



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 4 April 2019

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

Thursday 4 April 2019

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	1
Fife Health and Social Care Partnership (Deficit).....	1
Pension Age (Women Born in the 1950s).....	3
Mental Health Waiting Times (NHS Ayrshire and Arran).....	3
Silverline Care Caledonia (Unions).....	5
Rural GP Association of Scotland.....	6
Falling Birth Rate.....	7
General Practitioners in Rural Areas.....	8
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	10
Education (Subject Choice).....	10
Brexit (Preparations).....	13
NHS Tayside (Cancer Treatment).....	15
Centrica.....	16
ScotRail Improvements (Borders Railway).....	17
Teacher Absences (Aberdeen).....	18
Brexit.....	18
Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (Roll-out to Boys).....	20
Burntisland Fabrications.....	20
Free Personal Care (North Ayrshire).....	21
National Health Service.....	22
Violence Against Women.....	22
Drug Deaths (Task Force).....	24
Substandard Temporary Accommodation.....	26
LONG-TERM DECLINE IN SALMON STOCKS	29
<i>Motion debated—[Rachael Hamilton].</i>	
Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con).....	29
Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con).....	33
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab).....	34
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP).....	36
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con).....	37
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green).....	40
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab).....	41
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con).....	43
The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon).....	45
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	50
TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY	50
Rail Freight Group (Meetings).....	50
Rail Passengers (Standing).....	50
Kirkliston Transport Links.....	51
Fibre Networks Funding (Aberdeenshire).....	52
Automatic Vehicle Speed Limiters.....	53
Ferry Vessels 801 and 802.....	55
Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (Congestion).....	58
TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1	60
<i>Motion moved—[Michael Matheson].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson).....	60
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	64
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con).....	67
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab).....	70
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green).....	74
Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD).....	76
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP).....	79
Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con).....	81
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab).....	83

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP).....	85
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	87
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	89
James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab)	92
Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP).....	94
Colin Smyth	96
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con).....	99
Michael Matheson.....	102
TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL: FINANCIAL RESOLUTION.....	106
<i>Motion moved—[Derek Mackay].</i>	
DECISION TIME	107

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 4 April 2019

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Fife Health and Social Care Partnership (Deficit)

1. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in addressing the deficit that was built into the Fife health and social care partnership when it was established. (S5O-03110)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The opening budget deficit dating from the establishment of the integration joint board in 2016-17 is now reduced to just under £9 million. Further progress will be made on that over the coming year.

The deficit needs to be addressed by NHS Fife and Fife Council. Together with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we are engaging with NHS Fife, Fife Council and the IJB to support their plans to systematically reduce the deficit without reducing capacity by redesigning services and delivery and by investing in quality sustainable care.

Alex Rowley: That is not an acceptable position for us to be in. The chief executive of NHS Fife wrote to me last week and said:

“As we move into 2019/20, the budget position remains challenging with an estimated £15m ... budget gap.”

NHS Fife and the council have had to bail out the IJB for the current year, which is on top of the deficit that it started with.

The only answer from the Scottish Government seems to be that NHS Fife and Fife Council instruct the IJB to cut services. Does the cabinet secretary not realise that it is struggling to deliver services? Will she commit to meeting the co-leaders of Fife Council, who confirmed that to be the case when I spoke to them this morning?

Jeane Freeman: That is a bit ironic. The deficit was bequeathed by Fife Council and NHS Fife to the IJB before it even started. I agree—absolutely—that it is not acceptable, but if Mr Rowley really wants to start changing it, he needs to talk to Fife Council and get it to come on board with the work that COSLA and I are trying to do with the council and NHS Fife to address the deficit that they gave the IJB. They are not bailing out the IJB; they are being forced, in a really

perverse way, to address a deficit that they bequeathed in the first place.

We are trying to get them to stop telling the IJB to cut services; to recognise that the IJB has the statutory responsibility and, therefore, the decision-making power for commissioning and planning services; to use the funding that both NHS Fife and Fife Council have, including the additional funding for integrated joint services, to plan systematically to reduce what remains of the legacy deficit over a period of years—let us say the three years that I have given health boards to plan their finances—and to allow the IJB to work within its budget without having to try to repay a debt that belongs to NHS Fife and Fife Council in the first place.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): With Fife health and social care partnership looking to tackle the budget gap, day care services and care home closures are being considered. How will the cabinet secretary ensure that vital care for the elderly in the area will not be seriously affected?

Jeane Freeman: We are having a bit of an irony bypass this morning. I remind Alexander Stewart that the additional funds to NHS Scotland and our local authorities, including an additional £160 million for integrated health and social care, are funds that he and his party voted against. Nonetheless, we, on the SNP benches, take our responsibility seriously, even if our Scottish Conservative colleagues do not.

My officials and COSLA officials are directly engaging with the council, the health board and the IJB to resolve the legacy debt that was bequeathed to the IJB without reducing capacity or cutting services. It would be helpful to have members across the chamber engage with us in supporting that in whatever manner they might wish rather than trying to score cheap political points on the back of it.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the redesign of general practitioner out-of-hours services that is currently under way in the Fife health and social care partnership. A new multidisciplinary model is emerging that could save the services that we have all been fighting for, but it will require additional resources. Will the cabinet secretary commit to providing additional funding for training prescribing pharmacists and advanced nurse practitioners to deliver that new, modern model for out-of-hours delivery across Fife?

Jeane Freeman: I am aware of the proposals that are in hand. We have additional funds available to help both prescribing nurses and

pharmacists in those matters. We will look at the proposal when it comes to me specifically.

Pension Age (Women Born in the 1950s)

2. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding progress with changing the state pension age for women in Scotland born in the 1950s. (S5O-03111)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We have raised that issue with the United Kingdom Government on numerous occasions and have made clear our position that it should take responsibility for the mishandling of the policy and provide transitional protection for those who have been affected.

Those women have been badly let down by the UK Government, and it is disappointing that, despite the overwhelming evidence of the devastating impact that the changes have had, nothing has changed at the UK Government level. It is time for the UK Government to accept responsibility for the hardship that it has created.

Sandra White: Changes have obviously been made. In the light of the UK Government's punitive changes to pension credit, with the WASPI women—the women against state pension inequality—again being penalised, I ask the minister to call on the UK Government to put in place fair transitional state pension arrangements and halt the reforms to pension credit, which will hit those who are most in need.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In February, I wrote to the pensions minister about the recent changes to pension credit eligibility, and I urged him to consider the impact of those changes, particularly on those WASPI women who are part of a mixed-age couple and who will now find themselves doubly disadvantaged because of the UK Government's policies. He did not address my points regarding the plight of the WASPI women in his reply, so we will continue to raise those issues with the UK Government.

The strength of support from all parties, with the exception of the Scottish Tories, was evident in last night's members' business debate, which was led by Sandra White. I commend Sandra White and others who are involved in the cross-party group on WASPI for their continued support of the WASPI women in their fight for justice.

Mental Health Waiting Times (NHS Ayrshire and Arran)

3. **John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it can do to help NHS Ayrshire

and Arran reduce waiting times for treatment for mental health problems. (S5O-03112)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): Since 2016, the Scottish Government has invested £1.8 million in NHS Ayrshire and Arran for capacity building and workforce development to improve mental health waiting times, with over £770,000 to come. That funding is currently paying for 8.8 whole-time-equivalent staff, with another in recruitment. Alongside that, the board is receiving support from the mental health access improvement team to deliver front-line improvement projects to improve access to treatment.

The Scottish Government is also investing an additional £4 million in child and adolescent mental health services staff across Scotland, who will be instrumental in supporting new services and reducing pressure on the system.

John Scott: The minister will be aware of the difficulties in accessing CAMHS, particularly in south Ayrshire, and the long waiting time for an appointment with a consultant psychiatrist. She will know that suicide numbers are rising—particularly among young men, but regrettably across all age groups—with loneliness and isolation on the increase. What additional measures can the Scottish Government take to address those growing problems?

Clare Haughey: Mr Scott might be interested to know that the latest figures show that, in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, 95 per cent of CAMHS and 82 per cent of psychological therapies patients were seen within 18 weeks, with an average wait of seven and five weeks, respectively.

However, the Scottish Government recognises that some people are still waiting too long and we are determined to meet the waiting times standards across Scotland. That is why we set up a new mental health delivery board, which I chair and which had its second meeting this week. The board will oversee improvement activity and will track performance. Boards have been asked to put in place improvement plans by April, setting out clear milestones over the next two years.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The minister will be aware that Labour-led North Ayrshire Council is the first local authority in Scotland to have a dedicated mental health counsellor in each of its secondary schools. However, the leader of the council, Councillor Joe Cullinane, has told me that demand for the service is so high that some schools already have waiting lists, and he has raised the issue of support outwith the school day. What action will the minister take to ensure that every secondary school in Scotland, like those in North Ayrshire, has a dedicated mental health counsellor? What

resources are available to ensure that the service is sufficiently resourced and that support does not end at the end of the school day?

Clare Haughey: Monica Lennon will be aware that we have committed to having school counsellors in every high school in Scotland. As I said in my previous answer, we have also invested £4 million in CAMHS to deliver 80 additional staff, which will ease pressure on the system across the country. We have also committed to having 250 additional school nurses and to rolling out mental health first aid training for teachers across all local authorities. I believe that those measures will help to address some of the issues that Ms Lennon has raised, not just in Ayrshire but across Scotland.

Silverline Care Caledonia (Unions)

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Silverline Care Caledonia derecognising GMB Scotland as the trade union representing the staff in six of its care homes. (S5O-03113)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government's fair work action plan recognises the important role of trade unions and we are committed to supporting strong trade unions for the benefit of workers and our economy. It is therefore regrettable when an employer chooses to derecognise a union. I strongly urge both parties in this case to come together to reach an agreement.

Stuart McMillan: Does the minister consider that the decision is a concerning development at a time when care home staff across Scotland may feel undervalued, despite providing some of the most valuable services in society?

Jamie Hepburn: I agree with Stuart McMillan. Our care home workers, and our social care workers more generally, provide an essential service. The strong message from this place should be that we recognise their great value to our economy and society.

In relation to the specific circumstances, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is aware of and closely monitoring the situation, and we will be willing to offer any support that is required. However, the matter is being dealt with by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and I reiterate my message that we strongly urge both parties in this situation to come together, through ACAS if necessary, to reach an agreement.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The derecognition of the GMB at Silverline comes on the back of the derecognition of Unison at Cornerstone. A deliberate anti-union stance appears to be emerging in the care sector. What is

the Government doing to stop that from becoming a growing phenomenon? Has the minister met the companies and the trade union concerned to try to end that derecognition movement?

Jamie Hepburn: I have not, at this stage. I will be willing to do so, as is necessary. As I said, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is monitoring the situation. Clearly, it would be preferable if the parties could come together to resolve the situation. If it requires our further involvement, we will consider that. ACAS is actively involved and I hope that both parties can come to an agreement and an arrangement.

I reiterate that we greatly value the work of, and are working with, the trade unions, and I consider it a matter of the utmost regret when, in any circumstances, an employer actively derecognises a trade union.

Rural GP Association of Scotland

5. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it plans to take to re-engage the Rural GP Association of Scotland with its remote and rural general practice working group. (S5O-03114)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The rural group chair, Sir Lewis Ritchie, met the new chair of the Remote and Rural GP Association of Scotland on 3 April. I understand that the meeting was productive for all involved. Sir Lewis has acknowledged the concerns raised by RGPAS members and has agreed to hold further discussions in due course towards their continuing involvement in implementing the contract in our remote and rural communities.

I have had discussions with Sir Lewis as recently as last week and will continue to keep in touch with him as the matter progresses.

Gail Ross: The cabinet secretary's answer is very welcome, but there is a perception that tangible progress is not being made in the short-life working group. Will the Scottish Government commit to taking that feedback into account and refreshing the aims and objectives of the group with a view to reflecting the desire for the group to be more proactive?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms Ross for that additional question. I am aware of that perception. I do not think that it is entirely fair; nonetheless, it needs to be taken seriously and that was part of the discussion that I had with Sir Lewis. We will now take that feedback very seriously indeed, continue those discussions and look to see what more can be done, so that the group can become more proactive in the work that we need it to take forward.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I agree with Gail Ross's sentiments, because, as much as the cabinet secretary tries to dress it up, the Rural GP Association of Scotland resigned from the group because of the lack of progress that was being made to take on board rural GPs' concerns. Will the cabinet secretary agree to meet a cross-party delegation to take forward those real concerns and ensure that we get the GP contract right for every community in Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: It would be helpful if we could wait to see how Sir Lewis's discussions progress with the new chair of that group. That should be within a short timescale, because I am keen that we make progress on it and engage that particular association in this work. Once we understand how that progress has been made, I am content to meet members to see what more might be done.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am sure that the Rural GP Association of Scotland will re-engage if it is clear that its concerns are being heard and acted on, because there is real concern about the contract. It flies in the face of addressing health inequalities and it certainly does not value the work of rural GPs. It also lacks oversight by the technical advisory group on resource allocation. Will the cabinet secretary make sure that oversight is in place, so that the contract is in keeping with other health services?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms Grant for that question. Of course, we continue to have oversight, but it is worth noting for the record and for members' information that the Scottish Government did not impose that contract on GPs; the contract was negotiated and agreed with the British Medical Association GP group. Therefore, a significant number—in fact, a majority—of GPs across the country voted for that contract and are already working to it and seeing the benefit of it, including GPs in remote and rural practices. Nonetheless, there are additional concerns, which we are attempting to address. I am happy to keep members up to date with the progress that we make in that regard.

Falling Birth Rate

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the birth rate falling to its lowest level since records began in 1855, whether it will provide details of the steps that it will take to support people to have children, including supporting existing families to have more children. (S5O-03115)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Deciding when, and if, to have children is a matter of personal choice. The Scottish Government is working hard to create a country that is the best

place in the world to grow up, through a variety of initiatives that are aimed at supporting pregnant women, children and families.

Our targeted support that is provided to families includes our best start pregnancy and baby payments—which have already awarded more than £2.7 million—the provision of universal free school meals for every child in primary 1 to primary 3 and a school clothing grant that supports approximately 120,000 children.

We have funded 600 hours of early learning entitlement for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds, which will rise to 1,140 hours from August 2020, and more than 80,000 baby boxes have been given to new parents across Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer.

In the 20th century, Scotland's population growth was the lowest on earth. Last year, our birth rate was a feeble 9.2 per 1,000 people—well below replacement level. By contrast, our northern neighbour, the Faroe Islands, had a fertility rate of 2.4 children born to each woman—one of the healthiest in Europe.

Does the cabinet secretary agree with the Scottish Government's expert advisory group on migration and population that immigration alone cannot address regional or local depopulation or sustain communities? What will the Scottish Government do to research the barriers to Scots having children?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The decreasing birth rate is not new and it is not unique to Scotland. A recent report from the National Records of Scotland suggested that some of the reasons behind that are that women might be postponing childbearing until later ages and that economic uncertainty might be influencing decisions around childbearing. That is why the Government is doing what it can to help overcome some of those uncertainties and has introduced a raft of new financial supports, some of which I outlined in my earlier answer.

We are also taking wide-ranging action across Government portfolios to tackle poverty, by increasing income for work and earning, reducing household costs and maximising income from social security and benefits in kind. That will ensure that Scotland is not only the best place to grow up, but the best place to have children.

General Practitioners in Rural Areas

7. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support GP practices in rural areas. (S5O-03116)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): General practitioners in rural communities face distinct challenges, so the 2018-19 package of support that we put in place included financial support for recruitment incentives; financial support for relocation costs for GPs moving to rural posts; support for the Scottish rural medicine collaborative to develop recruitment and sustainability measures, including the £20,000 for GPs scheme; support for GP recruitment and resilience schemes in the Highlands and Islands; additional support of £0.5 million to support rural dispensing practices; and £150,000 to support information technology improvements to rural health boards.

Donald Cameron: A recent survey of rural GPs showed that 82 per cent of members of the Rural GP Association of Scotland believe that the outlook for rural healthcare is worse under the new contract and that 92 per cent of its members would reject the contract if they were given an opportunity to vote on it now. What reassurance can the cabinet secretary give rural GPs, who are clearly desperate and feel that their voices are being ignored by her Government?

Jeane Freeman: That contract was negotiated with the British Medical Association and was passed by GPs, including GPs in rural communities. It is always worth making the point that this Government did not impose the contract on GPs. Nonetheless, we are continuing to work with the BMA, which also needs to take account of some of these concerns. In fact, I met the BMA only yesterday to discuss what more we might do in phase 2 of the contract. We are also, as I said to my colleague Gail Ross, taking forward work with Sir Lewis Ritchie to take account of and address those concerns specifically, in addition to the substantive package of comprehensive support that I outlined.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Education (Subject Choice)

1. **Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Yesterday, the head of Universities Scotland said that there is a growing concern that the students in some schools, particularly in deprived areas, are losing out because of a lack of subject choice. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I know that there is an Education and Skills Committee inquiry into the issue just now, and we will certainly look at its findings with interest. Broadly speaking, however, the view that Jackson Carlaw described is not my view. As he will be well aware, under curriculum for excellence there are no set notions about the number or type of qualifications taken at each stage of the senior phase. What matters are the qualifications and awards that pupils leave school with, not just what they study in secondary 4, which is what some of the concerns that have been expressed have been about.

When we look at attainment in our schools, we see that the number of pupils leaving with qualifications at level 5 has risen, and the same is true at level 6. The numbers of pupils going into positive destinations are also at record levels. There is now growing evidence that the attainment gap between the richest and the poorest is beginning to close.

We will continue to pay close attention to these matters and will continue to focus on what needs to be done to ensure that every young person in our schools gets the best possible education.

Jackson Carlaw: I believe that the breadth of subjects in which students can achieve qualifications matters. Let us examine what is emerging. Whereas previously schools would offer around eight subjects in S4, in a majority of cases that number has now reduced to six. There is a massive reduction in subjects such as modern languages being taken in secondary school, with children in deprived parts of Scotland by far the worst affected.

We raised the matter with the First Minister a year ago, and yet from the evidence that we have heard this week, it seems that her Government remains in complete denial. Why?

The First Minister: As I am sure that Jackson Carlaw is aware, the general phase of education now goes on to third year, so it is longer. A broader range of qualifications and other awards are now available. As I said in my previous

answer, the percentage of pupils getting a qualification at level 5 has risen since 2009, and the same is true for qualifications at level 6, which are, broadly speaking, higher. We are seeing the attainment gap narrow.

We have to judge our education system not by the number of qualifications that are taken in one particular year but by what young people are coming out of school with, and we are seeing record numbers going into university, including record numbers from our deprived areas.

Those are all positive developments, but of course we think that there is more work still to be done, which is why the programme of education reform is under way.

Jackson Carlaw: In her answer, the First Minister illustrates that she is in denial. When representatives from her own main education agency were asked just yesterday how many teachers we are short in each subject, they declared that they did not know, but they were looking into it.

That brings us to the nub of the problem, because we learned this week that three quarters of schools say that a lack of teachers is constraining subject choice to some extent or by a great deal. No matter what spin the First Minister puts on it, teacher numbers are down by 3,100 under the Scottish National Party. Is it not simply the case that, if she cuts teacher numbers, she restricts the subjects that pupils can take?

The First Minister: The number of teacher vacancies and the subjects that they are in will vary from time to time but, generally, vacancy numbers in our schools are down. Since I became First Minister, the number of teachers in Scotland has increased by 1,242. We have the highest number of teachers in our schools since 2010 and the highest number of primary school teachers since 1980, and the recent pay award for teachers will help us even more in recruiting and retaining teachers. In fact, the contribution that the Scottish Government has made to that award is specifically geared to do just that.

On attainment, let me give a bit more detail to my earlier answers. I should say that we have changed how the figures are counted a little bit, so I give that caveat. However, broadly speaking, where we are able to make a direct comparison—*[Interruption.]* The Tories may not want to hear this, but I suggest that they listen. In 2006-07, when this Government came into office, the percentage of pupils getting a level 5 qualification or better was just over 71 per cent; the figure is now 85.9 per cent. In 2006, the percentage of pupils getting a level 6 qualification or better was 41.6 per cent; last year, the figure was 62.2 per cent. Those are the facts. We are seeing

attainment improve and the attainment gap narrow. That is good progress, but I will be the first to say that there is more work to do and we are getting on with doing it.

Jackson Carlaw: Of course the achievement of students is to be celebrated, but my question is about the breadth of subjects that students can take qualifications in. More than 1,000 people have written to the committee as part of the inquiry that the First Minister made reference to, confirming the point that I have just made about a lack of teachers reducing the availability of subjects in schools.

The chief inspector of education, Gayle Gorman, said to the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee yesterday that the failure to recruit teachers

"can—and in some cases does—limit opportunities to lead extensive curriculum improvements".

We know that subject choice in Scottish schools has narrowed significantly under the SNP. We also know that schools say that a lack of teachers—there have been fewer of them in every single year that this Government has been in office—is a core reason.

A year ago, when we raised the issue at First Minister's question time, Nicola Sturgeon said that she would "work hard" to ensure young people had a wide choice of subjects to take in secondary school, yet, a year on, we are back here again. She said that education would be her number 1 priority. Is it not time that she acted as if it was her number 1 priority?

The First Minister: We have been acting on it, which is why we are seeing the improvements that I have just cited. We see more people staying on longer at school and more people taking a broader range of subjects over a number of years. Those are good things and exactly what curriculum for excellence is designed to achieve.

Teacher numbers have risen in each of the past three years, so we now have a higher number of teachers than we have had at any time since 2010, and a higher number of primary school teachers since I was at primary school. We are also seeing attainment increase. Those are the facts.

Jackson Carlaw talks about difficulties around teacher recruitment. The situation is not unique to Scotland. In January, the Secretary of State for Education said that, in England

"it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff".

This is a challenge for many countries, but it is a challenge that this Government is addressing by taking action to recruit and retain teachers. We can see from the exam passes and the

qualification statistics that I have just cited that our young people are doing better as a result. I hope that everybody across the chamber—even Jackson Carlaw—can find it within themselves to welcome that.

Brexit (Preparations)

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday afternoon, the First Minister announced that she does not believe that the Prime Minister is ready to “give ground” on a Brexit deal. The Labour Party continues to vehemently oppose a no-deal Brexit. Today, we have returned to discussions, in good faith, to make concerted efforts to avoid that. However, there is no escaping the fact that, thanks to Theresa May and the Tories, we are now facing the cliff edge of a no-deal Brexit. Can the First Minister update Parliament and the country on the Scottish Government’s resilience committee’s plans for the event of a no-deal Brexit next week?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government resilience committee will meet again this afternoon. I will chair that meeting, just as I have chaired its meetings on a weekly basis for some time. We are making plans across the whole range of our responsibilities to ensure that, as far as we possibly can, we mitigate the impact of a no-deal Brexit.

I will be candid: no matter how much planning or contingency work we do, it will not be possible to mitigate every impact of a no-deal Brexit, should that happen. That is why it is so important that we all work to avoid that scenario.

Yesterday at Westminster, I had a constructive meeting with Jeremy Corbyn and then I met the Prime Minister. In the meeting with the Prime Minister I set out, once again, the Scottish Government’s single market-customs union compromise. That is not our first preference, but I have said that I am willing to work with the Prime Minister to see where there might be agreement around that. I also said that I was willing and keen to talk to her about how we can allay our concerns about migration, given the demographic needs of Scotland. All I got in return were the reasons why the Prime Minister did not agree with me on those things and why her deal was the best one. She wants to know where the rest of us are prepared to compromise, but I got no sense at all from her, at any stage yesterday, of where she is willing to compromise. From what I read of his meeting with her, I think that Jeremy Corbyn and his colleagues got pretty much the same impression.

If the Prime Minister wants to find a compromise, it is time for her to set out where she is prepared to compromise. It is also time for members from across the House of Commons to unite behind initiatives—such as the motion that

Joanna Cherry lodged earlier in the week—to ensure that we take away the risk of a no-deal Brexit once and for all.

Richard Leonard: I welcome the First Minister’s co-operative tone.

Let us focus on something specific to the Scottish situation. Last week, the chief medical officer and the chief pharmaceutical officer said that steps were being taken to deal with any shortfall in medicines as a result of a no-deal Brexit—*[Interruption.]* The health secretary previously stated that the Government wanted to have six weeks’ worth of medicine in storage on top of normal stock levels by the end of March. That includes medicines such as insulin, which more than 30,000 people in Scotland rely on every day. Can the First Minister take the opportunity to reassure the public that Scotland now has access to six weeks’ worth of reserves of all the medicines that we need?

The First Minister: That is the broad assurance that we have from pharmaceutical companies. We continue to work to ensure that that information is up to date and that those stockpiles remain, given that the date for a possible no-deal Brexit has changed. That date may change again, which means that those plans require to be kept under constant review. I assure the chamber that they will be.

We hope that we will not be in that situation. The Presiding Officer has indicated that if we are facing a no-deal Brexit at the end of next week, Parliament will be recalled from recess. I welcome that assurance. The Government will have the opportunity at that point to update Parliament with up-to-the-minute details of the preparations being made across a range of issues.

I could not help noticing that while Richard Leonard was asking me that important and serious question, the Conservative members were laughing.

Members: Shame!

The First Minister: It is not a laughing matter. Every Conservative in the Scottish Parliament and every Conservative politician across the country should be hanging their heads in shame at the fact that they have brought the country to the brink of crisis.

Richard Leonard: Let me turn to something else that is extremely serious. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work said that Brexit would represent

“an economic shock on the scale of the 2008 financial crisis.”—*[Official Report, 21 February 2019; c 44.]*

In the foreword to his budget, he wrote:

“However, if we face a no deal or cliff-edge Brexit I will have to return to Parliament to reassess our spending priorities.”

When will the First Minister bring to this Parliament those revised spending priorities? Will she commit to presenting her proposals for consideration by the Parliament next week, in the event of a recall in light of the no-deal Brexit possibility?

The First Minister: This is a serious issue. Let me say, first, that I hope that the finance secretary does not have to return to the Parliament with revised budget figures, because I hope that we do not find ourselves in a no-deal scenario.

If we find ourselves in that scenario, it will be important that the finance secretary does that as quickly as possible. I do not think that it would be reasonable to expect that to be next Thursday or Friday, but he would intend to do that as soon as possible after that, for full consideration by the Parliament.

If we are in that scenario—and let us all hope that that will not be the case—there will be a substantial shock to the United Kingdom economy and to the Scottish economy. We will do whatever we can to mitigate the impacts of that, but many of the levers lie in the hands of the UK Government—not just the levers that would allow us to avoid a no-deal scenario but the levers that will require to be pulled if we find ourselves in that situation.

When I was in London yesterday, I took part in the UK Cabinet sub-committee on no-deal planning. John Swinney and Mike Russell have attended previous meetings of that sub-committee. One of the issues on the agenda was the UK Government’s planning for the economic response; I made the point that I do not think that the scale of what the UK Government is planning is sufficient to meet the potential scale of the challenge.

We will continue to do everything that we can and to press the UK Government to do likewise. However, I repeat the very important point that if we find ourselves leaving the European Union next week or at any stage with no deal, none of us will be able to properly and fully mitigate the impacts of that, which is why all of us should be focused on doing everything that we possibly can to stop that happening.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are a number of constituency supplementaries.

NHS Tayside (Cancer Treatment)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): A constituent contacted me this week to inform me that she has been told by NHS Tayside that she is

one of the 300 breast cancer patients who might have received a lower dose of chemotherapy than they should have done in their treatment.

The issue was raised in the findings of the recent Healthcare Improvement Scotland report, “Clinical Management of Breast Cancer in NHS Tayside”. Just as important, it was raised in the media almost a year ago. Why has it taken such a long time to address the concerns? What steps is the Scottish Government taking to investigate variations in cancer treatment across Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In May 2018, a whistleblower wrote to the then health secretary, Shona Robison, about the issue. Shona Robison immediately arranged for the whistleblower to meet the chief pharmaceutical officer, and in July 2018, the chief medical officer and chief pharmaceutical officer asked Healthcare Improvement Scotland to examine the practice of lower dosage of chemotherapy in NHS Tayside. That resulted in the publication, earlier this week, of the report that Liz Smith mentioned.

The findings and recommendations of the HIS report were considered by an independent expert group, to understand any potential impact on Tayside patients arising from the different approach. The group has made it clear that any risk to patients of a negative impact is small. A further expert group, led by Professor Aileen Keel, of the Scottish cancer task force, will fully consider all the HIS recommendations and how they can best be delivered. The group expects to report its findings in June.

NHS Tayside has already announced that it will make changes to its breast cancer chemotherapy treatment, to bring it into line with the rest of Scotland.

I hope that that gives some assurance on the particular issue. On the broader issue, variation across different health boards is something that the Scottish Government looks at closely. For example, the atlas of variation often offers a way of looking at the issue. Where there are apparent variations, it is then possible to look into whether they are for good reasons or not and to take action. We take the issue extremely seriously, as I hope that the actions that the then health secretary took demonstrate.

Centrica

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): Workers at the Centrica call centre in Glasgow are deeply concerned at the news that 285 jobs are under threat, with the site facing closure. The proposed job cuts in Glasgow are the thin end of the wedge and will be deeply worrying to workers and their families.

Any loss of the jobs would have an adverse effect on not only Glasgow but the wider Scottish economy. The First Minister, as a Glasgow MSP, will share my concern at this development. Will she say what steps the Scottish Government can take to support the workforce in their efforts to ensure that those regressive job cuts do not go ahead?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am grateful to James Kelly for raising the issue, and I very much share the concerns that he has expressed. I was concerned to learn of the developments at British Gas and my thoughts are with the employees who have been affected.

Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, is trying to arrange a call with Centrica and the GMB for as soon as possible. Scottish Enterprise is establishing contact with the company and will provide whatever support it can. British Gas is the United Kingdom's largest energy supplier and is a significant employer in Scotland, so we want to do everything that we can to protect jobs in the company. I will ask Jamie Hepburn to keep James Kelly and any other member of Parliament who has a constituency interest in the matter up to date.

ScotRail Improvements (Borders Railway)

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): It gives me no pleasure to raise, yet again, failures on the Borders railway. However, just today, there were two peak-time cancellations and, as a result of overcrowding on later trains, two people fainted, with one requiring medical assistance. A pregnant woman also became ill. Given that, at a committee last week, Alex Hynes claimed that

"customers are already benefiting from improved service delivery",—[*Official Report, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee*, 27 March 2019; c 5.]

does the First Minister agree that Mr Hynes needs to get out and about on Borders trains to hear what my constituents think about his improvements?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I completely agree that that level of discomfort and inconvenience for passengers, as a result of overcrowding, in no way reflects the service level for which the Government and Scottish taxpayers are paying. I have been informed that today's cancellations were a consequence of a train failing early this morning, but I will reinforce to Mr Hynes and his colleagues the critical nature of providing a service that passengers can rely on and can feel safe and comfortable using.

Improvements across ScotRail's services have been patchy, with passengers in the east of the country continuing to be let down by ScotRail. On

Monday, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity met senior Abellio officials to reinforce the absolute requirement for improvement. A couple of weeks ago, I said in the chamber that ScotRail is in the last chance saloon, and I repeat that today. It must meet the commitments that are contained in the performance remedial agreement to which it has now signed up.

Teacher Absences (Aberdeen)

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that the number of teacher absences in Aberdeen has risen by 60 per cent in the past year alone, reaching a total of 2,486 staff days since September 2018. Why does the First Minister think that our teachers are so stressed that they need so much leave? What does she plan to do about it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We are working hard to reduce teachers' unnecessary workload. We have just agreed with the teaching unions a pay deal that will significantly increase teachers' pay, in recognition of the job that they do. I am happy to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to speak to the local council if there are particular issues in that part of the country, but we will continue to take the action that I have outlined in the chamber today to ensure that teacher numbers continue to rise and are appropriate for the level of demand that is placed on our teachers.

Brexit

3. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I want to ask some questions on an area of agreement. I share the First Minister's anxiety that there might be a hasty Brexit agreement between the leader of the Labour Party and the Prime Minister. Given that such an agreement would not be in the withdrawal agreement, it could be unpicked by Boris Johnson if he takes over from Theresa May later this year. When the First Minister met Jeremy Corbyn yesterday, did she get an indication of how he was going to address that issue? It seems clear to me that, if there is an agreement between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour Party, there will be no people's vote. Is that the First Minister's understanding?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am very concerned that a deal might lead to a legally binding withdrawal agreement being passed that would irrevocably take the United Kingdom out of the European Union on the strength of non-legally binding commitments about the future relationship. As Willie Rennie says, such commitments could be ripped up by a future Prime Minister, such as Boris Johnson—perish the thought. I expressed that concern strongly to Jeremy Corbyn and his

colleagues yesterday. It is up to him whether he listens to me, but I said that, if I were in his shoes, I would be very wary about doing a deal with the Prime Minister on that basis.

As far as a people's vote is concerned, it was not clear to me from the discussions that I had with Jeremy Corbyn yesterday which way the Labour Party will go on that issue. There is obviously a division within the Labour Party. That is fair enough but, given the mess that this process has become, it is vital that we do not end up with a cobbled-together, least-worst compromise that has been cooked up behind closed doors between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition. It would be far better, now, to request a long extension from the European Union, which would make it possible for us to fight the European Parliament elections. The House of Commons could, by all means, come up with what a compromise might look like, but people across the UK should then be asked whether they want to accept a second-best compromise or whether, given everything that we have learned over the past three years, they think that the best option for the whole of the UK is to remain in the UK.

Willie Rennie: I think that that is right. We remainers are concerned that a deal could be done behind closed doors that would give away the real benefits of membership of the EU without the people having a final say.

I seek some clarity on compromise, which the First Minister has talked about today and yesterday. She has referred to her paper in 2016, which talked about membership of the single market and the customs union. That was her main position until I charmed her to support the people's vote. [*Laughter.*] She changed her mind after I asked her.

What does the First Minister mean by "compromise"? Will she insist on a people's vote in all circumstances, or is she considering reverting to her original position?

The First Minister: I encourage Willie Rennie to keep up with the charm, which I think is much more befitting of his status in the Parliament.

I want to see a people's vote in all circumstances. As I have set out previously, the current situation is not of my choosing or of Willie Rennie's choosing. My preference is for Scotland to remain in the EU, and I will do everything that I can to bring that option about. I hope that this will not be the case at any stage, but if that choice is no longer open to the UK—it will always be open to Scotland, if we go down a different route, as I continue to hope to charm Willie Rennie into agreeing to do—I will want to protect Scotland from a hard Brexit. That is why we have previously

put forward—indeed, we voted for this in the House of Commons on Monday night—a single market/customs union compromise, but that is not my preference.

Right now, those of us who want the Brexit mess to be stopped in its tracks and the UK to be given the option of staying in the EU should continue to be fully behind the efforts to put the issue back to the people. I think that that is the right thing to do now; indeed, I think that it is the most democratic thing to do now.

The Presiding Officer: I will now take some further supplementaries.

Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (Roll-out to Boys)

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): A study published in *The BMJ* links the introduction of the human papillomavirus vaccine a decade ago with a 90 per cent reduction in cancer-causing HPV in Scotland, thereby demonstrating the significant and continued benefits of the vaccination programme. Can the First Minister confirm that it is the Scottish Government's intention to roll out the vaccine to boys? If so, when will that happen?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome that positive report from *The BMJ*. In Scotland, uptake of the HPV immunisation programme remains high and continues to exceed 80 per cent. As today's report shows, that is leading to a 90 per cent reduction in cancer-causing HPV in Scotland, which is remarkable and wonderful.

The Scottish Government remains committed to our efforts to ensure that girls benefit from the vaccine which, as the study shows, is saving lives. We want to build on that success, and we will extend the HPV vaccine programme to boys later this year.

In the meantime, it remains important that women continue to take up the invitation for regular cervical screening. Smear tests save lives. It is a unique test, as it can prevent the disease before it even begins. Treatment that is carried out as a result of screening prevents eight out of 10 cervical cancers from developing.

I hope that everybody in the chamber will welcome the news that the HPV vaccine is already an enormous success story. [*Applause.*]

Burtonisland Fabrications

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): It is now clear that Fife has lost out on £2.8 billion-worth of work on the Moray and Kincardine wind farm projects. It is a fact that, as part of the consent that was given for the Kincardine project,

commitments were given that substantial amounts of work would be done in Scottish yards. What is the First Minister going to do about developers renegeing on those commitments to Scottish yards? Given that the Fife yards are owned by Scottish Enterprise, what action plan will be put in place to ensure that investment comes into the Fife yards to ensure that they are fit for the future?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Alex Rowley for raising the issue. The finance secretary and I met DF Barnes, the new owner of Burntisland Fabrications, last week. We had the opportunity to discuss its understandable frustrations, which we share, about the recent experience of bidding for some of those contracts. We also discussed issues around investment in infrastructure at the yards and we were able to assure the company that we will continue to do everything that we can to support it. Those discussions are on-going.

We also discussed the concerns that have been raised by Gary Smith and Pat Rafferty, who represent the unions concerned, about whether or not—probably not—BiFab is operating on a level playing field. When Alex Rowley last raised this matter, I said that we will convene a summit to try to get to the heart of these issues, because I strongly believe that BiFab should have—and indeed does have—a bright future if we can resolve them. I am determined to work with the company, the unions and others to resolve these issues and make sure that the company has the future that it deserves.

Free Personal Care (North Ayrshire)

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I have raised the issue of free personal care with the First Minister numerous times in the chamber. Just yesterday, I received correspondence confirming that North Ayrshire has a backlog of 100 people waiting for funding. According to the health and social care partnership:

“free personal care ... can only be provided within available financial means ... due to ... budgetary pressures, there is a waiting list for funding”.

Every one of those people is waiting for funding for a solution to meet their needs.

First Minister, if free personal care is so universal, why are so many people waiting?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Free personal care has been there for many years for those aged 65 and over who are assessed as needing it; and, as of Monday this week, free personal care has been extended to those under 65 who need it. I am happy to look at the correspondence—and to have the health secretary look at the correspondence—if the member wishes to pass it to us. It is important that we work

with integration authorities to make sure that those who are assessed as needing care get it.

I say, gently, that if we had followed the Tory budget proposals, we would have had to take hundreds of millions of pounds out of the health service and out of integration authority budgets. We are increasing the money that is going into the health service and social care due to our proposals for increased funding, which the Tories voted against when this Parliament considered the budget.

National Health Service

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): This week, we heard Michelle Ballantyne say about the national health service:

“I would be quite happy if the Government had nothing to do with its running.”—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2019; c 44.]

This is a lady who received her education as a nurse from the NHS and who worked in the NHS. Is it not absolute Tory hypocrisy that she now seeks to undermine the NHS?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that the Scottish Conservatives are probably starting to wish that Michelle Ballantyne would make fewer comments in the chamber. I was in London yesterday, so I was not in the chamber and did not hear the comments; I have seen them as reported. As far as I am concerned, the NHS must always stay in public ownership and in public hands, run by the public. As long as I or my party has anything to do with it, that will continue to be the case.

Michelle Ballantyne’s comments yesterday underline the concern of many people that the NHS would not be safe in the Conservatives’ hands, because they would want to privatise it at the first opportunity.

Violence Against Women

4. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the new Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 will help to reduce violence against women. (S5F-03253)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 came into effect on Monday. It creates a specific offence covering not just physical abuse but forms of psychological abuse that were previously difficult to prosecute under existing law.

We know that the vast majority of victims of domestic abuse are women. Strengthening the law is one part of equally safe, which is our strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.

We have worked closely with justice partners to ensure that the justice system is ready for implementation of the act, including by funding Police Scotland to support the development of training for 14,000 police officers and staff. An extensive public awareness campaign has been launched to raise awareness of the fact that psychological abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour are domestic abuse.

Rona Mackay: Coercive and controlling behaviour has the most damaging and long-lasting effects on individuals. Does the First Minister agree that the public awareness campaign will send the clear warning to abusers that all forms of domestic abuse are criminal and that perpetrators should expect to face the full consequences of their abusive behaviour?

The First Minister: Yes, I whole-heartedly agree with that. The public awareness campaign is also important in ensuring that the public are aware of the change in the law and that victims understand how they can get help—and, in fact, that behaviour of this nature is a crime. Last week, when I visited Women's Aid in the east end of Glasgow with the justice secretary, I spoke to two survivors of this type of abuse, who said that, for many who suffer such abuse, the first barrier is often making them understand that such behaviour is unacceptable. We must reinforce the message that coercive and controlling behaviour is domestic abuse and that the new legislation will help to hold perpetrators to account.

The public awareness campaign that I have mentioned is running across multiple platforms—television, radio, online and print—and we are working with a number of third sector groups, including Women's Aid, the ASSIST service, Shakti Women's Aid and Abused Men in Scotland, to develop it. Again, I hope that all members will get fully behind it.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I, too, warmly welcome the new domestic abuse legislation coming into force, but I note that the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill will make it possible for domestic abuse and sexual offenders who would otherwise be in prison to be released under electronic monitoring. If those people were to breach exclusion zone conditions, there would be a very real danger of something adverse happening very quickly to domestic abuse victims. How will the First Minister ensure that such breaches are responded to in real time and with the immediacy required to protect victims?

The First Minister: We will continue to work very closely with organisations such as Women's Aid, which represent women who have been victims of abuse, to ensure that as we take forward broader reforms of our justice system, the needs of those who suffer abuse are put at the

absolute heart of everything that we do. In fact, that discussion is taking place in train with the changes with regard to the presumption against short sentences.

Of course, sentencing is a matter not for the Government but for the courts. As a result of the new legislation—under an amendment lodged, I think, by Linda Fabiani—courts now have a duty to consider in all domestic abuse cases the imposition of a non-harassment order to protect victims and, for the first time, the ability to use a non-harassment order to protect children as well as adult victims of the offence.

These are important issues to raise, and it is vital that victims of domestic abuse are very much at the heart of everything that we do in all aspects of the justice system.

Drug Deaths (Task Force)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether she will provide details of the scope and remit of the Scottish Government's new task force to tackle drug deaths. (S5F-03235)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing will convene an expert group to examine the key drivers of drug deaths and to advise on what further changes, either in practice or in the law, could help to save lives and reduce harm. As was outlined in the new drug and alcohol strategy a few months ago, we must recognise that there are limitations on public health outcomes associated with the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. As everyone will appreciate, it is also the case that drugs deaths are a complex issue. As no one approach, group or service can do all that is needed, it is important that we ensure that everyone works together. Moreover, the expert group that is being established will learn from the Dundee and Glasgow work on drug deaths to help to inform our continued efforts to tackle the issue.

Miles Briggs: Does the First Minister understand the frustration of families across Scotland at the Scottish National Party Government taking so long to wake up to this tragedy in our country? Anas Sarwar, Monica Lennon and I have been calling for action to be taken for the past three years, but SNP ministers have failed to act.

Given the level of concern about drug deaths across the country, how will the First Minister ensure that colleagues across the chamber are part of the task force that she mentioned and that experts and charities—many of whom agree with us that it is time that we urgently see a new focus on helping people not just to manage but to end their addictions—are included in taking that work forward?

The First Minister: We will continue to work across the chamber to do the right things on what is a complex and challenging issue. As the member knows, I represent a Glasgow constituency; I regularly speak to those with experience of drug use and to families who have been affected by it, and often those conversations underline not only the complexity of the issue but some of the things that we need to do. As I said in an exchange a couple of weeks ago with Jackson Carlaw, it is important that we are prepared to look at taking not just traditional actions but new approaches.

The issue of safe consumption facilities is raised regularly in this chamber. The Tories, in a seemingly knee-jerk way, have set their face completely against that approach, but in a letter to the Glasgow health and social care partnership, the Home Office wrote that it

“acknowledges that there is some evidence for the effectiveness of drug consumption rooms in ... reducing health risks for drug users.”

If we are to be serious about this issue, all of us must be serious about it, and we must all have the humility to accept that some things in the past have not worked and be prepared to adopt new approaches. That cuts both ways; if, as I hope they do, Opposition parties want to be part of this work, they need to consider that.

I, again, ask the member to rethink on the issue of safe consumption facilities. When he has done so, perhaps he could use any influence that he has on the United Kingdom Government to have it change its position. If the UK Government were to change its position, that would be one way of helping us to progress these matters in a positive way.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The First Minister is aware of the clamour for action about this public health crisis. There is a clamour, too, from people with drug problems for opiate replacement therapy. At the moment, the figure for those in treatment is 35 per cent in Scotland and 60 per cent in England. In one third of the drug-related deaths in 2014, the individuals concerned had no contact with drug treatment services. I welcome the task force and its anticipated work, but some issues cannot wait. Will the First Minister, as a matter of urgency, address the unacceptably low percentage of people with drug problems who are in treatment and ensure optimum prescribing and support to tackle the unacceptable number of deaths?

The First Minister: I am happy to ensure that that issue is looked at—although I am sure that it is being and has been looked at. It might be something that the expert group wants to look at in the early stages of its work.

Obviously, prescribing decisions are for clinicians to make, based on the best interests and the needs of those for whom they prescribe. The disparity between the opiate replacement therapy rates that John Finnie has highlighted is certainly something that I think should be looked at within the full scope of the task force’s work.

Nothing should be off the agenda. This is a serious, complex and challenging issue. We know that some of what is being done is effective; other things are, perhaps, not effective. There are also things that are not currently being done to which we must open our minds. If everybody involved has that spirit, we, in Scotland, can find a way of leading in the right direction, as we have done on so many other public health issues. That is what I hope that we can achieve.

Substandard Temporary Accommodation

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to reports that many pregnant women and homeless children are being housed by local authorities in substandard temporary accommodation. (S5F-03239)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Temporary accommodation provides an important safety net in emergencies. In “Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan”, we are very clear that such accommodation must be “high quality”, with stays “as short as possible”.

The vast majority of homeless families with children and homeless pregnant women are given temporary accommodation in the social rented sector. For others, the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2017 provides extra protection to ensure that families do not stay in unsuitable accommodation, such as bed and breakfast accommodation, for more than seven days. Breaches should not be tolerated, and the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning has already met councils concerned to discuss solutions.

As part of our plans to transform temporary accommodation, later this year, we will consult on extending protection to all homeless households. The consultation will ask for views on suitable sanctions for any council that fails to comply.

Pauline McNeill: The First Minister mentioned high-quality and temporary accommodation. All over the country, people are being put up in smelly and run-down private hotels and bed and breakfasts, mainly due to a lack of social housing stock, and at exorbitant cost to the taxpayer. *The Herald on Sunday* has reported horror stories of single rooms in grotty hotels with no cooker or fridge, and with residents locked out for being five

minutes late in getting to the accommodation. In some cases, there is nothing temporary about that temporary accommodation.

12:46

Meeting suspended.

I ask the First minister to focus on what can be done immediately to deal with the scandal. I know that there is a lot of on-going work, but will the First Minister keep in play recommendation 20 of the report that was commissioned by Social Bite to introduce

“legally enforceable standards for temporary accommodation”,

starting with at least the right to have a cooker and a fridge.

The First Minister: Yes—we will consider all recommendations of that nature. As I said in my original answer, one of the things that we will consult on is suitable sanctions for councils that do not comply with the rules. It is important to say that the vast majority of families who are in temporary accommodation are in temporary accommodation in the social rented sector.

We now have the time protection for families, for women with children and for pregnant woman, which we are looking to extend. In part, the increase in the number of breaches is due to the reduction of the time limit, but breaches are not acceptable, which is why the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning has been taking action with the councils involved.

We are determined to implement the recommendations that came from our task force, so that we transform temporary accommodation, but also so that, in a broader sense, we reduce the circumstances in which people have to go into temporary accommodation in the first place.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s questions.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Earlier, during portfolio question time, Tom Mason raised an issue relating to teachers in Aberdeen. I am aware, as others will be, that he is the local councillor for Midstocket and Rosemount in Aberdeen. I am sure that it was utterly inadvertent on his part not to draw our attention to that fact. Will you now give him the opportunity to put on the record that he has an interest in the matter that he raised?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stevenson. That is not a point of order, and, as you know, it is a matter for members’ judgment whether to declare interests.

Before we move to members’ business, we will have a short suspension while members and ministers change their seats.

12:48

On resuming—

Long-term Decline in Salmon Stocks

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15657, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on a long-term decline in salmon stocks. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the reported long-term decline in salmon stocks across Scotland's major rivers, including the Tweed, the Spey, the Dee and the Tay; understands that catches have decreased over the last decade; notes that, on the Tweed, rod catches have fallen from 23,219 in 2012 to 6,577 in 2017; believes that this is marginally above the previous worst years, 1977 and 1980; understands that angling in Scotland supports around 2,800 jobs and contributes £100 million to the economy; acknowledges that fishing generates significant employment opportunities in rural areas; recognises that there are significant challenges ahead if salmon stocks are to return to previous levels, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to take urgent action to devise effective conservation and management plans in conjunction with relevant bodies to help address what it sees as the persistent decline in salmon stocks.

12:48

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am delighted to bring my motion to the chamber this afternoon, and I extend a warm welcome to the members of various angling and fisheries associations—who are currently not in the gallery.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can I pause you there? I am quite happy to pause the debate. If you had given me advance notice that you had people whom you wanted to come in and hear the debate—

Rachael Hamilton: That is very kind of you, Presiding Officer. It would probably take five minutes, so it is okay.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am happy to do that.

Rachael Hamilton: Bearing in mind other people's commitments, I think we should crack on, but thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to members that, if they have people coming to hear other members' business debates, I will take advance notice, so I ask members to let me know.

I am happy to pause; we have plenty of time. I am being nice.

Rachael Hamilton: Will you allow two minutes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you a couple of minutes.

12:49

Meeting suspended.

12:54

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Rachael Hamilton—for a second time—to open the debate.

Rachael Hamilton: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a hotel owner.

I am delighted to bring my motion to the chamber for debate this afternoon, and I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing time for the members of angling and fisheries associations to take off their waders before coming into the public gallery. I thank them for their briefing notes and documents, which have further enlightened me about the long-term decline in salmon stocks.

We have striking scenery and a richness of rivers, so Scotland boasts some of the best fishing in Europe. From the fantastic beats along the Spey and the Dee with their majestic Highland backdrops to the pools of the Tweed and the Tay that are flanked by rolling agricultural lowlands, we are spoiled for choice.

The value of angling to rural Scotland is significant. It supports around 2,800 jobs and contributes £100 million to the economy, with the bulk of the economic benefit being felt in remote and rural areas that would not survive without the presence of angling, game shooting and field sports. That is illustrated by the fact that the average spend of fishing tourists on trips to Scotland is substantial, at around £5,000, with an estimated 80 per cent of expenditure occurring within 12 to 15 miles of the river.

Unfortunately, over many years, the success of Scottish fishing has taken a knock. We are all too aware of the long-term decline in salmon stocks in Scottish rivers and of the grave consequences that are now faced by many areas. The issue has caught the attention of the likes of David Attenborough, who recently marked international year of the salmon by taking to YouTube to highlight the damage that intensive fish farming is doing to populations of wild salmon. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has also voiced concerns, lamenting the 50 per cent reduction in salmon stocks along the River Dee. Some commentators have even said that salmon could become an endangered species in our lifetimes.

On the subject of the Dee, I do not intend to discuss the pros and cons of hatcheries. We can

all acknowledge that there is no single cause of the decline in salmon stocks in Scotland's rivers, and the picture is far more complex than we might imagine. In the latest Fisheries Management Scotland report, 12 high-level pressures on Atlantic salmon were identified, including increased mean sea temperatures, the acidification of the oceans, increased cyclicality in drought and flooding events, more invasive species and scarcer feeding opportunities, and all those things play a part in the story. Importantly, we must remember that most of those pressures are driven by climate change.

We cannot forget the impact of intensive fish farming on the west coast, either. Many believe that the decline in salmon rod catches has been steepest and most pronounced on the west coast because of the expansion of intensive aquaculture, which my colleague Finlay Carson will speak about.

In my constituency, the Tweed faces many of the same problems as other east-coast rivers, but it has its own unique set of challenges. For years, there was drift netting on the Northumberland coast, which affected the salmon returning to the river at Berwick. Worryingly, some 16,000 salmon were taken by north-east nets in 2015 but, thankfully, the Environment Agency proposed to stop the taking of salmon by the majority of net fisheries by 2019. However, piscivorous birds such as goosanders and cormorants and predatory mammals such as seals have also taken their toll.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I have not read the report that Rachael Hamilton mentioned, but I am interested in what she is saying. Can she confirm whether trout anglers taking salmon is among the reasons that are listed for the decline in stocks?

Rachael Hamilton: It is important that a range of views is taken from across the sector, and we must take into consideration everybody's point of view. However, I was talking specifically about drift netting.

The impact of the decline of salmon fishing is being felt right across rural Scotland. Angling is worth £24 million to the Borders economy, but that is likely to fall as a result of decreasing rod catches. There have been behavioural changes such as anglers switching from week-long fishing trips to trips of just a few days, and many anglers now commute from larger cities and do not contribute directly to the economy, whether through tackle shops or meals in restaurants.

The impact of the decline is likely to affect young anglers, too. It is difficult to make angling an attractive sport to the next generation when stocks are decreasing and potential job opportunities are

being eroded by the lack of spend in the rural economy.

It is time for us to take action and tackle the issues head on. I welcome the Scottish Government's £700,000 of funding to be spent on work to address the range of pressures to which the decline relates. That is a start, but we need to get all stakeholders, including scientists, anglers and ghillies, round the table to forge a way forward.

The wild fisheries review of several years ago aimed to address the matter, and it could have been a positive step forward. However, the wild fisheries bill was pulled, much to the frustration of many stakeholders, who believed that it could help to tackle the issues that are outlined in the motion. I recognise that the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 evolved from some of the review's recommendations, but it would be beneficial if the remaining recommendations—for example, the recommendation of a national wild fisheries strategy—were acted on sooner rather than later.

It is clear from studying previous Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee discussions on the 2016 regulations that we lack sufficient data and evidence to implement scientifically sound river management plans. A one-size-fits-all approach for the whole of Scotland does not work. We need to turn our attention to local management plans that are flexible, regularly reviewed and subject to scrutiny. We also need to take a cautious, well-informed and balanced approach to the conservation and management of salmon stocks. There is a fine balance between behavioural change and Government regulation. As we know, the Scottish Conservatives are not in favour of too much bureaucracy.

On the ground, we need to look at the whole ecosystem along the entire course of the river. Effective management of predatory birds and mammals will help salmon numbers to recover by giving smolts the chance to leave the river. In addition, we must not ignore the impact of fish farms. Both of the parliamentary committees that were involved in last year's inquiry into salmon farming—the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee—made it clear that effective regulation of salmon farms is imperative in order to protect wild salmon. However, I acknowledge that there is no silver bullet when it comes to reversing declining salmon stocks.

In this debate, we are focusing solely on the decline in salmon stocks, but salmon is the freshwater equivalent of the canary in the coal mine: it is an early warning system for something that is going wrong across the board. Healthy salmon populations are possibly one of the best

indicators of a healthy environment, which every one of us will benefit from. If we do not take action now, it will not be only our fragile rural economy that takes the hit in the short term; it will be our fragile environment as a whole in the long term.

13:02

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Rachael Hamilton for bringing forward this important debate.

At the end of last year, I was asked whether I would be the Scottish Environment LINK species champion for Atlantic salmon and I was delighted to take that on. It has been a learning curve—I did not know anything about it when I set out. What I have discovered has led to a number of worries.

The Atlantic salmon is a keystone species, which means that any decline in stock has a direct and immediate impact on freshwater biodiversity, with the presence of salmon being a useful indicator of the health of our rivers. It is therefore imperative that we work to preserve wild salmon stocks to secure the future of our aquatic ecosystem. Many steps have been taken to protect salmon, and exploitation in fisheries has been reduced significantly. Despite that, marine survival has decreased, from a situation in which around 25 adult fish return to Scotland for every 100 juveniles—smolts, as they are called—that leave our rivers, to the current situation, in which fewer than five adults now return for every 100 leavers. As a consequence, as Rachael Hamilton said, rod catches have reduced, with a knock-on effect on a fragile rural economy, reducing the ability of managers to raise money to support management and restoration activities.

To gain a deeper understanding of the salmon's ecological importance, as well as existing conservation efforts for the species, I have visited and liaised with managing organisations, such as the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board and the Tweed Forum, and have learned about the many projects that they oversee and how they hope to improve the robustness of wild salmon stocks. Large-scale holistic projects, such as the Nith fisheries management plan, will be invaluable to improving the stocks. Those projects support salmon at all stages of development, from creating a safer environment for salmon spawning to removing barriers to migration. They also support improved river use, with renewable energy schemes and anti-poaching measures being key areas of work.

It is worrying that 94 of the 173 rivers that have been assessed by Marine Scotland are designated as category 3, which means that any additional pressures on salmon in those rivers is demonstrably unsustainable.

I am sure that we can all agree that more needs to be done to protect wild salmon and encourage the growth of stocks. I join the call on the Scottish Government to work closely with river management organisations and salmon farmers to help with the conservation efforts and introduce substantive measures that draw on the experience and expertise of existing local groups.

In this, the international year of the salmon, I was delighted to attend the Fisheries Management Scotland conference for a short time on Friday. It was really interesting to hear about some of the issues that have played into the system. For example, climate change and the warming of the seas has meant that salmon food stocks appear to have moved. There was discussion of the invasion of the Pacific pink salmon, which was introduced into Russia's White Sea basin in the 1950s. However, the fish did not like the cold and have moved west, and in 2017, we saw a huge influx of pink salmon. The initial advice was that they would probably not spawn, but spawning surveillance with underwater cameras suggests that that is beginning to happen. We will need that kind of detailed work in the future, and we really need to support, in any way that we can, the experts who are carrying it out.

As the species champion for Atlantic salmon, I hope that I will learn a lot more and will be able to contribute to the debate. In this international year of the salmon, we have an opportunity to bring the problem of declining salmon stocks to the attention of the public. I hope that the Scottish Government will make bold efforts to publicise this ecological issue of national importance. The Atlantic salmon is one of Scotland's most treasured species. It is vital to the health of our rivers and our rural economy, and we must strive to secure its future.

13:06

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Rachael Hamilton for instigating this debate. As the motion rightly acknowledges, there is a worrying decline in our salmon stocks. The motion also acknowledges the importance of fishing to our rural economy, through leisure and tourism, and the job opportunities that it provides. However, it does not stress the importance of leisure for local people, who fish not just in our big rivers, which have been mentioned, but in burns, such as in Strathmore up in Sutherland, or in the places where, as a child, I fished for brown trout while my dad fished for salmon. The issue of where local people fish is really important.

We are not just talking about salmon, either. There are also sea trout, brown trout and other forms of angling. Angling is vital for our economy, but for it to have a long-term future, it must be sustainable. The system of three river gradings

was established in 2016 to determine the level of exploitation of fish stocks that is sustainable for each river. As many will know, that means mandatory catch and release for some rivers; for others, some retention is permitted. The system aims to strike a balance on rivers locally and nationally, while recognising the overall downward trend in salmon stocks. That is a challenge.

In 2017, 98 per cent of rod-caught spring salmon were released, as was 90 per cent of the annual rod catch. Our catch-and-release levels are the highest of any signatory to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. There is a clear commitment from the angling community—broad as it is—to fish responsibly, as much of the rod catch and return is done on a voluntary basis.

In South Scotland, I support the pressure that the River Tweed Commission has put on the Scottish Government to extend the close time on the Tweed to further protect fragile spring salmon stocks. I thank ghillie Ian Farr who, in his briefing, succinctly outlined the significance of the salmon decline on the River Tweed. I note with care the points that he has made.

In this and the previous parliamentary session, my concern has always been to ensure that robust data is available to enable informed choices to be made. Along with others on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, I will continue to scrutinise that. Marine Scotland has consistently acknowledged that challenge, and I see that steps are being taken to improve the granularity of the science behind the assessments. More can always be done, and I expect to see the science in that area develop and progress.

I recognise the complexities of the issue. Reversing the decline in salmon stocks needs to be tackled in a number of ways, not just by limiting fishing. There are environmental concerns to consider. Rivers are at a constant risk of pollution from industrial chemicals, agriculture and plastics, and fish stocks are an indication of the health of our rivers and our ecosystems. Climate change is also a serious challenge; riparian tree planting is one of the ways in which that is being addressed.

Fisheries Management Scotland has said that there are many ways in which we need to tackle the problem. It has highlighted that planning authorities and SEPA must be more connected. Its briefing says:

“It is vital that the conservation status of salmon is fully considered in all planning and regulatory decisions.”

I ask the minister to commit today to assessing how joined up the regulation of safeguarding wild salmon—and, indeed, sea trout—is and whether the issue can be addressed by the Scottish Government.

I thank Rachael Hamilton for bringing the debate forward. Let us all do our best for the future of this iconic species: the salmon.

13:11

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, thank Rachael Hamilton for securing this important debate, the subject of which is vital to the rural economy of South Scotland. That region includes not only the Borders, which Rachael represents and has talked about extensively, but Dumfries and Galloway in the west. It is significant that Rachael’s motion raises the issues of catches in four east coast rivers: the Tweed, the Spey, the Dee and the Tay. Many people on the west coast look enviously at those rivers, and there is certainly a perception that the west has been harder hit. Others have spoken about the effect of aquaculture, which we will hear more on later.

As Rachael Hamilton’s motion states, the benefits of angling to the economy of rural Scotland are significant: it supports 2,800 jobs and contributes £100 million to the Scottish economy.

I am grateful for the briefing from Ian Farr, the ghillie at Melrose, who outlines clearly how important salmon is to tourism and what factors might explain the decline in numbers—and declining they are. I note the Scottish Government’s own figures on the Atlantic salmon, which demonstrate a dramatic decline across the country of more than 50 per cent—from around 1.25 million in the 1960s to 600,000 in 2016.

As the Government has previously pointed out and others have pointed out today, there is no single cause for that decline. Inevitably, some of the impacts are beyond our control, so it is essential that all stakeholders work together to do what they can to manage pressures, which include the impacts of predation, barriers to migration and increased temperature due to climate change.

I note with admiration and approval the steps that Mr Farr and other river managers are taking. Obviously, Mr Farr cannot make much of a dent on global temperatures by himself in Melrose, but he is working hard on his doorstep and he makes some interesting suggestions about the need to remove man-made barriers, including obsolete ones that are left over from the tweed industry.

I note with interest his observations about the increasing number of predators that feed on smolts, 60 per cent of which never reach the sea. He tells us that cormorants, which are seabirds, are now numerous on the Tweed and that a roost in Rutherford has up to 100 birds. He says that seals are travelling up the river and that goosanders are a problem. I am not an expert in those matters, so I would be interested to know the minister’s view on those predators and

whether research is being done in that area, particularly on cormorant numbers, which I thought were interesting and notable.

The issue of predators and bird numbers has also arisen in relation to the rivers in my own patch, and it was raised by the chairman of the River Nith board last year. Angling tourism is also important in south-west Scotland, so I will say a few things about the rivers there. Although we are talking about salmon today, the River Annan is considered to be the best river in Scotland for big brown trout. It is certainly worth a visit for that reason.

Workers on the Nith are doing a number of important things to put in place the precautionary principle that the Government encourages in respect of the conservation of salmon. They, too, have seen numbers decline and have promoted catch and release. They maximise natural stock production by improving habitats and authorising and stocking fry where appropriate.

On the Nith, electrofishing is conducted as part of the Scottish Government's national programme, which is vital to providing data. Members and the minister will be aware that, on many rivers in Scotland, we simply do not have enough data on the numbers and behaviour of fish, which is really important when we classify rivers in ways that have an impact on angling. Claudia Beamish and others noted that angling communities felt aggrieved when their rivers were classified on the basis of not much information at all. I therefore very much welcome any increase in data gathering.

I note—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but will you please conclude, as you are almost a minute over your time?

Joan McAlpine: I also note that the Government has commissioned research on the mortality rate for catch and release, and I very much look forward to hearing about that when it is complete.

13:16

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank my colleague Rachael Hamilton for bringing this important debate to the chamber today.

A cultural icon is an artefact that is identified by members of a culture as representative of that culture. Icons are judged by the extent to which they can be seen as an authentic proxy for that culture. Our wild salmon fit absolutely into that description, as do our rivers—they are up there with golden eagles, ospreys and Scottish wildcats.

Many of the recognised iconic salmon rivers are in the east, but rivers such as the Bladnoch, Cree, Urr, Dee, Nith and Annan in my constituency make a hugely important contribution to the rural economy of the communities around them. Undoubtedly, greater protection and enhancement of stocks will help to maximise the socioeconomic benefits that flow from them.

Salmon are a protected species under the European Union habitats directive, yet we know that they continue to face many pressures in marine and freshwater environments.

Annual rod catches generally increased over the period from 1952 to 2010 but declined in each subsequent year until 2014, which had the second-lowest figures on record. Reported rod catches recovered slightly in 2015 and 2016, only to fall again in 2017. That is worrying, given that the proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release has generally increased since 1994. In 2017, 90 per cent of the annual rod catch was released, compared with less than 8 per cent in 1994. How much of that fall was down to external factors other than fish numbers? Fishing effort reporting is critical if the information is to be robust.

However, the most important question is: what are the causes of salmon decline? Atlantic salmon face a number of pressures during their life cycle. Those include, but are not limited to, predation; poor water quality; disease and parasites; barriers to migration; poor physical habitat quality; food availability; and factors affecting survival while at sea, including the challenge of climate change and the associated warming of the seas.

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee recently published a report on farmed salmon, which highlighted the potential issues that commercial farms may bring for the wild salmon population, including the impact of disease and parasites such as sea lice. I am confident that the report will result in the impact of such farms greatly reducing over the coming years.

There is also emerging evidence that predation by cormorants and goosanders may be more important than previously thought on at least some rivers, as well as evidence that the size and condition of smolts leaving the river may have an impact on their subsequent survival.

We have fantastic volunteer groups on my local rivers, such as the Nith District Salmon Fishery Board, the River Cree District Salmon Fishery Board and the Galloway Fisheries Trust, which work to improve water quality, remove barriers to migration and promote responsible angling. I take this opportunity to invite the minister to visit the Cree to see that for herself.

So much good work and research is being done on our rivers, but there is broad consensus that the main problems occur at sea and in the near-shore environment. In the marine environment, there have been huge shifts in the distribution of plankton, which are linked to changes in sea surface temperatures. Such ecosystem shifts are likely to have a significant impact on salmon.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea is doing work that looks at the by-catch in commercial fisheries, with a developing theory that mackerel and herring stocks in the north Atlantic have been significantly underestimated and that salmon in that area are suffering due to predation or competition from those species.

We urgently need to look into evidence that suggests that not only Scottish salmon stocks, but populations of sea birds that depend on plankton and small fishes for food, such as kittiwakes and puffins, are plummeting. Both salmon and those sea birds are in direct competition with mackerel. We need to ask whether north-east Atlantic mackerel stocks have been allowed to develop to a point where they are a serious threat to the salmon and the sea birds that are competing with them for the same food.

A fully integrated scientific study to find out what is happening to wild salmon on their journey down our river systems and out to sea is needed. Only then can evidence-based recommendations be made to inform policy and enable management solutions.

The Atlantic Salmon Trust has launched the missing salmon project—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but you cannot launch on to something else. You will have to wind down and conclude.

Finlay Carson: Certainly, Presiding Officer.

Over a period of just 40 years, wild Atlantic salmon numbers around the world have more than halved. The total population has fallen from 8 million to 10 million fish in the early 1970s to 3 million to 4 million today. Nobody knows where the mortality is happening, so I urge the Government to take action now—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not winding down in my book.

Finlay Carson: I am winding up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just say, “Thank you very much,” and sit down.

Finlay Carson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is fine.

In view of the remaining number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to

accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Rachael Hamilton to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Rachael Hamilton*]

Motion agreed to.

13:21

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I join members in thanking Rachael Hamilton for securing the debate. I have learned a lot more about salmon in the past half an hour than I knew previously.

Unfortunately, I cannot declare an interest as a salmon angler, but I will declare an interest as somebody who lives just a few feet from the River Teith, which flows into the Forth and is one of Scotland’s most iconic salmon rivers. I have never fished in it, but I have occasionally swum in it. Living next to the river helps me understand a little about how the pressures of climate change are affecting the health of our rivers and protected species, such as the salmon and the lamprey, which is protected by a special area of conservation on the River Teith.

It is clear that our rivers face major challenges as water temperatures rise, while water levels reduce and dramatic weather events become more frequent. A couple of years ago, I saw levels on the Teith drop to their lowest for decades. On what is the fastest-flowing river in Scotland, there were vast areas of exposed bedrock and isolated pools of increasingly warming water, linked by tiny streams that were getting narrower day by day.

Such weather events are going to increase, putting a huge strain on salmon and other species that require a cooler environment and good water flow to breed and succeed. We need catchment-wide approaches to tackling the issue—for example, joining up land owners to provide better riparian environments through tree planting, to which Claudia Beamish alluded, which can help to reduce river water temperatures.

A number of members have mentioned the success on the River Tweed, where management has shown what is possible with a strong catchment-wide approach, not only for salmon management but in tackling other issues, such as the scourge of non-native invasive species. We need to look at having more joined-up approaches in other areas.

Scotland’s fisheries trusts are in a position to co-ordinate a lot of the action that is needed to restore the environment in our catchments, but too often they have been excluded from the funding—through the Scottish rural development

programme, for example—that is required to play that role. It is important that we take a catchment approach, because preventative action will always be cheaper in the long run, and we have to ensure that the right incentives are there to take action in a way that joins interests together in protecting our river catchments.

It is precisely because of the pressures of climate change and a number of the other issues that members have raised in the debate that we need to take a far more precautionary approach to the siting of salmon farms. Again, I call for a moratorium on expansions to be put in place until we have the right system in place to manage the impacts of the industry on wild salmon populations.

I turn from the east to the west coast, where bad decisions are still being made, allowing vast expansions of salmon farms. For example, Argyll and Bute Council has just allowed a massive increase in biomass production from three farms on Loch Fyne, despite major concerns about the impact on sea lice levels in wild fish. The company in question has produced an environmental management plan that is vague and which lacked proper consultation. There are also major questions about how it could ever be enforced by the council, which has neither the resource nor expertise to do so.

Despite the central recommendation of the Parliament's report on salmon farming that

“the status quo is not an option”,

planning permissions are still being granted for the expansion of farms that are in the wrong places and have performed very poorly in the past.

That is happening regardless of what stakeholders such as Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland, Fisheries Management Scotland, district salmon fishery boards and communities themselves say, even where the track record of sea lice control on the farms is very poor, as it has been on Loch Fyne.

That must change if we are to see one of Scotland's most iconic and legally protected species start to recover. To fail to act at a time when the salmon faces huge environmental pressures is nothing short of a dereliction of duty.

13:25

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I declare an interest as a very keen trout fisherman with a season ticket for the Tweed—I will soon purchase season tickets for the Tay and the Clyde, too.

I apologise, but I must leave after I speak in order to attend another engagement.

I did not intend to speak in the debate, but when I saw the motion in the *Business Bulletin* today, I decided to take the opportunity to raise one issue, which is the continuation of protection orders on many of the major waters across Scotland. Many protection orders have been in place for decades—since before the formation of the Scottish Parliament. There are now 14 orders in force on major water systems such as the Clyde, the Tweed, the Earn, the Tay, the Tummel and the Spey. They were put in place supposedly to protect fish stocks and access to fishing. However, I remember that when the orders were introduced, many trout anglers believed that they had been introduced to keep trout anglers off some of the major river systems, leaving them free for the more exclusive salmon syndicates. I do not want us to divide fishermen. Whatever they fish for, fishermen are some of the greatest conservationists that there are. However, at the time, there was division between trout anglers and salmon anglers.

As a conservation measure that was intended to protect stocks, as the example in Rachael Hamilton's motion shows, protection orders have been an abject failure. As the motion says, 23,000 salmon were caught on the Tweed in 2012 but only 6,500 were caught in 2017. A protection order has been in place on the Tweed throughout that time. Something else must be at play. I do not know whether that is climate change, the impact of salmon farming, predation by goosanders and cormorants—as I have seen with my own eyes—or something else, but one thing that I know for sure is that it ain't fishermen that are causing the problem.

I fished the River Earn throughout my teenage years and beyond; it was once a river abundant with salmon and sea trout and I have seen it experience a tragic decline. That decline has happened since the protection order was made. There is definitely something else at play.

I have asked parliamentary questions to pursue the Scottish Government on the continuation of protection orders. Orders are put on rivers with no end date in place—none. I have asked the Government to carry out an analysis of protection orders to tell us whether they are working as a conservation management system. There is no plan to carry out any scientific analysis of whether they are a successful conservation method.

We are supposed to be in an era of evidence-based policy. In no other policy area would we provide no evidence and simply continue, as we are doing, when it is fairly obvious that we are failing.

Therefore, I ask the minister—and I will look for her reply in the *Official Report*, as I will not be here when she speaks—what the Government will do to

provide scientific evidence to justify the continuation of protection orders on waters across Scotland. It is not acceptable to say, “We will do nothing and just watch the decline.”

I hope that the minister will take a much more proactive stance than the cabinet secretary has done. The irony of Ms Cunningham’s position is that, in the 1980s and 1990s, she was a young, radical lawyer who represented members of the Scottish campaign for public angling when they were arrested for fishing illegally on the Queen’s beat on the Dee and on the river Tay. She defended those people—rightly, in my opinion—who were deemed to be fishing illegally, and now she is the cabinet secretary who is responsible for continuing the system that she once railed against.

I respect the minister greatly. I ask her to take a strong interest in the matter and to look into the system of protection orders, to see whether such orders are justified and whether they work as a conservation policy.

13:31

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Let me first thank Neil Findlay for his remarks, because I know that he has to head off. His speech was very interesting, and I share his sentiments.

I declare an interest: I, too, am a keen angler. I am a member of a number of angling clubs, including the Perth and District Anglers Association and the Stormont Angling Club. I can often be found incognito, dressed in waders and a balaclava—I will leave that image with members for them to ponder.

More important, I am a member of the Parliament’s Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee and co-authored, with my fellow members, the report of our inquiry into aquaculture, about which we have heard so much today.

I was not scheduled to speak in the debate but, like Mr Findlay, I take a keen interest in angling. It is a hobby, a sport, an industry and part of our rural economy. It provides me and so many others with much-needed escape, not least from politics on occasion.

Over the past year, I have learned that angling is also a valuable, indeed invaluable, industry in Scotland. Let me talk more about the industry and the people whom it employs, specifically the ghillies. They are a strange breed, I have to say. I have come across many over the past year, since I took up angling. They are a truly wonderful part of the fabric of Scotland; they represent the link between the days of old and the days of new—the link between breeches and tweed, and Gore-Tex and graphite. They can be grumpy, they can be

fun and they can be knowledgeable. They are the keepers of our rivers, the protectors of our wildlife, the teachers of our young, the advocates for our countryside, the managers of our riverbanks and the guides for our tourists—and they are usually owners of a kettle on a cold February morning.

Most important, ghillies are the eyes and ears of our rivers and we must listen to them. Fish numbers are so low across Scottish rivers that angling is a dying tradition. We could be witnessing the last generation of angling and the last generation of ghillies. I sincerely hope that that is not the case, but last week just 38 salmon were caught on the Tweed, and I suspect that there are beats on the Tweed where, in the good years, that would have been the catch in a single day.

An angler used to have to wait on a waiting list for a dead man’s shoes to get a week on a prestigious fishing beat. Now, demand has dropped so much that we can use an app on our mobile phones to book a day rod.

We could argue that that has opened up the sport and made it more affordable and accessible. That is the case, but how do we attract new entrants when there are simply no fish to catch? Anglers often say during the lunch break, “How many did you catch last season?” “Two or three,” is often the answer. “What, per day?” “No, over the whole year.”

The industry is in difficulties and we need to tackle some of the challenges that it faces. There is no simple solution. First, we need to tackle perceptions of salmon fishing. Most of the anglers I meet are retired, local and friendly. They are happy and willing—sometimes too willing—to impart their knowledge and advice. They love their rivers. This is not a sport for the rich, as it is in Iceland and Russia, where people take a 10-grand trip. For many people, it is a £30-a-day day out.

The debates about salmon farming’s effect in some areas have been well rehearsed. People on the east coast say that that is not the only problem. We do not know why there are such huge reductions in salmon. Perhaps therein lies the problem: not enough scientific research has gone into the matter.

Predation is an issue. Like Mr Findlay, I have seen cormorants and goosanders feeding on fish. I have seen seals so far up river that I have wondered what on earth they are doing there. Why are they feeding there? Why are salmon going further out to sea and heading in different directions? Where is their feed heading? Why are the river beds changing? Why have we not dealt with the damage of floods and storms and the years of lack of management or investment in some rivers? Why have we not righted the wrongs of the industrial era on our rivers?

As policy makers, we have to have a frank discussion about some of these areas, mainly catch and release. We also need to have a conversation about Sunday fishing. Tradition is one thing, but we are on the brink of having no industry at all. We need a healthy and open debate. Change is often unwelcome, but perhaps it is inevitable.

I thank Rachael Hamilton for the debate. I remain positive but, if action is not taken, I am afraid that the only thing we will be fishing for in future is sympathy.

13:35

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): I begin by thanking Rachael Hamilton for bringing this vitally important issue to the chamber today. Although we have had many speakers, it is a shame that more people are not in the chamber to hear the debate. Like Mark Ruskell, I have learned more about salmon in the past half hour than I have in the past while. It is something that I find fascinating. I do not have direct portfolio responsibility for the issue, but it is one that I have been involved with.

Michelle Ballantyne and a few other members made the important point that the salmon is a keystone species and talked about what the decline in numbers means for our biodiversity. As Claudia Beamish stated, it indicates the health of our rivers and our ecosystems. Although we might consider the issue to be a rural issue, and there are not that many people in the public gallery today, what it means for our wider ecosystems and biodiversity is so important.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the minister for giving way and refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

One of the most important threats to salmon and other species in rivers is the invasion of non-native and native species outwith their ecosystems. Will the Government work proactively to control such species in rivers as ranunculus, which is choking the very fish that the minister is talking about today?

Mairi Gougeon: I am happy to look at that. I was going to talk about the point that Mark Ruskell raised later in my contribution.

The salmon is one of Scotland's most iconic species. As we have heard today, fewer of the fish that leave our rivers for the ocean are returning. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea estimates that, in the 1960s, approximately 1.25 million salmon returned to Scottish waters each year, but by the end of 2016, that figure was

down to just 600,000. That pattern is replicated across the North Atlantic, with ICES estimating that overall numbers, which were around 8 million to 10 million in the 1980s, are now down to just 3 million.

There is a variety of reasons for that decline in numbers. In Scotland, we have worked with Fisheries Management Scotland and its member district salmon fishery boards and trusts to identify 12 high-level pressures on salmon, some of which Rachael Hamilton, Finlay Carson and others outlined today. We have published a list of those pressures online, and I will outline some of them today, along with the key mitigation activities that we are undertaking.

One such pressure is exploitation through angling and netting in our rivers and around our coasts. During the past few years, we have introduced a range of new measures to help to conserve and protect salmon in rivers. Changes to the annual close times on most rivers, for example, extend the period during which it is illegal to fish for salmon or to keep those that you have caught. Annual salmon conservation regulations set out the results of our annual assessment of stocks and detail those rivers where anglers must practise catch-and-release fishing.

Finlay Carson: Does the minister agree that, given the evidence that was recently given at the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, angling effort could be insignificant compared to other pressures on salmon?

Mairi Gougeon: We have to consider all the pressures. As I understand the discussion that took place at the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on 12 March, when the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations were considered and passed, Claudia Beamish noted the significant improvement in this year's assessment approach. We have to consider everything in the round and make sure that we do the research into each of the individual pressures.

We are continuing to develop and improve our annual assessment of adult stocks. Last year, we introduced a Scotland-wide assessment of juvenile stocks, which we hope will complement and improve the existing science. However, angling is just one part of the picture; as I have just stated, research in the area is vital.

In March 2018, we announced a package of £500,000 to be invested across a range of research and practical projects that are helping us to examine and address the wider pressures on salmon. For example, on predation we are working with the sea mammal research unit to analyse the behaviour and movement of seals in the River

Dee. Later this year, Marine Scotland will publish the results of research that was carried out with the Ness district salmon fishery board and the University of Aberdeen to identify the impact of dolphin predation on returning adult salmon in the Moray Firth. I am also happy to confirm to Joan McAlpine that we have recently commissioned new research to analyse the feeding habits of fish-predating birds, to identify where and when they are feeding and what they are eating—a point of concern that was raised by members during the debate. I know that, in the past, the impact of such birds has been of concern to Rachael Hamilton and to many anglers and fisheries managers.

SEPA is working with local authorities, landowners, fishery trusts and conservation bodies to deliver an annual programme of projects to remove and ease barriers to migrating fish. There is a recent example of that in West Lothian, where, since January, water is now flowing down a new bypass channel around the redundant rugby club weir, which is the third of seven weirs that will be tackled by 2021 to restore fish access to the River Almond catchment. The project is opening up around 200km of the river network to native fish, including salmon, for the first time in generations. It will also create new opportunities for angling, tourism and recreation.

I recently visited the Esk district salmon fishery board in Brechin to hear about the work that it does. I was taken to the site of the Pow Burn project, in which the board is working with SEPA to change the morphology of the burn and look at the impact that that has made. The board is starting to see trout return to that part of the river, where there had been none for a number of years. Board members also described to me their work on the catchment-wide approaches that Mark Ruskell mentioned. That vital work includes the tree planting that is happening further up the glens and other work around the Esk in relation to invasive non-native species.

On habitat improvement, fisheries boards are working with SEPA to address acidification and reduce diffuse pollution. Scottish Water is working to improve abstraction regimes in nine zones, to ensure that sufficient water remains in our rivers and lochs during periods of low rainfall.

As a number of members have mentioned, other pressures are associated with our salmon farming industry, giving rise to concerns. We have responded to the recent report of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on salmon, and identified links to many of our current initiatives, including the farmed fish health framework, the interactions working group, and SEPA's sector plan.

During the debate on the report on 6 February, there was broad cross-chamber support for the

sector, but with an emphasis on making progress on the known issues. We agree with that and have acknowledged that salmon farming must be developed sustainably, with appropriate improvements that help to minimise and address environmental impact.

However, such pressures do not affect only the salmon in our rivers. As the ICES figures show, the issues exist much more widely, and the loss of so many fish in the marine environment is also of great concern. That is why it is so important that we work with our partners across the world. Marine Scotland is taking part in sea sailor, which is a research programme that is being conducted by an expert international consortium to examine the factors that impact on the variation in marine survival of Atlantic salmon over time and in different geographical areas.

More widely, this is the international year of the salmon, which is an initiative that is being led by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization and the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission. I recall that Michelle Ballantyne also lodged a motion on the issue, much of which the Scottish Government agreed with. At the time, I did not realise that she was also the species champion for the salmon.

The international year of the salmon aims to raise awareness and understanding of the social and economic benefits that salmon provide, and to highlight the many issues that they face around the world. Last October, Roseanna Cunningham launched the Scottish component of the international year, when she met the presidents of NASCO and the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission in Perth. Officials from Marine Scotland were among a range of international speakers who contributed to last Friday's annual meeting of Fisheries Management Scotland.

I want to make a couple of points before we close, although I realise that I have gone way over my time. I recognise the importance of angling to the Scottish economy that many members outlined today.

Claudia Beamish talked about regulation and a joined-up approach, and we will certainly consider that. When we do that and it works, it is most effective.

I will be more than happy to accept Finlay Carson's invitation and to further discuss some of the issues that he raised.

Neil Findlay raised particular points that he wants us to address, and I am happy to look at those.

I realise that we have identified a number of pressures today, but we are undertaking the research to mitigate those as best we can. We

need to work together so that we can do that, and so that we do not end up in the situation that Jamie Greene outlined, in which angling becomes a thing of the past. We certainly do not want to see that happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. My efforts to curtail things were in vain. I thank all members for an interesting and informed debate—and, yes, I wish more people had heard it. It was extremely interesting.

13:45

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

Rail Freight Group (Meetings)

1. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Government when the transport secretary last met representatives of the Rail Freight Group. (S5O-03102)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): I last met representatives of the Rail Freight Group on 24 January 2019, and my officials maintain regular and constructive liaison with its representatives.

Mike Rumbles: Although rail plays a major part in transporting whisky for export south from central Scotland, 100 per cent of the 1.5 million tonnes of bulk spirit moved annually from the north of Scotland to maturation sites in the central belt is carried by heavy lorries. Will the cabinet secretary perhaps explore setting up a working group to promote the transportation of food and drink by rail, similar to the proposal to form a working group on transporting timber by rail?

Michael Matheson: The member has made a very reasonable point, and I am more than happy to consider it further. He might be aware of previous attempts to encourage the whisky industry to make greater use of rail freight as an option for transporting its goods. Although there has been some take-up of that, it has not been as extensive as we would like it to be. As I am very keen to do whatever we can to encourage more businesses to look at rail freight as an option for transporting their goods, I am more than happy to consider the member's suggestion.

Rail Passengers (Standing)

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on rail passengers being charged peak fares when they have to stand. (S5O-03103)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): This Government has invested £475 million in ScotRail's fleet during this franchise, increasing the numbers of carriages from just under 800 to almost 1,050 by 2020 to meet growing demand on our services, particularly at peak times. The arrival of more new Hitachi electric trains and high-speed trains every week

will allow existing refurbished trains to provide additional capacity to busier parts of the network.

Kezia Dugdale: I am grateful for that response, but it was not an answer to my question, which was about discounted fares.

Transport Scotland's own definition of capacity counts overcrowding only when the carriages that are on are fewer than the number that had been planned; it does not capture overcrowding on trains that have been poorly planned from the start, such as those coming from the Borders and East Lothian into Edinburgh. Those commuters regularly face delays, cancellations and overcrowding. Will the cabinet secretary instruct Transport Scotland to properly count overcrowding with immediate effect—and if not, why not?

Michael Matheson: We take account of overcrowding on particular routes, and that is part of the present franchise agreement. The problems that the member has highlighted on particular routes on the east coast of Scotland are well recognised, and ScotRail has been left in no doubt about the need to improve services in those areas, given the significant disruption that passengers in the Borders and in Fife have experienced due to overcrowding, as well as cancellations as a result of crew training. The reasons in that respect are well documented and have been rehearsed in this chamber on a number of occasions.

The member will be aware that we issued ScotRail with a remedial notice on 24 December last year, and its remedial plan, which was published in February, has now been embedded in the franchise agreement. A key part of the plan is to address improvements on the east coast, particularly in Fife and the Borders, and I have made it clear to ScotRail that we expect that plan to be fully implemented, as a failure to do so will result in its being in breach of the franchise agreement.

Kirkliston Transport Links

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government how it proposes to improve transport links to Kirkliston. (S5O-03104)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Transport Scotland is currently taking forward the second strategic transport projects review, which will determine the rationale for future strategic transport investment across Scotland for the next 20 years. As part of the STPR, we are working collaboratively with local and regional stakeholders to understand the problems that they face and to identify regional transport priorities.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The village of Kirkliston in my constituency has doubled in size in recent

years, but public transport has not improved in response to that. Huge pressure is being put on arterial routes because of car journeys into town and, indeed, on Dalmeny train station in South Queensferry, which is already overcrowded. Does the minister agree that it is time to look seriously at establishing a train station in Kirkliston, given its proximity to the train line, to give my constituents an alternative to using cars to get into the city?

Michael Matheson: Any proposal for a train station at Kirkliston would involve a process in which the local community would work in partnership with transport bodies.

I am aware that the City of Edinburgh Council is undertaking a transport study that is looking at some of the consequences in the area as a result of the Queensferry crossing. Transport Scotland has been in touch with the council to advise the council that it is happy to provide any data, or assistance with the project. Transport Scotland will consider any recommendations that come from the study and how those would feed into the STPR process.

On the member's point about the possibility of a new train station in his area, such a proposal would have to go through the normal appraisal process, which would consider whether that was the most appropriate measure to put in place to address the transport issues that he has identified.

Fibre Networks Funding (Aberdeenshire)

4. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the decision by the United Kingdom Government to reject Aberdeenshire Council's bid for funding from the local full fibre networks challenge fund to improve digital infrastructure. (S5O-03105)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): Regulation and legislation on telecommunications is reserved and the UK Government is responsible for ensuring that Scotland's digital infrastructure needs are met. I am concerned that bids, such as that by Aberdeenshire Council, have been rejected and that the UK Government is failing to properly fund the wider roll-out of superfast broadband coverage in Scotland.

By contrast, the Scottish Government has committed to extending superfast broadband access to every home and business in Scotland and has provided £579 million of the £600 million committed to the reaching 100 per cent programme.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the minister aware that Scotland received the lowest amount of any of the UK nations in the first round of £190 million funding? Aberdeenshire will receive nothing. Is he

also aware that Aberdeenshire has the highest proportion of exchange-only lines—as does south-west Scotland—which creates particular requirements to update the technology so that superfast broadband can be delivered. I very much welcome the R100 programme, but UK Government money is needed, too.

Paul Wheelhouse: I certainly very much agree with Stewart Stevenson on his latter point that we require more funding from the UK Government. Indeed, that is the conclusion of the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee report on broadband, which concluded that collaboration between the Scottish and UK Governments is needed. We are, for our part, willing to do that and also to ask the UK Government to consider additional resources for that end.

UK Government digital resources are increasingly being allocated via a series of challenge funds, with the criteria apparently being who can write the best bid, rather than which areas are most in need of investment. In contrast, the Scottish Government has invested £2 million to deliver full fibre connectivity to public sector buildings in the region, helping to unlock substantial commercial investment. I can tell Stewart Stevenson that, through the £400 million digital Scotland superfast broadband programme, 24,630 premises now have access to fibre broadband and 22,460 premises have the ability to access speeds of 24 megabits per second or better as a result of our investment.

Automatic Vehicle Speed Limiters

5. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what impact automatic vehicle speed limiters could have on the financial costs of speed limit enforcement. (S5O-03106)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government is keen to encourage and support the use of new vehicle safety technologies in our drive for safer roads in Scotland. There is no current assessment of how the future cost of speed enforcement could be affected.

Patrick Harvie: We already know that spending money on rolling out, for example, 20mph zones, pays back handsomely through the reduced human and financial cost of accidents. My colleague Mark Ruskell's member's bill on this topic would significantly decrease the cost that local authorities face from the current cumbersome process for designating 20mph zones.

However, is it not also clear that the European Union's decision that, from 2022, new cars will be fitted with intelligent speed assistance or

automatic speed limiter technology will be a game changer, with a large majority automatically complying with speed limits and acting as pacers on the road, so that even those people who choose to override their technology will be far more likely to comply?

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the decision is extremely well timed with my colleague's excellent member's bill on the topic? It would save money as it rolls out over the coming years. Does that not increase the argument that the Scottish Government should throw its weight behind the bill and see the maximum number of communities benefit from 20mph zones, with all the safety and health benefits that would come from that?

Michael Matheson: Presiding Officer, I think that Mr Harvie is in favour of the 20mph bill, going by that contribution. He has left members in the chamber in no doubt in that regard. However, he made an important point. Although we welcome the automatic speed limiter technology that is to be applied to EU-registered vehicles, it is overridable, so speed enforcement will still require to be undertaken. However, the technology gives us the opportunity to make progress on ensuring that we get greater adherence to the speed limits that apply at present.

I very much welcome the contribution that Mr Ruskell's bill has made in bringing focus to the benefits that can come from having 20mph zones. The Government supports 20mph zones and roads in the appropriate circumstances, but believes that the decisions on that should be made at a local level. Notwithstanding that, I recognise that there are some challenges in the existing regime for undertaking it and that there has been an inconsistent approach in how local authorities apply 20mph zones.

That is why we are presently undertaking work to review the traffic regulation order process, engaging with local authorities to identify what can be done to improve it and make it less bureaucratic, more timely and less costly for them and looking at what we can do with local authorities to ensure that we get a more consistent application of the use of 20mph zones across Scotland. However, given the variety of factors that need to be taken into account when applying a 20mph limit to a particular area or road, we believe that the decision is best taken at a local level, by locally elected representatives who know their communities best and can identify where it can be applied to the maximum benefit.

The Presiding Officer: There is a supplementary from Jamie Greene.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I echo the comments made by the cabinet secretary

about 20mph zones. It was a sensible observation of the situation. On the issue of vehicle speed limiters, the technology that is used is highly reliant on global positioning system data, for which, in much of Scotland, the signal is very weak. I ask that that is taken into account before any decisions are taken at either Scottish or United Kingdom level around the regulatory environment and that the civil service will raise that issue.

Michael Matheson: The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, which is responsible for applying those types of standards, has already agreed that, notwithstanding the UK's future relationship with Europe, it will apply those standards to vehicles within the UK. We will mirror those regulations when they apply.

Jamie Greene raises an important point about GPS coverage. It is similar to the issue that we have in relation to the use of connected and autonomous vehicles, because GPS is, again, an important element of their support. We need to ensure that we have maximum coverage in areas where such vehicles may be used, particularly in rural and Highland Scotland, which will have particular challenges on some of the road network. We need to consider those issues to make sure that that type of technology can be applied consistently across the whole road network in Scotland.

Ferry Vessels 801 and 802

6. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the construction of ferry vessels 801 and 802. (S5O-03107)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): The on-going delay to the delivery of the vessels is of great concern to ministers and is, clearly, hugely frustrating to stakeholders. That is particularly so for the communities who will benefit from their eventual deployment and for the operator, CalMac Ferries. Although, from a contractual perspective, management of the contract is for Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, Scottish ministers are closely monitoring the situation regarding delivery of the new ferries. We have concerns that FMEL's projected delivery timescale for the Glen Sannox in June this year cannot be met, so officials have written seeking clarification on delivery timescales for both vessels.

Jamie Greene: The vessels concerned are already 13 and 19 months, respectively, behind schedule. The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee has heard that their delayed entry to the CalMac fleet is adding considerable pressure to that fleet, especially as we move into the busy

summer period. Notwithstanding the dispute between the Government and the shipbuilder, many people are unclear about what is causing the delay in delivery of the vessels. When did the minister last visit the yard to see what progress has been made, and what is being done to address any issues that are causing delay? When will he update Parliament on when the two vessels will finally be delivered to the network, so that they can serve customers?

Paul Wheelhouse: Jamie Greene has raised a number of points. I will start with my visiting the yard. I have not visited it yet, but, at the request of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, I plan to engage with members of the workforce by meeting them at Ferguson's yard to discuss their aspirations and the Scottish Government's plans for vessel replacements in the future. We have presence on the site from CMAL, which is the body that commissioned the vessels from FMEL on behalf of the Scottish ministers, and from Luke Van Beek, who is an independent adviser who is providing updates on the yard's performance in delivery of the contract.

The Scottish Government is very aware of the pressure that exists on the fleet, about which Jamie Greene has made a very fair point. We have little spare vessel capacity, which means that there are knock-on impacts if a vessel goes out of service through either damage or maintenance requirements. We are working very hard to ensure that we are prepared for the summer season, and that we minimise the risk of vessels being taken out of service.

Jamie Greene has, fairly, asked about the reasons for the delay. They have previously been well rehearsed in the chamber. The difficulties are that the vessels are new ones for a yard that has been building up its workforce and is a relatively recently re-established business. We must recognise the challenges in that.

That said, we have concerns about how the contract has operated so far, although I do not want to intrude in areas in which there is on-going engagement with CMAL. Since we have commissioned the vessels from FMEL, performance on the contract has been the subject of discussion between the two parties.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank the minister for taking time to meet me and representatives of Arran Development Trust on Tuesday, to discuss the Glen Sannox and the Arran ferry service. The new vessel will make a hugely positive difference to the island when it enters service. Will the minister outline what measures he is taking to improve fleet resilience and reliability while work on the Glen Sannox continues?

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank Kenneth Gibson for arranging that meeting. It was very good to hear from his constituents about their concerns, and to relay directly to them our efforts to resolve the situation.

Kenneth Gibson asked an important question about resilience. We are aware that capacity is very constrained at the moment, so we need to ensure that every vessel at our disposal is working as efficiently as possible, to minimise the risk of its going out of service. In the past financial year we have spent £3.5 million on a resilience fund, and in the forthcoming year we will spend £4 million.

The measures that we are progressing are as follows. When vessels are in dry dock we will maximise effort and do every piece of work that we can do to ensure that the vessel is prepared for the season ahead, by building on knowledge of the previous year's operations and problems. We will tackle them all at once, thereby minimising the need for such work to be done during the summer season, which is the busiest period of the year.

We have also invested in specific areas including vibration analysis, which will consider when machinery is starting to wear out and how failures can be anticipated before they happen, and hydraulic fluid analysis, in which interesting innovation is happening.

I assure Kenneth Gibson that we are taking very seriously the need to ensure that his constituents and others are served throughout the summer season. We will do everything we can to ensure that vessels are in service.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): When the minister visits Ferguson Marine, I am sure that the workforce will tell him about their frustrations about the delays, and that they, more than anyone, want the dispute over the two ferries to be resolved. When he visits the yard, will he also listen to the workforce's calls for a national shipbuilding strategy that sets out a 30-year programme of work that would create more shipyard jobs, retain skills and expertise, encourage investment and improve the efficiency with which yards can produce ferries by creating the steady drumbeat of consistent work that Scotland's shipyards need?

Paul Wheelhouse: Colin Smyth has asked a very fair question on visibility of the pipeline. We are working very hard with CMAL and are now entering a period in which we will look at the next vessel replacement deployment plan in order that we can anticipate the future needs of the fleet. We are working with stakeholders, including the trade unions and local communities, to identify the needs of the fleet.

The Government is doing everything that it can, within the resource constraints that it faces, to

identify opportunities for procurement. It is intended that the next vessel that we procure will be the one to service Islay, and we are keen to meet our commitment on that. However, we are looking beyond that to future requirements and we are engaging with CMAL about its expectations on vessel replacement. I assure Colin Smyth that that is very much in our mindset.

On Colin Smyth's wider point about shipbuilding, my colleague Michael Matheson is leading on the marine strategy, which will, among other things, look at the needs of our marine fleet.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (Congestion)

7. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the AWPR is having on traffic flow and congestion on other roads in the north-east. (S5O-03108)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Since the Aberdeen western peripheral route fully opened to traffic, on 19 February, anecdotal evidence has been overwhelmingly positive, with many social media users sharing significantly reduced journey times for their commutes.

In line with published guidance, Transport Scotland will undertake an evaluation and consider the impact of the scheme by comparing conditions at year 1, year 3 and year 5 after opening, with the forecasts that were made during the scheme design and development.

Transport Scotland has estimated that the project will cut journey times across Aberdeen by up to half at peak periods, and that it will reduce traffic flow, thereby giving opportunities for greater priority for public transport in order to speed up journeys and improve reliability.

Gillian Martin: That is also my experience.

There are infrastructure plans for dualling the A96 past Inverurie to Huntly, and a selection of route options are currently being analysed. How are the impact of the AWPR and the projected impact of dualling the railway line between Inverurie and Dyce, as well as the building of a new station at Kintore, being analysed and taken into account?

Michael Matheson: As part of the design process for the A96 dualling programme, a transport model has been developed that will cover the corridor and surrounding area. The model includes committed schemes that it was anticipated would impact on the A96, including the AWPR and the Aberdeen to Inverness rail improvement work, so the design process takes

account of the forecast changes in traffic behaviour caused by those specific schemes.

Nonetheless, now that the AWPR is fully open, and after a period of settling down of traffic behaviour, I assure Gillian Martin that a traffic data collection exercise will be undertaken by Transport Scotland and a comparison made between forecast and actual performance.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know that Transport Scotland's decision last year to rule out dualling the A96 at Inverurie was based on data from 2017. Given what he just said about the need to use up-to-date data, will he instruct Transport Scotland to revisit that decision on the basis of new data following completion of the AWPR?

Michael Matheson: From the meeting that I had with Lewis Macdonald and the subsequent letter that I wrote to him, he is well aware of the reasons for Transport Scotland taking the options for routes that it has set down. My letter to him sets out in detail the approach that Transport Scotland has taken, and it explains the data that was used to inform the approach.

Lewis Macdonald will be aware that there are specific constraint issues about the online upgrading option. Undertaking a project of the nature of dualling the A96 results in significant disruption and challenges. Those issues have been given due consideration, and we will continue to consult on that, as we go forward with the routes that have been proposed by Transport Scotland.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The opening of the AWPR seems to have increased traffic travelling further north towards Peterhead, which raises questions about dualling the A90 beyond Ellon and the safety measures at the Toll of Birness. Does the cabinet secretary have any plans for those two vital projects?

Michael Matheson: Liam Kerr will be aware that we have started the process of establishing the strategic transport projects review—STPR—2, which will look at the wider road network in Scotland with regard to future investment choices and options. Those projects will be considered in that process.

Transport (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16747, in the name of Michael Matheson, on stage 1 of the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

14:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): I welcome the opportunity to consider the stage 1 report on the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which is an ambitious and broad piece of legislation covering a wide range of issues. The bill aims to help develop a cleaner, smarter and more accessible system for the travelling public across Scotland, and it will empower local transport authorities and others to improve journeys for the travelling public.

Members who have monitored the bill's progress will know that it is wide ranging and aspirational but also technical and complex in some areas. Such a mix can make scrutiny challenging. I commend the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee for the diligent way that it has undertaken stage 1 consideration. The extensive range of voices and viewpoints from across civic Scotland that the committee has heard from is testament to its accommodating and meticulous approach to the matter.

I welcome the lead committee's support for the general principles of the bill and its recommendation to Parliament that it should agree to those general principles. I look forward to saying more in the course of the debate about the Government's thinking on some of the matters that are raised in the report.

The bill's provisions range from measures to improve bus patronage, including smart ticketing, to improving air quality in our cities, increasing the safety and efficiency of road works and addressing parking issues. It also makes some necessary technical improvements to specific areas. For example, it will ensure more appropriate financial flexibility and governance arrangements for some public bodies. In developing the bill, a collaborative approach has been taken to ensure that its measures are informed by those that they will affect. We fully intend that that engagement will continue as we develop the associated regulations.

More widely, it is crucial that we see the bigger picture and how the bill fits into it. The legislation is part of a broader transport jigsaw and must be viewed in that wider context. Although matters such as low-emission zones, an improved framework for our bus services and prohibitions on irresponsible parking will benefit many, they

should not be seen in isolation. In addition to the bill, a host of other non-legislative work is going on across my portfolio to drive improvement, not least of which is our review of the national transport strategy. That wide-ranging review has involved extensive public engagement across Scotland. It is forward looking and will provide the high-level strategic and policy framework within which the measures in the bill will play out. I expect to issue a draft of the new strategy for consultation later this year.

We anticipate that the strategy will set the context for any future consideration of legislation, beyond the current measures proposed in the bill. The need for such a wider strategic perspective is something that the lead committee has raised in relation to low-emission zones. We have always been clear that LEZs have the potential to interact with a host of other transport issues, be that congestion, active travel, the improved feel of community space or the uptake of ultra-low-emission vehicles. It is in that vein that local authorities should be looking to implement such zones. The Scottish Government is aiding local authorities in that, not least by setting the strategic context that I just mentioned. Future LEZ guidance will also help to set the measures in that context, and we are taking other practical action to make our transport system cleaner, greener and healthier and to improve air quality.

I am therefore pleased that we seem to have wide political support for the principles of LEZs. Helpfully, there has been some fruitful discussion during stage 1 about the specifics that will be set out in subsequent regulations. That has covered issues such as penalty levels, the national emission standard and exemptions. Such feedback builds on the extensive engagement that the Government is having on those issues, which is running in tandem with the bill's progression.

There have also been questions as to whether specifics on such issues should be set out in the bill. It is worth remembering that LEZs are a new provision in Scotland. The flexibility afforded by secondary legislation is therefore necessary, as it allows proper engagement on development of the detail and an ability to respond to technological changes. I will reflect carefully on the comments of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, as the lead committee, and those of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, to ensure that there is appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of those measures.

I turn to the bus provisions in the bill. When it comes to improving air quality, buses are part of the solution, and measures to incentivise bus services should be an intrinsic part of the wider proposals around modal shift in LEZ areas and beyond. The bill offers an ambitious new model for

bus provision. The trend of declining bus patronage threatens networks across the country and we must work together to address that. However, the trend varies across Scotland, as do the causes, and I am clear that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. The bill gives local authorities options to improve bus services in their areas, which will ensure that there are sustainable bus networks across Scotland. The bill will support local authorities to meet local needs, whether they wish to pursue partnership working or local franchising or, in certain circumstances, run their own buses.

On that last issue, I am aware that there have been calls for us to widen our proposal for local authorities to run commercially competitive services. As I have previously stated, I will continue to listen to views on that as we move towards stage 2. The bill will also improve the information on bus services that is available to passengers, which will help them to plan their journeys. That will make bus travel more accessible and attractive, and we know that people want it.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is willing to look at the issue of local authorities running commercially profitable routes, but will he outline what he thinks the objections are?

Michael Matheson: The member will be aware that there are concerns in the bus industry about the impact that that could have on existing bus operators, as well as about the commercial viability of some routes. However, as I said, I am open to considering further measures that could help to improve bus services at a local level, including the issue that the member has raised, which was also highlighted by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

As well as clear information about bus services, passengers expect a simple ticketing offer. The bill will help to accelerate the implementation of smart ticketing and will support local authorities and operators to go further and faster to deliver multimodal smart ticketing arrangements, underpinned by consistent national standards. The Government is clear that partnership working between authorities and operators to address local ticketing needs is the most effective approach in a deregulated bus market. I am aware that there was support for that approach among various witnesses who appeared before the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee during its stage 1 deliberations.

I turn to the parking provisions in the bill. I am sure that we all want to ensure that our pavements and roads are accessible for all, particularly those with mobility considerations. It is therefore welcome that there appears to be cross-party

support for the principle of pavement and double parking prohibitions in the bill. There was some debate at stage 1 about specifics, such as the process for exempting streets, and exemption criteria for delivery vehicles. The Government has sought to strike a sensible balance on such details. We are still listening to people's views, and I am sure that we will hear more views this afternoon.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

There are quite a lot of streets in our cities where there is not enough room for everything that we would like to do. Does the cabinet secretary accept that, if the pavements are fairly wide and the roads are fairly narrow, it makes sense for cars to park with two wheels on the pavement?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that. Some city streets are too narrow for vehicles to park on both sides of the road and, at the same time, for vehicles to pass through. It is in recognition of that problem that the bill's provisions would allow local authorities to exempt particular areas from the prohibition.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): If, as the bill states, exemptions to parking prohibitions are to be made by local authorities, will they consult their local communities to come to an agreement that is best for all?

Michael Matheson: There is a provision for local authorities to undertake that process, which would include consulting local communities and other important partners such as emergency services, which have a clear interest in those matters, to ensure that they can express their views on that type of exemption process.

I am also grateful for the lead committee's reflections that our provisions on road works

"will provide a positive framework and improve ... quality, safety and performance",

and for its endorsement of our proposals to give regional transport partnerships more flexibility.

On the issue of canals, in our response to the committee's report, the Scottish Government has set out the wider measures that we are taking forward to improve such waterways, in addition to the provisions that are contained in the bill.

Workplace parking levies are not currently in the bill, but they have attracted significant interest in recent weeks. The Government has given a commitment to support an agreed Green Party amendment at stage 2 to create a discretionary power for local authorities to introduce those levies should they wish to do so. Our support for that amendment is contingent on the exclusion of hospitals and national health service premises. It will be a local levy and it will be a matter for local authorities to decide whether they wish to consider

introducing it in their areas in future. There will be no pressure from the Scottish Government to do so.

The Scottish Government recognises that the lead committee will wish to give itself adequate time at stage 2 to scrutinise such an amendment, including by taking evidence from stakeholders. We will support the committee in whichever way we can to accommodate that requirement.

I have cantered through a range of topics, which highlights the multitude of areas that the bill touches on. I look forward to hearing the views of members from across the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: I call Edward Mountain to open on behalf of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

15:07

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to contribute to the debate in my capacity as the convener of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

The committee's stage 1 report on the Transport (Scotland) Bill was published on 7 March. I thank the cabinet secretary for his letter of 1 April, in which he provided the Scottish Government's response to those recommendations.

In the limited time available, I will be able to cover only a brief selection of the issues that the committee raised in its report. It is unfortunate that we have less time available to debate the wide range of detailed and complex transport issues that the bill covers than we had last week to discuss the South of Scotland Enterprise Bill—a single-issue bill on which there was broad support across the Parliament.

The committee is aware that the Scottish Government has announced—it has reaffirmed this today—that it will support at stage 2 a Scottish Green Party amendment on the granting of powers to local authorities to introduce a workplace parking levy. The committee has agreed a timetable for stage 2 consideration that will allow us to take oral evidence on the full details of the amendment once it has been lodged. However, for the purposes of this debate, it is right that we park that issue—if members will excuse the pun—and discuss the many issues that appear in the bill as it is drafted.

Moving on to the committee's consideration of the bill, I thank all those who gave up their time to give evidence at committee meetings and to attend conference calls. I thank those who

attended an evening committee event in the Parliament and those who sent the many written submissions to the committee. I also thank the clerks, who supported the committee with professionalism at a time of a very heavy workload and a shortage of team members.

I will look specifically at the proposals in the bill, starting with low-emission zones. The committee is of the view that the effective introduction of low-emission zones will require steps to be taken in advance to provide improvements in public transport and to put in place measures such as park-and-ride facilities and improved active travel opportunities. In its response, the Scottish Government indicated that it agrees with the committee on that point and that such issues will be addressed in the LEZ guidance. We believe that that is welcome. The introduction of LEZs must be part of a co-ordinated package of measures if the behavioural change that is required is to be achieved.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's agreement with the committee's recommendation that national consistent emission standards and exemptions should be set out in the regulations. I note that the emission standards are likely to be Euro 6 for diesel and Euro 4 for petrol. I also note that the Scottish Government agrees with the committee that nationally consistent signage should be used for all LEZs.

Finally on LEZs, the committee acknowledges in its report the financial burden that might be faced by businesses and individual motorists should they need to upgrade or replace vehicles to meet the necessary emission standards. It noted that that would be likely to present a particular challenge to those on lower incomes.

I note that the Scottish Government will create a low-emission zone support fund that will target commercial and private vehicle owners who will have the most difficulty in making the transition to LEZ-compliant vehicles. That is welcome and, in my view, it is necessary if we are to incentivise road users to comply with LEZs.

In its report, the committee acknowledged the widespread concern about the decline in bus use across Scotland. However, the committee notes the concerns that were expressed by several stakeholders in evidence that the bus service provisions in the bill are unlikely to make a marked difference in stopping the decline in bus use. The committee is concerned that, although many of those provisions are broadly considered to be positive steps, the reality may be that few of them will be taken up in practice due to the lack of financial resources to facilitate their set-up and operation.

The Scottish Government clearly disagrees with that view. Although I understand that it wants to remain positive about the proposals in the bill, the broad message that the committee received from local authorities and others was that the proposals are underwhelming and are unlikely to deliver any significant improvement. I am sure that other committee members will comment further on the bus service provisions.

On smart ticketing, the committee is concerned that the provisions to introduce a national smart ticketing standard lack ambition and that an opportunity has been missed to deliver a meaningful step change in integrated public transport. On the basis of the evidence that it heard, the committee is of the view that that can be achieved only through the introduction of a single ticketing scheme operating across all modes of transport.

The Scottish Government responded robustly on that issue, effectively ruling out such a scheme on the ground of cost, with an assertion that it would require a restructuring of the bus market. However, it was made clear to the committee that progress in that area among transport operators has been painfully slow. It remains to be seen whether, if the bill is passed, the proposals within it will result in any tangible progress being made.

Although the committee welcomes the proposals to prohibit pavement parking and double parking, it expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the exemption, which will allow 20 minutes for loading and unloading deliveries. It therefore called on the Scottish Government to lodge an amendment at stage 2 to remove the exemption and for a more appropriate and workable mechanism to be developed and included in guidance. The Government said that it considers that removing the exemption would enable loading and unloading for an unspecified and unlimited length of time. Technically, that might be the case, but that does not respond to the committee's concerns that the exemption proposals, as drafted, would present innumerable practical and enforcement difficulties. I urge the cabinet secretary to rethink his position on that matter before stage 2.

During its stage 1 scrutiny, the committee discussed the issue of parking across dropped kerbs at pedestrian and other recognised crossing places. The committee felt that that is a

"significant ... barrier to the accessibility of urban streets".

The committee has therefore called on

"the Scottish Government to bring forward an amendment at Stage 2 to prohibit"

that practice. It is encouraging that the Scottish Government is currently considering the most appropriate legislative route for addressing the

issue. Nevertheless, I urge it to accelerate its considerations and to lodge a suitable amendment to complete what would be a welcome package of parking prohibitions

“which would more comprehensively enhance accessibility in urban areas.”

In the time available, I have been able only to skim the surface of the many issues that are covered in the committee’s stage 1 report. I hope that my fellow committee members will take the opportunity to discuss further elements of the report when they make their contributions.

The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recommends that the general principles of the Transport (Scotland) Bill be agreed to. However, we look forward to stage 2 consideration of the many proposals that we have made for its improvement.

15:16

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to open the stage 1 debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I add my thanks to the clerks and my fellow committee members, many of whom are in the chamber today. I also thank the many stakeholders whom I have met over the past few months, who have shared their views and opinions on the bill, including the transport secretary and his team, who have been very helpful in those discussions.

Since the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed, more people own and operate cars, we have seen a decrease in the patronage of our buses and the emergence of the gig economy has changed our driving habits and our economy. Equally, since 2005, there has been a renewed focus on our domestic and international obligations to tackle climate change.

At the outset, I say that the Scottish Conservatives will support the bill at stage 1. We agree with the general principles of what the bill is trying to achieve, although in many ways we do not think that the bill goes far enough to tackle many of the overarching issues that are faced by Scotland’s transport networks.

If someone is watching the debate and hoping to hear us discuss a groundbreaking, flagship piece of legislation that the Government has introduced, which will transform how Scotland is connected, or how the bill will radically address shortcomings in rail, road, bus, marine or aviation travel, or how the Parliament intends to revolutionise how we transport goods, people, or produce, they are welcome to stay tuned, but they may wish to change channels.

Overall, as it is currently drafted, the bill tinkers with existing legislation and proposes fairly benign

new powers. It is all very necessary perhaps, but it does not exactly push the limits of policy imagination. It contains little on long-term plans to improve community travel and transport, particularly among our elderly populations and rural communities, little that develops sustainable non-concessionary travel frameworks, or anything that proposes to deliver dramatic improvements to our railways or ferries, or a radical overhaul of the state of Scotland’s roads.

That being said, and in order to be constructive, let me set out my thoughts on the bill. Part 1 of the bill deals with low-emission zones. We think that poor air quality remains an issue in our cities—it lowers life expectancy and it puts huge pressures on our health service. In those respects, we agree that there is a need for LEZs. However, significant issues have been raised about the current proposal. The committee took evidence on the issue and a number of the stakeholders with whom I have had private consultations are rightfully concerned, not least those who will be least likely to be able to afford to upgrade to new Euro 6 standard-compliant diesel cars, and not least those small businesses that need vans, which are often purchased rather than leased, to go about their business. Those who live outside the cities, in rural Scotland, who often drive diesel or agricultural vehicles and sweat their assets for longer than people who live in the cities, are also concerned. What about people who find themselves living in a zone, who will be penalised simply for going about their everyday business, taking the kids to school or commuting to work?

If public transport was universally perfect, there would be no need for a car. In an ideal world there would be no need for low-emission zones, but we live in the real world. Businesses are concerned, and we ought to listen to them. Industries, such as the bus and taxi industries, have raised concerns about the costs of operating within the zones and of purchasing compliant vehicles. An electric-powered taxi costs £60,000. The committee’s stage 1 report makes explicit reference to that. It says:

“LEZs should not be introduced unless appropriate steps are taken in advance to provide improvements in public transport provision and to put in place measures such as park and ride facilities and improved active travel opportunities”.

I agree, but that is not what it says in the bill.

Conservative members want to see some clarity about national standards. Let us leave the geography and operating hours at the local level, but let us avoid the confusion for business of having multiple distinct schemes, with conflicting standards. We would like to see a clear timetable for the introduction of the schemes, with phased implementation, to allow everybody the time to

plan and transition to the new world. We would like to see appropriate incentives to encourage the take-up of ULEVs and LEZ-compliant vehicles.

Let us have a proper look at exemptions. Is it wise for disabled people, blue badge holders or other vulnerable travellers to have to pay to make vital journeys into cities for health appointments or to tackle social isolation? There must be support for residents within the LEZs, and public transport opportunities within the zones should be enhanced. We may seek to lodge amendments to that effect.

As the bill has progressed, other topics have not gained as much media attention as LEZs and parking, but they are nonetheless important. Local bus franchising is one example. There is a role for local franchising models, but that decision should not be made by anyone other than the local authority—the local authority must be fully transparent and open with local taxpayers about how their money is spent. However, I share concerns that the provision will allow them to operate only where there is an unmet need. That is severely limiting. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary address that in his opening remarks.

In reality, how many local authorities have the money to set up depots, lease buses, hire drivers and pay into pension pots? Even if they have the money to do that, what will happen when a commercial operator comes along and says that they, too, want to operate on that route? There are many unanswered questions about the bill in that respect, and the main question is whether the bill goes far enough on local franchising.

There are some good initiatives on smart ticketing, such as the standardisation of technical standards. That is wise, but it falls dramatically short of introducing a fully interconnected ticketing network, the likes of which many countries benefit from. That is what we need, and the Government has missed a trick.

There is not much to disagree with on the issue of road works. We heed the committee's warnings that local authority finance and resource remain a significant barrier to ensuring compliance.

One contentious issue that has arisen is pavement and double parking. We know that pavement parking is an issue in Scotland. It affects people who use our pavements; people with disabilities, people with pushchairs and people in wheelchairs or who are visually impaired can struggle to get past cars that are parked inappropriately. Equally, pavement parking is a widespread practice, which, as John Mason suggested, is a necessity on many roads. We have not talked enough about displacement: if the

cars are moved off the pavement and on to the roads, where do they go?

I hear that there will be powers for local authorities to exempt roads, but how many of them have done the necessary mapping exercise, and how much time and resource do they have to do that? I do not think that the bill's top-down approach is right.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Jamie Greene: I am sorry, but I have very limited time.

The best approach would be to empower local authorities to ban the practice of pavement parking where it needs to be stopped. It is all about empowering local authorities, which know their streets and communities best. The top-down approach is not the right one.

It is a shame that we do not have more time to debate the bill. In the closing seconds of my speech, I need to talk about the workforce parking levy—it would be remiss of me not to do so. I campaigned vociferously for the levy to be brought into the bill at stage 1, so that evidence could be taken and added to the stage 1 report. The Conservatives' view is very simple: it is an ill-thought-through, regressive tax on Scotland's workforce and we will oppose it at every stage of proceedings.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Will Jamie Greene take an intervention on that point?

Jamie Greene: I will not.

There is a lot to be positive about in the bill. We will take a constructive approach to amendments. However, there are several elements of the bill that need improvement. The stage 1 report was robust and in depth. I look forward to progressing the bill through Parliament and to taking part in constructive debates on it. I will listen to today's speeches with great interest.

15:24

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I ask members to imagine a transport system in which our transport agencies have the powers properly to regulate public transport in their areas and to deliver a genuinely integrated system; in which local communities can establish municipal bus companies without restrictions, putting passengers and not profit first, and reinvesting surpluses in better bus services and not shareholders' dividends; and in which a person can board a bus and use their bank card to buy a ticket for that bus journey and the connecting train journey, through a system that calculates the cheapest fare,

however many times they make the journey that week.

Members can imagine all those things, but the bill will not deliver any of them. The bill's timidity is matched only by the timidity of the Scottish Government's response to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's stage 1 report. The cabinet secretary made clear in his opening speech that the response represented just the start of the Government's thinking on changes to the bill, rather than its final word. I welcome that. Our stage 1 report captured a range of views from many stakeholders, which deserve to be properly considered as the bill progresses through the parliamentary process.

There are aspects of the bill that I welcome. I am glad that the Scottish Government has set out a legislative framework for low-emission zones, proposed a ban on pavement and double parking and proposed an increase in the powers of the Scottish road works commissioner. I am glad that, after opposing not one but two Labour members' bills on the subject, the Government plans to introduce some element of regulation to our bus network.

However, on too many counts, the bill lacks ambition. The mandatory minimum grace period for LEZs—and the length of the maximum period—and the lack of a clear definition of LEZ could slow down the change that is needed if we are to tackle air pollution. The loopholes in the ban on pavement parking, such as allowing 20 minutes for delivery and loading, risk undermining the aims entirely.

On buses, the bill tinkers around the edges of a failed deregulated system while our bus network is being dismantled, route by route, across Scotland. Since the Scottish National Party came to power, the number of bus journeys made in Scotland has fallen by 20 per cent and bus fares have risen by 17 per cent in real terms. There are many reasons for that decline, such as changing work patterns and growing congestion, but decisions that this Government has made have contributed.

The bus service operators grant has been reduced by 28 per cent under the SNP.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The member describes falling patronage and so on. Can he give us the equivalent numbers for bus patronage and Government support in Wales, where Labour is in power?

Colin Smyth: I can tell Mr Stevenson that there has been an 8 per cent fall in Scotland in the past few years, whereas the rate was 5 per cent in the rest of the United Kingdom. The important point is that the bill will do nothing whatever to reverse that decline. Mr Stevenson agrees with that point,

because it is in the REC Committee report to which he agreed.

Another factor that has contributed to the fall in bus use has been the cuts to council budgets in recent years, which are leading to yet more reductions in support for bus services in Scotland. The bill will do nothing to reverse the decline in bus passenger numbers, and it will do nothing to drive up standards in the sector or strengthen passengers' rights and workers' terms and conditions.

The bill will not improve affordability or tackle transport poverty. It will not properly promote community transport. Crucially, it will not lift the ban that Margaret Thatcher introduced, which prevents local authorities from competing to run bus services. The limited measures on franchising and partnership are welcome, but we need radical changes to how buses are run in Scotland, to protect the lifeline services that are currently being axed and to stop the big bus companies simply cherry picking the most profitable routes.

That means allowing our local councils to set up and run local bus companies, to meet their communities' needs, without the restrictions that the bill will place on them. It means ensuring that changes to bus routes will be allowed only after proper consultation with passengers and with the agreement of the traffic commissioner for Scotland.

It means putting a stop to the race to the bottom in how staff are treated. If a company wants to receive public money for delivering services, it should pay its workers a decent wage and deliver proper terms and conditions.

It means ending rip-off fares. It means not just setting up an advisory board on smart ticketing, but giving that board a legally binding remit to deliver a single ticketing scheme across Scotland and across transport modes.

It means properly investing in our buses, not imposing a £230 million real-terms cut in the council budgets that are needed to make that investment, as the Government's recent budget does. If we believe, as Labour does, that public transport is a public service, and if we really want to improve our environment, we need to properly fund public transport.

What will not protect our environment are the proposals for a so-called workplace parking levy, particularly given that the proposals are an afterthought and are being introduced at stage 2.

John Finnie: Was that the member's position when his councillor colleagues in Glasgow City Council and City of Edinburgh Council had such a proposal as part of their local authority manifestos?

Colin Smyth: The Parliament needs to make a decision first, because one of my deep concerns is that, under the proposals, if a car parking tax was introduced by City of Edinburgh Council, as Mr Finnie suggests, thousands of workers, including my constituents who live in Midlothian, the Borders, South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway, many of whom are on low incomes and are priced out of the Edinburgh housing market, even if they wanted to live there, would have to pay the tax because they would have no choice but to use their car to get to work. However, they and their local councillors would not have a say in whether the tax was introduced in Edinburgh, and not a penny raised would be spent on public transport in Midlothian or the south of Scotland. That is a flaw in Mr Finnie's proposals, and I hope that we will eventually be able to see the proposals that are currently being hidden from us by the Government.

The budget deal that has been done means that someone on £124,000 a year will get a cut in their income tax at the same time as a regressive car parking charge is introduced. A company boss will pay the same amount as a company cleaner will pay, and the chief executive of a health board who is on more than £100,000 a year will be exempt, but a carer who is working in a hospice and is on the living wage will have to stump up the money.

I will quote what the trade unions have said about the proposals, so Mr Finnie might want to listen. It is no wonder that Unison says that the tax "devalues council workers and other staff, who deliver vital services".

It is no wonder that the GMB says that

"it's an attack on the take home pay of workers".

It is no wonder that Unite says that it is a

"desperate attempt to absolve the government from the funding crisis they have presided over".

It is no wonder that the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen says that

"it's a burden on workers".

I make no apologies for being on the side of workers, because they are being forgotten by the SNP and the Greens. Labour will oppose the workplace parking levy, which would simply allow the rich to pay to pollute.

In supporting the principles of the bill today, we serve notice that we plan to lodge a series of amendments to improve the bill, some of which I will cover in my closing speech at the end of the debate. When we lodge our amendments, I hope that the Government will move beyond its response to the REC Committee's stage 1 report and work across Parliament to make the very significant improvements that the bill needs.

15:32

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

As colleagues have done, I thank the people who have contributed to the bill—the witnesses, our staff and the many organisations that have provided briefings. At decision time, the Scottish Green Party will support the general principles of the bill.

A transport bill should be seen as an opportunity and should provide a longer-term vision. It should provide policy coherence not just within but beyond the transport portfolio. However, I get no sense that the Scottish Government is crusading in that regard.

The cabinet secretary said that the bill is "aspirational" and he talked about a "transport jigsaw", but I prefer the approach of the Poverty Alliance Scotland and Oxfam, which posed the question what would an ideal transport system look like. Some of the provisions in the bill would clearly contribute to an ideal transport system, but we are way short of achieving such a system. This is a piecemeal bill that is conservative in outlook and will be amended.

The cabinet secretary mentioned a new national transport strategy, which is welcome. I look forward to seeing it: I am sure that there will be a lot of interesting contributions in it. Transform Scotland's submission on the bill talked about the opportunities to address, for example, congestion, which all my colleagues acknowledge is an issue. What does not affect congestion is the means of propulsion of a vehicle. Everyone was enthusiastic about replacing petrol with diesel, and then replacing diesel with electricity, but that is not the answer.

In the bill's policy memorandum, the Scottish Government says that

"Transport is a key facilitator for societal improvement and cohesion, therefore the Bill will have a positive impact on the Scottish Government's purpose to create a more successful country".

I say, on the basis of the bill that is in front of us, that that is a significant leap, because far too many of our transport policies reinforce the status quo. Under the bill, the market will still prevail when it comes to bus transport. It will be a case of private profit and public penalty, with hard-pressed local authorities being able to pick up only the scraps.

Road building is the transport priority of the Scottish Government and other parties. That is part of the on-going concession to the motoring lobby. If we concede to the motoring lobby, we ignore the needs of the 30 per cent of households who do not own a motor car. We know from the Scottish Government's facts and figures in the policy memorandum that buses contribute about 5

per cent of road transport emissions, whereas cars contribute 60 per cent of them. We know, too, that three quarters of public transport journeys in Scotland are undertaken by bus.

Much is made of Lothian Buses. I am delighted that it now has its 100-seat buses on the go. Because the company is publicly owned and run, the beneficiaries of Lothian Buses are the residents of the city of Edinburgh and the surrounding areas. Buses are vital in enabling people to go to work, school, college, hospital or the shops, or to visit friends and family. As has been said, people face cuts to routes, poor services and fare hikes.

Patronage has been declining for decades, so it would be entirely wrong to lay all the blame at the door of the present Government. Bus use has been going down since the 1960s, and mention has been made of many of the reasons for that. Transport Scotland—that was a Freudian slip; Transform Scotland cites the KPMG research on the decline in bus patronage, which talks about congestion and its impact on journey times, reliability and cost; the impact of parking; lifestyle changes, which have been mentioned by others; the relatively low cost of car use; and the decline in revenue for the bus industry from the Government and the rising costs.

Bus priority measures and low-emission zones would help. There has been negative talk about low-emission zones, but there has been little talk of the 40,000 lives in the UK that are lost every year as a direct result of poor air quality. Poor air quality is not a problem only in the centres of our major cities. I constantly remind residents in Inverness, where I live, that one of its streets has such poor air quality that it has to be constantly monitored. Therefore, it is clear that the idea of encouraging more people to drive into towns and cities does not make sense. Progressive countries are seeking to have vibrant town centres in which the motor car does not rule, and in which people can live, work and enjoy themselves.

When it comes to the workplace parking levy proposal, there is a danger that we could get bogged down in discussing hypotheticals. We have already heard rank hypocrisy from two of the parties in Parliament on the issue, and I dare say that that is likely to continue.

The example of bus use in Edinburgh is a very fine model. Edinburgh bucks the trend in many respects—it does so not just in relation to ownership, innovation and the range of routes and services that are available, but in relation to the nature of the passengers who use the buses. In other parts of Scotland, buses are used by poor people and cars are used by people who have money. That is why assistance has been given to the motoring industry for decade after decade, at

the expense of the bus industry. We know that, in Edinburgh, a wide range of people use the bus network.

The Poverty Alliance and Oxfam talk about the critical role that transport plays in the lives of people who experience poverty, both in supporting their ability to increase their income and in representing a significant and important cost. Affordability is important.

The bill has many positive aspects, but it lacks ambition. The Scottish Green Party will seek to inject some ambition at stage 2.

15:38

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I state at the outset that I believe that the Transport (Scotland) Bill is important, and the Liberal Democrats will support it at decision time.

The Government has great intentions. In the bill, it tries to address some major transport issues, including the introduction of low-emission zones, the state of our bus services, national ticketing arrangements and banning of pavement parking. What it does not do—so far—is address the contentious issue of a workplace parking charge. As we have heard, that is missing from the bill.

John Finnie: Will Mike Rumbles give way?

Mike Rumbles: Oh, come on! I am only 30 seconds into my speech.

We are told by the Government that the issue will be considered at stage 2, even if it was not considered at the important stage 1 evidence-gathering sessions.

John Finnie *rose*—

Mike Rumbles: I will be more than happy to give way, but not just yet.

I turn first to low-emission zones. If we are serious about creating effective low-emission zones in our cities, we must ensure that steps are taken to improve public transport provision in the areas that would be affected before the zones are introduced. Although the Government agrees with that, it has basically said, “Over to you, local authorities.”

We must also ensure that there is consistency across the country on which vehicles may enter an LEZ, in order to avoid confusion and to encourage compliance with regulations. I am pleased that the Government accepted that point in its response to the committee’s stage 1 report.

I now turn to the actions that will be needed in the bill to arrest the general decline in bus use. Contrary to what Mr Finnie says, it is not just poor people who use buses; I use buses every day. Lots of people use buses, not just the poor.

John Finnie: Will the member give way on that point?

Mike Rumbles: I will not, just now.

The bill should be a great opportunity to tackle decline in bus use. Unfortunately, I do not agree with the cabinet secretary that the Government has been ambitious on the matter. I agree with John Finnie that it is not exactly a “crusading” bill.

On one hand, the Government wishes to amend the Transport Act 1985 to allow local authorities to set up their own bus services. On the face of it, that is a very good idea. However, on the other hand, we are in the curious position in which the Government is saying to our local authorities, “You can set up your own bus company, but there aren’t any more resources available for you to do it, and by the way, you can only run your buses on unprofitable routes.” If those routes were to become profitable, the authorities would have to hand them over to commercial bus companies. What local authority is going to do that? We asked the question in committee and we are still waiting to hear an answer. I cannot see any local authority taking up that offer.

In our view, that is a missed opportunity. The proposal in the bill looks good, but on detailed examination it appears that nothing will change—to paraphrase someone else. Franchising seems to offer a better way forward. However, I am not convinced about the need for an independent panel to oversee local transport authorities. Local democratic control of the process is important, and I am not convinced that an additional hoop for local authorities to jump through is the right approach.

In the short time that is left to me, I will focus on the part of the bill that deals with pavement parking and on the as yet unseen proposal for a workplace parking charge.

The ban on pavement parking is most welcome. However, I have real concerns that the Government has provided a get-out clause in section 47(6)(c), on “Exceptions to parking provisions”, which will for the first time make it legal to obstruct the pavement, for a period of 20 minutes, when loading and unloading. That one provision means that in reality, the attempt to ban obstruction of our pavements will be hopelessly ineffective.

Jamie Greene: Is it therefore Lib Dem policy that there should be no exemptions to the ban on double parking? If so, how on earth is Mike Rumbles expecting to get in and out of taxis?

Mike Rumbles: I am talking about obstruction of pavements.

In our report, the committee makes it clear that it is concerned that the

“20 minutes for loading and unloading of deliveries may have the unintended consequence of creating a national exemption for pavement parking by commercial vehicles.”

Can people imagine how it would be impossible to enforce the law when vehicles are allowed to load and unload like that? In our view, the proposed exemption makes a mockery of the intention behind that provision, so I urge the Government to think again.

Michael Matheson: Can Mike Rumbles clarify whether his view is that there should be no exemption at all or that the 20-minute period is too long for the exemption?

Mike Rumbles: The evidence that we have received in committee is that whatever amount of time is put in the bill, it will be impossible to enforce. At the moment, the law says that vehicles cannot obstruct the pavement.

Michael Matheson: So, does Mike Rumbles want a ban?

Mike Rumbles: That is exactly right. However, if the minister wants to say that there could be an exemption if a certain amount of space was left on the pavement, that would be another matter.

I want to address the unique situation we are in in respect of the proposed workplace parking levy. The Scottish Government will whip its MSPs to support an amendment to the bill that its MSPs have not even seen.

John Finnie: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: I would love to, if I had time.

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that there is not much time—you have a minute left, tops, Mr Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: I am sorry, but I cannot take an intervention, as I am in my last minute.

No member of the committee has seen such an amendment, and I understand that not even the Green MSPs have seen it, although it is a Green proposal.

The fact is that the majority of members—that is, all the Scottish National Party and Green members—have been told that they must vote for the amendment when it eventually comes to the committee. No matter what evidence is presented, no matter what drafting problems might be found and no matter what unintended consequences might be seen as a result of detailed scrutiny of the legislation, it will just be voted through by the committee.

I have a lot of respect for the cabinet secretary—I consider him to be a responsible minister, and I do not blame him for something that has been foisted on him—but that is no way to pass legislation. A responsible Government would

not behave in that way. I never thought that our strong committee system, as established in 1999, would ever end up being misused in such a way.

The Presiding Officer: We now enter the open part of the debate. I call Stewart Stevenson, to be followed by Peter Chapman.

15:45

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I declare my honorary presidency of the Scottish Association for Public Transport, which has a keen interest in the topic before us.

I will start with the Labour Party's desire for perhaps every council in Scotland to take over the running of bus services and some of the financial implications of such a move. I have previously talked about the financial implications of Labour's proposals for bus passes for the under-25s, and these proposals are equally improbable. The general principle is that, if a franchise is taken away from a business, that business must be compensated not with one year's profit but with one year's revenue. That is £700 million or £800 million straight away.

Next, we should take a look at the accounts of Lothian Buses—which is, I should immediately say, an excellent company. Indeed, 100 years ago, my great-uncle Alex was the cabinet member of Edinburgh council with responsibility for it, so it is all probably down to him. What is the capitalisation for Lothian Buses, which covers about 10 per cent of Scotland's population? The answer, which can be found in the accounts as at 31 December 2017, is £147 million. If I factor that up—which I accept is a very crude way of working and is open to being criticised, but I have nothing better—we get a figure of £1.5 billion. If we then add the £700 million, we are talking about £2.2 billion.

I accept that that is the ceiling, which we certainly would not reach and could not exceed, but it illustrates the general point that, although there are a lot of numbers to look at, there has been almost no talk about those numbers. There is, of course, profit—the dividend comes back—but we need the capitalisation in the first place. It is also worth saying that a local authority would need to buy vehicles either from existing bus companies or from elsewhere, and I suspect that the existing bus companies would not give it a huge discount, given that it would be, in effect, a forced sale. The Labour Party is perfectly entitled to pursue its proposals, but I urge it to produce some numbers based on something more than my—to be blunt—20 minutes of research using the accounts of Lothian Buses—which, I repeat, is an excellent company that I use from time to time with my bus pass.

Colin Smyth: The member has, in effect, slated the idea of local authorities being able to set up bus companies in an unrestricted way, but does he support the Government's plan to allow them to set up such companies only to meet unmet need? If so, exactly how many local authorities does he think are going to do that?

Stewart Stevenson: I am very clear that the Government's proposals are good and worthy of support, and there are other proposals from the Labour Party to which I must say to the member that I am not closing my mind. Nevertheless, I must point out to him that, to gain support from across the Parliament, he will have to provide some numbers for the investment and the capitalisation that would be required as well as for the liabilities that would be taken on, particularly in relation to pensions as people were brought across from commercial companies under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. I simply urge the member to produce some numbers, because he might then persuade more of us who have yet to be persuaded.

On the bus improvement partnerships, it is fair to say that the previous voluntary and compulsory partnerships have not delivered as I think we had all hoped when we passed the previous legislation. However, I know that the bus companies are cautiously supportive of the new proposals, which is only reasonable, and I am certainly prepared to be cautiously supportive of them, too.

I think that we can do more on bus lanes. It should be compulsory for all bus lanes to operate 24 hours a day. We should also enforce them better. Once we do that, bus journey times will be consistent and people would rely on them more.

On parking, it is important that we respect the needs of those with reduced mobility, particularly those who are blind, who may walk into vehicles that are parked on pavements because they simply do not see them. Dropped kerbs are an issue for blind people, too, because they need a clear delineation between pavement and road.

On loading and unloading, I make a rather obvious suggestion: someone should be able to load and unload only if they have an indicator on their windscreen that is adjusted to show at what time they parked the vehicle. That is done in other countries, by the way—there is nothing particularly novel about that.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I am in my last minute—do forgive me.

In conclusion, I will mention the workplace parking levy. Like others, I have not seen the proposed amendment, and the whips have not yet approached me to tell me what I have to say or do on the subject. However, I will say this: there are different ways of introducing such a levy. I encourage John Finnie to consider that I am reluctant to support any measure that puts a cost on individual citizens but I might be prepared to support a measure that puts the cost on those who provide the parking. In other words, if the charge is on companies, that is fair enough, but if the charge is on individuals, that is a much more difficult ask for me.

I have no hesitation in saying that I will support this excellent bill come decision time tonight.

15:51

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

Like my REC Committee colleagues, I thank the clerks and everyone who attended the committee during evidence sessions to help us to write our stage 1 report.

It is clear that, across the chamber, although we all appreciate what the bill tries to do, on the whole, it lacks ambition and, if it is to achieve its aims, it will need to be amended as it proceeds.

I agree with the bill's general principles. Climate change and air quality have been discussed numerous times in the chamber over the past two weeks alone, and those are key drivers of the bill. The bill is large, covering six main aspects relating to transport. Time does not allow me to comment on all six, so I will discuss low-emission zones and bus services.

Part 1 would create a legal right for local authorities to establish, operate, amend and revoke low-emission zones. That key instrument is designed to reduce congestion and improve air quality in Scotland's four main cities, including, of course, Dundee and Aberdeen, which are in the North East region. A low-emission zone would restrict vehicles in the area to those that met specified emission standards, and anyone driving a car in an LEZ that did not meet the standard or that was not exempt would be fined. However, the bill lacks clarity. A clear definition of what an LEZ is and what its objectives should be are needed. It will be necessary for the Scottish Government to lodge an appropriate amendment at stage 2 to bring that clarity.

The effective introduction of LEZs will require improvements to public transport provision. Measures such as park-and-ride facilities and improved active travel opportunities will need to be put in place. Educating the public about why a zone is important and the benefits that it will deliver will be essential to getting drivers to buy in

to the concept. There must also be a robust appeals process to address queries on penalties and circumstances when drivers require to access the zone in an emergency. To avoid confusion and encourage compliance, there must also be consistency across the country about which vehicles can enter an LEZ.

The regulations must clearly set out minimum technical emission standards. Standardised signage and a comprehensive package of information must be provided by local authorities at all stages of introduction, to allow people sufficient time to prepare for the changes. There will also be a cost implication for business and individual motorists should they need to upgrade their vehicles. As is often the case, that would impact most heavily on those on lower incomes.

Part 2 addresses issues to do with bus services and focuses on concerns about the long-term decline in bus use across Scotland. That decline is being driven by many factors including the reduction in direct bus support in rural areas and congestion in towns. The lack of appropriate infrastructure such as bus lanes is leading to slow average speeds and long and slow journeys. The current provisions in the bill to allow councils to run their own bus services will not, in my opinion, deliver. We heard, during evidence sessions, that few local authorities are likely to have the financial resources or the expertise to take advantage of the options that are set out in the bill. Indeed, Aberdeenshire Council has recently axed several services in rural areas due to a lack of funding.

The bill would amend the Transport Act 1985 to allow a local authority to provide local bus services where there is an unmet public transport need. The committee felt that that was too restrictive and recommended an amendment at stage 2 to allow greater flexibility. I disagreed with that, however, because, if councils get involved where there is already adequate bus provision, they may trigger a bus war with the company that is already supplying the services, and bus wars never end well.

The bill also proposes replacing statutory bus quality partnerships with bus service improvement partnerships, which involve two elements. That change is generally welcomed, but local authorities question whether they will be able to join such a partnership due to constraints on time and resources. The Scottish Government has, thankfully, provided further information that clears up some of the confusion about how BSIPs will work in practice and how they will differ from the previous scheme. However, that clarity is lacking in the bill as it is drafted.

Another initiative that the bill would allow is bus service franchising. However, it was felt that, in practice, only a small number of local authorities

would have the time or resources to establish a framework. It is obvious to me that many of the schemes for bus services that are on offer in the bill will be taken up only if the Government is prepared to put additional funds at the disposal of councils.

Other sections of the bill that I have not had time to discuss cover smart ticketing schemes, pavement parking, road works and canals. We expect to work with stakeholders during stage 2 to further amend those sections as appropriate. There is also the workplace parking levy, which is due to be added to the bill at stage 2. It will evoke much debate in the committee, and the Conservative Party will oppose it. We can never support taxing people to drive to and park at their work. It will be interesting to see how Mr Lyle responds when we discuss that in committee.

The bill has merit, but it is by no means ready to be implemented as legislation. I am committed to working with all committee members at stage 2 to scrutinise all amendments that will strengthen and improve the bill and provide more guidance to local authorities and greater reassurance to the public and small business owners.

15:58

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary said, this is a wide-ranging bill, covering a range of distinct policy areas. However, I agree with members who have said that it is not nearly ambitious enough.

I will focus my remarks on public transport and those sections of the bill relating to how the bus market in this country operates, because Scotland's bus market is broken. Bus services are in decline and the deregulated model has failed. Instead of seeing a competitive market for bus services in which fare-paying passengers are in the driving seat, a patchwork of local monopolies has emerged across the country.

Since 2007, the total number of bus journeys is down by almost 100 million, and 64 million vehicle kilometres have been stripped out of our bus network. Meanwhile, fares keep rising, doing so more in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. In fact, the relative cost of bus travel has increased more than any other mode of land transport over the past 30 years, and by more than double the retail prices index.

It is clear that we need radical change. It is also clear that only where bus services are run on different principles do bus operators buck the trend, with higher passenger satisfaction, slower rates of decline and more profit reinvested in the bus network—in London, where the bus market is regulated to a high standard, or right here in Edinburgh, as we have heard, where Lothian

Buses is publicly owned and democratically accountable.

The Scottish Government says that the purpose of part 2 of the bill is to ensure that local authorities

“have viable and flexible options to improve bus services in their areas.”

If that is to mean anything, those options must include a realistic route to collective ownership. Local government must have the power to challenge and to replace the broken and failed deregulated system. Councils and communities must be empowered to form democratically controlled operators and to work with community transport organisations. Scottish Labour members of the Scottish Parliament will seek to amend the bill to strengthen Scotland's bus laws, make municipal and common ownership a reality, promote community transport, recognise that bus routes are essentially community assets that should be protected as such, and give the passengers and communities who depend on public transport a real say. We should have a people's bus service that is run for passengers, not profit.

If members want to know why that is so important, I will give them an example from my region. Changes by Glasgow CityBus will see the 142 Bishopbriggs circular service withdrawn because of a commercial decision that has been taken by a private operator. There has been no consultation or engagement with the community. The problem is that there are plenty of hurdles that transport authorities have to jump in order to provide a subsidised service, but apparently none for privately owned operators who seek to withdraw bus services entirely. Local councillor Alan Moir, who argues that the 142 service should be retained, tells me that 70 per cent of people who use the lifeline service are concession card holders. The deregulated market pays no regard to the social impact of withdrawing the 142 bus from this community and many others. That is why we have to shift power from the owners of the bus companies to our communities, as Colin Smyth has said.

Scottish Labour will seek to ensure that the hurdles to providing subsidised services through local government are not in place in relation to municipal ownership. Local authorities should be allowed to run services as a matter of principle, and not just in instances of unmet need. That would allow other parts of the country to benefit from the successful Lothian model, where profits are reinvested. It would also allow local, publicly owned bus companies to compete freely for any service or franchise that may be created in future. I have long supported London-style bus franchising powers—which I believe should be

granted automatically—coming to local government in Scotland. Just as the Scottish Government should provide a realistic route to common ownership, it should provide one to a London-style system.

On the issue of funding, there have been substantial reforms to the bus service operators grant in England and Wales: £93 million is now paid directly to Transport for London in the regulated market there. As a nation, Scotland already subsidises the bus industry to the extent that 45 per cent of operators' income comes from the public purse. In addition to funding local government fairly, the Scottish Government should review its funding for bus services to ensure that the provisions in part 2 of the bill are viable.

Every Scottish Labour MSP stood on a manifesto that promised that we would make it

“cheaper and easier to get to work.”

It is for that reason that Scottish Labour welcomes any progress on smart ticketing and integrated public transport. There should be a single multimodal smart ticketing system that can be used across all modes of public transport in Scotland. It is for the same reason that we believe that we cannot support a workplace parking levy. As Colin Smyth said, that is a regressive levy that workers would not be able to avoid and that would hit low-paid workers the hardest.

Climate change is one of the great challenges of our time, and vehicle emissions in our city centres are a public health concern, but the solutions do not have to be complicated. We already know what the answers are. What is required is a modal shift towards public transport. Low-emission zones must not exist in isolation. Better bus services will not just enhance public transport; they will also help us to reduce vehicle emissions.

For all those reasons, we must seek to strengthen the bill at stage 2 to assert the importance of public transport as a public service.

16:04

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am not a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, but I appeared before its predecessor, and the then Local Government and Regeneration Committee, on a number of occasions in connection with my proposed responsible parking bill, which I introduced as the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill. I thank those committees for listening to me. I also thank all those who gave evidence on the Transport (Scotland) Bill or who worked on it—not just on the parking aspect—very intensively.

We have been pushing for a responsible parking bill, or for the issue to be included in a transport

bill, for about 10 years, so I am delighted to be here to talk about the bill. I thank former MSP Ross Finnie who first tried to introduce such a bill about nine years ago, Joe FitzPatrick—whose bill I took over—and the many people and at least 20 charities and organisations, including lots of disability and social care charities, that came together with Living Streets Scotland in the responsible parking alliance, which did an enormous amount of work to help me when I was developing my bill. My bill had a very large number of responses—one of the biggest—for a consultation on a bill.

I have listened to the various discussions about the bill and I agree with a number of the committee's recommendations, particularly with regard to the amendment on dropped kerbs—I fully endorse what the committee has to say about that. My original bill included not just parking but the issue of dropped kerbs, which desperately needs to be looked at. I will give members a little bit of history about the first stage of my bill. Believe it or not, this Parliament did not have the powers—not only when Ross Finnie and Joe FitzPatrick were working on their proposed bills—to introduce any bills about blocked kerbs, dropped kerbs or responsible parking, as those issues were not covered in the 1998 or 2012 Scotland Acts. For one reason or another, they could not be included in any form of transport bill. I thank the Scottish Government—I believe that it was Derek Mackay, in particular—for introducing the Transport (Scotland) Bill and including in it the issues of my bill. That is fantastic, and it came about as a result of the Smith commission. It has been a long road to get to the point at which we can look at this properly.

Members talk about fines and so on, but I never envisaged the bill as being punitive. It should be educational, so that it teaches drivers that pavements are for people, not cars. I am looking forward to stage 2 of the bill and I hope that there will be an educational element to it, so that there is some form of education—whether on TV or elsewhere—to let drivers and car owners know that it will be coming into force. I do not want it to be punitive; I do not believe that there is a huge number of irresponsible, could-not-care-less, selfish drivers out there. Most of them are responsible.

It is just a matter of educating people about what can happen. We heard in evidence about a blind gentleman who was walking along the street with his white stick, happened to tap a car that was parked on the pavement and the stick broke. That gentleman was left stranded on the pavement for hours until somebody came along. There is the issue of people taking their kids to school or nursery in a pram or buggy and having to go on the road. That is dangerous and it should

not be allowed to happen. People must come before cars and, in response to the questionnaires that went out, 95 per cent of people were in agreement with that.

Pavements for people and roads for cars, and it is time that people were educated about that. That is why the dropped kerb issue is important. If somebody has parked on the dropped kerb, people who are disabled, blind, elderly or have kids in prams cannot walk along the pavement and cross the road at that point. It is about being sensible.

I thank members of the committee for the amount of work that they have put into the issues, and for putting up with some of the evidence that I brought to them. I understand about having to load and unload, which was mentioned by the Road Haulage Association. The subject was also raised at one of the committee meetings at which I gave evidence. There are, however, areas where it says, "No loading" or, "Only loading", so it is the policing of loading that is important. If people are getting something delivered, of course it has to be delivered to that place. Shops have to get deliveries, but it has to be done sensibly so that the delivery vehicles are not left across the whole pavement. That means education more than anything.

Not being a member of the committee, I am grateful to be able to speak in the debate. I look forward to stage 2 and stage 3, and to having responsible parking so that people can walk on the pavements.

16:10

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am grateful to be able to contribute to this stage 1 debate, particularly given that many people who live in the Highlands and Islands see public transport as a lifeline service, not just as an alternative to other modes of travel. Indeed, many rural and remote communities rely especially on robust and timely public transport and infrastructure to carry out daily tasks, get to work, attend hospital appointments and connect with friends and family. Whether it is people in our island communities who need a ferry service that runs on time and has enough space and capacity for passengers and vehicles or good local bus services to connect people from rural communities to Scotland's major cities, strong transport links are plainly good for society and the economy.

As Scottish Conservative colleagues have commented, we support the general principles of the bill and, as many of my colleagues have intimated, we feel that there are a lot of positive elements in the bill, as well as some missed opportunities. In the time that is available to me, I

want to focus on a particular area that I feel the bill could address slightly more: accessible transport and the needs of passengers suffering from disability.

Accessible transport is vital for many people across Scotland, particularly elderly and disabled people, but it is also important for other people, including parents travelling with young children. The experience of travel is important, too. Travelling to a station or bus stop, interacting with the surroundings, purchasing tickets and using various facilities are all elements of the travelling experience that must be viewed through the prism of accessibility.

I want to cover a few of those elements in greater detail. I had the benefit last year of hosting a round-table discussion for stakeholders, including the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance, Bus Users Scotland, and the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, at an event in the Parliament that I organised. The former transport minister Humza Yousaf attended, and I place on record my thanks to him for the interest that he showed in this issue. There were about 20 delegates from a multitude of organisations, who had different ideas, considerations and views on how the accessible transport experience in Scotland should look in the short and long term. It was a very valuable experience, and I had hoped that some of the suggestions might have been carried forward.

For example, one issue that arose at the round-table event was the design of vehicles. I heard various concerns about step access, the size of disabled buttons on new train stock, restrictive loop systems and poorly designed access to toilets. As a result, it may be that one of the things that can be considered at stage 2 is the issue of vehicle design.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission said in its submission on the bill that it recommends

"that disability access is named as a service standard to which all proposed vehicles used are subject to".

In its summary of recommendations and conclusions, the REC Committee stated:

"the ability to access transport can play a fundamental role in how a person can contribute to and participate in society. It notes the suggestions made on the bill from the Equality and Human Rights Commission and asks the Scottish Government to reflect on and respond to these in detail before Stage 2 of the Bill."

I sincerely hope that the Scottish Government listens to that recommendation and acts on it, because it is crucial that people have confidence on the issue in the future.

I am also particularly concerned about this issue because of a local aspect to the matter, which

involved the resignation of Arthur Cowie from the chairmanship of the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance over the redesign of the trains operating on the west Highland line. I know Arthur well, as we worked together last year in organising the round-table event that I mentioned. He is incredibly passionate about accessible transport, and his resignation from that role should be noted. In an article in *The Scotsman* in February, Arthur said:

“Recent actions by ScotRail and Transport Scotland have made me realise I have been wasting my time over the last 40 years in trying to achieve accessible travel, and have been played for a fool by the transport authorities over this period.”

I find that to be a particularly concerning indictment, and I hope that the Government listens to those views with respect to the bill.

I am concerned that the issue of cars parking across dropped kerbs has not been adequately addressed. The issue was mentioned by Sandra White and other members, and by Edward Mountain on behalf of the REC Committee. Apart from the obvious problems that parking across dropped kerbs can cause for most road users, it is particularly inconsiderate and problematic for many elderly and disabled pedestrians, who rely heavily on open dropped kerbs. I welcome the fact that the REC Committee report states:

“a prohibition of parking across such formally recognised crossing points (as distinct from residential driveways) would provide a package of measures which would more comprehensively enhance accessibility in urban areas.”

Again, I hope that the Scottish Government takes cognisance of that.

The Scottish Conservatives support the bill at stage 1. We agree that there is a need to adopt new practices and to ensure that transport meets our environmental commitments and we have a long-term plan that is fit for Scotland today and beyond. As a party, we will scrutinise the bill as it goes forward. As my colleagues who have spoken thus far have suggested, although there are areas of the bill that can be improved, we generally support it.

For my part, I hope that greater consideration will be given to accessibility issues, so that Scotland can lead the way in that crucial area. Ultimately, every individual who uses public transport in Scotland should have the same choice, freedom and dignity to travel. I hope that, as the bill progresses, we can make that happen.

16:16

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): First, I should say that I am more than happy to support the bill. It covers a number of areas, and I

will focus my remarks on pavement parking and the workplace parking levy.

There is no question but that we have a problem with pavement parking, which is when a car is parked fully or partly on a pavement to the extent that a wheelchair or pram could not get past. That is obstruction and, although the police have the power to enforce the law on that, in practice that seldom happens. In an ideal world, there would be plenty of space for completely clear pavements, lanes for cycling, space for parking and plenty of room for large vehicles to pass on the road itself. Unfortunately, many roads in Glasgow and elsewhere do not have space for all that. My fear is that forcing cars entirely on to the road surface would cause obstructions for public transport and emergency vehicles and so on. I do not think that any of us wants that.

Although there is a problem at the moment, there are also many considerate drivers who put two wheels on the pavement in order to avoid blocking either the road or the pavement. In fact, that is sometimes encouraged by council road markings that are designed to ensure that the road itself does not become blocked. I wonder, then, whether some compromise is needed. Perhaps it would be better for the rule to be that at least 1.5m of pavement must be left clear of vehicles, which would allow adequate space for wheelchairs and prams. If the pavement was less than 1.5m wide, no vehicle wheels would be allowed on the pavement at all. That would also have the advantage of being cheaper than the proposals in the bill. Although the bill would allow exemptions, I suspect that, because of the cost of introducing them, councils would resist doing so as widely as they should.

I am also concerned that, whatever the rules are, they are unlikely to be widely enforced. Experience in Glasgow already shows that, although parking on double yellow lines or parking that causes an obstruction is against the law, in many cases the law is not enforced. The bill proposes powers for local authorities to enforce the law, and the Government says on page 26 of its response to the stage 1 report that that is a duty. However, I fear that that will not happen in practice. Linked to enforcement is the question of whether fines are sufficient for councils to cover their costs, such as the cost of paying wardens.

Sandra White: Enforcement was one of the areas that I was going to comment on. I am also worried about what will happen if we make it known that anyone can park on the pavement, even if it is just with two wheels. There are large stretches of road in my constituency, which covers the city centre, and I would worry that there would be cars constantly parked on the pavements, which would mean that anyone with a pram or a

disability would have a long distance to walk before they could get off the pavement. I do not want to encourage people to park on pavements at all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I will give Mr Mason his time back.

John Mason: That is kind; thank you.

I accept that there are differences in different parts of the city. Streets in the city centre, such as Hope Street, where I have seen cars parked on double yellow lines that are not enforced, are slightly different from most of my constituency, which is further out. However, we must somehow find a compromise.

The second main topic that I will focus on is the workplace parking levy. As Mike Rumbles said, there are unusual circumstances in that the workplace parking levy has become part of the budget agreement and we expect to see an amendment to introduce it at stage 2. It is not normal to see such a major new issue appear at stage 2, and it is not ideal. Stage 1 is when a committee carries out a thorough examination of the main features of any bill, and I believe that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee carried out such an examination of the bill as introduced. There was an argument that, in order to take evidence on the levy, the committee could have postponed the completion of its report, but it was decided to press ahead with stage 1 and deal with the amendment as part of stage 2.

In principle, I am comfortable with a levy that targets directors and other highly paid individuals who have a parking space in the city centre, when they could easily use a train or bus for commuting to their 9-to-5 jobs, but I have a lot of questions about the proposed levy. We know that the provisions in the bill will only be enabling legislation and that it will be up to councils to decide whether they want it or not, but we do not know at what level the charge would be, whether it would apply to the employer or employee or what exemptions there might be. It has been suggested that NHS hospitals might be exempt. What about care homes, hospices, general practices, social work, the police and out-of-town factories where the workers do shifts? Should it be extended to out-of-town shopping centres, so that shoppers would pay to park and thereby help to protect our town centres? I look forward to seeing the amendment and to taking evidence in the committee, when I hope that those types of question will be clarified.

Another issue that has been raised is whether there would be any advantage in commercial bus services being publicly owned. I certainly regret that Strathclyde was forced to privatise its buses, while Lothian was allowed to keep its buses.

However, when we had Strathclyde Buses and before that, Glasgow Corporation Transport, Scottish Motor Traction—SMT—and the Scottish Bus Group, there were still frequent complaints about bus services. For example, in Rutherglen, the complaint was that all the buses ran to Castlemilk and ignored Rutherglen.

However, we had evidence that bus usage has been in decline in the west of Scotland since before 1960—long before any privatisation. Therefore, although I am sympathetic to public ownership and I think that we should consider it, we must be wary about assuming that it would automatically lead to increased or improved services. The fall in bus usage is complex; it is linked to a desire for cars and to improved train services in the Glasgow area.

I am more than happy to support the principles of the Transport (Scotland) Bill. It is clear that we will see one major amendment—and probably a host of other amendments—at stage 2. We will have to see what happens then.

16:22

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): It has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. Members have made contributions on issues ranging from pavement parking to low-emission zones. That shows the wide range of subjects that the bill covers.

I want to concentrate on buses, which is where the bill comes up short. In the area that I represent, there is no doubt that buses are very much required by commuters. They are required to get to work, for social purposes and to travel to hospitals. In recent years, bus services have been concentrated—a small number of companies focus on the more profitable routes, particularly around the city centre, and by the time we get to Rutherglen, which John Mason mentioned, or further, to Cambuslang, Halfway and Blantyre, the routes are not as well populated by buses.

Another trend that we have seen in recent years is bus companies shutting the routes in off-peak periods, particularly in the evening. That can be a problem, particularly for people who are perhaps travelling to visit people in hospital. To explain why that is happening, we need to examine the trend. One of the astonishing numbers that I came across in preparing for the debate was that, back in 2007, there were 487 million bus journeys in Scotland, but that figure has reduced by nearly 100 million to 388 million; so, there are now 100 million fewer bus journeys per year than there were 10 years ago.

There are a number of reasons for that. First, fares have increased by 18 per cent in the past five years, so it is more expensive for people to

travel by bus. There are also fewer buses—with 10 per cent less stock and 2 per cent fewer staff—and bus companies are contracting in size in terms of both infrastructure and numbers, which feeds through to the routes. The reduction in the bus service operators grant, which Colin Smyth described, also contributes, and the overall picture of reduced local government funding has not helped local authorities to subsidise less-profitable routes.

The picture that that paints is one of decline in the use of bus services and an increase in bus companies' power over communities in respect of their ability to either run or cancel routes. That seems unfair, particularly given that 35 per cent of journeys are made under the concessionary travel scheme, through which the Scottish Government makes a major contribution to free bus travel. The logic of that would be to give more power to communities and to look to a model that supports municipal bus companies.

Ultimately, we need to get back to a position where communities and councils have greater control of bus routes in order to ensure that their bus routes and bus companies serve them.

Ticketing and data are another interesting area, which sounds technical but could help—the get Glasgow moving group provided a good briefing on that. Over the years, there has been a lot of discussion about smart ticketing and having one ticket to cover different companies and different modes of transport, but the reality is that movement on that has been far too slow. It could help by providing ease of travel for customers and allowing for the collection of data. If we are to organise bus routes in an efficient manner that serves customers well, we need more information about fares, routes and usage. Smart ticketing and better collection of data would help to service that.

Finally, I turn to the workplace parking levy. There are two issues with it. First, it is fundamentally unfair. I just read a quotation from a senior Scottish Government minister, talking about free prescriptions, who said that it is unfair to tax ill health. By the same token, how is it fair to tax people driving to their work?

John Finnie: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute—in fact, he is in his last 30 seconds.

James Kelly: I am sorry—I have only half a minute left.

The second issue with the workplace parking levy, which even Mr Mason acknowledged, is that it is quite a big change in Government policy. It is one of the more controversial measures that the

Scottish National Party has introduced in the past 12 years and it is wrong for it to come in at stage 2 of a bill. If the Government genuinely wanted to bring it forward, it should have run a consultation on it and sought people's view on it, instead of ramming it through as part of a budget deal. There are big issues to resolve at stage 2.

16:29

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank the clerks for their work on the Rural Environment and Connectivity Committee report, and I welcome and support the bill at stage 1.

It is especially important for everyone to take note of part 1 of the bill, which covers low-emission zones—an important matter that gives the bill great purpose. I am concerned about the poor air quality in certain areas and that is why I want to deliver for the people of Scotland a bill that meets their needs and looks after their health. It is anticipated that the bill will accomplish that.

We should make great efforts to improve the health of the people of Scotland by putting forth a bill that strives to reduce air pollution. The bill will do that by prohibiting vehicles that do not meet emission standards from driving in low-emission zones. I welcome low-emission zones because I sincerely believe that the people of Scotland deserve to live free from health problems that are caused by poor air quality and that we could achieve that by enforcing low-emission zones. We should deliberately plan to prevent any unintended repercussions that would undermine our goal, such as the suspension of an LEZ; I believe that a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week LEZ should mean exactly that, as the British Lung Foundation suggested.

Our efforts and care should be extended to our local businesses. That is why I believe that part 2 of the bill, which covers bus services in Scotland, is also essential. The provisions aim to help local councils, by giving them options that will help them to enhance bus services in their area. Part 2 also strives to provide more innovative ways to address bus service issues. I was previously a councillor, and I have always believed that councils could do more with regard to bus services.

The decline of bus use in Scotland is visible and is a problem that concerns the committee and me. It could, and should, be tackled if Scotland is to reverse that trend. To do so, we must address the problem by looking at affordable solutions. I sincerely believe that, if more of our constituents were able to access our bus services, we would have more productive members of society and that we would bestow them with the opportunity to give back to Scotland.

The Transport (Scotland) Bill is a piece of legislation that attempts to help Scotland and its people: it is a start. Moreover, the bill will improve the daily lives of our citizens by providing a solution to our pavement parking issue. Indeed, pedestrians must be protected, and the bill will ensure that pavement parking is addressed.

We need to restrict pavement parking to protect our citizens from harm. Pavement parking is dangerous for all pedestrians, including those with sight loss. In fact, the Guide Dogs Scotland survey, which I thank the organisation for providing, found that nine out of 10 people with sight loss have had problems with cars that are parked on the pavement. Obstructions on the pavement are not just an inconvenience but a barrier to people being able to fully participate in our society. The obstruction prevents people with sight loss from moving freely, which increases feelings of isolation; people with disabilities and buggy users are also affected.

The bill will make pavement parking an offence except, of course, on a limited number of streets that are exempted by the council. However, the aim of the legislation should be that pavement parking is a total exception, not a norm. I suggest that pavement parking should be minimised in line with the ask of Guide Dogs Scotland. The bill responds to the request of our citizens, who showed 83 per cent support for new legislation that tackles pavement parking.

We make laws to improve the lives of all our citizens, including citizens with sight loss, and that is what part 4 of the bill should be about.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

As a member of the committee, I believe that we should listen to the views of Guide Dogs Scotland with regard to loading and unloading. I am sure that the issue will be resolved during the next stage, following discussion with Guide Dogs Scotland.

I will raise a final issue, in respect of which I declare an interest as the convener of the cross-party group on the Scottish Showmen's Guild. I voice my support for giving a limited exemption to showmen. At stage 2 of the bill, consideration should be given to having an exemption for showpeople who are travelling through a low-emission zone. Traditionally, showmen have been acknowledged as a special case and have exemptions in other areas. Historically—I sound like Mr Stevenson—showpeople were first granted concessionary rates of taxation in 1927. The Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 modified those concessions but kept the exemption for the

“showman's goods vehicle”. I will support a preservation of those reliefs for showpeople at stage 2 and will try to ensure that that happens.

I support the bill, which aims to have greater efficiency in pollution control, strives to improve our bus services and will solve our issues regarding pavement parking. I look forward to the next stage of the bill, when we will be looking at the workplace parking levy.

16:34

Colin Smyth: Transport impacts on many aspects of our constituents' lives, from their health to the environment to poverty. It accounts for more than a third of all greenhouse gas emissions, with levels currently the same as they were in 1990. It is a key cause of air pollution, which last year hit illegal levels in eight areas in Scotland.

Cars are by far the biggest polluters in the sector. However, ultra-low-emission vehicles still make up less than 1 per cent of road vehicles, bus usage has plummeted by 20 per cent in the last 10 years under the SNP Government and bus fares have risen by 17 per cent above inflation. The proportion of journeys made on foot has fallen since last year, and just 1.5 per cent of journeys are made by bike.

As the Poverty Alliance has highlighted, the most disadvantaged are hit hardest by those changes: young people are being priced out of travelling to education or work by spiralling bus fares, and older adults and disabled people are being isolated by the axing of local bus services.

The bill is an opportunity to meet those challenges head on and to move towards a modern, green, accessible transport system. It is an opportunity to set out a vision for transport and to establish the legal framework that will underpin our values and ambitions for public transport as a real public service. As the debate has shown, the bill as it stands fails to achieve that.

Several speakers including Mike Rumbles, John Finnie, Peter Chapman, Richard Lyle and others talked about low-emission zones—albeit they had different views. The bill sets out a much-needed and largely reasonable framework for LEZs. Amendments will be needed if we are to ensure that the legislation is effective and future proofed. That means having a statutory definition to provide clarity and make clear that the purpose of an LEZ is to ensure that air pollution is lower than it would be if an LEZ had not been introduced. That may seem obvious. However, when we consider the generous grace periods in the bill and the natural lifespan of cars, there is a real risk of local authorities introducing LEZs that ultimately do not have any real effect. LEZs will be weakened further if they can be suspended or are not

operated on a continuous 24/7 basis; Richard Lyle highlighted that.

Air pollution costs around 2,500 lives each year in Scotland. It is an urgent public health crisis, but one that the bill fails to recognise fully. As Neil Bibby, James Kelly, John Finnie, Mike Rumbles and Jamie Greene recognised, the bill also fails to recognise the urgent crisis that we face on our bus network by allowing councils to run only the bus services that the private sector does not want to run. Not a single council in Scotland has shown any interest in doing that.

It is no coincidence that Lothian Buses, Scotland's only municipal bus company, has seen its passenger numbers grow, while patronage elsewhere plummets, or that it has a 95 per cent customer satisfaction rate and some of the lowest fares in Scotland. That is the outcome of a model that prioritises passengers over profits, encourages social responsibility and delivers millions of pounds a year back into the public purse to be reinvested in public transport. It is unsustainable of the Government to believe that the bill should prevent the rest of Scotland from pursuing such a model.

Several members highlighted the fact that, as the bill stands, the provisions on ticketing arrangements and schemes do not go far enough—they do not even deliver the national multimodal smart card that the Government promised back in 2012. The establishment of a new national technological standard and the national smart ticketing advisory board are welcome, but we need to give the board the legally binding remit to deliver a single ticketing scheme across Scotland and across transport modes.

There was general consensus that pavement parking is an inconvenience for disabled people and that action is needed to tackle that. However, several members said that such action should be extended to include a ban on parking in cycle lanes and next to dropped kerbs—that point was made by Sandra White and Donald Cameron.

There was a recognition of the need for reasonable and targeted exemptions to the ban on pavement parking. However, those must not act as loopholes that undermine the ban, which is what the exemption that would allow 20 minutes for delivery and loading does. I fear that allowing parking on pavements with a 1.5m space would also be a loophole and continue to present a hazard for those with a visual impairment.

The bill also gives councils the power to enforce the new regulations. That point has not yet been covered, so I will spend a couple of minutes talking about it. That provision means that councils without decriminalised parking enforcement will be required to set up an entire department, which

could issue a parking ticket for a car parked on a pavement on one side of the street, but could not issue a ticket for a car parked on a double yellow line on the other side of the street. What an absurd situation for the Government to create. Surely it is not beyond the Government's ability to bring forward proposals to simplify the decriminalisation process or to extend councils' enforcement powers to a wider range of traffic offences.

Jamie Greene: Does the member share the view of Scottish Borders Council, which suggests that the proposal simply shifts responsibility for enforcement from the police to local authorities, which do not have the funding and resources for that?

Colin Smyth: Jamie Greene makes a valid point. The biggest problem is the fallout from Police Scotland's decision to scrap traffic wardens, who dealt with parking problems in our town centres. Now, we see police officers walking by cars that are parked on double yellow lines and not taking action, because the police do not regard that as a priority.

The situation is leading to parking chaos in far too many of our town centres, which is impacting on businesses. The sad reality is that if Police Scotland is not prepared to bring back traffic wardens, the only way to tackle the issue is by giving local authorities enforcement powers. The problem with the bill is that a council that has not decriminalised parking will have to enforce the law on pavement parking but will not have the power to enforce the law when it comes to parking on a double yellow line. That really is an absurd position. For the Government simply to say that councils should bear the huge cost in money and time of applying for decriminalised parking enforcement is not fair. The Government needs to tackle the anomaly.

In the brief time that remains, I want to put on record Labour's view that the provisions on regional transport agencies and road works are welcome. In particular, we welcome the strengthening of the Scottish road works commissioner's powers and the provision that makes the safety code mandatory for road authorities.

A number of members mentioned the workplace parking levy, but not a single one of them talked about the regressive nature of a tax that means that a company boss pays the same as a company cleaner.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has six seconds.

Colin Smyth: It is unfair that my constituents in South Scotland, who would have to pay the tax, would have no power over its imposition and no power to get any of the money raised spent on public transport.

We support the principles of the bill, but, as I think that all members showed, a lot of work and amendments will be needed to make the bill fit for purpose.

16:42

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to close this stage 1 debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I say at the outset that the bill has many laudable aims, so we will support it at stage 1. However, as members have made clear throughout the debate, the bill currently represents something of a missed opportunity.

There is little doubt that Scotland's transport network and the framework that governs it are in urgent need of renewal and modernisation. What we need is a vision—a real drive to the future.

As has been made clear throughout the debate, and in many of the helpful submissions that have been sent to members, significant gaps remain. For that reason, we are of the view that the bill could go further, so we will be pleased to lodge amendments at stage 2.

I will talk about specific areas of the bill, and will elaborate on the discussion that we have heard throughout the afternoon. First, on low-emission zones, there is no doubt that in many of our cities air quality remains a problem that lowers life expectancy and puts additional pressure on our health service. I live within a mile of Market Street in Aberdeen, which is one of the most polluted streets in Scotland. The transport sector is the largest source of nitrogen oxide emissions and the second-largest source of particulates in Scotland. We recognise the many potential benefits of tackling air pollution in Scotland's towns and cities, so we are broadly supportive of LEZs and the effect that they seek to achieve.

However, there are issues. I am indebted to a member of the SNP—I shall not name the member, because it was not a public conversation—who pointed out that there is anecdotal evidence that the impact of the Aberdeen western peripheral route on Market Street's pollution might be considerable. We are waiting for the local authority to report back on that. Further, she pointed out—rightly, in my view—that Market Street's issues are compounded by the many large ships in the adjacent harbour that keep their engines running. We need to be sure that LEZs are used properly and have the desired effect.

I note the concerns of the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland that the introduction of LEZs could have a direct impact on more than 80,000 businesses in Scotland's four biggest cities. We need to bear in mind the wide definition of "business".

Jamie Greene talked about electric taxis costing £60,000, which is a big hit for a self-employed driver, and his point about rural users of diesel and agricultural vehicles was also important.

John Finnie: Does Liam Kerr accept that people are increasingly living in town and city centres, in particular in vacated shops, so LEZs would be a boon to them, never mind to motorists?

Liam Kerr: I recognise that, but that does not detract from my point: LEZs have their place if they are used properly, but I would like the significant concerns about them to be ironed out at stage 2. John Finnie will share my specific concern about the cost to the public purse.

Peter Chapman mentioned Dundee, which would be one of the cities to introduce an LEZ. We should remember that the point is to impose penalties on drivers who bring dirty vehicles within the LEZ's boundaries. According to a question from Jenny Marra yesterday, at least 100 of Dundee's buses currently fail to meet basic environmental standards, and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee flagged up that the bus industry has raised concerns that introducing LEZs without sufficient lead-in times could force firms to withdraw services or increase fares. I know that John Finnie will be concerned about that.

The introduction of LEZs has to be done correctly, so I endorse Jamie Greene's suggestion that we need proper support and/or industry-specific exemptions to aid businesses and individuals, especially vulnerable people, in the transition to new LEZs. We need a clear timetable—which might include phased implementation—new incentives to encourage take-up of compliant vehicles, support for residents who will reside within the LEZs, and investment to enhance public transport and active travel routes.

Pavement parking is a real problem, so I am pleased that the bill addresses it. Richard Yule mentioned the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, and having experienced a blindfolded walk with a guide dog in Forfar and having consulted constituents in Aberdeen who are mobile only through using wheelchairs, I know that there is a definite need to address the issue. Cars that are parked on pavements can force people to walk into the road, which is especially dangerous for blind and partially sighted people, and for

people with reduced mobility, older people and families with pushchairs.

However, I again share Jamie Greene's concern that although inconsiderate parking must be tackled, a blanket ban with no room for exemptions by local authorities—remember, they know their communities best—might be too much of a catch-all approach. There has to be room for a compromise, such that we strike a balance between protecting vulnerable pedestrians and allowing harmless pavement parking to continue. I agree with the committee that a limited amount of pavement parking could be permitted in specific areas, provided that a specified minimum amount of pavement space remains.

I heard Edward Mountain talk about Cycling Scotland's briefing, and whether it would be appropriate to extend the provisions in the bill to cover cycleways. Sandra White and Donald Cameron talked powerfully about new protections for dropped-kerb crossing points. There is a great deal of merit in those proposals, so I endorse the calls for the Scottish Government to consider whether such extensions would be appropriate.

I will make some brief comments on the workplace parking levy. I cannot but oppose it, because I cannot see how it can be right to charge workers £500 just to park at their place of work.

John Finnie: I do not know where Liam Kerr got that figure from. Will he acknowledge that his party's UK Government reviewed the policies that were available to local authorities in England and Wales and considered that they are appropriate? Why does he want fundraising powers for local authorities in England, but not for those in Scotland?

Liam Kerr: Only one council has used the power. We are talking about what is right for Scotland. The significant point is the number of objections that have been raised—not the least of which is from the Scottish Police Federation, which suggests that the proposal could compromise not only public safety, but the safety of our brave police officers. I know that that will concern John Finnie. We must listen to those voices.

Perhaps uniquely, I completely associate myself with Colin Smyth's comments. His points were absolutely spot on—as were James Kelly's, to be fair—about commuters from outside cities paying, to no local benefit, under a fundamentally inequitable policy. That point was well made. Richard Yule seemed to miss out a bit of his speech, so I wonder whether he would like to intervene on me right now and restate his view that he will never vote for the policy. Would you care to do so, Mr Yule?

Richard Lyle: My name is not Richard Yule; it is Richard Lyle.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to conduct exchanges through the chair rather than across the chamber.

Liam Kerr: Mr Lyle seems to be reluctant to accept my invitation, so I will not push the point.

It is clear from this afternoon's debate, the committee's report and the many submissions that groups have sent to members in advance of the debate, that the bill is laudable. It includes many good principles, including a focus on the environment and support for bus services, which is not an issue that I have had time to summarise, although Mike Rumbles and Peter Chapman looked at it in detail and were highly persuasive.

I have my doubts about whether the bill goes far enough or is ambitious enough, but I confirm that we will support its general principles at stage 1, and I look forward to working collaboratively on a cross-party basis to drive improvements in Scotland's transport network.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Matheson to wind up the debate for the Government.

16:50

Michael Matheson: I welcome the contributions from across the chamber, in which members have touched on a range of issues in the bill. In his opening comments, Edward Mountain mentioned the limited amount of time that has been allocated to the debate, given the bill's complexity and the range of issues that it covers, and I have some sympathy with that point. So great is the range of topics that the bill covers, I had to canter through my opening speech in an effort to touch on as many of them as possible.

I want to pick up on some of the issues that have been raised. I take exception to Mr Greene's suggestion that, in some way, the bill is not an ambitious bill. I think that he got confused between the need for legislation and the need for a strategy to take forward legislative provisions. As I said at the outset of my opening speech, the bill is only one element of the wider range of measures that need to be taken to tackle a range of transport issues. The review of the national transport strategy will be critical to making sure that we achieve not only the benefits that can come from the bill but the goal of improving Scotland's transport infrastructure and transport services, which is a much more ambitious agenda. I am sure that Mr Greene will wait with bated breath to read the draft of the national transport strategy and that, when it is published, he will share it with

Mr Kerr, who also seems to have confused legislation and strategy.

A key issue is the provision of low-emission zones. It is clear that there is a need for us to take appropriate action to address pollution and poor air quality in our town centres, especially in our big cities. LEZs, which Edward Mountain, Jamie Greene, Mike Rumbles, John Finnie and Colin Smyth, among others, talked about, can assist us in doing that.

One issue that was raised was the need for a standardised approach to such zones. Edward Mountain correctly reflected what I said in my evidence to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, which I repeated in my response to the committee's stage 1 report. Our intention is to have consistency on how low-emission zones are applied. We want the truck, the bus or the car that is compliant in the Glasgow LEZ to also be compliant in the LEZs in Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We want a consistent approach to be taken to the standards that will be applied. We are setting out the relevant provisions in regulations to give us the flexibility to adapt those standards as things progress and we move on from Euro 6 and Euro 4 engines. That will mean that, as technology develops, we can amend the regulations instead of having to come back to the primary legislation. We will be able to adapt the standards much more quickly and flexibly through regulations as the new zones bed in and technology progresses.

Stewart Stevenson: The second pollutant on the list that is provided in the Government's "Cleaner Air for Scotland: The Road to A Healthier Future" is sulphur dioxide. The issue of vessels continuing to run their engines in harbours adjacent to populated areas is a real one, because that is the big source of sulphur dioxide. Will the cabinet secretary work with the UK Government to reduce the sulphur in marine fuels, which might help?

Michael Matheson: The member makes a good point. There are new and emerging technologies in the marine industry that could help to address that issue and we will continue to pursue the matter with the UK Government.

The issue of air quality was raised by Peter Chapman and John Finnie. The LEZs do not sit on their own in relation to improving air quality in our city centres. A key part of what we are seeking to do with LEZs is to help to introduce a range of other measures to prioritise public transport options. We only have to look at the approach that is being taken by Glasgow City Council, which introduced the first of its LEZs on 31 December 2018—hogmanay. The Glasgow connectivity commission is looking at a range of issues to see how it can improve transport connectivity in

greater Glasgow. A key part of that is improving bus provision.

Glasgow's approach is exactly the approach that LEZs will help to support and achieve elsewhere. It is about that wider and more holistic approach, looking at active travel options, other public transport options and bus prioritisation—all the measures that we know can assist us in improving air quality in our town centres and in improving the attractiveness of public transport and active travel options.

In places such as Glasgow, the average speed of a bus going through the city centre is in the region of 3mph. By providing greater public transport prioritisation in the town centre, the speed could double to 6mph. It would make journey times quicker and bus travel more attractive and the running cost for the bus industry would be lower as well. That is one of the measures that Glasgow is considering.

LEZs are important, but they are one of a range of elements. A number of members have raised issues in relation to the bus industry—in particular, the declining patronage. One of the errors that can be made in trying to tackle some of the challenges around the bus industry is to think that there is some magic wand that can reverse more than four decades of decline in bus patronage. We all know that the reasons for the decline in bus patronage are multifactorial. There is a range of issues that impact on bus patronage. The idea that there is a simple one-off, off-the-shelf solution that will address all the issues is wrong, because of the complexity of the issues. That is why it is important that the bill makes a range of different options available to local authorities so that they can develop an approach that best suits their local circumstances. For some, that may be franchising; for others, it may be a bus service improvement partnership or running their own services.

As I said when I was at committee, I hear the views of those who believe that there should be a provision to enable local authorities to run their own services as and when they like on a municipal basis, as in Lothian. I am not ideologically opposed to that. However, I will sound one note of caution—the suggestion that that is the answer to all our bus issues in Scotland is simply not true. We only have to look at municipal bus services in England to see that, in some cities, they do not work at all and the local authorities are looking to disinvest from the services because of the challenges. It is not simply about one model; it is how we make use of that model that is important, which is why we will give consideration to that.

Colin Smyth: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Finnie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Matheson: Mr Smyth was first in seeking to make an intervention so I will give way to him.

Colin Smyth: It is important to note that, during the debate, not a single member said that there was one panacea for the decline in bus patronage. However, why does the cabinet secretary think that banning councils from having the same model as Lothian is a way to improve bus services? Why does he stick to that point?

Michael Matheson: As I have said—and I will repeat it for the third time for the benefit of the member—I am open to giving consideration to that option. However, when members overplay a particular option, it suggests that they think there is a wand that they can wave that will resolve problems, which is just not true and does not reflect the complexity of the issues. No doubt the member will want to reflect on that.

I will draw my remarks to a close by saying something about parking. I heard the competing views in the chamber on the 20-minute exemption for unloading. It is important to recognise that people in the road haulage and delivery industries and business say that there must be some exemption to allow deliveries to take place, but I have also heard people say that there should be no exemptions whatever or that the exemption should be based not on time but on the amount of the pathway that can be made available.

There are also the concerns expressed by Sandra White who, as everyone in the chamber will want to recognise, has for many years now been pursuing, along with Ross Finnie and Joe FitzPatrick, the need to tackle pavement parking effectively. I will, of course, reflect on the views of and issues raised by the committee and members in the chamber. We are seeking to strike a balance that addresses the issue appropriately, but if there are ways in which we can address the concerns that have been expressed, we will certainly give them due consideration at stage 2.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That concludes this afternoon's debate.

Transport (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item is consideration of motion S5M-16393, on a financial resolution for the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Transport (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any charge or payment in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.—[*Derek Mackay*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S5M-16747, in the name of Michael Matheson, on stage 1 of the Transport (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next and final question is, that motion S5M-16393, in the name of Derek Mackay, on a financial resolution for the Transport (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Transport (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any charge or payment in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I remind members that I will be in touch at some point over the next week, but have a productive recess.

Meeting closed at 17:01.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for 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