



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

**Tuesday 8 March 2022**

**Session 6**



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**NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2022, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

\*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

\*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

\*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Michael Clark (Great British Railways Transition Team)

Tom Davy (Transport Scotland)

Jenny Gilruth (Minister for Transport)

Mick Hogg (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers)

Robert Samson (Transport Focus)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Peter McGrath

**LOCATION**

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)



## Scottish Parliament

### Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

*Tuesday 8 March 2022*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Dean Lockhart):** Good morning, and welcome to the eighth meeting in 2022 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. We are conducting this week's meeting in hybrid format.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Do members agree to take in private item 5, which is consideration of evidence on the transfer of ScotRail's operations, and item 6, which is consideration of the committee's work programme?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

### National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Order 2022 [Draft]

09:32

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is consideration of a piece of draft subordinate legislation. I welcome Jenny Gilruth, the Minister for Transport, and her officials: Heather Auld, solicitor, Scottish Government; and Tom Davy, head of bus strategy and concessions policy, and Debbie Walker, business and operations manager, Transport Scotland. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us.

As the instrument has been laid under the affirmative procedure, the Parliament must approve it before it comes into force. Following this evidence-taking session, the committee will be invited to consider a motion to approve the instrument.

I invite the minister to make a short opening statement.

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to discuss the draft order. The order sets the reimbursement rate and capped level of funding for the national bus travel concession scheme for older and disabled persons in 2022-23 as well as the reimbursement rate for the national bus travel concession scheme for young persons in the coming financial year. In doing so, it gives effect to an agreement that we reached back in December with the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which represents Scottish bus operators.

The order's objective is to enable operators to continue to be reimbursed for journeys that are made under both schemes after the expiry of the current reimbursement provisions on 31 March 2022. It specifies their reimbursement rates and the capped level of funding for the older and disabled persons scheme for the next financial year from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The order is therefore limited to the coming year.

Due to the on-going impact of Covid-19 on bus passenger numbers and the continuing uncertainty about the coming year, it has not been possible to undertake the usual analysis and forecasting that underpin the annual revision of the reimbursement rates and the cap for the older and disabled persons scheme. As a result, the funding cap and reimbursement rate for the scheme have been retained from the previous financial year, with the reimbursement rate in 2022-23 set at 55.9 per cent of the adult single fare and the funding capped at £226.1 million. Those figures are the

same as the corresponding figures for 2021-22. We think that, in practice, claims will be substantially less than the capped level, because of the continuing impact of the pandemic on patronage.

For the young persons scheme, the reimbursement rates have also been retained from 2021-22, at 43.6 per cent of the adult single fare for journeys made by passengers aged five to 15 and 81.2 per cent for journeys made by 16 to 21-year-olds. As in 2021-22, a budget cap is not being set for the young persons scheme in 2022-23. We believe that the rates are consistent with the aim set out in the legislation establishing both schemes that bus operators should be no better and no worse off as a result of participating in them. The rates will also provide a welcome degree of stability for bus operators.

As we know, free bus travel enables people to access local services and gain from the health benefits of a more active lifestyle, and it will also help strengthen our response to the climate emergency and support our green recovery by embedding sustainable travel habits in young people. The order provides for those benefits to continue for another year on a basis that is fair to operators and affordable to taxpayers.

I commend the order to the committee, and I am happy to answer any questions that members might have.

**The Convener:** Thank you, minister. Liam Kerr will ask the first question.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Thank you for bringing the instrument to the committee, minister, but I just want to clarify something with you. Yesterday, BBC North East Scotland reported that, in a debate on Aberdeen City Council's budget, the Scottish National Party group proposed the removal of, I think, £180,000 from the under-22s free bus travel fund to spend on other things. I had not appreciated that it was possible to move that funding elsewhere. As far as you are aware, is that possible and, if so, was that really intended when the scheme was introduced?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am not sighted on the detail of the specific example that Mr Kerr has highlighted, and I do not know whether officials know any more about it. However, we are happy to come back to him on the specifics. As Mr Kerr will be aware, this is a national scheme, but I do not want to say too much, as I am not aware of the news article or the debate that he cited with regard to Aberdeen City Council. As I have said, I am more than happy to write to him about the specific details of the scheme.

Do you want to come in on that, Tom?

**Tom Davy (Transport Scotland):** I am not familiar with the incident that Mr Kerr has highlighted, either, but I can say that, under the scheme, we are obligated to pay operators the rates that are set out in the order for passengers who are carried under it. That is the case, regardless of budget. No matter how many people operators carry next financial year under the young persons scheme, we are obligated to pay the percentage rates that are set out in the order. In that sense, we have a fixed statutory obligation to make payments, and it cannot be changed without changing the scheme itself.

A separate question is how much we expect that to amount to in budgetary terms over the next year. That is a slightly different matter, but it does not affect the scheme and what we are obliged to do under it.

**Liam Kerr:** I would be grateful if you would come back to me on that, minister. It seems to have been as much of a surprise to you as it was to me.

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am happy to do so.

**The Convener:** As members have no more questions, we move to item 3, which is formal consideration of motion S6M-02903. Only the minister and members may speak in this debate—to the extent that there is one—and I invite the minister to speak to and/or simply move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommends that the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.—[*Jenny Gilruth*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Convener:** The committee will report on the outcome of the instrument in due course. Do members agree to delegate to me, as convener, authority to approve a draft of the report for publication?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I thank the minister and her officials for coming. I briefly suspend the meeting for a changeover of witnesses.

09:39

*Meeting suspended.*

09:44

*On resuming—*

## Transfer of Operation of ScotRail

**The Convener:** Our next item is an evidence session on the transfer of ScotRail's operations. In March 2021, the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, announced his decision not to extend the franchise arrangements for the operation of ScotRail. Instead, it was announced that ScotRail would be run by an arm's-length company that would be set up by the Scottish Government. On 8 February, the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, confirmed that the transfer will go ahead on 1 April.

The committee has agreed to hear from stakeholders ahead of the transfer of operations on 1 April. At our meeting next week, we will hear from the Minister for Transport.

This morning, I am pleased to welcome Robert Samson, senior stakeholder manager at Transport Focus; Mick Hogg, regional organiser at the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—the RMT; and Michael Clark, programme director for strategy and transformation at the Great British Railways Transition Team.

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for accepting our invitation. It is good to see you. We have just over an hour for this evidence session and we will move straight to questions. The first question is from me. I ask each of you what service improvements you would like to see as a result of the impending reorganisation and what concerns you might have that the number of services that will be run under the new entity might decline. I ask you to respond in the following order: Mick Hogg, Robert Samson and then Michael Clark.

Mick, it is over to you. *[Interruption.]* I think that Mick's connection has dropped off. Robert, that brings you up the pecking order for answering—

**Mick Hogg (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers):** I am back, convener.

**The Convener:** Welcome back, Mick. Can you hear me okay?

**Mick Hogg:** Yes, I can.

**The Convener:** Did you hear my question?

**Mick Hogg:** Will you ask it again, please, if you do not mind?

**The Convener:** Absolutely. I asked each of you what service improvements you would like to see as a result of the impending reorganisation and what concerns you might have that the number of

services that will be run under the new entity might decline.

**Mick Hogg:** Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. My main concern is industrial relations with the new operator taking over. As MSPs will be well aware, 2020 and 2021 in particular saw a number of industrial disputes in Abellio ScotRail. That was primarily down to its intransigence in not being prepared to negotiate. The way that some of my members were being treated in ScotRail was unacceptable, hence the reason for the two disputes on pay and the rest day working agreement.

What I would like to see going forward under Scottish Rail Holdings is an improvement in our industrial relations and no repeat of the debacle that we had in 2020 and 2021. I take this opportunity to say that the discussions that we have had so far with the new Minister for Transport have been very positive, and I look forward to more constructive and positive dialogue with the Scottish Government and Scottish Rail Holdings.

We do not see a necessity for cuts to services. We want an increase in services. If we are serious about the green agenda, we must ensure that services are maintained. If there is a serious commitment to get people to stop using their cars and start using trains, we need to ensure that train services are available, and particularly that they are affordable for people. The proposal to cut train services needs to be reversed, as far as the RMT is concerned.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that. Before the meeting, we received the RMT policy submission document, so thank you for that, too.

I put the same question to Robert Samson.

**Robert Samson (Transport Focus):** Back in July 2020, we published "Rail passengers' priorities for improvement", and we believe that ScotRail should focus on that. We covered priorities across Great Britain, including in Scotland, and the top priorities that we would want to be addressed relate to the main passenger concerns:

"Reliability and punctuality ... Price of train tickets offers better value for money ... Passengers able to get a seat on the train ... Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel ... Train company keeps passengers informed about delays",

as well as maintaining clean trains, wi-fi connections and other issues, based on the passenger priorities, which are available on our website. I will not read out the whole list, but it covers about the top 20 priorities for passengers in Scotland, where they wish to see improvement.

We recognise that the May 2022 timetable will mark a reduction in services, from about 2,400 down to 2,150 trains a day. That goes against passengers wanting an improved frequency of trains. We asked ScotRail to make the “Fit for the Future” consultation on the May 2022 timetable a public consultation, as there are many local concerns across the length and breadth of Scotland about the timetable proposals. That must be viewed in the context of about 60 per cent of passengers travelling just now, compared with before Covid. We hope that the May 2022 timetable is a starting point and that subsequent iterations will have more services added as people return to rail.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much, Robert. I am sure that other members will want to follow up, as you mentioned a number of issues there.

I put the same question to you, Michael Clark. Let me know if you are in a position to address the question. You might have some views on it, as a representative of the Great British Railways Transition Team. I am happy to be guided by you.

**Michael Clark (Great British Railways Transition Team):** Thank you for the invitation to speak to the committee. As I was going to set out, I do not have any formal locus on the question, which remains one for Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government. Just to be clear, when I am speaking I might be talking about the experience that we are thinking through in the Great British Railways Transition Team, if it is of use to the committee to consider that more widely in the context of what Scotland is doing, but I cannot speak on ScotRail.

That said, I will pick up on some of Robert Samson’s comments. We are thinking through similar issues. On services, demand, recovery from Covid and the impact of that on the railway, passenger demand, freight availability and finances, there are similar issues in all the nations of the United Kingdom. The question that I would ask is: what is best for the passengers in recovering demand? It is a question of modal shift and getting people back on to the railway. That might mean more services or the same level of services, but I would consider what passengers want and what the funder—the Scottish Government, in this case—is willing to pay for that.

In the Great British Railways Transition Team, we are thinking about how we set up the railways to run as a commercial interest, or as a commercial business in the public interest, as we often put it. If you were considering it as a commercial interest, you would be trying to match services better to demand. One problem that the Williams-Shapps review found was that the railway was quite inflexible and did not react to passenger

demand, either by increasing or decreasing services, and that builds costs into the system.

Where I think Robert Samson was going, and where I would certainly go, is to ask whether there are better ways to tempt customers back on to the railway, using the money that is there. In comparison with February 2019, I think that we are at 72 per cent of revenue for rail journeys that start and/or finish in Scotland, but only 59 per cent of revenue for journeys wholly within Scotland. That matches patterns across the UK. Commuters have not come back as leisure travel has done, and business travel is quite flat. How do we address those trends? Is it through ticketing, passenger assistance apps, marketing campaigns or better information for end-to-end journeys? I would consider the whole question rather than concentrate on services.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much, Michael. It is useful to get that perspective. What impact will the introduction of Great British Railways have on ScotRail’s operations? Will there be increasing integration of services between the two operators? What is your expectation of those two parallel reorganisations, and what is the end goal?

**Michael Clark:** I will not get ahead of myself. The Scottish Government and the Government at Westminster are still discussing at the highest level how best to implement their mutual rail agendas. However, I think that the thrust of objectives from both Governments is a better integrated railway and a more seamless passenger experience. There seems to be a commonality of objective overall to have a more efficient, better customer-focused and increasingly green and decarbonised railway. That is a great place to start.

Through work on our whole-industry strategic plan, we are trying to set up a planning process for the next 30 years that can speak to both Governments’ strategic objectives and enable the whole railway and all the people who operate it, particularly those who run across borders, to plan in a way that serves all their customers.

I am pleased to have been invited to the committee, because we are looking at a lot of what is and has been going on in Scotland to see how we might replicate and learn lessons from it. The integration of track and train that will occur within the new ScotRail construct is particularly interesting to us. We are interested in how you create that capability and what advantages and disadvantages it has compared to the old alliancing systems. It is similar to a model that we are trying to replicate elsewhere across the railways.

We are aligned on strategic planning at the top level and on the integration of track and train at a



principle level. We are also looking to consider whether we can establish a freight growth target across England and Wales in a similar way to what Scotland has done to maximise that bounce-back and learn from the decarbonisation that Scotland's railways have driven forward.

I am optimistic that, at a high principle and strategic level, there is a commonality of views with which we can work to get a productive railway.

**The Convener:** Mick Hogg and Robert Samson, what assurances would you like on jobs, infrastructure improvement and the cost of rail travel? What concerns do you have about those?

**Mick Hogg:** We need to focus on getting more jobs in our railway. That is an absolute priority because, since the pandemic, our annual intake of staff at the academy within ScotRail's Atrium Court offices has been put on pause, so there has been no recruitment into our railway. The demographics in ScotRail are pretty high. The average age of a ScotRail employee is high—in the 50s—so we need to start investing in new blood.

We would also like something to be done on apprenticeships. Under the existing agreement, there were to be 100 apprenticeships over the lifetime of the franchise. As a result of the break clause being used, we are at a figure of 70 apprenticeships. I am not sure whether any apprentices were recruited at the height of the pandemic, but, under Scottish Rail Holdings, the RMT will advocate for more apprenticeships, so that we can invest in the future of Scotland's trains. That means increasing apprenticeships significantly.

I understand that the fares have gone up by 3.8 per cent. The trade unions do not see that fare increase as being necessary. We suggest that fares need to be affordable. If Transport Scotland, ScotRail and the Scottish Government were serious about attracting passengers back to the railway, the right way forward would be to have a fares freeze. Throughout the height of the pandemic, the First Minister advised people not to use public transport, including trains. We need to convince the people of Scotland that Scotland's trains are safe, affordable and clean. When we start doing that, we will start seeing passengers return to Scotland's railway.

10:00

**Robert Samson:** We recently conducted a consultation on ScotRail's ticket office opening hours, and it showed that passengers value a visible staff presence. We hope that, in the future, there will be a visible staff presence to assist passengers at all times. We published a report today about the West Midlands and the

experience of women and girls on public transport. One of the findings in the report is the need for a visible staff presence to give people reassurance when using the rail network. Having a visible, helpful staff presence—and sufficient jobs to enable that to be delivered—is a high priority for passengers.

We are looking forward to the Scottish Government's fair fares review to see what mechanisms are proposed for the longer term. Value for money always comes out very high—top or second—in passengers' concerns. It is not just the level of fares, but all aspects of the journey that you are paying for: reliability, punctuality, comfort and so on. Affordability is a very big issue.

As was said earlier, products such as flexible season tickets could encourage people back on to rail, now that some commuters are, to a certain extent, making use of a hybrid model and working from home and the office. Looking at ticketing initiatives to attract people back on to the rail network would help to meet the Government's objective of more people using public transport and rail as we decarbonise the transport system.

**The Convener:** Those replies were very helpful, and I am sure that members will want to follow that up.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** This is an opportunity to look at the future of rail in Scotland. I will start with Michael Clark. Network Rail will be subsumed into Great British Railways. Is it your understanding that Scottish ministers will retain a role in specifying and funding rail infrastructure outputs in Scotland? Those have been very successful in recent years, not least the Bathgate-Airdrie line in my constituency. If so, what will that look like under the current periodic review system? Or do you anticipate there being a different system? Will that control remain? If it does, what will the relationship look like? Can you comment on any discussions that you are already having with colleagues in Transport Scotland and other rail authorities?

**Michael Clark:** There is no intention to change the nature of the current relationship of funding and specification from the Scottish Government. It was quite a clear line in the Williams-Shapps plan for rail that that would be maintained. That is positive. As you said, it has delivered some very successful results and the clear ability for Scotland to specify what it would like out of its railway. We intend to maintain and honour that.

We have been speaking to many people, although not to a great degree at the moment. We are a technical, arm's-length body. We are waiting for the Scottish Government and the Westminster Government to conclude negotiations on how they would like to implement the proposals across the

nations of the UK. We will then work to implement that with Transport Scotland, ScotRail and the other authorities. As you would expect, we are in contact with people such as Bill Reeve, Alex Hynes and Chris Gibb, who are building the new ScotRail.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Do Robert Samson and Mick Hogg have any views about Great British Railways—I am conscious that Michael Clark is in the meeting—and what it might mean for Scotland?

**Robert Samson:** Back in 2018, when the Williams review was kicking off, we held a series of focus groups across Great Britain, including in Glasgow, about what passengers actually wanted out of the new structures, because they can look quite complicated to a passenger who just wants to make a journey.

When we delved into it, what they wanted was accountability and transparency about who is running the trains and about infrastructure projects. They also wanted simplicity; they wanted it to be clearly explained why new lines are being built, and why they are being delayed in some instances. The aim is to deliver accountability, transparency, and simplicity for passengers so that they can easily understand what the system will look like in future.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Mick, do you have any comments about Great British Railways and the future?

**Mick Hogg:** The RMT is concerned about what is being proposed in relation to Great British Railways. It has a cuts agenda written all over it as a result of using the pandemic to see a recovery of the railway. If that is the case, the RMT will fight the proposals every step of the way.

I make no apologies for making those comments, because I do not see how rail workers can be deemed to be key, essential workers who kept the economy ticking over during the height of the pandemic while, at the same time, it is being suggested that Great British Railways will mean job cuts and less investment in the railway.

We take the reverse view. We see the railway's recovery as meaning more jobs, more investment in our railway and an improvement in industrial relations. We are quite clear that we want to work with the Government to achieve a sustainable, workable, safe and affordable railway.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Thank you. I will stay with Mick Hogg for my second question, which is about the decarbonisation of ScotRail's services. Scottish ministers aim to fully decarbonise ScotRail's services by 2035, which will require a significant programme of electrification and the use of battery-powered or hydrogen-powered rolling

stock. Is that target realistic? What needs to happen for that target to be met? How much confidence do those who operate the service have in the new systems, and what involvement do you want in ensuring that we can move to decarbonisation in a safe and responsible way?

**Mick Hogg:** We would welcome any change that means that we have a greener railway, particularly if it means that we see more people ditching their cars and using public transport. That would be welcomed.

However, we need to ensure that there is a just transition in order to get to that target and that it does not mean that there are fewer jobs on the railway. The trade unions will do whatever we need to do to protect jobs and terms and conditions. The RMT will certainly focus on ensuring that jobs are protected.

Can you remind me what the other part of your question was?

**Fiona Hyslop:** It was about the operation of new stock—whether it is battery powered or whether we will see further technology changes and a move to hydrogen. What are the railway workforce's expectations of that?

**Mick Hogg:** We would welcome that as long as it did not reduce the number of personnel on trains. A big issue on Scotland's trains is an increase in antisocial behaviour and the number of assaults on staff and passengers. The Strathclyde manning agreement is an existing agreement on Scotland's trains that goes back 35 or 36 years. What it means, in layman's terms, is that there should be a second person on every train. That person need not be a guard, because the second person is not safety critical, but we need to ensure that there is a second person on every train in Scotland. When any new technology is introduced, we need to ensure that there is a staff presence on trains and at stations so that people feel safe on Scotland's trains and so that those trains are clean, safe and affordable to use.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I come to Michael Clark next. You referred to Scotland's experience of decarbonisation. Do you think that the 2035 target is realistic? I went on the hydrogen train at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—which, obviously, did not operate on hydrogen when it travelled. There are ambitions there, but there is also quite an expense. What is realistic? Is the target achievable by 2035?

**Michael Clark:** Again, I will have to put a bit of a caveat up front in that I have not specifically examined the Scottish target and the attempts to achieve it.

You highlighted a couple of interesting points in your questions. Similarly to Mick Hogg, I use the word “sustainable”. One of the priorities of the transition team is sustainability, which we read as financial and environmental. The best thing that we can do in the near term, as others have alluded, is get people back on the railways. One of the greenest measures that we can take at the moment is making the railway a more attractive mode of transport and stopping people using cars. There is an integrated transport aspect to that that we are very keen to promote. That would fit with Transport Scotland’s agenda for the railways, from what I know of it.

What I am leading up to is that having a target is a good thing. It concentrates the mind and people can work towards it. The 2035 target is ambitious, as targets should be, but I would be evaluating that against the funds available. I would think about what would be the most value-for-money way of achieving the greatest decarbonisation across the transport system. With new technologies, I would particularly be thinking about how proven they are, how likely they are to come through on time—I would have a rigorous programme around checking that and the costs around that—and how deployable they are, potentially, at scale. If I recall rightly, a recent Network Rail traction study identified about 9 per cent of the UK rail network where hydrogen was likely to be deployable. I would be trying to triangulate all of those things to see if hydrogen was achievable from a value-for-money and environmental impact perspective.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Robert, do you have any views on that? On value for money, although trying to get people back on to the railways is a way to decarbonise, in terms of less use of cars, there is a need for expenditure, perhaps more on capital, on hydrogen or, indeed, more electrification. On the value-for-money issue, is there a competition between those two things, or do we need to do both to achieve our net zero targets?

**Robert Samson:** I think that we need to do both to reach the net zero targets. It could attract passengers and non-users on to the rail network if they were coming on to a totally green—a net zero—rail network. A rolling programme of electrification has been on-going for several years. That should be achievable by 2035.

10:15

As Michael Clark alluded, the difficulty comes from the roll-out of new technology for hydrogen and battery-operated trains. We are looking at the introduction of those new technologies in some of our rural lines, such as the line in the far north or the Stranraer line. Key to all of that is how far those technologies develop to become deliverable

and affordable by 2035. The rolling programme of electrification should be deliverable by 2035.

**The Convener:** Liam Kerr and Mark Ruskell have supplementary questions.

**Liam Kerr:** Robert Samson, you said clearly that electrification should be achievable by 2035. The rail decarbonisation plan to 2035 is not costed. Despite having been published in July 2020, it says that

“that analysis has yet to be undertaken”.

Has enough work been done to assess what must be done to achieve electrification, such as dealing with bridges or lowering track where necessary? Given that the document was published in July 2020, is there any evidence that the lack of costing is being addressed or planned for?

**Robert Samson:** We are not heavily involved in the process just now, but we hope that Network Rail is looking at that as part of its control period 7 outputs and its strategic business planning. We also hope that the strategic transport projects review 2 will take forward some of those issues.

You rightly point out that the work must be fully costed. The electrification programme has been going for many years. We want that to continue because passengers see the benefit of the introduction of new electric trains. The class 385s perform better and have improved punctuality and reliability. That is to the benefit of passengers, which is the top priority on the railway. The programme needs to be costed, but the programme has been delivering, and we want that continue.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I work with a number of communities that are building up business cases for line reinstatements or bringing back stations on existing lines. They have been successful in getting money from the local rail development fund to do that. Those communities are concerned about the escalating costs of reopening railways and of capital projects on the rail network.

Michael Clark, why have we seen cost estimates, particularly for station reopening, double in recent years? I do not see where the additional costs are coming from.

**Michael Clark:** I am probably not the best person to answer that question. I do not have great oversight of the partners in Network Rail on the capital side of the business that have been building infrastructure.

I am aware of the Williams-Schapps work on project SPEED—swift, pragmatic, efficient enhancement delivery—which looks to halve the time and cut the costs of capital infrastructure projects. I do not want to use the term “gold

plating”, because that sounds rather pejorative, but we have found that the processes have become quite contractualised and ossified, and they are not very lean. Project SPEED has shown quite successfully that if you get the relevant parties—us, Network Rail, the Office of Rail and Road, the rail operators and interested local communities—together and sit them down, you can cut through quite a lot of that. If you involve local contractors, rather than a succession of subcontractors, there are ways to do it. In the current system, it takes a bit of concentration and the will to do it, but the temporary integration under ScotRail might help in looking at that along with local communities. That is my uninformed view.

**Mark Ruskell:** Does Mick Hogg, or anyone else, have views on that?

**Robert Samson:** I will come in quickly. Local communities want stations to be opened or reopened, and new lines built or lines reopened. The cost is quite high, but surely local communities, MSPs and regional transport partnerships are able to sit down with Network Rail, ScotRail and Transport Scotland to work out what is in the best interests of passengers and how we can deliver new railway stations in a way that is affordable and meets the needs of communities. As I said about the Williams review, passengers want accountability, transparency and simplicity. If we are transparent in delivering that, that should, I hope, aid the reopening of stations and new lines. It comes down to accountability, transparency and a simplified structure, which I hope will deliver all of that.

**Mick Hogg:** We have 349 stations on Scotland's railway, of which 143 are staffed. That leaves 206 unstaffed stations. From a trade union perspective, we would like every station to be staffed, because antisocial behaviour is on the increase and is getting out of control. We receive daily reports of our staff being verbally abused, if not assaulted, and of passengers being assaulted.

On ScotRail ticket offices, we certainly believe that the narrow focus of the ticketing and settlement agreement consultation did not give an opportunity for passengers' wider concerns on staffing to be raised. The ticketing and settlement agreement process is set by Westminster and allows Transport Focus to object on narrow criteria that are based only on ticket sales. As we all know, a booking office provides staff at stations and offers security and reassurance to many, including women, vulnerable groups and disabled groups. That is an important factor to take into account.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** For transparency, I declare an interest as a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport

Workers parliamentary group and of Unite the union.

Good morning, panel. My first question is probably best aimed at Mick Hogg. I was pleased to hear him say that early discussions between the RMT and the new Minister for Transport have been positive—that is encouraging. I am aware that the current ScotRail franchise has a no compulsory redundancy commitment, which is for all ScotRail staff. However, I understand that the Scottish Government has so far not agreed to continue that commitment under a publicly owned ScotRail. Will you give an update on that and set out the importance of a no compulsory redundancy policy?

**Mick Hogg:** That is a big focus of the RMT and my trade union colleagues who are involved in Scotland's railway. We have a no compulsory redundancy agreement. The ironic thing is that, under privatisation—under National Express, FirstGroup and Abellio—ScotRail had a no compulsory redundancy agreement, yet, under nationalisation from 1 April 2022, we still do not have clarification of a no compulsory redundancy agreement or confirmation that it will be extended. Last week, I had a discussion with the transport secretary and I raised that very question. The transport secretary's swift and quick response was, “Mick, who's saying that you're no gonnæ get an extension to your no compulsory redundancy agreement?” I am going to hold the transport secretary's feet to the fire on that question, because it is very important for my members.

We want some stability in the railway, particularly with Scottish Rail Holdings taking over the railway from 1 April 2022. I am encouraged by the discussions that I have had so far, but this very important question must be addressed to give the reassurance and stability that we need as we move forward.

**Monica Lennon:** Thank you for that, Mick. I think that we all want to see improving industrial relations.

The deputy convener has talked about the importance of looking to the future. I am not sure whether Mick Hogg can still hear us, because his screen has frozen. I will keep going unless I am told otherwise.

**Mick Hogg:** I can hear you.

**Monica Lennon:** That is good. Thinking about the deputy convener's important point about the future, I know that Scotland's four rail unions—the RMT, Unite, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association—have published the report, “A Vision for Scotland's Railways”. I am interested in hearing what the other panel

members think of that report, but first of all, will Mick Hogg clarify whether trade union representatives will sit on the new publicly owned ScotRail? Has that been confirmed?

**Mick Hogg:** I asked that very question as a result of the discussions on transfers under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, and we have put forward a proposal for our prospective nominee based on a consensus of opinion among the four rail unions. That position is being given due consideration by Scottish Rail Holdings, which is actually welcoming non-executive participation on the board. We will continue to raise the question, because we see the benefits of having a voice on the board to represent the four unions.

**Monica Lennon:** Does Robert Samson or Michael Clark have any views on the vision for Scotland's railways? After all, there are a lot of recommendations in the document.

**Robert Samson:** The document contains a number of recommendations, and we obviously welcome those that chime with passengers' needs, such as having a visible staff presence at stations and on board trains. That is the main one as far as passengers are concerned.

The establishment of ScotRail Trains Ltd also gives us an opportunity to strengthen the user's voice along with that of the trade union. ScotRail currently has a stakeholder advisory panel, but that could be strengthened and made into a challenge panel. A number of organisations, including Scottish Water, have established their own independent customer challenge panels to keep their customers at the heart of business planning and delivery. As part of the price control process, Ofgem established a customer engagement group with the responsibility of challenging a provider's overall performance. It is not so much about micromanaging, but there is an opportunity to have a challenge panel with the voices of users and trade unions. After all, ScotRail will be a monopoly provider, and it is important to get a user voice as well as trade union voice in at the very beginning. A challenge panel is one way of doing that, and such an approach has worked in regulated markets such as water and energy.

**Monica Lennon:** That was really helpful. Do you have anything to add, Michael?

**Michael Clark:** I have not read the document that you mentioned, so I cannot speak to it, but I think that it is excellent that such a vision has come forward. A lot of change is happening on the railway—and it needs it. I worked with Keith Williams on the Williams review, and it was clear that the railway was not working for passengers and funders in many aspects. Covid then created

a burning platform with regard to finances and demand. As a result, a lot of change is required from everyone, and key to that is ensuring that the people who staff and do the day-to-day work on the railways are at the centre of and embrace that change.

As someone said earlier, Network Rail is being absorbed and changed, ScotRail is being taken into the operator of last resort, and changes are being made to franchises in England and Wales. We cannot avoid thinking about how those changes affect staff or the changes that will be required of staff.

10:30

Earlier, Mick touched on a point that is worth highlighting again, which is about the real need to increase the diversity of the railways workforce. On international women's day, we should recognise that the railway is poor at diversifying its workforce. We could link that to other debates. The excitement about new technologies and the cutting edge of decarbonisation should inspire new and different people to come forward to the railway, which would help with the diversity aspect

We also need to look at customer focus, as well as skills and training, I am perfectly neutral about levels and numbers of workers. Mick Hogg will know better that Williams-Schapps involved thinking about whether the rest of the system had the right skills, and whether it was incentivised through the contractual processes in the right way. I cannot speak to that, but I imagine that ScotRail will want to work with the unions to confirm that type of thing. That speaks to other issues such as how we get the best ticketing and modernising retailers, with staff supporting them in the way that customers and passengers want. I also support Robert Samson's point about the user voice.

**Monica Lennon:** Thank you, Michael, and thank you for acknowledging that today is international women's day. I have a very brief question on that. Robert Samson has already touched on the point about women's safety. We heard from Mick Hogg about how many stations are unstaffed and that there are concerns about the safety of the workforce. This is a bit of a hot topic at the moment and the Government wants to have a national conversation about it, so are there any lessons that we can learn from international best practice? I would be interested to hear whether you have any knowledge on that. I will go to Michael Clark and then Robert Samson.

**Michael Clark:** I do not know about international best practice, but it is an incredibly important issue. If we cannot ensure the safety and security of passengers on the railway, we will not have passengers on the railway. That seems

to be a basic hygiene factor, and we will need to work hard to make sure that it is at a very high level. The transition team does not yet have a locus in that yet, but we are slowly building it in. We have been talking to the British Transport Police, and I know that the chief constable rightly prioritises the safety of women and girls on the railway, as you would expect. We are listening to their ideas and we are talking to them about how our work might promote that in due course when we have more responsibility for the matter.

**Monica Lennon:** Robert and Mick, do you have anything to add?

**Robert Samson:** I do not have anything to add on the point about international best practice. As I said earlier, today, we published our report on the experience of women and girls on public transport. I have still to read that in depth, but one of the things that stood out to me is that we found that 85 per cent of women and girls think about their safety when they are planning or making a journey. The mitigations that they put in place include travelling at particular times of day, using specific routes, avoiding certain types of transport, and travelling with others. It is quite alarming to hear that 85 per cent of women and girls think about their safety in advance when making or planning a journey. There is obviously work to be done in that area to make significant improvements.

**Monica Lennon:** The last word goes to you, Mick.

**Mick Hogg:** The new minister announced a national conversation about the future of ScotRail and a consultation on women's safety and public transport. The RMT believes that the cuts, which are wrong, will lead to worse passenger safety, security and accessibility. As the Transport Focus response said:

"this conversation should include ScotRail listening to the concerns expressed by passengers and stakeholders replying to this consultation."

If you look at the feedback from Transport Focus, and bear in mind the fact that there were 1,550 responses, 1 per cent of them were in favour of the cuts. That clearly demonstrates that 99 per cent were opposed to them.

The RMT would like to see a total reversal of the proposed cuts. Ticket office opening hours are to be reduced by 3,200 hours. Only 133 hours are proposed to be reinstated, and we do not believe that that is anywhere near enough. We can see disaster for Scotland's railway written all over the proposals, in relation to antisocial behaviour.

Please believe me when I say that antisocial behaviour, which I keep mentioning, is on the increase. Passengers and staff members are continually being assaulted, which is a real

concern for us, because the British Transport Police cannot be on every train. There are not enough officers to staff Scotland's trains. I have said before, and I say again, that I find it bizarre that we can ban people who are found guilty of antisocial behaviour from our football grounds and shopping centres, but we cannot ban the same people from using Scotland's trains. I find that staggering.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Good morning, panel. During the pandemic, we saw a huge change to the way that folk travelled—if, indeed, they did travel, because a lot of folk started working from home. As we emerge from the pandemic, what should the rail industry do to adapt to that change? We are hearing that some people will continue to do home working.

**Michael Clark:** That is a very good question. The pandemic has blown out of the water people's assumptions that there would always be a baseline demand on parts of the railway. We are now considering that virtually all rail travel—the vast majority of it—can be discretionary. That places a different emphasis on how we approach it, because we need to treat people much more as customers who have a choice of different transport modes, rather than as passengers who have little choice as they need to get to and from work.

We still see reliability and punctuality as core passenger requirements, and the basic hygiene requirement for clean and safe trains that Mick Hogg mentioned will not change. However, we are now trying to gain a much more targeted understanding of the market at even a town-to-town or city-to-city level. Who is travelling, at what time and for what purpose? What do they need from their ticket? Do they need flexibility? Do they need it to be digital? Do they need end-to-end ticketing so that they can connect?

We need to modernise the offer for the rail passenger in the way that other transport modes have already had to do because they have had to attract people to use them. We are thinking a lot more in that regard. We have a revenue team that is working really hard to analyse the flows, and a customer team that is working really hard on what the customer proposition looks like for a modern railway that we have to tempt passengers back on to, because we cannot take customers for granted.

This might also be an opportunity for the railway, because large parts of it had high peak demand, which drove costs and the rolling stock and made it more difficult to do infrastructure maintenance and renewal. We might now be able to spread the demand out and plan those things better, making the railway more efficient and ensuring that customers' journeys are not interrupted in that way.

The other thing that I will mention—again—is the need to integrate and look across transport modes in order to help customers. Rail can only go from station to station. I know that Scotland has a very promising active travel impetus, as does the Westminster Government, so we are thinking about how we link up stations as the gateway to the railway. We need to consider how we enable customers to get there in green ways and help them to map out their journeys by increasing the availability of data for them, as Transport for London has successfully done.

**Mick Hogg:** We should not have increased fares by 3.8 per cent. As I said earlier, if Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government and ScotRail were serious about attracting passengers back after the pandemic, the thing not to do was increase fares. We need to send the right signal to passengers that Scotland's railway is affordable, secure, clean and safe to use. We must bear in mind the fact that only 50 per cent of pre-pandemic passengers use our railway, which means that 50 per cent continue not to do so. If we were really serious about sending the right message, we should have ditched the plans to increase fares. It was the wrong decision, as were the First Minister's comments at the height of the pandemic.

It is ironic that we talk about encouraging people to use Scotland's railway, but ScotRail decided to go ahead with the consultation on ticket offices in January 2022 when it knew, as did Transport Scotland, that only 50 per cent of pre-pandemic passengers were using the railway. The trade unions saw that as a deliberate ploy to get the cuts agenda in through the back door, which was not helpful in terms of having an alleged national conversation on Scotland's railway.

**Robert Samson:** We have to think about fares and ticketing initiatives to attract people back, now that the way that they work and live has changed. We also have to consider the fact that we have peak fares in the morning and afternoon but the recovery is leisure based. Should there be peak travel or should it be the same fare throughout the day as people's travelling patterns change?

We should also think about engineering works. More people now travel for leisure at the weekend, so should we continually close some sections of the railway at the weekend to undertake engineering works or should it be done at different times during the week, when fewer people are travelling?

To a certain extent, all those questions are up in the air as passengers return. However, for two years now, we have been surveying 2,000 people about how they have been travelling through Covid. Consistently, about one third of them say that they will never again feel completely

comfortable on public transport. That is quite a worrying statistic. We need to find ways of encouraging them back and reassuring them about the safety measures, cleanliness and ventilation on trains until those fears go away.

It is not just about fares and ticketing initiatives. We need to look at other hygiene factors to encourage people back on to the rail network. That has come through in our surveys on travel during Covid.

**Jackie Dunbar:** You mentioned that one third of people say that they will never again feel comfortable on public transport. Apart from what you mentioned, is there anything else that might help people to feel more comfortable?

**Robert Samson:** Yes. It is about reassurance, having room on the train and having sufficient services at the time that people want to use them. It is a whole matrix that involves not just fares and ticketing but reassurance that the railway has reopened for business, as well as comfortable new trains and a visible staff presence. It also involves not only buying tickets from the ticket office but having digital provision and thinking about the way that people want to buy tickets in the future.

There are a whole range of mechanisms to make people feel safe on the rail network. I can send you further details on that. We have produced a report on five or 10 measures to make people safe, but I do not have it at my fingertips just now.

10:45

**Jackie Dunbar:** It would be extremely helpful if you could provide us with a copy of that.

The Scottish Government has set out ambitious plans for developing the Scottish rail network, including the creation of a Glasgow metro rail system. What are your views on them? Are they deliverable? Perhaps I can start with Michael Clark.

**Michael Clark:** I am sorry for smiling, but I was just thinking that I should not be tempted to comment on what the Scottish Government plans to fund. I hope that you will not consider me rude when I say that I do not think that that is within my purview.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Do you have anything to say, Robert?

**Robert Samson:** We will be responding to the consultation on STPR 2, but we fully welcome the plans for Glasgow metro and the link with light rail and the rail network as a whole. It will be one part of the jigsaw if we are to meet our net zero targets in the longer term.

**Jackie Dunbar:** That is all that I have to ask, convener.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much, Jackie. Liam Kerr has a quick supplementary on this area.

**Liam Kerr:** A very quick one, convener—if I may.

STPR2, which Robert Samson mentioned, is undeniably important, but it does not even mention re-laying the lines to Aberdeen from Peterhead and Fraserburgh. As a result, they will remain the farthest places on the mainland from a station, with driving the only option for people. That seems to fly in the face of all our ambitions in that respect. In your view, should the decision to exclude all consideration of the lines from Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen be reviewed, with a feasibility study ordered at the very least?

**Robert Samson:** I think that that brings us back to Mark Ruskell's earlier question about what local communities actually want and how such proposals are funded and delivered. Those proposals should not be excluded from the wider net zero debate; instead, we should see whether they are deliverable and feasible and make a difference to people's travelling behaviours.

**Liam Kerr:** I strongly agree.

**Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** Hello, panel. The committee has heard calls for better integration of walking, cycling and bus and rail services, including smart ticketing. Just last week, Scotland's Climate Assembly told the committee that it wanted a much more integrated and joined-up way of travelling and a mechanism for making public transport cheaper, particularly for low-income families. How can that best be achieved? Are the Scottish and UK Governments taking the right action to deliver that goal?

**Robert Samson:** More could be done to develop one-ticket solutions such as smart ticketing. After all, journeys do not begin and end at train stations; rail journeys are parts of a longer journey. In a report that we did a few years ago on transport integration, we found confidence to be a factor in all this. It is about not just smart ticketing but how joined up the services actually are. For example, will I get off the train just in time to see the back end of the bus or ferry that I was going to get departing—and vice versa? We need a whole integrated transport system package with interlaid timetables that people can be confident will be delivered, whether it be through a ticket in their pocket or on their smartphone.

We also need a smart ticket that ensures that people get the fare that is most appropriate to the time that they are travelling. With smart ticketing,

the consumer needs to have confidence that their ticket is fit for purpose and secure and that they will always be charged the most appropriate and cheapest fare for any leg of their journey. Any such system must also be tailored to both individuals and groups.

There are a range of ideas there about making sure that it is right for consumers. It is about giving them confidence in the product and confidence that they are always being charged the right amount for a particular leg of the journey.

**Natalie Don:** Michael, you touched on this earlier. I put the same question to you, with a short supplementary. Do you feel that an integrated ticketing system would benefit not only the public but the rail industry in the long run?

**Michael Clark:** That is a good question, and I tend to agree. A lot of what Robert Samson said is on our minds, too, and we are thinking about how best we might achieve that. Passengers want friction-free travel. They want not to have to think about it and to have confidence that it works.

We are looking at rolling out pay-as-you-go systems, similar to what is used in London, to other major conurbations. We are looking at consolidating online retail offerings. One issue is that all the operators have their own websites, with different levels of effectiveness. There are other, third-party, retailers. People get confused. We want a consistent offer where it is possible to put that together.

It all comes back to data and to what information is available. It can be quite confusing to get information about your ticket, but it need not be. There must be simpler ways of providing that information to passengers so that people can make their own choices.

If that is implemented properly, it will be better for the railway system. One challenge is that, so far, it has been done in fragments. Each operator might think about having a smartcard. Each one will have a different ticket gate that is not operable with another train company's offering. That all adds to the confusion and the complexity.

We must think about how that can be made simple and easy for the passenger. It should work the way that a Visa card or an Apple Pay system would, where there is commonality in the back office and problems are sorted out by the system underneath, rather than by the passenger working out what they have to have in their pocket at any time.

It could be more efficient for the railway if there were not multiple back-office systems that have to be patched to talk to each other. With a bit of machine learning, and the right data from all parties, you should be able to do that now.



You asked about integrated ticketing and smart ticketing. Your question was also about accessibility and inclusion. Taking a good look at how well—or how badly—the railway is doing at serving all its potential customers and passengers across the UK is a positive thing to do. We are working on a national accessibility strategy that is linked to our whole-industry strategic plan. We are trying to take a broadly inclusive approach. How could we serve people who should be customers of the railway if they wanted to be customers?

That links with the idea of making it simple, friction-free and easy, and of providing information and assistance online and digitally when it is possible to do so.

**Natalie Don:** That was a very helpful answer.

I ask Mick Hogg the same question. How could a smart, integrated ticketing system be achieved? Are the Scottish and UK Governments taking action to deliver on that? Could integrated ticketing in practice be a challenge for workers, due to the ticket applying to more than one method of public transport? Please give me your views on that.

**Mick Hogg:** A smart, integrated rail ticket service would be welcome. It appears to be the way forward. I do not think that we can block or oppose the use of new technology.

However, from a trade union perspective, we would say that there must be a just transition. We must ensure that staff are not put on to the industrial scrap heap. We must listen to what passengers want and there should be a lot more joined-up thinking about rail, buses and ferries.

That is an absolute priority. As things stand, rail, bus and ferries can only be described as an absolute shambles, because there is no forward thinking. A better strategy needs to be put in place that allows a person to go from the railway to the ferry and from the ferry to the bus to get to their final destination, or vice versa. Another important point is that we need to support the most vulnerable people in society who are not familiar with the new technology. We can talk about using machines at stations and say that we are going to close booking offices or stations, but we need to be serious about ensuring that Scotland's railway is open for everyone in society. We need to ensure that the most vulnerable people within society are included in the national conversation.

I keep making reference to antisocial behaviour and how it is on the increase. Vulnerable people are not going to use Scotland's railways. They will stay in their houses because they are scared. They will be reluctant to use Scotland's railway because it is not safe. If we ignore that issue and we are not serious about tackling it, Scotland's railway will become a magnet for antisocial behaviour. What we should do first is scrap the

cuts agenda, support Scotland's railway, support the most vulnerable people in our society and do better forward planning for the integration of ticketing for rail, ferry and bus services.

**Natalie Don:** Thank you all for your answers. I have no further questions.

**The Convener:** Before I bring in Liam Kerr, I ask the panel members to give us briefer replies. We still have a bit to get through and I am keen to let all the members ask their questions.

**Liam Kerr:** I shall direct one question to Mick Hogg, on the basis of what he has just said, and Michael Clark and Robert Samson can come in if they wish to add anything.

I listened carefully to the point that Mick just made, which was a good one. Moving on from that, I am concerned at some of the statements and answers that I have been hearing in the parliamentary chamber that suggest that less well-used services could be cut. That would have an obvious impact in the north-east and the Highlands, for example. Do you share my concern about that implied direction of travel that we have been hearing about? Is the RMT resistant to using the current lower levels of use as a reason for centralising investment and services away from places such as the north-east?

**Mick Hogg:** We want to see 100 per cent use of Scotland's railway. As I said, there are 349 stations on Scotland's railway, of which 143 are staffed. Those figures speak volumes about the approach to Scotland's railway. I do not think that we are sending the right signal and supporting passenger use by ensuring that our railway is not only safe but clean and affordable. We want every station to be staffed and the cuts agenda to be reversed.

11:00

**Liam Kerr:** Does Robert Samson or Michael Clark have anything to add to that?

**Robert Samson:** I have a quick point. To meet the Scottish Government's net zero targets, we need more passengers on the rail network in the short, medium and longer terms. We know that the new timetable is coming in in May 2022, but we want that to be seen not as the beginning of a cuts agenda but as a starting point for growing back the railway and getting more passengers on board—increasing demand and increasing services through timetable alterations.

**The Convener:** Our final question is from Mark Ruskell.

**Mark Ruskell:** Later this week, we will finally get the report into the tragedy at Carmont, near Stonehaven. I do not want to pre-empt the detailed

findings of that report, but do you have any broad recommendations about dealing with the two issues of climate adaptation on the rail network and how we ensure that services on the network are safe, and how franchises and the operator of last resort should be run? Are there any lessons in relation to rolling stock or safety that need to be brought into the discussion? You have all mentioned safety as a top issue in getting people back on to the railways. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mick Hogg:** Privatisation has clearly not helped matters on our railways. We do not have much to thank the pandemic for, but one thing that is clear is that, if it was not for the pandemic, we would have been looking at a lot more fatalities in that tragedy at Stonehaven. Usually, there would be hundreds of passengers, as opposed to the 20 or 30 on the day in question.

It has come out loud and clear that the infrastructure in the far north of Scotland is Victorian, which clearly demonstrates the lack of investment in our infrastructure. If we are serious about learning lessons from what happened up at Stonehaven, we need to ensure that our railway receives more investment and that the Victorian infrastructure is addressed as quickly as possible. If we do not do that, given the adverse weather conditions that we expect, we could see other tragedies like the Stonehaven one coming our way pretty soon.

**Robert Samson:** We need to learn lessons from what happened at Stonehaven. We must invest in the rail network to address climate change and deal with severe weather resilience.

What Mick Hogg said about the Victorian heritage and infrastructure is right, but to a large extent the Victorians built the railways in the right places and it is land-use planning decisions since then that have hindered us to a certain extent. We have to look at the use of flood plains. It is about building in resilience to ensure that passengers can have safe and secure journeys.

**Michael Clark:** I support that comment about building in resilience in how the railway goes about the operations and maintenance that make up part of its daily routine.

I expect the integration of track and train under the new ScotRail contract to help with that. People will not be looking at their own decision making on their own particular contractual basis with regard to track or train; they can look across the piece and see what the best decisions are for the rolling stock, the operations and the services that they are running at any given time, and can adapt what they are doing more quickly, because they are incentivised to do the best thing for the whole system rather than the best thing for their

contracts. I hope that that will lead to more effective decision making that will prevent anything like the Stonehaven incident happening again.

**Mark Ruskell:** We have talked a lot about a national conversation and have highlighted particular strands of that conversation, such as the ticket office closure consultation, the first complete national timetable review in Scotland in, I think, 30 years and a welcome focus on women's safety. How do our witnesses see a national conversation going forward? We have heard mention of having passenger representation on the board or some kind of focus on that. However, is there a wide way of doing things? For example, could we have a kind of citizens assembly on ScotRail? Should we have more regular and involved discussions about services at a community level? We are in quite a participatory democracy, but I am not seeing that read across into some of the discussions about the future of ScotRail. It all seems to be quite disjointed.

**Robert Samson:** The national conversation could give us an opportunity to have greater user participation, and citizens assemblies could inform how the rail service is delivered. The rail service is not about lumps of metal; it is about transporting people who want to make journeys.

We have generic principles that apply across Scotland about what passengers want with regard to punctuality, reliability, frequency of service, ticketing, value for money and good information during disruptions. However, to go back to what you said about the timetable consultation, we were keen that that would be a full public consultation on a national timetable. Timetables are extremely local and relate to individual needs. For a person travelling from Fife to Edinburgh, a change in the timetable of 15 minutes can mean that they have to change childcare arrangements and have problems with getting children to school before getting the train to work. A family's daily life can be disrupted by one train's time changing. That is why we have to have public engagement to get the railway that we want.

The start of ScotRail Trains Ltd on 1 April is an opportunity for us all to deliver the rail network that we want, in line with our net zero ambitions. Instead of everyone coming into the national conversation separately, we should look at it as an opportunity to create a first-class railway. All of us—elected people, stakeholders such as myself and so on—should grasp that opportunity and deliver the railway that we want to see.

**Mick Hogg:** Clearly, a national conversation is welcome. We certainly welcome this opportunity to have dialogue and input as opposed to having a national confrontation, which is what we had in 2020-21, during the pandemic. We want to see an improvement in our industrial relations. One of the

franchise commitments was to good industrial relations. Scottish Rail Holdings and the transport secretary, who is in listening mode, have said that they want to have good industrial relations. We hope that good industrial relations will be a number 1 priority for Scotland's railway.

**Michael Clark:** Robert Samson talked about the availability of passenger data, and I think that consulting people on change and bringing them with you is a positive thing to do as the railway starts to expand. That will attract people and reassure them about what the railway is for and who it is for, and it will also attract talented people to work on the railway, which we discussed earlier.

You should consider whether to broaden that out to include not only passengers and users but all taxpayers, given that, as you have heard, 22 per cent of public transport journeys in Scotland in 2019 were by rail. Asking people what they want from the transport system that they are paying for would result in an interesting conversation. I would be interested in the aspect of the conversation that involves asking people how rail can be at the heart of what we are doing, alongside other areas.

**The Convener:** That brings us to the end of our allocated time. I thank the panel members for joining the committee. We appreciate your time and your insights into the transition that faces ScotRail and rail operations in Scotland and across the rest of Great Britain.

That brings us to the end of the public part of the meeting.

11:11

*Meeting continued in private until 12:48.*



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

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