a last resort. Not everybody chooses to do that, but we did, and we can see the result in the level of our customer complaints. Not skip-stopping means that it takes us longer to respond to an incident. We think that it takes us 25 per cent longer to recover from an incident than it did before we stopped the use of skip-stopping, but it was the right thing to do.

PPM is just one measure of the quality of the train service. In the last period, it was interesting that, although our PPM level was lower than in the same period 12 months earlier, the level of customer complaints was a lot better. Although it causes difficulty for our PPM statistics, it is the best thing to do for the customer, which is why we did it.

Colin Smyth: I think that customers think that trains stopping at the station where they are waiting is a good thing for a rail company to do. It is remarkable that that is now an excuse for not hitting performance targets. It suggests to the committee that, when the franchise bid was made, hitting performance targets on the basis of missing stops was built into that. That, presumably, is the logical conclusion to trains not missing stops any longer being a reason for not hitting performance targets.

Alex Hynes: Failure to stop at stations has occurred on Scotland's railway for many years and way back into the previous franchise. In autumn last year, we overused that measure, which is why we took the policy decision to ban it.

Colin Smyth: Now that you have effectively banned skip-stopping, when will you meet your contractual performance targets? The ORR suggests that we will have to wait until 2022 for that. Is that the case?

Alex Hynes: Clearly, we need to get to a 92.5 per cent PPM moving annual average as soon as possible. Given that we are trying to move a moving annual average, there is a mathematical limit to how quickly we can reach it. The target of a 92.5 per cent PPM MAA is very challenging, and Scotland's railway has never got to and stayed at that level. That is why we are working flat out to get there as soon as we can.

Colin Smyth: You say that you are working to get there as soon as you can, but the ORR says

that that will not be until 2022. Is that accurate? If not, when will you meet your performance targets?

Alex Hynes: Our aspiration is to get there as soon as we possibly can. That is our target.

Colin Smyth: You will be pleased to know that this is my final question. What engagement have you had with the Scottish Government on your failure to hit the performance targets? Have ministers given any indication that they expect to end the Abellio ScotRail contract on the first expiry date of 31 March 2022, or do they intend to let it continue until 2025?

Alex Hynes: We review the performance of Scotland's railway every month with officials at Transport Scotland. I recently met the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to discuss the issue of train service performance. The Scottish Government is—quite rightly—holding us to account on the delivery of better train service performance. You will find that the Scottish Government is on the record explaining that its expectation is that the franchise will run its full term.

Right now, the focus for the ScotRail Alliance is delivering an improved service to customers, the December timetable change and the new fleets of trains that will deliver faster journeys, more seats and more services, which we promised to our customers.

The Convener: The next question is from Jamie Greene. Jamie, you tried to catch my eye during an exchange; you can bring in that point to your question.

Jamie Greene: Thank you, convener. It is all linked together and follows on from Mr Smyth's line of questioning.

Alex Hynes, do you know why the year 5 payments to Abellio ScotRail have been brought forward, or is that a question for the Government?

Alex Hynes: Can you clarify your question?

Jamie Greene: I am talking about the accelerated franchise payments. My understanding is that those payments to Abellio have been brought forward by the Government, and Transport Scotland has paid them earlier than the year in which they are due. Are you aware of that?

Alex Hynes: Abellio ScotRail has not received any money from the Scottish taxpayer that it is not already due. Clearly, this is a big commercial contract, and these commercial discussions happen all the time. If you have a specific question, perhaps we can follow that up after this committee meeting.

Jamie Greene: You referred to money that is due, but is it due now? Is it the case that the

money is due down the line but has been paid earlier? That is my understanding of what has been reported.

Alex Hynes: This is a complex commercial contract for which commercial negotiations happen all the time, but it is not true to say that Abellio ScotRail has had a single penny from the Scottish Government that it is not due.

Jamie Greene: Thank you for clarifying that.

In a previous answer, you mentioned that PPM is not the only way of monitoring performance and that there are others. I will point to two others, one of which is the service quality incentive regime fund, which is an important part of your metrics; and the other is the level of complaints. I will start with the complaints aspect, because you mentioned it in your answer to Colin Smyth and you seemed to be pleased with progress on it. You might have read today's report in the latest edition of *Which?* magazine that looks at how complaints are handled by train operators in the United Kingdom. The reality is that 40 per cent of people who complained to ScotRail did not think that their complaint was handled politely and 57 per cent of people who complained to ScotRail had a more negative view of the company after complaining. Is that acceptable to ScotRail?

Alex Hynes: I will take the SQUIRE aspect first and then go on to customer complaints. I am pleased to say that SQUIRE is moving in the right direction and that we are making very real progress in that area. You will have seen in the last quarterly results that there was a 10 per cent improvement in our SQUIRE performance. The three areas that we need to tackle next are the surfaces of car parks, ticket office closures and on-train ticket inspection. We have good plans in place for all those areas. Angus Thom leads our SQUIRE improvement plan, so I will ask him to explain to the committee what else we are doing in that area.

Angus Thom (ScotRail Alliance): Since we last met in May, we have introduced a new way of ensuring that we tackle some of the problems that are identified through SQUIRE. When we met previously, 11 areas had been identified as not achieving or not improving in a way that was satisfactory for our customers. Out of those 11 areas, 10 are now heading in the right direction, which relates to Alex Hynes's point about the 10 per cent improvement. We have further plans for our on-train ticket inspection because of mechanical and software problems that we are having with some of the equipment that our ticket examiners use on board trains.

I lead working groups that are looking at how we can improve service quality for our customers and ensure that we make the best of the funds that are

available. As Alex Hynes touched on, there is £5 million of investment—not from the SQUIRE fund—going into car parks around our stations, which our customers will welcome; and £2 million has been spent on putting in a more modern closed-circuit television system to improve security at stations. Those are some examples of the things that we are doing.

Jamie Greene: Before Mr Hynes comes back on my question on customer complaints, could you say whether I am correct in understanding that there is more than £4 million in the SQUIRE pot at the moment?

Angus Thom: I cannot give you an exact figure on that.

Jamie Greene: I got that number from an answer to a recent parliamentary question, but we can check it for the record. How do we ensure that that money, which is, in effect, a fine for not meeting your performance metrics, will be used to do things that will improve the customer experience and will not be used to do things that you should be doing anyway?

Angus Thom: When we make an application, working with our colleagues in Transport Scotland, to use that money for something that might benefit the customer or improve something for them, be it on the train, in the station or in the car park, we have to write an investment paper that we submit to the Abellio board. Transport Scotland has full sight of what we spend that money on. The money is used to improve things that have been identified through the service quality incentive regime as needing improvement. For example, we might put more station shelters in and improve seating at certain locations. You might have seen that some of the stations on the Edinburgh to Glasgow route have had their waiting areas improved and had money spent on them in general.

Alex Hynes: Any money that spent from the SQUIRE fund is genuinely in addition to what was in the investment programme, so it is genuinely extra money. Clearly, the expenditure requires Transport Scotland authority, so it makes sure that that is the case.

With regard to complaints, I am familiar with what *Which?* has published this morning, and we will review that report and see what lessons we can learn to further improve our complaints performance. We in ScotRail have set ourselves the target of responding to complaints within one week rather than the four-week industry standard, and our performance against those targets is good, but I am sure that there are always things that we can learn to continually improve our complaints-handling process.

The Convener: A few questions have come up during that discussion, so I will take Mike Rumbles first and then Richard Lyle.

Mike Rumbles: In response to Jamie Greene's question whether you had received any taxpayers' money in advance of when it was supposed to be due, you gave what I at first thought was a clear answer. You said that you had not received a penny of taxpayers' money that was not due, but the real question that I would like to be answered is whether you received it before it was due.

Alex Hynes: This is a big commercial contract—

Mike Rumbles: But it is a simple question. Did you receive money that was due to you before you were due to receive it?

Alex Hynes: The subsidy payments between ScotRail and Transport Scotland are adjusted all the time to reflect changes in the contract.

Mike Rumbles: Is that a yes, then?

Alex Hynes: Sorry?

Mike Rumbles: Is that a yes, then? Have you received taxpayers' money before it was due?

Alex Hynes: The answer to the question is that these commercial discussions happen all the time, including on the phasing of subsidy. However, it is not true to say that ScotRail has received anything that has not been due to it under the terms of the franchise agreement.

Mike Rumbles: But was it received on time? If I may say so, you seem to be evading what is a very important question on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. It is a very simple question to which Jamie Greene did not, from my perspective, get a clear answer when he tried to pursue it, so I am trying to pursue it now. Just so that we get it clear, can you tell us whether ScotRail received taxpayers' money that was due to it before it was due to receive it? Yes or no?

Alex Hynes: We have had discussions with the Scottish Government about the phasing of subsidy payments, yes.

Mike Rumbles: So you have received money before it was due.

The Convener: Alex, I think that you are going to have to answer the question, because you are being pushed on it. The subsidy will normally be paid on a particular date—the due date—but you have been asked by two committee members now whether you have received that money in advance of the due date. To me, the question requires a simple yes or no. It would be helpful to end this line of questioning and move on, but we cannot do so until you give me a yes or no answer. Have you received a payment in advance of the due date?

Alex Hynes: It is true to say that ScotRail has received some revenue support payments that are contractually due to it from April next year in advance of that date, but that does not change the net amount of taxpayer subsidy to the franchise. It is also worth saying that these kinds of commercial discussions happen all the time between ScotRail and the Scottish Government, and this is just one of the changes that we discuss at regular intervals with Transport Scotland officials.

The Convener: So the simple answer is yes, the money has been paid in advance, but it makes no difference to the overall amount.

Did you want to come in here, Richard?

Richard Lyle: Yes, convener. I was just going to make the comment that you have just made: it does not matter. If you are owed X amount of money, what is the problem with getting it on this or that date, just as long as you do not get more than that amount?

The Convener: Hold on—I think that John Finnie has a particular question about payment dates. If your question is on the same issue, Mr Lyle, I am happy for you to go ahead and ask it.

Richard Lyle: No, convener. My question is on a separate issue.

The Convener: In that case, I will bring in John Finnie and then come back to you.

John Finnie: In response to three of my colleagues, you used the term “franchise” on some occasions and the term “contract” on others. Are the terms one and the same and therefore interchangeable? You have talked about changes to the contract, but what changes are we talking about?

Alex Hynes: The contract is called the franchise agreement, which is a big thick document containing hundreds and hundreds of pages on the rights and obligations of the franchisee and Transport Scotland. It is managed in a dynamic way. If we do not meet certain commitments, we have to make payments to Transport Scotland, and the late delivery of the Hitachi trains was a good example of that. Sometimes, the Scottish Government chooses to reinvest those payments in the Scottish rail network.

The commercial negotiations happen all the time on a real-time basis. Their purpose is to ensure that we deliver good services to ScotRail passengers and a good deal for the Scottish taxpayer.

10:45

John Finnie: I am glad that you mentioned the Scottish taxpayer. I understand your desire to use

the term “commercial in confidence”, but we are talking about taxpayers’ money, which the committee has an obligation to scrutinise the use of. What substantive contract changes with financial implications have been made?

Alex Hynes: The largest change to be made to the franchise agreement since it came into force on 1 April 2015 is our revolution in the rail timetable. The timetable benefits that Scottish rail customers will experience in the next 12 months will be greater than those that were expected when the bid was made.

That is a further improvement to the benefits for Scottish rail customers and it involves a big change to the franchise agreement, which requires an increase in net subsidy. It is another good example of the on-going commercial changes that we make to the agreement. We make such changes to reflect the latest situation. The contract is dynamic; we signed it in 2014, but the world looks a bit different now. Both parties continually work together to deliver the best outcome for Scottish rail customers and taxpayers. Such discussions happen all the time.

John Finnie: I do not recognise the claim that the information is commercial in confidence; we are talking about taxpayers’ money. Where can the committee find a note of all the contract changes? It is clear that everyone wants the timetable to be enhanced.

Alex Hynes: I understand that the franchise agreement and any variations are available on the public register, albeit that they are redacted if discussions are commercially confidential.

John Finnie: In what way are the discussions commercially confidential? You are a sole provider.

Alex Hynes: If a change that we agree with the Scottish Government requires us to spend money with a third party, we do not necessarily want the supplier to know how much money we have to spend because, if it knew that, that figure would miraculously become the cost that the supplier quoted to us. Commercial confidentiality genuinely applies.

John Finnie: If you—

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt—

John Finnie: Can I ask one further question, convener?

The Convener: After that, I must go to Richard Lyle; otherwise, he might explode.

John Finnie: If ScotRail wants to buy an additional service from someone, surely it knows that the cost will be X and it says, “Give us X more.” You imply that the cost would be X plus something.

Alex Hynes: We have some big third-party suppliers and we do not necessarily want the supply chain to know our budgets. Sometimes, such detail is redacted from the franchise agreement between ScotRail and Transport Scotland, to ensure that we deliver the best deal for passengers and taxpayers.

The franchise agreements for every train operating company across the UK are publicly available but, on an exceptional basis, some key clauses are redacted to protect commercial confidentiality.

The Convener: Richard Lyle has a follow-up question on SQUIRE performance.

Richard Lyle: I also have other points to ask for clarity on. Is drawing on an overdraft facility with a bank, without going beyond it, similar to ScotRail's arrangements? You are allowed £X from the Government, which you can draw on at any time. Is that similar—yes or no?

Members: No.

Alex Hynes: The railway has only two sources of funding—from customers through the fare box and from the Scottish Government through subsidy payments. Both those things change over time.

Richard Lyle: You can draw on the subsidy at any time, as long as you do not go over the limit.

Members: No.

The Convener: Richard—

Richard Lyle: Okay—I will leave that and move on to another question.

ScotRail is a train operator, not a car park attendant. Should some of the performance targets that you have be reviewed? Are some unnecessary?

Alex Hynes: SQUIRE is the toughest service quality regime in existence in any franchise agreement across the United Kingdom. We signed up to it, and it is our job to meet it. It is designed to measure things that the customer sees, irrespective of who is responsible for delivering them.

The stations and the car parks are primarily owned by Network Rail. They are leased by ScotRail. The car park resurfacing that we are doing between now and the end of March specifically to tackle service quality areas is being funded by Network Rail.

I do not know whether Angus Thom has any follow-up comments on that.

Angus Thom: Alex Hynes has covered most of the main points about service quality. The regime is tough but, as he said, we have committed to

abide by it and to ensure that we improve things for our customers. SQUIRE is about improving what the customer sees and feels when they go into our stations or get on our trains.

Richard Lyle: There is a car park near Bellshill train station. It is not right beside it, but you are responsible for it. We—

The Convener: I am sorry, but I am absolutely parking that comment, because it is not on the line of questioning that we agreed.

Richard Lyle: Some car parks are well away from the stations, but you are still responsible for them. I was only asking a question.

The Convener: I want us to move on to the next question, which is from John Mason.

John Mason: In a slightly different direction, you mentioned in your opening remarks the class 385 rolling stock, which Mr Stevenson enjoys. Can you give us an update on that? I think that there were a few hiccups in October. Where are we with that?

Alex Hynes: We have 10 trains in service, four of which operate between Edinburgh and Glasgow and one of which operates between Edinburgh and North Berwick. Twenty trains have been accepted by ScotRail and are ready for service, and we are working with Hitachi to get a sufficient number of trains in the class 385 rolling stock into Scotland and accepted for use for the December timetable change, when the requirement will jump up to around 30 trains.

We have had some teething problems with the new rolling stock, which is not unusual with the introduction of new trains. We are working with Hitachi to iron out those teething issues.

The train is operating pretty reliably, and I think that the £475 million of investment will prove to be a fantastic investment by Abellio. The feedback that we have received from our customers on the Hitachi train, which we brand as “express”, has been superb, and we are looking forward to giving customers across the central belt of Scotland a taste of that new product.

John Mason: So there are 10 in use, 20 have been accepted and 30 are needed. Is that correct?

Alex Hynes: That is correct.

John Mason: Will we eventually get 30?

Alex Hynes: No. We are buying 70 of the trains. We need 30 for the December timetable change.

John Mason: Will we have 30 for next month?

Alex Hynes: Yes. We will deliver a full Hitachi Edinburgh to Glasgow service from next month. We will also operate the Hitachi trains between the central belt and Alloa and use them to operate a

new service between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk Grahamston. The 365 trains—the so-called “happy trains”—will go on to the Dunblane routes. We will continue to work with Hitachi to ensure that we have all 70 trains in service by next May, which is when the next timetable change is. That will deliver even more services, more seats and faster journeys for the customers of Scotland’s railway.

John Mason: One of the aims of using those trains was to reduce the Edinburgh to Glasgow journey time to 42 minutes. Will you give us an update on how that is going?

Alex Hynes: Yes. We already deliver a journey time of 44 minutes by exploiting the potential of electric trains. That is down from 52 minutes when we had the diesel operation. From December, we will start to deliver 42-minute journey times between Edinburgh and Glasgow. That is a 20 per cent reduction in the journey time between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Next May, we will operate even more services with 42-minute journey times by exploiting the fact that we will have more Hitachi trains and fewer diesel trains on the network. As we know, diesel trains are slower to accelerate and brake.

It remains my aspiration to get journey times between Edinburgh and Glasgow down to 39 minutes, to exploit the very quick performance of the train. Network Rail colleagues are seeing what incremental infrastructure work would be required to enable that to happen in the future.

John Mason: Is it the intention that all journeys will be 42 minutes or will some services stop more often and take longer than 42 minutes?

Alex Hynes: That will be the case at peak times, when we make more stops to prioritise capacity and frequency, and later at night, when services sometimes stop more often. However, the standard service pattern will be 42 minutes wherever possible.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I have a small point of clarification. You said that ScotRail is investing £475 million in the new trains. Is that correct?

Alex Hynes: Correct.

Peter Chapman: Is that money for the 70 trains—the rolling stock—and not for infrastructure?

Alex Hynes: We are spending £475 million on the new fleet—the Hitachi trains and the intercity trains—as well as on the refurbishment of all the trains that we are keeping in Scotland, which will be refurbished to an as-new standard.

Peter Chapman: Does that include the 125s on the Aberdeen to Edinburgh route?

Alex Hynes: Correct.

Maureen Watt: Between 2011 and 2014, I got the Government’s agreement to upgrade the trains from the central belt to Aberdeen and Inverness so that they would have four or five coaches and be slightly more comfortable for such long journeys. We are coming to the end of 2018 and that has still not been achieved. Can you provide an update on the roll-out of the high-speed trains between the central belt and Aberdeen and Inverness?

Alex Hynes: Yes. Since October, we have been operating the first intercity service between Aberdeen and Edinburgh, so customers have started to benefit from the four-carriage intercity trains. We will be getting 26 intercity trains with four or five carriages—that is a change from a three-car diesel train.

As with the express train, the customer feedback that we have had on that change has been exceptional. We are really excited about giving customers more of those intercity services as we recreate the intercity network for Scotland across the seven cities.

Following next month’s timetable change, we will operate 10 services that use the high-speed train. Because of delays by Wabtec with the heavy overhaul of the train, we will be operating some HSTs in what we call “classic mode”—in other words, pre-refurbishment—although they are still quality trains.

Customers are already experiencing the high-speed trains between Aberdeen and Edinburgh and they will start to see more of those trains from 9 December. Between now and the end of next year, we will roll out more of the high-speed trains, and we will complete the refurbishment of all those trains by the end of 2019.

Maureen Watt: So there are 10 of those trains at the moment; how many will there be in total?

Alex Hynes: There is one in service at the moment, there will be 10 in service next month and, ultimately, there will be 26 trains, which will all have been refurbished to an intercity standard by the end of next year.

Mike Rumbles: The unrefurbished high-speed trains will deposit toilet waste directly on to the tracks, despite ScotRail’s agreement with rail workers not to do that. Of course, the practice impacts on those workers most of all.

On 1 November, in response to my parliamentary question, the First Minister said:

“That is not a practice that we support”

and

“it is important that ScotRail works to resolve that situation as quickly as possible.”—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2018; c 26.]

When will the situation be resolved?

Alex Hynes: We agree; we do not support that practice and we do not want to see more of it. However, because of the delays to the refurbishment of the intercity trains, we have been forced into a situation in which we have to operate the high-speed trains in what we call “classic mode”.

As you might imagine, we have had extensive discussions with our trade union colleagues and our workforce on how we manage the issues that that presents. We have some investment planned that we will deliver as soon as possible in an effort to mitigate the impact of the fact that the trains are not fitted with closed-emission toilets. That includes a modification to the rolling stock that will limit where and when that effluent is discharged on to the track. We will continue to work with our workforce based on the track to ensure that any risks are managed.

The good news is that, in Scotland, we generally do not allow track workers trackside when trains are running, so risk is minimised there, and we have set ourselves a deadline of the end of this month to work with our trade union partners to come up with a package of measures.

11:00

Mike Rumbles: That is the deadline for coming up with a package of ideas. My question is, what is the deadline for getting rid of the practice, which we really should not have in the 21st century? What is the timescale for saying, “By this date, this will not be happening”?

Alex Hynes: At the moment, we expect all the intercity trains to be refurbished, including the fitment of the closed-emission toilets, by the end of next year. As an interim measure, we are going to invest in the classic high-speed trains to reduce the problem. We can fit technology to the trains that limits where and when we can issue the effluent on to the track.

Mike Rumbles: When do you think that that will be done?

Alex Hynes: Probably in the early new year, but we are still in discussions with our trade union partners and the workforce to find a solution to that difficult problem, to ensure that no one is exposed to any of the issues related to the use of that rolling stock, which is used today here in Scotland—it is not a new thing for Scotland’s railway. We would rather not be here, but we are working with our partners in the trade unions to find a way through the situation.

The Convener: You described the discharging of human waste on to the railtracks as the classic mode—I am not sure that that is the way that I

would look at it. How are you going to assure people in Scotland, a lot of whom rely on private water supplies, that human waste is not being dropped on to the track close to water that could affect the drinking water in their houses? I find it very odd. If a farmer is driving down the road carrying cattle, it is completely against the law for their waste to be discharged on the road, for example. It has to be taken back to the farm and disposed of properly. I do not understand how we are in this situation. Surely you knew when you put the trains on the track that this was going to be a problem. Can you assure me that effluent will not go anywhere near human water supplies? Can you absolutely assure the public that that will be the case?

Alex Hynes: There is no risk to water supplies. This is a practice that is currently in use across the UK rail network, including here in Scotland. We will manage any risks just as we do today, and there is nothing that we would do to compromise the quality of the water supply. As you know, plan A was to have the refurbished high-speed trains in service, including the fitment of retention tanks for the toilets, but we are not in that situation. We do not want to be in the current situation, so we need to ensure that we manage any risks as best we can, and that is what we are discussing with our workforce.

The Convener: If human waste is dropped on the track and you get rain, that waste will break down and seep through the ballast that is on the track and it could get into human water supplies. There are very strict regulations regarding that, so I am not sure how you can give that assurance.

Alex Hynes: It is a risk that we manage today, and it is our job to ensure that that risk gets no worse as a result of this.

Peter Chapman: This is a fairly shocking situation. As I understand it, you will be running 10 of these trains between Aberdeen and Edinburgh as of next month, of which only one will be refurbished; nine of them will still be in what you call the classic mode—although I would use another word to describe it. Is it correct that only one of the 10 trains that will be running next month will be upgraded?

Alex Hynes: That is our expectation, yes. We expect to have a second refurbished train here in Scotland, but we may use it to continue driver and conductor training and maintenance training. The trains have recently come out of service on the Great Western Railway. They were refurbished relatively recently. Customers will be used to the look and feel of those trains, which already operate from Aberdeen and Inverness on cross-border services. Our customers tell us that they would prefer a classic HST over a class 170 service. That was not our original plan, but I firmly

believe that customers will regard it as an uplift in the level of quality of rail service provision.

Peter Chapman: But it is far from what we were promised. We were promised that every one of the HSTs would be refurbished before they came into service on that route, and you have completely failed to deliver on that. You knew a long time ago that the refurbishment was coming down the track. Why are you so far behind with the refurbishment of the HSTs?

Alex Hynes: The reason for that is that Angel Trains, which owns the trains, has not delivered on the contract that we entered into with the company. The root cause of the problem is that Wabtec, which is the company that is doing the refurbishment of the trains on behalf of Angel Trains, has struggled with the refurbishment programme. That has left us in the situation that we are in.

Angus Thom: Wabtec has struggled to maintain the required staffing levels for the refurbishment programme, and it has had to overcome technical difficulties in fitting some of the new and upgraded equipment that we want on the trains. It has started to work through the problems and to make inroads, but it has struggled to deliver on time. We are holding Wabtec and Angel Trains to account, to make sure that they recover the situation as quickly as they can. We have had to take the unfortunate decision to introduce the classic or as-is version of the trains, which have come from Great Western Railway.

Peter Chapman: Is any financial recompense due as a result of Wabtec's failure to refurbish the trains?

Angus Thom: Under the contract and the franchise agreement that we have with the Government and Transport Scotland, we have obligations to deliver trains by certain dates. If we do not hit those obligations when we said that we would, penalties will be imposed on Abellio ScotRail.

Peter Chapman: Penalties will be imposed on Abellio, but are there penalties that you can pass to Wabtec?

Angus Thom: Yes. Through the different contracts, there are mechanisms for us to hold Wabtec and Angel Trains to account.

Jamie Greene: I am sure that Mr Thom and Mr Hynes understand the frustration of passengers on the Aberdeen and Inverness routes on discovering that, although more than £1.3 billion has been spent on central belt improvements, including the delivery of spanking new class 385 trains and improved journey times, when they want to go to Edinburgh they will need to catch unrefurbished trains that are nearly 50 years old. Do you

understand that sense of frustration among passengers?

Alex Hynes: It is fair to say that we share customers' frustration that delays by Wabtec and Angel Trains have left us in this situation, but we still want to deliver a greater number of seats, a greater number of journeys and faster journeys for customers. We will start doing that next month.

The feedback that we have had from customers who have used the intercity train that we have already introduced has exceeded even the feedback that we have received from customers on the brand-new Hitachi trains. That demonstrates that, provided that the customer environment is of high quality, the age of the train is not a material consideration in the mind of the customer.

Richard Lyle: A couple of weeks ago, a couple of us from the committee were in Glasgow. I had the opportunity to walk through Glasgow Queen Street station, which is being refurbished and is undergoing substantial redevelopment, principally to provide increased passenger circulation space. While I was there, I spoke to two workers. I was surprised to discover that one of them worked for an agency, even though he was wearing a ScotRail jumper. Do you have any agency workers working for ScotRail? Can you provide an update on the redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station?

Alex Hynes: Sure. We have some agency workers working for ScotRail, to fill short-term gaps in our staffing or to deal with an increase in demand—for example, when special events take place or in the run-up to Christmas, we bring in additional short-term agency people to support our teams on the ground. As a living wage employer, we make sure that all our staff in ScotRail, as well as the people in our supply chain, are paid the Scottish living wage.

Right now, we are running a huge recruitment campaign across Scotland's railway for 200 people to join Network Rail Scotland and 140 people to join ScotRail in order to accommodate the growing demand for great people to supply the bigger and better railway that we are creating.

As for the redevelopment of Queen Street, we have completed the demolition of the 1970s buildings in front of the Victorian train shed on George Square, and we have commenced the creation of the brand-new, fully accessible and modern concourse, which will bring the railway into the heart of George Square. That project, which is on time and on budget, will by December next year deliver eight-car platforms, which will enable us to lengthen the Edinburgh to Glasgow services from seven to eight carriages. The

complete station will be finished in the spring of 2020.

Richard Lyle: You have just answered my next question, but I should quickly say that the two people I talked to spoke highly of ScotRail. They were hoping to get full-time jobs, and I hope that they do. I wish them well.

The Convener: Colin Smyth has a question on a slightly different issue with regard to stations.

Colin Smyth: Services from Ayr station have been severely disrupted since August, including all southbound services between Ayr and Stranraer being cancelled. I very much welcome the fact that some of the services were reinstated on 2 November, but when can we expect the reinstatement of all southbound services? Moreover, given the fact that the problems at Ayr station are not going to go away and that further work will be required there, can you give us a guarantee that you are developing a contingency plan for opening a temporary station south of Ayr to deal with any future disruption?

Alex Hynes: Like you, we were pleased with the reinstatement of train services through to Stranraer. Just yesterday, we had a meeting of the station task force, and all parties reiterated their commitment to and desire for the reinstatement of a full service as soon as possible. We do not have a firm date for that yet, because we are still coming to an understanding of what works need to be carried out on the former Station hotel building to ensure that we protect the railway and get the full functionality that we need, particularly with regard to access to our Ayr Townhead depot. All parties—Transport Scotland, ScotRail, Network Rail Scotland and South Ayrshire Council—are working as fast as they can to reinstate the full train service as soon as possible and are, in parallel, working up a plan for the longer-term future of the station to ensure that if we have to do any further stabilisation or encapsulation works they are not too disruptive to the train service.

Stewart Stevenson: We have already covered a fair bit of the issue that I was going to ask about. My question was about what is happening in Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa, but you have covered some of that in response to my colleague John Mason.

Looking at some of the diagrams for the new timetable, I note that the Edinburgh to Dunblane line is pathed as a 158; however, you said in your answer that it would be a 365. Is that simply because the 365's performance characteristics are being treated as a 158? I am looking at service 1P23 on 10 December.

Alex Hynes: It was my understanding that we had diagrammed electric trains on that route, but

we are still working through the fine detail of our timetable.

However, on the electrification of the railway between Falkirk and Stirling-Dunblane-Alloa, the construction phase is now complete, and we have started to energise the railway, as it is called. Essentially, it means that we have switched the electricity on. Each night, we are ensuring that the construction is such that we can start to run test trains; indeed, we will start to run test trains at the end of the month to ensure that the electrification system is performing as expected. We can then hand the railway over for the operation of electric trains on that route from 9 December. My expectation, therefore, is that electric trains will be operating between Falkirk Grahamston and Stirling-Dunblane-Alloa from 9 December.

11:15

Stewart Stevenson: The pathing for Glasgow Queen Street to Alloa is showing 385s, so I presume that the engineering and proving is complete on that route. Is that correct?

Alex Hynes: I will need to clarify that. I am happy to take that offline and respond to your question in writing.

Stewart Stevenson: The pathing from Edinburgh to Cumbernauld via Grahamston is also showing 385s. Is the engineering complete on that as well?

Alex Hynes: The electrification of the line between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk Grahamston is complete and in use. From December, we will operate a brand-new service, which is Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk Grahamston and, in addition, the services to Dunblane, Stirling and Alloa all convert to electric operation from 9 December.

John Mason: Continuing on that theme, will you give us an update on the electrification of the Shotts line?

Alex Hynes: On Shotts, we have now had authorisation from the rail regulator to say that we can use that piece of infrastructure, and the east end of the Shotts line electrification has now been energised and is fit for service. We hope to complete the west side of the Shotts line project next month. The Shotts line electrification does not actually drive a timetable change for December—it is not December dependent—but both the Stirling-Dunblane-Alloa electrification and the Shotts line electrification are due to complete next month, and both of those projects will be delivered within our budgeted borrowing headroom. Actually, they are both due to beat the regulatory milestone for the electrification of those lines, which was March next

year. We expect to complete both in December this year.

John Mason: Although they are not in the timetable, when will you start using electric trains on the Shotts line?

Alex Hynes: It will not be in December, but it will be between December and May. We are currently working through the fastest possible way of giving customers the benefit of electric trains. Clearly, that requires Hitachi to deliver in excess of the 30 that we need for next month's timetable change.

The Convener: The next question is from the deputy convener, Gail Ross.

Gail Ross: Can you give us an update on—

The Convener: Sorry—I am going to pause there, because I told Richard Lyle that I would bring him in on the previous question.

Richard Lyle: I just have a quick general question. Quite a lot of rail track is near houses. When you are upgrading a station or platform, what action do you take to ensure that residents are not too inconvenienced by the noise, especially during the night?

Alex Hynes: As you might imagine given the scale of the investment in Scotland's railway network, making sure that we conduct that work, which often happens overnight, in a way that takes cognisance of line-side neighbours is really important to us. We have a specific team to manage those community impacts. We first ensure that line-side neighbours are aware that work is going to take place—we inform them. As you might imagine, a very large amount of communications activity is happening across Scotland's rail network through community liaison. We then ensure that our contractors and workforce understand the sensitivity of the work that they are doing, particularly if it is overnight. Inevitably, there is disruption in some cases in the short term, but it is our job to manage that work as delicately as possible.

Of course, once the electrification schemes are constructed, because electric trains are quieter than diesel trains, the noise impacts of the railway are significantly reduced. Although there might be short-term impacts that we have to manage sensitively, at the end of the day, an electric railway is quieter than a diesel one.

The Convener: I apologise for interrupting Gail Ross.

Gail Ross: Apology accepted.

Can we get an update on phase 2 of the Highland main line?

Alex Hynes: We are currently on site and upgrading the Highland main line.

We have a £60 million project, which is due to finish at the end of March, and which will adjust the infrastructure on the Highland main line to enable us to operate a regular hourly service between the Highlands and the central belt and to cut journey time in due course, once we have completed the roll-out of the intercity trains. The project is going well. It will unlock faster journeys and the additional seats and services that we will provide in future timetable changes.

Gail Ross: I am glad that you mentioned faster journeys. In your opening remarks, you talked about scenic rural journeys. On the far north line, the journey time from Inverness to Wick is four and a half hours. That is lovely for someone who wants to take in the scenery, but it is not so great for a person who wants to get somewhere quickly. What work is being undertaken to cut the journey time?

Alex Hynes: On journey time, there are two areas that I want to pick up on. One is generic: across Scotland's railway network we are working hard on journey time. Both ScotRail and Network Rail Scotland have targets to improve journey times on Scotland's railway, for passengers and for freight. We have a team that is working on that, to ensure that we are maximising opportunities.

Secondly, and specifically on the far north line, the on-going review group is assessing ideas for cutting journey time. For example, we might amend stopping patterns or put in additional services, with limited stops, to reflect the fact that the visitor economy is not the only market that we serve in those areas.

John Finnie: The £60 million investment is significant and very welcome, but at the end of the day it will still leave the greater part of the route between Perth and Inverness as single track. Sod's law guarantees that, if a locomotive is going to break down, it will break down on the single-track section of the line, as has happened a number of times.

The ORR's most recent "Network Rail Monitor Scotland" expressed concern about "timetabling and opportunities for freight".

As a result of the developments at Aviemore and Pitlochry and the introduction of the new high-speed trains, will some journey times be longer than they currently are? Are there knock-on implications for people who travel beyond Inverness?

Alex Hynes: Our expectation is that we will cut journey times as a result of the Highland main line upgrade. A reason why we have not given exact journey times is that we need to work with other

train operating companies—and freight operating companies, because we have ambitious targets for freight growth, too—to develop the timetable, across Scotland's railway industry, so that we come up with the best possible solution for passengers and freight. We have clear targets to cut journey times for passenger journeys and freight journeys.

John Finnie: Do you acknowledge the significant impact on the proportion of the line that remains single track, notwithstanding the welcome upgrades?

Alex Hynes: The current investment programme will enable the infrastructure to support better train services. However, single-track sections will remain, as you said, which inevitably constrains our ability to grow the train service further.

John Finnie: Have you evaluated the increase in the movement of trains—which, again, is welcome—and the implications of that? As the deputy convener and I are well aware, if there is a problem, people are not held up just once; there can sometimes be three delays on the line going north.

Alex Hynes: We expect the infrastructure interventions to enable a more reliable railway. With the deployment of the intercity trains, with their better capability in terms of acceleration, braking and quality, customers can look forward to faster journeys, more seats and more services, enabled by the Highland main line project. That is what we are committed to delivering for people.

John Finnie: You talked about scenic routes. Are the west Highland lines being viewed in the same terms? I understand that the frequency of Sunday services to Lochaber will be increased, which is welcome.

This point relates to the whole network: a lot of the additional capacity is generated by people who do mountain biking and so on. I think that you know where I am going with this: I am thinking about the undertakings on the number of cycles that will be carried between Glasgow and Edinburgh, in the context of the upgrading and issues to do with the weight of doors and what the refurbished high-speed trains can carry. A big expectation has been created. It is all very well to have an increased service on a Sunday, but it does not help much if trains can still fit only two or three bikes on.

Alex Hynes: We continue to invest in scenic rail journeys; we are refurbishing rolling stock to enable more scenic layouts—that involves lining up seats with windows, for example, which we have done on the class 158 rolling stock and are doing on the intercity rolling stock. Next year, we

will launch and promote more scenic rail journeys as we refurbish more stock.

The carriage of cycles is a big challenge. The fact that we are getting more carriages—the fleet will be up from 800 to 1,000 carriages in the future—will give us more space for everybody, including cyclists. We are working with the Scottish Government on a plan for the scenic lines under which we would hire additional carriages that could carry cycles and heavy mountain biking equipment. We hope to launch something on that next summer.

We have an investment programme to increase the number of bikes that can be stored on intercity train carriages. That modification is under way. Once all the longer-distance services are operated by intercity trains, we will enable customers who are on end-to-end journeys—those that go from the start of a train's service to its end—to store their bikes in the end power cars. We cannot launch that until all the high-speed trains are into traffic, because we do not want to promise customers a high-speed train one way that they cannot catch for their return journey.

We have an investment programme for cycles at stations and on board, and we have a dedicated cycling manager. Making Scotland's railway more convenient for cyclists is a key part of our investment programme.

John Finnie: Will you please share with the committee progress on cycle capacity?

Alex Hynes: Yes—we are happy to follow that up.

Maureen Watt: Work is on-going on the Aberdeen to Inverness upgrade, and I understand that the work on the section from Aberdeen to Dyce was completed ahead of schedule. Will you update us on the project? Could the whole project come in ahead of schedule? I know that pretty major work will shortly require commuters to use bus services.

Alex Hynes: We are spending £330 million on upgrading the Aberdeen to Inverness line, which will enable ScotRail to introduce more services, quicker journeys and higher-quality services. We are focused on ensuring not only that the service between Aberdeen and Inverness is better but that local rail provision into Inverness and into Aberdeen is better.

The project is on time and on budget. In consultation with the public in that part of the country, we decided to use two big closures of the railway to do the project. The first blockade, which took place earlier this year for 14 weeks, was used to reinstate double track between Aberdeen and Dyce. I am pleased to say that that project went well; we delivered all the work that we expected in

that period, and the rail replacement operation also worked well. That railway has operated reliably since we handed it back into service.

The next phase of the project involves a similar block from next spring into the autumn, when we will reinstate more double track. Customers will feel the full benefits of the Aberdeen to Inverness upgrade in December next year, when we will have more services and better-quality rolling stock. The service will also be more reliable, because there will be fewer single-track sections between Aberdeen and Inverness.

The Convener: Jamie Greene has a question.

Jamie Greene: Thank you, convener—I appreciate your indulgence. In the chamber, I recently asked about the Scottish Government's plans for improving disabled access to stations and carriages. The answer somewhat pointed me in the direction of lobbying Network Rail. Will you reassure me that the UK and Scottish Governments and all members of the ScotRail Alliance are taking a joined-up approach? Do you have the will and a plan to improve disabled access across the network?

11:30

Alex Hynes: The accessibility of rail services is right up there at the top of our agenda. The good news about ScotRail services is that there are always at least two people on board each train who can support customers who require additional help. By the end of next year, every single carriage in the rolling stock fleet will be fully accessible to people with reduced mobility. Every time that we make a station investment, we ensure that there is full accessibility—I say to Richard Lyle that Queen Street station is a good example in that context. We are currently working with Transport Scotland to ensure that we can exploit the UK access for all funding pot to improve station accessibility.

We have a dedicated accessibility manager and a forum that helps us to design products and services. I will give an example. People in the accessibility forum were the first to try out our new intercity train, and they were really pleased with the accessibility improvements that we had made. Some people might have noticed the changed priority seating on express trains to ensure that priority seating is really clear. The people who represent accessibility groups that we work with say that that that is absolutely fantastic and really helps people with additional needs. We are looking to see whether we can roll that out on the other fleets.

Accessibility is absolutely at the top of our agenda.

The Convener: That has sparked two more questions.

John Finnie: I commend the priority seating on trains, which is excellent. I have seen a lot of favourable comment about it on social media. If I noted correctly, you said that there are always at least two people on board a train. That is very welcome news. Is that a big announcement today?

Alex Hynes: Obviously, in the driver-only operation bits of the network, which tend to be in the Glasgow metro area, we are committed to providing a ticket examiner on board each service. We have been working hard on that area, and nearly every service that operates now has at least two people on board.

John Finnie: How does that work? Does the ticket collector stay on the train all the time, from start to finish?

Alex Hynes: That is correct. As part of our franchise agreement and as part of our agreement with our trade union partners, we are committed to providing a ticket examiner on board the driver-only operated services, which, as I said, are mainly in the Strathclyde area. We have seen great progress in that area recently.

John Finnie: A ticket examiner is not the same as a highly trained safety-critical guard, of course.

Alex Hynes: The role is different. Nevertheless, from a customer perspective, customers like to see helpful and visible highly trained employees, and that is what we set out to deliver. We have been working hard in that area to ensure that, no matter where a person is in Scotland's railway network, there will be a consistent level of onboard visibility of our people.

John Finnie: That is very reassuring. Will you share the roll-out of that programme with the committee?

Alex Hynes: Yes—absolutely.

The Convener: Richard Lyle will ask the last question. I have a point of clarification after that.

Richard Lyle: There is a question about ticket prices that has not been asked. Could ticket prices be made more accessible? If a person wants to go to Aberdeen or wherever and books in advance, they can possibly get a deal. Is there any way of rationalising the system and making it simpler for people such as me who like to go on trains?

The Convener: No, Mr Stevenson, you cannot get out your five cards on that question.

Alex Hynes: Obviously, the fares and ticketing system across the UK is complex.

Richard Lyle: I know that you have to make a profit.

Alex Hynes: Our job is to try to make the system as simple as possible for customers to understand. That is one reason why we are investing in smart ticketing. Our advice to customers is that, if they want the very best deal, they should ensure that they buy before they board. They should buy in advance if they can. We ensure that we offer really good-value fares to our customers because, ultimately, one of the ways in which we will be successful will be by ensuring that the additional seat capacity that we provide is filled with customers so that they can enjoy our product.

The Convener: I have a point of clarification. I was one of the committee members who went to Glasgow Queen Street station and saw the work going on there. When you came to the committee on 9 May, you said that the completion date for the redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station is 2020. I think that you said to the committee today that that redevelopment would be completed in December 2020.

Alex Hynes: The eight-car platforms will be delivered by December next year and the station concourse redevelopment will be complete by the spring of 2020.

The Convener: So everything will be complete by the spring of 2020.

Alex Hynes: That is the end date for the redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station.

The Convener: Thank you. I am grateful for that. I am sure that you will be back before then to answer questions about that, if necessary.

I thank you very much for the evidence session. As there are no further questions, I suspend the meeting for five minutes to allow the witnesses to depart.

11:35

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

Exotic Disease (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018

Aquatic Animal Health and Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018

Fisheries (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

The Convener: Under item 4, the committee will consider proposals by the Scottish Government to consent to the UK Government legislating in relation to three UK statutory instruments.

We have received consent notifications relating to three sets of regulations. The instruments are being laid in the UK Parliament under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and the Scottish Government has categorised all three as making minor or technical amendments. The committee's role is to decide whether it agrees to the Scottish Government giving consent to the UK Government to make regulations on its behalf. However, in the committee paper, there are broader related policy issues that may arise in future.

We have all had a chance to go through the instruments. I could go on and explain each one, but are there any comments on them?

John Finnie: I have no issue at all with their content, and it is appropriate that we lend our support. However, the paragraph in paper 4 with the heading "Summary of stakeholder engagement/consultation" says:

"The Scottish Government meets frequently with a very broad range of stakeholders to discuss animal health and welfare related matters."

I do not doubt that but, given the amount of legislation that is coming, it would be good to know that those specific issues have been drawn to the attention of the normal consultees.

The Convener: That is a genuine point. It would be helpful if we asked the Government to clarify that it has consulted the interested parties when the regulations are brought forward.

Stewart Stevenson: Given that the matter involves the Scottish Parliament giving consent to the UK Parliament, the consultation would, of course, properly lie with the UK.

The Convener: It would still be comforting to know that the matters had been discussed. We can leave it to the Government to ensure that we have raised that point.

As there are no other comments, does the committee agree to write to the Scottish Government to confirm that it is content for consent to be given in relation to the UK SIs?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Does the committee agree that it should note, and request a response from the Scottish Government on, the related policy matters that are identified in the paper, which will require to be addressed in the future?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting. The committee will now move into private session.

11:43

Meeting continued in private until 11:52.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba